



Asia-Pacific Governance Watch

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Push for Certainty on Recycled Content Use

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1、 Government Policy and Legislation

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Global Consortium Launches Three-Year Effort to Strengthen Internet Freedom in 50 Countries

The effort will place regional and local organizations at the forefront of the fight to preserve an open, interoperable, reliable, and secure Internet. Journalists, activists, academics, and marginalized groups around the world face substantial risks online, often from governments imposing authoritarian digital policies that violate basic freedoms, including the right to assembly, association, and expression online. “In the East and Horn of Africa sub-region, laws are restricting speech online, weakening privacy, unveiling whistleblowers, and threatening the open and interconnected internet. Additionally, both state and non-state actors are contributing to the increasingly chaotic phenomenon of online hacking threats. Online freedom is at threat now more than ever.” – Neil Blazevic, DefendDefenders. Based on the belief that internet freedom benefits everyone, a new global Internet Freedom Consortium, organized by Internews and funded by the US Agency for International Development, has launched a 3-year initiative to enhance digital security for civil society and media organizations, engage citizens in internet governance debates, and advance human rights online. The Consortium will feature regionally-based organizations that are leaders in digital rights and digital security and will grow to include a wide range of additional members from each region of the globe. Initial consortium regional leads will include Co-Creation Hub (CcHub), Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA), DefendDefenders, Derechos Digitales, Digital Security Lab Ukraine (DSLUI), EngageMedia, and Paradigm Initiative (PIN). In addition to Internews, the following international organizations will support consortium members through providing technical support: Article 19, Global Network Initiative (GNI), International Center for Not-for-profit Law (ICNL), Ranking Digital Rights (RDR), and the University of Notre Dame.

Internews will support this distributed network of dedicated Internet freedom-focused organizations to partner with funders, civil society, media, and tech platforms, in order to respond to global digital threats and proactively promote an open Internet. "As a regional organization with extensive experience in Latin America, for Derechos Digitales this project is a great opportunity to work with a very interesting network of local partners, building capacities that are much needed in a regional context of authoritarianism, techno-solutionism, polarization, and human rights violations. The project will provide an opportunity to enhance the visibility of Latin American voices in the global discussions to protect internet freedom, which will be much enriched by the knowledge and the perspectives locally developed in our region". – María Paz Canales, Derechos Digitales. By supporting localized internet freedom initiatives

within a global, community-based internet freedom strategy, the Consortium will construct strong local and regional bulwarks against a rising wave of digital authoritarianism. “In 2013, we knew something was wrong with the Nigerian government’s curious investments in surveillance technology, but all we had was unquestionable passion. Thanks to early support from Internews, and the opportunity to work with an ecosystem committed to human rights in the digital age, we started addressing these national challenges and led projects that could help limit internet freedom violations. The foundation for Paradigm Initiative’s current work across Central, East, Southern and West Africa was laid by the type of early support and networking opportunities that this 3-year initiative will offer to many organisations just starting.” - 'Gbenga Sesan, the Paradigm Initiative. The consortium expects to work across approximately 50 countries. Internews will announce additional consortium members in the coming months.

From <https://internews.org/> 09/11/2020

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OECD Countries Make Partial Progress Updating Rules on International Shipping of Plastic Waste

OECD countries have agreed to update rules on the export of hazardous plastic waste for recycling in line with international changes so that advance consent from destination countries will be required ahead of shipping. However, they did not reach consensus on updated arrangements for the export of non-hazardous plastic waste. OECD countries have agreed to review the situation for non-hazardous plastic waste in 2024. The OECD rules apply to all trade in waste destined for recovery operations between the Organisation’s 37 member countries. This outcome means that while all OECD countries will need to secure permission from destination countries before shipping hazardous plastic waste, there will be no OECD-specific controls on shipping non-hazardous plastic waste between member countries. Instead, OECD countries will retain the right to define requirements for such shipments in line with domestic legislation and international law. While each OECD country can decide what controls to apply to shipments of non-hazardous plastic waste, they have committed to inform the OECD Secretariat of their decisions, and the list of controls applied will be made publicly available to ensure transparency. Non-hazardous plastic waste includes both pure single-polymer waste, where recycling leaves little residue, and mixed plastic waste where recycling leaves by-products that need to be properly disposed of.

OECD members held a series of meetings between July 2019 and July 2020 to discuss whether and how to update rules on plastic waste shipped between member countries in light of amendments concerning plastic waste made in May 2019 to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, which governs waste shipments internationally. The

187-member Basel Convention, in force since 1992, sets controls on the shipment of waste aimed at protecting human health and the environment. The changes agreed in 2019 will take effect in January 2021 and may result in a further decrease in the global trade of plastic waste. The OECD rules enable member countries to trade waste for recycling in an environmentally-sound and economically efficient way. Allowing waste to be treated in countries with a cost advantage in sorting or recycling can help to boost global recycling rates and strengthen secondary plastics markets. The OECD rules also provide a framework for waste trade from or to any OECD member that is not a Party to the Basel Convention, such as the United States.

Roughly 2% of the approximately 360 million tonnes of plastic waste produced globally each year is exported for treatment according to UN trade data. Total volumes of traded plastic waste plunged after China introduced import restrictions at the start of 2018, but shipments surged to alternative destinations that are not always well-equipped to manage the by-products of plastics recycling. The search for new recycling markets led to higher flows of plastic waste to Thailand, Malaysia, Viet Nam, India and Turkey, an OECD member country. Other major OECD importers of plastic waste for recycling include the United States, Korea, Canada and EU countries. The update to the OECD rules means hazardous plastic wastes will remain subject to the OECD's "Amber" control procedure, whereby shipment is dependent on an advance consent procedure, but for non-hazardous plastic waste, each OECD country retains its right to control the waste in question in line with domestic and international law. The situation for non-hazardous plastic wastes will be reviewed in 2024 and the OECD will provide all appropriate support to its members in the hope that it will be possible to reach an agreement. See a full summary of the OECD Council decision on plastic waste

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/11/2020

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Digital Surveillance by Intelligence Services: States Have to Take Action to Better Protect Individuals

Strasbourg, 07.09.2020 - In a joint statement issued today, the Chair of the Council of Europe's data protection "Convention 108" committee, Alessandra Pierucci, and the Council of Europe's Data Protection Commissioner, Jean-Philippe Walter, called on States to strengthen the protection of personal data in the context of digital surveillance carried by intelligence services, by joining the Council of Europe convention on data protection "Convention 108+" and by promoting a new international legal instrument providing democratic and effective safeguards in this field. "Countries must agree at international level on the extent to which the surveillance performed by intelligence services can be authorised, under which conditions and according to which safeguards, including independent and effective oversight", they stressed. The development of a new legal standard could be based

on the numerous criteria already developed by the courts, including the European Court of Human Rights and the US Supreme Court.

