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ASIA-PACIFIC GOVERNANCE WATCH

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Asia-Pacific Governance Watch

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Breaking Down Silos Key to ADB Achieving the Goals of Its Strategy 2030: Independent Evaluation Report

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) needs to ensure greater collaboration across its organization to meet the thematic goals of its corporate strategy, Strategy 2030, says a report released today. The report, Evaluation of the One ADB Approach, prepared

by ADB's Independent Evaluation Department (IED) reviews the merits and challenges of collaboration within ADB. "There are many initiatives under the One ADB umbrella to help ensure that ADB is delivering integrated solutions to its developing member countries, regardless of sector, thematic, or regional silos," said IED Director General Emmanuel Jimenez. "The report suggests ways to enhance their effectiveness through complementary measures and greater coordination." The report found, for example, that public and private sector support would be more effective with more upstream diagnostic work on private sector projects, rather than on joint transactions. It also found that private sector staff engagement in planning programs and client dialogue could be scaled up to achieve better outcomes. While there are good initiatives to address the integration of knowledge in ADB's operational work, the incentives embedded in these systems are what will determine whether behaviors will change. "Operationally, the delivery of financing and services could use a stronger focal point at the country level by further empowering ADB's country directors," said ADB Principal Evaluation Specialist Linda Adams, one of the report's main authors.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 02/21/2022

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CHINA: Issuing 5-year Plan for Financial Standardization

China's financial regulators have issued a plan to advance standardization of the financial sector over the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025). The authorities plan to improve standardization in a wide range of areas, including supervision, risk prevention, financial technology, green finance and digital currency, with the goal of basically establishing a financial standard system that fits modern finance in 2025. The document was jointly published by the People's Bank of China, the State Administration for Market Regulation, the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission, and the China Securities Regulatory Commission. The country will improve the monitoring and early warning of financial risks, especially in internet finance. Efforts will be made to guide the use of technologies, including cloud computing, big data and artificial intelligence. The utilization of financial data will be under better management to ensure the protection of public security, business secret and personal privacy. The Chinese government published 137 national and industrial standards in the financial sector between 2016 and 2020 and the standardization played an increasingly important role in serving the real economy, warding off risks and deepening reforms.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 02/08/2022

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Xi Signs Order to Promulgate Regulations on Military Equipment Experiment, Assessment

Xi Jinping, chairman of the Central Military Commission, has signed an order promulgating a set of regulations on the experiment and assessment of military equipment. The regulations stipulate the basic tasks, contents and management mechanisms of military equipment experiment and assessment under new circumstances, and serve as the fundamental rule of relevant work. The regulations, consisting of 56 articles in 11 chapters, took effect on Feb. 10.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 02/12/2022

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China Steps Up Personality Rights Protection on Internet

China's crackdown of online crimes related to personality rights continues, with documents to better guide the handling of cases forthcoming, the Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP) said Monday. Insult, slander, and infringement of citizens' personal information on the internet all violate personality rights, said Miao Shengming, an official with the SPP. He added that the top procuratorate has supervised the handling of more than 30 criminal cases related to such crimes. Since 2019, prosecuting agencies have pressed charges against 213 people for insult or defamation, 21,923 for infringement of personal information, and 15 for crimes that besmirch the reputation or honor of heroic martyrs, Miao said. The SPP is currently working with the Supreme People's Court and the Ministry of Public Security to draft relevant normative documents to further clarify issues in the area and address the difficulties in prosecution of such cases, he said. The SPP also publicised five cases that represent personality rights protection in the digital era on the day.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 02/21/2022

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China Outlines Tasks to Advance Rural Vitalization in 2022

China unveiled its "No. 1 central document" for 2022 on Tuesday, outlining key tasks to comprehensively push forward rural vitalization this year. As the first policy statement released by China's central authorities each year, the document is seen as an indicator of policy priorities. Work on agriculture and rural areas has been high on the agenda for 19 consecutive years since 2004. The document called for efforts to stabilize and increase agricultural production, steadily raise farmers' incomes, and ensure stability in China's rural areas to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and other changes unseen in a century and promote sound economic and social development. "We must firmly hold the bottom lines of guaranteeing China's grain security and ensuring no large-scale return to poverty," the document noted. China will enhance grain production and the supply of vital agricultural products, it said. Measures will be taken to ensure that the sown areas for grains remain stable and the full-year grain output stays above 650 billion kg. Efforts will also enhance the production capacity of

soybean and oil plants and ensure the supply of key products such as pork and vegetables, said the document.

The document detailed reasonable protection of farmers' incomes from growing grains and coordinated regulation on major agricultural products. In 2022, China aims to develop 6.67 million hectares of high-standard farmland, promote national projects on black soil protection, and launch the third nationwide soil condition census, noted the document. It also specified measures to vigorously promote the research on vital agricultural core technologies such as germplasm, enhance applications of agriculture machinery and equipment, accelerate development of facility agriculture, and effectively prevent and respond to major agriculture-related disasters. The document urged efforts to improve mechanisms for monitoring and assisting people at risk of falling back into poverty, and to ensure assistance and support policies are implemented in a timely manner. More efforts should be made to help boost the incomes of populations that have recently been lifted out of poverty, according to the document.

China will increase support for key counties in rural vitalization and for communities of relocated people while working to promote the integrated development of the primary, secondary and tertiary industries in rural areas, it said. Efforts should be made to develop county-level industries and commerce systems, as well as to encourage rural residents to obtain employment or start businesses locally, said the document. In an interview with Xinhua, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs Tang Renjian said the country should consolidate poverty-reduction achievements with steady economic growth, with more financial support tilted toward developing the technology, facilities and marketing of rural industries that help increase the incomes of rural households. Tang listed farm-produce processing, rural tourism and rural e-commerce as three major industries for rural vitalization, and stressed the prevention of excessive financing, development and construction, so as to yield practical results. The document also urged the continued implementation of the five-year action plan on improving the rural living environment, stressing solid work on enhancing rural infrastructure in key areas such as highways, water facilities, power grids and clean-energy facilities, as well as improving the quality of rural housing.

It called for greater efforts on developing digital villages by pushing for smart agriculture and empowering rural public services with digital technologies. The document noted that measures should be taken to increase investment for rural vitalization, such as providing support from the public budget and the central government budget, and supporting the issuance of local-government bonds for qualified projects. It also stressed optimizing financial services to advance rural vitalization. More support will be provided for qualified local financial institutions in terms of relending, rediscounts and required reserves. More work will be done to strengthen the building of a rural credit system and facilitate credit lending for rural

households, while agricultural insurance and reinsurance will be actively promoted, it said. The document also proposed to improve the recruitment and training systems of talent for rural vitalization.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 02/22/2022

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State Councilor Stresses Modern Market Regulation for High-quality Development

State Councilor Wang Yong has underscored improving the effectiveness of market regulation to further boost market vitality and shore up China's high-quality development. Wang made the remarks in south China's Hainan Province, where he conducted inspections on the development and supervision of market entities. During the inspection tour, Wang urged to fully leverage the role of Hainan Free trade Port in exploring innovation in market regulation, so as to foster a modern market regulation system, a market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment, as well as a safe environment for consumption.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 02/24/2022

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JAPAN: Govt Panel Compiles Economic Security Plan

A Japanese government panel of experts Tuesday compiled recommendations for envisaged economic security legislation, calling for strengthening supply chains for critical goods and ensuring the security of key infrastructure. Based on the recommendations, the government plans to introduce an economic security promotion bill to the ongoing regular session of the Diet, Japan's parliament, late this month. Japan is facing an urgent need to beef up its economic security at a time when the United States and China are competing for economic and technological dominance. The government aims to enhance its economic security system with the proposed law with four pillars: strengthening supply chains, ensuring the security of core infrastructure, promoting public-private technical cooperation and keeping secret patents on technologies that could be used for military purposes. Referring to the coronavirus pandemic and geopolitical tensions as risks in terms of economic security, the panel urged the government to quickly shape the legislation and have it enacted.

It also suggested that all government ministries and agencies work together and that necessary manpower, money and systems be made available to help the law work effectively for wide-ranging industry sectors involved. Based on the recommendations, the government will include in the proposed legislation a financial framework to strengthen the supply chains of strategically important items such as semiconductors and pharmaceuticals. Core infrastructure will be clearly defined, and

an advance screening system will be introduced for procurement of facilities and equipment and outsourcing management for such infrastructure to block foreign interference. The government plans to stipulate that energy, water, information and communications, financial, transportation and postal services are key infrastructure sectors, informed sources said. As for the public-private technical cooperation, a think tank will be established in fiscal 2023 to specify cutting-edge technologies that need to be developed and strengthened. To keep secret patents on sensitive inventions, such as those related to nuclear technologies, the patent office will conduct the first-stage screening of patent applications and a new section involving the Cabinet Office and the Defense Ministry will conduct the second-stage screening.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 02/08/2022

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Govt Eyes Law Revision to Boost Uptake in Childcare Leave

The government is planning to revise a law that will allow local public servants to take up to four periods of childcare leave. The bill, which is likely to be passed in the current Diet session, is aimed at encouraging more male employees to take time off work to help care for their offspring. Currently, local public servants are allowed two periods of childcare leave: once within the first eight weeks of a child being born, and once again before the child turns 3. Under the revised law, both men and women will be allowed four periods of childcare leave, achieved by splitting the two original leave periods. According to a survey by the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry, 13.2% of male local public servants took childcare leave in fiscal 2020, far lower than 51.4% of male national public servants — excluding those in certain posts, such as Self-Defense Force officials. The fire-fighting division and police force registered particularly low figures, at 4.2% and 4.9%, respectively.

In recent years, there has been an uptick in the number of male local public servants taking childcare leave. However, while the rate for national public servants increased 36.9 points from 14.5% in fiscal 2016, the rate for local public servants increased by just 9.6 points. According to the ministry, many male local public servants are hesitant to take childcare leave because they have parents who live nearby and can help with childcare, and they also worry about a decrease in income. “By increasing the number of childcare leave periods, male workers will be able to alternate periods of leave with their partners when necessary and mitigate concerns regarding income,” a ministry official said.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 02/16/2022

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Cabinet Approves Draft Law to Promote Economic Security

Japan's cabinet approved Friday a draft law to promote economic security by strengthening supply chains for vital products such as semiconductors and to better

cope with geopolitical risks associated with China and Russia. As global competition intensifies in the high-technology field and concerns grow about cyberattacks, the government aims to enact the bill during the current parliament session through mid-June. The bill stipulates the government will safeguard key infrastructure from cyberattacks, develop cutting-edge technologies through public-private cooperation and make certain patents related to sensitive technologies nonpublic. To build stronger supply chains, the government will designate goods such as chips, pharmaceutical products and rare minerals as critical items for which the government will closely monitor and financially support suppliers' procurement plans. In the infrastructure area including telecommunication and transportation, the government will screen equipment that operators plan to install to mitigate vulnerability to cyberattacks and prevent use of parts from overseas that could pose security threats.

To support development of dual-use technologies for commercial and military applications, the government will set up a committee comprised of government officials, representatives from private companies and researchers from universities. A fund worth 500 billion yen (\$4.3 billion) is planned for the purpose, while a state-run think tank will provide support by conducting research on the latest technological developments overseas. Members from the private sector will have confidentiality obligations. The bill also introduces rules on the nonpublication of certain inventions applicable in the nuclear and defense fields. It sets punishment of up to two years in jail for individuals reporting false information in infrastructure project screening or leaking nonpublic patent data. Discussions over whether to grant private citizens a security clearance status allowing access to sensitive information was put off in view of concerns raised about examining their personal history.

From <https://japantoday.com> 02/26/2022

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SOUTH KOREA: Joining Top-Tier Group in Democratic AI Policy Index

South Korea climbed to the first-tier group of countries last year in terms of how well its state policies for artificial intelligence are aligned with democratic values, a U.S. nongovernmental organization said Wednesday. In 2021, South Korea moved up by one notch to the first-tier group with 11 points, compared with 8.5 points the previous year, according to a report by the Center for AI and Digital Policy. Canada, Germany and Italy also stayed on the top tier last year. The Artificial Intelligence and Democratic Values Index (AIDV) was introduced in 2020 to make a worldwide assessment of national AI policies and their alignment with democratic values based on 12 metrics, including the progress of a country following the OECD's principles of using AI. The index measures how a country's AI policies are harmonized with democratic values, such as transparency and the presence of an independent watchdog.

"Korea introduced new requirements for AI impact assessments, published guidance on AI Personal Information Protection and expanded algorithmic transparency," the center said in the report. South Korea's data protection watchdog, the Personal Information Protection Commission (PIPC), published guidelines for the protection of personal information gathered and used by artificial intelligence last year, following a controversy over a South Korean startup's AI chatbot. The PIPC imposed a hefty penalty of 103.3 million won (US\$92,900) on the startup for leaking a massive amount of personal information in the process of developing and commercializing the chatbot Lee Luda. The chatbot also raised ethical questions over its learning algorithms and data collection process for discriminatory and offensive language against sexual minorities and disabled people.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 02/23/2022

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South-East Asia

THAILAND: Statement by Prime Minister on APEC

This year, Thailand is hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum as the region aims for an inclusive and sustainable recovery in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Next week, APEC delegates will begin their first set of meetings to roll out the year's agenda, and advance APEC's work to implement the Aotearoa Plan of Action agreed last year to achieve the Putrajaya Vision 2040, which guides APEC's actions for the next twenty years. The theme of APEC 2022 is "Open. Connect. Balance." Our priorities are to make APEC open to all opportunities, connect in all dimensions and balanced in all aspects. Thailand's theme is driven by our vision to address the imbalances revealed by the pandemic and achieve growth through the integration of the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) model, three well-established economic development approaches, into the region's economy. APEC's work is a long-term pursuit that requires continual and coordinated efforts. Following through on members' commitments to the Asia-Pacific, I'm delighted to announce that the United States of America will host APEC in 2023 and Peru will host APEC in 2024. Together, we will fulfill our shared goal of an open, dynamic, resilient, and peaceful Asia-Pacific community for all our people and future generations. I look forward to welcoming APEC Leaders to Thailand in November when we will set the goals for the region.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 02/10/2022

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VIETNAM: MoH Issues New Guidelines on the Diagnosis and Treatment of COVID-19 in Children

The Ministry of Health has issued new guidelines on the diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19 in children, especially children under 12 months who are at high risk of

severe disease. The number of children infected with COVID-19 has tended to increase recently. The new guidance has replaced the one issued on November 8, 2021. Under the new guidance, the ministry has changed the instructions on confirmed cases of children with COVID-19. A child identified as a COVID-19 patient has tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 by real-time polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) test; has been in close contact with a COVID-19 case and has a positive rapid test result for SARS-CoV-2; a child who has epidemiological factors or clinical symptoms suspected of being COVID-19 and a positive rapid test result of SARS-CoV-2; or a child with epidemiological factors and test results positive for SARS-CoV-2 twice within eight hours. In the previous guidance, confirmed cases are defined as all cases with suspected symptoms and a positive test result for SARS-CoV-2 by RT-PCR. Also following the new guidance, the ministry has added the level of asymptomatic in children with COVID-19. Thus, there are five levels of asymptomatic, mild, moderate, severe and critical levels in children with COVID-19. The new guidance also regulates treatment with the antiviral drug Remdesivir to treat children with mild cases of COVID-19.

Accordingly, Remdesivir is indicated for the treatment of mild inpatients with at least one risk factor, or patients with respiratory failure requiring oxygen, continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP), high-flow nasal cannula (HFNC) or non-invasive ventilation. In the previous guidance, it did not regulate the use of the drug to treat children with mild symptoms. The ministry also said that children with COVID-19, who have mild risk factors, need to be considered for treatment at a medical facility. There are 14 risk factors that could cause severe illness for a child with COVID-19, consisting of premature babies and low birth weight; obesity and overweight; diabetes, genetic diseases and metabolic disorders; chronic lung diseases and bronchial asthma; cancer; chronic kidney disease; organ transplant or haematopoietic stem cell transplant; cardiovascular disease; neurological diseases; sickle cell disease, thalassaemia, other chronic haematological diseases; congenital or acquired immunodeficiency diseases; liver failure; systemic diseases; and children treated with corticosteroids or other immunosuppressive drugs.

According to the ministry, SARS-CoV-2 causes illness in both adults and children but it is less common in children. However, recently, the number of children infected with COVID-19 has been increasing. The majority of children with COVID-19 are asymptomatic or mild with upper respiratory or gastrointestinal symptoms (over 55 per cent), moderate (40 per cent), severe (4 per cent) and critical (0.5 per cent). Infants under 12 months are at high risk for severe illness. Children with COVID-19 usually have mild symptoms, so hospitalisation and death rates are low compared to adults. Multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) with COVID-19 is rare, occurring between two and six weeks after SARS-CoV-2 infection. This is a serious complication that can be fatal and tends to increase, the ministry said.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 02/24/2022

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Guidelines on Supervision, Assessment of Foreign Investment Issued

The Minister of Planning and Investment has issued a circular giving guidelines on the supervision and assessment of foreign investment activities in Việt Nam. Accordingly, Circular 02/2022/TT-BKHĐT is applicable to state management agencies related to foreign investment activities, including ministries, ministerial-level agencies, provincial-level People's Committees, investment registration agencies, agencies tasked with state management of investment in accordance with legal regulations on investment, foreign-invested economic organisations and projects operating in Việt Nam. The circular stipulates the principles for foreign investment management, one of which is not to hinder or affect the normal operations of foreign-invested organisations and projects during the process of supervision and evaluation. The Ministry of Planning and Investment (MoPI) is authorised to supervise and evaluate the enforcement of state management of foreign investment; conduct overall supervision and assessment of foreign-invested projects; and inspect foreign-invested projects that are approved by the Prime Minister and the National Assembly, large-scale projects with great influence on socio-economic development, and other projects under the direction of the Government or the Prime Minister. According to the MoPI, ministries and ministerial-level agencies in charge of specialised management are responsible for sending reports on the supervision and assessment to the MoPI every year before March 1 in the year following the reporting year. Meanwhile, the People's Committees of provinces and centrally-run cities are tasked with carrying out the overall supervision and assessment for foreign investment activities within their management. The circular will take effect on April 1 this year, replacing Circular 09/2016/TT-BKHĐT dated June 30, 2016.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 02/26/2022

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HCM City Targets Comprehensive Digitisation

HCM City plans to speed up digital transformation to achieve its goals of becoming a digital government and smart city this year. City leaders have pointed out three major areas of focus: governing the city in the new situation (after the pandemic), building databases and linking all databases related to governance and reforming governance and finding new driving forces for future growth. According to the Department of Information and Communications, the city will implement comprehensive technology solutions and exploit shared data for the prevention and control of COVID-19 and hastening economic recovery. The databases contain information about the public, enterprises and land. The department director, Lâm Đình Thắng, said the city would speed up digital transformation at governmental organisations and promote e-government to improve the efficiency and quality of public services. At the same time the city is also deploying applications to enhance

interaction between the governmental agencies and residents, help enterprises speed up digital transformation, build a digital economy and society, and quickly achieve digital transformation in priority areas such as healthcare and education. Over 900 State agencies, corporations and non-business establishments are already using some features of an integrated data-sharing platform.

Transportation, health, education and training, environment, urban planning, and security agencies use a number of applications to better serve the public and businesses. In addition, HCM City will establish at least two technology innovation centres from now through 2025 to help businesses achieve digital transformation, according to the city People's Committee. They will strengthen supply chains, transfer technologies and innovations, carry out research into digital products, increase awareness of digital transformation, promote an innovation eco-system for start-ups, and help businesses develop digital products. They will also tie up with prominent global partners for digital transformation and seek funding, evaluate the effectiveness of digital products and support research and development of digital products and solutions. Assessing the city's digitisation efforts, Trần Thị Lan Hương, senior public sector specialist at the World Bank in Việt Nam, said the city would need to carry out specific transformations to boost the value of its digital economy since it has great competitiveness and better resilience after the pandemic. It ranks fifth out of 63 provinces and cities in the index for information technology application and development. It contributes a third of the country's GDP, and so would need to be a pioneer in digital transformation, she added.

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South Asia

INDIA: Presenting 'Panchamrit' on India's Climate Action at COP26

The Government of India has articulated and put across the concerns of developing countries at the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held in Glasgow, United Kingdom. Further, India presented the following five nectar elements (Panchamrit) of India's climate action: Reach 500GW Non-fossil energy capacity by 2030. 50 per cent of its energy requirements from renewable energy by 2030. Reduction of total projected carbon emissions by one billion tonnes from now to 2030. Reduction of the carbon intensity of the economy by 45 per cent by 2030, over 2005 levels. Achieving the target of net zero emissions by 2070. In this context, it was highlighted that the transfer of climate finance and low-cost climate technologies have become more important for the implementation of climate actions by developing countries. The ambitions on climate finance by developed countries cannot remain the same as they were at the time of the Paris Agreement in 2015. It was

emphasized that just as the UNFCCC tracks the progress made in climate mitigation, it should also track climate finance. Further, it was conveyed to the developed countries that India understands the suffering of all other developing countries, share them, and hence raises the voice of developing countries. The mantra of LIFE- Lifestyle for Environment to combat climate change was also shared in COP 26. It was stated that Lifestyle for Environment has to be taken forward as a campaign to make it a mass movement of Environment Conscious Lifestyles. The message conveyed by India was that the world needs mindful and deliberate utilization, instead of mindless and destructive consumption.

As a part of its overall approach, India emphasized the foundational principles of equity, and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. It also highlighted that all countries should have equitable access to the global carbon budget, a finite global resource, for keeping temperature increase within the limits set by the Paris Agreement and all countries must stay within their fair share of this global carbon budget while using it responsibly. India also called on the developed countries for climate justice, and for undertaking rapid reductions in emissions during the current decade so as to reach net-zero much earlier than their announced dates, as they have used more than their fair share of the depleting global carbon budget. India's interests have been articulated in decisions adopted at COP 26. The announcement to intensify India's climate action has the potential to bring investment and new technologies to support the country's transition to a clean and climate-resilient economy. Many nations in the world have applauded the five nectar elements (Panchamrit) of India's climate action. This information was given by Shri Ashwini Kumar Choubey, Minister of State, Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change in Rajya Sabha today.

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com> 02/04/2022

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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

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Delhi Govt Notifies EV Policy for Cab Aggregators & Delivery Companies

The Government of Delhi, on February 10, notified a draft policy to mandate the use of electric vehicles for cab aggregators, food and other doorstep delivery services. As per the policy, the companies have to ensure that the 10 per cent of the fleet of two-wheelers and five per cent of all the four-wheelers should be electrically-propelled. The Delhi government uploaded the draft policy on their official website on January 14, to get suggestions and objections from the public within 60 days. According to a report by the Indian Express, Advisor to the Minister for Environment Reena Gupta said, “This policy marks an important milestone in the Delhi Government’s goals of reducing air pollution by 30 per cent by 2024. To ensure the policy has the intended impact of reducing vehicular pollution in the NCR (National Capital Region) area, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) should also direct other states to adopt similar aggregator regulations in the larger NCR region to allow for a transcending policy to combat vehicular pollution in the NCR area.”

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/> 02/14/2022

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Power Ministry Notifies Green Hydrogen Policy

A step forward towards National Hydrogen Mission, the Ministry of Power notified Green Hydrogen/Green Ammonia Policy for production of Green Hydrogen or Green Ammonia using renewable sources of energy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the National Hydrogen Mission on India’s 75th Independence Day last year. The Mission aims to aid the government in meeting its climate targets and making India a green hydrogen hub. “This will help in meeting the target of production of 5 million tonnes of Green hydrogen by 2030,” the ministry said. According to the policy, Green Hydrogen/Ammonia manufacturers may purchase renewable power from the power exchange or set up renewable energy capacity themselves or through any other, developer, anywhere. The benefit of Renewable Purchase Obligation (RPO)

will be granted incentive to the hydrogen/Ammonia manufacturer and the Distribution licensee for consumption of renewable power.

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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/> 02/23/2022

Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: To Create National Artificial Intelligence Strategy

The first meeting of the working group on technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution took place in Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Economy told Trend. According to the ministry, at the meeting chaired by the Executive Director of the Center for Analysis and Coordination of the Fourth Industrial Revolution Tamerlan Taghiyev, a presentation on the working group's principles, the possibilities of expanding the introduction of new technologies, the work to create a National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data, their analysis, and processing was held, and discussions were conducted. The working group was created to study the possibilities of introducing the latest technologies, the formation of a regulatory framework, roadmaps, coordination of projects, as well as expanding cooperation with international organizations in this area. The group includes representatives of 22 state structures, and the coordination of its activities was entrusted to the Center for Analysis and Coordination of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 02/09/2022

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Azerbaijan Develops Cybersecurity Strategy – Deputy Minister

Azerbaijan's cybersecurity strategy has been developed, Azerbaijani Deputy Minister of Digital Development and Transport Rovshan Rustamov said at the presentation of a report on disinformation and hybrid threats against Azerbaijan, prepared by the Azerbaijani Social Research Center, Trend reports.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 02/14/2022

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New International Program for Azerbaijani Startups

Top disruptive young teams and companies from Azerbaijan can now pop on international investment stages like Warsaw, Prague, Budapest and Bratislava. It is all thanks to V4-Azerbaijan Tech Bridge, a new, 1,5-year long program for training innovators with global ambitions and exposing them to leading edge EU partners: accelerators, VCs, angels. The goal of the V4-Azerbaijan Tech Bridge project is to establish and enhance cooperation between Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) and Azerbaijan in the sphere of innovation by linking startup ecosystem players like innovation hubs, private investors, venture capital funds and innovation-seeking corporations from the EU with the potential of Azerbaijani startups and innovators. The project will establish a new networking platform between partners from the Visegrad Group (investors, accelerators, angels,

mentors, etc.) on the one hand, and startups and innovators from Azerbaijan on the other. The project will provide a series of meetings, training, excellence program, demodays, networking, post-acceleration and finally the V4-Azerbaijan Startup Summit in Baku in 2023.

The project will consist of 8 online regional chapters in V4 top tech-cities designed to promote those 8 cities and whole V4 ecosystem in terms of opportunities for young, innovative talents from Azerbaijan. 20 most promising Azerbaijani startup teams will be invited to the Online Semi-Finals in Ganja so the Jury can select 10 excellent startups for the physicals startup gala in Baku (2023). The project was initiated by the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Baku and received funding from the International Visegrad (V4) Fund. The initiative will be implemented by a Consortium of 4 Partners from Visegrad Group: Startup Hub Poland Foundation (Poland, project leader), AI Startup Incubator (Czech Republic), CEU iLab (Hungary), CIVITTA (Slovakia) in cooperation with IdealHub Innovation and Technology Center from Azerbaijan. The project enjoys the support of all Visegrad countries Embassies in Baku: the Embassy of Czech Republic, Embassy of Hungary, Embassy of Poland and the Embassy of the Slovakia. Why Poland and the Visegrad Region "CEE is one of the fastest-growing regions in the EU with lots of potential. As a participant of their V4 project, I was able to observe the thriving startup ecosystem first hand.

These countries provide both exciting opportunities, including accelerator programs, mentorship, VC funding for early-stage startups, as well as advice from successful entrepreneurs, as they have had several large exits of startup companies and currently have few unicorns." says Sanya Kumari, a startupper traveling between Azerbaijan and the US. How it works? By Feb 28th disruptive Azerbaijani startups can apply on the project website (startuphub.pl/V4-azerbaijan/) to join the first chapter of this brand new format, hosted by Startup Hub Poland in Warsaw. 10 selected teams will take part in 2 days short online bootcamp (10th & 11th March) leading to the Demoday on April 7th. The winner will be shortlisted for a big gala in Baku in June 2023 called V4-Azerbaijan Startup Summit in Baku. "Starting from Warsaw the Visegrad Region will host 8 similar chapters all together. In the most vibrant technopolis in Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, the fastest growing startup region in the European Union. There is a unicorn boom here as we speak and I see no reasons why Azerbaijan should not benefit from this melting pot" - says Maciej Sadowski, CEO of Startup Hub Poland.

The V4-Azerbaijan Tech Bridge, apart from 8 online chapters (10 different Azerbaijani startups every time; 80 all together) full of skillful workshops and networking, contains two events in Azerbaijan. On-line semifinals for 20 most motivated startups in Ganja in May 2023 and on-site Baku Finale called V4-Azerbaijan Startup Summit for top 10 teams. Organizers will invite several venture capital funds from the West investment chemosphere to Baku to celebrate and invest into Azerbaijani most excellent startups. "Four leading startup

organizations from the Visegrad Region will help Azerbaijani colleagues to appear flawlessly on the stage. This wide International project is designed to train all, but highlight those top notch ones. European investors are only discovering Azerbaijan right now. There is no better way to introduce this country to them as showcasing most descriptive business concepts which await support to become global players.

On the other hand, this project will promote the startup ecosystems of the Visegrad Group countries as a convenient place to start and develop innovative projects proposed by talented Azerbaijani teams." - said Rafal Poborski, Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to Azerbaijan. "There is a technological and investment spot emerging next to richest centers in Europe and attracting the greatest technological talents from abroad with its openness, infrastructure, global relationships and investment opportunities. It is the Visegrad region, the next place for every investor and good startups to be", says Katarzyna Skoneczna, Program Director I SHP. "There is business to make in CEE now, when the eyes of VCs are pointed at Poland and its neighbours." - Katarzyna concludes The project starts in Warsaw with the boot camp for the first 10 startups booked for March 10th, 12:00 PM CET. But the open call for projects ends on February 28th Warsaw's midnight. All Azerbaijani startups interested in investments and business partners from the EU should apply here. Community partners, investors, media and all other stakeholders of the entrepreneurial stage in Azerbaijan are welcome to contact the organizers using this link.

Important dates: Feb 28th, 2022 by 11:59 PM Warsaw time (CET) - the deadline of the call for Azerbaijani startups for the Warsaw Chapter Mar 7th, 2022 - the expected release of selected 10 startups to the Warsaw Chapter Mar 10th, Mar 11th 2022 - two days on-line boot camp for first 10 startups Apr 2022 by March 2023 - 7 local chapters for remaining 70 startups (10 different startups per chapter) Apr 7th 2022 - Warsaw Chapter online demo day for 10 startups May 2023 - Semi Finals for 20 startups in Ganja (online) Jun 2023 - V4 Azerbaijan Startup Summit in Baku with 10 best of the best startups on-site demo day.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 02/18/2022

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Azerbaijan Approves Plan of Actions on "Year of Shusha"

The Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan has approved the Plan of Actions on the occasion of the "Year of Shusha", Trend reports. The events will be carried out at the expense of funds allocated from Azerbaijan's state budget for 2022 for the relevant executive structures, and other sources not prohibited by law. Control over the execution of the order was entrusted to the Humanitarian Affairs Department of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The order comes into force from the date of its signing.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 02/26/2022

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KAZAKHSTAN: Investigating Facts of Law Enforcement Officials Fleeing Duty During Unrests in Early January

Kazakhstan investigating facts of law enforcement officials leaving posts during large-scale unrests in early January, Trend reports citing the press office of Kazakh president. President of the Republic of Kazakhstan received Prosecutor General Gizat Nurdauletov. Due to the situation in Almaty city, Almaty and Zhambyl regions, over 1,500 weapons from the arsenals of law enforcement agencies fell into the hands of criminals. Totally, during the January events, 3,388 weapons, including 1,629 guns from 10 hunting shops have been stolen. Of this volume, one third or 967 units were found. The search and seizure of weapons are underway, investigations continue on all facts.

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TURKMENISTAN: Plans to Make Country Smoke-Free by 2025

President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov has approved the National Program to free Turkmenistan from tobacco for 2022-2025, Trend reports citing Turkmenportal. This Program was created to put in place effective measures to promote and widely accept healthy lifestyles among the population, fight tobacco, improve citizens' health and increase human life expectancy, and make Turkmenistan a tobacco-free country by 2025. Turkmenistan's anti-smoking campaign began in 1998 with a ban on tobacco product advertising. Smoking was then prohibited in the country's universities. In 2000, smoking was prohibited in public places, on the streets, in administrative buildings, and on military installations, and two years later, drivers of vehicles were prohibited from smoking. The country joined the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in the spring of 2011, and six months later the first resolution "On Approval of the Action Plan for Tobacco Control in Turkmenistan for 2012-2016" was signed. In April 2017, the National Program for the Implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in Turkmenistan for 2017-2021 was approved.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 02/26/2022

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Oceania

NEW ZEALAND: Change In Shipping Law Needed To Protect Fuel Security

Maritime Union of New Zealand / New Zealand Merchant Service Guild / Aviation and Marine Engineers Association joint media release The maritime sector says a

simple change to maritime transport laws could protect New Zealand's fuel security. Following the controversial closure of the Marsden Point refinery, petrol companies plan to remove New Zealand's coastal tankers in favour of overseas tankers, with no guarantee of reliability or backup plan if things go wrong. Three organizations representing maritime professionals are calling for action to protect New Zealand's fuel security – the Maritime Union of New Zealand represents seafarers, the New Zealand Merchant Service Guild represents ship's masters and officers, and the Aviation and Marine Engineers Association represents marine engineers.

Maritime Union of New Zealand National Secretary Craig Harrison says the decision to remove coastal tankers will provide marginally higher profits to already profitable petrol companies at the cost of fuel security. He says the important role of domestic shipping capability in the fuel supply chain must be preserved. Mr Harrison says minor changes to section 198 of the Maritime Transport Act could direct New Zealand coastal tankers be given priority for coastal deliveries of oil. This could mean using Marsden Point as a storage hub for New Zealand fuel supplies and maintaining the current two New Zealand flagged oil tankers. Mr Harrison says dedicated New Zealand coastal tankers ensure fuel security through reliable scheduled visits to New Zealand regional ports. He says current shipping delays with international vessels calling at New Zealand ports shows dependency on overseas shipping is a high risk to regional economies. For example, a delay or interruption to delivery of fuel to South Island ports would create a huge issue with the primary sector's ability to function, he says. "Dedicated New Zealand coastal tankers provide a ready-made mobile storage facility, would be immediately available in event of local emergency to deliver fuel, and provide a back-up option if overseas shipping is disrupted." The unions are in talks with the New Zealand Government on the issue.

From <https://www.scoop.co.nz> 02/03/2022

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New Zealand Announces Plans to Reopen to the World

New Zealand has announced it will begin reopening to the world, signaling an end to nearly two years of tough border rules that have separated families and shut out almost all foreigners. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern outlined a five-step plan Thursday that will allow fully vaccinated New Zealand citizens to start traveling from Australia later this month. They will need to self-isolate on arrival -- but they won't need to go into state-run quarantine facilities. By July, fully vaccinated people from Australia or visa waiver countries -- including the United Kingdom, the United States, and many European nations -- will be able to enter New Zealand and self-isolate on arrival, according to the plan. The government website states that "self-isolation can be in your home or suitable alternative accommodation," so it's not yet known whether non-residents will be able to use hotels, rented apartments or other similar accommodations for their own self-isolation purposes.

The announcement is a major shift for New Zealand, which imposed some of the world's strictest border rules in a bid to shut out Covid-19. The country banned almost all foreign travelers in March 2020, and requires incoming visitors to spend time in a state-run quarantine facility at their own cost. To deal with the limited quarantine places, New Zealand brought in a quarantine lottery system which allowed citizens to enter an online queue at designated times in the hopes of scoring spots. That has meant many New Zealanders have struggled to get home -- and some haven't seen their loved ones for years. The system has allowed New Zealand to keep Covid-19 numbers low, and just 53 Covid-19 deaths have been reported in the country, according to the country's Ministry of Health. But Ardern has been under increasing pressure to ease border rules and allow New Zealand to reunite with the world -- and to the estimated 1 million New Zealanders living overseas.

Ardern said the anguish of quarantine had been "heartbreaking." "But the choice to use it, undeniably saved lives," she said, adding that the border rules had bought New Zealand time to become "one of the most vaccinated countries in the world." New Zealand has fully vaccinated 93% of eligible people, according to the Ministry of Health. "We are in a new phase in our Covid response," Ardern said. "Covid as an illness hasn't touched many of us to date. But with the transmissibility of Omicron we know we will experience the virus more directly. But the difference here is that we have all the tools possible now to prepare." New Zealand's shift away from a zero-Covid approach has been signaled for months. In October, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said the country would begin to move away from a zero-Covid strategy toward living with the virus.

The following month New Zealand announced it would begin a gradual easing of borders in 2022, although those plans were pushed back due to the spread of Omicron. Foreign nationals will be required to be fully vaccinated against the coronavirus in order to enter the country when it reopens. New Zealand's move on February 3 comes in the wake of similar steps from neighboring Australia. Like New Zealand, Australia imposed strict border rules to shut out Covid. Fully vaccinated citizens, visa holders and people from certain countries -- including New Zealand, Japan and Singapore -- are now able to travel to Australia without a travel exemption.

From <https://us.cnn.com> 02/03/2022

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New Zealand Traveller Declaration

From next week, Customs will be piloting a new online traveller declaration system, which will collect and assess travellers' COVID-19 health-related information. The New Zealand Traveller Declaration system requires travellers to upload this information before they depart for New Zealand, including their vaccination status, pre-departure test and travel history. Once borders open, this information will help identify what travellers need to do when they arrive in New Zealand, such as enter

quarantine-free, self-isolate, or enter a managed isolation facility. To ensure this system is ready for when it goes live later this year, travellers on specific flights have been invited to participate in the pilot to help test the processes. This new online system will simplify the traveller journey and help manage the expected increase in traveller volumes at the border. The implementation of a new traveller health declaration process for travellers to New Zealand was first announced by the Government as part of the Reconnecting New Zealanders to the World forum in August 2021. The New Zealand Traveller Declaration system is expected to go live for all travellers at the end of March 2022.

From <https://www.scoop.co.nz> 02/04/2022

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Human Rights Commission Hands Over Petition Calling for Pay Transparency Legislation

Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) Commissioner Saunoamaali'i Karanina Sumeo handed over a 4,141 strong petition to the Workplace Relations and Safety Minister, Michael Wood at parliament today. The EEO Commissioner has been advocating alongside women's groups, unions, businesses, and allies for the introduction of a pay transparency mechanism to ensure that government and businesses uphold their domestic and international human rights commitments and employment law obligations. "Ending the secrecy around pay and promotion is an opportunity to do right by everyone in all their diversity, in every business, every industry, at every level," said Saunoamaali'i Karanina Sumeo. "By making pay visible we help job seekers market their talent, indicate a business that values fairness, and help to identify and address any unfairness, unconscious bias and discrimination in our workplaces," she added.

The Commission recommends that an independent agency is set up to collect and publish pay information and provide resources for workers and workplaces to ensure pay equity and equal employment opportunities. "Employer anxiety around dealing with questions from workers about fairness and equality over pay and promotional opportunities is no reason to keep pay scales hidden and locked under clauses that forbid people to talk about their pay with others." "This entrenched secrecy around pay and progression continues to fuel ethnic, gender and disability pay gaps across Aotearoa New Zealand. It must end with us now," added Ms Sumeo. Chief Human Rights Commissioner Paul Hunt said the government has a duty under international and domestic human rights law to ensure equal pay for work of equal value.

"Discrimination in the form of lower pay and slower career progression affects women, Māori, Pacific, disabled, migrant, minority ethnic and the rainbow community, the most. These groups have been waiting far too long for the guarantee of equal pay. I urge the government to expedite the recommendations outlined in the petition," said Chief Commissioner Hunt. The Human Rights Commission is calling on the

government to legislate pay transparency as several other countries have, but in alignment with values that uniquely define us. “Pay transparency will help make fair pay and equal opportunity real for everyone, starting with closing gender, ethnic and disability pay inequity,” said Ms Sumeo. “I am hopeful the government will consider our petition and begin work towards pay transparency legislation. By ensuring equal pay for work of equal value, we all help create a fairer society, where everyone can achieve their potential and be fairly rewarded for the work they do.”

From <https://www.scoop.co.nz> 02/10/2022

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Self-Isolation Rules for International Travellers – Expert Reaction

The Government has released details on how people overseas will be able to travel to New Zealand without a stay in a managed isolation facility. Starting at the end of February, vaccinated Kiwis coming in from Australia will be able to skip MIQ provided they test negative before flying and spend seven days in self-isolation on arrival, undergoing two rapid antigen tests before getting the all-clear. This is the first step of the gradual reopening of our international border, with other groups eligible to bypass MIQ at later points throughout the year. The SMC asked experts to comment on the news. Dr Dianne Sika-Paotonu, Immunologist, Associate Dean (Pacific), Head of University of Otago Wellington Pacific Office, and Senior Lecturer, Pathology & Molecular Medicine, University of Otago Wellington, comments:

“Today new self-isolation rules were announced for travellers coming from overseas. From 28 February, some travellers coming to Aotearoa New Zealand will be able to self-isolate for seven days, and will need to indicate where they are staying. “They will require a negative pre-departure test result, proof of vaccination and online declaration to be completed. Three rapid antigen tests will be supplied to new arrivals for testing on day 0/1, testing on day 5/6, and one back-up. “Travellers will need to be able to access a COVID-19 testing centre, and must ensure their accommodation has wi-fi or mobile phone/landline access and coverage. Under special circumstances, temporarily leave from self-isolation at this time might be possible to visit a terminally ill family member/relative for example. “Later this evening, we will also be moving from Phase 1 of the Government’s Omicron response plan with a focus on ‘stamping it out’ to Phase 2 of ‘slowing down the spread’.

“This second phase has a strong focus on self-managing with Omicron, with reduced self-isolation times, a focus on more rapid antigen testing, digital tools for communication (e.g., text communication for positive cases), and people being responsible for communicating with close contacts. “Since this second phase also has an emphasis on trying to get help and assistance to those who are most vulnerable, it important to note that we remain in the process of protecting vulnerable communities that include our children, tamariki and tamaiki aged 5-11 years, and getting people boosted to protect them from Omicron. “Even though this Omicron

outbreak is occurring against the backdrop of high COVID-19 vaccination rates, evidence indicates that a booster shot is still needed to protect against Omicron. Inequities with respect to Māori and Pacific peoples, tamariki and tamaiki are again showing in booster and vaccination levels.

“An equity focus that reduces barriers and builds trust for people and with the appropriate prioritisation, will help people access the help and services they need at this time and avoid our hospitals becoming overwhelmed as they have become in other countries. “We need to do everything we can to slow down the spread of Omicron while our children, tamariki and tamaiki get vaccinated, and for people to get boosted. “Evidence clearly indicates that Māori and Pacific peoples and their whānau, aiaga and kainga remain vulnerable to being disproportionately impacted and affected by COVID-19 and will require focus and prioritisation with respect to COVID-19 vaccination, boosters, testing and prevention efforts. “In the meantime, there is still work for us all to do and to help break the chains of transmission and keep each other safe: get boosted, tested, vaccinated, isolate if needed, wear a mask, and follow the public health measures.”

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Papua New Guinea: ADB Welcomes Legislation to Enable Business Activity

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has welcomed the passing of legislative amendments to enable Papua New Guinea (PNG) to modernize its business registry and boost business activity. The Companies (Amendment) Act and Business Groups Incorporation (Amendment) Act will modernize PNG’s business laws, ensuring they meet global anti-money laundering standards and enabling PNG’s business registry to collect essential company information. The amendments will ensure the country’s upgraded online business registry collects all relevant and essential company data. The new registry, due to launch later in 2022, will make the process of formally registering a business faster and more accessible and will facilitate greater access to finance, contracts, and international trade for PNG businesses.

“Without the collection of this business information through online registries, businesses may struggle to operate or contract with each other,” said ADB Pacific Liaison and Coordination Office Regional Director Lotte Schou-Zibell. “ADB welcomes the passing of these important amendments which will make it easier and more efficient to do business.” “The modernization of PNG’s online business registry is critical for IPA’s ambitious program to promote business growth and investment,” Investment Promotion Authority (IPA) Managing Director Clarence Hoot said. “We are pleased that PNG is moving closer towards the full launch of its updated registry.”

The two amended acts, which passed on 20 January 2022, were developed with

support from the Private Sector Development Initiative (PSDI)—an ADB technical assistance program in partnership with the governments of Australia and New Zealand. PSDI is partnering with IPA to launch the modernized online registry in 2022. “The passage of amendments to the Companies Act and Business Groups Incorporation Act demonstrates the Government of PNG’s support for expanding business and investment opportunities for its people,” Australian High Commissioner to PNG Jon Philp said. “Australia supports PNG as it seeks to improve its business-enabling environment.”

From <https://www.adb.org/> 02/24/2022

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Asia-Pacific

Riga Establishes Digital Agency to Drive Transformation

A new centralised agency is being established in Latvia’s capital Riga to improve digital services and the use of data. The creation of the office, which will begin its work from April 1, is inspired by other cities in Europe. “In modern municipalities, technology must become the driving force behind digital transformation so that the city can offer high-quality and innovative services to its citizens,” said Mārtiņš Staķis, Chairman of the Riga City Council. “In planning this reform, Riga gained experience from European cities that are already leaders in digital growth – Helsinki, Barcelona and others. Our goal is to create a Riga digital agency that can lead the implementation of smart and forward-looking solutions in our city.”

Data, procurement, skills

The responsibilities of the new agency include ensuring the availability, security and effective use of data. The team will also be tasked with the development of shared IT solutions and improving procurement processes to promote competition between suppliers. A further area of focus will be developing digital skills among city employees, and improving internal collaboration. The Riga Digital Agency is a result of the re-organisation of the city’s Information Technology Centre as part of an IT modernisation drive. The city will launch a recruitment process to find a director for the new agency and until then, it will be led by Aris Dzērvāns, Director of the Information Technology Centre. An Information Technology Support Division will also be established to provide internal technical help.

From <https://cities-today.com/> 02/09/2022

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APEC Takes Steps to Reconnect the Region, Deepen Regional Integration

As economies learn to live with COVID-19, and as demand to travel is expected to make a steady comeback this year, APEC is taking the lead to pave a calibrated and measured way of reconnecting the dynamic region of the Asia-Pacific. In his address to senior officials and business leaders from 21 APEC member economies last week in an event held in Singapore, Thani Thongphakdi, Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Thailand and 2022 Chair of the APEC Senior Officials, underscored the need to reconnect the region to support recovery. “Thailand recognizes the need to reconnect the region to support economic recovery. Taking forward the recommendation of the region’s business leaders to APEC leaders last year, a Safe Passage Taskforce was created in order to coordinate cross-border travel resumption,” Thani explained.

He pointed out that the objective of the Taskforce is to reopen cross-border travel safely and seamlessly in the short term, while looking to expand business mobility in the longer term. “The Taskforce will engage subject matter experts by exploring possible common travel protocols and mutual recognition of health certificates, as well as promoting sustainable tourism.” To enhance connectivity in the long term, Thailand will continue conversations on broadening the scheme of the APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) and other innovative schemes to facilitate mobility for businesspeople and professionals to travel across APEC economies. “We want to keep the momentum of international cooperation going by further deepening our regional economic integration,” Thani added. “Our discussion on the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific or FTAAP has been the cornerstone in facilitating trade and investment in the region.” A policy dialogue on FTAAP will be held in May to provide an avenue for member economies and business leaders to discuss how regional economic integration should evolve in the post-COVID era. Thani emphasized the importance of involving APEC business communities throughout this process.

“As our experts are kick-starting a refreshed conversation on FTAAP, particularly on emerging trade issues post-COVID-19, we ask business communities to share these insights on what is needed in the changing landscape,” added Thani. The First APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) meeting was held in Singapore on 15 to 18 February—150 delegates attended the meeting in person and while most APEC senior officials joined virtually. In tandem, APEC’s technical meetings are underway, covering sectoral issues such as food security, ocean and fisheries, the digital economy, market access and business mobility. These discussions will culminate at the Senior Officials’ Meeting on 24 and 25 February.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 02/21/2022

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APEC Propels Regional Integration, Connectivity and Sustainability

Senior officials from 21 member economies pushed forward APEC's work to reinvigorate regional economic integration, reconnect the region and reassure sustainability for future growth as guided by the APEC 2022 theme of "Open. Connect. Balance." During the first APEC Senior Officials' Meeting in 2022, member economies deliberated approaches for refreshing the discussions on the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) post-pandemic, the reopening of safe and seamless travel in the region as well as exploring the bio-circular-green (BCG) economy model. "In past years, member economies have worked hard in moving forward our work on FTAAP," said Thailand's Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Thani Thongphakdi, who is also the Chair of 2022 APEC Senior Officials. "While differences in positions on this issue persist, I believe there are opportunities for cooperation, given the changing landscape and emerging challenges especially from the COVID-19 pandemic," he said.

"Future-proofing the work on regional economic integration, next-generation issues such as health, environment, sustainability and digital economy need to be considered." The APEC Committee on Trade and Investment will carry the discussions on FTAAP and COVID-19 forward, with a scheduled dedicated session on 15 March, and a public-private dialogue in the margins of the APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade Meeting in May, in collaboration with the APEC Business Advisory Council. Members reiterated the importance of trade as a path towards economic recovery, emphasizing their strong support for the role of the multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its core. "APEC can build good momentum for the substantive and meaningful outcomes of the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) rescheduled for this June, including on issues of trade and health, environment, agricultural, fisheries subsidies and the WTO reform," Thani explained.

Member economies also called for a continued and intensified effort to improve the services sector in APEC through the utilization of digital technologies and the APEC Services Competitiveness Roadmap, as well as by continuing discussions on environmental goods and services. According to a report by the APEC Policy Support Unit, APEC's share of total world services exports has declined from 38.8 percent in 2016 to 38.1 percent in 2019, which means that APEC has decreased its trajectory and has to ramp up services exports rapidly if it wishes to increase its global share of services exports by 2025. Services are critical for most economies as they provide the bulk of economic output and employment. APEC needs to build momentum to ensure an open and predictable environment for access to services markets. To advance APEC's sustainability agenda, Thani introduced goals that will support the promotion of economic policies that complement global efforts in addressing environmental challenges. Thani added that while APEC's mechanisms to further sustainability are decentralized, "these goals driven by the BCG economy aim to provide the entry point to advance this agenda in an integrated and comprehensive manner." Senior officials concluded their first meeting of the year and

will convene again in May this year in Bangkok, Thailand.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 02/25/2022

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East Asia

CHINA: Premier Stresses Gathering Wisdom to Improve Gov't Work

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on Monday urged efforts to "gather wisdom from all sides" to improve the government's work, and specified measures to bolster China's industrial economy and service sectors. While chairing a State Council executive meeting, Li was briefed on the handling of suggestions from deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC) and proposals from members of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in 2021. Last year, offices and departments under the State Council handled 8,666 suggestions from NPC deputies and 5,718 proposals submitted by CPPCC members, accounting for 96.4 percent and 93.4 percent of the total numbers of suggestions and proposals respectively, according to the meeting. The meeting pointed out that relevant departments adopted more than 4,300 pieces of advice and subsequently introduced over 1,600 policy measures.

With this year's "two sessions" taking place soon, the meeting urged efforts to collect suggestions and proposals from NPC deputies and CPPCC members via various means, including hotlines and network messages, and respond to them to help improve the government's decision-making process and policy implementation. The industrial and service sectors have played a key supporting role in sustaining the country's economic development and stabilizing employment, the meeting noted. As the industrial economy is not yet fully recovered and some service sectors face difficulties due to COVID-19, a slew of measures will be rolled out swiftly to provide stronger support, according to the meeting. Specifically, the country will step up income tax reductions and exemptions in the industrial and service sectors, prolong tax deferrals for small, medium and micro-sized manufacturing firms, and expand the scope of tax and fee cuts.

Financial services for enterprises should be improved, with the central bank providing incentive funds for expanding inclusive loans to small businesses, the meeting said, calling for an increase in mid- and long-term loans to manufacturers and a reduction in the financing costs of businesses. The meeting also stressed efforts to shore up weak links in the industrial and supply chains of the manufacturing sector, speed up the construction of new infrastructure and ensure the adoption of carbon-cutting technologies within key sectors. Regarding the catering, retail, tourism and transport sectors, which have faced particular difficulties, the country will increase support for them in the form of tax reductions and deferred premium

payments. While anchoring market expectations amid a complicated domestic and external environment, the country should stabilize the prices of bulk commodities, ensure food and energy security, and increase the coal supply to safeguard power usage in both production and daily life, the meeting stressed.