Referring to the European Court of Justice's judgment on "Schrems II" of 16 July 2020 concluding that the EU-USA "Privacy Shield" agreement does not provide an adequate level of protection to personal data transferred from the EU to the USA because of insufficient human rights safeguards arising in the context of the access to data by USA government's surveillance programmes, the statement highlights that this decision has implications beyond EU-USA data transfers and provides an opportunity to strengthen the universal data protection framework. The statement recalls the role that the Council of Europe's modernised data protection treaty, not yet in force, can play in providing a robust legally binding agreement for the protection of privacy and personal data globally, notably concerning the flow of personal data across borders. While the convention already provides a strong international legal framework for the protection of personal data and specifically addresses the need for an independent and effective review and supervision of restrictions to data protection justified by national security or defence, it does not fully and explicitly address some of the challenges posed at international level by the mass surveillance capacities, which requires the drafting of a new specific international legal standard.

The Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data, also known as "Convention 108", is the only legally binding instrument on the protection of privacy and data protection open to any country in the world. Adopted in 1981, the treaty was updated in 2018 by an amending protocol, not yet in force, ensuring that its data protection principles are still adapted to today's tools and practices, and strengthening its follow up mechanism. So far, 55 countries have ratified "Convention 108" and many others have used it as a model for new data protection legislation throughout the world.

From <https://www.i-policy.org/> 09/14/2020

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East Asia

CHINA: Stressing Keeping Prudent Monetary Policy More Flexible, Appropriate

The State Council, China's cabinet, on Wednesday stressed efforts to pursue a prudent monetary policy in a more flexible and appropriate way in order to promote steady economic and financial operation. It emphasized the need to maintain policy strength and sustainability, refrain from resorting to a deluge of strong stimulus policies, and channel funds into the real economy, according to a statement released

after a State Council executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang. The State Council also specified rules on the establishment of financial holding companies to better serve the real economy. In terms of air pollution control in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and its neighboring areas, the meeting stressed enhancing the clean use of coal and accelerating the transformation and upgrading of the steel, coking, petrochemical and construction materials and other industries. Efforts should be made to develop the eco-friendly industries and circular economy, strengthen international cooperation, and achieve economic growth and environmental protection at the same time, the statement said. Two nuclear-power projects with a total investment of 70 billion yuan (about 10.24 billion U.S. dollars) were approved at the meeting. Pushing ahead with nuclear power projects is an important measure to expand effective investment, enhance energy support and reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, the statement said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/02/2020

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New Regulations Mark Improvement of Party Building in Chinese Military: Official

The newly introduced regulations marked new progress in Party building within the Chinese military, according to a leading official with the Political Work Department of the Central Military Commission (CMC). It is the first set of comprehensive and systematic regulations on the subject, as well as an innovative move in building the system of Party regulations within armed forces, said the official. The regulations focus on strengthening the institutional guarantee for the absolute leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) over the military, and clarified the requirements and improved the working mechanism for implementing the principle of ultimate responsibility resting with the CMC chairman. The regulations were adopted at a meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee on June 29.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/10/2020

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Senior Legislator Calls for Full Implementation of Charity Law

A senior Chinese legislator has stressed the thorough implementation of the Charity Law to promote the healthy development of China's charity services. Wang Chen, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and vice chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, made the comments during an inspection tour on the law enforcement of the Charity Law in northeast China's Liaoning Province from Wednesday to Friday. The

inspection team from the NPC Standing Committee heard reports from local authorities, held symposiums with representatives from the governments, charitable organizations, experts and donors, and conducted on-site inspections and random spot checks. Wang applauded Liaoning's efforts in fully enforcing the Charity Law and the progress and achievements gained. He stressed building modern charitable organizations with good social reputation, strong professional ability, good managing structure and reasonable division of labor. He underlined that the internet and other new technologies and platforms should be fully used to promote the sustained and healthy development of online charity activities. Wang also called for greater promotion and publicity of the Charity Law among the public.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/12/2020

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China Announces New Rules Regulating Financial Holding Companies

The State Council, China's cabinet, on Sunday unveiled new rules to regulate market access of financial holding companies. The new regulation requires non-financial companies or other eligible entities, which control at least two financial institutions doing business across financial sectors, to apply to and get approval from the People's Bank of China to establish financial holding companies. The move is aimed at plugging regulatory loopholes and deepening financial reforms amid efforts to maintain market order, reduce risks and enhance support for the real economy, according to a notice released by the State Council. The regulation, which will take effect on November 1 this year, specifies rules on a wide range of issues concerning the market access of financial holding companies, including registered capital, shareholders, actual controllers, capital replenishment and risk management.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/13/2020

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New Rules Will Further Reduce China's Financial Risk

China issued fresh rules on Sunday to tighten regulation of the country's financial holding companies, a move that experts say will forestall risks in the financial sector. The new regulation concerns non-financial companies and other eligible entities that control at least two financial institutions doing business across financial sectors, requiring them to apply for and gain approval from the central bank, the People's Bank of China (PBOC), to establish financial holding companies. The move is aimed at plugging regulatory loopholes and deepening financial reforms amid efforts to maintain market order, reduce risks and enhance support for the real economy, according to a notice released by the State Council. The new rules will be effective

from Nov. 1, 2020. While some large financial groups and non-financial enterprises have been operating as financial holding firms in recent years to conduct cross-industry investments, financial holding companies have not been included as a group in the country's supervision framework, posing financial risks, PBOC Vice Governor Pan Gongsheng told a press briefing Monday.

Recognizing that some well-managed firms have optimized resources and reduced costs by means of financial holding firms, Pan also noted irregularities in the sector, including misuse of funds from financial institutions and improper profits from related-party transactions. The new rules require non-financial firms to establish separate financial holding companies subject to regulation, effectively putting up a firewall between the real economy and the financial sector to reduce contagion risk, Pan said. "The new regulation is credit positive for China's financial system as it will improve governance around the ownership of financial institutions," David Yin, senior analyst at Moody's Investors Service, said in a research note. The rules require transparent and simplified organizational structures, increase scrutiny over financial holding companies' legitimacy and sources of capital, and strengthen the risk-control, capital-management and disclosure practices of financial holding companies, Yin noted.

The new regulation will have a positive impact on the financial market, facilitating orderly competition among all sorts of institutions and forestalling systematic risks, the PBOC said in a statement. China has been stepping up efforts in recent years to contain financial risks, cracking down on high-risk shadow-banking activities and taking over financial firms with illegal practices that threatened their solvency. The country's financial regulators have been dealing with risks exposed by Tomorrow Holdings, Anbang Group and other firms with the characteristics of financial holding companies, Pan said. The central bank will continue to roll out detailed rules governing financial holding firms and work with other regulators to enhance the ability of financial holding firms to serve the real economy, he added.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/14/2020

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China to Introduce Measures to Improve Elderly Care Services

China is to introduce new measures to improve the management of nursing homes and standardize the services on offer, with the aim of promoting the sound growth of the elderly care service industry, an official said Thursday. The new measures, contained in a revised regulation on nursing homes that will take effect on Nov. 1, include provisions on the registration, supervision, operation and legal liabilities of nursing homes, Xiao Dengfeng, an official with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, told a press conference. The existing regulation was introduced in 2013. The new regulation has seven chapters and 49 articles. According to the new regulation,

nursing homes will be categorized into for-profit and non-profit institutions, he said. The document highlights the role of the government in running elderly care institutions to ensure that the basic needs of the poor population are met. Nursing homes established by the government can be run by private organizations through entrusted management, leasing or other means. The document also encourages extended facilities for the elderly, such as community elderly care and home-based services, Xiao said. The document contains stipulations concerning enhanced supervision of elderly care facilities, including strengthening and innovating oversight, said Yu Jianliang, director of the ministry's elderly service bureau.

The document states that civil affairs departments should perform their supervision and inspection duties in accordance with the law. They can take measures against elderly care institutions suspected of violations of laws and regulations, such as conducting on-site inspections, requiring rectification of misconducts, or ordering the suspension of operations. Civil affairs departments should strengthen coordinated supervision and establish a credit system for nursing homes, said Yu. Yu also underscored the importance of interconnection of information systems and data sharing of elderly care services by making good use of information technology. The role of social supervision should be promoted by listening to the opinions of the elderly and setting up unimpeded channels for complaints, Yu said. Drawing on the experience of fighting against COVID-19, the document brings in provisions that require nursing homes to lay down emergency response plans against natural disasters, public health emergencies and public security incidents, among others, said Li Banghua, deputy director of the ministry's elderly service bureau. It also includes infectious disease prevention and control measures at nursing homes, said Li.

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China Rolls Out New Measures to Boost Reform and Development of SOEs and Private Businesses

China will take solid steps in implementing the three-year action plan for SOE reform, and make more efforts to create a level playing field for private firms, the State Council's executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on Thursday. Li stressed that SOEs should focus on their main responsibility and business, develop sound market-oriented operating mechanisms, and increase core competitiveness. At the same time, a level playing field for the private sector shall be created to boost their confidence in development. SOEs need to make continued efforts to achieve higher quality and efficiency, sharpen core competitiveness and strengthen dynamism for sustained growth, to better their role in underpinning the national economy, according to the meeting. "We will continue to unswervingly consolidate and develop the public sector, and unswervingly encourage, support and guide the

non-public sector. The SOE reform needs to achieve higher quality and efficiency, help facilitate deeper cooperation in the industrial and supply chains and enhance SOEs' core competitiveness," Li said.

Solid steps will be taken in implementing the three-year action plan for SOE reform. The task of relieving SOEs of their obligation in undertaking social programs will be essentially completed this year. Greater efforts will be made in deepening the mixed-ownership reform, strengthening the modern corporate structure, and developing sound market-oriented operating mechanisms. SOEs will be supported in enhancing basic research and innovation, advancing research on critical technologies, and vigorously promoting entrepreneurship and innovation. The SOEs' non-essential business will be spun off at a faster pace, to enable the SOEs to better focus on growing their main business. The meeting also decided on further efforts to create a level-playing field for private firms, to boost employment. Market access will continue to be broadened. Power grid operators will accelerate the spinning off of competitive operations such as equipment manufacturing. Oil and gas infrastructure will be made equally accessible to all businesses regardless of types of ownership.

Private companies will be supported in participating in the construction of major railway projects. "We must stabilize the growth of the private sector with every possible means. The private sector has contributed over 90 percent of new jobs. It is remarkable for a country with 1.4 billion people to achieve a fairly full employment," Li said. Key national research infrastructure will be made more accessible to the private sector. The accreditation of national-level technology centers in private companies will be accelerated. The channels for private business employees to get professional qualifications will be unclogged. Small and medium-sized private firms will be allowed to jointly participate in industrial land transaction, including the tendering, auction and listing for sale. Local governments will be encouraged to establish risk sharing mechanisms for loans made to micro, small and medium-sized companies. "We need to increase support for private firms and create broader space for the private sector, so that they will be able to bring into full play their respective strengths," Li said.

"A prosperous private sector will in turn support the growth of the SOEs," he said. The meeting also decided on measures that will help provide inter-provincial access to high-demand government services key to the growth of businesses and people's daily lives. Some 58 service items, including market entity registration, pension scheme portability, verification of professional certificates and notarization of diploma and driving license, will be made accessible inter-provincially by the end of this year. Another 74 service items, including industrial production licensing, record-filing of the settlement of medical bills, social security card application and household registration relocation, will be made available across provinces by the end of next year. Online access will be optimized to make inter-provincial services more convenient and user-friendly. Meanwhile, the need of a smaller number of people for

on-site access to these government services will also be fully met, the meeting urged.

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Highlights of Chinese Policies Supporting Economic Recovery

China's economic recovery continues to gather steam as the country has rolled out a series of policies and measures, including providing more financial support and tax reduction, as well as promoting foreign trade and consumption to revive the coronavirus-battered economy and boost employment. The following facts and figures highlight how the country is forging ahead in resuming work and production and pushing its economy on a recovery track. **CREDIT SUPPORT** The People's Bank of China, the central bank, devised two credit instruments in early June: the loan extension support tool, which aims to encourage banks to defer businesses' inclusive loan repayments, and the credit loan support tool, which is designed to step up loan issuance. As an indication that the effects of the two instruments have become visible, outstanding inclusive loans for small and micro businesses hit a record high at the end of July by going up 27.5 percent year on year.

Rather than tipping the monetary policy into quantitative easing, the country called on financial institutions to concede 1.5 trillion yuan (about 221.6 billion U.S. dollars) worth of their profits to companies in a bid to directly channel funds into the real economy. **TAX AND FEE CUTS** The orderly implementation of China's tax and fee cut policies has helped invigorate market entities and strengthen the sustainability of enterprises' development. In the first half of the year, China's tax and fee cuts totaled over 1.5 trillion yuan. For 100,000 key tax source enterprises, tax and fee burdens dropped by 0.65 yuan per 100 yuan of the operating revenue. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the country has lowered employers' contributions to social security schemes for old-age pensions and unemployment and workplace safety, and refunded unemployment insurance premiums to alleviate enterprises' burdens.