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Senior Official Urges Efforts to Advance Whole-Process People's Democracy, Rule of Law

A senior Chinese official on Tuesday urged persistent efforts to develop whole-process people's democracy and advance the rule of law in China. Wang Chen, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chief of the China Law Society, made the remarks while delivering a keynote speech at a legal science forum. Noting that whole-process people's democracy is a significant result of creative efforts led by the CPC, Wang called for efforts to make it more extensive, fuller in scope and sounder in practice. He said it is important that various institutions and national governance fully express the will of the people, protect their rights and interests, and spark their creativity. People working in the field of law should redouble their efforts to study and publicize China's overall and legal systems, fully leverage their relevant expertise, and put forward more high-quality suggestions, Wang said.

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National Political Advisors Urged to Conduct In-depth Study of Public Issues

China's top political advisor Wang Yang on Wednesday urged national political advisors to conduct in-depth study of issues concerning the fundamental interests of the country and the people, and to launch discussions and offer high-quality suggestions in that regard. Solid and effective efforts are needed to prepare for the fifth session of the 13th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), China's top political advisory body, Wang said at a Chairperson's Council meeting where a work report on preparations for the session was heard. Wang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the CPPCC National Committee, called on political advisors to commit to great unity and solidarity and to bring together the will and strength of the people for the convocation of the upcoming 20th CPC National Congress. Political advisors at the meeting reviewed a CPPCC National Committee report on the democratic supervision of the implementation of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) in 2021, among other reports. The meeting also endorsed a decision to revoke the membership of four persons in

the 13th CPPCC National Committee. Guo Weimin, a member of the CPPCC National Committee and its Foreign Affairs Committee, was named spokesperson for the fifth session of the 13th CPPCC National Committee.

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China to Expand Coverage of Electronic Certificates to Access Government Services

China has issued a guideline on expanding the coverage of electronic certificates that allow people and businesses to access government services, and on accelerating their nationwide recognition to further digitalize these services and optimize the country's business environment. The guideline, issued by the General Office of the State Council, urged efforts to innovate in administrative management and improve government services to promote the wider application of the electronic certificates for the benefit of the people. By the end of 2022, a unified national electronic certificate sharing system will be basically put in place, with certificates frequently used by enterprises and individuals mostly issued electronically and electronic licenses widely applied in government services, it said. It also noted that online and offline services should be better integrated, with the traditional services mode being retained to cater to the needs of the elderly, those with disabilities and other groups. China has made intensified efforts to improve government services and cut administrative red tape to further unleash market vitality and enhance operation efficiency.

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Xi Stresses Firm Adherence to China's Path of Human Rights Development

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, has stressed unwavering adherence to China's path of human rights development. Xi made the remarks while presiding over a group study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee on Friday. Xi called for more efforts to pay attention to, respect and safeguard human rights and better advance the development of China's human rights cause as the country has embarked on a new journey to fully build a modern socialist China. To respect and protect human rights is a persistent pursuit of the CPC, Xi stressed. Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, the CPC has continued to make the respect for and protection of human rights an important agenda of national governance, and has prompted historic achievements in China's human rights cause, Xi said.

The problem of absolute poverty has been solved, whole-process people's democracy further developed, social equity and justice firmly safeguarded, and the world's largest education, social security and healthcare systems established, Xi said, highlighting some of the progress in human rights development. China has effectively combated COVID-19 to protect the health and safety of the people to the greatest extent possible. China maintains that all ethnic groups are equal, respects people's religious beliefs, and safeguards the lawful rights and interests of people of all ethnic groups, Xi said. China has ensured long-term social stability. It is the only major country in the world that has consecutively formulated and enforced four national human rights action plans. It also actively participates in global governance on human rights, Xi added.

In the practice of advancing the cause of human rights, China has blazed a path of human rights development that is consistent with the trend of the times and suits the nation's conditions, Xi stressed. Xi noted six main features of China's development of human rights: upholding the Party's leadership, respecting the people's principal position, proceeding from national realities, upholding the rights to subsistence and development as the primary and basic human rights, safeguarding human rights in accordance with the law, and participating in global governance on human rights. The features are also experience that should be further upheld and developed in the context of new practices, Xi said.

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JAPAN: Fujitsu Establishes AI Ethics and Governance Office

Fujitsu Ltd has announced the decision to establish a new organization to strengthen its governance of AI ethics. The company said building and maintaining trust remains central to all of its business activities, forming the basis of its Purpose—"to make the world more sustainable by building trust in society through innovation." In March 2019, Fujitsu formulated the "Fujitsu Group AI Commitment" to create greater value for customers and society while honoring its promise to deliver safe, secure, and transparent AI technology. With this commitment as a point of departure, in September 2019 Fujitsu further established the "Fujitsu Group External Advisory Committee on AI Ethics" to ensure an objective evaluation of Fujitsu's AI ethics framework by an impartial third party. Since then, Fujitsu has continuously and proactively worked to enhance its corporate governance to enforce the principles of ethical AI. On Feb 1, Fujitsu newly established the "AI Ethics and Governance Office" to accelerate the safe and secure deployment of leading-edge technologies including artificial intelligence (AI) and other machine learning applications in society. This marks the next step in Fujitsu's ongoing efforts to strengthen and enforce comprehensive, company-wide measures to achieve robust AI ethics governance based on international best-practices, policies, and legal frameworks. The new office will focus on implementing measures to actively promote ethics related to the

research, development, and implementation of advanced technologies.

From <https://japantoday.com> 02/01/2022

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Govt to Start Online System for Obtaining Visas for Foreigners

The government plans to launch a special website by the end of the week that allows the submission of required forms online for foreigners newly entering the country. The move is designed to facilitate the pre-arrival procedures when nonresident foreigners are readmitted after border control measures implemented in response to the omicron variant surge are relaxed from March 1. The aim is to reduce the burden on users through a form submission system that allows hosts or others responsible for the new arrivals to input information about them and other details. With the easing of border control measures, the government is opening the country back up to non-tourist visitors such as foreign businesspeople and students. Businesses, schools or others that will be accepting the new arrivals will input their name, contact information, passport numbers and the person responsible for them on the website and submit the form to the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry. By electronically signing a written pledge, the required forms for visa issuance will be issued online.

The written pledge is demanded because supervision of the new arrival by the person in charge of hosting them is a criteria for the visa. In the pledge, the host promises to secure a hotel or other quarantine facility for the visitor upon entry, monitor their health while in quarantine, and to contact a medical institution if they are found to be infected. Last November, the government decided to allow the entry of some short-term and new arrivals, but that was before the first confirmation of the omicron variant. At that time, it was necessary for hosts to submit itineraries to and obtain approval from the relevant authorities. After business circles criticized the procedure for being complicated, the government decided to do away with the preliminary screening and introduce the form submission system instead. The government also plans to set up a call center to handle inquiries about the procedure.

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SOUTH KOREA: Science Ministry to Set Up Korean Version of US DARPA

The government will introduce the Korean version of the US' Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency this year to accelerate future-oriented research on innovative technology, Science and ICT Minister Lim Hye-sook said Thursday. Adapting the US DARPA model -- creator of the computer mouse, drones, the Internet predecessor Arpanet, GPS, and voice recognition -- the Korean agency will have its own independent rights in operation and budget to lead challenging research

and development of next-level technology. Its official launch is scheduled for the second half of this year, according to the ministry. The minister also laid out four major focuses for this year: Fostering “essential strategic technology,” innovating future technology, becoming a digital-leading country and fostering youth talent. “The Ministry of Science and ICT will secure technological sovereignty by gathering R&D capabilities in essential technology fields that will determine the nation’s survival. We will find the answer to become a leading country of the post-COVID-19 era in technological innovation,” Lim said in a press conference held at the Sejong Finance Center. “Based on the national essential strategic technology growth strategy announced at the end of last year, we will strengthen our competitiveness by designating pan-ministerial strategic technologies such as AI, semiconductors, battery, hydrogen, quantum and space.”

The minister said it is difficult to tell when the second launch of the country’s homegrown Nuri rocket will take place due to technical adjustments and the simulation process. Last month, the government concluded that the loosening of a fixture holding a helium tank of the Nuri rocket was the reason for the incomplete launch. The launch is scheduled for May at the moment, but officials said it is likely that the second trial will be delayed. To help the Korean ICT industry take a lead in the metaverse market, the ministry will focus on nurturing hyper-connected businesses of artificial intelligence, 6G and blockchain, the minister said. Meanwhile, she also stressed the government’s role in minimizing the digital divide. “In times like this, the digital divide leads to a gap in social and economic status. We will enact the digital inclusion act so that all people can benefit from digitalization without any gaps and expand the operation of digital classrooms,” she said. “We will support youth so that they can take on challenges and grow from them based on digitalization. We will provide resources such as data vouchers and government research centers’ infrastructure, which can create synergy in helping the youth grow.”

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 02/01/2022

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South-East Asia

MALAYSIA: Johor State Election Set for March 12

Malaysia's southern Johor state will hold state-level elections to select its new government on March 12, the country's election commission (EC) said on Wednesday. The nomination day for candidates will be on Feb. 26, with 2,597,742 eligible voters having been listed to cast their ballot, EC Chairman Abdul Ghani Salleh told a press briefing. This will be the third time in five months that Malaysians are going to the polls following the Melaka state election last November and the northern Borneo state of Sarawak, which held its polls last December. The election is expected to set the stage for the 15th general election, which must be held on or before July 2023, according to Azmi Hassan, senior research fellow at Nusantara

Academy for Strategic Research. "The Johor election comes after the lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18-years-old and automatic voter registration and political parties are eager to observe the voting trends of these new voters, who will decide the outcome in many areas," Azmi told Xinhua in a phone interview.

"This will also be a test for newer parties like Pejuang and MUDA who are going into their first election while it will be the debut of the Sabah-state based Warisan in Peninsula Malaysia," he said. Besides the new parties, Azmi said it will be important to watch how United Malays National Organization (UMNO) clashes with Bersatu and PAS, two parties with which it cooperates with in the central government but who it seeks to contest against in the Johor state election. "If UMNO manages to pull off a big win in Johor, it is very likely that instead of another state election, UMNO will push for a general election. What happens in Johor will be critical in deciding political developments at the national level," he said. UMNO is the lynchpin party of Barisan Nasional, a coalition that governed the country since independence in 1957 until it was defeated for the first time in the 2018 national polls.

From <https://english.news.cn> 02/09/2022

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Philippines: Election Campaign Kicks Off amid Pandemic

Campaign for presidential election formally kicked off in the Philippines on Tuesday, three months ahead of the voting on May 9 to choose a new president that will lead this Southeast Asian country in the next six years. At least 67.5 million Filipinos have registered to vote, including 1.8 million voters overseas. They will also elect the vice president, about 300 lawmakers, and over 18,000 positions as local officials. There are 10 presidential candidates and nine candidates for the vice president. According to surveys, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., 64, the son of former President Ferdinand Marcos, is leading in the opinion polls. Trailing behind him are 56-year-old incumbent Vice President Maria Leonor Robredo, Manila City Mayor Francisco Domagoso, Senator Manny Pacquiao, Senator Panfilo Lacson, and five others. In the Philippines, the president and vice president are elected separately. Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte-Carpio, 43, daughter of President Rodrigo Duterte, will run for vice president as the running mate of Marcos Jr.. Duterte, whose six-year term ends in June, has yet to endorse any presidential candidate. Like in past elections, some candidates already started campaigning on television, social media, and radio months before the campaign season started.

As early as October, presidential aspirants have begun crisscrossing the archipelago to dole out goodies and cash, launch TV promotions and roll out social media advertising programs. The candidates' names and pictures are displayed on giant billboards along major highways. However, unlike in the past, the candidates are not expected to barnstorm cities and towns, croon love songs, hug babies, and dance on stage to win votes. The Commission on Elections has imposed restrictions in order to

contain the spread of COVID-19, barring politicians from entering houses, crowding, handshakes, hugs, kissing, or any actions that involve physical contact. Even taking selfies and photographs, activities that require proximity with people, as well as distribution of food and drinks are prohibited. With the COVID-19 threat, the candidates are expected to be more prominent in digital platforms and hire social media savvy advisers to woo the youth, who comprise more than half of the total registered voters. Meanwhile, the crescendo of campaign rhetoric and mudslinging is also expected to intensify in the coming days as the three-month campaign unfolds.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 02/08/2022

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Philippine President Starts to Pack as Term Draws Near

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, whose term ends in June, has said that he started packing his things barely four months before he hands over the presidency to the successor. "I have started packing and shipping my things (to Davao City)," Duterte said in a taped public address aired late Monday night. "I started shipping the small things, the tokens, the bronze ones which are heavy," he said. The 76-year-old leader lived in Davao City with his family. He commuted between Metro Manila and his hometown during his six-year presidency. "I will make a speech one of these days thanking the people for the distinct honor of giving me the position as president," he added. Duterte also said he plans to buy an affordable two-bedroom condominium unit in Metro Manila to hang out whenever he is in town for a visit. Before being elected president in 2016, Duterte had served as the Davao City mayor for 23 years. There are 10 presidential aspirants on the campaign trails. According to surveys, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., 64, son of former President Ferdinand Marcos, is leading in the opinion polls. Trailing behind him are 56-year-old incumbent Vice President Maria Leonor Robredo, Manila City Mayor Francisco Domagoso, Senator Manny Pacquiao, Senator Panfilo Lacson, and five others. In the Philippines, the president and vice president are elected separately. Duterte's daughter Sara Duterte-Carpio, 43, will run for vice president as the running mate of Marcos Jr.

From https://english.news.cn 02/08/2022

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VIETNAM: PM Calls for More Efforts in Law Building and Institutional Improvement

Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính on Wednesday chaired a Government meeting on law building – the second of its kind this year. During the meeting, cabinet members discussed the Government's proposal for this year's law building programme and eight bills to be developed. The bills are the Law on Inspection (amended), Petroleum Law (amended), Law on Civil Defence, Law on Management and Protection of National Defence Works and Military Zones, Law on Co-operatives (amended), Law on Bidding (amended) and Law on implementing democracy at the

grassroots level. Addressing the opening session, Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính said that the Resolution of the 13th Party Congress emphasised continuing to pay attention to the work of building and perfecting institutions, making it one of the three breakthrough tasks. The PM said that the Government recently submitted to the National Assembly a proposal on the amendment of one law that could lead to the amendment of other laws. Problems and bottlenecks remain, especially in issues relating to natural resources management, key goods and necessities, major economic balances and macroeconomic stability, PM Chính said. He added that the economic recovery programme, worth about VNĐ350 trillion, required such problems and bottlenecks to be solved promptly so that the programme could generate positive and effective results. The PM asked ministers and heads of agencies to pay more attention and closely direct institutional improvement, especially in reviewing current legal documents and fixing them if needed. The Ministry of Justice was asked to inspect and oversee the law building work at agencies so that the work could be done properly in terms of procedures, time and quality.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 02/17/2022

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Transport Ministry Issues Statement on Its Role in Repatriation Flights

The Investigation Police Agency under the Ministry of Public Security has asked the Ministry of Transport to provide a list of "rescue" flights to repatriate Vietnamese citizens stranded overseas during the COVID-19 pandemic as part of its investigation into bribery case at the Consular Department under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Transport Ministry was requested to direct units to provide the names of airlines, flight numbers, take-off and landing airports as well as aviation businesses that were authorised to operate these flights, the agency said in a document sent to the ministry. The list of citizens returning from abroad on repatriation flights and contracts, payment costs of each flight, and conditions for citizens to return home should be clarified. The agency also asked the Transport Ministry to hand over a list of individuals who are working at the ministry in charge of approving airlines and businesses that conducted "combo" (with fees borne by the passengers) and "rescue" flights which are free of charge. In a statement the Transport Ministry said repatriation flights were carried out as the Party and State wanted to help stranded Vietnamese overseas who were in disadvantaged circumstances and needed to get home amid COVID-19 outbreaks.

The Transport Ministry has worked closely with the Foreign Affairs Ministry, the Public Security Ministry, Health Ministry, and Defence Ministry to conduct these flights, as assigned by the National Steering Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control. The Transport Ministry is responsible for directing the Civil Aviation Administration of Việt Nam to issue flight permits and flight service plans for the repatriation flights according to the Citizen Rescue Plan approved by the Consular

Department on the basis of concurrence among relevant ministries and agencies, according to the statement. “This is a mandatory procedure under aviation law and international practice for all flights,” it noted. In addition, the Civil Aviation Administration of Việt Nam is responsible for informing and guiding airlines, domestic and foreign air traffic service providers, and airport operators in carrying out flight plans as well as implementation of COVID-19 regulations on flights and at airports, the statement reads. Evaluating the demands of Vietnamese citizens stranded overseas, making the final list of approved passengers on these flights, or licensing businesses to operate ‘combo’ or ‘rescue’ flights, are not the tasks that the Transport Ministry were assigned, it claimed. The ministry has asked relevant departments and staff to provide the information requested by the investigation agency. It has been working closely and responsibly to facilitate the flights to meet the demands of the Vietnamese citizens overseas.

Earlier, the Investigation Police Agency started legal proceedings against and arrested four high-ranking officials of the Consular Department for “taking bribes” in line with Article 354 of the Penal Code. The four are Nguyễn Thị Hương Lan, born in 1974, head of the Consular Department; Đỗ Hoàng Tùng, born in 1980, deputy head of the department; Lê Tuấn Anh, born in 1982, chief of the department’s office; and Lưu Tuấn Dũng, born in 1987, deputy head of the citizen protection desk at the department. They are accused of seeking personal gain in licensing some companies that organised special flights to take Vietnamese citizens abroad home from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, with countries around the world enforcing various degrees of border closures. The flights were frequently called out for being overly expensive, having complicated application procedures, and lack of transparency in the eligibility process. After achieving high vaccination rate, Việt Nam has started to relax border rules starting in the beginning of 2022 and has lifted all restrictions on inbound/outbound flights as of February 15.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 02/20/2022

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Conference Launches Tasks for People’s Councils in 2022

The National Assembly (NA) Standing Committee held a conference in Hà Nội on Monday to review the performance of provincial-level People’s Councils in northern localities last year and launch tasks for 2022. NA Chairman Vương Đình Huệ attended and delivered remarks at the event. Nguyễn Thị Thanh, head of the Standing Committee’s Board for Deputy Affairs, said the NA Standing Committee would have held a conference reviewing the 2016 - 2021 performance of the People’s Councils last year, but instead, it sent a review report to localities due to the COVID-19 situation. In the new tenure, the NA Standing Committee decided to organise the conference annually, and meetings will take place in the northern, central, and southern regions separately in 2022 in adaptation to the pandemic, she noted. In the elections of deputies to the 15th NA and all-level People’s Councils for

the 2021 - 2026 tenure, 3,721 deputies were elected to provincial-level People's Councils, 22,550 to district-level councils, and 239,788 others to councils at the communal level.

In 2021, despite the pandemic's continued impacts, the Vietnamese economy still posted stable development and kept its attractiveness to foreign investors, which was partly attributed to efforts by all-level People's Councils - the local organ of State power and the representative of the people's will, aspirations, and right to mastery that made important decisions to implement the Party's guidelines and policies and the State's laws, according to a report delivered at the conference. At the event, permanent members of the People's Councils from some localities reported on their councils' performance and experience in 2021, which showed many new and positive points in their organisation and working methods. They also proposed several tasks and solutions for this year. Speaking at the event, NA Chairman Huệ said apart from achievements gained in the operation of People's Councils, shortcomings remained, failing to meet the requirements and expectations of citizens and voters, Chairman Huệ said. He urged to continue reviewing, completing and implementing the master plan on continuously renewing and improving the operation quality of People's Councils.

The People's Councils of localities in 2022 needed to issue resolutions to implement and supervise the implementation of Government and NA policies and resolutions on socio-economic development, finance and State budget and public investment, particularly the COVID-19 prevention and control programme and the socio-economic recovery and development programme during 2022-2023, the NA Chairman said. He also stressed the need to enhance information dissemination and application of information and technology in operation of People's Councils. Chairman Huệ asked People's Councils of localities to pay more attention to improving quality and flexibly organise forms of meetings with voters and forms of their sessions (online, in-person or combination of both); and effectively handle complaints and petitions of voters and people.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 02/22/2022

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South Asia

INDIA: Empowering Data-driven Governance, Labour Ministry Launches Nationwide Survey of Domestic Workers

In a move to implement data-driven governance in unorganised sectors, Union Minister for Labour & Employment Bhupendra Yadav launched the first-ever all India survey on domestic workers. According to a press note, the Ministry has entrusted Labour Bureau, Chandigarh to hold a survey of domestic workers in all 37 states and union territories (UTs) and 742 districts across the country. While announcing the

survey, the Minister also released the questionnaire with an instruction manual for the survey. The Ministry kept forward their view that the survey is aimed to have estimates on the number and proportion of domestic workers at the national and state level, percentage distribution of domestic workers on the basis of live-in or live-out, formal or informal employment, migrant or local, wages, socio-economic characteristics, etc. Addressing the occasion Yadav said that for the first time in independent India such a survey is being conducted. This reflects the government's commitment to have a data-driven policy powered by evidence that will handhold the government to deliver services better and ensure "sabka sath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas". He emphasised the significance of data collection and mentioned that the e-shram portal and all India surveys being conducted will pose a game changer to have new standards for data-driven policies.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 02/23/2022

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Delhi Govt Makes 425 of 456 Citizens Services Online

The Chief Secretary of Delhi Vijay Dev informed the Lieutenant Governor (L-G) of Delhi Anil Bajjal on the digitalisation of 425 citizen services, 93 per cent of the 456 services identified, senior government officials said. As per a national daily, cent per cent digitalisation of citizen services will be completed by August, a year ahead of the deadline, the CS added during a review meeting chaired by the L-G. Before the lockdowns were imposed, in May 2020, there were only 122 services available online for citizens. The pandemic-led lockdown provided an impetus to digitise more services to aid people in times of crisis and prevent crowding at government offices. As per the government data, there are a few services offered by the directorate of employment and the drugs control department that are yet to be digitised and linked to the e-district portal. However, L-G has been given assurance to have those covered by month-end. However, almost all departments integrated their citizen services with the e-district portal.

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com> 02/24/2022

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SRI LANKA: ADB-ADBI Launch Innovation and Structural Transformation Database

The new Asian Development Bank (ADB)-Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI) Innovation and Structural Transformation Database provides a valuable, one-stop platform for analyzing trade-driven growth and economic development in Asia and will be introduced during a launch webinar on 22 February. The database contains a wide variety of trade, supply chain, and capital indicators critical to the innovative growth and structural change of the region's economies. The indicators cover four broad areas: Shifts in the sectoral composition of economies, including output and employment, and how these shifts affect labor productivity. Internationally traded

products that highlight the capabilities required to produce them. Innovation indicators, such as patent-based data associated with the development of new technologies. Global value chain (GVC) indicators that show the integration of economies into GVCs, in terms of intensity, geographical distance, and diversity of their backward and forward linkages. Senior researchers from ADBI, ADB, and the United Nations University – Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute designed the ADB-ADBI Innovation and Structural Transformation Database and will explain its key features and importance for economic research and policy development during the launch webinar. The database is free, interactive, and offers a multitude of options for visualizing its available data. The data can also be downloaded.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 02/18/2022

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: New Deputy Vice President Appointed at SOCAR

Deputy Head of the Public Relations and Events Department of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) Ibrahim Ahmadov has been appointed deputy vice president of SOCAR, Trend reports. Ahmadov's current work is related to the control, organization, and coordination of corporate communication activity of SOCAR Group. "Previously, I worked as deputy head of the public relations and events department at SOCAR," Ibrahimov wrote on his Facebook page. "I have been appointed deputy vice president of SOCAR as part of the structural changes in our company. My job is to control, organize and coordinate the corporate communication activity of SOCAR Group. At the same time, I will serve as a press secretary."

From <https://en.trend.az/> 02/11/2022

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Azerbaijan Weightlifting Federation Elects New President

Azerbaijani Minister of Agriculture Inam Karimov has been elected a new president of the Azerbaijan Weightlifting Federation, Trend reports. The election was held during the reporting conference organized by the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 02/19/2022

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TURKMENISTAN: Begins Preparation for Early Presidential Elections – Media

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov instructed the Central Commission for Holding Elections and Referendums in Turkmenistan to begin preparations for holding early presidential elections, Chairman of the CEC, Gulmurad

Muradov told reporters, Trend reports. It is not yet known when the snap elections will be held. Earlier it was reported that during the extraordinary meeting of the Halk Maslakhaty (People's Council) and Milli Gengesh (National Council) of Turkmenistan, held on Feb. 11, Berdimuhamedov said that road to public administration of the country should be given to young leaders.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 02/12/2022

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Turkmenistan Aims to Promote New International Relations Philosophy

Turkmenistan will promote a new philosophy of international relations "Dialogue is a guarantee of peace," said President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, Trend reports citing Turkmenistan Golden Age online newspaper. He made the remark during the meeting of the People's Council of Turkmenistan. "As you know, I named this philosophy "Dialogue is the guarantee of peace." We will continue to work with the UN to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for the benefit of all humanity. At the same time, the issues of ensuring a peaceful and free life of people will always be in the first place," the Turkmen president emphasized. Berdimuhamedov stated that Turkmenistan would actively implement Ashgabat's new international relations philosophy, which is based on clearly calibrated political criteria, healthy, positive pragmatism, and universally recognized and understandable human values. The president also noted that the country's future strategic plan necessitates the daily completion of the tasks assigned to it.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 02/14/2022

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Turkmenistan Completes Presidential Candidate Registration Campaign

Turkmenistan's Central Election Commission (CEC) has registered the last two candidates for the snap presidential election to be held on March 12, Trend reports citing Turkmenportal. The CEC issued a presidential candidate certificate to Khydyr Nunnaev, Vice-Rector for Research at the Turkmen State Institute of Physical Culture and Sports from Ashgabat's initiative groups of citizens and Maksat Odeshov, Chairman of the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan's district committee named after Saparmurat Turkmenbashi from the Dashoguz's initiative groups. Thus the campaign for registration of candidates for the post of president of Turkmenistan that started on February 14 has been completed with nine registered candidates. Three of them were nominated by political parties and six by initiative groups of citizens. Those who have been registered by the CEC are Deputy Prime Minister Serdar Berdimuhamedov from Democratic Party and Agadzhan Bekmyradov, Deputy Head of the Executive Authority of the Mary region, for the post of president from Agrarian Party, Berdymammed Gurbanov, chief physician of the Avaza sanatorium from

Balkan region, Perhat Begenjov, Director of the Financial and Economic Secondary Vocational School from Lebap region, Maksatmyrat Ovezgeldiyev, Head of the sanitary and epidemiological service of the Babadaykhan district from Ahal region and Kakageldi Sariyev, Director of the Renewable Energy Sources research and production center under Turkmenistan's State Energy Institute from Mary region, Babamyrat Meredov, Director of the Vepaly Gurlushik ES from the Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, as well as Khydyr Nunnaev and Maksat Odeshev. Earlier during the extraordinary meeting of the Halk Maslakhaty (People's Council) and Milli Gengesh (National Council) of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said that road to the public administration of the country should be given to young leaders and instructed the CEC to begin preparations for holding early presidential elections.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 02/23/2022

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Oceania

NEW ZEALAND: Reserve Bank Committee Reappointments; New Members

Bob Buckle and Peter Harris have been reappointed as external members of the Reserve Bank of New Zealand's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), Grant Robertson said. The MPC is responsible for the monetary policy decisions needed to support maximum sustainable employment and price stability. Dr Buckle and Mr Harris were appointed as external members in 2019 for terms of three years. On the recommendation of the Board of the Reserve Bank of New Zealand, they have both been reappointed for terms of three years from 1 April 2022. "It was important to retain Dr Buckle's and Mr Harris' experience and expertise as external members of the MPC which responded to a one-in-100 year economic shock and provide continuity as the pandemic evolves," Grant Robertson said.

The Reserve Bank's Assistant Governor/General Manager Money Group Karen Silk has been appointed as an internal member of the MPC for a five year term from 16 May 2022. The Manager of the Central Bank Analytics team in the Economics Department at the Reserve Bank Adam Richardson has been appointed as an internal member for a six month term from 11 March 2022. Mr Richardson is an interim member of the MPC while the Reserve Bank recruits for the role of Chief Economist/Director of Economics. He will be the acting Chief Economist/Director of Economics when Yuong Ha, the current Chief Economist and an internal member of the MPC, leaves the Reserve Bank on 10 March 2022. "The internal candidates have the appropriate knowledge, skills and experience to assist the MPC," Grant Robertson said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 02/22/2022

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3、 Management, Capacity Building and Innovation

Asia-Pacific

Global Conference for Media Freedom: Joint communiqué

Media freedom is a cornerstone of democracy. Free and independent media is necessary for ensuring accurate information and informed public debate and discussion, holding governments accountable and drawing attention to human rights violations, and it serves as a watchdog for the public interest. Media freedom has continuously been in decline in recent years, driven in part by anti-democratic and illiberal pressures and practices and by the misuse of digital technologies to restrict media freedom. Challenges to media freedom include unduly restrictive laws, arbitrary and/or unlawful surveillance, censorship, undue interference in the circulation of information online and physical violence; these challenges are exacerbated by financial threats, which jeopardize media independence and sustainability. Women journalists are disproportionately targeted by online harassment, threats, sexist hate speech and trolling. In many instances, women journalists are subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and gender-based violence because of their sexual orientation, race, disability, religion, ethnicity or gender identity, as well as other reasons. This can lead to self-censorship such that women choose to withdraw from the public sphere, which undermines media pluralism and democracy as a whole.

By joining the Media Freedom Coalition, we have made a commitment to continue working together to improve media freedom and the safety of journalists online and offline both at home and abroad. As representatives of governments, it is our responsibility to ensure that people in our countries can freely enjoy all their human rights. Today, we recall the commitments made in the Global Pledge on Media Freedom. We committed to speaking out and taking action together: by combining forces to share information, as appropriate, and to take action in cases where journalists and media organizations are at risk; by shining a light on violations and abuses of media freedom, bringing these to the attention of the global public and working toward accountability; by standing together to intervene at the highest level with the governments of countries where media freedom is at risk and to show solidarity with countries that work to build media freedom; and by considering all available measures to address violations and abuses of international human rights law related to media freedom.

We reiterate our commitments to increase coordination locally through our diplomatic missions around the world, to defend media freedom and to increase support for and engagement with journalists and independent media under threat. We support

measures to tackle the precarious working conditions and poverty of journalists, which undermine their independence. The Media Freedom Coalition expresses its gratitude to Estonia and the Estonian Institute of Human Rights for shining a spotlight at the Global Conference for Media Freedom on the important topics of disinformation and freedom of speech, the protection of journalists and the interlinkages between media freedom and Internet freedom. We also thank them for creating the Media Freedom Coalition's website, which provides the members of the coalition with a platform to continue addressing abuses of media freedom together.

We commend the tireless work of all journalists and media workers who uphold and defend media freedom. We pay tribute to all journalists and media workers who have been targets of intimidation, violence or arbitrary detention or who, in the most extreme cases, have been killed in the course of exercising their profession. We again wholeheartedly congratulate Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov on being awarded the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize, which emphasizes the importance of independent journalism. We need journalists to report the facts, keep us informed and hold those in power accountable. When violence against journalists triumphs, media cannot be free and democracy cannot function. We look forward to celebrating the upcoming 10th anniversary of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity—a milestone in media freedom and the protection of journalists.

We welcome the ongoing work of the independent High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom to provide advice to governments to ensure the protection of media freedom in legislation, and we note the recommendations contained in the reports of the panel. We also warmly welcome the newly appointed deputy chairs of the panel, Can Yeginsu and Catherine Amirfar. We look forward to working together with them. We recognize the importance of media development work, which supports media organizations in becoming more viable and resilient and improves the enabling environment for media. We commit to working together to improve the effectiveness of this work including through the Working Group of the Coalition on Media Development.

We underscore the important role played by international and regional organizations in the protection and promotion of media freedom, including the UN, UNESCO, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Organization of American States, the African Union and the Council of Europe. We also note the complementary and fundamental role of other like-minded initiatives, such as the Freedom Online Coalition and the International Partnership on Information and Democracy. We commend the work of the Global Media Defence Fund, administered by UNESCO, in enhancing journalists' legal protections and improving media freedom by supporting investigative journalism and strategic litigation. We commend

the work of civil society organizations, and especially that of the Media Freedom Coalition—Consultative Network, co-chaired by IFEX, ARTICLE 19 and the Pakistan Press Foundation, in providing the Media Freedom Coalition with expert counsel and strategic direction.

Finally, we would like to thank Maldives, Germany and Latvia for their commitment to media freedom as members of the Media Freedom Coalition's Executive Group, and we would like to welcome the Czech Republic and Estonia as new members of the Executive Group, as well as Ireland, which has officially joined the Media Freedom Coalition as its 50th member. We would like to express our gratitude to the United Kingdom for initiating the work of, and being a strong co-chair of, the Media Freedom Coalition. We are also thankful to the United Kingdom for launching the Media Freedom Coalition Secretariat, which will ensure the sustainability of the coalition. We also thank Canada for its ongoing leadership as co-chair of the Media Freedom Coalition since 2019 and welcome the Netherlands as a new co-chair of the coalition. The Netherlands will provide strong leadership in this role.

From <https://www.mediafreedomcoalition.org/> 02/09/2022

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Smart City Mobility Index: European Cities Rank Highest

This week, the parking tech company EasyPark Group published its Smart City Mobility Index, revealing which cities are leaders in mobility innovation. Examining parking solutions, traffic management systems and clean transport in cities from all over the globe, the group concluded that European cities rank at the top of the index.

Expanding on previous findings

Before delving into the results of the study, it is important to note that the Smart City Mobility Index is an extension of a previous study carried out by the group. In October 2021, the company conducted and published its Cities of the Future Index, which focused on 4 key sections, namely Digital Life, Mobility Innovation, Business Tech Infrastructure, and Environment. "We recently conducted the Cities of the Future Index which contained a section that specifically looked at mobility innovation and three areas within it: parking innovation, traffic management and clean transport. Mobility should be of utmost importance to governing bodies, and therefore we conducted a deep dive to reveal the cities that are excelling in this area," explained CEO of EasyPark Group, Johan Birgerzon.

Three indicators of Mobility Innovation

To assess the Parking Innovation of a city, the group assessed the number of parking spaces per capita, the use of digital payments at parking spots, the number of parking technology operators, the civilian adoption level of parking technology, and how widespread it is. For the Traffic Management indicator, it analysed congestion levels, how long travellers spend in traffic, and the level of dissatisfaction due to long

commutes. Calculating how clean a city's transport is, it looked at the number of green vehicles per capita, new electric car sales, charging infrastructure per capita, and CO2 emissions.

How do cities rank?

To ensure that its rankings are as accurate as possible, the group split the cities into 3 categories based on population sizes. The top 5 cities in each category are listed as follows:

Cities with over 3 million residents

Barcelona, Spain

Berlin, Germany

London, UK

Rotterdam, Netherlands

Manchester, UK

Cities with between 600,000 and 3 million residents

Copenhagen, Denmark

Dortmund, Germany

Amsterdam, Netherlands

Zurich, Switzerland

Vienna, Austria

Cities with between 50,000 and 600,000 residents

Lund, Sweden

Aalborg, Denmark

Kortrijk, Belgium

Aarhus, Denmark

Rostock, Germany

To view all the cities in the Smart City Mobility Index, visit EasyPark Group's website.

From <https://easyparkgroup.com/> 02/09/2022

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Plastic Pollution Is Growing Relentlessly as Waste Management and Recycling Fall Short, Says OECD

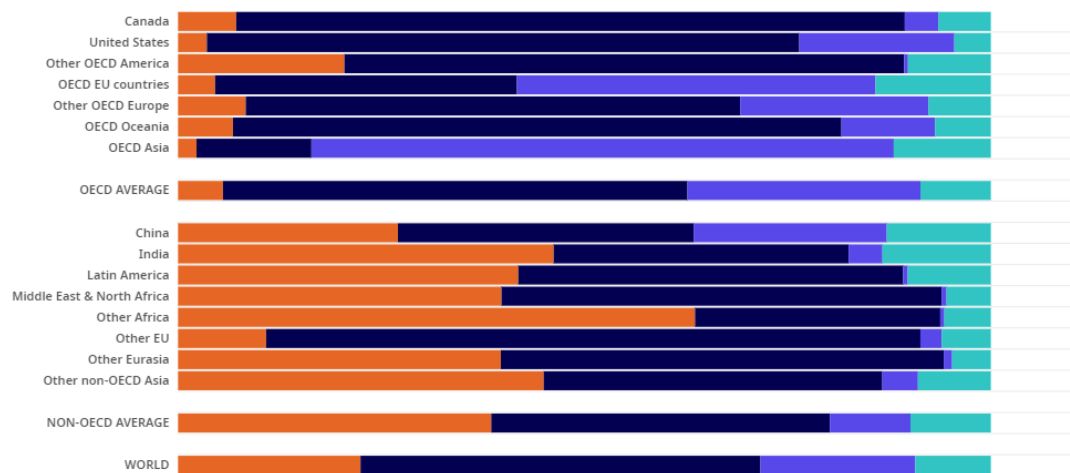
The world is producing twice as much plastic waste as two decades ago, with the bulk of it ending up in landfill, incinerated or leaking into the environment, and only 9% successfully recycled, according to a new OECD report. Ahead of UN talks on international action to reduce plastic waste, the OECD's first Global Plastics Outlook shows that as rising populations and incomes drive a relentless increase in the amount of plastic being used and thrown away, policies to curb its leakage into the environment are falling short. Almost half of all plastic waste is generated in OECD countries, according to the Outlook. Plastic waste generated annually per person

varies from 221 kg in the United States and 114 kg in European OECD countries to 69 kg, on average, for Japan and Korea. Most plastic pollution comes from inadequate collection and disposal of larger plastic debris known as macroplastics, but leakage of microplastics (synthetic polymers smaller than 5 mm in diameter) from things like industrial plastic pellets, synthetic textiles, road markings and tyre wear are also a serious concern.

Globally, only 9% of plastic waste is recycled while 22% is mismanaged

Share of plastics treated by waste management category, after disposal of recycling residues and collected litter, 2019

Mismanaged & uncollected litter Landfilled Incinerated Recycled



Source: [OECD Global Plastics Outlook Database](#)



OECD countries are behind 14% of overall plastic leakage. Within that, OECD countries account for 11% of macroplastics leakage and 35% of microplastics leakage. The Outlook notes that international co-operation on reducing plastic pollution should include supporting lower-income countries in developing better waste management infrastructure to reduce their plastic leakage. The report finds that the COVID-19 crisis led to a 2.2% decrease in plastics use in 2020 as economic activity slowed, but a rise in littering, food takeaway packaging and plastic medical equipment such as masks has driven up littering. As economic activity resumed in 2021, plastics consumption has also rebounded. Reducing pollution from plastics will require action, and international co-operation, to reduce plastic production, including through innovation, better product design and developing environmentally friendly alternatives, as well as efforts to improve waste management and increase recycling.

Bans and taxes on single-use plastics exist in more than 120 countries but are not doing enough to reduce overall pollution. Most regulations are limited to items like plastic bags, which make up a tiny share of plastic waste, and are more effective at reducing littering than curbing plastics consumption. Landfill and incineration taxes that incentivise recycling only exist in a minority of countries. The Outlook calls for

greater use of instruments such as Extended Producer Responsibility schemes for packaging and durables, landfill taxes, deposit-refund and Pay-as-You-Throw systems. Most plastics in use today are virgin – or primary – plastics, made from crude oil or gas. Global production of plastics from recycled – or secondary – plastics has more than quadrupled from 6.8 million tonnes (Mt) in 2000 to 29.1 Mt in 2019, but this is still only 6% of the size of total plastics production. More needs to be done to create a separate and well-functioning market for recycled plastics, which are still viewed as substitutes for virgin plastic. Setting recycled content targets and investing in improved recycling technologies could help to make secondary markets more competitive and profitable.

Some key findings from the Outlook:

Plastic consumption has quadrupled over the past 30 years, driven by growth in emerging markets. Global plastics production doubled from 2000 to 2019 to reach 460 million tonnes. Plastics account for 3.4% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Global plastic waste generation more than doubled from 2000 to 2019 to 353 million tonnes. Nearly two-thirds of plastic waste comes from plastics with lifetimes of under five years, with 40% coming from packaging, 12% from consumer goods and 11% from clothing and textiles. Only 9% of plastic waste is recycled (15% is collected for recycling but 40% of that is disposed of as residues). Another 19% is incinerated, 50% ends up in landfill and 22% evades waste management systems and goes into uncontrolled dumpsites, is burned in open pits or ends up in terrestrial or aquatic environments, especially in poorer countries.

In 2019, 6.1 million tonnes (Mt) of plastic waste leaked into aquatic environments and 1.7 Mt flowed into oceans. There is now an estimated 30 Mt of plastic waste in seas and oceans, and a further 109 Mt has accumulated in rivers. The build-up of plastics in rivers implies that leakage into the ocean will continue for decades to come, even if mismanaged plastic waste could be significantly reduced. Considering global value chains and trade in plastics, aligning design approaches and the regulation of chemicals will be key to improving the circularity of plastics. An international approach to waste management should lead to all available sources of financing, including development aid, being mobilised to help low and middle-income countries meet estimated costs of EUR 25 billion a year to improve waste management infrastructure.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 02/22/2022

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APEC to Strengthen Food Security, Safeguard the Environment

Food security, food safety and sustainable agriculture development have long been concerns in Asia-Pacific, and as the region works to overcome the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, APEC is advancing actions to ensure that people do not go hungry and are well nourished, while taking care of the environment. “Despite

having various individual food systems, member economies are confronted with similar vulnerabilities, and this is why collaboration will be the key in our efforts to strengthen food security in APEC,” said Chantanon Wannakejohn, Chair of the APEC Policy Partnership on Food Security. “There is a need for us to improve both the quality and the quantity of our food production, this also includes improving the way we trade our food products with each other,” he added. “While we look for ways to grow and increase our production, we need to decrease the environmental impact of food value chains and support good environmental outcomes.”

“APEC should have a role in addressing some of the key food security challenges as we are, collectively, significant food producers and consumers.” Sustainability has become the main focus area as APEC officials advance the region’s vision to restore growth that is strong, balanced, secure, sustainable and inclusive, including ensuring food security and safety. Last year, agriculture and food ministers reaffirmed their commitment to an open, transparent, productive, sustainable and resilient APEC food system by launching a new 10-year food security roadmap. This year, the Policy Partnership on Food Security will focus on developing concrete actions to carry out the APEC Food Security Roadmap of 2030. Leveraging the rapid advancement of digital technology over the course of the pandemic, member economies are seeking wider adoption of global data standards to improve the overall transparency and efficiency of food value chains, with a review scheduled to be conducted in 2025. “Digitalization and other innovative technology provide us with opportunities to strengthen food security by enhancing productivity, minimizing food loss and waste, dealing with climate change and natural disasters, as well as facilitating food waste,” Chantanon added. Member economies will explore domestic schemes or programs that encourage innovative products and solutions, as well as research and development of emerging technologies such as smart agriculture.

Public-private partnership will also play a key role in supporting members’ individual and collective efforts to minimize the food system’s harmful impact on the environment. For this, economies are looking to intensify public-private investment in infrastructure and cold-chain to reduce the current level of food loss and waste. “We strongly believe that the future of food security and economic growth will depend on how we can foster growth in parallel with creating the balance in our economy, social and environment front,” Chantanon added. “This is also in line with the theme and priorities of APEC Thailand 2022.” Thailand has highlighted its economic model of bio-circular-green (BCG) as one of its priorities this year. Agriculture and the food sector are one of the main focus industries—the goal being products diversification and the migration of low-value commodities to value-added products. The Food Security Ministerial Meeting is scheduled to be held in August this year.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 02/22/2022

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CHINA: More Cross-border E-commerce Pilot Zones Approved

China's State Council has approved setting up more cross-border e-commerce pilot zones in 27 cities and regions as the government seeks to stabilize foreign trade and foreign investments. The new pilot zones, including those in Erdos in Inner Mongolia and the city of Yangzhou in Jiangsu Province, will replicate and advance the experience learned from the previous five batches of pilot zones, according to a statement released by the State Council. While trying to promote the high-quality development of trade, the cabinet also stresses efforts to ensure national security, internet security, data security, and biological security to foster an amicable business environment for market entities. China's cross-border e-commerce has been expanding much faster than overall foreign trade, and its share in overall foreign trade has gone up significantly. Since 2015, China's State Council has established 105 cross-border e-commerce pilot zones in five batches. The new business model has become a vibrant force driving China's foreign trade growth. Official data shows that China's total trade in goods moved up another notch in 2021, exceeding 6 trillion U.S. dollars for the first time, despite the pandemic continuing to weigh on global trade.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 02/08/2022

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China Excludes Affordable Rental Housing from Property Credit Control

China will not include affordable rental housing loans in the management system that sets caps on real estate loans, the country's central bank said Tuesday. Financial institutions should scale up support for affordable rental housing in accordance with law while managing risks and pursuing sustained development, according to a statement jointly issued by the People's Bank of China (PBOC) and the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission. The move is expected to increase loan issuances for affordable rental housing projects and aims to further improve the country's housing support system, the PBOC said. To guard its financial system against risks, China has implemented the management system for property loans since Jan. 1, 2021, imposing upper limits on outstanding real estate loans and mortgages for lenders. Moving forward, the central bank pledged to put in place a rental housing financial system and promote the healthy development of the property sector.

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Chinese Premier Stresses Support for Agricultural Production

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang stressed increasing support for agricultural production to ensure that annual grain output continues to exceed 1.3 trillion jin (650 billion kg) this year. Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks in an instruction to a national work conference on Spring agricultural production held on Sunday in east China's Shandong Province. Noting the current growth of wheat seedlings is weak, Li urged precautions against plant diseases, insect pests, and extreme weather to ensure another bumper summer harvest. Efforts should be made to ramp up support for agriculture production, guarantee agricultural supplies, keep the prices of agriculture supplies stable, and ensure the Spring farming gets off to a good start, Li said. Vice Premier Hu Chunhua, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, attended and addressed the conference, underscoring the importance of ensuring supplies of grain and farm produces to support the stable economic and social development. Hu urged solid efforts to meet this year's agricultural targets in full, stabilize grain planting, expand the production of soybean and oil plants, and mitigate the impact of natural disasters.

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China to Step Up Support for Industrial and Services Sectors in Special Difficulty

China will boost the steady growth of the industrial economy and support the services sectors in special difficulty, according to a decision made at the State Council's Executive Meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang on Monday. The meeting underscored the backbone role of industrial and services sectors in economic development and employment stability. As recovery of the industrial economy is not yet fully established and some service industries still face special difficulty caused by COVID-19, measures will be rolled out swiftly to provide stronger support. "We are introducing the relief policies for industrial and services sectors in special difficulty first this year, as part of the effort to frontload policies as appropriate." Li said. More income tax relief will be extended to industrial and services sectors. This year, micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) that purchase new equipment worth above 5 million yuan (about 786,000 U.S. dollars) and with a 3-year depreciation period are entitled to a one-off deduction of total purchase costs from taxable income, or a 50 percent deduction for such purchases of equipment with a depreciation period of four, five or ten years.

Tax deferral policies will be extended for MSMEs in the manufacturing sector. The coverage of the policy to reduce or waive six local taxes and two fees (namely, resource tax, urban maintenance and construction tax, real-estate tax, urban land use tax, stamp tax and tax of farmland used for non-agricultural purposes as well as education surcharge and local education surcharge) will be expanded to include all low-profit small businesses and self-employed households. Guidance will be

provided to strengthen financial services. The People's Bank of China will provide incentive funding to support increase of inclusive loans to micro and small businesses. Efforts will be made to facilitate a fairly rapid growth in medium and long-term loans to manufacturers. These will enable a steady fall in businesses' overall financing costs. Industrial and supply chains in the manufacturing sector will be strengthened and weak links shored up, and rebuilding of industrial foundation will be taken forward.

Efforts will be accelerated to develop new infrastructure and upgrade energy-saving and low-carbon technologies in key areas. These will boost effective investment. To address the special difficulties facing catering, retails, tourism and passenger transportation, support will be scaled up including temporary tax breaks and partial deferral of social insurance contributions, with a view to promoting stable employment and consumption recovery. Value-added tax will be exempted in 2022 for public transportation services such as bus, long-distance passenger transportation, ferry and taxi. The temporary refund of quality guarantee deposit for tourism services at the rate of 80 percent will stay effective. For micro and small businesses and self-employed households in the services sector renting state-owned property, six months of their rentals will be waived for those in areas classified as high or medium-COVID-risk areas this year, and three months of such rentals will be waived for those in other areas.

Localities may provide assistance deemed proper to micro and small businesses and self-employed households renting non-state-owned property, and reduce or exempt property tax and urban land use tax this year for property owners who cut or waive rentals. "Inflation is a prominent issue facing the world, and we must pay close attention to its potential spillovers. China's consumer price rises less than one percent. A very important reason is that in dealing with various challenges, we did not resort to a deluge of stimulus or excessive money supply, and we managed to stand firm. The macro leverage ratio was stable or down slightly last year," Li said. "We are confident and capable of tackling inflation, but we must stay on alert. Bottlenecks in the services sector could also lead to sectoral inflation. As consumption remains subdued at present, it is important to take measures as quickly as possible, which is conducive to overall circulation of the national economy. It is no easy feat that we have not experienced inflationary pressures over the past years. Should inflation occur, it would cause a major impact on the society. Therefore it is crucial to ensure supply and keep prices stable."

The meeting stressed the importance of ensuring targeted and regular COVID response. Efforts to ensure the supply and stable prices of commodities will continue, to ease cost-induced pressures on downstream enterprises and keep consumer prices generally stable. Food and energy security must be safeguarded. Efforts will be made to ensure a bumper harvest this year. Coal supply will be increased and coal-fired power plants will be supported in running at full capacity and generating

more electricity, so as to meet the electricity needs for production and residential consumption. Policies to further help enterprises overcome difficulties will be prepared, in order to boost business vitality and the driving force for economic development. "Amid the complex and challenging situation at home and abroad, we must attach great importance to tackling the constraints in economic activity and anchoring market expectations," Li said.

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China to Pilot Commercial Endowment Insurance Nationwide

From March 1, China will expand a soon-to-be nationwide pilot scheme for commercial endowment insurance catering to its aging population, the country's insurance regulator said on Monday. Dedicated to elderly care, commercial endowment insurance products are available to those aged 60 and above, according to the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission. The country launched the pilot scheme in Zhejiang and Chongqing in June 2021. As of late January, six insurers have participated in the scheme, with premiums totaling 400 million yuan (about 63.1 million U.S. dollars). Expanding the pilot scheme will make endowment insurance products accessible to more consumers, boost the consumption of elderly care-oriented financial products, and encourage insurers to discover more paths to develop commercial endowment insurance, the commission said. In its latest step to implement a national strategy to address population aging, China has released a blueprint for the development of the country's elderly care services system during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025). The plan specifies major goals and tasks for the five-year period, including expanding the supply of elderly care services, improving the health support mechanism for the elderly, and advancing the innovative and integrated development of service models.

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China Boosts Support for Export Credit Insurance

China is moving to step up support for export credit insurance as part of its efforts to spur the stable growth of foreign trade. Regulators should guide enterprises to make full use of export credit insurance policy tools and give full play to the role of export credit insurance in risk protection, according to a circular jointly released by the Ministry of Commerce and the China Export & Credit Insurance Corporation. The circular called for support to enterprises to deepen traditional export destinations and tap diversified markets, with a focus on providing credit insurance services for exports to countries along the Belt and Road, emerging markets, and free-trade zone partners. Urging timely attention on the difficulties facing small and medium-sized trade firms, the circular stressed targeted efforts to expand insurance coverage and

scale for them and cut their insurance costs. It also detailed efforts to encourage the growth of emerging foreign trade models such as cross-border e-commerce and overseas warehouses. In 2021, China has taken a slew of measures 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. Official data shows that China's total foreign trade in goods moved up another notch in 2021, exceeding 6 trillion U.S. dollars for the first time, despite the pandemic continuing to weigh on global trade.