Other fee-slashing moves include waiving road and expressway tolls, cutting electricity and gas rates for enterprises, and extending the loss carry-forward period from five years to eight years for sectors hard hit by COVID-19, such as transportation, catering, and tourism. **JOBS FIRST** While employment was affected by the epidemic during the first several months of the year, China has continued efforts to support employment through multiple channels, including ensuring jobs for key groups, such as college graduates and migrant workers, and catalyzing entrepreneurship and innovation. Measures have also been taken to boost employment for people working in new forms and models of businesses and strengthen protection for flexible employment, including individual businesses, part-time jobs, and new types of employment.

The country created around a million urban jobs on a monthly basis recently, compared with only 390,000 new jobs in February, when the epidemic severely hit the country. In the first half of this year, China added a total of 5.64 million urban jobs, accounting for 63 percent of the annual target. FOREIGN EXCHANGES China has rolled out a series of policies to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on foreign trade and supply chains. Official data showed China granted export tax rebates or exemptions worth 812.8 billion yuan in the first half of the year to relieve financial pressure on companies. Amid rising concerns of coronavirus contamination in supply chains, Chinese customs had inspected more than 500,000 cold-chain samples for COVID-19 as of Sept. 7, covering frozen foods, packaging, and containers. Cold food exporters that failed a COVID-19 nucleic acid packaging test twice would be blocked from shipping to China for a week, while those that failed it three times would be frozen out for a month.

Aiming to balance epidemic control and economic and social development, China's civil aviation regulator introduced a reward and suspension mechanism, with detailed policies for the carriers to increase or suspend flights. From early June, China's civil aviation regulator adjusted policies for international passenger flights, allowing more foreign carriers to resume flights to China on a once-a-week basis while suspending an airline's flights for a week if the number of passengers testing positive reaches five. SPENDING STIMULATING Buoyed by the recent boost in consumer sentiment, the country's consumption will continue to rebound. Favorable factors include continued government policy support, new promotion measures by enterprises, and increasing consumer confidence.

For example, the National Consumption Promotion Month kicked off on Sept. 9 and will continue for the entire month. During the promotional campaign, over 10,000 key enterprises and major e-commerce platforms in large and medium-sized cities of 31 provincial-level regions across the country will host a series of promotional activities, which will integrate online and offline modes, goods and services marketing, as well as sectors including commodity, travel, culture, and entertainment. Local governments and merchants have issued different types of vouchers, amounting to hundreds of millions of yuan, to boost consumer spending. Each yuan of such government subsidies could add new consumption of 3.5 to 5.8 yuan, according to an estimate from the Guanghua School of Management, Peking University.

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Xinjiang Successfully Practices Int'l Labor, Human Rights Standards: White Paper

Xinjiang has become a successful example of practicing international labor and human rights standards in underdeveloped areas with large populations of ethnic minorities, according to a white paper released by the State Council Information Office on Thursday. As a founding and permanent member state of the International Labour Organization and a signatory state to a host of UN conventions, China applies international labor and human rights standards in its legislation, policymaking and policy implementation, to effectively safeguard workers' rights, according to the document titled "Employment and Labor Rights in Xinjiang." In fulfilling their responsibilities to secure employment, local governments at all levels in Xinjiang promote full and high-quality employment for people in different areas, of different ethnic groups, and with different economic conditions, to achieve common development and progress among all ethnic groups, it says. Xinjiang has thus become a successful example of practicing international labor and human rights standards in underdeveloped areas with large populations of ethnic minorities, it notes.

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Experts Say China's White Paper on Employment, Labor Rights in Xinjiang Shows Policy Effectiveness

China's white paper on the employment and labor rights in Xinjiang shows the effectiveness of measures taken by the Chinese government to promote employment and protect labor rights in Xinjiang, refuting unfounded accusations with concrete facts and figures, international experts have said. The white paper, titled "Employment and Labor Rights in Xinjiang," was released by China's State Council Information Office on Thursday. Bishnul Rijal, deputy chief of International Department and member of the Nepal Communist Party Central Committee, said the white paper clearly shows China's people-centered development policy and its absolute commitment to the well-being of its people. It is unacceptable that Xinjiang-related issues are politicized or hyped with the ill-intention to defame China, said the expert on international affairs. Sonia Bressler, a French expert on China, said that the Chinese government has always adhered to a people-centered governance philosophy and improved the well-being of local people by facilitating their employment.

The white paper shows the real situation and achievements in employment promotion in Xinjiang through facts and data, effectively refuting some Western media's groundless accusations against China on Xinjiang-related issues, Bressler said. Donald Rushambwa, a researcher at China-Africa Economic and Culture Exchange Research Center, said the white paper shows that the labor rights and interests of the people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang have been fully protected.

Through various employment-oriented training, local workers have greatly improved their skills and enhanced their competitiveness, Rushambwa added. Oleksiy Koval, a member of the Board of the Ukrainian Association of Sinologists, said that the white paper shows the public the various endeavors taken by the Chinese government to promote employment and develop Xinjiang.

The white paper provides specific data on changes in employment in Xinjiang over the past five years, including the number of new jobs, changes in the income of the population and poverty alleviation in poor rural areas, Koval said. For local residents, there are many concrete examples of how the existing employment system can be used to improve their life, increase their incomes and find desirable jobs, he added. Mohamed Noman Galal, a member of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, said providing employment to over 13 million people in Xinjiang is a "reaffirmation that the people of Xinjiang are equal to all other Chinese citizens in terms of full rights and duties." Having visited Xinjiang several times and talked to many local people, Galal, a former Egyptian Ambassador to China, said, "We didn't find any kind of discrimination against the people of Xinjiang."

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Beijing Approves Regulation on Public Health Emergency Response

The regulation on public health emergency response in Beijing was approved at a session of the Standing Committee of the 15th Beijing Municipal People's Congress on Friday. According to the regulation, Beijing will establish an information report system for public health emergencies. Medical staff who find clues to the occurrence or potential occurrence of public health emergencies shall report to their units and disease control and prevention institutions and may go beyond their level in case of emergency. Any unit or individual has the right to report potential public health emergencies to the government and relevant departments through different channels, including the municipal government's hotline 12345, hotlines of the departments, government websites and new media platforms. The municipal and district-level governments and relevant departments should guarantee smooth reporting channels, establish an acceptance, investigation and handling mechanism, and safeguard the legal rights and interests of the individual according to law. Non-malicious false reports shall not be investigated for responsibility.

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China Releases Guideline on Courts to Facilitate Opening-up

China's Supreme People's Court on Friday issued a guideline on the legal services provided by courts to add impetus to further opening-up. With 17 articles in six parts, the document highlights the principle of equal protection, aimed at providing a market environment in which Chinese and foreign parties engage in fair and impartial competition and are equally protected by the law. The litigants' rights to choose a competent court and the applicable laws and methods to deal with the dispute are guaranteed, according to the guideline. To promote the modernization of the trial system for foreign-related commercial and maritime cases, the guideline demands that the courts precisely ascertain and apply international treaties, conventions and foreign laws to strengthen the international credibility of adjudication. The newly released guideline calls for the appropriate handling of foreign-related commercial and maritime cases concerning cross-border trade, investment and shipping, as well as the COVID-19 epidemic. It requires further integration of foreign-related trials and the building of intelligent courts. In the meantime, the document also urges the building of a litigation service platform for extraterritorial litigants and the further development of the China International Commercial Court. In terms of intellectual property rights, the 17-article document stresses the need to implement the punitive compensation mechanism for intellectual property infringement cases.