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China to Increase Affordable Rental Housing Supply: Ministry

China will work to expand the supply of affordable rental housing as part of efforts to resolve housing difficulties, said the country's housing authorities at a Thursday press conference. With developing subsidized rental housing as one of the priorities this year, China will have 2.4 million units of government-subsidized rental homes available nationwide this year, said Wang Menghui, minister of housing and urban-rural development. The country will also add another 100,000 public rental houses and renovate 1.2 million houses in rundown areas, said the minister. In 2021, a total of 942,000 government-subsidized rental homes in 40 key cities were provided to help new city dwellers and young people in need of affordable housing, data from the ministry showed. The country will maintain the continuity and stability of its housing policies and strengthen precision and coordination in policy maneuver, said Wang.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 02/24/2022

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JAPAN: Cyber Chakai Aims to Make Tea Ceremony Traditions More Accessible with Modern Technology

Though we call them “tea ceremonies” in English, in Japanese the structured sharing of freshly brewed matcha is usually called chakai, or a “tea meeting.” Calling it a meeting really makes more sense, because while the host is the one who prepares and serves the tea, there are various procedures and etiquette points that guests are expected to understand and follow as well. However, even many Japanese people are unfamiliar with, or have forgotten, what they're supposed to do in a chakai. In modern times, it's not uncommon for someone to have no first-hand experience beyond a few days of culture lessons in junior high school. So to help make tea ceremonies more accessible, a team of designers came up with the idea for Cyber Chakai. The project was a joint effort between several partners, including Fujitsu, TZEN Communications, Kyoto tea wholesaler Yamamasa Koyamaen, and Tokyo

green tea cafe Atelier Matcha. The concept for Cyber Chakai is to combine the traditional aspects of tea ceremony with modern technology, utilizing projected images and camera sensors.

As guests enter the room, a camera confirms their arrival and their seating space is illuminated on the tatami reed-flooring, along with a welcome message. Once all the visitors are in their place, the host enters to serve the customary sweets that are part of the ceremony, and to prepare the tea. Once a guest's cup of tea is placed in front of them, the room's camera sensors recognize and illuminate the vessel, and instructions for what to do next are also projected onto the floor. For example, after you pick up the cup, you're supposed to hold it in your left hand and rotate it clockwise three times before taking a sip, in order to fully appreciate the ceramic design and color (as shown at the point queued in the video below). By offering this guidance in written form, the quiet, tranquil atmosphere of the tea ceremony can be preserved. The Cyber Chakai concept also uses image projection to create virtual landscape windows and interior decorations, such as calligraphy scrolls, to help the host create the ideal mood for the occasion.

Many of these artistic flourishes are applications of Fujitsu's virtual conference technology, and the Cyber Chakai shown in the video even includes a sort of party game in which the guests try to guess which specific variety of tea they've sampled, "writing" their guesses on the floor using a stylus which the cameras can track the motion of and convert into projected text, which can then be passed around the room and even onto the walls as though it were written on a physical piece of paper. Two Cyber Chakai events were held at Fujitsu's Okada Memorial Library facility last month, and the creative partners hope that the concept can be adopted in ways to spread understanding and appreciation of tea ceremonies among those whose inexperience might preclude them from ordinarily taking part in the custom, including visitors to Japan from overseas.

From <https://japantoday.com> 02/07/2022

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Digital Training Programs Eyed to Help People Retrain, Foster Tech Talent

The government plans to launch educational programs focused on teaching digital skills to unemployed people and nonregular workers whose employment situation has been impacted by the coronavirus crisis. With the Cabinet of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida positioning the digital sector as a pillar of its growth strategy, nurturing human resources is another aim of the educational programs, which are scheduled to start in fiscal 2022 and likely to be free of charge. According to the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry, the pandemic has impacted the employment situation of more than 120,000 workers, including people who were made redundant and those who were not offered contract renewals, among other situations. In cooperation with the

private sector and the national network of “Hello Work” employment centers, the government will support people who want to acquire digital skills, helping job seekers find work or change their careers.

The programs will initially be offered at 25 universities and technical schools across the country and will accept about 750 participants. Participants who complete foundation courses in information security and programming are also expected to be offered work experience opportunities. Courses for employed people will also be launched in more practical fields such as data analysis, deep learning and technology related to the so-called internet of things. About 300 people are expected to be accepted on such programs at 10 universities and other educational facilities. The government aims to offer the digital courses nationwide by fiscal 2023 at the earliest.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 02/08/2022

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Japan Unveils Booster Rate Data in Major Cities to Push Vaccination Rollout

In an effort to urge a faster rollout of COVID-19 booster shots, the government has started listing the rates of vaccination in 20 major cities on the website of the Prime Minister’s Office. This information is in addition to the vaccination rates of these third shots per prefecture that are already available on the website. Data on the 23 wards of Tokyo taken as a whole is also listed. As of Tuesday, the list shows that Okayama has the highest booster vaccination rate among the 20 ordinance-designated cities at 17.5%, while Yokohama has the lowest rate at 4%. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida referred to booster shots at a meeting of the government and the ruling coalition on Tuesday. “The data input to the government system shows that booster shots increased from the previous day by about 1.1 million doses,” Kishida said, though the figure is different from the actual increase in a single day because information about the shots is sometimes input later than the date of vaccination. Additionally, pandemic-related quasi-emergency priority measures scheduled to end for 21 prefectures on Sunday are set to be extended for at least nine of them. The government on Tuesday was considering extending the measures to March 6 for Fukushima, Hokkaido, Ibaraki, Kagoshima and Tochigi. A day earlier, it had planned to extend them to the same date for Hyogo, Kyoto, Osaka and Shizuoka. As for letting measures end for some prefectures, the government is considering doing so for Okinawa and Yamaguchi. The decisions will be finalized Friday.

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Japan Might Bring Back Proof of Vaccination System to Push Booster Shots

With COVID-19 booster shots administered to only 15% of the population so far, the government is looking to reintroduce a proof of vaccination system to allow entry to eateries and events. The system was introduced in November last year to remove restrictions on the number of people allowed in restaurants and event venues, even under a novel coronavirus-related state of emergency or quasi-emergency. Proof of a negative PCR test was also allowed. After the omicron variant spread and conspicuously infected people who had already received their second dose of the vaccination series, the system was suspended in January. As a third dose is said to be effective against the effects of the omicron variant, receiving the booster shot will likely be the prerequisite for proof of vaccination. A subcommittee of experts on COVID-19 control measures will be convened within the week to begin discussions, according to government officials. The quasi-emergency measures currently in place in Tokyo and 30 prefectures are provisionally set to end March 6, so the government will hear expert opinions when considering the timing of the system's reintroduction.

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SOUTH KOREA: Gov't Mulling Providing Self-test Kits to Vulnerable Groups

The government is considering providing COVID-19 self-test kits to vulnerable groups for free, including low-income citizens. The Ministry of Health and Welfare said on Tuesday that it is holding working-level talks with relevant ministries to nail down the scope of beneficiaries and the size of the aid, which it views as necessary to prevent the spread of the highly transmissible omicron variant. The move comes amid criticism that the government's shift to a new response system tailored to omicron has made it difficult for vulnerable groups to purchase self-test kits. Under the new response system, the polymerase chain reaction(PCR) tests are limited to high-risk groups, such as those aged 60 or older. People who do not belong to the groups are offered the PCR tests only after they test positive on antigen tests. Demand for such kits has risen sharply, with local pharmacies quickly running out stock. Moreover, the government has decided to provide fever reducers, thermometers, self-test kits and disinfectants only to high-risk groups requiring management, making it even harder for those in low-income brackets and the disabled to have access. A budget proposal deliberated by the parliamentary health and welfare committee on Monday includes a new budget worth over 150 billion won, earmarked to supply self-test kits to children, the elderly and the disabled as well as nursing homes.

From <http://world.kbs.co.kr> 02/08/2022

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ICT Minister Calls for Telcos' Cooperation on Dispute over Additional 5G Frequencies

Science and ICT Minister Lim Hye-sook on Thursday met with the heads of three major South Korean telecom operators to discuss a dispute over additional 5G network frequency bands and urged cooperation in providing better network service to consumers. In December, the ministry agreed to open bidding for additional 5G networks in the 3.4- to 3.42-gigahertz spectrum, as requested by LG Uplus, the smallest mobile carrier. Lim earlier hinted at a possible delay in the auction -- initially planned for this month -- after top mobile carrier SK Telecom Co. and No. 2 player KT Corp. complained about the ICT ministry's decision on the additional bidding. "We urge your swift cooperation in expanding investment and in providing network service that meets consumer demand," Lim said. SK Telecom and KT say LG Uplus is at a relative advantage in the auction, as it costs considerably less for the company to utilize the spectrum, which is closest to the frequency used by LG Uplus. Late last month, SK Telecom filed a request to the ministry for an additional 40 MHz band to be put up for bidding, citing the need for fair competition among the three companies. In June 2018, the ICT ministry completed an auction for 5G network frequencies used by the country's three mobile carriers. SK Telecom and KT each won 100 MHz in the 3.5 GHz wavelength, which can provide better service at longer distances, with LG Uplus settling for 80 MHz. The total bidding price of the 280 MHz at the 2018 auction -- allowed for use for 10 years until November 2028 -- was 3.68 trillion won (US\$3 billion).

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 02/17/2022

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Moon Welcomes WHO's Decision to Establish Global Biomanufacturing Training Hub in S. Korea

President Moon Jae-in on Thursday welcomed a decision by the World Health Organization (WHO) to set up a global biomanufacturing training hub in South Korea, saying the move would help Seoul achieve its goal of becoming a global vaccine hub. Moon made the remarks after WHO announced it will establish the facility in South Korea that will carry out biomanufacturing training for workforces from around the world. "Korea has become a hub country for education and fostering professionals to increase vaccine capabilities in developing countries," Moon said in a message posted on social media. "We will actively share our experiences and knowhow with the international community and contribute to self-sufficiency of vaccines and resolving vaccine inequality," Moon said. The facility will provide technical and hands-on training on operational and good manufacturing practice requirements, and will complement specific trainings on an mRNA vaccine technology, WHO said. The facility is expected to help the low- and middle-income nations strengthen their biomanufacturing capabilities.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com/> 02/24/2022

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Gov't Launches Forum Seeking New Strategies for FTAs

The government launched a forum on Friday to seek new strategies for free trade agreements(FTA) in line with the changing global trade environment. Experts attending the inaugural forum hosted by the trade ministry called for an in-depth and strategic analysis, stressing that analyzing the economic effects of FTAs offers the basis for future strategies. They also advised the government to consider characteristics of different types of trade pacts in the analyses, and to extend its scope to include the consequent effects of participation in global supply chains and intermediary goods. The international trade environment is rapidly changing due to the expansion of trade protectionism, intensifying Sino-U.S. rivalry, and a transition to digital and green economies post-pandemic. FTAs have also taken various formats, such as mega FTAs and pacts specializing in specific fields. The ministry plans to host five to six additional forums this year.

From <http://world.kbs.co.kr/> 02/25/2022

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S. Korea Remains 5th in Global Car Production Kama

South Korea was the fifth-largest country in the world in terms of auto production last year, keeping its rank for the second consecutive year despite the chip shortage-triggered decrease in car manufacturing, data showed Monday. According to the Korea Automobile Manufacturers Association, the country produced some 3.46 million cars, a 1.3 percent decrease from the year before. KAMA explained that despite a global shortage of semiconductors, South Korea was able to minimize the decrease in output by securing supplies as much as possible and effectively managing its inventory. The country to produce the most cars was China with 26.8 million, followed by the US with 9.15 million, Japan with 7.84 million and India with 4.39 million. India, in fact, showed a remarkable 29.6 percent increase in production, making it to fourth, replacing Germany. Germany saw an 8.8 percent drop in output. Germany had produced only 3.42 million cars, the lowest output since 1975, due to a critical semiconductor shortage in the second half of last year.

Growth of car production worldwide marked 2 percent in 2021, KAMA said, citing the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic and a semiconductor shortage as the main causes for limiting quantitative growth. In the case of China, its car exports grew by more than 100 percent on-year in 2021 as it tried to resolve oversupply. This, KAMA evaluated, will deepen competition with South Korea as Asia's fourth-largest economy heavily relies on exports for its growth. Electric vehicle production, meanwhile, has increased in China by 13.6 percent and Spain by 9.3 percent with the help of their government support in expanding electric vehicle production, the organization said. "Countries like China and the US that have a very big domestic market can increase the production of EVs with just some government subsidies. But South Korea, which has a small domestic market, needs much more than (subsidy handouts) such as active corporate investment," said an official from KAMA.

South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Tightening Social Restrictions Following Omicron Wave

The Indonesian government has decided to upgrade the public mobility restriction protocol, locally known as PPKM, to level 3 alert status, following the wave of COVID-19 Omicron variant. The country's Coordinating Minister for Maritime and Investment Affairs, Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, told a press conference on Monday that the level 3 restriction was applied in Indonesia's capital Jakarta and its satellite cities of Bogor, Depok, Tangerang and Bekasi, renowned resort island Bali, Yogyakarta, and Bandung. The PPKM level 3 means that public places such as cinemas, restaurants, shopping centers, and houses of worship are only allowed to receive visitors only up to 60 percent capacity and to close by 9:00 p.m. Only adult visitors who have been fully vaccinated are allowed to enter those places, where for children, only those who have received their first shot, are allowed to get into. The decision to elevate the level restriction policy came just days after Bali, the country's most renowned holiday island, reopened for direct international flights from all the countries and regions worldwide. The Southeast Asian country is seeing a surge in COVID-19 cases since January, driven by the Omicron variant. Indonesia on Monday confirmed 26,121 new COVID-19 cases, raising its tally of infections to 4,542,601, the country's health ministry said. According to the ministry, the death toll from COVID-19 in the country rose by 82 to 144,636, while 8,577 more people recovered during the past 24 hours, bringing the total number of recoveries to 4,191,604. As the Indonesian government is accelerating its national vaccination programs to curb the spread of the virus, more than 186.70 million people have received their first dose of vaccines, while over 131.11 million have taken the second dose.

From <https://english.news.cn> 02/07/2022

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Indonesia Seeks 8.58 Bln USD Investment to Close Coal-Fired Power Plants

Indonesia is seeking 8.58 billion U.S. dollars in investment to shut down a number of coal-fired power plants as the country is currently expediting the transition into green energy. The country's coordinating minister for maritime and investment affairs, Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, said at the Mandiri Investment Forum held virtually on Wednesday that the investment could help retire 5.5 gigawatts of the power plants, which was targeted to be completed by 2030. In the next stage, from 2030 to 2055, the country would retire 49 gigawatts of coal power plants as an effort to reach net-zero emission by 2060 or earlier, according to the minister. As one of the world's

top carbon dioxide-emitting countries, Indonesia has been committed to reducing the use of fossil energy and has planned to replace the coal-fired plants with solar, geothermal and wind power, Pandjaitan said.

From <https://english.news.cn> 02/09/2022

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CAMBODIA: Gov't Defends Decision to Establish National Internet Gateway

The Cambodian government on Tuesday defended its decision on establishing a national internet gateway, saying the move is intended to strengthen tax collection and deter cybercrime. "The establishment of national internet gateway, which prevails in almost all countries around the world, serves as an effective tool to enhance national revenue collection on the basis of transparent, equal and sincere competition between the state and telecoms operators," the spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation said in a statement. "It, furthermore, contributes to thwarting cybercrimes, namely illegal use of cross-border network connections, illicit online gambling, internet scams, etc.," the spokesperson said. "This mechanism has no provisions allegedly authorizing the collection of consumers' data and restricting freedom of expression." The spokesperson said the Cambodian government will separately prepare a bill on personal data protection as soon as the draft law on cybersecurity is concluded.

The spokesperson's statement came after some foreign media and human rights groups repeatedly criticized the decision by the Cambodian government, accusing the latter of using it to collect data, wiretap consumers' conversations, and restrict freedom of expression, among others. The allegation that the establishment of national internet gateway permits Cambodian authorities to monitor and conduct surveillance of internet activity, intercept and censor digital communications, and collect, retain, and share personal data of users are "unfounded", the spokesperson added. "On the contrary, the government respects the individual's rights to privacy and freedom of expression and protects personal data, all of which are enshrined in laws, the Constitution, ratified international human rights treaties, the Civil Code, the Criminal Code and the Law on Telecommunications," the spokesperson said. The Southeast Asian nation has seen a rapid rise in internet users in recent years. According to the Telecommunication Regulator of Cambodia (TRC), the kingdom currently has a total of 47 mobile and fixed internet service providers. The country has about 17.2 million mobile internet subscribers and 327,188 fixed internet users, the TRC said.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 02/16/2022

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VIETNAM: Proposed Amendments to e-Commerce Tax Declaration and Payment

The Ministry of Finance is seeking comments on a new draft decree that provides amendments to Decree No 126 on tax administration and Decree No 123 on invoices. According to the new draft, e-commerce platform owners must declare and pay tax on behalf of individual sellers for goods and services sold on their platform online. For goods and services not sold online, the owner must declare and pay tax on behalf of individual sellers, under their authorisation. The owner is also required to disclose information to tax authorities of traders, organisations and individuals, who have made transactions on their platform. The information includes the sellers' names, tax codes, IDs, addresses, phone numbers, and sales revenues of goods and services sold online. Information disclosure shall be made quarterly via electronic means in accordance with regulations on electronic tax transactions, or via direct connections if the connections meet technical standards set by the General Department of Taxation. People can make their comments on the draft via the ministry's online portal.

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South Asia

INDIA: PM Modi to Unveil 'Statue of Equality' in Hyderabad on Feb 5

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the statue of Ramanujacharya, an 11th-century saint and a social reformer, as the 'Statue of Equality' in Hyderabad on February 5. The statue to be unveiled is a 216-foot statue and is located in a 45-acre complex in Shamshabad on the periphery of Hyderabad. The President of India Ram Nath Kovind will be inaugurating the inner sanctum of the statue. As much as 120 kg of gold was used to build the inner sanctum of the statue. The weight of gold is to commemorate the 120 year-life of the saint. The entire project, worth Rs 1000 crore, has been completed with the help of donations from devotees across the globe. The event will witness 1035 yagya with other spiritual activities including mass chanting of mantras as a part of Ramanuja Sahasrabdi 'Samaroham'. It is likely to be the largest event in modern history. The unveiling of the statue will mark the 1,000th birth anniversary of the saint. The 216-foot statue would be one of the tallest statues in a sitting posture, as per a press note from the organisers. The series of events leading to the statue unveiling would start off from the 2nd of February. Further, the press note added that the Chief Minister of Telangana K Chandrasekhar Rao with Chinna Jeeyar Swami, a spiritual guru, would be co-hosting the event. Chief Ministers of other states, political leaders and actors would also be present at the event. 'Panchaloha', an amalgamation of five metals including gold, silver, copper, brass and zinc has been used to build the statue. The complex houses identical recreations of 108 Divya Desams and 108 ornately carved Vishnu temples taking reference from the works of the Alwars, mystic Tamil saints. Who was

Ramanujacharya? Ramanujacharya was born in 1017 in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu. He was a saint and a social reformer who freed millions from social, cultural, gender, educational and economic discrimination. His idea of society was backed with a conviction that every human is equal regardless of nationality, gender, race, caste or creed.

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Transport Ministry Adopts Data-driven Road Safety Model by IIT Madras

In a major move to achieve the SDG goal of reducing fatalities due to road accidents, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has officially adopted a data-driven model developed by IIT Madras to make roads safer and improve emergency response. The Ministry will be adopting the model with funding from the World Bank. Over 32 States and Union Territories (UTs) have come on board for adopting the IIT Madras' model. The IIT Madras team has signed MoUs with the respective state governments to help them devise a roadmap to fulfil targets under the SDGs by 2030. The IIT team will also aid the states in building a data-driven trauma care system with institutional registry. Speaking to PTI on IIT Madras' model, Venkatesh Balasubramanian, Professor, Department of Engineering, IIT Madras, said that six states namely Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu with the highest number of road accident deaths took up the data-driven model on a pilot basis. In terms of technology adoption, 27 states and five UTs have started implementing the Integrated Road Accident Database (iRAD). Of these, at least 11 states and a UT has commenced the collection of data using iRAD, he added. Under this project, police personnel will be provided with a mobile application that will enable them to feed descriptions, pictures and videos of a road accident. This will generate a unique ID for the incident. Further, an alert notification will be sent to a Public Works Department (PWD) official who will then visit the site to examine the incident and feed details of the road, surroundings, design, etc.

The data collected will be analysed by the IIT Madras team which will further suggest corrective measures accordingly. Calling road safety a collective responsibility of all the stakeholders, Professor Subramanian said that it is quintessential to develop a good workable strategy based on data. The Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, is of the view that India can achieve the dream of becoming a five trillion economy only when the roads are safe for the goods and people to move across the country. Commenting on IIT Madras' initiative, the Minister said, "iRAD is one of our flagship road safety initiatives conceptualised and designed by IIT Madras. It has enabled structured accident data collection involving all the stakeholders. This is a single platform being implemented across India. This shall pose a great help to central and state governments and other stakeholders in

devising strategies to improve road efficiency and assess the impact of improvements made.”

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Centre Sets June 2023 as Deadline for Completion of Pimpri-Chinchwad Smart City Projects

The Smart Cities Mission under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of India marks June 2023 as the deadline for Pimpri-Chinchwad to complete smart city projects. MoHUA Joint Secretary & Mission Director for Smart Cities, Kunal Kumar, opened up on the development projects under the mission and said that cities including Pune, Pimpri-Chinchwad and Solapur are ahead in implementing projects, hence, the three cities are expected to complete by June 2023. However, he emphasised the need to spread awareness on the mission among the people. On his visit to Pimpri-Chinchwad, Kunal inspected a few projects under the smart cities mission including projects being implemented in Pimple Gurav, Pimple Saudagar and Akurdi, said Neelkanth Poman, Joint CEO of Pimpri-Chinchwad Smart City Ltd. As per a report by a national daily, Poman said that the Ministry has promised to release the remaining funds for the smart city projects as the works get completed. As many as 22 projects are ongoing under the Pimpri-Chinchwad Smart City Ltd. Nine of which have been completed. The civic body has received Rs 780 crore from the projects and the Centre will be releasing Rs 200 crore as the projects get completed.

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Smart Cities Have Tendered Projects Worth 1,88,507 Crore Yet

The Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, Hardeep Singh Puri, on February 7, informed that the 100 smart cities selected under the Centre’s Smart Cities Mission (SCM), have tendered out 6,721 projects worth Rs 1,88,507 crore, as of January 21, 2022. Further, work orders have been issued in 6,124 projects worth Rs 1,62,908 crore; 3,421 projects worth Rs 58,735 crore have been completed. The Minister shared the information in a written reply to Rajya Sabha. As per the mission’s guidelines, the Government of India will provide financial support to the extent of Rs 48,000 crore over five years i.e., on an average Rs 100 crore per city per year. An equal amount on a matching basis will be contributed by the State Government/Urban Local Body (ULB), read the Minister’s reply. He also mentioned that as of January 21, 2022, the Government of India has released Rs 28,413.60 crore for 100 Smart Cities, out of which Rs 23,668.27 crore (83 per cent) has been utilised. Presently, there is no proposal under consideration of the Government for adding more cities under the mission.

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/> 02/13/2022

Clean UP: 18 UP Cities Awarded in Swachh Survekshan

As many as 18 cities of Uttar Pradesh have been awarded for maintaining cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation in 'Swachh Survekshan' for the year 2021. This comes in as a strong indication of the work of the state government in making UP a cleaner state. Swachh Survekshan is an annual survey of cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation in cities and towns across India. In all, 18 UP cities, including Varanasi, Meerut, Noida and Ghaziabad, won awards in different categories. Awards were given away to respective mayors and other officials of respective cities by Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and the Minister of State Kaushal Kishore. The efforts put in by the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath-led government in ensuring a clean Uttar Pradesh ranging from constructing 2.61 crore toilets across the state under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan to constructing around 69,265 community toilets and 652 pink toilets for women and girls have delivered the desired results as the state's overall ranking has also witnessed significant improvement. The manner in which the Yogi government converted the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan into a mass movement, has been widely appreciated by the experts. The government implemented a door-to-door garbage collection system in 11913 wards out of 12007 wards of municipal bodies to keep the streets and roads of the cities clean. The slogans of 'Gaadi wala aaya ghar se kachra nikal' were raised at every door by the municipal vehicles. As a result of this, Lucknow bagged awards in 'best state capital in citizen feedback' and 'garbage-free cities' (for cities with over 10 lakh population) categories in Swachh Survekshan 2021.

The government also made all the 75 districts open defecation free (ODF) by constructing more than 2.61 crore toilets across the state. In addition, Meerut got the 'fastest moving big city' award in the 10 to 40 lakh population category, while Ghaziabad got the 'best big city innovation and best practices' award. Noida got the 'India's cleanest medium city' award in the 3 to 10 lakh population category. Hapur got the 'best city in maximum citizen participation' award in over one lakh population category while Patiyali town in Kasganj got the 'best city in maximum citizen participation' award under less than one lakh population category. Meerut Cantonment got 'India's cleanest cantonment award in one lakh population category while Varanasi Cantonment got the 'best cantonment in citizen feedback' award in over one lakh population category. Ghaziabad, Aligarh, Noida, Jhansi also got the 'garbage-free city' award in different population categories.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 02/24/2022

India Emerging as A Hub of Hi-tech Manufacturing

India is now an attractive hub for foreign investments in the manufacturing sector,

said Union Ministers Jitendra. “With the help of Make in India drive, India is becoming the hub for hi-tech manufacturing as global giants have either set up or are in process of setting up manufacturing plants in India. The global giants are attracted by India’s market of more than a billion consumers and an increasing purchasing power,” the minister said, while delivering the inaugural address at the 28th edition of DST-CII India-Singapore Technology Summit, With emerging technologies like block chain, nano technology, quantum computing, internet of things, artificial intelligence, the country aspires to in the league of top 25 innovation nations, he further said. India is on a continuous rising trajectory of innovation and with emerging technologies. The minister highlighted that the country is placed 3rd among countries in scientific publication as per NSF database and has been featured within the top 50 innovative economies globally (at 46th rank), as per Global Innovation Index (GII).

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J&K Chief Secretary Launches GSS E-Portal to Digitalise Loans Under Govt Schemes

In another move to promote digitalisation in Jammu & Kashmir, Dr Arun Kumar Mehta, Chief Secretary launched the J&K Bank GSS e-portal on February 25. The portal will enable real-time tracking of credit applications under government-sponsored schemes. The CS called it an important move towards transparency in the processing of loan applications in the bank and said that it will address the longstanding concerns around the processing of loan applications under government schemes. He further emphasised that applicants have the right to track their loan processing and status, especially about the reasons in case the application is rejected. Managing Director (MD) and CEO of J&K Bank, Baldev Prakash, gave a presentation elaborating on the GSS e-portal. Further, he informed the people that the manual processing of the files will be stopped immediately. He highlighted that the portal has a provision of sending SMS requests to the applicants as reminders for completing the loan related formalities required. Also, if the processing time exceeds 15 days, it will generate an exception report for higher authorities to pitch in. The CS lauded the bank’s initiative and asked the respective authorities to enable the portal to shoot alerts and SMS to applicants citing reasons for rejection of their loan applications. He also asked the bank to make the portal is mobile-enabled and integrate all the 15 centrally sponsored schemes with the portal by the mid of March. Secretaries in the state government; Baldev Prakash, MD and CEO of J&K Bank and other senior officials from the bank attended the inauguration.

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SRI LANKA: Cargills Online Becomes First Ecommerce Platform to Integrate LANKAQR

Senarath Bandara - Managing Director /CEO, Cargills Bank, Ranjit Page - Deputy Chairman / Group CEO, Cargills (Ceylon) PLC, D Kumaratunge - Assistant Governor, Central bank Of Sri Lanka, Ajith Nivard Cabraal – Governor, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Yohan Samuel - Delivery Agent, Cargills Online, Sanjeewa Premawaradana - General Manger / IT, Cargills (Ceylon) PLC, Asanka Mahanama – Senior Manager - IT, Cargills (Ceylon) PLC, Roshan Dilruk – Operations Manager, Cargills Online. Cargills Online has become the first and currently the only e-commerce platform in Sri Lanka to integrate LANKAQR for delivery thereby providing greater convenience to its customer base together with its wide merchandise offering. LANKAQR is a project initiative to ensure all QR codes and QR based transactions in Sri Lanka are standardized and interoperable. Customers can use the mobile app or visit the website and select LANKAQR as the payment method. When the Cargills team delivers the order, the customer can use any payment app to make the payment using LANKAQR. Even if the payment option is selected as “Card On Delivery” or “Cash On Delivery”, the customer can pay via LANKAQR once the goods arrive. LANKAQR was introduced by the Central Bank together with licensed financial institutions and LankaClear (Pvt) Ltd with the aim of moving Sri Lanka towards a less-cash society and increasing financial inclusion across the country. LANKAQR allows customers to make payments, directly from their bank accounts to accounts of merchants or service providers, using payment apps of LANKAQR certified financial institutions. LANKAQR is a low-cost digital payment solution, which primarily targets small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

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Sri Lanka Needs Price Formula to Avert Future Energy Crisis

Sri Lanka pitches into darkness and its people form lines at fuel stations due to the ongoing energy crisis. Fuel, which is the single largest import accounting for 18% of the country's total import expenditure, cost an alarming USD 3.7 billion in 2021. Since the actual cost of petrol and diesel is significantly higher than the current selling price, it promotes excessive consumption. This is in direct contradiction to the government's other policies that are aimed at reducing imports. Although there have been some increases in fuel prices recently, they are inadequate. Sri Lanka continues to sell fuel at a significant loss. Diesel is sold at a loss of LKR 46.80, while petrol is sold at a loss of LKR 18.37. Sri Lanka's price of fuel is also below its neighbours. The selling price of petrol in India is about LKR 259.44, while diesel is about LKR 235.8. The selling price of petrol in Bangladesh is about LKR 202 while diesel sells at about LKR 188.23. Fuel, therefore, continues to be underpriced, highlighting a serious structural flaw in Sri Lanka's fuel pricing mechanism. The losses incurred by the energy utilities have been financed by the state banks and have grown so large they now threaten the stability of the banks. The total liabilities owed by the state-owned monopoly, the CPC (Ceylon Petroleum Corporation) to the country's two state banks, is a staggering Rs. 707,505 million (USD3.5 billion) by

the end of July 2021. Ensuring energy prices are no longer subsidised will reduce further debt accumulation by the state banks. Therefore a sharp increase in fuel prices is now unavoidable to prevent destabilising the financial sector and to prevent shortages of fuel supplies. Unless the root causes of the problem are addressed and the interest rates, foreign exchange rates and other key prices within the economy are allowed to be determined by market forces these imbalances will continue to recur.

Providing fuel subsidies also disincentives fuel efficiency. According to World Bank estimates the top 30% of society consume an overwhelming 70% of fuel sold in the country. There is little economic sense in channelling public funds to subsidise the relatively well-off segments of society. A direct cash transfer program targeted at vulnerable households requires far fewer funds and will address the needs of poorer segments of society. This will require a re-examination of the Samurdhi scheme. Another key reform should include eliminating the barriers to entry to Sri Lanka's energy sector. Enhancing competition by allowing more players to operate in the market is the only means of achieving both stable supply and stable prices in the long term. Instead of continuing with the general subsidy, the government should consider introducing a market-driven pricing formula to determine prices at the pump. Immediate and urgent measures to bring about macroeconomic stabilisation needs to complement these reforms if the country is to come out of this difficult situation.

Key Points

Advocata Institute calls for the implementation of an effective fuel pricing formula.

Pricing energy correctly reduces the build-up of imbalances.

Reducing barriers to entry and promoting open markets in energy is the only viable option to reducing fuel prices.

The current crisis requires far-reaching measures and allowing the price system to function is a crucial step in dealing with the problems.

Using direct cash transfers to address the issue of equity is more efficient than subsidising all users of a product; the Samurdhi scheme will have to be re-examined for these purposes.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Aiming to Create Modern Innovation Space - Deputy Minister

The establishment of a modern innovation space is one of the priority areas in Azerbaijan, Deputy Minister of Digital Development and Transport of the Republic of Azerbaijan Rovshan Rustamov said in an interview with Russian media, Trend reports. According to him, this is reflected in the strategic document "Azerbaijan 2030:

National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development", approved by the order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev in February 2021. "The main task of the ministry is to create a favorable innovation environment in the country. We believe that digital transformation is a key factor on the way to an innovative society," said Rustamov. He noted that digital transformation is comprised of three parts. The first one is digital government, which provides better services and better governance through technologies. The second is the digital economy, which allows automating processes, creating digital products and making more accurate forecasts. And the final part of digital transformation is the path to a society in which people have digital skills, entrepreneurs have access to open data, and value is created through innovation based on open data.

The Deputy Minister also added that there are various conditions ensuring the successful implementation of digital transformation, for instance, the existence of a guiding concept, the necessary modern IT infrastructure, qualified human resources to carry out the transformation process, and promoting cyber security of digital infrastructure and management, coordination and regulation of all these processes. "In order to properly execute digital transformation, we have developed an optimal concept based on global trends and suitable for the country. Currently, the document is at the stage of coordination with various government agencies," Rustamov stated. Meanwhile, the concept provides for the total digitalization of society increasing the digital skills of citizens, promoting the digitalization of business, and the comprehensive development of regulatory mechanisms in the field of ICT. It includes reducing costs in public administration, increasing efficiency, ensuring the sustainability of government mechanisms, cyber and information security.

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Azerbaijan Instructs to Improve Supply of Basic Food Products

Azerbaijan has given instructions to improve the supply of basic food products, Trend reports. This is envisaged by the order of Azerbaijan's Prime Minister Ali Asadov on urgent action to strengthen anti-inflationary measures in Azerbaijan. The decree provides for measures on enhancing the provision of the domestic market with food products within the minimum consumer basket, as well as stimulating local producers of the food products.

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Azerbaijan to Stabilize Price Growth Rates Through Markup Pricing

The Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan has been instructed to stabilize the growth rates of prices for basic foodstuffs through trade allowances in

accordance with the market economy rules, Trend reports. This is stated in the order of Azerbaijan's Prime Minister Ali Asadov on urgent action to strengthen anti-inflationary measures in Azerbaijan. According to the decree, in order to strengthen the social protection of vulnerable groups, proposals should be submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers within 15 days to steady the growth rate of prices for basic foodstuffs within the minimum consumer basket through trade allowances.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 02/21/2022

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Azerbaijan to Take Action on More Efficient Organization of Agricultural Fairs

Instructions were given to organize fairs and optimize expenses related to transport, logistics and trade networks in Azerbaijan, Trend reports. This is stated in the order of Azerbaijan's Prime Minister Ali Asadov on urgent action to strengthen anti-inflationary measures in Azerbaijan. According to the order, the relevant government structures were instructed to take measures to more effectively organize the wholesale and retail sale of agricultural products at fairs, develop private bases on the procurement and sale of logistics centers. Meanwhile, they were charged with preparation and submission of proposals to the Cabinet of Ministers on the use of possible mechanisms to optimize transport and logistics costs for local and imported agricultural-food products within 15 days.

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TEKNOFEST Azerbaijan to Give Additional Impetus to Innovations, Technologies Dev't in Country

The holding of the TEKNOFEST International Aviation, Space and Technology Festival in Azerbaijan will give an additional impetus to the development of innovations and technologies in the country, Azer Bayramov, advisor to the chairman of the State Agency for Public Services and Social Innovations (ASAN Service) under the President of Azerbaijan, said in his interview to Trend. According to Bayramov, the registration of participants for the competition of socially oriented technologies will continue until the end of February. "As of today, about 90 projects have been registered within the competition. Hopefully, by February 28, the number of projects and participants in the competition will increase. Each team includes three-six more people, which ultimately means a large number of participants," he noted. The adviser reminded that in 2019, the number of participants in this festival in Turkey exceeded 1.7 million people, making it the largest aviation, space and technology festival in the world.

"The main goals of the festival are to increase the interest of young people in technologies and innovations, to encourage young people to create technological

projects. Today's participants of the festival can become entrepreneurs in the field of innovations and even (create) technology companies," he further said. Besides, Bayramov stressed that from May 26 to May 29 in 2022, TEKNOFEST will be held outside Turkey for the first time in Azerbaijan. "The number of participants in the TEKNOFEST festival is growing from year to year. In the first year of the festival, the number of participants was 20 thousand people, in 2019 – 50,000, in 2020 – 100,000 and in 2021 – 200,000," he noted. "Hopefully, youth will actively participate in the festival, which will be held in Azerbaijan, as well. Given the number of the population of Azerbaijan and Turkey, of course, the indicators that were recorded in Turkey in previous years can't be compared with Azerbaijan."

Along with the above, the adviser said that the main organizer in Azerbaijan is the country's Ministry of Digital Development and Transport, with the joint organization of the Turkish Technology Team Foundation (T3), the Ministry of Industry and Technology of Turkey and more than 60 Turkish state institutions, universities and private companies. "Azerbaijan plans to hold 10 competitions in various areas. Among them, I would like to highlight the competition of socially oriented technologies, of which our agency is a partner," he noted. "The competition will contribute to the creation of projects useful for society, and for this, participants will integrate their technological knowledge and experience with awareness of their social responsibility." "This competition includes three subcategories: GovTech (digital technologies in the government sector), social technologies and the category of health and first aid," Bayramov said.

He added that the state agency creates the necessary infrastructure and conditions, and also supports the development of Azerbaijan's innovation ecosystem. "The creation of any innovation and technology is aimed at ensuring that the Azerbaijani youth is not only a user of technology but also its developers," concluded Bayramov. The upcoming TEKNOFEST International Aviation, Space and Technology Festival will be held in Azerbaijan on May 26-29, 2022. TEKNOFEST in Baku is held by the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport of Azerbaijan. At the same time, the TEKNOFEST production office operates in Baku. The full staff of the office is comprised of Azerbaijani specialists. The event has been held annually since 2018, with the joint organization of the Turkish Technology Team Foundation, which is managed by the Turkish Ministry of Industry and Technology and the chief technology officer of Baykar Makina, in partnership with more than 60 Turkish government institutions, universities and private companies. The goal is to popularize such areas as aviation, space industry and digital economy, to encourage entrepreneurship in these areas, to identify the knowledge and skills of young engineers through competitions organized within the framework of the festival, as well as to present national technologies to the general public.

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KYRGYZSTAN: EU Will Continue to Support Kyrgyzstan's Health System

Today, February 3, Minister of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic Alymkadyr Beishenaliev and the EU Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic Eduard Auer visited the laboratory and the Republican Center for Quarantine and Particularly Dangerous Infections. The meeting was also attended by Nazira Artykova, the WHO Representative in Kyrgyzstan, and Stalbek Berdiev, Director of the Republican Center for Quarantine and Particularly Dangerous Infections, Trend reports citing Kabar. During the pandemic, the EU-WHO program, launched in 2020, trained national epidemiologists, laboratory workers, and public health professionals involved in COVID-19 testing. In addition, the EU-WHO program reviewed 13 national health facilities across the country. Sustainability criteria for quality management systems, biosafety, healthcare facilities' waste management capabilities, and training of healthcare workers for COVID-19 testing were reviewed. "The spread of SARS-CoV-2 tested national laboratories in Kyrgyzstan. Good laboratory practices, quality control, and accurate results are an essential part of our response to COVID-19," said Alymkadyr Beishenaliev. He thanked the WHO and EU Delegation to the Kyrgyz Republic for their consistent technical support and advice on strengthening national laboratory capacity. The EU Ambassador Eduard Auer emphasized: "Testing is crucial for effective control of COVID-19 transmission. No one is safe until we are all safe. And the EU will continue to support Kyrgyzstan's health system and provide vaccines through the global COVAX mechanism. Europeans and Kyrgyz people are working together to overcome this global pandemic." Central Asia COVID-19 Crisis Response Programme (CACCR) is a collaborative effort between the European Union (EU) and the WHO Regional Office for Europe targeting Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. The two-year, €3 million regional project is designed to help prevent, detect and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and to enhance the countries' capacity to respond to similar public health threats.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 02/03/2022

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Stakeholders, Development Partners, and the World Bank Discuss Ways to Improve Air Quality in Bishkek Through a Multisectoral Approach

Today, the World Bank, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology, and Technical Supervision of the Kyrgyz Republic, and Bishkek Mayor's Office launched a series of technical workshops that will focus on reducing air pollution in Bishkek and surrounding areas. This series of knowledge exchange events aims to create a forum to identify air quality challenges, needs, and priorities, and explore areas for further collaboration in order to address air pollution issues in the capital city. The series will run through October 2022. "As a lead coordinating agency, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology, and Technical Supervision of the Kyrgyz Republic

works to address the quality of air in the country in close cooperation with the Bishkek Mayor's Office, local communities, and non-governmental organizations. We value our partnership with the World Bank and international development partners to improve the air of our capital and health of its residents," noted Kanatbek Sadykov, Deputy Minister of Natural Resources, Ecology, and Technical Supervision of the Kyrgyz Republic.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), every year more than 6 million people worldwide die from heart and lung disease, cancer, and stroke, caused by air pollution. Among its victims, vulnerable groups represent a disproportionate share. Apart from health impacts, air pollution also carries large economic costs and incalculable damage to the environment. Like elsewhere, poor air quality poses major health risks for residents of large cities in the Kyrgyz Republic. IQAir, a global information platform that monitors air quality in real time, has repeatedly reported high levels of harmful and toxic substances in Bishkek's air. The air pollution levels in Bishkek frequently exceed the WHO Ambient Air Quality Guidelines many times, putting the health of the capital's residents at risk. The major sources of air pollution are residential heating in the winter and transport. According to data provided by the Kyrgyz Republic under the Convention for Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution, in 2018, residential heating contributed about 50 percent to particulate emissions, while transport accounted for more than 70 percent of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) emissions.

The virtual workshop gathered stakeholders from the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision of the Kyrgyz Republic and other government agencies, Bishkek Mayor's Office, academia, development partners including UNDP, GIZ and the Asian Development Bank, as well as leading national and international development and environment experts. The participants took stock of the current interventions and needed actions and coordination among all stakeholders in the energy, transport, and other spheres to ensure clean and healthy air for all. "Bishkek Municipality is taking certain measures to improve the environmental situation in the city as reflected in the Plan of Comprehensive Measures to Improve the Environmental Situation in Bishkek and Alamudun and Sokuluk districts of Chui region, the Green Economy Development Program and other documents. The Mayor's Office is always ready for cooperation and open to any suggestions. I am convinced that the experience and knowledge of experts from the World Bank, the GIZ, and other organizations will be useful to our city and its residents," said Maksatbek Sazykulov, First Vice Mayor of Bishkek.

The World Bank supports the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic in identifying major drivers of air pollution, as well as short- and long-term complementary measures and investment activities to improve air quality in Bishkek and its surrounding areas. This includes knowledge exchange to develop jointly with governmental and non-government stakeholders the Air Quality Management Plan and to strengthen

the country's regulatory framework, institutions, and the public sector capacity. "The World Bank is committed to supporting the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic in its efforts to address air pollution and climate vulnerabilities," said Naveed Hassan Naqvi, World Bank's Country Manager for the Kyrgyz Republic. "Also, our technical and financial support is focused on transition to a green economy, renewal of natural capital such as water, landscapes and forests, and biodiversity – all with an aim to give the people of the Kyrgyz Republic a healthier and more prosperous future."

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 02/03/2022

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Project to Develop Lottery Activities Being Launched in Kyrgyzstan

A ceremony of signing agreements on the implementation of projects under the PPP (public-private partnership) program was held on Tuesday, Trend reports with reference to Kabar. The event was attended by Director of PPP Center Sanzharbek Bolotov, Minister of Economy and Commerce Daniyar Amangeldiev. In particular, the agreement on lottery activities with foreign investors Elbet d.o.o and Axel Capital was signed. These companies have extensive international experience in the development, implementation, adaptation, integration, launch and technical support of software for single type lotteries in many countries of Europe and Asia. The PPP project is aimed at the development of lottery activities in the republic in order to regularly and significantly replenish the national budget, to meet the needs of the population to participate in lotteries and the desire to win lotteries. The investor for the second project is domestic Hermes Logistics LLC. The project will provide additional income to the state and contribute to raising the prestige of the state through the construction of modern buildings and facilities for various competitions. The project is financed by own and/or borrowed funds of the private partner. In total, the agreements attracted investments of KGS 1 billion 212 million.

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KAZAKHSTAN: Detecting Illegal Mining Farm

The territorial department of the Financial Monitoring Agency for Kazakhstan's Almaty city (FMA) along with the Prosecutor's Office of Almaty identified a "mining" farm located in Almaty's Industrial Zone, illegally conducting digital mining activities, Trend reports citing the press service of the FMA. It was revealed that mining farms were installed in six containers, in which over 700 pieces of equipment with an encryption complex for digital cryptocurrency mining. Investigations are underway and expert examinations have been ordered. Other information in the interests of the investigation is not disclosed.

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Oceania

NEW ZEALAND: Council Says Waters Reform Needs More Tailored Solution for Hamilton

Hamilton City Council wants Government to reconsider its proposed Three Waters Reform structure, and instead look at a regional waters organisation which better reflects the needs of high-growth Councils. Council yesterday approved a submission requesting the changes, and other improvements, to a Government-appointed Working Group looking at governance and accountability of the new waters structures. Mayor Paula Southgate says Hamilton, and other high-growth metropolitan councils, have different needs to rural and provincial councils. The large-scale, multi-region entities proposed by Government aren't right for Hamilton, she said. "I don't believe the model currently proposed is the best thing for Hamilton. In fact not one single Councillor thinks that," she said. "The reality is we have a huge wave of water infrastructure and other infrastructure costs coming to simply keep up with growth. Whatever structure is put in place has to reflect that reality, otherwise we are not going to get the benefits for our city that we need."

Mayor Southgate said she saw scope for a smaller, more tailored organisation which brings together a potential partnership between Hamilton and Tauranga, and possibly others. Council's submission will go to a Working Group considering an 'Exposure Draft' of proposed legislation to create four new entities to manage water, wastewater and stormwater in New Zealand. In 2024 the new entities are proposed to replace 67 separate local authorities as the bodies responsible for managing Three Waters assets, delivering services, and investing for the future. After feedback from councils and others late last year which identified concerns with the proposed governance structures of the entities, Local Government Minister Nanaia Mahuta set up the working group of 20 members, with public sector advisor Doug Martin as independent chair. The working group will report back to Government by the end of this month.

Much of Hamilton's previous feedback has been addressed in the Exposure Draft, including guaranteed representation for Hamilton in the entity's governance structure, provision for voting that recognises Hamilton's scale in the region, and stronger ability for the city's representative to influence Board appointments. Council's rights as joint owners of the entity's assets have also been strengthened. Yesterday's meeting notes Mayor Southgate will meet with Tauranga City Council Commissioner Anne Tolley and senior Ministers to propose an alternative waters entity model for the central North Island. Mayor Southgate will also write to all Waikato and Bay of Plenty Mayors to develop the case for a Waikato and Bay of Plenty entity. Council will continue to consider other proposals or concepts on reform models from other councils, and from other submissions made to the Working Group.

Innovation Key to the Future of Money and Cash

New Zealand's money and cash system is at a "cross road" and innovation is necessary to build a sustainable future, Adrian Orr, Governor of the Reserve Bank of New Zealand – Te Pūtea Matua told a conference of Angel Investors in Wellington today. "We must decide how best to use of digital technology to modernize central bank money, while we continue to ensure cash remains an option for those who need it. An innovative approach is needed to support a more efficient and resilient cash system, and the changes required are potentially far reaching," Mr Orr said. The Bank is commencing Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) proof-of-concept design work, taking into account the public's feedback received during recent consultation. The work will be a multi-stage and multi-year effort, and no decision has yet been made on what form of CBDC was right for New Zealand.

"The technology exists now to implement a CBDC, but it needs to be well designed. At a basic hygiene level, a CBDC must be user-friendly, resilient to cyber and other operational risks, and enable privacy. These features promote widespread trust and use," Mr Orr said. Mr Orr referred to the resounding feedback from the public on the importance of privacy in their money. "We believe that a CBDC can be designed in such a way that privacy can exist alongside design features that make it hard for central bank money to be used for nefarious or illegal purposes. The emphasis we place on privacy reflects the fact that the CBDC design will be driven by broad community, rather than specific commercial, interests." A CBDC would provide a platform for economic and financial innovation, including competition in the payments and settlement sector, cross-border transfers, and financial inclusion and capability building tools. Consultation on an issues paper, Future of Money – Cash System Redesign (Te Moni Anamata – He Whakahou i te Pūnaha Moni) closes on 7 March 2022, with about 190 submissions received so far. The paper sets out issues facing the cash system, largely driven by falling transactional cash use, and raises options including requiring banks to offer cash services and retailers to accept cash.

Governments Dragging Their Feet on Rapid Energy Transition – Report

A research report released this week by the Fossil Fuels Aotearoa Research Network (FFARN), led by economic anthropologist Dr Terrence Loomis confirms governments have an important role to play in rapid energy transitions, but few are acting like there's a climate emergency. The report, Accelerating Energy Transition: Obstacles and Opportunities for Urgent Government Action, [embargoed copy attached]

suggests there is more to the reluctance of governments to undertake urgent energy reform than party politics or failure of 'political will.' "We found that politicians encountered several typical obstacles when trying to build a collective political will to introduce bold measures like rapid energy transition," Dr Loomis said. "These could be categorised as either economic, structural/institutional or political."

For example, the study found policymakers were often locked into the outmoded economic paradigm of 'growth' rather than more holistic frameworks that were better suited to addressing the climate crisis. Politically, the research showed the fossil fuels industry was playing a key role in delaying energy system transformation and encouraging public backlash against strong government energy measures. Dr Loomis noted "The study suggests strategies progressive policy makers could consider, in collaboration with concerned business leaders and climate action groups, to overcome such obstacles and unblock policy inertia." 350 Aotearoa is hosting a webinar on 17 February 2022, where Dr Loomis will present the research findings and discuss the implications of the report with participants. 350 Aotearoa is using the release of the report as a springboard to expanding its national energy campaign.

Coal Action Network's Tim Jones said his organisation welcomed the release of the report, which he said provided some much-needed fresh thinking on how to overcome the many pitfalls to accelerating energy transition. "We know urgent action is needed to decarbonise our energy system, but figuring out the best route to do that, and avoiding side-tracks and false turns is not easy. Lack of agreement among those working to accelerate the energy transition makes it easier for fossil fuel companies and their supporters to delay the climate justice action we so desperately need," Jones said. David Tong of Oil Change International also welcomed the report, citing research suggesting if we just burned the oil and gas reserves in existing fields it would still take us beyond 1.5°C warming.

"To keep the ambition of the Paris Agreement alive and protect people from the worst impacts of the climate crisis, governments must break free from vested interests, and implement meaningful policies to manage the decline in oil, gas, and coal production," Tong stated. New Zealand has taken a critical step forward by joining the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance as an associate member. The FFARN report, Tong said, "outlines strategies for overcoming predatory delay, and unlocking the government action needed to manage the decline of fossil fuels."

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Government Must Protect People in Prisons

The below statement can be attributed to Campaigns Director Lisa Woods from Amnesty International Aotearoa New Zealand, following outbreaks of COVID-19 in prisons. Due to the communal nature of prisons, people held there are particularly

vulnerable to the spread of COVID. It is deeply concerning that growing numbers of people in prison are contracting the virus. People in prison deserve dignity and care - including access to health care and PPE when needed - and crucially right now, vaccinations. People in prison do not have the same autonomy and opportunities to protect themselves against COVID as others do. The responsibility to care for people in prison falls on the agencies restricting their liberty, and the Ministers responsible for those agencies.

Amnesty International was concerned to read in a response to an Official Information Act request that on 11 June 2021, Corrections was advised that a decision had been made by the Ministry of Health to slow the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine to certain groups, including people in prison. The reason was to manage stocks. As a result, Corrections paused the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine to prisoners at all sites from Monday 14 June 2021, with the vaccination programme only resuming in late July 2021, not long before the Delta outbreak. Delays like this put an already vulnerable population at greater risk. Given the information that has come to light, questions must be asked and assurances provided about the prioritisation of people in prison for vaccinations, including boosters, and that there are no further delays, especially with Omicron spreading quickly. The Government must ensure it is doing everything it can to protect people in prison.

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Waste to Energy Is Still a Goal

Mayoral candidate Craig Lord will lobby for support to build a Waste to Energy plant in Auckland if elected into office this year. With more than 200,000 tonnes of rubbish going into Auckland based landfills annually, and Chinese owned Waste Management with Auckland Council support simply wanting to dig more holes to bury the problem, he says it is time to change the script. "There are hundreds of WTE Plants spread around the globe. Asia has them, the US does, Australia is building, and in Europe combined they output more than 4.7 Gigawatts of municipal energy. We're meant to be a green country and we are holding ourselves back – that's embarrassing. Sweden is now so efficient they recycle 99% of their refuse. That means only 1% goes into the ground while 99% is recycled into energy or roads and other products."