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JAPAN: Quickly Present Blueprint for Digitization of Public Administration

It is important to digitize public administration and make it more user-friendly for the people. The government should clearly present its outlook for the future and a road map. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has announced his administration's intention to establish a digital agency as one of its key policies. The government plans to submit a related bill to the ordinary Diet session next year. Within the government, an idea has surfaced to merge the Cabinet Secretariat's IT General Strategy Office and related sections of the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry and the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry. Unifying digital policies that have straddled multiple ministries and agencies to establish a structure to promote digitization is highly significant. It must be tackled in a speedy manner. What should be taken up first is digitizing the administrative services of central government ministries and agencies and local governments.

In measures to respond to novel coronavirus infections, confusion arose over the online application for the cash benefit of ¥100,000 per person. The sharing of information on the infectious disease between the central and local governments stalled, and schools were notoriously unprepared, such that they were unable to offer remote classes. Teleconferences between ministries and agencies did not go as

smoothly as had been intended. Such incidents occurred because each ministry and agency has its own computer system and there is no government-wide strategy. The digital agency is envisioned as serving as a control tower to improve such situations. The challenge will be to create an effective structure that enables a unified response that transcends the vertical divisions of ministries and agencies. In addition to the internal government systems, the government must also promote digitization in various areas of society, including the economy, medical care and welfare, and education.

The government needs to examine why the various initiatives it has taken in the past have been inadequate and rebuild a realistic strategy. It is important for the government to explain the specific path of digitization to the public in a way that is easy to understand. It must not be forgotten that the essential purpose of digitization is to increase convenience for people. Some administrative procedures have already been digitized. But some have pointed out that users are required to enter the same information many times and check attached documents, which in fact increases the amount of time and effort. It is an urgent task to undertake further reform by simplifying the procedures and making them a one-stop affair. It is important to come up with a system that is user-friendly for all people, regardless of age or financial circumstances. Spread of the use of My Number cards, which are needed for online applications for government services, has been slow. The public's concerns about the protection of personal information should be dispelled. Competition to acquire talented personnel in the field of information technology is fierce. The public and private sectors need to work together to focus on human resources development.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 09/19/2020

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Suga Wants Basic Policy on New Digital Agency by Year-End

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said on Wednesday he wanted to compile a basic policy on a new digital agency by the end of this year and submit necessary bills to next year's ordinary session of parliament. Creating an agency to speed up the digitalization of Japan's outdated government administration has been a key pledge of Suga, who was elected premier last week. While the government has made "digital transformation" its main policy plank this year, the switch has proved difficult due partly to a vertically structured bureaucracy that hampers efforts to use common platforms for administrative work. "We need to make a digital agency as an organisation which will have a function of strong command power with personnel of high ability from public and private sectors, and lead digitalization in the overall society," Suga told ministers in a meeting.

"I want to accelerate discussions to do so, compile basic policy by the end of this year and submit necessary bills to next ordinary session of parliament." Suga said

that setting up the digital agency would be a reform which would lead to a change in the nation's economy and the society. He pledged to make sweeping changes to overcome the digital woes, which were blamed for delaying delivery of cash payouts to help citizens weather the impact of the coronavirus. The government aims to build a digital society based on My Number cards for personal identification and improve digital administrative procedures, a government official told reporters after the meeting. Japan's digital transformation minister, Takuya Hirai, said in a twitter on Wednesday that he would launch a preparation team this month. "Japan needs to raise its potential growth rate by digitalization," said Takuto Murase, senior economist at Japan Research Institute.

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SOUTH KOREA: Telcos, Gov't Set Up Task Force to Expand 5G into Rural Areas

South Korea's three mobile carriers and the government launched a task force Tuesday to help expand 5G coverage into rural areas as the country moves to provide super fast connectivity to all people. The task force aims to allow roaming network sharing among SK Telecom Co., KT Corp. and LG Uplus Corp. in areas where population density is low, the Ministry of Science and ICT said. Each mobile carrier will set up their communication networks in designated areas, which can be shared with the other two, after they reach an agreement on the issue in the next six months. As of June, South Korea had 7 million 5G mobile network subscribers, mostly in big cities, after the country began to offer the fast communication service in April 2019. The ministry said the tie-up between SK, KT and LG Uplus will mark the first time that the companies will work together on a national level to share network roaming infrastructure.

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S. Korea Kicks Off Data Dam Project to Fuel Growth, Create Jobs: Gov't

South Korea kicked off its so-called Data Dam project that can fuel growth and create thousands of new jobs, the science ministry said Wednesday. The project, part of the larger Digital New Deal program announced in July, aims to collect and process information provided by both public and private sectors to create useful data that can be shared through 5G networks. The information can stimulate new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality and create related businesses, the Ministry of Science and ICT said. The Data Dam derives its name from the Hoover Dam that helped the United States overcome the Great Depression.

The ministry said that it has selected seven key business areas for support, with 4,739 companies and institutions forwarding ideas and some 2,100 projects to be selected for support in the first year.

The seven areas are educational AI, various AI vouchers geared to helping companies, AI convergence, creation of cloud flagships that can make use of data, related cloud vouchers, building big data platforms and setting up advanced data centers. "Initially, it was expected that the latest project could create some 24,000 jobs, but companies picked for the educational AI project alone said they need to hire at least 28,000, which will push up the overall employment figures," the ministry said. Educational AI is considered the centerpiece of the Data Dam, with 290 billion won (US\$240 million) being allocated and over 1,250 projects to be checked and developed going forward. Besides education, the dam project will likely have far reaching impacts in the field of medicine and areas like farming. The ministry said it is currently in the process of streamlining rules to make collection and distribution of data easier, with a road map of administrative and legal reforms to be released in November.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 09/02/2020

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: ADB Endorses New 5-Year Partnership Strategy

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has endorsed its 2020–2024 country partnership strategy for Indonesia, which aims to apply the full range of financing support and solutions through ADB's sovereign and private sector operations along with its technical know-how to catalyze investments, support sustainable development, and help Indonesia emerge stronger from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Under the new 5-year strategy, ADB's operations will support Indonesia's inclusive economic development by focusing on people's well-being, economic competitiveness, and the environment, while helping build resilience to climate and disaster risks. ADB will assist in Indonesia's sustainable economic development, including the recovery from the pandemic, with a combination of knowledge, technical, and financial support. ADB will help the country strengthen health care, expand social protection, improve education quality, and develop job skills. ADB will also focus on helping Indonesia tackle climate change and strengthen its resilience to natural disasters and pandemics. "The new country partnership strategy reflects ADB's strong commitment to helping Indonesia boost human development, improve economic competitiveness, and address disaster risks and environmental sustainability amid heightened economic uncertainty and rising global threats such as climate change," said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa. "The

strategy provides a flexible and agile framework for ADB to help Indonesia incorporate green recovery and other sustainable development options, while strengthening domestic resource mobilization to support the recovery efforts.”