Lord believes it is easily doable and with less emissions from a plant than from a landfill, the project would be backed by the majority of Aucklanders. "It's going to cost between \$400 and \$800 million to build depending on the finished design and that is quite feasible. If the city can't do it then a private enterprise can. They can build it, and make their profits, but of course with systems in place to make sure they are not going to overcharge the city for the services or the power that comes from it. It can and should be done. In fact, it will be. By us or someone else." He is adamant that

the current mindset of 'collect and forget' by the population can be changed if they see a purpose. "Right now, we throw and disregard because we don't see any other option. Let's make an option. Let's create something so fantastic that people will be picking up rubbish from the streets, the streams, the beaches and oceans just so it can be thrown into our very own Waste to Energy plant."

He says if it's designed right it could have extra benefits than just a disposal and energy building. "Zero Waste is a fallacy so let's think outside of the box here. Climate change is on everyone's mind, but it's more than just public transport and cycle lanes. This is no longer a vision around the world - this is happening. Call it what you will, the main point is that we need to build one and we need to do it now."

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Government Supports 10,000 Māori into Mahi, with 900 More Expected

Over 10,000 Māori jobseekers have been supported into mahi across the Government's employment programmes, with 967 more rangatahi expected to be supported into employment, education or training with the latest tranche of He Poutama Rangatahi funding, Minister for Social Development and Employment Carmel Sepuloni announced today. "We've worked hard to secure our recovery from COVID-19, unemployment has fallen to 3.2 percent and our labour market has held up better than expected. This is a reflection of the suite of Government measures and interventions we've put in place to protect jobs and livelihoods in the midst of a pandemic," Carmel Sepuloni said. "10,000 Māori into mahi is an incredible milestone but we mustn't take our foot off the pedal, which is why this morning we also launched Te Mahere Whai Mahi Māori – The Māori Employment Action Plan, to accelerate the recovery.

"We're continuing to support that recovery by delivering more opportunities for people to get into meaningful mahi with 11 community providers receiving funding to support over 900 rangatahi to participate in He Poutama Rangatahi. "A basic principle of He Poutama Rangatahi was that local communities were best placed to understand barriers rangatahi faced to employment, and the latest funding would support providers in Auckland, Wellington, the Bay of Plenty, Tairāwhiti, Te Tai Tokerau and Hawke's Bay. "We know that Māori rangatahi are a focus of the programme because many are at risk of long-term unemployment due to barriers they face accessing, and succeeding, in education and training. "He Poutama Rangatahi continues to provide participants with life skills, work readiness training, and ongoing, intensive, individualised pastoral care. We know it's a programme that works because it's helped 3133 rangatahi who had engaged with the programme since 2018 move into employment, education or training. "He Poutama Rangatahi, along with our Government's suite of employment programmes, remain a key part of

our plan to manage labour market impacts on young people, and as we build back better from COVID-19,” Carmel Sepuloni said.

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Government Invests in Game Changing Lithium Recovery Technology

The Government will invest in world-leading lithium recovery technology with potential to strengthen our geothermal energy and advanced manufacturing sectors, and contribute to a lower carbon future. Economic and Regional Development Minister Stuart Nash has announced the new Regional Strategic Partnership Fund (RSPF) will invest in Geo40 Limited, to help scale-up its lithium recovery technology at Ohaaki near Taupō. “This is a game-changing programme of work,” said Stuart Nash. “The investment is the first by the RSPF. It delivers on a manifesto commitment to keep supporting regional economic development once the Provincial Growth Fund closed to applications. Regional leaders help set the strategic priorities for RSPF investment, which is seed funding as a catalyst for other investment.

“Lithium is a highly prized element, in much demand for electric vehicle batteries and to help mitigate the impacts of climate change. EVs are expected to account for more than half of new car sales in the northern hemisphere by 2030. “Overseas, traditional ways of mining lithium leave a heavy carbon footprint. In contrast, the Geo40 programme involves new technology to sustainably recover lithium from geothermal brine, and return the water to the geothermal field. The brine is a watery residue containing mineral compounds, and is a by-product of geothermal electricity generation. “If we can successfully build up Geo40’s green technology to commercial scale, New Zealand could become an international leader in technology for the sustainable supply of lithium, and help to build lasting action on climate change.

“It could also help meet New Zealand’s 2050 carbon neutral target and create jobs to support the economic recovery. Expanding geothermal energy and advanced manufacturing opportunities in Taupō will be significant to diversify its local economy. “The region is already renowned around the world as a tourist destination, with one in three jobs tied directly or indirectly, to tourism. Geo40 now offers a chance to further strengthen the regional economy and build more resilience for jobs and businesses. “The investment of \$2 million through Kānoa, the Regional Economic Development Unit, will see the Government take a further equity stake in Geo40 Limited. It will allow the company to progress its lithium recovery method before moving to commercial production. “By taking an equity stake in the company, the government has the opportunity to share in the upside of the investment, and the company has the opportunity for growth without the additional burden of debt on its balance sheet.

“Geo40 has a proven record of world-leading solutions to recover valuable minerals

and elements from geothermal brine. It already exports silica, recovered from the Ohaaki site. The silica technology was also supported by government with a \$15 million loan and equity funding from the Provincial Growth Fund in 2019. “It is a collaboration between government, GEO40, the landowners and kaitiaki the Ngati Tahu Tribal Lands Trust, and power generator Contact Energy. Local government leaders across the region have also helped by endorsing energy and advanced manufacturing projects as priorities for investment from the RSPF. “There are 215 government-backed regional economic development projects in Waikato, with approved funding of \$273 million. Those in Taupō involve large sums, like the \$20.6 million redevelopment of the Taupō town centre and \$5 million to revamp Taupō airport. Others are more modest, like \$142,000 for tourism infrastructure like toilets and kitchen facilities to support camping. And some have the potential to be truly transformational, like the developments at the Ohaaki site,” said Stuart Nash.

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Support to Grow Local Conservation Skills

The Government’s Jobs for Nature programme continues to support local employment opportunities with an investment in a project that will significantly increase Ngāti Tūwharetoa’s capacity to engage in on-the-ground and strategic conservation activities. “An investment of \$500,000 to the Tūwharetoa Maori Trust Board’s Oranga Taiao, Oranga Tangata project over two years will provide full-time work for five people and contribute to the protection, restoration and enhancement of biodiversity around Taupō,” says Conservation Minister Kiri Allan. “Its aim is two-fold; firstly it is about growing a tikanga-based workforce to provide restoration, pest management, and fencing skills to restore lands and tributaries across the rohe of Tūwharetoa.

“Secondly it will build capability within the Tūwharetoa Māori Trust Board, allowing it to generate funding, employ staff, engage with landowners and Ahu Whenua Trusts, and develop a long-term environmental plan. “Key to the project is supporting the iwi to fully participate in environmental decision-making, monitoring, research and other aspects of conservation. “This work, along with other proposed environmental restoration of rivers and lake margins, will provide an ongoing legacy for the wider Taupō area which both Ngāti Tūwharetoa and the broader community will be able to take pride in and enjoy into the future,” Kiri Allan said. As part of their commitment to looking after the whanau and therefore the wai, the board will work alongside the Tauhara Mountain Trust and their aspirations to trial a predator proof fence around the base of the mountain. This is in conjunction with their wilding pine eradication, restoration planting and pest management.

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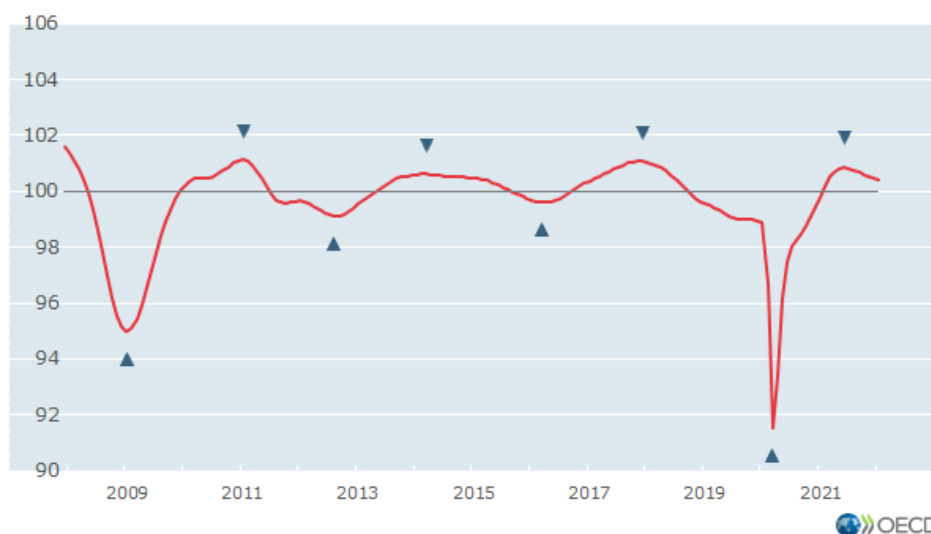
4、 Economic and Social Development and ICT

Asia-Pacific

OECD Leading Indicators Continue to Point to Moderating Growth in Several Major Economies

The OECD composite leading indicators (CLIs), designed to anticipate fluctuations in economic activity over the next six to nine months, continue to point to a moderation in economic growth in several major economies, albeit to a different extent across countries. Among the major OECD economies, the CLIs for Canada, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom confirm having passed a turning point in economic activity, as flagged in [last months' assessment](#), and now point to moderating growth momentum. In the United States, Japan and the Euro Area as a whole, the CLIs have also passed a cyclical peak, but have since remained relatively stable. In France, the CLI points to stable growth around the long-term trend. Among the major emerging-market economies, the CLI for China (industrial sector) continues to point to growth losing momentum, with similar indications now emerging for India and slowing growth continuing in Brazil. In Russia, the CLI now points to stable growth. The CLIs, which are based on a range of forward-looking indicators such as order books, confidence indicators, building permits, long-term interest rates, new car registrations and [many more](#), should continue to be interpreted with care as uncertainties from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic persist, notably due to the impact of the Omicron variant in recent months. Variability in underlying indicators may result in higher than usual fluctuations in the CLI. As usual, the magnitude of the CLI should be regarded as an indication of the strength of the signal, rather than a precise measure of anticipated growth in economic activity.

OECD area: stable growth



Unleashing the Benefits of Digital Transformation for Palestinian Economic Growth

Despite progress, the potential of the digital economy in the Palestinian territories is not fully realized, says new World Bank report. The Palestinian Digital Economy Assessment evaluates the state of the digital economy, identifies opportunities, and provides recommendations on reforms that can help accelerate digital transformation and, ultimately, economic growth. “Investing in the Palestinian digital economy is more important than ever. Not only does it enhance its competitiveness and access to the global markets, providing jobs and a source of fiscal revenue, but it has also become vital in times of crisis. We have witnessed the significant move of many Palestinian businesses toward online channels during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Kanthan Shankar, World Bank Country Director for West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian economy has not been creating enough jobs and over a quarter of the population was unemployed in the second quarter of 2021 (17 percent in the West Bank and 45 percent in Gaza). Women are particularly disadvantaged with only 17 percent participation in the labor market versus 68 percent for men. According to the report, accelerating the Palestinian digital transformation and building a well-connected Palestinian economy will help create new jobs, bridge the gender divide, and improve economic growth.

Despite recent progress, the report found that there is still room for significant improvements in several parts of the digital economy in West Bank and Gaza. Ranked below the average of other Arab countries in the World Bank’s MENA Tech Digital Economy Assessment, the digital transformation in West Bank and Gaza has been relatively slow in recent years. The Israeli restrictions on ICT equipment imports, spectrum allocation (currently limited to 2G in Gaza and 3G in the West Bank), and rights of way in Area C have been a major impediment to the establishment of digital infrastructure, connectivity, and high-speed broadband access. These measures have delayed network connectivity within the Palestinian territories and with the rest of the world. According to the global ICT Development Index, West Bank and Gaza is placed below the developing country average in broadband penetration rate.

Strengthening the Palestinian digital economy will require a sustainable political resolution with the Government of Israel to remove current restrictions. At the same time, internal policy reforms and financial resources by the Palestinian Authority (PA) to implement a full-fledged digital transformation of the economy will be needed. The report recommends reigniting the work of the Israeli-Palestinian joint technical committee and calls on the Government of Israel to allocate the needed spectrum for Palestinian 4G and 5G deployments prior to the completion of 5G deployments in

Israel. “Palestinians have all the capabilities needed to leapfrog into the digital economy. Development of the digital economy is among the PA’s national priorities. It is thus important to ensure continued strong political leadership on the digital agenda to facilitate institutional and cross-sector coordination,” added Shankar.

Addressing deficiencies in the Palestinian regulatory environment and improving coordination among agencies on the digital agenda are within the control of the PA. Among the regulatory reforms, the report calls for strengthening competition in the market, updating the law on e-transactions, and developing the laws on consumer protection and cybersecurity. Equally important is the implementation of the recently signed Telecommunications Law and Companies Law. The report recommends establishing an inter-ministerial committee on digital development and ensuring institutional coordination and resource mobilization for cross-cutting and sectoral priorities.

Increased investment and adoption of digital financial services is crucial to take full potential of the digital age. Cash and checks still dominate the economy, and e-commerce continues to operate largely via cash-on-delivery. The report notes how increased adoption of digital payments holds a large potential for improving the efficiency of government agencies and digital businesses and easing the everyday life of Palestinians. Digital transformation will require upgrading the skills of Palestinians and supporting the growth of digital businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the demand for digital skills as more businesses and PA agencies have started using digital solutions. Improving digital skills will necessitate updates to curriculum and teacher training, as well as stronger linkages between tertiary educational institutions and industries. Furthermore, digital businesses can create new jobs and increase productivity. Promoting the growth of digital businesses will require support programs to increase international market reach, enhance the capacity of support organizations (such as incubators and venture capital funds) and strengthen access to finance.

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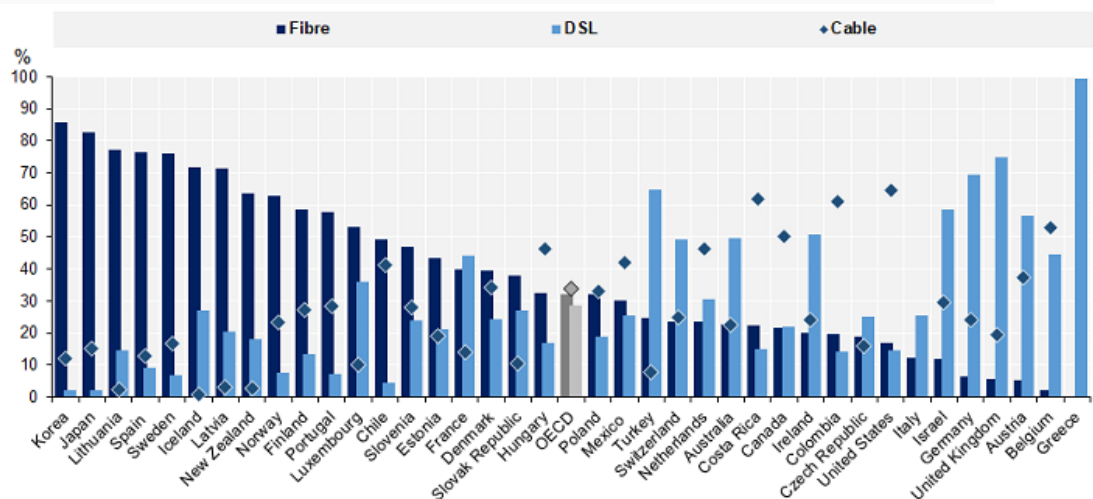
High-speed Fibre Internet Continues Its Strong Growth in OECD Countries as DSL Declines

High-speed fibre subscriptions grew by 15% across OECD countries from June 2020 to June 2021, as living and working under Covid-19 restrictions continued to drive demand for high-quality internet connections with the rapid upload and download speeds that fibre offers. The latest update to the [OECD broadband portal](#) shows fibre now makes up 32% of fixed broadband subscriptions across the OECD’s 38 member countries, up from 12% a decade ago, and is by far the fastest-growing broadband technology, outpacing a 4.5% rise in overall fixed broadband subscriptions. While countries use different technology mixes, 23 OECD countries have now a higher

share of fibre than copper-wire DSL in their total fixed broadband connections, up from 20 countries a year ago. Cable showed more modest growth of 4% in the year to June 2021, and is now declining in 15 countries, yet it remains the main fixed broadband technology for nine OECD countries. DSL subscriptions declined by 6% over the same period, with several OECD countries showing sharp declines.

Fibre, DSL and cable subscriptions in total fixed broadband, June 2021

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Latin American OECD countries saw significant increases in fibre with growth rates of 74% for Costa Rica, 71% for Chile, 43% for Colombia and 26% for Mexico. Other countries with impressive growth in fibre connections include Israel with 76%, Ireland with 54% and Italy with 53%. Seven countries now have a fibre share of above 70% of their fixed broadband subscriptions: Korea with 86%, Japan with 83%, Lithuania with 77%, Spain with 76%, Sweden with 76%, Iceland with 72% and Latvia with 71%. Cable remains dominant in North and South America, accounting for 64% of subscriptions in the United States, 62% in Costa Rica, 61% in Colombia, 50% in Canada, 42% in Mexico and 41.4% in Chile, where fibre has overtaken it. In Europe cable is the dominant technology in Belgium (53%), Hungary (46.4%), and The Netherlands (46%).

DSL connections, meanwhile, saw sharp declines of over 30% in Chile (-37%), New Zealand (-32%), Norway (-40%), Spain (-32%), and Sweden (-31%). Some operators in OECD countries are in the process of shutting down copper connections altogether, for instance in France, Japan, Estonia, Finland, Sweden and Spain. Mobile broadband continued its inexorable growth with a 6.3% increase in subscriptions in the year to June 2021, a higher rate of growth than in the two previous periods (3.6% in June 2019-June 2020 and 5.8% in June 2018-June 2019.) In contrast, the number of data-only subscriptions declined in 17 out of 38 countries and this category experienced a 0.4% drop in subscriptions. This could be due to

greater use of fixed networks at home during Covid-19, which tend to offer a better connection quality for work, education, and leisure.

M2M SIM cards have grown by an impressive 16%, with Sweden, Austria, Iceland and the Netherlands dominating the ranking, having 175.6, 82.5, 82.3 and 50.3 M2M cards respectively per 100 inhabitants. Overall, fixed broadband subscriptions in OECD countries totalled 462.5 million as of June 2021, up from 443 million a year earlier, to average 33.8 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. Mobile broadband subscriptions totalled 1.67 billion as of June 2021, up from 1.57 billion a year earlier, and averaged 122 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. Download broadband data, charts and penetration maps by country at <http://oe.cd/broadband>. *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/> 02/10/2022

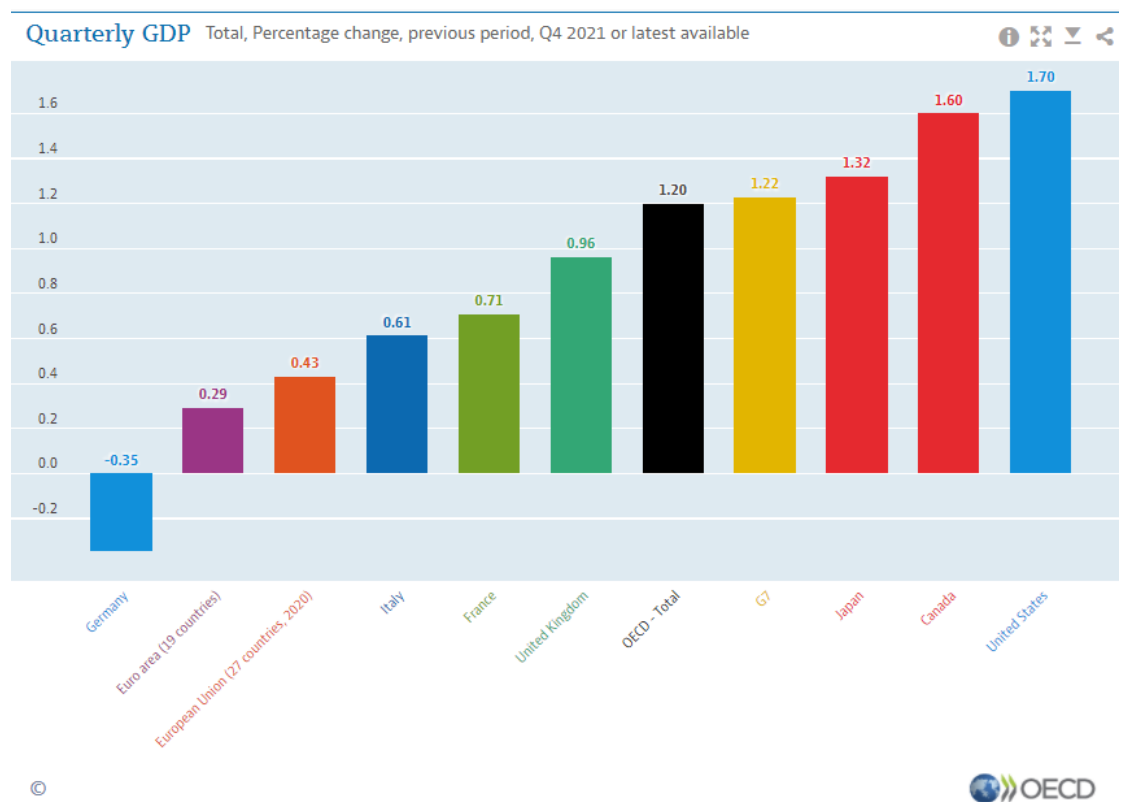
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OECD GDP Growth Continues Steadily in the Fourth Quarter of 2021, but Slows in Europe

Gross domestic product (GDP) in the **OECD area** rose by 1.2% between the third and fourth quarter of 2021 according to provisional estimates, slightly up from the 1.1% increase recorded between the second and third quarter. In the **G7**, quarter-on-quarter GDP growth accelerated to 1.2% in the fourth quarter of 2021 from 0.9% in the third quarter, driven by increases in the **United States** (1.7%, compared with 0.6% in the previous quarter), **Canada** (1.6%, compared with 1.3%) and **Japan** (1.3%, compared with minus 0.7%). GDP growth slowed markedly in major European economies in Q4 2021, including **France** (to 0.7%, compared with 3.1% in the previous quarter) and **Italy** (to 0.6%, compared with 2.6%). In **Germany**, GDP contracted by 0.7% in Q4 2021 compared with growth of 1.7% in Q3 2021. In the **United Kingdom**, GDP growth stabilised at 1.0% in Q4 2021.

Canada has now exceeded its pre-pandemic level of GDP by 0.2% compared with Q4 2019, joining the **United States** and **France** which regained their pre-pandemic levels in Q2 2021 and Q3 2021 respectively. GDP in other **G7 countries** remained below pre-pandemic levels, with the largest gap in **Germany**, still 1.5% below the level recorded in Q4 2019. In the **United States**, final domestic demand grew by 0.5% in Q4 2021, while rebuilding of stocks contributed 1.2 percentage points to the 1.7% quarter-on-quarter GDP growth. In **Japan**, the main drivers of Q4 GDP growth were private consumption (1.4 percentage points) and exports (0.2 percentage points), while government consumption, investment and destocking each removed 0.1 percentage points from overall growth.

Among other **OECD countries** for which data are available for the fourth quarter of 2021, **Colombia** and **Israel** recorded the highest increases in GDP compared with the previous quarter (4.3% and 3.9%, respectively), followed by **Hungary** (2.1%), **Spain** (2.0%), **Poland** (1.7%), **Portugal** (1.6%) and **Sweden** (1.4%). Decreases were recorded in **Austria** (minus 2.2%) and **Latvia** (minus 0.1%). Looking back on growth for 2021 as a whole, according to initial estimates GDP in the **OECD area** increased by 5.5% in real terms following the sharp fall recorded in 2020 (minus 4.6%) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among **G7 countries**, the **United Kingdom** saw its economy shrink the most in 2020 (minus 9.4%) and recorded the highest annual growth in 2021 (7.5%). **France** experienced an increase of 7.0% in 2021 compared with a contraction of 7.9% in 2020, while **Italy's** economy expanded by 6.4% in 2021 after contracting by 8.9% in 2020.



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Services Trade Liberalised in 2021, Showing Significant Decrease in Volume and Effects of New Measures, OECD Says

Global services trade regulations showed signs of liberalisation in 2021, slowing the steady build-up of trade barriers identified in previous years, according to a new OECD report. OECD Services Trade Restrictiveness Index (STRI): Policy trends up to 2022 shows that liberalisation outpaced new restrictions during the past year, as the erection of new barriers to services trade slowed across almost all major sectors covered. The average cumulative increase in barriers across sectors covered by the

Index (STRI) was six times lower in 2021 than in 2020, indicating a significant decrease both in the volume and effect of new trade restrictions. Most trade liberalisation was identified in air transport services, commercial banking and computer services. Easing of regulations particularly affected services supplied through commercial presence in other markets, and through the temporary movement of people.

The annual report, which covers services trade regulations in 50 countries and 22 services sectors, representing more than 80% of global services exports, identifies top performers in terms of regulatory best practices and liberalisation, including the Czech Republic, Japan and Chile. It also points out new measures that have created impediments to services trade, notably tighter conditions on the screening of foreign investment, which was already on the rise in 2020, and continued in 2021. Other regulatory changes were implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as governments implemented measures to protect public health and to mitigate the economic consequences. However, most COVID-19 policy measures have marginal bearing on the STRI database, as these are largely temporary or targeting support measures in sectors not covered by the STRI, such as health, protective equipment or essential goods.

The OECD points out that ambitious efforts to ease services trade barriers could yield substantial benefits in reducing trade costs for firms that provide services across borders, especially if the trends identified in 2021 continue in the years to come. On average across sectors, services trade costs could decline by 6% to 16% in the medium term if countries could close half of the regulatory gaps with best performers. An ambitious services trade agenda, including new services market access commitments in comprehensive trade and investment agreements, can drive such gains, the report said. The trend towards market openness for services trade identified in the OECD's annual monitoring exercise accompanies the landmark adoption of the WTO Reference Paper on Services Domestic Regulation at the end of 2021, demonstrating collective will to liberalise services trade. OECD analysis demonstrates that full implementation of the new WTO disciplines can unlock annual services trade cost savings in the range of USD 150 billion, with substantial benefits in financial services, business services, communications and transport services.

Open markets for services trade boost supply chain resilience, while lower services trade costs will facilitate recovery from the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic on exporters. Multilateral trade rules and open commitments on services can lock in these benefits and provide certainty to firms seeking to access foreign markets. For further information on OECD work on the services trade, see: <https://www.oecd.org/trade/topics/services-trade/>. Direct media queries to John Drummond, Head of the Trade in Services Division of the OECD Trade and Agriculture Directorate (+33 1 45 24 95 36), or Lawrence Speer in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 45 24 79 70). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global

policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

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International Trade Statistics: Trends in Fourth Quarter 2021

Acceleration in merchandise trade bolsters recovery in G20 trade, but growth in services trade eases

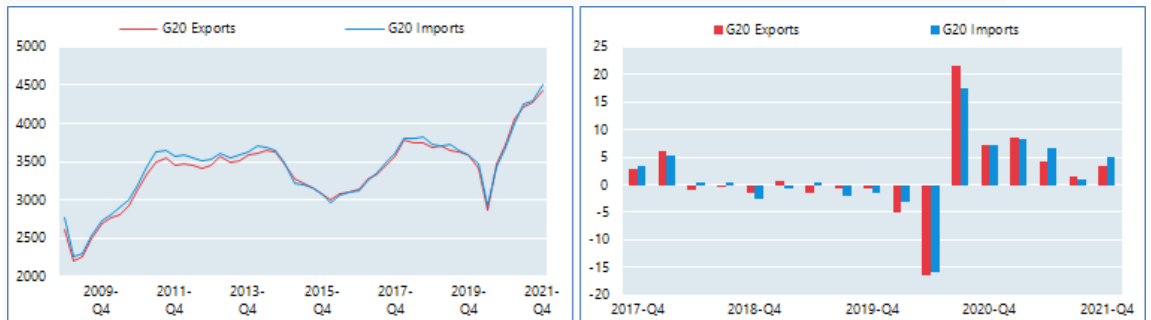
Following a slow third quarter, G20 international merchandise trade accelerated in value terms in Q4 2021, partly due to high commodity prices, in particular for energy. While shipping costs kept the value of trade in transport services at record highs, trade in other services showed a slowdown notably in Europe, possibly reflecting a tightening of Covid-19 related restrictions towards the end of the year. Growth in G20 international merchandise picked up in Q4 2021, with exports up 3.4% and imports up 5.0%, with respect to the previous quarter and measured in seasonally-adjusted current US dollars. This compares to the slower growth (1.5% for exports and 0.9% for imports) recorded in Q3 2021. Energy price increases continued to fuel merchandise trade growth in value terms, while pressure on supply chains, including for semiconductors, appears to have eased towards the end of the year.

Growth in exports and imports of services for the G20 is estimated at around 2.5% and 2.4% in Q4 2021, respectively, compared with the previous quarter and measured in seasonally-adjusted US dollars. The preliminary estimates compare to the rates of 3.8% and 3.5% recorded in Q3 2021 for exports and imports. Services trade continued to expand at a sustained pace in North America and most of East Asia, while growth slowed down in Europe.

In 2021, annual merchandise exports and imports for the G20 expanded by 25.9% and 26.1%, respectively, with values around 16% above their 2019 levels. While high commodity prices explain part of the increase, stimulus packages also played a role by spurring the demand for traded goods. **Annual growth in exports and imports of services is estimated at around 15.0% and 11.3%, respectively.** While transport costs skyrocketed, travel, which includes the expenditure of non-residents abroad, recovered but remained subdued. Trade in computer, business and financial services performed well across most of the G20 economies in 2021.

G20 merchandise trade

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



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

A recovery in trade in vehicles and parts helped push merchandise trade growth in North America in Q4 2021, with exports from the **United States** (up 7.1%), **Canada** (up 6.7%) and **Mexico** (up 6.0%) all recording strong growth. Import growth for Canada (up 7.2%) and the United States (up 5.9%) was largely driven by higher purchases of home electronics and mobile phones. Merchandise exports instead contracted in **Argentina** and **Brazil** (minus 7.3% and minus 5.0%, respectively), with lower shipments of metal ores and soybeans (mostly to China) weighing in particular on the Brazilian figures. Imports, on the other hand, expanded by 13.0% in Argentina and by 11.5% in Brazil, the latter driven by energy products, electrical machinery and fertilisers. Merchandise trade picked up in Europe in Q4 2021, following the weak growth seen in Q3 2021. Exports and imports in the **European Union** (EU-27) expanded by 2.3% and 5.1%, respectively. All the major European G20 economies showed robust merchandise trade growth: **France** (exports and imports up 2.6% and 6.3%, respectively), **Germany** (up 2.2% and 5.8%) and **Italy** (up 2.5% and 4.5%), with higher purchases of energy products driving the import figures and trade in vehicles and parts recovering. Merchandise exports and imports of the **United Kingdom** expanded by 3.2% and 5.3%, respectively, with chemicals, machinery and transport equipment driving exports and energy products contributing to imports growth.

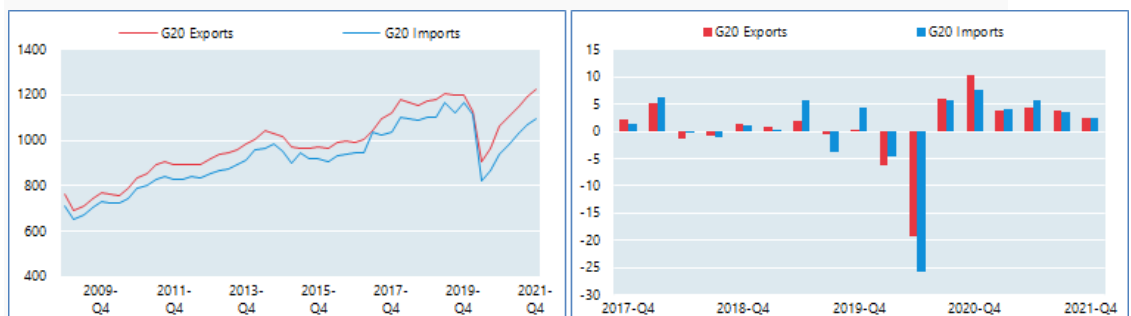
Electronics and vehicles (including e-cars) continued to spur exports growth for **Korea** (up 5.2%), while **Japan** saw more moderate growth in both exports (up 0.5%) and imports (up 2.2%). **Chinese** merchandise exports (up 4.6%) and imports (up 0.9%) rebounded in Q4 2021, after the much weaker figures in the previous quarter. Electronics and integrated circuits helped boost growth in exports, with integrated circuits also fuelling import growth along with soybeans and metal ores. **India**, with exports up 2.2% and imports up 10.7%, and **Indonesia** (up 8.9% and 13.1%), also posted solid merchandise trade figures in Q4 2021. Falling prices for metals and lower shipments of coal and fuels affected export growth for **Australia** (minus 3.5%), while imports expanded by 7.5%, largely driven by higher spending on vehicles, telecommunication equipment and home electronics. Exports from **South Africa** also contracted by 2.1% in Q4 2021, reflecting drops in

its major exports of metal ores, fruits and electrical machinery, while imports increased by 3.3%.

In 2021 as a whole, merchandise trade values for the vast majority of the G20 members more than recovered the drops recorded in 2020. Exports and imports expanded by 23.1% and 21.3%, respectively, in the **United States**, with energy products and pharmaceuticals recording significant growth on the exports side. Similarly, annual exports and imports rose by 20.8% and 25.1% in the **European Union**. Electronics (integrated circuits, mobile phones, displays and computers) continued to propel merchandise exports from **Korea** (up 25.6%) and **China** (up 32.2%). Machinery and vehicles and parts contributed to total merchandise exports growth for **Japan** (up 18.3%), while imports increased by 21.3% over the year. Leading exporters of primary commodities benefitted from high demand and steep price increases, with merchandise exports soaring in 2021 for **Russia** (up 47.5%), **India** (up 42.1%), **Indonesia** (up 38.4%) and **South Africa** (up 44.9%).

G20 trade in services

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



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

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

Note: the Q4 2021 trade in services values are preliminary estimates based on available data, covering about 60% of exports and imports for the G20 aggregate.

Services trade showed a mixed picture in Q4 2021. Following the expansion recorded in the previous two quarters, services trade in **Europe** slowed down in Q4 2021. Services exports increased by 1.8% in **France**, with weak sales of financial and insurance services partially offsetting growth in travel (up 15.9%) and transport (up 4.3%). **German** exports contracted by 2.3%, while imports increased moderately by 1.2%. The **United Kingdom** recorded a slowdown in both services exports (minus 2.4%) and imports (minus 2.5%), while exports and imports of **Italy** increased by 1.6% and 3.6%, respectively. **Turkey's** trade in services continued to expand in Q4 2021. Exports grew by 4.0%, while imports rose by 8.0% reflecting strong purchases of computer and business services. Similarly, **Russia's** services trade expanded markedly, with exports increasing by 8.4% and imports surging by 19.4%. An easing of travel restrictions and high transport costs sustained trade in services growth in **North America**. The **United States** saw a 6.6% rise in services exports,

with travel and transport up by 39.4% and 11.3% in Q4 2021. Imports grew more moderately by 4.3%. Similarly, **Canada**'s services exports and imports expanded by 6.5% and 6.1%, respectively, compared to the previous quarter.

Transport, computer and business services continued to boost trade in services growth across **East Asia**. Exports increased by 5.5% in **Korea**, with construction, of which Korea is a leading exporter, picking up strongly (up 55.9%) following three quarters of contraction. **China** also saw marked growth of 6.1% in services exports, fueled by higher sales of transport, computer and business services. Imports expanded by 4.6% in Korea and by 3.8% in China. **Japan**, on the contrary, experienced a decline in both services exports and imports (minus 3.9% and minus 5.0%, respectively), reflecting lower trade in all services but transport. Owing to prolonged entry restrictions, which depressed travel receipts, services exports contracted further in **Australia**, recording a 4.9% fall in Q4 2021. However, services imports increased by 4.9% driven by transport (up 21.8%). In **Brazil**, services exports grew by 0.7%, while imports rose by 3.4% on higher purchases of business and transport services.

For 2021 as a whole, most G20 economies showed a robust rebound in trade in services compared to the previous year, although in many cases values remain below pre-crisis (2019) levels due to subdued travel figures. Exports of services from **Korea** and **China**, up 34.8% and 42.5% in the year, respectively, are an exception: soaring transport receipts, as well as buoyant figures across all services, drove total exports well above their 2019 levels. **Japanese** exports and imports expanded more moderately over the year (up 4.2% and 5.3%, respectively), while strict travel restrictions continued to weigh heavily on **Australia**'s services exports (down 8.4% compared to 2020). Services exports and imports increased by 8.6% and 16.2% in the **United States**, with financial and business services driving export growth, and transport and travel propelling import growth. In Europe, annual exports from **France** (up 18.0%), **Germany** (up 15.6%) and the **United Kingdom** (up 8.1%) were all close to their 2019 levels, largely reflecting dynamic trade in business and financial services. With travel receipts twice as high as in 2020 (but still 30% below their 2019 levels), **Turkish** exports of services jumped by 56.2% in 2021.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 02/24/2022

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Dow Jumps over 800 Points in Its Best Day Since Late 2020

U.S. stocks surged on Friday with the Dow logging its best day in over a year, as Wall Street closely followed updates on the Russia-Ukraine tensions. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 834.92 points, or 2.51 percent, to 34,058.75, notching its best daily gain since November 2020. The S&P 500 rose 95.95 points, or 2.24 percent, to 4,384.65. The Nasdaq Composite Index increased 221.03 points, or 1.64 percent, to 13,694.62. All the 11 primary S&P 500 sectors closed noticeably higher,

with materials and financials up 3.58 percent and 3.16 percent, respectively, leading the gains. U.S.-listed Chinese companies traded mostly higher with six of the top 10 stocks by weight in the S&P U.S. Listed China 50 index ending the day on an upbeat note.

The Ukraine issue remains a focus on Wall Street.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is ready to send a Russian delegation to the Belarusian capital of Minsk for negotiations with Ukraine, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Friday told a briefing that his country has no plan to occupy Ukraine and Moscow is ready to hold negotiations straight after the Ukrainian forces “lay down their arms.” Investors also assessed Western sanctions against Russia and the U.S. Federal Reserve’s next policy move. For the week, the Dow dipped 0,06 percent, while the S&P 500 and the tech-heavy Nasdaq climbed 0.8 percent and 1.1 percent, respectively.

From <https://todaynewspost.com/> 02/25/2022

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Trade Integration Deepens in Asia and the Pacific amid Pandemic

Trade among economies in Asia and the Pacific rose to the highest level in 3 decades, bolstering the region’s economic resilience amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic even as mobility restrictions and supply-chain disruptions hampered global trade, a report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) shows. Asia and the Pacific’s trade grew 29.6% in the first 3 quarters of 2021, compared with global trade growth of 27.8%. Trade within the region rebounded 31.2% during the same period, following a 3.1% contraction in 2020, according to the Asian Economic Integration Report (AEIR) 2022, released today. Intraregional trade made up 58.5% of the region’s total trade in 2020, the highest share since 1990. The strong intraregional trade, along with the release of global pent-up demand and the early economic recovery in the People’s Republic of China, underpinned the region’s economic resilience. Measures to further promote trade and investment across borders—such as the newly launched Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership free trade agreement—can help advance regional trade and economic integration and pave the way for a sustainable recovery from the pandemic, according to the report.

“The strengthening trade and value chain linkages among economies in Asia and the Pacific are an encouraging sign for a resilient recovery from COVID-19,” said ADB Chief Economist Albert Park. “The pandemic has caused visible economic damage and reversed many of the region’s hard-won gains in reducing poverty. We must build on the achievements of regional integration and cooperation to support a return to inclusive and sustainable economic growth.” A sustained recovery will require close policy cooperation on multiple fronts, particularly in terms of managing the exit from the pandemic and establishing health and safety protocols related to economic

and border reopening. Strengthening regional health security and supply chains, as well as mitigating climate change risks, would boost the region's resilience to future shocks. Integration among economies in Asia and the Pacific has continued to deepen in areas including new technology and digital connectivity, environmental cooperation, trade linkages, investment, and value chain participation, according to the report.

Foreign direct investment into the region also remained resilient, declining by only 1.3% in 2020, compared with a 34.7% drop globally. Meanwhile, remittance inflows to the region are estimated to have grown 2.5% in 2021, after a 2.0% drop in 2020. Tourism remained one of the sectors hit hardest by the pandemic, with international arrivals in Asia and the Pacific dropping 82.8% in 2020 compared with the pre-pandemic average from 2015 to 2019. The AEIR 2022 theme chapter discusses the imperative of advancing digital services trade in Asia and the Pacific. The chapter highlights how rapid digitalization and the COVID-19 pandemic are spurring the growth of digital services trade, and it discusses ways economies in the region can capitalize on these opportunities through human capital development, enhanced digital connectivity, regulatory reforms and institution building, and international cooperation.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 02/09/2022

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APEC Region's GDP Growth Moderates to 5.8% in 2021

The APEC region's economic growth is expected to have moderated for 2021, hurt in part by the emergence of new variants of COVID-19 as well as elevated inflation from the combined effect of supply shocks and strong pent-up demand. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) expanded by 5.8 percent in 2021, lower than the earlier prediction of 6 percent, according to a newly updated report by the APEC Policy Support Unit. "We are dealing with multiple headwinds that derail our push for recovery," said Dr Denis Hew, the APEC Policy Support Unit's director. "Adding to that, growth in APEC will remain uneven mostly due to disparities in pandemic management and vaccine coverage. China's modest economic growth is also expected to have some impact on the economic performance of the region." The report notes that the APEC region's economic growth will continue at a moderate pace in the coming years, expanding to 4.2 percent in 2022 and 3.8 percent in 2023.

Higher inflation poses an additional challenge as it has already driven some economies to tighten monetary policy settings, which could have a dampening effect on economic activity. APEC's inflation rate doubled to an average of 3 percent in 2021 compared to 1.5 percent in 2020, thanks to higher energy and food prices. "We expect inflation to moderate to 2.5 percent in 2022, with a further decrease to 2.3 percent by 2023," said Rhea C. Hernando, a researcher with the APEC Policy Support Unit who authored the report. "Authorities need to continue to anchor

inflation expectations with clear monetary policy intentions, and this, along with the stabilization of global and supply conditions, will help bring down inflation.” The report highlights how public debt around the region has increased to around 65 percent of GDP in 2020, compared to the pre-pandemic 10-year average of 49 percent of GDP. This significant increase is led by the massive fiscal response to cushion the blow of the health and economic crisis brought by COVID-19.

“Governments are faced with the inevitable option to scale back their fiscal stimulus and shift to a more targeted and calibrated approach to continue their support to vulnerable households and viable businesses,” Hernando added. “However, narrowing fiscal space and tightening monetary policy could slow down consumption and overall economic activity.” Moving forward, the report recommends that APEC economies continue to prioritize the health of the people in the region so that they can recover, reopen and rebuild. “The message remains more or less the same; safeguard the free and rapid flow of medical supplies across borders to expand vaccination coverage. At the same time, we need to address vaccine hesitancy by focusing the information campaign on highlighting vaccine protection and correcting misinformation,” Dr Hew reiterated. “In addition to this, economies need to ensure the availability of medical and essential workers as they are the key to recovery.” Thailand, the host of APEC 2022, will lead the region’s effort towards charting a post-COVID-19 future for the Asia-Pacific region that is resilient, inclusive, balanced and sustainable, guided by its theme, Open. Connect. Balance. Thailand will host the first round of technical meetings this February. To view the event calendar, visit this page.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 02/10/2022

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APEC Sees Surge in Trade, Grows Double-Digits Despite Disruptions

Home to half of world trade, the APEC region posted double-digit growth both in trade volume and value during the period of January to September 2021, according to an update to an APEC Policy Support Unit report. The volume of APEC’s merchandise exports and imports increased by 14 percent and 16 percent respectively compared to the same period last year, when these were in the negative zone. The value of merchandise trade, meanwhile, rose to 28.2 percent for exports and 27.3 percent for imports, driven by higher costs of fuel and manufactured products. The update highlights that the reasons for this surge are the combined effect of a rebound in economic activity, marked by a spike in demand, as well as a low base, since trade contracted in the last couple of years. Adding to that, supply shocks led to higher shipping and storage costs which fed into prices of exports and imports. Trade expanded in a broad range of manufactured goods, including iron and steel, chemicals, machineries, clothing and footwear, while trade in COVID-19-related goods such as pharmaceuticals and telecommunications

equipment has remained strong. “To sustain the recovery, member economies should remain united in their response and their priorities; that in the immediate period, we must ensure that people are healthy so that economies can recover, reopen and rebuild,” explained Dr Denis Hew, Director of the APEC Policy Support Unit. “Central to this is the free and rapid flow of medical supplies across borders to expand vaccination coverage, on which members agreed early last year.”

Also read: APEC Region’s GDP Growth Moderates to 5.8% in 2021: Report

In terms of trade in services, the update notes a rebound in APEC’s commercial services by 11.1 percent for exports and 9.2 percent for imports in the first three quarters of 2021. The increase in shipping rates boosted the performance of transport services, which grew by 26.8 percent, while strong consumer demand pushed goods-related services to grow by 10.7 percent in Q1-Q3 of 2021. “Unfortunately, the travel sector continued to be a drag on services trade as the recovery of travel and tourism is largely dependent on the full reopening of borders across the world,” said Rhea C. Hernando, a researcher with the APEC Policy Support Unit who wrote the report. “Travel services last year is still around 30 percent lower than the 2019 level despite efforts by authorities to develop several travel corridors,” Hernando added. “This only highlights the importance of APEC’s commitment in advancing the work to safely reopen borders and reconnect the region.”

As Chair of APEC 2022, one of Thailand’s priorities is to address the pressing issue of disrupted connectivity by resuming safe and seamless cross-border travel, reinvigorating tourism and services sector, facilitating business mobility as well as increasing investment in health security. “Looking ahead, in order to achieve the new vision of open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful Asia-Pacific, member economies are poised to implement the individual and collective actions set out by the Aotearoa Plan of Action,” Dr Hew stated. “Although the implementation of the strategies spelled out by the plan of action depends on economies’ domestic conditions and resources, the key is to act now by implementing what is relevant, feasible and appropriate,” he concluded. For more information on the APEC Regional Trends Analysis update, visit this page.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 02/16/2022

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Embracing Challenges, Engaging Collectively and Enabling Opportunities Are Key to Asia-Pacific Success, Says Business Leaders

Asia-Pacific business leaders in the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC), meeting this week in Singapore, affirmed their determination to continue to work closely together in a complex, intertwined and rapidly-changing region. ABAC Chair for 2022, and Chairman of the Federation of Thai Industries, Supant Mongkolsuthree,

explained that ABAC's theme was "Embrace, Engage and Enable". "The business community recognizes that this is a time of great disruption, but also presents a great opportunity. We can leverage synergies from engaging collectively, embracing the challenges and enabling our communities, in order to realize the full potential of our region." The Chair added that this was a message that ABAC had underscored during a session with APEC Senior Officials. "This approach will take us a long way down the path to creating the open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful region that our Leaders foresaw in the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040, which will be implemented through the Aotearoa Plan of Action starting this year."

The Chair said that ABAC had also been honored that Gan Kim Yong, Singapore's Minister of Trade and Industry, had opened the ABAC meeting. Turning to the Council's priorities, the Chair said that the pandemic remained a central concern. "COVID is still a reality. But 2022 is our chance to embrace the new normal – by safely reopening borders through more equitable access to vaccination and more regionally-coherent approaches for travel, along with efforts to smooth out supply chain disruptions. We can also enable greater productivity and growth through boosting structural reforms." The Chair explained that future-proofing the region's trade architecture was also essential. "APEC's Leaders have set the goal of a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific. The foundations have been laid – now we need to get building, utilizing what we have learned about resilience, sustainability and inclusion throughout the pandemic. We also want to see a stronger, more relevant World Trade Organization emerging from the WTO Ministerial Conference this year."

The Chair noted that climate change would be another major focus. "We will be drawing on our Climate Leadership Principles from 2021 to help embrace the transition to a low-carbon, green and circular economy in the APEC region," he said. "We will also contribute to shaping the implementation plan for a sustainable, digitally-enabled and trade-friendly food system under the new APEC Food Security Roadmap." Finally, underpinning all of this work would be digital transformation. "We have already held a Digital Trade Symposium and will explore a range of other digital topics this year. Digital technologies can help to turbocharge a green recovery, drive trade expansion and create new opportunities – but we need to create the right enabling environment and infrastructure for that.

"This is particularly critical for micro, small and mid-sized businesses (MSMEs), women and other disadvantaged groups," the Chair noted. "MSMEs, including women-led firms, make up the lion's share of our business community and employment, but they have been hit hard by the pandemic. If we can build their digital capabilities and options, we can help unlock their potential. That will make a critical contribution to our overall economic recovery," the Chair commented. The Chair said that ABAC had welcomed the recent announcement from the Prime Minister of Thailand that the United States of America would host APEC in 2023 and Peru in 2024, noting that this strong leadership continuity was crucial to APEC's

aspirations for a better future for all. “We call on APEC to facilitate the safe reopening of borders to accelerate the much-needed economic recovery of the region, particularly for the MSME sector which have been disproportionately impacted by the restrictions on movement of people.” “I look forward to working with my ABAC colleagues and others around the region to show that APEC is open for business, and ready for action this year and in the future,” the Chair concluded.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 02/18/2022

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APEC Prepares to Restart Travel

APEC economies are committed to the safe resumption of travel in the region by considering harmonization and interoperability mechanisms in a bid to facilitate the movement of people and reconnect business mobility in the Asia-Pacific. “Reconnecting the region is a priority, an urgent task for us all,” said Cherdchai Chaivaivid, the Chair of APEC Safe Passage Taskforce who is also Thailand’s APEC Senior Official. “Restarting cross-border travel will no doubt support economic recovery, and at the same, time reemphasize APEC’s relevancy and efficiency in the midst of the ever-changing global landscape.” “It is crucial that we coordinate our policies and move towards harmonization,” he added. “We need to make certain that we deliver something meaningful and practical by at least this May, otherwise, it will be too late.” In their first meeting on Monday evening, the Safe Passage Taskforce assessed several proposals and policy actions that complement global travel initiatives, while addressing gaps and concerns such as how to ensure that the resumption of travel will be inclusive and non-discriminatory. Member economies presented their proposals for contributing to the safe resumption of cross-border travel, including non-binding principles for the interoperability of vaccination certificates in the region, which will support the smooth operation of international travel.

“These proposals will lay a solid foundation in safe passage for APEC for long-term resilience,” Cherdchai stated. “Having a set of principles will guide APEC to work towards interoperability and safe and sustainable travel as well as enhance connectivity.” “Leaders and ministers have been extremely clear in their directives for APEC to facilitate safe and seamless resumption of cross-border travel, especially through promoting information exchange and coordinating measures related to cross-border movement of people, including in relation to air and maritime crew, and COVID-19 testing and vaccination certificates,” Cherdchai explained. “APEC ministers also committed to explore specific initiatives, solutions, and best practices to facilitate safe travel in the region, paving the way for a return to people moving across borders for business, tourism as well as for educational purposes.” Member economies discussed mechanisms for information sharing internally among member economies to share best practices, as well as for a one-stop information platform on international travel for the public within APEC.

Policy and technical recommendations for international travel were also provided by guest speakers from the World Health Organization and International Civil Aviation Organization. Members also heard how other regional groupings are operationalizing their own travel passages, including the ASEAN Travel Corridor Arrangement Framework. "We also recognize that there is still a gap in our work in regards to facilitating essential travelers, including aircrew and seafarers," Cherdchai said "We have to step up our efforts in these areas and move ahead in getting proposed actions and initiatives going." The outcomes and progress of the policy discussions during the Safe Passage Taskforce meeting will be reported to APEC Senior Officials during their two-day meeting this week.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 02/23/2022

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East Asia

CHINA: Capital Market to See More Development Opportunities in 2022

China's capital market is expected to see sound development with more opportunities this year, experts said. "The opportunities outweigh the challenges for China's capital market in 2022," said Peng Wensheng, chief analyst of the China International Capital Corporation, in a recent interview with Xinhua. Peng added that the country's innovation drive and policies to stabilize growth would further stimulate vitality and unleash the potential of China's capital market. Despite uncertainties in the global financial market in 2022, China's capital market still has the foundation and conditions for sustainable and sound development, said Liu Yuanchun, vice president of Renmin University of China. More liquidity support and continued reforms would help China's capital market maintain its sound development, said Liu. The steady growth momentum of the Chinese economy has laid a solid foundation for capital market development, said Liu. Liu added that China's economic growth is forecast to range from 5.2 to 5.6 by some agencies. Chinese authorities have underscored a "triple pressure" -- shrinking demand, supply shocks, and weakening expectations -- and prioritized stability in its economic work for 2022 in a tone-setting economic meeting. Despite the triple pressure, China's economy will likely maintain steady growth momentum this year with decreased unemployment, generally stable commodity prices, and enhanced technological innovation, Liu said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 02/06/2022

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China's E-commerce Hubs See Surging Exports via Int'l Freight Trains

Jinhua and Yiwu in east China, two of China's major e-commerce hubs, have

delivered 5,886 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of cargo via China-Europe and China-Laos freight train services during the Spring Festival holiday. The figure marked a 79.3 percent increase from the same lunar new year period of the previous year, said local railway authorities. During the week-long holiday, 4,166 TEUs of cargo were carried by China-Europe freight trains that departed from Yiwu. Meanwhile, 1,720 TEUs of freight were transported by China-Laos freight trains and China-Europe freight trains launched by Jinhua. Jinhua City in east China's Zhejiang Province also administers the county-level city of Yiwu. Yiwu is widely known as the world's supermarket and China's small commodity hub. Falling on Feb. 1 this year, the Chinese New Year is an important traditional festival and often marks a peak consumption season of the year.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 02/07/2022

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Cross-border E-commerce Pilot Zones Forge a Promising Future for China's Foreign Trade

Cross-border e-commerce is gaining momentum in China against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic that severely impacted international trade, and the recent approval of more cross-border e-commerce comprehensive pilot zones has, undoubtedly, accelerated this trend. Last week, China's State Council issued a statement, approving the establishment of more cross-border e-commerce pilot zones in 27 cities and regions, including Erdos in Inner Mongolia and Yangzhou City in Jiangsu Province. This now brings the overall tally of pilot zones to 132, covering almost all provincial-level regions in China from coastal industrial powerhouses such as Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Guangdong to inland areas. "As a new form of foreign trade with great potential, cross-border e-commerce is still on its fast growth track," the Ministry of Commerce said. Cross-border e-commerce, featuring online marketing, online transactions and contactless payment, has boomed in China over the past few years, particularly during the last two years when the pandemic impeded business travel and face-to-face contact.

According to official data, cross-border e-commerce volume soared tenfold over the past five years. In 2021 alone, China's cross-border e-commerce imports and exports climbed 15 percent year on year to 1.98 trillion yuan (about 311 billion U.S. dollars), with related pilot zones playing a significant role in spurring the growth. China began setting up cross-border e-commerce pilot zones as early as 2015 in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, in a bid to trial the new business form and digitalize its trade channels. In these pilot zones, local governments provide a variety of trade services ranging from logistics, payment, law, taxation and customs clearance to facilitate enterprises' cross-border e-commerce businesses. "Our company has seen tangible benefits after the establishment of cross-border e-commerce pilot zones," said Wu Fan, head of the Asia-Pacific region of U-Play Corporation, an Anhui-based hygiene products manufacturer. Currently, 90 percent of the company's products are

sold overseas via cross-border e-commerce retail. The company's cross-border imports and exports soared 62.5 percent from 80 million yuan in 2020 to 130 million yuan in 2021, Wu said, attributing this growth to preferential tax policies.

The favorable policy environment for cross-border e-commerce has led to a continuous increase in the number of cross-border e-commerce companies. So far, China has seen the establishment of more than 30,000 enterprises related to cross-border e-commerce, with the volume climbing every year. Apart from benefitting market entities, cross-border e-commerce pilot zones also improve the shopping experience of consumers, said Xu Qing, director of public affairs department at Tmall Global, a leading online shopping platform where Chinese consumers hunt for overseas products. "Thanks to the cross-border e-commerce boom, domestic consumers can choose from more overseas products with lower prices and faster delivery without leaving their homes," Xu said. As one of the world's largest goods traders, China is expected to further enhance its competitive strengths in foreign trade through the expansion of cross-border e-commerce pilot zones. Zhu Caihua, a professor at the University of International Business and Economics, said cities later designated as cross-border e-commerce pilot zones should leverage local development advantages and enhance institutional innovation to propel high-quality development of the new business form.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 02/15/2022

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China Still Strong Magnet for Foreign Investment

China remains a strong magnet for foreign investment in a pandemic-jolted world, as revealed by the latest data, and experts believe the trend will continue thanks to the country's continued opening-up and improved business environment. After hitting a record high last year, foreign direct investment (FDI) into the Chinese mainland, in actual use, expanded 11.6 percent year on year to 102.28 billion yuan in January, the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) has said. In U.S. dollar terms, the inflow went up 17.6 percent to 15.84 billion dollars. The growth last month was the fastest and the first double-digit increase for the same period since 2016. Experts called the results hard-won and said they reflected China's undented attraction for foreign capital amid external uncertainties. Last year's robust FDI momentum sustained into this year as global capital flows accelerated and domestically the country's stable economic fundamentals, improved business environment and new foreign-investment law reassured foreign investors, said Zhang Jianping with the MOC's research institute.

A recent MOC survey showed that 94.9 percent of over 3,000 foreign businesses operating in China have a largely optimistic outlook. China has ramped up efforts to further open up the economy. Shortened negative list for foreign investment came into force on Jan. 1, with off-limit items cut to 31 from 33 a year ago. Notably, the foreign capital cap in the auto industry was removed, and manufacturing restrictions

in pilot free trade zones were also reduced to zero. In January, foreign investment in the service industry went up 12.2 percent year on year, while the inflow to high-tech industries surged 26.1 percent. Liu Xiangdong, a researcher with the China Center for International Economic Exchanges, said the rapid growth in high-tech and service investment mirrors an ever optimized economy and the new important role of foreign capital in the country's economic landscape. Looking forward, while the pandemic will still weigh on the global economy, experts believe

China's FDI inflow can maintain the impetus this year despite the high comparable base in 2021 and the possibility of softened transnational investment activities around the world. MOC spokesperson Shu Jueting has said China will further expand its high-level opening-up, enhance its services for foreign-funded firms and projects, and make more efforts to optimize the business environment in 2022. The ministry will guide more foreign capital to invest in emerging fields, including advanced manufacturing, modern services, high-tech, energy conservation, environmental protection and the digital economy, Shu said. Part of the country's FDI impetus will also come from the less tapped central and western regions, which saw FDI inflows up significantly by 46.2 percent and 42.2 percent, respectively, in January. Foreign businesses investing in those areas can have much lower operating costs and enjoy various policy supports, such as tax breaks, Zhang said, stressing that there is huge potential for boosting foreign investment.

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China to Boost New Infrastructure Projects amid Economic Recovery

China will accelerate the construction of major new infrastructure projects, support telecom operators to speed up 5G construction and help industrial enterprises advance digital transformation, according to a circular released Friday. The circular on policies to promote the steady growth of the economy was issued by 12 central departments including the National Development and Reform Commission. China will kick off major projects for the industrialization of the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System and promote the large-scale application of the system in major regions, the circular stated. The country will accelerate the construction of eight national computing hubs amid its efforts to channel more computing resources from the country's eastern regions to its less developed yet resource-rich western regions. The circular also stressed the healthy development of real estate investment trusts (REITs) in the field of infrastructure. The measures aim to cement the growth momentum of China's industries amid the triple pressure of shrinking demand, supply shock and weakening expectation.

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China Enriches List for Cross-border E-commerce Retail Imports

China will further optimize the list of imported retail goods for cross-border e-commerce starting from March 1, 2022, the Ministry of Finance said. The list will add a total of 29 product categories including ski equipment, tomato juice and golf equipment, according to a statement jointly issued by the ministry and seven other departments. All the items included in the list are in high demand by consumers in recent years, said Gao Lingyun, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. "The adjustment could enrich domestic market supply, meet consumers' aspirations for a better life and provide more opportunities for overseas enterprises," Gao said. The list was issued in April 2016 and has been optimized several times, with its commodity categories kept increasing, which helped promote the development of cross-border e-commerce and high-quality trade, said Tian Guofeng, deputy secretary-general of China Association of Trade in Services.

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"Maker Economy" Promotes Rural Development

Before the Spring Festival, Xu Zhanxiang visited villagers from Gaomaoquan Village in Hohhot, capital of north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, with his fellow livestreamers. Xu is a "rural maker" -- an entrepreneur in the rural area, and he runs a local company that assists aspiring young people with rural entrepreneurship. Livestreaming e-commerce is one of the company businesses, which helps to boost sales of local agricultural products and bring additional income to local farmers. Capitalizing on the country's strategy of rural vitalization, Xu's company began to provide voluntary training courses for college students who aspire to be rural makers. Trainees have multiple job choices, such as taking part in livestreaming e-commerce and local factory production. To spur college students' enthusiasm for becoming rural makers, Xu rushed around college campuses in Inner Mongolia to give speeches to students. Thirteen sessions of social practice have been carried out so far, covering around 300 students.

Caihong, previously trained as a rural maker in Xu's company, who is now working at an agricultural science and technology enterprise in Beijing, intends to develop breeding in his hometown and has been strongly backed by Xu. "For me, it is a worthwhile cause as long as one trainee is willing to contribute to rural vitalization," Xu said. "We are happy to have young makers here and we really have a good harvest," said Liu Xiuyuan, a local villager. Thanks to new seed varieties and scientific farming methods brought in by the young makers, the corn yield per hectare of land has risen from around 5.25 tonnes to around 10.5 tonnes now. "Rural maker economy" is thriving. In Yulingguan Village, Qingliangfeng Township in east China's Zhejiang Province, young maker Hong Liyue set up a culture demonstration base of

Asian honeybees, providing local bee owners with voluntary technical assistants and unified purchase services. As a national nature reserve, Qingliangfeng Township offers a favorable habitat for Asian honeybees.

They are easy to raise because they have strong nectar gathering capability and strong adaptability, Hong said, adding that the honey taken from these bees can be sold directly and there is no secondary process. "Yulingguan is home to many old people. It is good for villagers to raise Asian honeybees and sell honey to fatten their wallets," said Hong. To attract more rural makers, the township government has established a service center for rural makers in its local exhibition center of agricultural products, offering a free venue for rural makers to develop businesses. So far, 110 makers in the township have engaged themselves in rural entrepreneurship, fostering multiple industries with local characteristics, such as homestays and vegetable and fruit cultivation. China has stressed efforts to consolidate its poverty elimination achievements and push for rural vitalization. Xu is delighted to see growing support and recognition on him and to find more young people who are willing to start businesses in rural areas.

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China Expects Robust Rigid Housing Demand, Aims to Secure Supply

China expects robust rigid demand for housing, the country's housing regulator said Thursday, with demand in the sector shored up by an influx of migrants to urban areas and people's desire for better housing. Over 11 million new jobs are created in urban areas every year, one factor that has generated rigid demand for housing in the country, Wang Menghui, minister of housing and urban-rural development, told a press conference. China is still in the stage of rapid urbanization, as indicated by the increase in population and the number of families in urban areas, Wang noted. Official data shows that the number of permanent urban residents in China had risen to 64.72 percent of its population by the end of 2021, with the number expected to continue growing amid the country's urbanization drive. On top of demand from new arrivals in cities, Wang said that exiting city-dwellers also wish to improve their living environment and conditions, while residential communities built before 2000 are failing to satisfy the desire for bigger and better houses.

China's urban development has entered a crucial phase of urban renewal and the country boasts great domestic demand, Wang said, explaining that that process entails upgrading old infrastructure as well as building it anew. Factoring in these demands, the ministry plans to ramp up the supply of government-subsidized rental housing, including the provision of 2.4 million housing units this year, and to renovate over 1.2 million homes in run-down areas, according to Wang. While rolling out policies to ensure that both rigid demand for housing and the demand for

improvements are met, China will also make efforts to stabilize the prices of land and houses, as well as expectations.

The minister said that the country will work to make sure that the property market is running smoothly and maintain the continuity and stability of regulatory policies. The rebuilding of old urban residential communities, along with major renovation projects like urban pipeline networks, will be promoted, Wang said, adding that the country also aims to advance the construction of new infrastructure that is digitalized, network-based and intelligent. In a tone-setting annual economic meeting held in December, China pledged efforts to better cater to the reasonable demand from home buyers and adopt city-specific policies to boost the virtuous cycle and healthy development of the sector. As the real-estate industry is an important sector in bolstering the domestic market, the ministry will take measures to expand domestic demand and stabilize growth, making contributions to broader economic development, Wang said.

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China Moves to Guide Coal Prices Within Reasonable Range

China's top economic planner is moving to improve the price formation mechanism in the coal market to guide price movements within a reasonable range as the country seeks to ensure stable energy supplies. In a circular released Thursday, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) put the relatively reasonable range for the medium and long-term trading of 5,500 Kcal thermal coal at Qinhuangdao Port at 570 yuan (about 90 U.S. dollars) to 770 yuan per tonne. In full considerations of logistics and production costs, the NDRC accordingly proposed the ex-mine prices for medium and long-term trading in major coal production areas including Shanxi, Shaanxi and Inner Mongolia. "Proposing a reasonable range is not to adopt government pricing for coal, but to establish a range regulation mechanism on the basis of market-formed prices," NDRC official Wan Jinsong explained, saying the move could enable better combination of the roles of the market and the government to avoid drastic ups and downs in the market. The new policy comes after surging coal prices last year prompted China's coal-fired power stations to reduce their output to avoid losses because of official caps on electricity prices, resulting in power outages that halted factory production. Thermal power still takes up a large share of China's energy output, accounting for about 70 percent of the country's power generation. Although authorities have since managed to cool down the coal price rally through a slew of measures, calls are growing for an improved mechanism to rein in drastic fluctuations.

To ease the risk of a further power crunch, in October last year, the NDRC improved the pricing mechanism for coal-fired power, adjusting the floating range of the market-based electricity transaction prices to 20 percent in either direction,

compared with the previous ceiling of 10 percent and the floor of 15 percent from the benchmark price. The market transaction prices of coal-fired electricity for enterprises with high energy consumption are not restricted by the ceiling of 20 percent upward fluctuation. The latest move to range-guide coal prices should help enable the smooth transmission between coal and electricity prices, while tackling the persistent conflicts in the two markets, according to NDRC official Peng Shaozong. Thursday's circular pledged to enhance the country's capacity to balance supply and demand, strengthen market supervision to prevent improper interventions and timely investigate illegal market practices. The new mechanism sends a clear signal on the government's regulation of coal prices, which will guide market expectations for upstream and downstream industries and deter speculation, noted Peng. He predicted coal prices would see a reasonable retreat from the current level. Coal output and market supplies are now remaining largely stable, with daily production stabilizing at over 12 million tonnes and stockpiles at power generators at an elevated level. As China's coal self-sufficiency rate exceeds 90 percent and the relationship between upstream and downstream sectors remains stable, China has the conditions to guide coal prices to operate within a reasonable range, said Wan from the NDRC.

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Anhui's Pilot FTZ Sees Robust Foreign Trade in 2021

The pilot free trade zone (FTZ) in east China's Anhui Province generated foreign trade of over 154 billion yuan (about 24.3 billion U.S. dollars) in 2021, accounting for 22.3 percent of the province's total. A total of 13,000 new enterprises had been established and 795 projects signed in Anhui's pilot FTZ in 2021, with a combined contractual investment of 319.5 billion yuan, according to the administration office of the China (Anhui) Pilot Free Trade Zone. "We will grasp the opportunities such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement to woo more investment and boost foreign trade this year," Zhang Jian, head of the Anhui provincial department of commerce and director of the pilot FTZ's administration office told a press conference on Thursday. Established in September 2020 with three subzones in the cities of Hefei, Wuhu and Bengbu, the Anhui pilot FTZ has developed rapidly to become a high-level opening-up and development platform.

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How Xi's Thought Fosters a Greener, More Sustainable Chinese Economy

The Beijing Winter Olympics which closed Sunday became the first Games in history to be carbon neutral; this is an unlikely achievement that could not have happened

without China's greening transformation over the past decade. Previous Winter Olympics have claimed to be carbon neutral, but China is considering a much broader range of emissions, an article on Nature's website quoted the International Olympics Committee as saying. It notes that China has been investing heavily in renewable energy as part of its overall goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2060. Amid a great deal of green efforts is the eye-catching renovation of used Olympic venues. The 'Ice Cube,' a premier curling venue, for instance, was retrofitted from the iconic 'Water Cube,' swimming and diving venue of Beijing 2008, and at the Shougang competition zone, world-class facilities were repurposed from a disused steel plant. These new landmarks not only offered audiences captivating sights but also attested to the sweeping changes in China's economic landscape toward greater sustainability under the guidance of Chinese President Xi Jinping's economic thought.

AN OVERALL TRANSFORMATION

Back in 2012, the country began to face dual pressure from both the slowing growth in the aftermath of the international financial crisis and environmental woes caused by years of extensive development. That year, China's aggregate gross domestic product (GDP) accounted for 11.5 percent of the world's total, but its energy consumption per unit of GDP, or energy intensity, was 2.5 times that of the world's average level. "We owe so much to the ecological environment. If we don't do solid green work from now on, we will pay a higher price in the future," Xi said in December 2012, during his first inspection trip out of Beijing as general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee. Since then, China has ramped up its efforts on an unprecedented scale to advance the greening transition of the economy as Xi's hallmark green development phrase "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" become a maxim in the country.

Taking energy mix, for instance, the world's second-largest economy began to be less reliant on coal and other fossil energies causing high emissions, while increasing the proportion of clean energies. In 2021, energy intensity dropped by 2.7 percent from the previous year, official data has shown. The progress came as the indicator declined by 28.7 percent from 2011 to 2020. The proportion of coal in China's total energy consumption was reduced from 69.2 percent to 56.7 percent during the 2010-2020 period. In 2021, the share of coal consumption further dropped by 0.8 percentage points year on year, while that of clean energies including natural gas, hydropower, nuclear power, wind power, and solar energy climbed 1 percentage point. "Protecting the environment is protecting productivity, and improving the environment is boosting productivity," Xi said during an inspection trip to south China's Hainan Province in April 2013.

Along with the transformation of energy structure, China has also steadfastly prompted its upgrade of industrial structure, with the service sector and low-carbon industries growing rapidly. Accounting for 53.3 percent of China's total GDP last year,

the service sector's contribution rate to economic growth reached 54.9 percent, 16.5 percentage points higher than the second industry. For the primary industry itself, carbon emissions have continued to decline. It is estimated that from 2015 to 2020 carbon dioxide emissions per unit of added value of Chinese industries fell by about 22 percent, according to a white paper on China's response to climate change.

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER ENVIRONMENT

The last 10 years have also witnessed China's unprecedented moves on improving the environment, from controlling air, water and soil pollution to conserving existing green ecosystems as well as adding new forests, grasslands and wetlands. "We should protect the environment like we protect our eyes, and treat the environment like we treat our lives," Xi said when joining a deliberation with lawmakers from east China's Jiangxi Province at the annual meeting of the National People's Congress in 2015. Last year, the share of days with good air quality rose to 87.5 percent, up 0.5 percentage points from 2020. The progress was built on marked improvements during the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-2020), which increased by 5.8 percentage points to 87 percent. Good air days came along with the fast growth of green areas. Earlier data from NASA satellites showed that China alone accounts for 25 percent of the global net increase in leaf area during 2000-2017.

Joining Beijing citizens to plant trees in April last year, Xi urged greater efforts to increase the country's forest areas, enhance the quality of forests and boost the carbon sink capacity of ecosystems. Since 2013, Xi has joined Beijing citizens in tree-planting activities for nine consecutive years. Data from the white paper on responding to climate change showed that from 2016 to 2020, China had planted around 36.3 million hectares of forests and added 202,600 hectares of new wetlands. Aiming for a greener and more sustainable future, China has revved up its policy support to achieve the goals of carbon peaking before 2030 and carbon neutrality before 2060, which Xi put forward in 2020 at the General Debate of the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly. Within less than two years, a set of policy arrangements have been unveiled in this respect, involving both top-level designs and institutional innovations.

In late October last year, central authorities issued a guiding document on achieving the carbon goals, laying out key specific targets and measures for the coming decades. By 2030, China's carbon emissions will peak, stabilize and then decline, and by 2060, China will be carbon neutral and have fully established a green, low-carbon and circular economy, it says. Going forward, challenges will remain. But in Xi's opinion, there is no turning back. "Meeting these [carbon peaking and neutrality] targets will require tremendous hard work from China. Yet we believe that when the interests of the entire humanity are at stake, China must step forward, take action, and get the job done", Xi said when addressing the World Economic Forum Virtual Event of the Davos Agenda in 2021.

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How Xi's Thought Navigates China's High-quality Development

Guizhou, the southwestern Chinese region once with the biggest poverty-stricken population at the provincial level, is now at the forefront of the world's latest technology revolution. Thanks to the mild weather, clean air, and conducive geographical conditions, the province is now among the regions with the most mega-data centers globally. In 2021, the digital economy contributed about 34 percent of the region's gross domestic product (GDP). The sea change took place in the past ten years. The locals refer to the period as the "golden decade." Since the convening of the 18th Communist Party of China (CPC) National Congress in 2012, Guizhou has been one of the fastest-growing provincial regions in China in terms of the economy and lifted 9.23 million people out of poverty. Today, forests cover more than 61 percent of the region's land.

It is also home to the Five-hundred-meter Aperture Spherical Radio Telescope (FAST), the world's largest single-dish radio telescope. This "golden decade" of Guizhou typifies what has happened to China under the guidance of Chinese President Xi Jinping's economic thought. It steered the world's largest developing economy on a path of higher-quality growth that is more efficient, equitable, sustainable, and secure. A look into Xi's economic thought on high-quality development and how far the country has come in achieving it may provide some insights into China's development experiences and clues for its future development trajectory.

A NEW DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY

Back in 2012, when Xi was elected the general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, the Chinese economy was facing a growth slowdown after decades of skyrocketing expansion. The lingering impact of the global financial crisis, an extensive growth model, pollution, as well as a stack-up of institutional and structural problems were challenging the traditional development pattern of this galloping economy. Xi defined this phase of China's economic development as "the new normal," which called for new solutions to growth, structure, and a new driving force for the economy. He has repeatedly emphasized GDP growth rate could not serve as the sole yardstick of success for development. In search of solutions, the president visited cities, villages, and enterprises, and held meetings and symposiums with scholars, entrepreneurs, scientists, and public representatives to devise major plans and strategies for the country's next-stage development.

In 2015, Xi put forward a new development philosophy featuring innovative, coordinated, green, open, and shared growth. It set a fundamental guideline for China's economic development as the core of Xi's economic thought. "These development concepts did not emerge from the ether; they came from the domestic

and foreign experience of development, and from analysis of both domestic and foreign trends in development," Xi explained. "They epitomize our Party's growing understanding of laws governing economic and social development based on our country's most prominent problems," he said. Two years later, at the 19th CPC National Congress, Xi made a significant judgment that the country's economy had been transitioning from a phase of rapid growth to a stage of high-quality development. Since then, high-quality development has become the fundamental requirement for authorities to make economic policies and exercise macroeconomic control. In a landmark resolution released last autumn, the CPC reiterated the need to achieve high-quality development. It is a development blueprint in which "innovation is the primary driver, coordination is an endogenous trait, eco-friendly growth prevails, openness to the world is the only way, and shared growth is the ultimate goal."

HIGHER-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

Guided by the new development philosophy, China has carried out strategies featuring a supply-side structural reform, poverty alleviation, innovation, pollution control, rural vitalization, coordinated regional development, the socialist market economy, and greater opening-up. Under Xi's leadership, tremendous changes have occurred in the past decade. In 2021, which marks the centenary of the CPC, China realized the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, with absolute poverty eliminated. China is now the world's second-largest economy and an upper-middle-income country with a per capita GDP of over 12,500 U.S. dollars. Over 400 million Chinese have entered the middle-income group. Marked improvement has taken place in China's economic structure. In 2020, the tertiary industry, mainly the service sector, accounted for 54.5 percent of the country's GDP, while the country's ratio of foreign trade to GDP dropped from 67 percent in 2006 to less than 32 percent in 2019.

From 2011 to 2020, China's energy consumption per unit of GDP decreased 28.7 percent, one of the fastest reductions in the world. Clean energy consumption accounted for 25.3 percent of total energy consumption in 2021, up from 14.5 percent in 2012.

On the innovation front, China rose to 12th on the Global Innovation Index 2021 released by the World Intellectual Property Organization, the only middle-income economy to rank in the top 30. China's spending on R&D hit a new high of 2.44 percent of its GDP in 2021, up from 1.98 percent in 2012. China has pursued synchronized development across regions, optimizing resource allocation and closing economic disparities to seek harmony and coordination. The country has rolled out regional development plans nationwide, including the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Yangtze River Delta, and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. Despite protectionism and unilateralism arising amid the COVID-19 pandemic, China has stayed committed to wider opening-up to seek room for growth and share development momentum with the world. Following constant efforts to open

up more sectors, improve the business environment and reduce tariffs, China has become one of the top destinations for foreign investment. The foreign direct investment into the Chinese mainland, in actual use, hit a record high last year after expanding 14.9 percent year on year.

The country started holding expos such as the China International Import Expo and the China International Consumer Products Expo to share its vast market with the rest of the world. Upon a complete victory over absolute poverty in 2021, the country embarked on a new mission of mutual prosperity, which is "the essential requirement of socialism and an important feature of Chinese modernization," according to Xi. Rather than "robbing the rich to help the poor" or pursuing egalitarianism, China has vowed to deal with the relationship between efficiency and fairness and make basic institutional arrangements for income distribution. "The ultimate purpose of social and economic development is to fulfill the desire of the people for a better life," Xi once told the country's lawmakers. "High-quality development will remain the theme for China's economic and social development in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) period and beyond, and it concerns the overall situation of the country's socialist modernization drive," he has said.

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China's Sharing Economy Market Turnover Grows 9.2 Pct in 2021

China's sharing economy showed resilience and potential in 2021, with its market turnover up about 9.2 percent year on year, a report from the State Information Center showed. The total market turnover stood at around 3.69 trillion yuan (about 582.5 billion U.S. dollars) last year, according to the report on the development of China's sharing economy. Shared office space saw the fastest expansion, with market size growing 26.2 percent year on year. Disrupted by sporadic resurgences of COVID-19 and related regulatory measures, the market size of shared accommodation shrank 3.8 percent from a year earlier, said the report. Shared services continued to play a crucial role in economic growth in 2021, the report said, citing an example that the revenue of online takeaway services took up approximately 21.4 percent of the total revenue of China's catering industry.

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JAPAN: Had IMF Delete Mention of Coal in Report on Its Economy

The Japanese government had the International Monetary Fund delete a sentence on the country's apparent pledge to phase out support for overseas coal projects in a staff report released last month, government sources said. The deletion was made at the request of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which places an

emphasis on exports of coal-fired power plants. The report, which details conclusions made by IMF staff at the end of an official visit to Japan, was released on Jan 27 following online discussions between the international financial institution and the Japanese government. The document contains analysis on recent economic developments and policies in Japan amid the novel coronavirus pandemic, as well as the outlook and risks for future recovery. Under a section titled "Shifting to a Low-carbon Economy," an initial draft obtained by Kyodo News included a passage that said the Japanese government, based on an agreement reached at the Group of Seven summit last June, had pledged to end new financing for coal-fired projects that lack measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

"While the Japanese government pledged to end new unabated coal financing, ending exceptions from the pledge and phasing out of existing commitments to support coal projects abroad would further contribute to the global efforts on climate policy," the draft said. In the document that was actually released, however, there was no mention of ending support for coal. One government source said the deletion was the result of a government request to the IMF as the industry ministry felt "many concessions had already been made during last year's international negotiations" and it did not want any references to coal in the report. Reuters reported on Feb 2 that "a sentence critical of Japan's continued financing of high-emissions coal projects" had been deleted from the IMF staff mission statement. Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said at a press conference the following day that the government was not in a position to comment on how the report had been prepared. Gerry Rice, director of communications at the IMF, also declined to comment, telling Kyodo News that "we don't comment on leaks of draft documents."

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10% of Hospitals Have Cybersecurity Vulnerabilities

About 10% of hospitals have continued using equipment that has been identified as vulnerable to cyber-attacks after being warned of the risks, according to a nationwide survey. The lack of action being taken is highlighted amid several cases of system outages at hospitals due to malicious software dubbed ransomware. The survey, which was conducted by an organization comprising hospital associations and Medical ISAC Japan, was distributed among 5,596 hospitals belonging to the associations from Jan. 31. An interim report was compiled based on the 476 responses that had been received by Feb. 10. About 40% of the respondents had been warned by the government of vulnerabilities to their virtual private networks, which are used to access systems remotely. Of these hospitals, 24% had not subsequently implemented cybersecurity measures.

About 10% of the hospitals were at high risk of being targeted by cyber-attacks. Some 90% of institutions said they felt threatened by cyber-attacks, but almost half

said their budgets for cybersecurity measures were insufficient, at 46%, which appears to indicate a lack of urgency. Several targeted hospitals were unable to access electronic medical data on its backup system, which was accessible on the internet, for a while after an attack. According to the survey, 98% of the hospitals had backup systems, but only 47% stored the data offline, separate from their main networks. Since late January, the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry has also been surveying hospitals across the country about the use of vulnerable devices and backups. Based on the results of the survey, it will urge institutions to improve their systems.

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SOUTH KOREA: Nearly 30 Pct of Mobile Users Subscribed to 5G Data

Nearly 30 percent of South Korea's mobile subscriptions were on 5G networks last year, data showed Thursday, as new smartphone launches boosted user growth in the latest generation networks. The total number of 5G users reached 20.92 million as of end-December last year, accounting for 28.7 percent of the country's total 72.86 million mobile network subscriptions, 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 figure marks an increase from 20.19 million 5G subscriptions in November as new smartphone launches in the country, including Apple Inc.'s new iPhone 13 series in October, helped boost user growth. SK Telecom Co., the country's largest mobile carrier by subscriptions, had the most 5G users at 9.87 million, followed by KT Corp. at 6.37 million and LG Uplus Corp. at 4.61 million, the data showed. The number of mobile users subscribed to 4G networks in South Korea fell to 48.29 million in December, accounting for around 66 percent of mobile subscriptions.

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5G-Speed Wi-Fi Networks to Be Available in Seoul Subway Trains This Year

South Korea's ICT ministry said Wednesday it will start providing 5G-speed Wi-Fi services inside subway trains on major lines in Seoul by the end of this year in a move to improve network services. The ICT ministry said it plans to make 5G network services on the 28-gigahertz (GHz) band available on subway lines 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8 in a move that is expected to dramatically improve Wi-Fi speed inside subway trains by tenfold from the current average of 71.05 megabits per second (mbps) to around 700 mbps. The ministry plans to have the 5G equipment ready by April and to install it inside the subway trains in the second half of the year. Last year, the ministry

joined hands with the country's three major carriers -- SK Telecom Co., KT Corp. and LG Uplus Corp -- to establish a backhaul network based on mmWave 5G for Wi-Fi on the Seoul subway system. The ministry said it successfully tested the technology last month on Line 2 from Sinseoldong Station to Seongsu Station and is currently expanding it to the other lines. South Korea aims for nationwide coverage of 5G networks by the end of this year after they first went live in April 2019. The vast majority -- 66 percent -- of the country's mobile users were still on 4G networks as of December last year, compared with 28.7 percent on 5G.

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Auction for Additional 5G Spectrum Delayed amid Dispute

A planned bidding for additional 5G network frequency bands has been delayed to after this month, officials said Thursday, as three major South Korean telecom operators failed to come up with a compromise over the planned auction. In December, the Science and ICT ministry said it will open bidding for additional 5G networks in the 3.4- to 3.42-gigahertz spectrum, as requested by LG Uplus, the smallest mobile carrier. The auction was initially planned for this month, but the country's top two mobile carriers -- SK Telecom and KT Corp. have complained about the ministry's decision. They claimed LG Uplus is at a relative advantage as the spectrum requested by the No. 3 player is closest to the company's current frequency and will cost considerably less for LG Uplus to utilize it. ICT Minister Lim Hye-sook and the head of the three mobile carriers held a meeting earlier in the day to address the dispute over the bidding, but the companies failed to narrow their differences. "The auction will not open in February. ... It's true the schedule is being slightly delayed from what we had initially announced," an ICT ministry official said.

Minister Lim urged cooperation from the three wireless carriers in providing better network service to consumers. "We urge your swift cooperation in expanding investment and in providing network services that meet consumer demands," Lim said. Late last month, SK Telecom proposed that the ministry put an additional 40 MHz band in the 3.7 GHz spectrum up for bidding, along with the frequency requested by LG Uplus. SK Telecom said the move will help ensure fair competition, adding that it and KT can each secure a 20 MHz band if the additional 40 MHz band is put up for auction. The ICT ministry said it has not yet decided whether to open a separate auction for the additional 40 MHz band requested by SK Telecom. In June 2018, the ICT ministry completed an auction for 5G network frequencies used by the country's three mobile carriers. SK Telecom and KT each won 100 MHz in the 3.5 GHz wavelength, which can provide better service at longer distances, with LG Uplus settling for 80 MHz. The total bidding price of the 280 MHz at the 2018 auction -- allowed for use for 10 years until November 2028 -- was 3.68 trillion won (US\$3 billion).

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 02/17/2022

Schools Open Up More to Possibility of Going Online

The Education Ministry on Monday recommended schools be more flexible with attendance policies in early March during a two-week transition period, dialing up an advisory for holding online classes if needed. The announcement gives schools more flexibility from the ministry's earlier guidelines for schools to go hybrid with online and offline classes, allowing schools to tweak attendance policies regardless of the rules during the first two weeks of the new semester. "We are expecting the number of confirmed cases to rapidly increase in early March. Therefore, schools will be advised to change their attendance measures depending on the infectious disease control situation in the area," an official from the ministry said during a press briefing held Monday. "Though the numbers may not meet the threshold, they can decide individually in cooperation with the education office." The official added that schools cannot go fully online just because there have been many complaints from students and parents.

Earlier this month, the ministry announced that schools can adopt a hybrid approach to classes if more than 3 percent of students are confirmed as infected with COVID-19 in a day or if the number of those who have been restricted from attending classes surpasses 15 percent. While the ministry had said schools need not stick to the exact guidelines, it has repeatedly asked schools "to be cautious about switching to remote learning," meaning to refrain from taking such measures. It, however, explained Monday that the first two weeks of March will be designated as a transition period for schools to adapt to the new infectious disease control and prevention system, and schools will be allowed to make the decision on their own. Also, students will use a self-diagnosis application on mobile phones from Feb. 28 to record and share their health condition with schools. Rapid antigen testing kits will be given out by schools on March 2.

To support the infectious disease control and prevention plans at schools for the new semester, the ministry and education offices across the nation will transition into an emergency response system from Monday to the end of March, holding weekly meetings to check schools' response to COVID-19. "Though the number of confirmed cases in schools is expected to rapidly increase in March, the number of patients in serious condition (amid the spread of the omicron variant) has been relatively very low compared to the delta variant situation," Education Minister Yoo Eun-hye said during a meeting held Monday, adding that schools should swiftly respond to the virus situation and work with emergency response teams at the education offices. "There are two major agendas for the new semester: building up a test system with self-testing kits and polymerase chain reaction tests, and having schools run flexibly. The ministry and educational offices will work on supporting schools to adapt to the two agendas," Yoo said.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 02/21/2022

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Seoul City to Provide Online Street View Service of All 14,699 Alleys

Street views of all 14,699 alleyways in Seoul, including those of narrow back alleys unavailable even in commercial road view services, will be available within the first half of this year, the city government said Tuesday. The city government created 53,715 images of the alleys over the past two years to offer the complete street views of every alley that even online map services by major internet portals like Naver and Daum have not provided so far, officials said. Street views of 10 districts north of the Han River, including the central district of Jongno, will be accessible starting Wednesday, while those of Gangnam and 13 other districts south of the river will be available in June. The service will be first available on the city government's digital map platforms -- map.seoul.go.kr and smap.seoul.go.kr/m -- and on internet portals likely before July. The city government said the new service is expected to improve road accessibility for people using wheelchairs and strollers, and help firefighters respond to emergencies. The city government has also collected the locations of safety installments in Seoul, such as surveillance cameras, security lights and emergency bells, in order to use the information to improve security measures in needed areas. The locations of 6,585 closed-circuit TVs, 23,169 security lights and 1,095 emergency bells will be available on S-map, Seoul's 3-D digital map.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 02/22/2022

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S. Korea's Total Fertility Rate Hits Record Low Last Year

South Korea's total fertility rate hit a record low last year as the number of childbirths continued to fall, data showed Wednesday, underlining the country's bleak demographic situation. The country's total fertility rate -- the average number of children a woman bears in her lifetime -- came to 0.81 last year, down from 0.84 the previous year, according to Statistics Korea. It marked the lowest since 1970 when the statistics agency began compiling related data. Last year marked the fourth straight year the rate was below 1 percent. South Korea was the only country whose total fertility rate stayed below 1 percent among 38 member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). As of 2019, the total fertility rate among OECD nations averaged 1.61. The agency earlier forecast the country's total fertility rate will likely nosedive to a record low of 0.7 in 2024 before rebounding to one in 2031.

The country's crude birth rate -- the number of births per 1,000 people per year -- also reached an all-time low of 5.1 last year, down from 5.3 a year ago. The data underscore the country's gloomy demographic pictures amid its chronically low

childbirths and rapid aging. Many young South Koreans delay and give up on getting married or having babies amid a prolonged economic slowdown and skyrocketing housing prices. In 2021, the number of newborns in South Korea reached a record low of 260,500 in 2021, down 11,800 or 4.3 percent from the previous year. the data showed. Last year, an all-time high of 317,800 people died, up 12,800 or 4.2 percent from a year earlier. This resulted in a decline of 57,300 in the country's population last year, larger than a fall of 33,000 in 2020. Since South Korea reported the first natural decline in the population in 2020, the country has seen the number of deaths outpace that of childbirths.

"This trend is expected to continue as the number of newborns will keep declining and deaths will likely rise amid rapid aging," Noh Hyung-joon, a Statistics Korea official, told a press briefing. A fall in the fertility rate is feared to accelerate a major drop in the working-age population, a phenomenon known as a demographic cliff. A fall in the working population means a decline in labor supply, potentially undercutting economic growth. South Korea's total population is estimated to have recorded its first decline last year due to low births, fast aging and a decline in incoming foreigners amid the pandemic. Its total population is presumed to have peaked at 51.84 million in 2020. The country's working-age population or people aged 15 to 64, came to 37.4 million in 2020, accounting for 72.1 percent of the total population. Such population is forecast to continue to fall and reach 17.4 million in 2070, down 53.5 percent from 2020 levels.

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Seoul Vows to Become Digital Emotional Culture City

The Seoul city government on Wednesday announced a digital culture city project centered on creating digital media artworks throughout the capital. The city government declared this year as the first year of the "Digital Emotional Culture City" project and unveiled 10 cultural policy tasks. Under the project, the Gwanghwamun Square area in central Seoul will be transformed into a huge media art stage and Nodeul Island, an uninhabited artificial island in the Han River, and other waterfront spaces will be reborn as art spots. The Dongdaemun Design Plaza, or DDP, in central Seoul will also be reborn as a cradle of digital media art content, comprising a digital library and a digital museum, the government said. Specifically, a large media facade will be installed at the Sejong Center for the Performing Arts in Gwanghwamun in July to permanently display media artworks, it said. It will hold the so-called "Media Facade Festival" in the area every December using major buildings around Gwanghwamun Square. In November, an outdoor electronic sign board at the Seoul Library near Seoul Plaza will be replaced with an LED digital media canvas, while the central Seoul plaza will be made into an open space where all citizens can comfortably read books.

The city government will also organize a media art show with the theme of 100 years of Seoul every night at the Donuimun Museum Village in central Seoul beginning in May. In September, an immersive content production studio equipped with the nation's largest LED wall structure will open at Mount Namsan in central Seoul. In addition, waterfront areas of the Han River, which flows through Seoul, will be developed as cultural resting places for citizens, the government noted. Nodeul Island will be reborn as a "global art island" focused on public art, while public art landmarks will be created along the waterfront areas of Nodeul Island, Seonyudo Park and Nanji Hangang Park by 2026. It said various cultural facilities will open one after another this year -- remodeled Samcheonggak, a traditional cultural space, in March; the nation's first art book culture space in August; and a combination of an art museum and an archives in September. Seoul Mayor Oh Se-hoon said his government will take advantage of digital technologies to expand opportunities for all citizens to enjoy culture and art in their daily lives, and minimize the culturally underprivileged class.

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South-East Asia

MALAYSIA: Registering Lower Unemployment Rate of 4.2 Pct in December

Malaysia's unemployment rate fell to 4.2 percent in December from 4.3 percent in the previous month, official data showed Tuesday. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) said in a statement that Malaysia's employed persons in December remained upward with a marginal increase of 0.2 percent month-on-month to 15.65 million persons. It said that the employment-to-population ratio, which indicates the ability of an economy to create employment in the country, recorded a slight increase to 66.1 percent in the month from 66 percent in November, 2021. In the meantime, it said the number of unemployed persons in Malaysia continued to decrease by 1 percent month on month to 687,600 persons in December, 2021. "In Malaysia, the aftermath of the pandemic caused the economic revival to be somewhat hindered and it also affected the regaining of the entire labor market as its recovery is directly proportional to the performance of the economy," said the DOSM. However, it said the reopening of economy and schooling sessions are anticipated to result in more positive impact on other related activities. "More travelling activities domestically and abroad were also observed during the month. These positive progresses signaled that the labor market is foreseen to continue improving in the upcoming months, but not considering the challenges of the new and more lethal variants," it said.

From <https://english.news.cn> 02/08/2022

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No Economic Shutdown in Malaysia Despite COVID-19 Case

Spike

Malaysia will not shut down its economic and industrial activities even if new COVID-19 cases spike, Malaysian Minister of International Trade and Industry Mohamed Azmin Ali has said. Previous lockdowns had caused 826,000 people to lose jobs in the first three months of the total lockdown in 2020, Mohamed Azmin said following a Chinese Lunar New Year dinner hosted in Johor state on Monday by the Batu Pahat Chinese Chamber of Commerce. "We can't do it anymore (total lockdown), yes, we need to manage this pandemic effectively, we will do our best on the health matter, but 'economic health' is also important. And we will now do it in a balanced way if there is a sudden spike (COVID-19)," state news agency Bernama quoted the minister as saying. Mohamed Azmin said his ministry will focus on getting the employees of the economic sector vaccinated. Malaysia has seen a spike in fresh COVID-9 infections over the past week, with 13,944 new cases being reported on Tuesday alone, according to data from the health ministry, with the Omicron variant being blamed for the increase.

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Malaysian Economy Grows 3.6 Pct in 4th Quarter of 2021

The Malaysian economy grew 3.6 percent year on year in the fourth quarter of 2021, as economic activities resumed with the easing of containment measures, official data showed Friday. The rebound in economic activity was aided by recovery in the labor market as well as continued policy support, the Malaysian central bank said in a statement. In addition, strong external demand amid the continued upcycle in global technology provided a further lift to growth. On the supply side, all economic sectors recorded improvements in growth, led by the services and manufacturing sectors. On the expenditure side, growth was driven mainly by the improvement in household spending and trade activity. On a quarter-on-quarter seasonally-adjusted basis, the Malaysian economy rose 6.6 percent. With the turnaround in growth in the fourth quarter, the economy grew by 3.1 percent for 2021 as a whole.

For 2022, the central bank expects the domestic economy to remain on its recovery path, supported by the continued expansion in global demand and higher private sector expenditure given improving labor market conditions and on-going policy support. The continuation of major investment projects in both private and public sectors will also support growth, it said. "Malaysia is well-positioned to continue benefitting from the expansion in global economic and trade activities. The acceleration of the COVID-19 booster vaccination program and vaccination of children above five years old, coupled with sufficient capacity in the healthcare system, would improve domestic economic activities, thus strengthening the recovery momentum," said the country's central bank governor Nor Shamsiah. However, she said the balance of risks remains tilted to the downside, mainly from

development surrounding COVID-19, both globally and domestically. In a note on Friday, OCBC Bank economist Wellian Wiranto said Malaysia's latest gross domestic product (GDP) uptick signals its domestic consumption strength. "Given the momentum, we have revised up our 2022 GDP forecast from 5 percent before to 5.4 percent year on year," he said.

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PHILIPPINES: Unemployment Rate Up to 6.6 Pct in December 2021

Around 3.27 million Filipinos were out of work in December 2021, up from 3.16 million recorded in November despite the easing of pandemic mobility restrictions, according to a Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) survey released on Thursday. The unemployment rate in the country slightly picked up in December 2021 at 6.6 percent, PSA head Dennis Mapa said in an online briefing. According to Mapa, the labor force participation rate (LFPR) rose to 65.1 percent in December, the highest in 2021. "But not all that participated in the labor force landed a job. It is the reason why the unemployment rate increased," Mapa explained. Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Karl Kendrick Chua said the slight increase in the unemployment rate "was more than offset by the larger increase in the LFPR." By accelerating the vaccination program and safely reopening more sectors in the economy, Chua said the government was "able to generate more and better jobs for the people." However, Chua said he expects "employment outcomes to slightly deteriorate" in January due to the reimposition of stricter quarantine rules. The Philippines continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic. The country now has over 3.6 million confirmed cases, including 54,690 deaths.

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VIETNAM: To Build a Modern and Sustainable Agriculture Economy by 2030

Việt Nam has set an objective to build a modern and sustainable agriculture economy during the 2021-2030 period, said minister of agriculture and rural development Lê Minh Hoan at a conference in Hà Nội yesterday. In order to realise such objectives, the minister said the country's agriculture sector must foster an advanced economy with an emphasis on producing high-quality products and added value that meet the demands of the market. Another top priority is to build the country's rural areas and improve living standards for farmers. The minister highlighted the need for the development of agricultural infrastructure and investment in human resources that benefit Vietnamese farmers. According to the ministry, Việt Nam's agriculture sector aims for a growth target of 2.5-3.0 per cent annually until 2030 with agricultural productivity at 5.5 per cent. Measures have been taken to

explore potential markets for Vietnamese products, which was said to increase in value at 5-6 per cent a year. Hoan said the objective is to transform Việt Nam's rural areas into modern, developed agricultural production centres that employ advanced and environmental-friendly technology by 2050. The ministry's top priority is the adoption of green technologies with a focus on preserving and protecting natural resources as well as the human habitat. The country is to continue with its restructuring efforts of the agriculture sector in the near future with a focus on developing local products with strong competitive advantages and stronger collaboration among localities and production centres across the country. Meanwhile, there is a need to conduct a comprehensive review of the country's current land-use regulations, said Trần Công Thắng, head of the Institute for Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development. He advised policymakers to come up with more flexible and effective policies to encourage businesses to invest in agriculture and land-enrichment activities, especially in remote and isolated regions in desperate need of infrastructure.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 02/18/2022

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Việt Nam Joins the Race to Develop 6G

The Ministry of Information and Communications has established a steering committee on the research and development of sixth-generation wireless (6G) technology. Led by Minister Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng, the committee is responsible for researching and proposing to the competent authorities strategies, mechanisms and policies on how to beef up the development of 6G in the country. It is in charge of monitoring the research and development on standards, production and commercialisation of 6G technology in the world, as well as combining research, forecast development trends of the domestic and international telecommunications markets. The committee will also devise a roadmap for research, testing, production and commercialisation of 6G equipment and services and propose solutions to support Vietnamese enterprises in the production and commercialisation of 6G equipment and services. This move is in line with Việt Nam's policy of developing 6G technology in 2022 which Minister Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng emphasised in a meeting last month. He said it's high time for Việt Nam to get ahead of the development curve and strengthen its digital infrastructure with an objective to become one of the world's leading nations in 6G technology.

Việt Nam is in the phase of commercial testing of 5G networks, provided by Viettel, VNPT and MobiFone in some big cities (only certain areas) with an average download speed of about ten times faster than 4G. According to the press release on the ministry's website, the ministry will possibly license 6G frequencies in 2028, before the commercialisation of 6G. 6G technology is the successor to 5G cellular technology which is expected to support data rates of 1 terabyte per second and will take us one step further to the virtual world. Several technologies of potential are

being considered as enablers for the 6G network, such as Free Space Optics, quantum communications, unmanned aerial vehicles, artificial intelligence (AI), and big data analytics. The application of the 6G network is expected to help build a super-smart society with smart houses, smart transport, and smart cities, to improve the quality of life for citizens. According to the cycle of development, each new generation of networks is usually deployed after 10 years and 6G is expected to be commercialised by 2030. Countries around the world, including the US, South Korea, China, Japan, and Finland have already joined the race for 6G network development. According to information technology experts, despite being the trend of the future, commercialisation will depend on many factors such as user demand, terminal equipment, and the investment performance of enterprises. However, the early involvement in 6G research and design would benefit enterprises as once they own patents related to communications standards they would be able to reap substantial benefits through selling software and equipment. Currently, 4G networks cover 99.8 per cent of the nation, with the number of smartphone owners in Việt Nam increasing from 59.2 per cent in 2018 to 75 per cent in 2021. The Vietnamese government expects that from 2023, all Vietnamese people will own smartphones, making 5G commercialisation “an inevitable reality”.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 02/26/2022

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South Asia

INDIA: Gorakhpur to Soon Have Metro Service, PIB Nods to the Project

Gorakhpur will soon be seen flying high, as the ambitious Gorakhpur Metrolight Rail Project got an approval stamp from the Public Investment Board (PIB) for the Phase 1 of the project. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Twitter, while congratulating everyone for this prestigious project. Preparations are underway to run a three-coach light metro train in Gorakhpur. For this, RITES and Lucknow Rail Metro Corporation have approved the Detail Project Report (DPR) and sent it to the government. Post the approval from PIB, it is expected to get the final approval from the Central Government. It may be recalled that the state government had also allocated Rs 100 crore for metro project in Gorakhpur and Varanasi. There will be a total of 14 stations on the first route of the Gorakhpur Light metro, while the second route will have 12 stations, as per the DPR. It has been proposed to operate a three-coach (car) metro train in the Gorakhpur metropolis at a cost of about Rs 4600 crore. The first route will be 15.14 km long while the second one of 12.70 kms.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 02/2/2022

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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.

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UP to Boost Tourism with Kashi Vishwanath Corridor in Varanasi

The holy city of Varanasi will soon have another major tourist attraction, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi soon to dedicate the Kashi Vishwanath corridor on the country on December 13. The project is estimated to be around Rs 1000 crore. Work on the project, which also includes the construction of a corridor from the main temple to the ghat on the bank of Ganga, apart from beautification and expansion of the temple town, has been going on for the last four years under the direct monitoring of Chief Minister Yogi and is on verge of completion. The foundation was laid by the PM himself in March 2019. The project aims at facilitating access to the temple premises for millions of devotees visiting the famous pilgrimage centre of India since time immemorial while beautifying and keeping the city clean in order to attract tourists. Kashi Vishwanath temple is getting a face lift for the first time since independence. The entire area around the temple is being renovated and beautified. The project aims to give a new identity to Kashi as a centre of cultural, religious and national reawakening. The grand Anand Van, spread over an area of 50,200 square metres, is being constructed at the cost of Rs 339 crore. Besides, the renovated temple will have a security wing, museum, facilitation centre, Banaras Gallery, Vedic Centre and a multipurpose hall. As many as 24 buildings including among others a Spiritual Book Centre, Passenger Facilitation Centre, Bhogshala and Guest House are under construction. In the second phase, the construction of the ramp at Jalasen ghat and Lalita Ghat is scheduled, apart from a grand entrance to the corridor. The cost of the second phase is expected to be around Rs 60 crore. Once the Kashi Vishwanath corridor is completed, pilgrims and visitors will be able to witness the

Ganga river as well as the gold-plated shikhar (spire) of Lord Shiva temple from the viewing point in the temple square. An emporium, office of the temple trust and public utilities will be available at one place in the temple square. On festivals and other special occasions, up to 5000 people can gather on the premises of the temple square.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 02/3/2022

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MoHUA & AFD Launches Swachhata Startup Challenge

The Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of India, in partnership with the Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) and Agence Française de Développement (AFD) today launched the Swachhata Start-Up Challenge to provide an impetus to innovative start-ups to come forward and drive catalytic transformation in the sanitation and waste management sector. In line with Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision for 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and 'Make in India', the Challenge seeks to promote an enabling environment for enterprise development under Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban 2.0 (SBM-U 2.0). Today, the start-up space is evolving rapidly with India leading the world with over 70 unicorns (crossing the valuation of USD 1 billion). With the appetite for risk and spirit of innovation at its core, the start-up space holds immense potential to revolutionize India's waste management sector. This is also aligned with the vision of SBM-U 2.0 launched by Hon'ble Prime Minister on 1st October 2021, which is focused on encouraging the adoption of locally innovated, implementable solutions and business models in sanitation and waste management. The Swachhata Start-Up Challenge launched today aims to capitalise on the start-up movement by providing opportunities for entrepreneurship to young innovators to create socially impactful and market-ready business solutions. The Challenge was launched by Shri Manoj Joshi, Secretary, MoHUA along with H.E. Emmanuel Lenain, Ambassador of France to India and H.E. Ugo Astuto, Ambassador of the European Union to India and Bhutan, in the presence of Ms Roopa Mishra, Joint Secretary & National Mission Director, SBM-U, Government of India and Bruno Bosle, Country Director, AFD India.