The strategy is in line with Indonesia’s National Medium-Term Development Plan (2020–2024) and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, as well as ADB’s corporate strategy, Strategy 2030. “We greatly appreciate ADB’s strong support to Indonesia over the years, especially the speed of ADB’s response and its close and active engagement with the government during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Indonesian Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati. “The partnership strategy positions ADB as a key partner with innovative solutions to complex development challenges. We welcome ADB’s focus on inclusive, competitive, and sustainable development.” Indonesia’s economy is the largest in Southeast Asia and the seventh-largest in the world based on purchasing power. The country had reduced poverty by more than half, to 9.2% of the national poverty line in 2019 from 23.4% in 1999, but the progress risks being reversed due to the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the strategy, ADB’s sovereign lending to Indonesia is expected to reach \$10.7 billion from 2020–2023. ADB’s country operations will seek to mobilize cofinancing from development partners and investments from the private sector to help the government better respond to increased demand for financial support amid the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, ADB will help Indonesia attract more private investments in infrastructure by promoting public-private partnerships. It will support Indonesia’s Sustainable Development Goals by designing innovative financing options to reduce the risk of green infrastructure projects and help catalyze private sector investments.

ADB will support the government’s policy reforms in human capital development, financial inclusion, business competitiveness, state-owned enterprises, and clean energy. ADB operations will seek to advance gender equality in Indonesia by helping increase women’s access to formal banking, strengthen female graduates’ job skills, and boost their participation in rural enterprises, as well as improving vulnerable women’s access to social services. ADB-financed projects will promote the application of technology to maximize development results. For example, ADB will use big data analytics, financial technologies, satellite technology for flood mapping and urban development, smart grids and meters, geothermal, waste-to-energy, and remote-sensing systems to improve survey and planning processes for the operation and maintenance of assets. ADB’s country program will support Indonesia’s participation in regional cooperation and its contribution to the development of regional public goods. That includes international tax cooperation, trilateral cooperation with the Pacific island countries on ocean health, partnership on reducing environmental pollution from plastic waste, and the development of border towns to reduce regional disparities. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from

the region.

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SINGAPORE: To Adjust Work Pass Schemes Without Sending Wrong Signals of Closing Up

Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said on Wednesday that the city-state have to make adjustment to the work pass schemes, but must not send the wrong signals of closing up to foreign talents. He said when delivering a speech in the parliament that the numbers of both Employment Pass holders and S Pass holders in Singapore have been coming down since COVID-19 outbreaks this year. "But we still have to make adjustments to our work pass schemes because there is now more slack in the job market, but also because over time, the education levels, capabilities and incomes of our local workforce have gone up," he added. According to the prime minister, Singapore uses foreign work pass policies to control the inflow of foreign workers, and ultimately ensure that they add to the workforce in Singapore rather than substitute for them and benefit Singaporeans rather than hurting them. He said that Singapore, as a small country with small population, have no choice but to topping up with foreign workers and work pass holders to grow its economy. By being open to talents from all over the world, Singapore created more opportunities for its people, and it has succeeded by being an international hub, tapping talents worldwide, and serving a global market. "So even as we adjust our work pass policies, we must be careful not to give the wrong impression that we are now closing up, and no longer welcoming foreigners," Lee said. "Such a reputation would do us great harm." Singapore has to do the right thing for itself, but must also avoid sending the wrong signals to others, he added.

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THAILAND: Gov't Taking Tough Measures to Fight Online Gambling

Thailand is taking tough measures to fight online gambling by warning internet service providers and cellphone operators of legal action if they fail to block access to gambling websites. Government spokesman Anucha Burapachaisri confirmed on Sunday Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has instructed the authorities including the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission and the police to strictly take such measures to keep children and youths away from online gambling. For that reason, those authorities have warned the ISPs and cellphone operators in Thailand to immediately deny access to a total of 1,202 gambling websites under court orders, which have

been earlier issued, according to the government spokesman. Those gambling portals are to be practically denied within 15 days or else the ISPs and cellphone operators might be faced with legal action under the Computer Crimes Act and the Gambling Act. Many people, particularly adolescents and teenagers, are feared to be addicted to online gambling and spend a lot of money on betting games, given easy access to those gambling websites so far.

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VIETNAM: Decree to Provide More Funding to Educate Disadvantaged Children

Preschool teachers in extremely difficult villages, communes, in coastal areas and islands will enjoy an additional allowance of VNĐ450,000 (\$20) per month, due to a new decree. Decree 105/2020 /NĐ-CP specifies policies for preschool education development, including policies for preschool classrooms, children and teachers. The decree was issued to replace Decree 06/2018/NĐ-CP, which become invalid from the beginning of November this year when the new decree comes into effect. Under the old decree, preschool teachers only received support for teaching aids and funding for training while they attended training courses. Teachers can enjoy the allowance if they teach two sessions per day in groups of children from two years of age or older or directly teach the Vietnamese language reinforcement to groups of children from ethnic minorities. The time to enjoy the support is calculated according to the actual number of teaching months but must not exceed nine months per school year. The allowance is paid in conjunction with their monthly salary payment and is not used for payments for social insurance benefits, health insurance and unemployment insurance.

The decree will also help public kindergartens in communes with extremely difficult socio-economic conditions in coastal areas, islands and communes in difficult areas feed the children they educate. Funding to feed preschool children will be calculated based on the number of children allowed to have boarding meals, at least equal to VNĐ2.4 million (US\$100) per month per 45 children. Each school is entitled to no more than five times the above support level per month and not more than nine months per school year. Private kindergartens in industrial zones licensed by authorities with at least 30 per cent of children being workers' children in the industrial zones are provided equipment, toys and teaching aids according to the list prescribed by the Ministry of Education and Training and funding for repairing facilities. The minimum level of support is VNĐ20 million (\$870) per kindergarten. Also under the decree, children belonging to the below groups will be supported with VNĐ160,000 (\$7) per child per month for lunch. They include children with parents or caregivers residing permanently in extremely difficult villages, communes, and extremely poor coastal areas and islands, children in poor and near-poor families,

children of martyrs, war invalids, sick soldiers, children of Heroes of the People's Armed Forces, and children with disabilities. The supportive period is no more than nine months per school year.