The Challenge, which is open to start-ups registered in India and French actors collaborating with an Indian start-up (as a joint venture), invites solutions across four thematic areas viz. (i) social inclusion, (ii) zero dump (solid waste management), (iii) plastic waste management and (iv) transparency through digital enablement. The Challenge provides a prominent platform to participating enterprises to showcase their innovative products and services along with significant monetary and mentorship incentives – top 10 awardees stand to receive ₹25 lakhs along with one year of dedicated incubation support from French Tech, the French government's initiative to promote start-ups. Apart from this, eligible startups will get additional incentives which include up to ₹50 Lakhs follow-on investment from Villgro, the implementation partner of the Challenge and up to 100,000 USD worth of credits and

technology support from technology partner Amazon Web Services, to each winner. The call for online submission of applications starts from today through the dedicated micro-site launched at the event (www.swachhatastartupchallenge.com) along with a video that details the key modalities of the Challenge. Speaking on the occasion, Joshi said, "The Swachhata Startup Challenge, launched today, is a step towards ensuring innovation and smart governance in SBM-U 2.0 by incentivizing the startup ecosystem to help realize our vision of 'Garbage Free Cities'. The Challenge aims to capitalize on the skills and expertise of this space to find implementable ideas and solutions that can be adopted and replicated at scale across urban India. MoHUA and the French Government share a long-standing association for promoting sustainable urban development in India and the launch of the Challenge today is another step towards strengthening this bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the waste management sector with a focus on plastic waste."

Elaborating on the French Government's role in promoting innovations in the waste management space in India, Lenain added, "France and India are committed to taking joint action against plastic pollution, and the AFD-MoHUA Swachhata Startup Challenge is a concrete step in this direction. The French Development Agency will provide seed funding to the tune of 25 lakh rupees and one year of customized support to each of the 10 selected start-ups. This initiative also comes at a time when France and the EU are looking to work closely with India on the international stage to negotiate a global treaty on plastic pollution. Speaking about the need for concerted efforts in tackling the issue of plastic pollution, Ugo said, "In a globalised economy, tackling plastics requires a collective and cohesive effort. The international community will soon discuss the need for a Global Agreement on Plastics like we already have global conventions for climate or biodiversity. We will try to chart a predictable course for businesses and for households to embrace change and adapt." A variety of innovations have contributed to the success of the first phase of SBM-U. Taking this spirit forward, SBM-U 2.0 is focused on encouraging cutting-edge solutions from small scale and private entrepreneurs and start-ups, through investments in R&D, technology challenges, and facilitation for inclusion in the Government E-Marketplace (GeM) portal. A step in this direction was taken earlier in December 2021 with the Swachh Technology Challenge, a first-time initiative by SBM-U 2.0 to encourage start-ups, individual entrepreneurs, educational institutions, local businesses, research and development organisations, NGOs, and other citizen groups to help city administration efficiently manage Mission operations through technology-driven operations. The Technology Challenge received wholehearted participation from States/ Union Territories and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), with over 2,500 entries received from across urban India. Winning solutions from start-ups under Swachh Technology Challenge which are presently being reviewed, will now get direct entry into the Swachhata Start-Up Challenge launched today by MoHUA.

The virtual event, which was attended by senior government representatives including Principal Secretaries, Mission Directors and Municipal Commissioners from

States and cities, also saw a panel discussion on the 'Role of Technology and Business Innovation to Reinforce Indian Waste Sector'. Participants included senior bureaucrats from Chhattisgarh and Odisha along with representatives from organisations such as Saahas Zero Waste and Green Artha. Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban 2.0, launched on 1st October 2021, aims to achieve the vision of 'Garbage Free Cities' over the next five years through remediation of legacy dumpsites, construction and demolition waste and plastic waste management. Additionally, sustainable sanitation through faecal sludge and used water management will be a key focus under SBM-U 2.0. Over the years, SBM-U has been encouraging innovations and best practices particularly through Swachh Survekshan, the annual cleanliness survey conducted by MoHUA. This trend has been rising over the years with over 4,000 innovations and best practices having been identified since 2018. Moreover, innovative technological solutions have played a critical role in achieving the outcomes under SBM-U's journey with several key initiatives such as Swachhata App, SBM Toilets on Google Maps, etc in collaboration with partners such as Janaagraha and Google. The Swachhata Start-Up Challenge is another step towards smart and sustainable urban development by incentivizing the innovations' ecosystem through strategic collaborations thus helping realize the Prime Minister's vision of 'Garbage Free Cities' under SBM-U 2.0 (With inputs from PIB).

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com> 02/04/2022

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UP Govt Makes Record Transactions to Beneficiaries Through DBT

The Government of Uttar Pradesh marked yet another achievement with record transactions of Rs 2.75 lakh crore through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) under various welfare schemes in the last four and a half years. DBT is considered a crucial element of transparent governance as under this system, the money is directly transferred to the beneficiary's bank account through digital means. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath-led Government of Uttar Pradesh, on November 6, disbursed as much as Rs 1980 crore in the bank accounts of parents of 1.80 crore students as an aid for purchasing school uniforms, sweaters, bags, shoes and socks. In the latest budget session of the state assembly, Governor Anandiben Patel, while referring to DBT, had said that in 2020-21 fiscal, the UP government has sent more than Rs 56,000 crore directly to the accounts of the beneficiaries through DBT. With DBT in place, middlemen have been eliminated and payments have become transparent. On the initiative of the CM, 137 schemes of 27 departments were onboarded in the state and an amount of Rs 2.75 lakh crore was sent to the accounts of the beneficiaries of these schemes through DBT. While the DBT scheme is curbing corruption in the state, it is proving to be a boon for farmers, labourers, daily wagers, students and pensioners.

The Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) programme has helped the government in taking a

quick effective response during the unexpected COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. Money was sent directly to the accounts of lakhs of farmers, MNREGA workers, labourers from other states, women, old people, 'divyangs', and pensioners. The Jan Dhan accounts opened under the initiative taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi became helpful in disbursing the aid amount to the beneficiaries. Apart from payment of minimum support price (MSP), the state government has paid over Rs 1.45 lakh crore through DBT in the accounts of sugarcane farmers. Under PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, so far Rs 27,521 crore has been sent to the accounts of more than 2.54 crore farmers through DBT. The UP government has set new dimensions of transparency in the procurement of government departments by making record purchases on the GeM portal. For the third time, in the 2020-21 fiscal, Uttar Pradesh ranked number one in the highest government procurement through the GeM portal. The state has made a purchase of Rs 5471 crore. In the last four and a half years, the UP government has made a total purchase of over Rs 14,878 crores through the GeM portal.

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8 Crore Youth Benefit from UP Govt Employment Schemes

The Government of Uttar Pradesh has strongly worked towards providing employment to the youth of the state. According to statistics, a total of eight crore people, including nearly two crore youth and their six crore family members dependent on them, have benefitted from the state government's employment schemes. The youth have been at the centre of the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath-led UP government's policies and decisions and have benefitted from the several measures undertaken by the government to get them the best of education and create job opportunities cutting across cast and community lines. The CM kept the youth in his priority, whether it was providing government jobs, creating employment in the private sector, helping them setting up business ventures by facilitating loans, or providing scholarships for students and now distributing tablets and smart phones to them. The state government has provided contractual appointment to 3.5 lakh youngsters. Furthermore, around two crore youth got employment through 82 lakh Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which were provided loans worth Rs 2.16 lakh crore. Besides, in the ODOP (One District One Product) sector, loans worth more than Rs 8,875 crore were disbursed, facilitating employment for over 25 lakh youths of the state. A total of 11,296 ODOP products are currently available on Amazon's website, competing with the world's biggest brands. Officials of various government departments have been instructed to fill the vacancies in their departments with priority. This move will not only help in smooth functioning of various departments but also prove to be a great employment generation option. More than three lakh people have got employment in industrial units. Statistics say that under the state government's startup policy, five lakh youths have got jobs.

UP Govt Uses e-Pos Machines to Ensure Transparent Distribution of Free Food Grains Under PMGKAY

The distribution of free foodgrains under the fourth phase of the Pradhan Mantra Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) is about to get over by November 15. In a big relief to the poorer sections of the society, the Uttar Pradesh Government has already announced the extension of Free of Cost food grains till Holi, apart from PMGKAY, with the addition of cooking oil and salt to the relief package. The State has so far distributed approximately 128 Lakh MT of free food grains in the State since the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (April 2020). The Yogi government will commence the distribution in December. To ensure that there is a fair and transparent distribution of food grains, the State government used e-Pos machines extensively. It may be noted that Uttar Pradesh has distributed around 10480841.952 MT of free food grains under PMGKAY. While approximately 2339556.740 MT of free ration was separately distributed by the government, which was 'over and above' the ration being distributed under PMGKAY. The total distribution amounts to around 128 lakh MT (12820398.692 MT) in the state so far. Families falling below the poverty line- Antyodaya card bearers and priority households both will avail of the extended scheme. The scope of the relief package has also been widened to include 1 kg cooking oil, either refined or mustard, as well as a kg of salt as well as a kg of dal, said the CM. Earlier, free 5 kg food grains were being provided to over 15 crore beneficiaries of the State. Under the scheme, each beneficiary receives 3 kg wheat and 2 kg rice.

As per the directives issued by the Chief Minister and the central government, the distribution takes place entirely through PoS devices with biometric Aadhaar and dealer authentication in an utmost transparent manner. Along with PMGKAY, the UP government of Yogi Adityanath also distributed free ration, giving double relief to the people. The distribution by the state continued from April to June in 2020, while in 2021, the Yogi government carried out the distribution for the month of June, July, and August. Uttar Pradesh has more than 1,30,07,969 units of beneficiaries under the Antyodaya Ann Yojna and over 13,41,77, 983 units under Priority Household cardholders. The state has over 80,000 fair-price shops. The distribution for the month of November under PMGKAY commenced on the 3rd. Till 11th November, a total of 29494404 ration cards received 626952.867 MT of ration. This comes around 81.97 percent of total ration cards and 84.37 percent of the total allotment.

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)."

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Sustainable Mobility: Govt Focusing on Decarbonisation of Transport

The Government is actively working towards the decarbonisation of transport, with a major focus on the adoption of sustainable mobility. As part of the NDC-Transport Initiative for Asia (NDC-TIA) project, NITI Aayog and World Resources Institute (WRI), India, with the support of GIZ India, conducted a virtual consultation workshop on 'Financing for Decarbonization of Transport'. The workshop was conducted to identify actionable strategies. The workshop aimed to bring financing institutions and transport organisations together to collectively work towards furthering innovative financing policies for the decarbonisation of transport. The workshop witnessed the participation of dignitaries from various ministries, NDC-TIA project partners, representatives of Indian banks, international financial institutions and private sector companies, and stakeholders and experts from the transport and financing sectors. NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant said, 'We need more such financial instruments to provide a further impetus to clean mobility in India. We must come up with financing mechanisms that are widely applicable, acceptable and, most importantly, sustainable.'

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Broadband Will Create Pool of Skilled Youth in Villages

Broadband will not only provide facilities in the villages but will also create a big pool of skilled youth in the village economy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, emphasising on the digital connectivity. Rural digital connectivity is no longer mere aspiration but has become a necessity, the Prime Minister said while addressing a post-budget webinar. He further said that broadband will enable expanding the service sector to rural areas, facilitating economic growth as well. Modi stressed on

the need to identify problems in optical fiber connectivity in order to chalk out solutions to address the issues. The Union Budget 2022-23 has proposed to allocate 5% of annual collections under the USOF to promote R&D and commercialisation of technologies and solutions in order to enable affordable broadband and mobile services proliferation in rural and remote areas. Moreover, it has also been proposed to cover all villages on optical fiber network by 2025.

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Delhi Govt Makes 425 of 456 Citizens Services Online

The Chief Secretary of Delhi Vijay Dev informed the Lieutenant Governor (L-G) of Delhi Anil Bajjal on the digitalisation of 425 citizen services, 93 per cent of the 456 services identified, senior government officials said. As per a national daily, cent per cent digitalisation of citizen services will be completed by August, a year ahead of the deadline, the CS added during a review meeting chaired by the L-G. Before the lockdowns were imposed, in May 2020, there were only 122 services available online for citizens. The pandemic-led lockdown provided an impetus to digitise more services to aid people in times of crisis and prevent crowding at government offices. As per the government data, there are a few services offered by the directorate of employment and the drugs control department that are yet to be digitised and linked to the e-district portal. However, L-G has been given assurance to have those covered by month-end. However, almost all departments integrated their citizen services with the e-district portal.

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Udaipur Ranked 3rd Among Smart Cities Following Bhopal & Indore

The City of Lakes Udaipur was ranked third in the list of smart cities with as many as 85 per cent of the projects completed. Recently, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, the Government of India released a list of 100 smart cities and Bhopal and Indore secured the top two positions respectively. As per the rankings, Udaipur has jumped up two spots to the third position from fifth in the previous year's rankings. The other smart cities from Rajasthan that made it to the top 10 include Kota at the eighth spot and Ajmer at the ninth. However, the capital city Jaipur has been rated 44th on the list. The Udaipur Smart City officials are all set to take the city to the top position by completing 90 per cent of the work in March. As per the fund allocation, the Centre sanctioned Rs 1221 crore for the completion of 93 projects of which 79 projects have been completed at a cost of Rs 550 crore. For the completion of projects, Rs 500 crore has been provided by the Centre while Rs 300 crore was contributed by the state. If Udaipur Smart City could complete 90 per cent of the projects in a month, the Centre will give 15 more points to the city making Udaipur

topping the list.

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NITI Aayog's Multidimensional Poverty Index Ranked Bihar as Poorest State

NITI Aayog in its first Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) report ranked Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh as the poorest states in India. The index showed that as much as 51.91 per cent of the population of Bihar is poor, while 42.16 per cent of the population is poor in Jharkhand and 37.79 per cent in Uttar Pradesh. With 36.6 per cent of the population poor, Madhya Pradesh followed as the fourth poorest state and Meghalaya with 32.67 per cent was named the fifth poorest state of the country. Securing the bottom ranks in the index, Kerala with 0.71 per cent, Goa with 3.76 per cent, Sikkim with 3.82 per cent, Tamil Nadu with 4.89 per cent and Punjab with 5.59 per cent were the five states with the lowest poverty across India. With 27.36 per cent of the population in poverty, Dadra and Nagar Haveli was ranked the poorest Union Territory. Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh with 12.58 per cent, Daman & Diu with 6.82 per cent, and Chandigarh with 5.97 per cent followed in the list. Puducherry with 1.72 per cent of its population as poor, Lakshadweep with 1.82 per cent, Andaman & Nicobar Islands with 4.30 per cent and Delhi with 4.79 per cent have shown lower poverty. Besides, the index also showed that Bihar has the highest number of malnourished people. Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh followed in the list. The state of Bihar also performed poorly in terms of the percentage of population deprived of maternal health, percentage of population deprived of years of schooling, school attendance and percentage of population deprived of cooking fuel and electricity. In the category of child and adolescent mortality, Uttar Pradesh ranked the worst followed by Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. However, in terms of the percentage of the population deprived of sanitation, Jharkhand performed the worst. Bihar and Odisha followed.

As per the report, India's national MPI has taken into consideration the globally accepted and robust methodology developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Index has three equally weighted dimensions, health, education and standard of living. These dimensions are represented by 12 indicators namely nutrition, child and adolescent mortality, antenatal care, years of schooling, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, assets and bank accounts. Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar in his foreword said, "The development of the National Multidimensional Poverty Index of India is an important contribution towards instituting a public policy tool which monitors multidimensional poverty, informs evidence-based and focused interventions, thereby ensuring that no one is left behind." While Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant in his foreword said that the year 2021 marks the sixth anniversary of the adoption of the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs) which envisage ending poverty in all its forms everywhere.

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SRI LANKA: Role of Divestments in Overcoming Present Economic Challenges

The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) has very ambitious plans for the country's economic transformation including an economic growth expectation of more than 6% during five-year period of 2022-2027. The national budget announced in 2022, forecasts public investments to be at 5.1% of GDP. A similar figure was announced during the last budget as well where it was targeted at 5.4% of GDP but currently the estimate for 2021 is at 3.5%. The total tax revenue estimated in the national budget was an optimistic expectation as well with a growth projection of 50% (LKR 662 billion) in 2022. This is far more than what past budgets had also projected. This increase in revenue is expected to reduce the budget deficit as a percentage of GDP to 8.8% in 2022 from 11.1% in both 2020 (actual) and 2021 (forecast). Therefore, the government needs substantial funding in order to invest in relevant sectors of the country to accelerate economic growth. If this is to be raised through borrowings, it will crowd out the private sector while also put pressure on interest rates given government's policy of utilising domestic financing. Observing the 52 State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) monitored by the Ministry of Finance (MoF), an aggregate profit of LKR 103 billion was generated during the first seven months of 2021, but was eroded by loss-making entities with a total loss of LKR 96 billion. 94% of this loss was contributed by 3 entities, namely; Ceylon Petroleum Corporation, Sri Lankan Airlines Ltd and Sri Lanka Transport Board, while, 85% of profits were contributed by 5 entities. In this regard, letting go of significant stakes in nonstrategic assets and minority stakes in strategic assets could be the best course of action that can be followed given the political milieu of the country. This will enable strategic assets to be sustained for a long period of time while enabling growth in the economy. A clear distinction between strategic and non-strategic assets should be drawn for this purpose. This can avoid divesting controlling stakes of strategic assets, which could undermine the long-term growth potential of the country.

History of Divestments in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is no stranger to divesting SOEs. Divestment of public enterprises were incorporated into the state policy in 1987 with an aim of reducing the fiscal burden, and improving the efficiency and profitability of entities. This led to extensive SOE reforms being carried out between 1989 and 2002 with partial and full divestiture of 84 enterprises. SOE divestments has been a key channel of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into Sri Lanka. During 1990 and 2000, the 11 largest SOE divestment transactions that occurred in the country amounted to USD 609 million of the USD 1,791 million received as FDI during the same period (Central Bank, 2002).

Therefore, divesting SOEs can bring in the much needed FDI into the country and aid the government in their efforts of economic revival post the pandemic. A list of few key divestments that occurred during the period of 1990-2001 is given in table 01 below. In line with the savings and investment model, current account of the Balance of Payment (BOP) is identical to government savings and private savings minus investments. In 2020, private savings accounted for LKR 4,007 billion while government savings stood at a negative LKR 1,180 billion. Therefore, by increasing government income or by cutting down government expenditure, the current account deficit can be reduced. Barring 5 years, Sri Lanka has been recording primary balance deficits (non-interest government expenditure greater than government revenue) since 1950.

Hence, selective divestment of assets will allow the government to generate a one-off income, reduce the fiscal burden, and improve this persistent government dissaving, which thereby can translate into a favorable current account balance. The total turnover of the 52 SOEs monitored by the MoF was significant in 2020, amounting to LKR 1,804 billion, which was close to 1.5 times the total Government revenue collected in 2020. However, the cumulative bank credit that was pumped into SOEs as at November 2021 was LKR 1,185 billion and treasury grants provided to the 52 SOEs in 2020 was at LKR 75 billion. Therefore, the financial burden of SOEs on the government is substantial and in return detrimental for the economy. The increase in bank credit also increases money supply, which then exerts pressure on inflation. Hence, selective divestments can help the government alleviate the financial and administrative burden of SOEs on the Government and thereby the economy. Another dimension of the fiscal burden is the relationship between Sri Lanka's rating and the performance of SOEs. For example, Moody's changed the country's rating outlook from stable to negative in June 2016 owing to weak financial performance of SOEs. The private sector operating under a competitive environment is generally deemed to be profit oriented and is expected to strive towards minimising costs through improvements in its effectiveness of services offered. Therefore, divestiture can bring in the much needed efficiency and effectiveness to SOE operations. It can also provide the SOEs the freedom to operate outside of political and bureaucratic constraints, and separate the state's operational activities, from its policy making and regulatory functions. Divestiture can bring in investors with the capacity to invest in expansions. For example, Hilton has much potential for further development but owing to financial constraints, the government is unable to pursue such developments. The Hyatt project is also another example that requires significant investments to reach completion, which the Government is not in a position to undertake.

It is important to first differentiate state assets as strategic and non-strategic. Strategic assets can be identified as assets that should remain under state ownerships for non-commercial reasons such as national security, managing price, provision of essential public goods or services, etc. A case for divestment of

significant stakes can be made for SOEs if it is no longer deemed to be aligning with these state-ownership objectives. Examples of a few non-strategic assets in Sri Lanka can be identified in sectors such as real estate, finance, insurance, investment funds, shipping, oil and gas, handicraft, fisheries, etc. Some of these, may be considered as strategic by the government for various reasons. However, the divestment process allows one to divest minority stakes without losing control of an enterprise. Even a single share in excess of a 50% stake will provide control of the enterprise. Absolute control can also be enjoyed with a 75% stake as that permits the government to pass extraordinary resolutions. Hence, reducing the ownership of an enterprise down to 75% will not result in any dilution of control. Ideal method that can be followed is to offer significant stake through a competitive tender process or a bidding process conducted on a special board of the Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE) among shortlisted parties. Balance can be offered through an Initial Public Offering (IPO) allowing members of the general public to become part owners of a SOE. Offering a part of shares to employees can help overcome resistance, and builds their commitment to remain and support the new management after the sale. A similar approach was followed in Sri Lanka during the first wave of divestments in 1988. For example, when United Motors was incorporated as a public limited liability company, each employee received 500 shares as a gift. The divestments that took place in this period were also termed as “peoplisation” to limit resistance from the public.

A weakness that was observed in divestments carried out by Sri Lanka in the past was that the proceeds were not allocated to an ear-marked account and instead went into miscellaneous expenditure. Therefore, carefully planning on how these will be used for Sri Lanka’s economic development is imperative and following a transparent process in this regard is essential. Much of the recent criticism is due to the lack of a transparent process, both in terms of selecting investors and the use of divestiture proceeds. The complexity of these transactions will mean that it requires a carefully crafted implementation plan. Therefore, it is vital to have a detailed plan specifying the entities that will be divested, method of divestiture, modality of divestments and earmarking the proceeds of these divestments. Much attention is also required to perform stakeholder consultations and obtain their support to ensure a smooth implementation process. The divestiture of significant stake in Sri Lanka Telecom can be cited as a successful case study that followed a due process including conducting stakeholder consultations. In Vietnam, divestments have been a major focus for the government since it increases the efficiency of loss-making SOEs. Divestments are also a significant source of revenue for the government, which helps the government in managing the fiscal deficit and fund economic development plans. In 2016, earnings from SOE divestments in Vietnam reached VND 30 trillion (USD 1.3 billion), while in 2017 it was about 5 times the figure in 2016 (VND 140 trillion – USD 6 billion). In 1991, with the liberalisation of the Indian economy, the government opted for SOE reforms with divestments in order to improve SOE viability as well as to raise revenue for the annual budget cycles. Last year, too, the country set an ambitious

disinvestment target of INR 1.75 trillion (about USD 24 billion) during its budget announcement. However, a lot needs to be done by the government to achieve this divestment target in 2022.

Partially divesting government ownership in SOEs does not correspond to a decrease in the government's ability to influence or control the enterprises concerned. A 50% stake or more will provide control of the enterprise and absolute control can be retained with a 75% stake. Therefore, given the political milieu of the country and to avoid public resistance, options such as selling significant stakes with management for non-strategic entities and releasing smaller stakes for strategic entities can be considered rather than following a full-scale privatisation programme. In a few non-strategic sectors such as hospitality, even the divestiture of majority stake can be considered. To list on the stock market even with minority stakes can provide the SOEs with the much needed transparency and efficiency in business operations through adherence to stringent regulations. It should also be noted that the 3 main loss-making entities aforementioned are high foreign currency intensive businesses as well and hence, require extensive financial discipline. Therefore, in the present scenario where Sri Lanka is facing significant funding constraints, SOE divestment should be seriously considered for inclusion in the economic recovery plan of the country. The full article can be accessed at: [The Role of Divestments in Overcoming Present Economic Challenges](#).

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Trade Turnover on E-Commerce Platforms Up

The trade turnover on e-commerce platforms in Azerbaijan increased by 68 percent in 2021 compared to 2020, head of the Azerbaijani Azexport project Aykhan Gadashov said at a briefing, Trend reports. Gadashov said that these indicators increased as a result of COVID-19 pandemic. "The online purchases worth more than \$7 billion were made in Azerbaijan in 2021, which is by \$3.3 billion or 68 percent more than in 2020," Gadashov said. The head of the project stressed that the number of bank cards has also increased in Azerbaijan. "The number of bank cards reached 11.04 million in Azerbaijan as of late December 2021, which also contributes to the growth of e-commerce," Gadashov said.

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Azerbaijan Plans to Integrate 'Face to Pay' Solution into Digital Signature

Face to Pay solution (Payments via Face Recognition) is planned to be integrated into the SIMA (new generation digital signature) project in Azerbaijan this year, Chief Commercial Officer of AzInTelecom Ruslan Aliyev said during a press conference entitled "New Generation Digital Signature", Trend reports. Aliyev said that authorization and transactions through biometric data and cloud technologies have been integrated into the new generation digital signatures. "Any citizen can receive a digital signature without leaving house, as well as use services of banking and non-banking organizations and other structures through this mobile application," the chief commercial officer said. Aliyev stressed that today work is underway with several financial structures to integrate banking services into the application, and there are already pilot projects. "The Face to Pay project is planned this year," the chief commercial officer added. The first concept of a digital signature was introduced in 1976. The digital signature was introduced in Azerbaijan in 2011. A presentation ceremony of a new generation digital signature was held in Azerbaijan on February 11.

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Digital Signature Used in Azerbaijan in Almost Every Sphere - SINAM

A presentation ceremony of a new generation digital signature was held in Azerbaijan on February 11, Trend reports. Elchin Aliyev, president of the Azerbaijani SINAM IT company, said that digital signature is used in Azerbaijan in almost all spheres while the development of technologies requires new standards. He made the remarks at a press conference entitled "New Generation Digital Signature". "Together with the Azerbaijani Ministry of Digital Development and Transport, AzInTelecom and SVORT, we have developed a digital signature of the new generation that meets all international standards," president of the company added. "We have been working on the development of this project over the past 20 years as part of the public-private partnership." The new generation digital signature meets all the requirements of the international community, Aliyev said.

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Azerbaijani E-Signature Resilient to Cyberattacks - Deputy Minister

The dependence of Azerbaijani e-signature [SIMA] on cloud technologies increases its resilience to cyberattacks, Azerbaijan's Deputy Minister of Digital Development and Transport Rovshan Rustamov told Russian media, Trend reports. According to Rustamov, since the non-personalized signing key doesn't contain any information, there is no way for criminals to gain access to personal information during cyberattacks. "The e-signature infrastructure and activities in this direction have

existed in our country for a long time. To carry out this work in accordance with a single mechanism and quality, a certification services center operates at the ministry," he said. "The experience gained with the help of the certification services and e-signature center has allowed us to create a new platform signature, called SIMA. This project is primarily a biometric signature. The platform was created based on the requirements of digital transformation," the deputy minister noted. "Thanks to this electronic signature, more efficient and accessible user service will be possible. This will also help popularize the digital activities of business entities and develop the digital economy." Rustamov further said that SIMA is based on biometric authentication, which combines "public key" and cloud technologies. "For example, an identity card scanned by a user using a mobile application is checked for belonging to this person. The test operation is performed by identifying the person based on the application through the camera of the mobile device," he explained. "If the information in the identity card belongs to this person, the user is provided with an e-signature certificate, otherwise in case, the request is denied." "Digitalization makes our life easier, but also creates certain problems. Today, almost every user is subject to cyberattacks in one way or another. It's no secret that any cyberattack on a digital signature can cause serious problems for its owner. From this point of view, SIMA is of great importance," concluded Rustamov.

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Demand for eSIM Technology Increases in Azerbaijan - Deputy Minister

Demand for an embedded SIM (eSIM) technology is increasing in Azerbaijan, Deputy Minister of Digital Development and Transport Rovshan Rustamov told Trend. "Today we see that these technologies are in demand in the country's market, and work is underway in this direction," Rustamov said. The deputy minister noted that the concept paper, including the entire list of issues related to the implementation, standards, and frequency distribution, has already been prepared for the introduction of the 5G network in Azerbaijan. "Furthermore, this document reflects the application of technologies. It indicates which devices can be used in this network, and covers some other issues," he added. The eSIM (Embedded SIM) technology is an alternative to physical SIM cards. This is a miniature microchip that is embedded in the phone at the production stage. The data stored in its memory can be overwritten.

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Azerbaijan Eyes Increasing Number of Hotels Via State Support

The number of hotels in Azerbaijan is planned to be increased with state support, representative of the Association of Travel Agencies of Azerbaijan Goydaniz Gahramanov said, Trend reports. Gahramanov made the remark during a

conference entitled "Innovative activity of small and medium-sized enterprises during the stabilization of economic growth in the post-COVID-19 pandemic". According to him, an increase in the number of hotels in Azerbaijan will increase competition in this market and reduce hotel prices. The association's representative also noted that Azerbaijani territories liberated from Armenian occupation [in the 2020 second Karabakh war] have great potential in the development of the hotel business and the expansion of the hotel network. The number of hotels in Azerbaijan that received a star category at the beginning of 2022 reached 21. Currently, 14 hotels in Azerbaijan have five "stars", six hotels - four and one hotel - three "stars".

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Azerbaijan Unveils Transactions Through "QR-Codes" Within Instant Payments System

The transactions worth 7.9 million manat (\$4.6 million) were carried out in Azerbaijan in 2021 through QR codes within the Instant Payment System (AOS), Trend reports with reference to the Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA). Moreover, the transactions through QR codes within AOS have become available since 2021. According to the CBA, 2,300 transactions were made through QR codes in 2021. AOS system has been fully launched on October 1, 2020 and allows carrying out payment transactions within 5-10 seconds. It was developed by the Swiss CMA Small Systems AB. Some 21 banks, Azerpost LLC and the State Treasury Agency of the Ministry of Finance have been integrated into the system. AOS allows carrying out the payment transactions among individuals, businesses and state agencies 24/7/365 through the bank accounts by using simplified identifiers, namely, FIN code, taxpayer identification number, mobile phone number, email while the money is immediately displayed on the recipient's bank account.

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Azerbaijan to Temporarily Limit Use of One E-Service on State Tax Service's Website

The use of the e-service "Application for a new certificate of Asan Imza" on www.e-taxes.gov.az website will be limited from February 26 through February 28, 2022, the State Tax Service under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy told Trend. This is connected with the modernization of e-services, in which the data from the existing website is transferred to the new one. "Taxpayers will be able to use this e-service again from March 1," the State Tax Service added.

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Upcoming Years to Be New Stage in Strategic Dev't of Azerbaijani Economy

This and the next four years will be a new stage in the strategic development of the Azerbaijani economy, Minister of Economy Mikayil Jabbarov said during a conference on "Tax reforms for inclusive and sustainable development: towards voluntary action through digital transformation," Trend reports. According to Jabbarov, in the mentioned period, it's planned to strengthen competitiveness, innovation orientation and financial stability of national economy. He noted that until 2026, it's envisioned to boost drivers of sustainable economic growth, reintegrate the territories liberated from Armenian occupation [in the 2020 second Karabakh war] into the economy of Azerbaijan. "The new strategy for socio-economic development for 2022-2026 is aimed at expanding public-private partnerships in all sectors of the economy, significantly improving the quality of the ecosystem," the minister further said. Besides, according to him, the strategy envisions the sustainable development of human capital, the creation of favorable conditions for the widespread use of the digital economy and innovation. "At the new stage, the main sources of Azerbaijan's economic growth will be investments from the private sector and the non-oil sector," added Jabbarov.

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KYRGYZSTAN: GDP Amounted to KGS 37B in January This Year

Gross domestic product in January this year, according to preliminary estimates, amounted to more than KGS 37 billion and compared to January 2021 increased by 1%, head of the Foreign Trade Department of Kyrgyzstan Gulsara Sulaimanova told during a press conference in Bishkek, Trend reports with reference to Kabar. She noted that excluding enterprises on the development of Kumtor deposit, the volume of GDP in January this year amounted to more than KGS 35 billion and grew by 1.1%. The head of the department said that the volume of industrial production in January 2022 was more than KGS 22 billion and compared to January last year decreased by 4.5% due to the reduction of production of chemical products (20.5%), rubber and plastic products, other non-metallic mineral products (18.7%), food (including drinks) and tobacco products (7.7%) as well as the extraction of minerals (6.6%). "Positive trends were observed in construction, where the increase in volumes amounted to 1.6%, agriculture - 2.4%, wholesale and retail trade - 7.3%," Sulaimanova added.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 02/10/2022

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Consent Education to Be Mandatory in All Australian Schools from Next Year

Education on consent will be made mandatory in all Australian schools, after state and federal ministers unanimously agreed to include it in the curriculum. The learnings will be age appropriate, with young kids taught generally about seeking permission and respectful relationships, while older students will learn about consent, power imbalances, gender stereotypes, and coercion. The announcement comes after consent advocate Chanel Contos ran a social media poll, which found a staggering number of people in her social network had been sexually assaulted at high school. After receiving more than 200 “yes” responses, she launched the Teach Us Consent campaign with a petition for better consent education in schools, attracting more than 44,000 signatures. Ms Contos told Sunrise she was “relieved” governments had agreed to roll out consent education.

“The Australian curriculum only gets reviewed once every five years, so if we didn’t get it through this round, we would have had to wait another five years at least,” she said on Friday. Ms Contos, who claims she was abused by a schoolboy when she was 13, worked on the proposal for the “age appropriate” consent curriculum and will meet with Prime Minister Scott Morrison next week. She said the lessons would be tailored for each year group. “When we’re in kindergarten, we’re obviously not talking about consent in an explicitly sexual way, we’re talking about sharing toys, holding hands in the playground, asking for permission and it slowly builds on that as students get older,” she said. Education ministers are due to meet in April to finalise the new curriculum, which is set to be taught from the 2023 school year onwards.

From <https://7news.com.au> 02/18/2022

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NEW ZEALAND: Government Must Back Minimum Wage Boost with Funding for Disability Providers

Today's announcement of a 6% increase in the minimum wage will be a welcome boost for many disability sector workers, but the disability support providers who employ them will need more government funding to make ends meet, says New Zealand Disability Support Network CEO Peter Reynolds. "Disability support providers are under extraordinary pressure with rising demand for their services, inflation fuelling increased costs, and difficulty finding workers in the tight labour market," says Reynolds. "Many of our members rely heavily on government funding for the services they provide and it's a constant struggle to get funding levels that accurately reflect the cost of providing the services disabled people and their families need.

"In the Minimum Wage Review, the Ministries of Health and Social Development, as well as ACC, advise that the minimum wage rise will result in extra costs to their third-party providers, and this will mean they have to provide higher levels of funding. ACC alone estimates it will need \$8m in funding for third-party employers, like

disability support providers. "We request that Ministers confirm that government agencies will get the funding they need to pass on to disability support providers facing an increased wage bill. This has not always happened in the past, and providers have found themselves squeezed by the rising wage bill, unable to deliver the services disabled people need. "The Labour Government has increased the minimum wage by 35% since 2017, and we expect it will continue to do so. For this to be sustainable, the Government needs to ensure that matching increases in disability support funding are forthcoming," says Reynolds.

From <https://www.scoop.co.nz> 02/11/2022

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Road Transport Threatened by Rail Development

The trucking industry has commissioned a report from Ia Ara Aotearoa Transporting New Zealand, favouring trucking as a form of transport at the expense of rail. Spokesperson Nick Legget points to road safety, congestion and environmental damage as "second order externalities" favouring economic reality as the only real consideration. Chair of TRAC Guy Wellwood, however, points out that, "Rail saves New Zealand \$1 billion through a reduction of congestion alone, and that trucks are a major road hazard involved in 20% of all road deaths as well as a number injuries". Founder of TRAC Niall Robertson points out that pollution is one of the greatest challengers for the current generation and that road transport is one of the worst offenders. Robertson says, "Tyre dust is full of toxins that are poisoning our waterways and tyres also make up 40% of the particulates that come from trucks to pollute our air. Tyres also produce microplastics and are now the second greatest contributor to oceanic microplastics".

Due to their disproportionate size and weight compared with other vehicles trucks do 99% of all road damage, require big land cobbling motorways to separate adequately from other vehicles and demand more expensive road engineering, yet motorists pay about 50% of the costs of roads through the fuel excise tax. That's a subsidy that the road transport industry is quiet about. Don Braid from Mainfreight once said that 24% of freight is non-urgent so should go by the cheapest way which is rail, which challenges the "12% of contestable freight" by this report. Robertson says, "The current financial structure is flawed, with the fate of the New Zealand railway system bound to KiwiRail's next quarter's bottom line. There needs to be a separation of below wheel infrastructure from the company and open access to other operators in order to allow more investment in the New Zealand rail network from the private sector". Rail needs to grow its market share, not just for the reasons of safety, environmental protection, saving of greenhouse gases and road congestion, but also to give businesses alternative and cheaper options to get their goods to market. Rail is also poised to develop a much greater role in urban and inter-regional public transport and tourism services too. Wellwood says, "Rail is being invested in all over the world, because it ticks all the boxes to help us deal with all of the major

challenges of the present and the future”.

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Labour Productivity Rises 0.5 Percent

Labour productivity rose 0.5 percent in the year ended March 2021, Stats NZ said today. “The rise in labour productivity reflects labour inputs declining by more than the fall in output over the March 2021 year,” national accounts industry and production senior manager Ruvani Ratnayake said. Labour productivity measures the quantity of goods and services (output) produced per hour of labour. Rises were also seen in multifactor productivity, which rose 0.7 percent, and capital productivity, which rose 1.0 percent.

From <https://www.scoop.co.nz> 02/16/2022

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Safe-Nursing Report Shows Why Health System Needs Fixing

A report ordered by Health Minister Andrew Little into a programme supposed to make sure public hospitals have enough nurses to run safely shows why the health system must be overhauled. “I ordered this review back in August because of the long-standing concerns of the Nurses’ Organisation and the Public Service Association about a lack of follow-through by District Health Boards on the safe-staffing accord for public hospitals. The review report, which I’m releasing today, confirms those concerns,” Andrew Little said. “The Care Capacity Demand Management Programme (CCDM) was agreed to in 2006 by the previous Labour Government to monitor and manage nursing staffing levels in hospitals. “It was to be implemented in 2009, but by then the Government had changed and the incoming National Government failed to take it seriously. As a result, the scheme wasn’t implemented in most hospitals for more than a decade.

“When Labour returned to Government we committed to proper implementation of CCDM by June 2021, and we provided additional funding for district health boards to do it. “However, just seven DHBs met that deadline. This is not acceptable. This inconsistency between DHBs is one of the reasons why we are reforming the health system. “Despite the inconsistent application of the CCDM, however, we are making progress and improving nursing staffing levels. “Since we became the Government in 2017, we’ve employed an extra 3621 nurses in DHBs, increased nurses’ wages, made it easier for foreign-trained nurses to settle in New Zealand, and we’ve got recruitment programmes under way,” Andrew Little said Andrew Little says he agrees with the report’s criticism of a lack of national workforce planning.

“Under the reformed health system, the 20 DHBs will be replaced in July by a single national agency, Health New Zealand, which will be better able to plan for and

manage the nursing workforce right across the country,” Andrew Little said. “It is critically important that we fix the nursing shortage for the sake of our overworked nurses and to ensure the safety of patients and our health reforms will make nationwide work force planning much easier as well as ensuring greater accountability.” The review was led by former Nurses Organisation associate professional services manager Hilary Graham-Smith. The other members of the panel were Dr Jill Clendon, Dr Rhonda McKelvie and Kapua Quinn.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 02/17/2022

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Govt Announces New Partnership to Boost Local Employment for Major Transport Projects

The Government is launching a new employment initiative to get local people into work on transport projects being built across the country, Transport Minister Michael Wood and Social Development and Employment Minister Carmel Sepuloni announced today. “This new initiative is centred on projects that are part of our Government’s New Zealand Upgrade Programme (NZUP), and offers the twin benefits of improving local employment outcomes while providing Kiwis with better and safer transport choices,” Michael Wood said, on a visit to the construction site for the \$655 million Takitimu North Link project. “Local people will learn new skills to work on major infrastructure projects in communities across Aotearoa, which will create a larger pool of workers for the construction industry and help to address skills and labour shortages.

Waka Kotahi is delivering 19 NZUP projects, and I know that discussions to identify employment opportunities on the Takitimu North Link project, which will connect Tauranga and Ōmokoroa with a new 14 kilometre four-lane corridor, will begin very soon. “I’m pleased that Waka Kotahi and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) have agreed on this partnership to boost targeted employment outcomes on NZUP projects. The two have already worked together on a successful pilot project on the Te Ahu a Turanga–Manawatu Tararua Highway project, which resulted in local people getting heavy vehicle licenses to be trained as digger operators and drivers. People were also helped into jobs as administrators, labourers, builders and workers on conservation projects,” Michael Wood said.

“The partnership between MSD and Waka Kotahi supports the government procurement directive to achieve broader cultural, economic, environmental and social outcomes for Aotearoa,” Carmel Sepuloni said. “This initiative will also ensure close engagement with mana whenua on employment opportunities, while supporting local businesses. “MSD recognises that we are stronger when we work together. This partnership means people can be connected early to the right support and services they need from us to gain employment on the Takitimu North Link and a career,” Carmel Sepuloni said. Waka Kotahi is also supporting the Government’s

Broader Outcomes initiative, with a focus on growing local small and Maori owned businesses through its NZUP projects. For example, Takitimu North Link stage 1 has recently sub-contracted a small hapu-owned welding start-up business.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 02/22/2022

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Government Launches Free Telehealth Service to Provide 24/7 Abortion Support

A new national abortion telehealth service called Decide is the latest milestone in improving abortion services, Associate Health Minister Dr Ayesha Verrall announced today. “Decide will connect people to abortion information, advice and counselling over the phone, from health practitioners anywhere in the country,” Dr Ayesha Verrall said. Currently, abortion telehealth services are offered by some District Health Boards (DHBs), but not all. Expanding this service nationally is a huge step in improving access to abortion services. “In-person care will always be offered, but it’s important that other options are available as well where suitable. “Telehealth makes it easier for people to reach the services and support that already exist, particularly those who find it difficult to visit a doctor or clinic. It also gives assurance to health practitioners that their patients have additional sources of support.”

Decide will be rolled out in three phases. Referrals and information about abortion services will be available from 26 April, 2022. Follow-up care and abortion-related counselling will be available from 1 July 2022. The final phase, set for November 2022 includes telemedicine, which means providing clinical consultations for an early medical abortion over the phone and couriering medications. “As part of the telemedicine service, people will be able to immediately talk to a practitioner willing to provide abortion services, removing a key barrier for some people.” All patients of this service will be part of an active follow up process and services will be available via the free, dedicated number 0800 DECIDE. Decide will be led by Family Planning and Magma Healthcare (also trading as The Women’s Clinic). Both organisations are recognised experts in abortion and sexual health, alongside DHB providers, and have experience in providing sexual health and abortion services via telehealth.

A website (www.decide.org.nz) will be active from 26 April, 2022 to provide accurate, impartial information about abortion services in New Zealand to help people make informed decisions about their pregnancy. This website will also connect people to the Decide telehealth service. “Everyone should be able to access abortion information and care when they need it. “The national telehealth service is part of wider improvements to abortion provision. “Earlier this year, Government lifted some of the funding restrictions on abortion medication, which enabled a wider range of health practitioners like GPs and nurses, to prescribe them. “Changes like this continue to build on quality, accessible abortion care,” Dr Ayesha Verrall said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 02/23/2022

Government Paves Pathway for Pacific Prosperity

Minister for Pacific Peoples Aupito William Sio says Pacific social enterprise makes a big difference to economic and social outcomes for Pacific peoples. This follows a successful joint Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and Ministry for Pacific Peoples (MPP) pilot initiative demonstrating the value of Pacific social enterprise in Aotearoa New Zealand. Minister Aupito said, “Over the past two years, we have explored opportunities to recognise and invest in Pacific social enterprise models, working collaboratively with community groups Cook Islands Development Agency New Zealand (CIDANZ) and its eFamilies programme; Vahefonua Tonga Methodist Trust (SIAOLA) and its GREI financial literacy model; and Faith City’s The Business Factory (TBF).” “We are now better equipped to inform policy makers because we have a greater understanding of the key success factors and barriers for Pacific social enterprises.

The findings show us ways to create new employment opportunities, and how to generate wealth through increased levels of income, revenue, and capital for Pacific communities.” “After being commissioned by MSD’s Industry Partnerships, Moana Research has monitored the progress of the three Pacific social enterprise groups and submitted the Pacific Prosperity through Social Enterprise (PPTSE) Evaluation Report and Rubric Framework for Policy, Planning and Practice, which we are pleased to launch today and can be found here: www.mpp.govt.nz and www.msd.govt.nz.” “The PPTSE and Evaluation findings and achievements will inform future strategy for both agencies regarding Pacific progress and elevate innovative community initiatives.”

“MSD’s support has enabled this collaboration and now there is a more robust foundation for both agencies to continue working collaboratively in support of Pacific Social enterprise,” Carmel Sepuloni said. “Ensuring Pacific peoples are at the heart of development, thinking and decision-making is an important part of this. “This collaboration reinforces the strengths and abilities of Pacific peoples to drive their own innovative solutions, and the huge economic and social benefits that an increase in Pacific social enterprise can bring to Pacific people and New Zealand society,” Carmel Sepuloni said. Aupito William Sio said, “Pacific social enterprise is an area in which MPP, will continue to support and seek funding for, allowing Pacific communities to transform and flourish in Aotearoa.”

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 02/23/2022

Govt Launches Road Safety Campaign with Target of Zero Road Deaths

Transport Minister Michael Wood and Police Minister Poto Williams have today launched the Road to Zero public awareness campaign, which sets a target of zero road deaths and serious injuries by 2050, and a 40 per cent reduction by 2030. “There should be zero tolerance for people being killed or seriously injured on our roads. The Road to Zero strategy is part of our plan to build the safest road system we can, and work towards zero road deaths and serious injuries,” Michael Wood said. “We’re aiming for significant reductions in a relatively short space of time, and we’re targeting all aspects of the transport system to get there. We’re investing in safer infrastructure, we’re working to get more people into safer vehicles, we’re rolling out safer speed limits, and we’re refocusing on targeted and effective Police enforcement.

“Road to Zero is not about any single initiative but about how we develop an overall safer system. It’s important for people to know that a large reduction in road deaths and serious injuries is achievable – the measures that are being introduced are internationally proven and have reduced deaths and serious injuries when systematically rolled out. “There’s a huge amount of work being done, and we won’t get to zero deaths and serious injuries overnight, but by having zero as the goal and working towards it with a clear plan and a hard target for 2030, we can save thousands of lives, which is well worth fighting for,” Michael Wood said. Poto Williams says the Government has taken steps to strengthen the leadership, governance, and reporting for the delivery of Road to Zero, including a renewed focus on the vital role of Police enforcement to deter impaired driving and other unsafe behaviour.

“New Zealanders can be assured that our commitment to saving lives and preventing injuries on our roads is genuine and strong. We’re investing \$2.9 billion in Road to Zero activities over the next three years, including \$1.2 billion for road policing, which is an increase of \$140 million compared with the previous three years. We’ve also commissioned an independent review to ensure that our road policing activities and safety infrastructure investments are effectively prioritised, delivered, and monitored as part of Road to Zero. “Every death and every serious injury on our roads has a devastating impact on a large number of people – whānau, friends, colleagues and neighbours, as well as our first responders. It’s time we stopped accepting that a certain amount of death and serious injury is just the price we all pay for moving around. We need to move past the whole idea of a ‘road toll’ paid in human lives. No one deserves to die or be seriously injured on our roads,” Poto Williams said.

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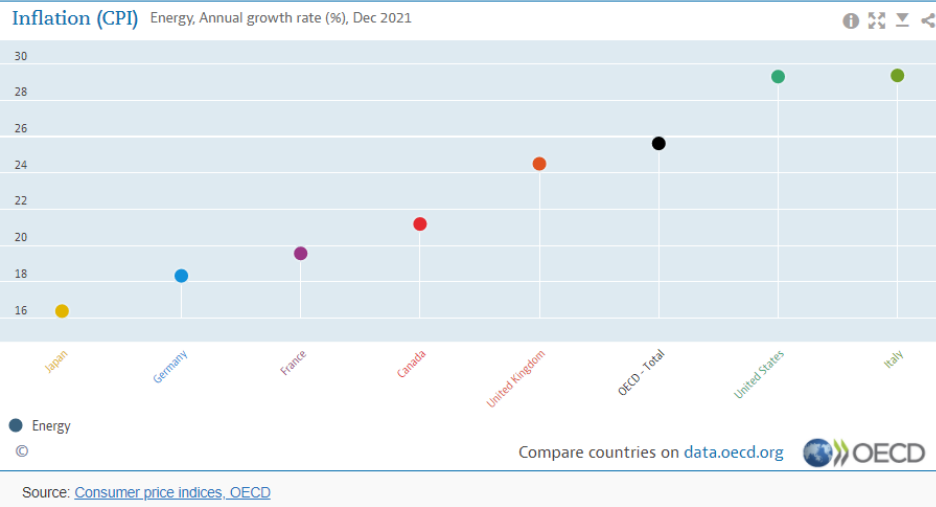
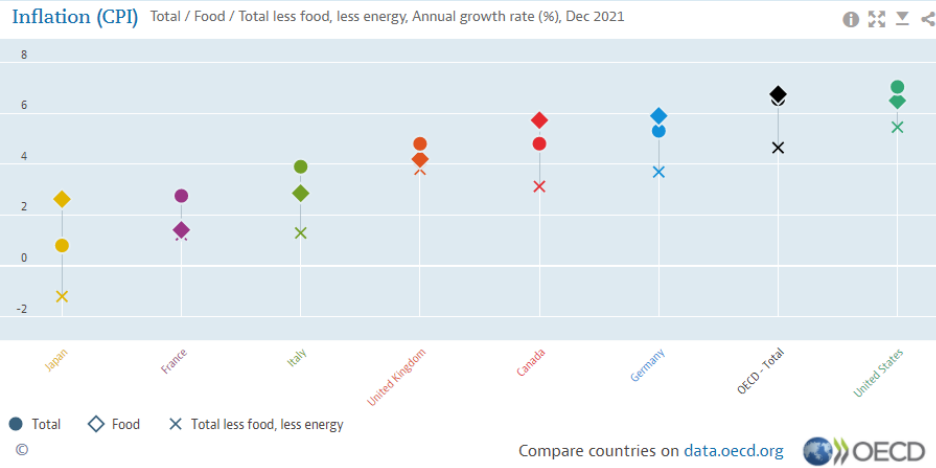
Asia-Pacific

Inflation in the OECD Area Hits 30-Year High in December 2021, Reaching 6.6%

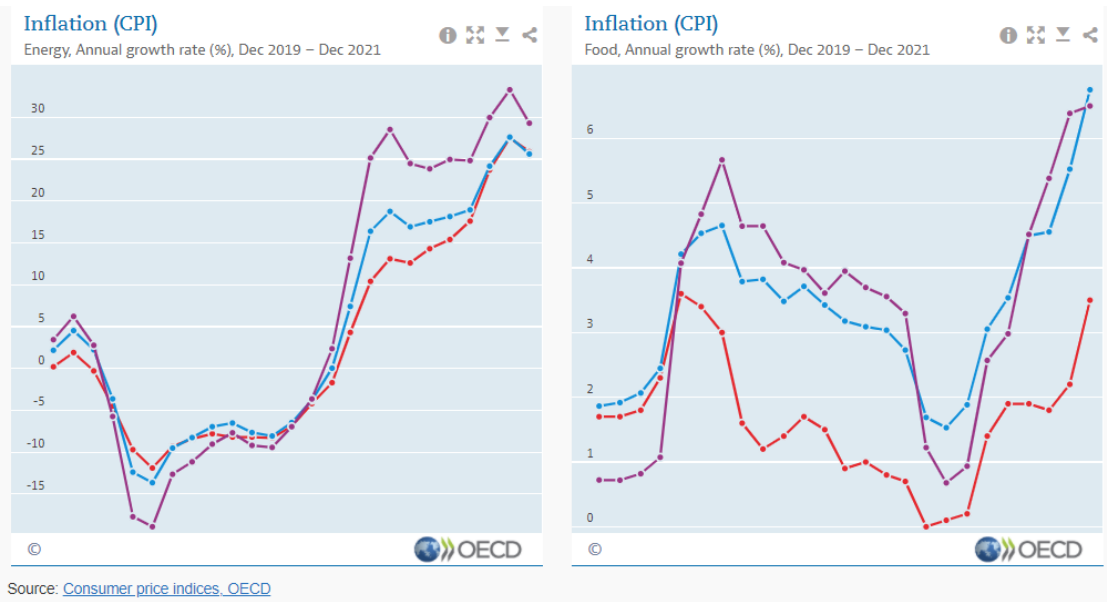
Inflation in the OECD area rose to 6.6% in the 12 months to December 2021, compared with 5.9% in November, and just 1.2% in December 2020, reaching its highest rate since July 1991. This increase was driven in part by a surge in annual inflation in Turkey (to 36.1% in December, after 21.3% in November). Excluding Turkey, inflation in the OECD area increased more moderately (to 5.6%, after 5.3% in November¹). Energy prices soared by 25.6% in the OECD area in the 12 months to December 2021, two percentage points (p.p.) lower than November's 27.6%, but high compared with 4.2% in December 2020. Food price inflation in the OECD area picked up strongly to 6.8% in December, compared with 5.5% in November and 3.2% in December 2020. Excluding food and energy, OECD year-on-year inflation also rose sharply, to 4.6%, compared with 3.9% in November, and contributed significantly to headline inflation in a number of large economies. For 2021 as a whole, annual inflation in the OECD rose to 4.0%, compared with 1.4% in 2020, the highest annual average rate since 2000. Energy prices increased by 15.4%, the highest rate since 1981. By comparison, they had decreased by 6.5% in 2020. Excluding food and energy, annual inflation rose to 2.9%, compared with 1.8% in 2020.

Consumer prices, selected areas

December 2021, percentage change on the same period of the previous year, %



Energy (CPI) and Food (CPI), selected areas
 December 2019 – December 2021, percentage change on the same period of the previous year, %



New US\$3.75 Million Grant to Help Palestinians Fight the Coronavirus Outbreak and Future Health Shocks

An additional grant of US\$3.75 million was allocated to the ongoing West Bank and Gaza COVID-19 Emergency Response. The additional financing will continue to support the Palestinian Authority's response to the threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic while ensuring continuity of essential health services and contributing to long-term resilience. The grant will be contributed from the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response (HEPR) Multi-donor Trust Fund administered by the World Bank. It is a flexible mechanism for rapid financing to support countries and territories to improve their capacities to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and mitigate the impact of epidemics on populations. "COVID-19 continues to pose a high risk of morbidity and mortality, as well as a burden to healthcare systems. Due to low capacity of testing in the Palestinian territories, the number of COVID-19 cases are underestimated. Still, the numbers of new infections reported daily continue to reach new highs. The additional financing will support the original project by providing immediate response to COVID-19, but also contributing to long-term resilience," said Kanthan Shankar, World Bank Country Director for West Bank and Gaza.

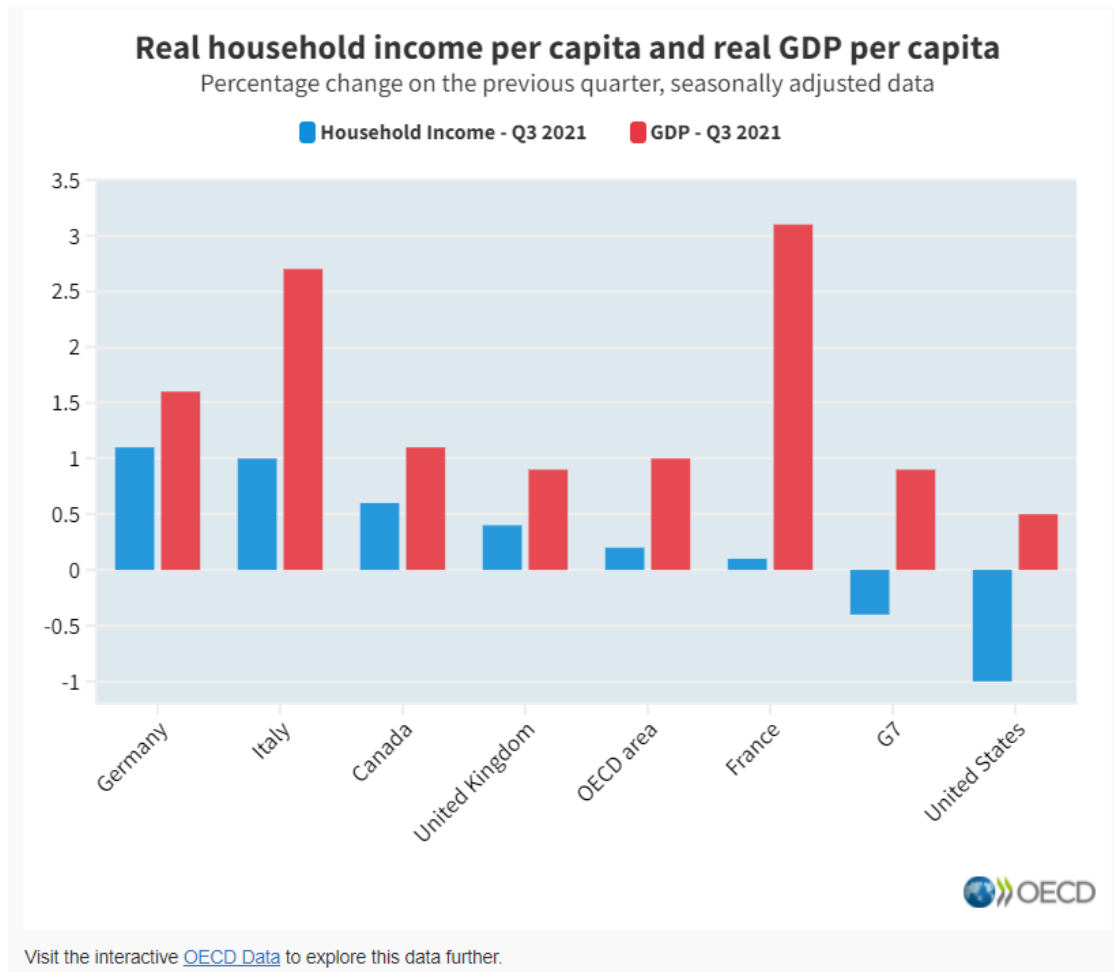
Beyond strengthening the overall healthcare services and clinical capacity in immediate response to COVID-19 under the framework of the parent project, the new grant focuses on procuring supplies and equipment that could be utilized to promote resilience to future pandemics and health shocks. These include medicines for the treatment of health emergencies and chronic conditions as well as emergency medical devices and equipment including defibrillators, vital-signs monitors, emergency trolleys, patient beds, mobile blood banks, ultrasound machines, generators, and more. The operation will also seek to reduce limitations to access to healthcare experienced by rural and marginalized communities. For instance, women in remote areas often find it difficult to access health services due to distance to health facilities and lack of transportation. Mobile clinics financed through the additional financing will ensure equitable access to quality care for populations that are often left behind. The World Bank will continue to strengthen resilience and pandemic preparedness in the health system through technical and operational engagement with the Ministry of Health and other partners in the sector.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 02/06/2022

Household Income Rises Slightly in OECD Area in Q3 2021 As US Decline Offsets Increases in Other Countries

Real household income per capita rose by 0.2% in the OECD area in the third quarter of 2021 compared with the previous quarter. Household income increased in

most member countries, but this was offset by a 1.0% decline in the United States. The level of household income per capita across the OECD area is now 4.0% higher than the pre-pandemic level recorded in the fourth quarter of 2019.



From <https://www.oecd.org/> 02/07/2022

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Greater Transparency on Hidden and Distressed Debt Can Reduce Global Financial Risks and Support Recovery

Developing countries face growing risks from financial fragility created by the COVID-19 crisis and non-transparent debt, says a new World Bank report. As rising inflation and interest rate increases pose further challenges to recovery, developing countries need to focus on creating healthier financial sectors. According to World Development Report 2022: Finance for an Equitable Recovery, risks may be hidden because the balance sheets of households, businesses, banks, and governments are tightly interrelated. Today, high levels of non-performing loans and hidden debt impair access to credit, and disproportionately reduce access to finance for low-income households and small businesses. "The risk is that the economic crisis of inflation and higher interest rates will spread due to financial fragility. Tighter global financial conditions and shallow domestic debt markets in many developing countries

are crowding out private investment and dampening the recovery,” said World Bank Group President David Malpass. “It is critical to work toward broad-based access to credit and growth-oriented capital allocation. This would enable smaller and more dynamic firms – and sectors with higher growth potential -- to invest and create jobs.”

The global public health crisis triggered by COVID-19 quickly turned into the largest global economic crisis in more than a century, resulting in major setbacks to growth, increased poverty rates, and widened inequality. In response, governments initiated large and unprecedented emergency support measures, which helped mitigate some of the worst social and economic impacts, and increased sovereign debt levels – already at record highs in many countries before the crisis. The response also exposed several challenges with private debt that now need to be urgently addressed – including a lack of transparency in reporting non-performing loans, delayed management of distressed assets, and tighter or no access to credit for the most vulnerable households and businesses. The new World Development Report highlights several priority areas for action, including early detection of financial risks. Since few countries have the fiscal space and capacity to address all challenges simultaneously, it outlines how countries can prioritize resources depending on their context.

Surveys of businesses in developing countries during the pandemic found that 46 percent expected to fall into arrears. Loan defaults could now sharply increase, and private debt could quickly become public debt, as governments provide support. Despite the severe contraction in incomes and business revenues resulting from the crisis, the share of non-performing loans remains largely unimpacted and below expectations. However, this may be due to forbearance policies and relaxed accounting standards that are masking significant hidden risks that will become apparent only as support policies are withdrawn. “Prior to crises, it’s often the things that you don’t see that ultimately get you. There is reason to expect that many vulnerabilities remain hidden,” said Carmen Reinhart, Senior Vice President and Chief Economist of the World Bank Group. “It’s time to prioritize early, tailored action to support a healthy financial system that can provide the credit growth needed to fuel recovery. If we don’t, it is the most vulnerable that would be hit hardest.”

The report also calls for the proactive management of distressed loans. Many households and firms are confronted with unsustainable levels of debt due to lower income and revenue. Effective insolvency mechanisms can help avoid the risk of long-term debt distress and lending to ‘zombie’ firms that undercut economic recovery. Improving insolvency mechanisms, facilitating out-of-court workouts, especially for small businesses, and promoting debt forgiveness can help enable the orderly reduction of private debts. In low-income countries, dramatically increased levels of sovereign debt need to be proactively managed in an orderly, and timely manner. The historical track record shows that delays in addressing sovereign debt distress are associated with protracted recessions, high inflation, and fewer

resources going to essential sectors like health, education, and social safety nets, with a disproportionate impact on the poor. Finally, it is critical to work toward inclusive access to finance to support the recovery from a historic pandemic. In low-and-middle income countries, 50 percent of households are unable to sustain basic consumption beyond 3 months. The average business reports that they only have cash reserves to cover two months of expenses.

Households and small businesses have been at greatest risk of being cut off from credit, yet access to credit improves the resilience of low-income households and enables small businesses to navigate shutdowns, stay in business, and eventually grow and support the recovery. Digital financial tools and products can play a critical role in assessing borrower risk and providing recourse in the event of default, thus improving management of credit risk, enabling lending, and fostering new economic opportunities. The policy reforms necessary for achieving an equitable recovery also offer governments and regulators an opportunity and roadmap to accelerate the shift toward a more efficient and sustainable world economy. Climate change is a major source of neglected risk in the world economy. Well-designed crisis response policies and longer-term reforms can encourage capital flows toward greener firms and industries.

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 nearly 70 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.

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Trust Key for Higher Tax Revenues in Developing Countries

In many developing countries, tax revenues remain far below levels needed to provide citizens with basic services or fund extra spending to minimize the impact of COVID-19. But as governments look for ways to strengthen tax collection systems, they must take a holistic approach to tax reform that includes building citizens' trust, says a new World Bank report. *Innovations in Tax Compliance: Building Trust, Navigating Politics, and Tailoring Reforms* outlines a novel, integrated framework for improving tax systems based on three core pillars: enforcement, facilitation, and trust. According to the report, when implemented alongside reforms to boost enforcement and improve facilitation, strategies to increase trust between taxpayers and tax administrations can lead to higher rates of compliance and build a foundation of

public support for more effective taxation.

“The report offers feasible, clear-cut paths to putting trust building into practice,” said Edward Olowo-Okere, Director of the World Bank’s Governance Global Practice. “With detailed information on successful initiatives, it urges reformers to focus on how to more effectively tailor strategies to local contexts and constraints. In Freetown, Sierra Leone, for example, successful property tax reform followed significant public education programs and new forums for engagement between taxpayers and the city.” “Discussions about how to raise extra resources are especially relevant now that governments across the world are having to substantially increase public expenditure to protect people and economies from the damage wrought by the pandemic,” said Marcello M. Estevão, the Bank’s Global Director for Macroeconomics, Trade and Investment. “Fiscal pressures are growing because of record-high levels of debt in lower- and middle-income countries and because of the need to transition to a green economy.”

Tax reforms have leaned heavily toward strengthening tax enforcement and facilitating compliance, with sanctions for citizens and corporations that avoid paying their obligations and mechanisms that make it as easy as possible for taxpayers to find out what they owe and make payments. Despite important successes, these efforts have not been sufficient to consistently deliver more effective, equitable, and accountable tax systems. In fact, taxation of the wealthy remains highly ineffective in many countries. Weak taxation in many places appears rooted in political resistance to more effective taxation, low trust and compliance, and the difficulties posed by wealth held offshore. Recent research has shown that a lack of trust in the state’s role as both tax collector and service provider remains an important deterrent for many would-be taxpayers to enter the formal economy or pay their full taxes – and undermines broader political support for reform efforts. The report was supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the World Bank’s Global Tax Program.

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East Asia

CHINA: Finance Ministry Calls for Better Macroeconomic Coordination

China has called for strengthening global cooperation in coordinating macro policies, as part of efforts to propel common development, according to the Ministry of Finance. "Major developed countries should adopt responsible macroeconomic policies and appropriately control the spillover effects," Finance Minister Liu Kun said when attending the meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bank governors via videos recently. Highlighting the importance of fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic, Liu said that China is ready to work with other parties to advance the

reform of the health governance system under the framework of the World Health Organization. Liu also noted that China is the biggest contributor among the Group of 20 (G20) members to the success of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative for the poorest countries. China calls on all parties to follow the existing G20 consensus, respect the independent decisions of debtor countries and promote steady progress of relevant work in a practical manner, said Liu. Multilateral creditors, like the World Bank, should participate in debt mitigation actions in a substantive way, providing support for low-income countries, said Liu.

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China's Loan Prime Rates Remain Unchanged

China's one-year loan prime rate (LPR), a market-based benchmark lending rate, came in at 3.7 percent Monday, unchanged from the previous month. The over-five-year LPR, on which many lenders base their mortgage rates, also remained unchanged from the previous reading of 4.6 percent, according to the National Interbank Funding Center (NIFC). In January, the over-five-year LPR was lowered by 5 basis points from the December reading of 4.65 percent. The one-year LPR had two consecutive cuts in the previous two months. It was lowered by 5 basis points to 3.8 percent in December and was subsequently cut to 3.7 percent in January. Analysts have said that the cuts in the LPRs will produce positive effects in expanding domestic demand, stabilizing external demands, and ensuring stable development of the property sector. Based on bank quotes calculated by adding a few basis points to the interest rate of open market operations (mainly referring to the medium-term lending facility rate), the LPR is calculated by the NIFC to serve as a pricing reference for bank lending. The LPR currently consists of rates with two maturities -- one year and over five years. The quoting banks submit their figures before 9 a.m. on the 20th day of every month. The NIFC calculates and releases the LPR at 9:30 a.m. on the same day or on the next working day.

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China to Step Up Tax, Fee Cuts to Support Market Entities

China will intensify tax and fee cuts with targeted measures in 2022 to bring benefits for market entities and bolster economic growth, according to the Finance Ministry on Tuesday. "China will see a larger scale of tax and fee cuts this year," Minister of Finance Liu Kun told a press conference, citing that the country cut about 1.1 trillion yuan (about 173.9 billion U.S. dollars) of taxes and fees last year. In recent years, the country has given full play to tax and fee deductions in vitalizing market entities and shoring up economic development, said Xu Hongcai, vice minister of finance. "On the surface, tax and fee cuts can slice fiscal revenue, but in essence, the move has

propelled economic growth and a subsequent increase in fiscal revenue," Xu said. Official data shows that China now boasts over 150 million market entities, while a total of 13.26 million firms were newly established and have engaged in tax-related activities in 2021, up 15.9 percent year on year.

The implementation of tax and fee cuts policies has reduced the burden on market players and strengthened their resilience, Xu said. To further vitalize market entities, this year the country will intensify tax-deduction efforts and launch targeted support measures while focusing on the high-quality development of the manufacturing industry, smaller businesses and scientific innovation. Preferential tax measures should move in tandem with other proactive fiscal, monetary and industrial policies to help market players tide over difficulties, according to Xu. Amid the tax and fee cuts, the growth of local-government revenue will slow down, Xu noted, adding that the central government will significantly increase transfer payments to local governments. These funds will mainly flow to less developed regions, those in difficulty, and those where fiscal revenue faces mounting pressure from tax and fee cuts, he added.

The country will maintain appropriate levels of fiscal expenditure while giving priority to key sectors, including sci-tech breakthroughs, environmental protection and major regional strategies, Liu said. Measures will be taken to allocate local government special bonds in a reasonable manner, Liu said, noting that the country issued 484.4 billion yuan in January to fund projects in the transport, industrial park infrastructure and other key areas. The figure accounted for one-third of the 1.46 trillion-yuan funds that were allocated late last year from the country's 2022 quota for local government special bonds. The advance allocation is aimed at stimulating effective investment and mitigating economic pressure, Xu added.

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China's Securities Market Sees Number of Investors Exceed 200 Mln

China saw the number of investors in its securities market exceed 200 million as of Feb. 25, official data shows. In March 2019, the number of investors topped 150 million for the first time, according to the China Securities Depository and Clearing Co., Ltd. In January, the securities market attracted more than 1.32 million new investors. Individuals accounted for the majority of new investors, while the number of new institutional investors stood at 3,700, the data shows. By the end of last month, the newly-established Beijing Stock Exchange had more than 4.8 million qualified accounts.

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JAPAN: BOJ Offers Bond Purchases to Keep Rates Low

The Bank of Japan made an offer for unlimited government bond purchases Monday, moving to curb a surge in long-term interest rates in the world's third-largest economy. Japan's central bank set the interest rate for purchasing 10-year government bonds at 0.25%. The market rate had risen close to that level recently on speculation the BOJ might begin reeling back its ultra-loose monetary policy in line with other central banks like the U.S. Federal Reserve. The BOJ offer drew no bids but still had the effect of lowering interest rates. The last time the Bank of Japan made a similar move was in July 2018. The latest decision highlights the BOJ's intention to keep interest rates super low since inflation remains well below its target rate of 2%. Japan's benchmark interest rate has been kept at minus 0.1% for years. Japan has maintained a near-zero interest rate policy for years to counter a trend toward deflation, or falling prices. Business activity has slowed as the country's population ages and grows smaller. The coronavirus pandemic has added to those woes, and Bank of Japan Gov. Haruhiko Kuroda has repeatedly said the bank supports keeping interest rates very low. Japan is not entirely immune to inflationary pressures but it has been less affected than many other major economies where central banks have moved to raise interest rates that were kept low to support markets and minimize the impact of the pandemic. High interest rates can discourage investment and hinder cash flow to businesses. The Bank of Japan announced its plans for the unlimited bond purchases last week.

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Japan Financial Watchdog Reviews Compulsory Quarterly Disclosure Rule

Japan's financial watchdog has begun discussions as part of a review of compulsory quarterly company disclosures, a controversial move the regulator argues will encourage firms to think long-term but that critics say will erode transparency. The Financial Services Agency is expected to show as early as this spring the direction of its review, a part of efforts to promote a "new capitalism" as advocated by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, following discussions at its Financial System Council. The move comes as the agency tries to address so-called "short-termism" in which companies prioritize market-pleasing profit figures at the expense of investing in sustainable growth and delivering the wage hikes desired by the government. At the council's first meeting on the issue on Feb. 18, the proposal was opposed by multiple corporate governance experts who argued reducing the frequency of disclosures will impact transparency and increase uncertainty around listed Japanese companies. Many also expressed doubts about the claim that removing compulsory quarterly disclosure will address the issue of short-termism, saying that there is not enough academic evidence to back it.

Many did, though, support the need to remove the current duplication that exists in compulsory results disclosures. The quarterly disclosure rule was introduced by the Tokyo Stock Exchange in 1999 and became mandatory by law in 2008 after investigators were hamstrung in their work looking into internet firm Livedoor Co's falsification of quarterly results in 2006. Currently, listed companies disclose results every three months based on stock exchange rules as well as being required to provide audited quarterly financial statements, but there is overlap in the content of the market announcements. There have been some attempts to review quarterly disclosure rules in the past, but a 2018 study ended without adopting any change, with the FSA panel saying the review "could affect Japan's competitiveness as it could be perceived as a retrograde step." According to the FSA, Britain and France removed compulsory quarterly disclosures in 2014 and 2015, respectively.

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SOUTH KOREA: ICT Ministry to Invest 130 Bln Won in Data Projects This Year

South Korea's ICT ministry said Sunday it plans to spend 129.8 billion won (US\$108.2 million) on ramping up data projects this year, including distributing "data vouchers" to support small and medium-sized businesses. The latest investment comes as part of efforts to utilize data collected from the so-called Data Dam project, an initiative that kicked off in 2020 to gather data generated through public and private networks to maximize data utilization. The ministry said it will allocate 124.1 billion won to the data voucher project this year to help SMEs and small businesses cover costs in developing new data products or services. Around 5 billion won will be earmarked for another project to develop data and artificial intelligence-based products, the ministry said. South Korea unveiled the digital New Deal in 2020 with the aim of investing around 58 trillion won in key digital technologies, such as network infrastructure and artificial intelligence, to lay the foundations for a digital economy.

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Finance Chief Urges Consideration of Industry Traits in Digital Taxation

Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki said the Pillar One digital service tax, often dubbed the Google tax, requires reasonable consideration of the different traits of the sectors included. Taking part virtually in a G20 meeting of finance and central bank chiefs held in Indonesia, Hong called for swift and productive talks on follow-up measures to the new digital tax. Under Pillar One of a global tax agreement struck last year, multinational enterprises will have to pay taxes to the countries where they provide services and generate profit. The measure is to ensure a fairer distribution of profits

and taxing rights. Among South Korean firms, Samsung Electronics is expected to meet the condition for this new tax. The latest G20 meeting discussed uncertainties in the global economy, stronger policy coordination and support for vulnerable countries.

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Gov't Launches High-Yield Savings Program to Encourage Young People to Save

An installment savings program with a maximum interest rate benefit of ten percent has launched on Monday. The high-yielding savings account is aimed at encouraging young people to stably manage their assets, with eligibility extended to those aged 19 to 34. The maximum monthly pay-in for the two-year installment plan is 500-thousand won. Eleven banks, including Kookmin, Shinhan, Hana and Woori, began accepting applications on- and offline at 9:30 a.m. The interest rate offered by the five major banks ranges from five to six percent. Taking into account a state incentive and a tax exemption on income from interests, those registered are expected to enjoy a benefit equivalent to a maximum ten percent return annually. The government has set aside 45-point-six billion for the program, enough to cover some 380-thousand people, though nearly two million people had reportedly checked their eligibility status through last Friday. During the first week, applications will be taken under a five-day rotation system based on the applicant's birth year. For example, those born in the year ending with one or six can apply on Monday, those ending with two or seven on Tuesday, three or eight on Wednesday, four or nine on Thursday and five or zero on Friday.

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: ADB Approves 150-Mln-USD Loan for Green Recovery

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a loan worth 150 million U.S. dollars to support a facility that can accelerate Indonesia's economic recovery, local media reported Wednesday. The facility, the Sustainable Development Goals Indonesia One-Green Finance Facility (SIO-GFF), will catalyze public and private fundings to support green and viable infrastructure projects, which would help Indonesia achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SIO-GFF, the first of its kind in Southeast Asia, aims to finance at least 10 projects, with a minimum of 70 percent of the financing to support green infrastructure and the rest to support the SDGs. This facility will increase sustainable infrastructure development and accelerate Indonesia's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic by raising capital and

creating jobs, said Anouj Mehta, head of the ADB's Green and Innovative Financing Unit for Southeast Asia, quoted by Antara news agency on Wednesday. With an innovative financing model that incorporates global green standards, the SIO-GFF will help Indonesia focus on climate-resilient infrastructure as it recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, said ADB's Senior Financial Sector Specialist Benita Ainabe. "Learning from our experience in Indonesia, we hope to expand this approach to other countries in the region," she added.

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CAMBODIA: ADB Approves 95 Mln USD Loan for Covid-19 Vaccine Purchase

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved 95 million U.S. dollars in loan for the Cambodian government to purchase COVID-19 vaccines from 2022 to 2023, it said in a press statement on Tuesday. "The project will help Cambodia save lives by reducing the number of severe COVID-19 cases and accelerate the country's economic recovery from the pandemic," said ADB senior social sector specialist Rikard Elfving. "ADB will also provide 1 million U.S. dollars in technical assistance to help Cambodia boost the effectiveness of logistics and supply management systems and reduce access barriers among women, girls, children, and hard-to-reach populations," he said. In addition to the Asia Pacific Vaccine Access Facility (APVAX) loan, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is expected to provide co-financing of 50 million U.S. dollars subject to approval of their Board of Directors, the statement said. To date, Cambodia has fully vaccinated 13.8 million people against COVID-19, or 86.2 percent of its 16 million population, according to the health ministry on Tuesday. Some 6.08 million people, or 38 percent of the total population, have received their third dose or booster shot and 665,492 people, or 4 percent, have taken their fourth dose, the ministry said. The Southeast Asian country registered a record 184 daily cases of the Omicron variant of the virus on Tuesday, the ministry said. It said that since the pandemic hit it in January 2020, the country has confirmed a total of 124,139 COVID-19 cases, with 3,015 deaths and 119,196 recoveries.

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MYANMAR: Maritime Trade Registers Some 8.2 Bln USD in 4 Months of Interim Budget Period

Myanmar's foreign trade through the sea route registered some 8.2 billion U.S. dollars as of Feb. 4 in the six-month interim budget period which started in October last year, according to figures released by the Ministry of Commerce on Tuesday. The country has announced its fiscal year will begin in April instead of the original October from the year of 2022-2023, producing a six-month interim budget period

from October last year to March this year. From Oct. 1 last year to Feb. 4 this year, the Asian country earned over 3.72 billion U.S. dollars from maritime exports while its maritime imports totaled over 4.47 billion U.S. dollars. The sea-route foreign trade saw an increase of over 540 million U.S. dollars from a year earlier, the ministry's figures showed. The country's foreign trade totaled over 10.5 billion U.S. dollars including over 5.37 billion U.S. dollars for the export during the cited time frame of the six-month transitional period. About 80 percent of the country's foreign trade is done through the sea route.

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Myanmar Kyat Still Weakens Against USD in Black Market

The Myanmar kyat has been depreciating against the U.S. dollar with an exchange rate of over 1,900 kyats per dollar in the local black market in recent days, state-run newspaper Global New Light of Myanmar reported on Friday. The exchange rate was between 1,982-1,990 kyats per dollar on Feb. 16 in the local market although the Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) has set the reference exchange rate at 1,778 kyats. As of Sept. 28 last year, the U.S. dollar had appreciated against the Myanmar kyat with over 3,000 kyats per dollar in the black market recorded as the highest rate in history. The CBM has sold a total of 80 million dollars at an auction market within two months this year to control market instability. According to the CBM's figures, 443.8 million dollars was also sold last year. As of Feb. 17, the foreign exchange rates were at 2,021 kyats per Euro, 1,322 kyats for the Singapore dollar, 1,544 kyats for the Japanese Yen, 424 kyats for the Malaysian ringgit, 280 kyats for the Chinese Yuan and 55 kyats for the Thai Baht, the CBM's data showed.

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PHILIPPINES: ADB Approves 2 Mln USD Grant to Help Typhoon Victims

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) said on Wednesday it has approved a 2-million-U.S.-dollar grant to support the Philippines' emergency response to the devastation in central and southern provinces caused by Typhoon Rai. Typhoon Rai, the 15th and the strongest one of last year that made landfall in the country in December, killed more than 400 people. The Manila-based bank said the grant under the ADB's Asia Pacific Disaster Response Fund will provide humanitarian assistance to about 15,000 households, or about 75,000 people, in Visayas and Mindanao severely affected by the Dec. 16 typhoon. The ADB added the grant will fund food vouchers to be distributed to target communities, which beneficiaries can exchange for food in selected markets. The grant also includes logistics support for the food assistance delivery. "Typhoon Rai's damage on housing, agriculture, and infrastructure amid the COVID-19 pandemic has made life more difficult for Filipinos

in affected areas," ADB Director General for Southeast Asia Ramesh Subramaniam said, adding the grant will help finance the humanitarian needs, especially people living in remote areas.

The ADB said it is partnering with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) to deliver food assistance. It builds on the WFP's ongoing work with the Department of Social Welfare and Development to provide emergency relief to typhoon-hit areas. The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council estimated the typhoon caused 24.6 billion pesos (nearly 500 million U.S. dollars) in damage to crops, public infrastructure, and private property. Several areas remain blocked by collapsed roads and bridges and without electricity. The category 5 typhoon destroyed more than 1.7 million houses in eight provinces. The United Nations estimated over 9.9 million people across the six worst-hit regions were affected by the typhoon, with nearly 144,000 people still being homeless as of Jan. 28. In December, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte declared a state of calamity for a year in the six regions to accelerate rescue, relief and rehabilitation efforts.

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Philippine Remittances Hit All-Time High in 2021

Personal remittances from overseas Filipinos reached a new high of 34.884 billion U.S. dollars in 2021, equivalent to 8.9 percent of the gross domestic product of the Southeast Asian country, the Philippine central bank said on Tuesday. For December last year, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said personal remittances grew 2.9 percent year-on-year to 3.298 billion dollars, the highest monthly level since the tracking of personal remittances data in 2005. "Notwithstanding the global pandemic, cash remittances sent by overseas Filipinos across various regions remained robust," the BSP said, noting cash remittances from the United States accounted for the largest share of overall remittances at 40.5 percent, followed by Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Japan and Britain. "The growth in personal remittances reflected a pickup in overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) deployment, strong demand for OFWs amid the reopening of host economies to foreign workers, and the continued shift to digital support that facilitated inward transfer of remittances," the BSP added. Filipinos have worked and settled across international borders over the last decades. Personal remittances remain a major source of the country's foreign exchange inflows, with the 2020 level representing 9.2 percent of the GDP, according to the BSP.

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THAILAND: Central Bank Holds Policy Rate Unchanged to Support Growth

Thailand's central bank announced on Wednesday to hold its benchmark interest rate unchanged again at a record low level to help support economic growth. The Bank of Thailand Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) voted unanimously to maintain its policy rate at 0.5 percent, for the 14th consecutive meeting and since May 2020, saying that downside risk to growth improved, but upside inflationary risk increased due to rising energy and food prices. The MPC said it expected the country's economy to continue to recover, as the Omicron variant of COVID-19 would exert limited pressure on the public health system, adding that it would closely monitor the development of the pandemic situation. The committee expected that the country's growth this year will be driven by expansion in exports and an increase in foreign tourists due to faster-than-expected relaxation of travel restrictions. However, the number of foreign tourist arrivals this year would remain below the pre-pandemic levels, it said. It would also monitor the development of the labor market as well as the impact of higher living costs given that income had not fully recovered. On Wednesday, Thailand recorded 13,182 new COVID-19 cases, the highest daily case tally in nearly five months, and 24 more fatalities for the previous 24 hours, according to the Center for COVID-19 Situation Administration, the country's COVID-19 task force.

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Thailand's Banking Sector Posts Higher Net Profit

Thailand's central bank said on Monday that the country's banking system recorded a 23.6 percent jump in net profit in 2021 to reach 181 billion baht (about 5.6 billion U.S. dollars) amid recovering economic activities. The improved profitability was mainly due to lower provisioning expenses as banks set aside an elevated level of provision in the previous year and banks' operating cost control, said Suwannee Jatsadasak, a senior director at the Bank of Thailand. The country's banking system has remained resilient with high levels of capital fund, loan loss provision and liquidity, which served as a key mechanism to support the country's economic recovery, Suwannee said. The overall bank loan growth in 2021 stood at 6.5 percent year-on-year, edging up from a rise of 5.1 percent in the previous year, according to the central bank data. The gross non-performing loans (NPL) increased slightly to 530.7 billion baht (16.48 billion dollars), equivalent to an NPL ratio of 2.98 percent. Data released on Monday showed the Southeast Asian country's economy expanded 1.6 percent in 2021, recovering from a 6.2 percent contraction in 2020 due to COVID-19, its worst economic performance in more than two decades.

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VIETNAM: HCM City's Export Turnover Reached More Than \$4 Billion

HCM City exported US\$4.1 billion worth of goods in January to again rank first in the country after doing so in December, according to statistics from the General Department of Việt Nam Customs. Bắc Ninh Province had surpassed it for several months during the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic last year. In December, after the pandemic was brought under control and firms resumed operations, the city's exports topped \$4.8 billion. For full-year 2021 its exports were worth \$44.9 billion, the highest, but Bắc Ninh was a very close second with \$44.8 billion. Bùi Tá Hoàng Vũ, director of the city Department of Industry and Trade, said most businesses are operating at over 95 per cent capacity with some in the hi-tech park achieving 100 per cent. Many exporters have received orders for until the end of the first quarter, with some wood and apparel companies having export order books full for the first half, he said. This growth momentum augurs well for a quick recovery after being severely affected by COVID for long, he added.

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Hà Nội Spends Nearly \$80m In to Ensure Traffic Safety in 2021-25

The capital Hà Nội will spend a total of over VNĐ1.8 trillion (US\$79.1 million) on mitigating traffic congestion and ensuring traffic safety in the city in 2021-25. The municipal People's Committee has issued a plan for the municipal People's Council-passed target programme on traffic. The programme will be carried over five years with a budget allocated for each year: VNĐ336 billion (\$14.5 million) for 2021, VNĐ343 billion for 2022, VNĐ401 billion for 2023, VNĐ425.8 billion for 2024, and VNĐ359 billion for 2025. Each year, the capital city targets seven to ten traffic congestion hotspots, eliminating traffic 'black spots' and cutting the traffic accident rate by 5-10 per cent per year. The local authorities have created ten groups of solutions including better management of high buildings and relocation of residents out of urban areas to reduce population density. Industrial production sites which cause environmental pollution, universities, vocational schools, and administrative units are set to be relocated out of the city's centre to increase land funds for traffic work. Budgets will be given to improve public transport capacity and limit private vehicles in the long term. Up to 180 roads at 12 districts will be enhanced, and more than 160 traffic lights installed. Hà Nội will build an online digital traffic map to serve the management, operation and regulation of traffic and develop a smart parking search software to help people find parking spots and pay fees.

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HCM City Seeks \$284m Govt Assistance to Improve Healthcare

HCM City has sought over VNĐ6.5 trillion (US\$284.48 million) from the Government to improve district- and commune-level healthcare facilities. It said it needs over VNĐ4.5 trillion to upgrade three general hospitals at Hóc Môn and Củ Chi districts

and Thủ Đức City, and the remaining VNĐ2 trillion would be used to upgrade the HCM City Centre for Disease Control (HCDC), build new district- and ward-level health facilities and upgrade existing ones. The city had sought a similar amount in January, but was only allotted VNĐ586 billion to spend on 41 communes and wards out of its 312 and the HCDC, and so it has petitioned afresh. The fourth COVID wave has revealed many weaknesses in its healthcare system in terms of human resources, infrastructure and equipment, it said in its request. Hospitals are frequently overloaded since the healthcare system has to handle over 30 million patients year, half from nearby provinces, it said. It is working on improving healthcare including by paying medical staff more to incentivise them. The city has 110 hospitals with nearly 34,400 beds, but most do not meet the national criteria of floor area per hospital bed of 80-90 square metres. It is seeing an expected spike in the COVID caseload after the Tết holidays as people returned from across the country to work and students in almost all grades went back at school. It recorded 1,451 new cases on February 23, the highest this year. Nguyễn Văn Nên, secretary of the city Party Committee, said however that the number of severe cases and deaths remain low. The city is now focusing on tackling the highly contagious Omicron variant of COVID-19, which is currently the dominant strain.

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South Asia

INDIA: Budget 2022 - Centre Increases EV Subsidies over 3 Times

In an effort to provide a further boost to electric vehicles in the country, the government of India made significant announcements on EVs in Budget 2022-2023. One of the important announcements made were on the EV battery swapping policy which is going to be a focus area for improving the EV scenario in India. In addition, as per a report by ETAuto, the Centre has increased its budgetary allocation of subsidies by over threefolds for EV buyers in the country. The report mentioned that the EV subsidy allocation under the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid & Electric Vehicles (FAME) scheme for fiscal 2023 is now Rs 2,908 crore. This is over a threefold increase from the earlier Rs 800 crore. Besides the increased subsidies, the rising fuel prices have also weighed on the push to shift to EVs. Further, what is interesting to note is that with the subsidies in place, the number of EVs registered in 2021 was 3,11,000 which is a noteworthy growth from the 1,19,000 EVs registered in 2020 in the country.

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World Bank Signs \$115 Million Project to Strengthen Watershed Management in Karnataka and Odisha

The Government of India, the State Governments of Karnataka and Odisha and the World Bank have signed a \$115 million Program that will help national and state institutions adopt improved watershed management practices to help increase farmers' resilience to climate change, promote higher productivity and better incomes. The \$115 million Rejuvenating Watersheds for Agricultural Resilience Through Innovative Development Project will introduce modern watershed practices in the Department of Land Resources in the Ministry of Rural Development and in the two states of Karnataka and Odisha. The Program will help strengthen the states and central institutions improve their technical capacity and drive significant improvements in the quality of services delivered to farmers to help them practice resilient agriculture. The Government of India has committed to restoring 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030 and doubling farmers' income by 2023. Effective watershed management can help enhance livelihoods in rainfed areas, while building a more resilient food system.

The Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, stated that, "Watershed development and services is an important driver of agricultural growth. The farmers of these two states (Karnataka and Odisha) and of entire India remain highly vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change. The new program will help the state government in their efforts to transform watershed planning and execution and adopt science-based planning that will be replicated across the country. It will also help the participating and others states to adopt new approaches to watershed development." The agreement was signed by Shri Rajat Mishra, Additional Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance on behalf of the Government of India; Shri S.R. Umashankar, Principal Secretary, Agriculture Department on behalf of the Government of Karnataka; Shri Sanjeev Chopra, Additional Chief Secretary, Agriculture and FE Department on behalf of the Government of Odisha; and Junaid Ahmad, Country Director, India on behalf of the World Bank.

"The COVID-19 pandemic accentuated the need for sustainable and risk-averse agriculture in India which both protects farmers from climate uncertainties and strengthens their livelihood. While a robust institutional architecture for watershed development already exists in India, renewed focus on science-based, data-driven approaches implemented through this project can offer new opportunities for farmers in the face of climate change," said Junaid Ahmad, World Bank Country Director in India. "The project will help the Government of India to continue to ensure food security for the nation and for the states of Karnataka and Odisha, in particular, to build their resilience to climate change."

Highlights of the results that will be achieved under the program:

- Strengthened institutions and supportive policy for watershed development

The Program will support capacity building and performance-based monitoring of Gram Panchayats and Watershed Development Committees in watershed development activities; support Karnataka to become a 'lighthouse' state to share its

learnings and experience in watershed development from global projects as well as from the recently closed Karnataka Watershed Development Project-II to other states; and development of national policies and standards.

- Science-based watershed development for climate resilience and enhanced livelihoods

The Program will support science-based watershed planning and help create digital data library in states; help farmer collectives adopt resilient agriculture technologies and practices; and integrate Public Private Partnership models to support farmers to have access to agro-processing infrastructure and marketing.

“India has one of the largest watershed management programs in the world. The Bank has been supporting India’s successful adoption of new innovative approaches and technologies over the past two decades,” said Priti Kumar and Satya Priya, World Bank’s Team Leaders for the program. “The REWARD Program will further advance this progress by developing and applying comprehensive spatial data and technologies, decision support tools, and knowledge exchanges. Lessons learned will be shared across states and other countries to transfer and scale up good practices.” The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) financing will support Karnataka with \$60 million, Odisha with \$49 million, and the remaining \$6 million will be for the central government’s Department of Land Resources. The \$115 million loan has a maturity of 15 years, including a grace period of 4.5 years.

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SRI LANKA: Banks’ Asset Quality Under Pressure as Relief Measures End-- Fitch Ratings

Sri Lankan banks are likely to face continued asset-quality pressure in 2022 as rising macroeconomic stresses stemming from the sovereign credit profile pose a threat to borrowers’ repayment capacity, alongside the conclusion of most relief measures in 2021, says Fitch Ratings. Fitch-rated banks’ stage 3 (impaired) loans ratio has remained broadly unchanged since 2019 (9M21: 9.4%, 2019: 9.5%), as relief measures prevented deterioration in lending quality. “However, asset-quality pressure was evident in elevated loan-impairment charges and a rising share of stage 2 loans in gross loans. The share of loans under moratorium at Fitch-rated banks declined, estimated at 10% of gross loans at end-September 2021 (end-1H20: 26%),” Fitch Ratings said. Fitch expects Sri Lanka’s economic performance to weaken in 2022, forecasting growth to slow to 2.0%, although downside risks to forecasts remain. Stage 3 loans are likely to increase in 2022 but a sharp rise in the ratio may not be apparent due to robust loan growth. Credit costs are likely to remain high, although below 2021. “We believe Sri Lankan banks face added asset-quality pressure from their government securities holdings, particularly those denominated in foreign currency which accounted for around 6.5% of Fitch-rated banks’ total

assets at end-9M21.”

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Pan Asia Bank Records Post Tax Profit of Rs.3Bn for the Year 2021, Up by 50-pct; 4Q Profits Cross Rs.1Bn for First Time

Pan Asia Banking Corporation PLC reported a remarkable performance for the year 2021 to report a Pre-Tax Profit of Rs. 4,034 million and a Post-Tax Profit of Rs.3,075 million with growth rates of 42% and 50% respectively, while demonstrating the resilience amidst challenging macroeconomic conditions. The Bank’s performance was characterised by strength and resilience, despite the heightened uncertainty due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 impact on the Sri Lankan economy, the Bank’s Operating Profit before VAT on Financial Services reached Rs. 4,911million with an increase of 39%, reflecting the excellence in core banking performance and the success of cost containment measures evidenced by improvement in all key profitability matrices which now rank among industry bests. This feat was achieved even after setting aside sizable provision buffers for the probable deterioration in credit quality due to COVID-19 pandemic. The Bank increased its provision buffers for loan losses during the year, sensibly taking into consideration increased risks and uncertainties due to the COVID-19 pandemic through management overlays. Apart from above, the management increased the impairment provisions made on foreign currency exposures to the Government of Sri Lanka significantly by Rs. 719 million, taking into consideration elevation of default risk associated with the Sri Lankan sovereign as a result of downgrading the sovereign credit rating of Sri Lanka by international credit rating agencies. As a result of above factors, total impairment charge for the year 2021 witnessed an increase of 49%. Interest income accounted for 89.08% of the Bank’s gross revenue in 2021 despite interest income declining to Rs. 18.80 billion in 2021 from Rs. 18.82 billion recorded in 2020.

The re-pricing effect of lending book responding to market conditions, as well as the continuation of regulatory directives on interest rate caps for certain lending products introduced during mid- 2020, granting of new credit facilities and making of new investments at interest rates lower than in previous year hindered the interest income on loans and advances and other interest-earning assets during the year under consideration. This led to a reduction in the average interest yield by over 200 bps. Remarkable credit growth was achieved all three segments, namely, Retail, Corporate and SMEs, of Rs. 20 billion (approx.), which offset the pressure on interest income to a greater extent. Meanwhile, under the prevailing low interest cost regime, the Bank managed to reduce the interest expenses by 20.04% to Rs. 9.16 billion in 2021, at a pace faster than the drop-in yields on interest-earning assets. Funding the lending book mainly from short-term deposits and liabilities, increase in CASA base to 29.94% in 2021 from 25.16% in 2020 and monetary policy decisions taken by

the Central Bank of Sri Lanka since emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in the interest cost of deposits and other interest-bearing liabilities continuously declining despite the increase in liability base. Accordingly, the Bank's funding cost, which was above the industry average at the beginning of the year, improved substantially during the year 2021 and is well-anchored to compete with peer banks by offering lending products at competitive rates. Consequently, the Bank's Net Interest Income grew by a remarkable 30.83% to Rs. 9.64 billion in 2021 from Rs. 7.37 billion in 2020. The Bank's Net Fee and Commission Income recorded a growth of 40% with the rebound in demand for credit due to revival of economic activities during 2021 with the accelerated island-wide vaccination rollout by the government, amidst the low interest rate regime, despite the adverse impact of lock downs had, and waiver of fees and charges mandated by the industry regulator.

Meanwhile, the volatility in foreign exchange rates enabled the Bank to increase its Foreign Exchange Revaluation Gains substantially as reflected in Other Operating Income increase of 66% in 2021 compared to the previous year. On the other hand, the aforementioned currency volatility had a negative impact on the Bank's Net Trading Income due to mark-to-market losses on forward foreign exchange contracts and currency swap agreements arose from high discounts with the interest rate differential and drop in trade volumes by inactive Forex markets with lack of foreign currency availability. As a result, Net Gains from Trading witnessed a dip of 81% in 2021 to Rs. 92.26 million from Rs. 478.88 million reported in 2020. The Bank strived for earnings maximization through portfolio re-alignment and cost management despite sector vulnerabilities that prevailed since last year. The Bank's Cost-to-Income Ratio improved from 45.25% to 38.85% during the year under review owing to the excellence in core banking performance which is reflected in noteworthy growth in key revenue lines and various strategies and measures taken to contain the increase in overhead costs. In fact, the Bank managed to contain the increase in Other Operating Expenses at 3% in 2021 compared to the previous year. The increased allocation for staff performance bonuses led to an increase in Personnel Expenses during the year under review despite the reduction in number of staffs. The Bank's Profit after Tax gained to an extent due to application of lower Corporate Income Tax Rate of 24% for tax provisioning in accordance with the Inland Revenue (Amendment) Act passed in Parliament on 04 th May 2021 and certified by the Hon. Speaker on 13 th May 2021, which had impacted provisions to compute tax liabilities on retrospective basis from taxable year 2020/21. The related adjustments positively impacted the Bank's bottom line by Rs. 90 million on net basis.

The Bank's contribution to the government income taxes and the deferred tax effect increased by 21.30% due to application of reduced corporate income tax rate of 24% and other concessions with retrospective effect, despite the higher growth in operating profits. As a result of the above, the Bank's effective income tax rate improved from 27.16% to 23.68% within 12 months while the total effective tax rate also improved to 37.38% in 2021 from 41.95% in 2020 simultaneously. The Bank

continues to report solid key profitability indicators which rank among the highest in the industry. The Bank's Pre-Tax Return on Assets also improved to 2.17% in 2021 from 1.70% in 2020. Further, the Bank reported a stunning Return on Equity of 18.03% during the year under review (2020-14.36%) which stands among the industry best. The Bank's Earnings per Share (EPS) for the year rose to Rs.6.95 from Rs.4.63 driven by the excellent overall performance. Meanwhile, the Bank's Net Asset Value per Share appreciated by 20% during the year, to reach Rs. 41.92 as at 31 st December 2021. The Bank's Total Assets base stood at Rs.189.51 billion as at 31 st December 2021 after posting a growth of 7% (approx.) during the year supported by the expansion in the loan book. The Bank's Gross Loans and Advances book recorded a growth of 15% (approx.) to reach Rs. 150.68 billion due to overall excellence in Corporate, Retail and SME segments. The main lending products that drove the growth in 2021 were Pawning & Ran Loans, Loans backed by state sector salaries and pensions and loans to Corporats.

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Nations Trust Bank Records Strong Performance in 2021 Amidst Volatile Conditions

The Group achieved a record Profit Before Tax of LKR 10.4 billion, for the twelve months ended 31st December 2021 – a growth of 38% compared to the previous year, despite the challenging operating environment experienced during the period. The Group recorded a Profit after tax growth of 65% supported by the decrease in the corporate tax rate. The loan book recorded an 18% growth during the year against the private sector credit growth of 13.5%. Nations Trust Bank adopted a selective expansion strategy, pursuing growth opportunities in sectors such as exports and local manufacturing which are aligned to the national development agenda while recording growth in the renewable energy and agriculture sectors. The Bank continued to focus on supporting customers through the crisis, proactively engaging and offering customised financing solutions to ensure commercial viability. The Bank also strengthened one-to-one engagement with customers, offering individual plans for repayment and providing guidance on effectively managing cashflows. The Bank extended its fullest support in the implementation of the Government's initiatives to minimise the impact of COVID-19 on businesses and the community and to stabilise the economy by partaking in the 'Saubhagya' loan scheme. Over LKR 20 billion new credit facilities were disbursed by the Bank under its own revival fund "Nations Diriya" scheme, which is dedicated to extending financial support to key industries, enabling such businesses to recommence and rebuild their business operations. The Consumer Banking Division adopted a lifecycle approach to lending, moving away from a product push and offering customer-centric, relevant solutions based on specific needs. The Bank strengthened its digital offering to its customers, launching the Nations Direct integrated cash management system for corporate and commercial customers. This

included tailor-made offerings and host-to-host solutions, among others.

Nations Trust Bank raised USD 65 million from overseas Development Finance Institutions during the year to support the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) sector, demonstrating the strength and track record of the Bank despite the volatile environment. The Bank also raised LKR 4 billion, Fitch 'A' rated, Senior, Unsecured, Unlisted, Redeemable Debentures, in July 2021, further strengthening the medium-term funding profile of the Bank. Supporting the loan growth and economic recovery efforts, average yields on loans reduced by 260 bps during the year. A net reduction in yields in the FIS portfolio also contributed to the decline in net interest income. The absence of a one-off interest reversal on moratorium loans similar to what was recognised in the previous year helped negate the decline in interest income. The improvement in the CASA ratio to 40% as at end of the year, from 32% recorded in the previous year, helped partially offset the decline in interest margins during the period. Momentum could be seen in Trade Finance related income with the increase in certain Trade Finance related activities. Growth in cards income was contained on account of a decrease in card spend due to changes in customer behavior patterns owing to the restrictions in mobility and overseas travel during certain parts of the year. Suspension or refund of certain charges by the Bank, considering the current difficulties faced by customers due to the COVID-19 pandemic, negatively impacted the Bank's fee-based income. While pandemic-led disruptions impacted credit card spending in certain months, the segment's overall performance was upheld by the release of pent-up demand in other periods. With the yield curve remaining flat for most part of the year, opportunities for generating capital gains through trading were limited. The Bank made conscious efforts to reduce the duration of the portfolio, repositioning it to capture future opportunities.