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New Draft Law Key to Reducing Traffic Accidents: Deputies

The majority of National Assembly deputies agreed on the need to build a draft law on road traffic safety and order separate from the draft law on road traffic to reduce traffic accidents and tighten compliance with traffic laws. At the 48th session of the National Assembly Standing Committee yesterday, many NA deputies said the number of traffic accidents and traffic fatalities has remained high despite the efforts of authorities. NA Secretary General Nguyễn Hạnh Phúc said in recent years, road traffic accidents accounted for 95 per cent of the total number of accidents across the country. Though the Law on Road Traffic was issued in 2008, the number of accidents has only slightly decreased, so it was necessary and urgent to improve the legal framework to ensure traffic order and safety. Figures from the Ministry of Transport show that at least 334,000 traffic accidents have been recorded in Việt Nam since 2009, killing 101,000 and leaving 336,000 injured. On average, 10,000 people die of traffic accidents every year.

The main cause of traffic accidents is road law violations by drivers, accounting for more than 90 per cent of cases. Many drivers have poor driving skills and low awareness of traffic safety laws, while police control over drunk and drug driving remains loose. The draft Law on Road Traffic Safety and Order includes many prohibited acts that might pose risks of traffic accidents, traffic congestion or impacts on traffic security and order. Chairman of the NA's National Defence and Security Committee Võ Trọng Việt said the committee analysed and evaluated carefully to avoid any overlaps between the two bills. The separation of the laws would clarify the responsibility of ministries in terms of ensuring traffic safety and order. The draft law was carefully prepared to be submitted to the National Assembly in the next session, he said. Regarding training, testing and issuance of driver licences, NA Secretary General Phúc said privatising the procedure was appropriate, but it needed to ensure quality. Driving training centres have been invested in for a modern training system and using advanced technology.

However, Phúc said, cases where one vehicle used many different license plates were unacceptable. In addition, there were still many self-modified vehicles which failed to ensure safety. This should be clearly defined in the draft law and submitted to the National Assembly. Chairman of the NA Judicial Committee Lê Thị Nga said the most important factor was people's compliance with traffic laws as well as the working spirit of officials when handling traffic violations. Chairman of the NA's

Committee for Culture, Education, Youth, Adolescents and Children agreed, saying investment was very necessary to raise people's awareness of driving laws. Binh said it was necessary to conduct surveys on the traffic situation, increase fines and use that money to invest in traffic infrastructure. At the conclusion, the NA Vice Chairman Đỗ Bá Tỵ affirmed the Government was in charge of road traffic safety. The examination and issuance of driving licenses, which was assigned to the Ministry of Public Security instead of the Ministry of Transport as currently, should have a thorough review of the operation of apparatus and costs. The Government needed to clarify this content and the NA would decide on how it would work, he said.

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South Asia

INDIA: DMRC Releases New Guidelines Prior to Resumption of Functions

Following the Centre's announcements on the resumption of metro services from September 7, metro corporation across the country have come up with their set of guidelines for smooth and safe functioning. Similarly, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC), on September 3, released a set of new guidelines. As per the new guidelines, the metro stations in containment zones will remain closed after September 7. Further, metro trains will not stop at stations where passengers are found not maintaining social distancing. Also, wearing a face mask will be mandatory during travel on Metro trains and masks will be provided to passengers on payment basis at stations. According to Mangu Singh, DMRC Chief said that in the first stage, Delhi metro services will operate in two shifts from 7 am to 11 am and then from 4 pm to 8 pm. However, in the second stage, trains will be available from 7 am to 1 pm and from 4 pm to 10 pm, he added. Further, he said that the normal operations of Delhi metro will resume after September 12. As per Singh, in the first phase which begins on September 7, Yellow Line from Samaypur Badli to Huda City Centre will resume operations. Whereas, from September 9, Blue Line or Line-3/4 (Blue Line) connecting Dwarka Sec-21 in Delhi and Noida Electronic City/Vaishali; and Pink Line or Line 7 connecting Majlis Park and Shiv Vihar will resume operations. The following day, on September 10, Red Line or Line 1 from Rithala to Shaheed Sthal New Bus Adda; Green Line or Line 5 from Kirti Nagar/Inderlok to Brig. Hoshiar Singh (Bahadurgarh); and Violet Line or Line 6 from Kashmere Gate to Raja Nahar Singh (Ballabhgarh) will also resume services with the same timings. In stage-2, kicking in from September 11, Magenta Line or Line 8 from Janakpuri West to Botanical Garden; and Grey Line or Line 9 from Dwarka to Najafgarh will also be made operational. The trains in stage two will operate in batches of six-hour each from 7 am to 1 pm and 4 pm to 10 pm, the DMRC said. And, from September 12, stage three will kick in and in addition to lines made operational, Airport Express Line from

New Delhi to Dwarka Sec-21 will also resume service.

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Tamil Nadu Announces New Electronics & Hardware Manufacturing Policy

In a bid to increase electronics industry output to \$100 billion by 2025, the Government of Tamil Nadu announced a new Electronics & Hardware manufacturing policy on September 7. The state hopes to contribute 25 per cent of India's total electronic exports to the world by 2025. The new policy also includes skill training for over 1,00,000 people (semi-skilled and skilled) by 2024 to meet the incremental human resource requirement projected by NSDC for Tamil Nadu in Electronics and Hardware Manufacturing sector. The new hardware policy further aims to increase the productivity in Tamil Nadu, especially across focus sectors such as mobile handsets, LED products, chip designs, PCBs, solar photovoltaic cells, medical electronics, and automotive electronics. Similar to the National Policy of Electronics 2019, the Tamil Nadu government will provide assistance for developing core competencies in the sub-sectors. Further, the new policy targets undertake a focused research and development program to achieve the above objectives and foster an environment of research and innovation, foster a conducive environment for ESDM start-ups. The incentives offered by the state would be an addition to what the Centre is offering. Investments made from January 1, 2020, will be considered eligible for availing incentives. The state also looks forward to formulating a special package for ESDM units and MSMEs which will include capital subsidy, interest subvention, low tension power tariff subsidy, generator subsidy, assistance for obtaining intellectual property and assistance in obtaining certifications.

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MeitY to Table Proposal for AI-based Programmes & Policy for Cabinet's Approval

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) is finding artificial intelligence a potential solution to address problems such as language barrier commonly faced issue by the Indians. The ministry expects to get a nod from the cabinet in a month to launch programmes based on the next-generation technology, said senior government officials. According to Abhishek Singh, CEO, MyGov and National e-Governance Division (NeGD), the ministry will soon reach out to the cabinet with a policy to launch AI-based programmes. However, Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog, in a statement said that though the details are not to be discussed publicly yet the ministry is expected to table the proposal for the policy within 60 days.