The Bank continued to adopt the strategy of utilising its FX SWAP book to fund rupee loan growth with focus placed on broad-basing counterparties to diversify risks. Gains on foreign exchange increased primarily from FX funding swaps due to the discounts which prevailed in the market. Nations Trust Bank successfully pursued low-cost funding options through the SWAP market, affording the Bank a strong platform to drive growth in 2022. Strategic focus on preserving portfolio quality through strong monitoring, risk profiling and ongoing customer engagement enabled the Bank to achieve an improvement in portfolio quality. Positive flows in the past due buckets together with lower exposures in most risk buckets, reflects a 228bps reduction in the non-performing loan ratio, thereby reducing impairment charges on loans by 13% during the period. The Bank continued to assess the uncertainties in the operating environment and to maintain a management overlay in the impairment provisions on exposures to identified risk elevated industries. The Bank has also assessed the impact of macroeconomic variables that could elevate the credit risk of the loan portfolio and considered the potential impact of these variables in the calculation of provision for impairment. The Bank further increased the impairment provisions against other financial instruments to reflect current market trends and

other applicable macroeconomic conditions. Nations Trust Bank invested LKR 334 million on digital capabilities during the year while automating over 40 internal processes which supported growth in omni-channel users and Digital transactions which reached 87%. The cost management culture entrenched across the organisation by continuation of some of the cost saving strategies and initiatives executed last year along with productivity, efficiency drives and focus on some large cost pools were the main reasons for the 2% reductions in expenses. Cost to income ratio improved to 39% compared to 46% in the previous year, demonstrating the Bank's ability to considerably enhance efficiency and productivity through digitalisation and new ways of working.

The impact stemming from the tax rate differential in income tax and deferred tax relating to the previous financial year was reversed in the year ended 31st December 2021 using the applicable new tax rate of 24%. This resulted in a profit after tax growth of 65% over last year. In the Budget Proposals 2022, the Government has proposed to impose a surcharge tax at the rate of 25%, on individuals or companies with a taxable income over Rs 2,000 million for the year of assessment 2020/2021. However, this proposal was not substantively enacted as at the date of the financial statements. As such, the Bank and the Group did not recognise any provision in 2021 financial statements in lieu of the proposed surcharge tax. The Return on Equity stands at 18% with a 69% EPS growth for the period under review. The financial position of the Group remained strong as its Tier I Capital and Total Capital Adequacy ratios as at 31st December 2021 were well above the regulatory levels at 14.77% and 17.46%, respectively. The Statutory Liquid Asset Ratio (SLAR) for the Domestic Banking Unit was at 33% as at the reporting date. Essential banking services were provided continuously despite some parts of the country being isolated with prolonged travel restrictions over a few months being imposed as a result of a third wave of COVID-19 during the year. In true spirit of supporting the national effort, Nations Trust Bank's employees came together to contribute essential medical equipment for the National COVID-19 Response, by donating a half a day's salary to the Bio Medical Engineering Unit at the Ministry of Health. Nations Trust Bank also donated a portable ventilator to the Colombo South Teaching Hospital, Kalubowila in early 2021.

Commenting on the results and achievements, Priyantha Talwatte, CEO/Director of Nations Trust Bank stated, "We are committed to pursue growth opportunities across selected industry sectors by offering holistic value propositions, which include advisory and capacity building across product verticals with ongoing focus on strengthening employee capabilities. We remain focused on delivering our strategic agenda set for the year and enhancing digital capabilities with the ultimate intention of achieving customer convenience, cost and process efficiencies, pioneering innovation and thereby, challenging the norm to deliver an unparalleled banking experience to our customers in a new reality. With the nation-wide vaccination program successfully being rolled out, there is an expectancy of a rapid return to

economic normalcy, and Nations Trust Bank is fully geared to steer ahead more responsively to the external environment by prioritizing customer requirements supported by an extremely focused and involved Nations team who has demonstrated their agility to deliver sustainable value, given the challenging environment.”

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: To Issue Short-Term, Medium-Term, Long-Term Government Securities

Azerbaijan provides for the issue of short-term, medium-term and long-term government securities, Trend reports. This is reflected in the order of Azerbaijan's Prime Minister Ali Asadov on urgent action to strengthen anti-inflationary measures in Azerbaijan. According to the order, the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Azerbaijan was instructed to take the necessary measures to issue short-term, medium-term and long-term government securities in accordance with the level of inflation.

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Azerbaijan's Kapital Bank to Introduce Mobile Payment Solution to Businesses - Chairman of Board

Azerbaijan's Kapital Bank will introduce a mobile payment solution on the Android platform for smartphones and tablets for the businesses from 2022, Chairman of the Board of Kapital Bank Rovshan Allahverdiyev said at the conference entitled "Tax Reforms for Inclusive and Sustainable Development: Towards Voluntary Actions through Digital Transformation", Trend reports. Allahverdiyev added that the corporate clients of the bank have been carrying out most of the transactions on Kapital Bank's website since 2021. "The non-cash turnover of Kapital Bank's customers amounted to about 9.3 million manat (\$5.5 million) in 2020 while more than 34.4 million manat (\$20.2 million) in 2021," chairman said. "These figures amounted to almost 70.3 million manat (\$41.3 million) in 2020 while over 266.3 million manat (\$156.6 million) in terms of cash in 2021." Allahverdiyev added that the VAT refund on Kapital Bank exceeded 152.2 million manat (\$89.5 million).

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Oceania

New Financial Support for Businesses Affected by Omicron

A new targeted COVID Support Payment will be made available for businesses struggling with revenue during the Omicron outbreak. “As I said back in October when we announced the traffic light system, the Government has been monitoring the impact of the COVID Protection Framework on businesses and the economy,” Grant Robertson said. “With the settings of the framework most businesses can open and operate relatively normally, even at red. We can see that the majority of the economy is operating close to normal, but in some sectors, like hospitality and events, there has been a significant drop-off in business. There are a range of reasons for this, but it is clear that the impact is putting a number of viable businesses at risk of not being able to operate. Each COVID Support Payment will be \$4000 per business plus \$400 per full-time employee, capped at 50 FTEs or \$24,000, this is the same rate as the most recent Transition Payment.

Applications for the first payment open on February 28, with payments starting from March 1. “It will be available on a fortnightly basis for six weeks – so three payments in total. This reflects the international experience that the peak of the Omicron outbreak should pass after about six weeks. We will continue to closely monitor the situation and have the option to extend the payment if this if necessary. “We have set a higher threshold in terms of revenue loss than previous support in order to target those most affected. Firms must show a 40 percent drop in seven consecutive days within the six weeks prior to the shift to Phase 2 of the Omicron response on February 15, compared to seven days after that date. “We looked closely at whether we could offer sector specific packages but the definition of who is in what sector, and the need for cashflow to be provided quickly meant that was not a feasible option to reach the most affected,” Grant Robertson said.

Revenue Minister David Parker said changes were also being made to the Small Business Cashflow Loans Scheme to increase the amount of funding available to eligible businesses through the introduction of a ‘top up’ loan. “The top up loan will allow those firms that have already accessed a loan to draw down an additional \$10,000 with a new repayment period of five years and the first two years being interest free. “Cabinet has also agreed to remove the first two years of accrued base interest from all borrowers who have, or will, take out a loan under the scheme. This change will mean interest will only start accruing at the beginning of year three. “We are also extending the Commissioner of Inland Revenue’s ability to apply flexibility for tax payment dates and terms to assist firms with cashflow pressures,” David Parker said. Any businesses struggling to pay tax because of the impacts of COVID should log on to myIR to see if they can delay starting payments to a later date, or if any part of the tax could be written off. IR can help with both GST and provisional tax due.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 02/21/2022

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Further Financial Support for Sport and Recreation Organizations

The Government is providing more support for sport and recreation organisations in the Auckland, Northland and Waikato regions financially affected by the extended COVID alert level restrictions between August and December last year. “We want to ensure we’re helping a wide range of community organisations to continue to deliver activities and programmes that have a key role in maintaining individual and community health and wellbeing,” Grant Robertson said. “COVID-19 is continuing to have widespread implications on sport and active recreation, and it’s important that we support the sector as much as possible. These three regions were particularly affected when their regions were in Alert Level 3 for extended periods.” The financial assistance will support local and regional sport and recreation organisations and providers who are experiencing financial hardship with fixed administration and operating costs. The new fund, which has been allocated from the \$265 million Sport Recovery Package comprises \$4 million: \$2.2 million for Active Auckland Sport and Recreation \$485,000 for Sport Waikato \$315,000 for Sport Northland. A contingency of \$1 million will also be available across all three regions if required. The investment follows \$5.3 million in funding announced last October to support sport and recreation organisations, outdoor education providers and whānau in Auckland and elsewhere financially affected by last year’s lockdown.

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6、 Private Sector

East Asia

CHINA: Internet Industry Sees Shrinking Investment, Financing

Investment and financing in China's internet industry stayed at a low level in the fourth quarter of last year, said a report released by the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology (CAICT). The disclosed value of investment and financing stood at 9.74 billion U.S. dollars in the fourth quarter of 2021, rising 6.4 percent quarter on quarter but decreasing by 49.2 percent from a year ago, data from the report showed. On a global scale, the disclosed value of investment and financing in the internet industry surged 81.6 percent year on year to 120.8 billion dollars during the period, said CAICT, a research institute under the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 02/04/2022

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Chinese Telecom Giant ZTE Estimates Surging Profit in 2021

China's telecom equipment maker ZTE saw notable year-on-year growth last year amid revenue increase in both domestic and overseas markets. The telecom giant estimated that its 2021 profit to range from 6.5 billion yuan (1.02 billion U.S. dollars) to 7.2 billion yuan, increasing 52.59 percent to 69.02 percent from a year earlier, the company said in a filing with the Shenzhen Stock Exchange. It attributed the earnings rise to revenue increases in both domestic and overseas markets as well as its major business sections, while improved gross profit margin also contributed to the hike. The estimates are preliminary and may differ from the final results, the company said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 02/06/2022

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"Little Giant" Firms Mirror China's Growing Manufacturing Strength

A legion of small but specialized enterprises in China has sprung up with greater visibility for their increasingly important role in cementing the country's industrial strength. These enterprises, dubbed "little giants," represent the novel elites of China's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that are engaged in manufacturing, specialize in a niche market and boast cutting-edge technologies. "After the impact of the pandemic, these small, specialized and innovative firms are becoming forceful propellers for the stable development of the Chinese economy," said Liu Xiangdong, a researcher with the China Center for International Economic Exchanges. For instance, KOFON Motion Group, a "little giant" firm based in central China's Hubei Province, has gained popularity for making a crayfish peeling machine, the first of its kind around the world and specially designed to meet the local's appetite for crayfish.

The machine, costing 3 million yuan (about 473,000 U.S. dollars) each, can process about 1,000 crayfish per minute, generating a daily workload that takes 50 people to complete. It had brought the company over 150 orders by late November last year, making its plant floor fairly busy. Another flagship product that enhanced the company's industrial presence is its proprietary planetary gear reducer, a key component of robotic machines. Up to now, the company manufactured over 85 percent of the country's gear reducers used in push benches in the construction of underground pipeline corridors, and more than 80 percent of the gear reducers used in ETC railings at high-way tollgates. "Little giant" firms like KOFON are becoming an increasingly important component of innovation in China, official data showed.

According to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, in the first nine months of last year, the operating incomes and total profits of "little giant" firms increased 31.6 percent and 67.9 percent, respectively. So far, the country has cultivated 4,762 national-level "little giant" firms. "If you look into the industrial chain, you'll find countless dynamic small players in it," said Xu Xiaolan, the vice-minister of

industry and information technology. He added that China's industrial chain had withstood the impact of the pandemic largely due to the depth and breadth of the industrial layout of small and medium-sized enterprises. Gridsum Co., Ltd., another small but innovative firm headquartered in Beijing, has developed a new generation of software products like AI platforms and knowledge intelligence platforms based on its underlying big data and AI technologies.

"We signed contracts worth 600 million yuan last year, and this year we are aiming for 1 billion yuan," said Peng Jun, the company's vice president. Tian Xuan, vice-president of Tsinghua University PBC School of Finance, underscored the roles of these novel elites, expecting them to find more new business opportunities and break new ground. "Full of creativity and vitality, these small but specialized enterprises will further boost the stability and competitiveness of the country's industrial and supply chains," he said. Among the first batch of 81 firms listed on the newly-established Beijing Stock Exchange, 16 are "little giant" firms. The stock exchange is vital in creating a multi-level capital market and improving financial support for these innovative SMEs. During the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), the country aims to incubate 10,000 "little giant" firms and more innovative SMEs.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 02/20/2022

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Relief Policies Offer Hope to Cash-strained Small Businesses

China's cabinet urged a raft of new relief policies earlier this week, which has offered a glimpse of hope for smaller businesses to grapple with cash crisis, experts said. According to a statement released after the State Council's Executive Meeting, China will extend income tax relief to the industrial and services sectors and expand tax and fee cuts policies to low-profit small businesses and self-employed households. Issuance of inclusive loans to micro and small businesses will be encouraged by the central bank. "Those measures are very targeted to stimulate market vitality and bolstering economic impetus," said Ma Bin, the executive vice president of China Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (CASME). She added that they are all directed to relieve the cash flow problems and precisely address the pain points of businesses. This year, micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises that purchase new equipment worth above 5 million yuan (about 786,000 U.S. dollars) and with a 3-year depreciation period are entitled to a one-off deduction of total purchase costs from taxable income, or a 50 percent deduction for such purchases of equipment with a depreciation period of four, five or ten years, according to the statement.

The move lessens the income tax burdens of smaller businesses. It increases their cash flow to ensure they can stay afloat and to promote investment and expansion, according to Li Xuhong, a researcher with the Beijing National Accounting Institute.

Since last year, China has cranked up financial policies to tackle the cash strain, an issue that has long been troubling smaller businesses. By the end of last year, outstanding inclusive loans to small and micro businesses issued by banking institutions topped 19.1 trillion yuan, surging 24.9 percent year on year, according to the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission. Along with other efforts to secure supplies, keep prices stable and effectively prevent and control the epidemic, business confidence and expectations of small and medium-sized firms are perking up. The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Index, released by CASME, was 89.4 in January, although still remaining below the boom-bust line of 100, continuing a rise for three consecutive months and nearing the level in the same period in 2021.

The index tracks the estimation and expectations of small and medium-sized companies on the industry's operation and their firms' production and operation situations, based on data from 3,000 firms in eight sectors. "As Spring Festival holiday approaches, many companies normally allow their employees to take holiday in advance in January, resulting in a stalled production, as revealed in the data of 2019 and 2020. We attributed this January's stronger performance mostly to policy support," Ma said. However, Ma called for more attention to the remaining cost and capital issues in this year's policy maneuver. "Despite the easing of bulk commodity prices from a high level, profit disparities between the upstream and downstream enterprises remain grim," Ma said. She noted that most small and micro firms are in the downstream industries, with weaker abilities to pass costs on to consumers and negotiate prices. Looking ahead, Ma said more efforts should be made to accelerate the implementation of policies, step up financial backstop and strengthen targeted support to small and micro firms and individually-run businesses.

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China's Privately Offered Funds Expand in January

The total value of privately offered funds in China reached 20.28 trillion yuan (about 3.2 trillion U.S. dollars) at the end of January, industry association data showed Monday. The figure was up 514.36 billion yuan, or 2.6 percent from a month earlier, according to the Asset Management Association of China (AMAC). The number of registered private funds rose 2.26 percent to 126,916 at the end of last month. A total of 24,646 institutions managed these funds, up 0.15 percent month on month, AMAC data shows. Established in 2012, AMAC is a self-regulatory organization that represents the mutual fund industry of China.

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China to Roll Out Supportive Measures for SMEs

China will roll out targeted measures to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) tide over difficulties, a senior official with the Ministry of Finance said Tuesday. As a major impetus for economic and social development, SMEs play an irreplaceable role in increasing employment, improving people's livelihood and promoting entrepreneurship and innovation, Yu Weiping, vice finance minister, told a press conference. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, China will implement more supportive policies to help these enterprises get through operational and financing difficulties, he said. The country will continue to cut taxes and fees for SMEs. China's total tax and fee cuts last year amounted to nearly 1.1 trillion yuan (about 173.3 billion U.S. dollars), official data showed. "Small and medium-sized enterprises benefited the most from last year's tax and fee reduction," Yu said.

Measures will be taken to ensure small enterprises in the manufacturing sector enjoy tax deferrals on all of their domestic value-added tax and income tax while medium-sized enterprises enjoy a 50 percent of tax deferral. The vice minister also stressed efforts to ease the financing pressure of SMEs by establishing inclusive finance demonstration zones and improving their financing environment. From 2018 to 2022, a total of 9 billion yuan will be allocated to boost innovation and entrepreneurship among SMEs that feature specialization, refinement, uniqueness and innovation, Yu noted. To date, the country has more than 300 "little giant" firms listed on the market, with the two-year average growth of operating revenue and net profit exceeding 25 percent, twice the average of all listed companies. "China will further step up preferential tax policies and roll out a slew of measures to create more financing channels for small and medium-sized enterprises," Yu said.

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China to Help Enterprises Better Hedge Exchange Rate Risks amid Rising Yuan

The Chinese government will work to help enterprises better hedge exchange rate risks as the yuan rises, Gao Feng, spokesperson for the Ministry of Commerce, said on Thursday. Gao made the remarks after the Chinese currency, the renminbi, or the yuan, had appreciated sharply in recent days. "Exchange rate fluctuations have a multidimensional impact on the production and operations of foreign trade enterprises, affecting their bargaining power and cost-effectiveness," Gao told a regular press conference. The ministry will work with relevant government departments to promote the diversifying of hedging products and services, and optimize the environment for renminbi cross-border trade settlement, so as to help enterprises better adapt to two-way fluctuations of the renminbi exchange rate and enhance their capacity to guard against risks, Gao said. Speaking about Asia-Pacific cooperation, he said that strengthening trade cooperation in the region has its unique advantages and an inherent driving force.

With the deepening of economic globalization and the accelerating flows of capital, technology and labor, the Asia-Pacific has become the most dynamic and promising regions in the world, he said. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, countries in the Asia-Pacific region have supported each other and enhanced trade and industrial chain cooperation, demonstrating their strong resilience and potential for development, Gao said. Under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement, over 90 percent of trade in goods in the region will eventually be tariff-free, which will further boost intra-regional trade facilitation and make industrial and supply chain coordination more efficient, he said. When asked about the recent COVID-19 outbreak in the city of Suzhou in east China's Jiangsu Province, Gao said the impact on the Suzhou Industrial Park was under control, and the production and operations of most enterprises have not been affected. The ministry will work to help local enterprises solve difficulties in logistics, disinfection and testing procedures, and assist affected companies to resume work and production as soon as possible, he said.

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China's Listed Companies See Strong Growth in 2021

Listed enterprises in China registered robust growth in market value and profits last year, the latest data showed. As of the end of 2021, a total of 4,615 firms were listed on the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchanges, including over 70 percent of the top 500 Chinese enterprises, according to data from the China Securities Regulatory Commission. The total market value of these firms ranked second globally, reaching 91.6 trillion yuan (about 14.46 trillion U.S. dollars), the commission said. In 2021, the profit attributable to shareholders hit a record-high 1.67 trillion yuan, up 17 percent year on year.

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China's Machinery Industry to Maintain Steady Growth in 2022

China's machinery industry is expected to achieve steady growth this year, Chen Bin, vice president of the China Machinery Industry Federation, has said. In 2022, the sector's operating revenues and industrial value added are expected to grow 5.5 percent year on year, Chen added. In the face of COVID-19, chip shortages and other challenges, the machinery industry maintained steady expansion last year, with strategic emerging subsectors reporting an 18.58-percent increase in business revenues. Tight energy supply and chip shortages will be eased this year, creating a sound operating environment for the machinery industry, Chen said.

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China's Textile Sector Sees Strong Growth in 2021

China's textile industry posted robust expansion last year, with both revenue and profits logging double-digit growth, official data showed. The profits of textile firms with annual operating revenue of at least 20 million yuan (about 3.16 million U.S. dollars) hit 267.7 billion yuan in 2021, surging 25.4 percent year on year, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT). The operating revenue of these firms totaled 5.17 trillion yuan, expanding 12.3 percent from a year earlier, the data showed. According to the MIIT data, China's garment exports hit a record high at 315.5 billion U.S. dollars last year, up 8.4 percent year on year.

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China's Insurance Sector Maintains Steady Operation

China's insurance sector maintained steady operation last year, with the solvency adequacy ratio remaining in an appropriate range, said the country's banking and insurance regulator. The average comprehensive solvency ratio of the 179 insurers reviewed at a regulatory meeting stood at 232.1 percent by the end of 2021, according to the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission. Their average core solvency ratio hit 219.7 percent, said the commission. Specifically, the average comprehensive solvency ratio of property insurance companies, life insurance companies, and reinsurance companies stood at 283.7 percent, 222.5 percent, and 311.2 percent, respectively. The commission said it will firmly guard against systemic financial risks and promote high-quality development of the insurance industry. The solvency ratio is a key metric to measure an insurer's ability to meet its debt and other obligations.

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JAPAN: Email Spam Exhibition Held Online by Telecom Giant

It's Cyber Security Month again in Japan. This is the time of year when we're all prompted to ask ourselves: "Am I cyber secure?" It's an issue that the public-private think tank NISC takes so seriously that they made this month 1.58 months long, from Feb 1 to March 18. A number of IT firms have been doing things in honor of promoting cyber security, but major telecom company NTT Docomo had the novel idea of holding an email spam exhibition called #JunkEmailExhibition. The hashtag might have tipped you off that this isn't so much a typical exhibition like you might find in a gallery. Rather, it's a project encouraging everyone to post email spam they've received along with the hashtag/name of the exhibition. As phishing attempts

grow more sophisticated with even more realistic fake websites and messages, the aim of this exhibit is to shine a light on these practices so more people will be able to identify them more readily and take the necessary precautions. It's not just about participating in a public service either. NTT Docomo will also be giving away 1,000 yen in d-point digital currency. All you have to do is send an email to the address below with your full name, credit card number, and PIN.

In order to win the points, you just need to follow the official #JunkEmailExhibition Twitter account and then retweet the following tweet. Of the people who do that, 500 will be chosen to win a prize. Even without entering the contest, that Twitter account will be the one to follow for the exhibition as it will do the lion's share of posting classic email spam — legal, illegal, and everything in between. Mails, DMS, and SMS messages will be displayed, alerting people to winning contests they've never entered or claiming packages that were never ordered. And along with each example, there will be a full analysis of it, including the specific psychology it preys upon and the potential countermeasures to take. For example, sometimes people who are normally savvy at spotting fraudulent emails can become so busy that a well-crafted fake message from Amazon can slide under the radar during a lapse of proper attention. To prevent that, the simple act of keeping bookmarks to the real versions of sensitive websites for services like shopping can go a long way to keeping people safe whenever a real or fake problem arises. Most people probably don't need this kind of education, but we all seem to have that one family member who looks like they could get sucked into a scheme with a Nigerian prince or Yusaku Maezawaa. So, it's for them that we should all work together and share safe online habits.

From <https://japantoday.com> 02/20/2022

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SOUTH KOREA: Requiring Google, Netflix and 3 Others to Provide Stable Online Services This Year

South Korea's ICT ministry said Thursday it has required tech giants Google, Meta Platforms and Netflix, as well as local rivals Naver and Kakao, to comply with the country's revised law requiring them to provide stable services. In 2020, South Korea passed a legal 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 outages. The revised law, informally dubbed the "Netflix law" in the country, applies to online service companies that account for 1 percent or more of the country's average daily data traffic in the last three months of the previous year and that have more than 1 million daily users. Local streaming platform Wavve has been excluded from the regulation this year as its average traffic fell short of 1 million daily users.

The ministry said it has notified the five companies and will finalize the designation within this month after consultations with the companies. The ministry said global

tech giants made up a significant portion of the country's daily data traffic in the final three months of 2021, with Google accounting for a whopping 27.1 percent, followed by Netflix at 7.2 percent and Meta at 3.5 percent. Among local companies, top portal operator Naver held the top spot at 2.1 percent, followed by rival Kakao at 1.2 percent. The five companies accounted for a total of 41.1 percent of the country's average daily traffic over the period. The ICT ministry data also showed that Google's average daily user number over the period stood at 51.5 million, followed by Kakao at 40.6 million, Naver at 40.3 million, Meta at 6.8 million, and Netflix at 1.7 million.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 02/03/2022

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S. Korea to Support Companies to Minimize Impacts from Ukraine Crisis

South Korea said Friday it plans to provide financial support to local exporters in an effort to minimize their potential damage from international sanctions against Russia over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. The United States announced new sanctions against Russia, including export controls, over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in a bid to restrict Russia's ability to do business in major currencies. South Korea said Thursday it will join the international community in imposing sanctions against Russia though it stopped short of drawing up its own punitive measures against Moscow. The government said it will immediately provide trade financing to local exporters if they suffer business losses due to the sanctions. It also plans to draw up an emergency financing program worth of up to 2 trillion won (US\$1.7 billion) if needed. South Korea said the Ukraine crisis is expected to have limited impacts on the economy in the short term, given its export volumes to Russia and Ukraine, and a stockpile of major raw materials. The government is closely watching the developments of the Ukraine tensions on concerns that it could jack up already high oil prices and disrupt supplies of energy and raw materials. Oil prices topped \$100 per dollar Thursday, moving to a seven-year high, amid the escalating Ukraine tensions. South Korea heavily relies on imports for its energy needs.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 02/25/2022

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Gov't Extends Loan Maturity, Debt Repayment Deadline for Small Biz for 4th Time

Financial authorities have decided to extend loan maturity and defer debt repayment deadlines by six more months for small business owners hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Financial Services Commission(FSC) Chairman Koh Seung-beom announced the decision following his meeting with the heads of local banks on Monday, noting small businesses and the self-employed have yet to recover to pre-pandemic levels due in part to the Omicron wave. The measure of extending loan maturity and deferring debt repayment was first implemented in April of 2020

and later extended three times, each by six months. According to five major commercial banks, the total amount of the loans and interests subject to the measure stood at nearly 140 trillion won as of the end of last month.

From <http://world.kbs.co.kr> 02/28/2022

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South-East Asia

CAMBODIA: Additional Fund of 100 Mln USD for SME, Agriculture Banks Announced

The Cambodian government on Monday announced an additional 100 million-U.S. dollar funding for two state-owned banks to assist small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and agriculture. Economy and Finance Ministry's Secretary of State Ros Seilava said the two banks are the Small and Medium Enterprise Bank of Cambodia and the Agricultural and Rural Development Bank. Each of them received an extra fund of 50 million dollars, he said. Seilava said the additional fund was approved after the government launched the Strategic Framework and Programs for Economic Recovery in the Context of Living with COVID-19 in a New Normal 2021-2023 in December last year. "The additional fund aims to provide further support for SMEs, agriculture, rice industry, animal raising, and agro-industry sector," he said at the announcing ceremony held online. "It will help restore socio-economic activities, especially in SMEs, agro-industry and other priority sectors, during the post-pandemic era," he added. Economy and Finance Minister Aun Pornmoniroth said last week that the success of the national vaccination campaign in controlling the spread of COVID-19 has allowed the country to fully resume its socio-economic activities in all areas. He said the kingdom's economy is predicted to grow at a higher rate of around 5.6 percent in 2022 from 3 percent last year, buoyed by the expected rises in global demand and foreign investors' confidence.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 02/14/2022

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MALAYSIA: Manufacturing Sales Grow 15.5 Pct in December 2021

Malaysia's manufacturing sales in December 2021 grew 15.5 percent to 143.9 billion ringgit from the same month in 2020, official data showed Tuesday. Meanwhile, the sales value increased by 1.1 percent as against the previous month. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) said in a statement that the growth in sales value for the month was driven by the petroleum, chemical, rubber and plastic products subsector (19.9 percent), especially in the manufacture of coke and refined petroleum products industries. The expansion was also attributed to the food, beverages and tobacco subsector (19 percent) supported by the manufacture of food products industries as well as the electrical and electronics products subsector (18.4 percent) mainly in the manufacture of computer, optical and electronics products. In

the fourth quarter of 2021, the sales value of the manufacturing sector grew 16.5 percent to 427 billion ringgit as compared to the same quarter of the previous year. This increase was driven by petroleum, chemical, rubber and plastics products (25.2 percent), electrical and electronics products (17.7 percent) and food, beverages and tobacco products (17 percent). For 2021, the sales value of the manufacturing sector increased by 15.5 percent to 1,554.7 billion ringgit as compared to the same period in 2020. In comparison with pre-pandemic 2019, the sales value of the manufacturing sector increased by 13 percent. (1 ringgit equals 0.24 U.S. dollar)

From <https://english.news.cn> 02/08/2022

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VIETNAM: Sixteen Banks Cut over VN Đ 21.2 Trillion for Pandemic-Hit Customers

Sixteen commercial banks cut over VNĐ 21.24 trillion (US\$936 million) of loan interest for COVID-19-hit customers from July 15 to December 31, 2021, surpassing their commitment by 5.13 per cent, the State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) reported on Wednesday. The Vietnam Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Agribank) made the sharpest reduction with over VNĐ 5.51 trillion for more than 3.5 million customers. It was followed by the Joint Stock Commercial Bank for Foreign Trade of Vietnam (Vietcombank), with VNĐ 4.63 trillion for 269,644 customers; and the Joint Stock Commercial Bank for Investment and Development of Vietnam (BIDV), over VNĐ 4.12 trillion for 452,746 customers. According to Deputy Governor of the SBV Đ ào Minh Tú, last year, the bank maintained the regulatory interest rates, creating favourable conditions for credit institutions to access the SBV capital at low costs. Tú said that the 16 banks, which own 75 per cent of the total outstanding loans of the economy, showed strong performance in realising their commitments to reducing interest rates for pandemic-hit clients. Earlier, the banks committed to cutting loan interests amounting to VNĐ 20.6 trillion for customers. Four State-run commercial banks continued to commit a VNĐ 4 trillion aid package for reducing loan interests and cutting all banking service fees for customers in localities undertaking social distancing in line with the Prime Minister's Directive No 16.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 02/10/2022

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Newly-Established Enterprises Surge in January

In the first month of 2022, Việt Nam saw a surge in both the number of newly-established enterprises and registered capital compared to the same period last year, according to the General Statistics Office (GSO). The latest GSO report showed that the whole country saw 13,000 new enterprises established in January, with registered capital of over VNĐ192.3 trillion (US\$8.47 billion), up 16 per cent in the number of enterprises and 23 per cent in registered capital month-on-month.

Compared to the same period last year, these figures are 29 per cent and 24 per cent higher, respectively. The number of businesses returning to operation also surged in all areas. This signal shows the efforts of the business community despite the pandemic, the GSO said. Specifically, 19,100 companies returned to operation across the whole country in January, up 353 per cent compared to December 2021 and up 194 per cent over the same period last year. This brought the number of newly established and re-operating enterprises in the first month of this year total up to 32,100, surging 94 per cent year-on-year.

The average registered capital of a newly established enterprise also increased by 5.8 per cent year-on-year to reach VNĐ14.8 billion, the report said. If including VNĐ343.8 trillion of additional capital registered by 5,600 operating enterprises, the total amount of additional capital registered in January was more than VNĐ536.1 trillion, an increase of 36 per cent over the same period last year, it noted. Head of GSO Nguyễn Thị Hương said this was a positive result, continuing the momentum from the end of 2021. Last year, the continuous and effective support of the Government and functional agencies laid the foundation for the business's recovery. In the latest move, the State recently issued Resolution No 02/NQ-CP on major tasks and solutions to improve the business environment and heighten national competitiveness in 2022. Meanwhile, a resolution on fiscal and monetary policy to support the socio-economic recovery and development programme with a scale of VNĐ350 trillion was passed at the first extraordinary session of the 15th National Assembly in January to meet the urgent requirements of the country, businesses and local people.

Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment Trần Quốc Phương said that the authorities were making all-out efforts to support businesses' recovery since the beginning of this year. Hopefully, these efforts would create the right conditions for businesses to operate effectively in 2022. The ministry has just issued Decision No 44/QĐ-BKHĐT to rapidly increase the number of newly-established enterprises, reduce the rate of enterprises dissolved or having operation halted while cutting off input and informal costs for businesses. Top priority will be given to researching and reviewing the list of investment and conditional business lines and then removing barriers to investment and business activities due to overlapping and contradictory legal regulations. In 2022, the Ministry of Finance will enhance administrative reform, especially procedures directly related to people, businesses and State agencies while focusing on simplifying business conditions. Nguyễn Minh Thảo, head of the Research Department on Business Environment and Competitiveness, said there was room for authorities to speed up administrative reform to better support businesses. Thảo also emphasised the importance of promptly detecting and removing overlaps and contradictions in regulations that might affect the establishment of enterprises.

Good signals for fast recovery

Phạm Xuân Hồng, chairman of Saigon Garment 3 Joint Stock Company, said although last year there was a time when many garment businesses in the south experienced production interrupted and they had to shift some orders to factories in the north, they could still fulfil orders. Thanks to its flexible adaptability, Vietnamese textile and garment companies were highly appreciated by foreign partners and continued to sign new orders as soon as they resumed their production activities, said Hồng who is also chairman of the HCM City Textile and Garment-Embroidery Association. Phạm Văn Việt, chairman of Việt Thắng Jean Co, said his company had orders until the end of the second quarter and was focusing on expanding its production to increase exports. If the current productivity was maintained, his company's growth this year would be 15 per cent higher than in 2021. After the Lunar New Year (Tết) holiday, most businesses in the south have returned to work. According to the Trà Vinh Economic Zone (EZ) Management Board, by February 8, the majority of enterprises in two zones - Định An and Long Đức - restarted their production, with a total of 15,600 workers returning to work. In Bình Dương Province, about 81 per cent of businesses were operating by February 8 with the number of employees returned to work reaching 72 per cent.

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Programme to Support Private Firms in Sustainable Business Development

Deputy Prime Minister Lê Minh Khái has signed a decision approving a programme to support private enterprises in sustainable business development in the 2022-25 period. The major objective of the programme is to boost private businesses' sustainable development with harmony between economic interest and cooperate social responsibility as well as environmental protection, thus contributing to completing 17 sustainable development goals in 2030. It also aims to mobilise social resources for the growth of the ecosystem supporting the firms in sustainable business so that they can make positive contributions to job generation, improvement of living conditions for low-income people and disadvantaged groups, environmental protection and climate change response in Việt Nam. In 2025, private enterprises' awareness of the importance of sustainable business is expected to be improved. By the year, at least 10 tools and solutions to measure, evaluate and recognise sustainable business will be developed to support about 10,000 private enterprises, helping to reach the target of saving 5-7 per cent of total power consumption of the country and raising labour productivity by about 7 per cent annually. A database and an ecosystem supporting sustainable business will also be developed. The programme will be implemented on a national scale, covering all private enterprises implementing sustainable business, relevant organisations, ministries, agencies and localities. The programme will give support to the firms in building sustainable business strategies and plans. Those that are recognised as sustainable firms will receive assistance in personnel training, technology access,

digital transformation, capital resources access, communications and trade promotion.

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South Asia

INDIA: NMC to Set Up 106 EV Charging Stations Through Private Partnerships

In another step to boost the shift to electric vehicles, the Nashik Municipal Corporation (NMC) has identified 106 locations across the city for establishing EV charging stations. The civic body will lease out these identified areas to the private players for setting up and operating charging stations. As per the officials, the corporation will float the expression of interest (Eoi) by month-end. The NMC has been making recurring efforts to bring in a behavioural change among people to make car buyers prefer EVs over fossil-fuel propelled vehicles. Also, the corporation has brought out a policy for buying CNG vehicles and EVs for its departments. In a recent initiative, the civic body has ordered all the new residential buildings with at least 25 flats to set up EV charging stations and for additional 25 flats, there must be two EV charging stations. As per this, residential societies with 50 flats or more must have two EV charging stations.

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/> 02/14/2022

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SRI LANKA: RigServ Opens Global Resource Centre in SL; Plans to Empower Local IT Sector

Supply chain and technology consulting company, RigServ, recently commenced operations in Sri Lanka via its dedicated Global Resource Centre which employs 50 subject experts in their relevant industrial areas. RigServ offers clients industry expertise as well as data-driven, impartial, and creative solutions to their most difficult situations. RigServ was founded in 2014 by operational and technical leaders in Houston, Texas, with the primary purpose of assisting clients and solving difficult business issues in a cost-effective manner. The firm currently has an impressive repertoire of clients including APM Terminals, Maersk Drilling, Transocean, ARO Drilling, Endeavor Energy Resources, Pinnacle Asset Integrity Services, CVR Energy, and Seadrill. RigServ's current active projects include supply chain consulting, technology and systems consulting, supply chain outsourcing, enterprise business intelligence reporting, process improvement, ERP systems management, master data maintenance & cleansing, inventory reviews, full lifecycle software development, business transformations, project management and quality management. As a member of IFS's growing Partner Network since 2015, RigServ's services will extend to areas of: Implementations of IFS's robust Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP),

Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) and Enterprise Service Management (ESM) software solutions. The new agreement is intended to support IFS's aim of developing an ecosystem that allows enterprises to better penetrate the market by enhancing technology and knowledge resources for IFS products. "We're glad to be in Sri Lanka formally and hope to work closely with local talent & expertise to serve our global clientele. RigServ provides supply chain policy and procedure development as well as implementation, management and maintenance of ERP upgrades through proven methodologies and processes that reduce complexity and optimize performance. We are confident Sri Lanka is the ideal destination for an endeavor of this nature given the country's strategic location & dynamic resource pool," said Chris Kadavil, Co-CEO/Co-Founder of RigServ.

Coinciding with the launch, RigServ entered into a partnership with the University of Colombo to offer a bursary for 2 technology students per batch for the entirety of their degree i.e., 4 years. In addition, RigServ intends to train & certify IFS applicants who're fresh out of university in an effort to produce new resources to the IFS ecosystem & provide opportunities to new graduates within the country. Commenting on this endeavor, Co-CEO/Co-Founder of RigServ Christopher Collins said RigServ was thrilled to have partnered with the prestigious Colombo University to mold future professionals: "We perceive this initiative to be a win-win; we gain access to a pool of young, brilliant minds and the prospective trainees are afforded an opportunity to gain international experience & exposure – within Sri Lanka – by working under the mentorship of our experts." Meanwhile Kumarakulasingam Rajanathan, Director Operations, RigServ Sri Lanka said they're privileged to have IFS as a strategic partner given their expertise as well as familiarity with the Sri Lankan context. RigServ is a world-renowned consultancy in energy & marine sectors & its strategic partner, IFS, is a global enterprise solutions software provider headquartered in Sweden.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 02/08/2022

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Venture Engine Shortlists Sri Lanka's Top Fundable Startups

Venture Engine, Sri Lanka's pioneering startup acceleration program, has entered the final phase of its tenth edition with the selection of its top 10 grouping of finalists. The program's next, and final, stage is the showcasing of these finalists to potential investors as "Sri Lanka's Top Fundable Startups" at the Venture Engine finale, which is slated for the 23rd of February 2022. "Sri Lanka's Top Fundable Startups" representing the tenth edition of Venture Engine include one-to-one online tutoring platform Tutopiya (EdTech); peer-to-peer lender Helios (FinTech); 'Buy Now, Pay Later' platform, Mint Pay (FinTech); Non Fungible Token (NFT) marketplace Hyperglade (Web 3.0); and home improvement services, like plumbing, carpentry, domestic help, etc, accessible online via Better App (Consumer). Additionally, the "Sri Lanka's Top Fundable Startups" group of finalists will be rounded out by

SaaS-based enterprise front office visitor tracking and management software HireTrace (SaaS); plastic recycler Chakra Sutra; SaaS-based Insurance software, Surecore (SaaS); sports coaching platform Knod Corp PTE; and palm based products maker Palm2Go (Consumer). Having survived several weeks of exhaustive preparation, including multiple rounds of pitching and filtering, as well as six workshops on vital topics like business plans, valuations and funding cycles, Go To Market strategies, and financial and legal essentials; these finalists are now highly prepared to make their final pitches to the high-powered gathering of local and international investors expected to attend the program's Finale on the 23rd of February 2022. Now successfully concluding its tenth edition, Venture Engine is geared towards helping innovative and scalable startups solve a genuine pain point. It is founded by BOV Capital and the Indian Angel Network, and partnered by the Lankan Angel Network (LAN). The Ford Foundation is the tenth edition's Platinum Sponsor.

Further, Venture Engine will, for the fourth time, reward one of its participants in the for-profit social enterprise space with a very special Impact Entrepreneurship Award, which is once again being given out by Indian Venture Capital firm Aavishkaar, Venture Engine's Gold Sponsor. Other sponsors and partners for this edition include ICTA, SL@100, Council for Startups, SLASSCOM, HATCH, Dialog Axiata PLC, KPMG, PwC, AOD, Shift and CPP. Since it first kicked off 10 years ago, Venture Engine has become Sri Lanka's most successful platform for accelerating, and growing, the country's most promising new business ideas. Over a thousand Sri Lankan startups have been vetted and mentored by this program since its launch in 2012. To date, the Venture Engine program has attracted Rs. 2Bn+ in funding for 35 of Sri Lanka's most exciting startups. Some successful Venture Engine startups include InsureMe, Roar, ZigZag.lk, Takas.lk, Saraii Village, Stripes & Checks, Skrumptious, Kimbula Kithul, Strive, PlushBox, Nithya, Extrogene, OMAK Technologies, LiveRoom, Intellocut, BusSeat.lk, IgniterSpace, House of Lonali and 24-7 Techies.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Disclosing Number of State Facilities Privatized Following Auction

The State Service on Property Issues under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy held another auction for the privatization of state property on February 15, Trend reports citing the ministry. According to the ministry, a small state-owned enterprise and a facility, as well as 12 cars, were privatized following the auction. This time there was great interest in the privatization of cars as during the previous auctions. The auction was held in competitive conditions. The offer for one of the cars

exceeded the starting price by six times. The Ural truck at a starting price of 2,500 manat (\$1,470) was purchased at 15,100 manat (\$8,882). A Hyundai Sonata car was purchased at 10,600 manat (\$6,235) at an initial starting price of 7,000 manat (\$4,117). The privatized facility and a small state-owned enterprise are located in Beylagan and Shamkir districts. Some 100,855 manat (\$59,326) is expected to be transferred to the state budget following this auction. The next auction will be held on February 22 and 54 state facilities will be put up for it.

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Azerbaijan Expects Growth of Share of Creative Industry in GDP

About two percent of Azerbaijan's GDP accounts for the creative industry sector, Azerbaijani Minister of Culture Anar Karimov said during a conference entitled "Problems and Opportunities for Business in Creative Industry", Trend reports. Karimov said that the share of this sector in Azerbaijan's GDP in the near future must reach about 10 percent. "Azerbaijan pays great attention to the development of the creative industry," the minister said. "The Ministry of Culture is carrying out a number of events aimed at ensuring the sustainability of this sector." "Our ministry has considered the development of this industry a priority since 2019," Karimov added. "The work is also underway to optimize legislation and legal system."

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Azerbaijan Talks Facilities Privatized Through Auction

The State Committee on Property Issues under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy held auction for the privatization of state property on February 22, Trend reports citing the ministry. According to the committee, one package of shares of a joint stock venture (JSC), one state-owned enterprise and 17 road vehicles, were privatized following the auction. This time there was great interest in the privatization of vehicles as during the previous auctions. The auction was held in competitive conditions. The offer for one of the vehicles exceeded the starting price by seven times. The KamAZ truck at a starting price of 3,500 manat (\$2,060) was purchased for 26,100 manat (\$15,350). A Toyota Land Cruiser car was purchased for 27,800 manat (\$16,350) at an initial starting price of 10,000 manat (\$5,880). The privatized facilities also include Tovuz Maishat JSC, 30 percent of the shares of which was sold at 16,568 manat (\$9,750). Another privatized facility is a state-owned enterprise located in Gazakh district. Some 167,268 manat (\$98,390) will be transferred to the state budget following this auction. The next privatization auctions will be held on March 1, 3 and 9.

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UZBEKISTAN: ADB President Confirms Support for Private Sector-Led Development

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) will continue supporting private sector-led development in Uzbekistan, including renewable energy, as the country pursues a new development strategy, ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa said today in a virtual meeting with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Investments and Foreign Trade Sardor Umurzakov. “We are pleased to see Uzbekistan’s strong economic recovery from the pandemic,” said Mr. Asakawa. “As Uzbekistan’s long-term development partner, ADB will continue to help strengthen the government’s capacity to meet its goals, increase the country’s renewable energy sources, and assist in its overall development efforts.” Mr. Umurzakov expressed his appreciation for ADB’s continued support to Uzbekistan, its economic reforms, and infrastructure development covering key sectors of the economy. He also requested ADB to increase its support for human capital development.

Mr. Umurzakov appreciated ADB’s support in rehabilitating Uzbekistan’s road infrastructure and developing the road sector strategy. He requested further assistance to engage the private sector in Uzbekistan’s significant road rehabilitation and maintenance needs. Uzbekistan’s new national development strategy, 2022–2026 prioritizes improving people’s livelihoods and society, including by developing social infrastructure in communities and reforming the state. Uzbekistan aims for 25% of its energy consumption to be derived from renewable sources by 2030. ADB supported Uzbekistan’s first major private sector renewables investment with a \$17.5 million loan for a 100-megawatt solar power plant. ADB also helped to secure public–private partnership (PPP) contracts in solar power, district heating, and wastewater treatment. This year, ADB aims to provide further support to Uzbekistan in renewable energy including solar and wind; investments in water resources, urban development, and roads; policy-based lending for state-owned enterprises and PPP reform; continued mortgage market development; as well as credit guarantees and project readiness financing. ADB also plans to continue expanding and broadening coverage of its private sector operations in Uzbekistan. To strengthen development partners’ support to reforms in strategic sectors, ADB will assist the government in organizing Uzbekistan’s Country Platform for Development Coordination roundtable meetings this year. ADB is also providing technical assistance to help boost the capacity of Uzbekistan’s Agency for International Cooperation and Development to manage development projects. Since Uzbekistan joined ADB in 1995, the bank has committed loans, grants, and technical assistance of more than \$10 billion to support the country’s development.

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AUSTRALIA: Dairy Giant Legal Victory in Tas Milk Spat

The largest dairy producer in Australia has had a legal win, with a judge ruling it won't have to pay previous owners of its farm in Tasmania millions of dollars over a milk price dispute. The Tasmanian Land Company (TLC), owned by a New Zealand council, sold its dairy business in 2016 to Chinese-owned Van Dairy Group for \$275 million. The sale included a pre-existing agreement to supply milk to processor Fonterra. In May 2016, one month after the sale was finalised, Fonterra announced it would drastically cut milk prices retrospectively for the 2015/16 financial year. Shortly afterwards, TLC agreed to pay Van Dairy Group \$2.2 million in a "lump sum adjustment" to account for the disadvantage sustained by the latter as a result of the post-closing price difference. In mid-2017, Fonterra agreed to pay suppliers, including Van Dairy Group, an extra payment of 40 cents per kilogram of milk solids in 2017/18.

TLC argued in the Supreme Court of Tasmania that those additional payments were intended to reverse the reduction in milk prices in 2015/16. It argued Van Dairy Group wasn't entitled to the extra payments as well as the \$2.2 million adjustment. TLC claimed Van Dairy Group was obliged to pay TLC the extra payments, calculated to be about \$2.27 million. But in a decision delivered on Wednesday, Justice Michael Brett dismissed the claim, finding TLC had failed to establish it "on any basis". "The income in advance payment was legitimately made after negotiation and in full and final settlement of the parties' rights under the contract," he wrote. "It was clearly justified on the basis of the contractual rights and obligations of each party at the time. "In respect of the additional payments, the defendant was entitled to the fruits of its ownership of the assets and its production of milk in the 2017/18 year." Van Dairy Group's farm in northwest Tasmania covers about 17,000 hectares, with annual milk production reaching up to 80 million litres. The 2016 milk price cut prompted an Australian Competition and Consumer Commission inquiry which found a range of industry market failures.

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Cheese Company Fined over Putrid Spill

Putrid rotting milk sent flowing into a Melbourne creek has cost a struggling cheese company more than \$8000. Fresh Cheese Co directors believe waste pumps were turned off during a break-in at their Melbourne factory in October 2018, just hours before nearby residents began reporting stinky, milky water in Yuroke Creek near Broadmeadows. Residents reported a smell like sewage or rotten milk, describing it as nauseating. Environmental Protection Authority officers were called in and found the water was white with a fatty, bubbly scum on the surface. They traced it to an open culvert filled with a thick white sludge with a rotten cheese milk odour. Melbourne Water crews gagged as they blocked off the contaminated part of the

creek. The cause was traced back to the nearby Fresh Cheese Co factory where managing director Geoff Sharpe revealed the premises had been broken into the night before the first reports were made.

Drawers had been rifled through and some cheese was suspected to have been stolen. Mr Sharpe said the waste pumps were also suspected to have been turned off, resulting in the overflow. A fault in the drain was also uncovered, which was repaired when EPA officers arrived to inspect. The company admitted a charge of permitting an environmental hazard over the spill. County Court Judge David Brookes said Fresh Cheese had struggled through COVID-19, and while it had remained open and retained all staff throughout the pandemic the cost had been huge. Without subsidies and wage support it's unlikely the company would have survived. It's not out of the woods yet. A major contract with supermarket chain Aldi, worth \$7.5 million in revenue, is due to expire in March and has not yet been renewed. Judge Brookes said if that contract isn't replaced it could result in staff losing their jobs or the company winding up altogether. They've faced other challenges with disruptions to international supply chains, skyrocketing freight costs, and a dramatic increase in cost and haphazard supply of raw materials. He took all that into account when convicting the company on Tuesday. He ordered Fresh Cheese pay a \$8060 fine.

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NEW ZEALAND: Business Events Sector Hard Hit By Ongoing Isolation

Business Events Industry Aotearoa (BEIA) says today's New Zealand government announcement on border openings is great news for returning kiwis and others, but will not help revive New Zealand's hard-hit industry unless there is a radical change to isolation requirements. BEIA Chief Executive, Lisa Hopkins says isolation, in any format, is an impediment for international visitors. "Currently \$150 million worth of business events are at risk because of international border settings," she says. "The sooner the government can announce opening to Australian manuhiri without isolation, the sooner our sector can begin to recover. "We do take some optimism from the government's decision to continue to review these restrictions. However, given planning is required for business events, the sooner we know borders can open without isolation, the better.

"The reality is a business visitor will not isolate in a hotel for seven to 10 days if they are expected to attend a three-day conference. The sector will now be fielding cancellations and postponements from Australia. "Our industry members are in dire need of assistance, and we continue to work with government positively to support initiatives to help revive our ailing industry. The ability to welcome back international delegates and attendees is just one of those initiatives. "While the Prime Minister's

speech today acknowledged the exemplary work of other industries throughout the pandemic, it was disappointing it did not recognise what was once New Zealand's largest export earner. "The impact the pandemic has had on business events, major events, cruise, tourism, and hospitality has been extreme. And while we now look forward to a future with greater optimism, it will take some time to work through the past," Lisa Hopkins says.

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Lying RAT Companies Should Be Referred to Commerce Commission for Misleading and Deceptive Behaviour

The Taxpayers' Union is calling on the Minister of Consumer Affairs to report companies accused of lying about the Government's alleged confiscation of RAT tests to the Commerce Commission for breaching the Fair Trading Act with misleading or deceptive conduct. Union spokesman Jordan Williams says, "While the Government claims it has not been stealing businesses' rapid antigen tests, the Herald reports that companies supplying the tests are still telling customers the opposite. This is consistent with what the Taxpayers' Union has been told about its own order." "Unlike for politicians, it's illegal for companies in trade to lie or deceive under the Fair Trading Act." "There's possible cartel behaviour here too. How else do you explain that all of these companies have exactly the same story?" "Consumer Affairs Minister Kris Faafoi needs to take action. His Cabinet colleagues appear to be victim of an elaborate ploy to deceive New Zealanders. If he really believe his Government hasn't stolen RATs, why isn't he on the phone to the Commerce Commission demanding these companies are held to account?"

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