He also mentioned the RAISE 2020 Summit, a conference on AI which Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate today in the evening. As per the view of Ajay Sawhney, Secretary, MeitY, "AI will bring tremendous opportunity for India if the talent pool that the country has is used to solve various problems by using the technology." Adding on, said that there are 22 regional languages and people who know only a particular language are unable to communicate with others. "This is one of the many other problems that artificial intelligence can address," Sawhney said. National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence (NSAI) highlighted the potential of AI in boosting India's annual growth rate by 1.3 percentage points by 2035 and identified priority sectors for the deployment of AI with government's support.

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CSC Takes Up 'Ghar tak Fibre' Scheme Under BharatNet Initiative

Common Service Centres (CSC) under the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) has undertaken the task of laying optical fibre network to connect villages to gram panchayats or village blocks across India under the Centre's BharatNet Initiative. The CSC is taking the initiative through its Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs). In his address on the 74th Independence Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Only five dozen village panchayats were connected with optical fibre before 2014. In the last five years, 1.5 lakh village panchayats have been connected with optical fibre. In the coming 1000 days, every village of the nation will be connected with optical fibre". Taking up the PM's vision of connecting villages through optical fibre network, CSC aims to provide Fiber To The Home (FTTH) broadband internet connectivity to 45,945 villages of nearly 8900 Gram panchayats, where Wi-Fi and FTTH through BharatNet are functional. Dinesh Tyagi, CEO, CSC said that with the spread of broadband connectivity in villages of Bihar, online service delivery and various other schemes and initiatives by the government can be availed by citizens with just a click. New employment opportunities will open up in villages and this will help local youth and especially girls to become independent and support to their families. Further, new avenues of extra income sources such as rural BPO, E-Commerce, e-Education, Tele-Medicine, online-banking, shall be created by the availability of internet in villages. The task of operation and maintenance optical fibre network laid under the BharatNet phase 1 as allocated to CSC in July 2019. In January 2020, the FTTH connectivity was also added to five government institutions. However, CSC VLEs achieved a great output in phase-1, wherein 5889 Gram Panchayats there were over 45,000 subscribers with over 20,000 rural households and government institutions who have access to broadband internet.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Baku Transport Agency Comments on Taxi Services Regulations

The project on the regulation of taxi services, developed by Azerbaijan's Baku Transport Agency, is advisory in nature and is aimed at improving the activity in this sphere, the Baku Transport Agency told Trend on Sept. 3. As a result of the implementation of the project, it is projected to solve such issues as ensuring the safety, health, and comfort of passengers at a higher level, as well as improving the working conditions of taxi drivers, increasing their social welfare and income, forming an attitude towards taxi services as a profession, transformation of competition based on dumping into the competition based on quality, ensuring of transparency, strengthening of the state control. Thus, the fulfillment of the tasks arising from the resolution #73 of the Cabinet of Ministers will be ensured. "The numerous appeals and proposals have been received from market participants and citizens over the past few days in connection with the project," the Baku Transport Agency added. The Baku Transport Agency has decided to re-work on the project, taking into account the opinions and proposals.

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Ministry of Agriculture Talks Non-Cancellation of Subsidies

The resolution #319, signed on September 2 by Azerbaijani Prime Minister, Ali Asadov, does not envisage the abolition of subsidies which are given by the state for cotton-growing, tobacco-growing, beekeeping and silkworm cocoon production, Head of the public relations and information support department of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Agriculture Vugar Huseynov said, Trend reports on Sept. 3. Huseynov stressed that rendering of state support for agriculture is regulated upon the Azerbaijani president's decree "On the creation of a new mechanism for subsidies in the agricultural sector" #759 dated June 27, 2019. "Under this decree, the payments on six types of subsidies for crop and livestock production in the country have been made through the Electronic Agricultural Information System since January 1, 2020," the head of the department said. "Therefore, the Cabinet of Ministers' previous decisions on granting subsidies to the farmers, the existing regulations are brought following the new decree."

"This is a legal procedure and the Cabinet of Ministers' recent resolution on the cancellation of several decisions envisaging support in the agrarian sector is related to this compliance," Huseynov said. "The state has already paid the subsidies for the autumn sowing. The subsidies in other categories, including the field of beekeeping,

are still being granted. The comments on social networks interpreting the recent decision of the Cabinet of Ministers as the abolition of subsidies are erroneous and legally unfounded." The head of the department reminded that under the decision of the Council of Agrarian Subsidies dated September 2, 2019, 100 manats (\$58) are paid to farmers for each ton of cotton which is supplied to the processing plants while 50 manats (\$29) are paid for each ton of raw tobacco. "Moreover, farmers are provided with the subsidies worth 220 manats (\$129) for each hectare of cotton crops while 280 manats (\$164) - tobacco crops," Huseynov said. "Beekeepers receive subsidies worth 10 manats (\$5) for each hive. The state also gives the subsidies worth five manats (\$2) for each kilogram of raw silk cocoon which is handed over to the collection points." "None of these subsidies have been canceled," Huseynov said. "The state continues to support the country's agricultural sector and the subsidies will still be transferred to the "farmer cards".

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Azerbaijan Amends Procedure on Paying Compulsory Health Insurance Premiums

Azerbaijan's Cabinet of Ministers has amended the 'Procedure for the phased payment of insurance premiums from the state budget for compulsory health insurance in 2020'. According to the amendments, insurance premiums for compulsory health insurance will be paid in stages not in 2020, but in 2020-2021. According to the current decision, in line with the 'Sequence of application of compulsory health insurance in the administrative-territorial units of the country', approved by the Cabinet of Ministers on December 27, 2019, the amount of insurance premium per capita by administrative-territorial units where compulsory health insurance was applied from January through March, amounted to 90 manat (\$52.9), from April through June - 67.5 manat (\$39.7), from July through September - 45 manat (\$26.4), from October through December - 22.5 manat (\$13.2). The amount of the insurance premium per capita in accordance with the 'Sequence of application of compulsory health insurance in the administrative-territorial units of the country', approved by the Cabinet of Ministers on April 10, 2020, is determined as follows: - for 2020 – insurance premium per capita on administrative-territorial units in which compulsory medical insurance has been in force since January 2020 amounted to 90 manat; - for 2021 - insurance premium per capita on administrative-territorial units where compulsory health insurance will be applied from January 2021 equaled 90 manat + 90 manat x consumer price index in the country, the premium on administrative-territorial units where compulsory health insurance will be applied from April – 67.5 manat + 67.5 manat x consumer price index in the country.

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Azerbaijan Launches Project on Non-Cash Payment in Public Transport

A pilot project has been launched in Azerbaijan's Shamakhi city through the most modern innovations in the field of cashless payment for passenger transportation via the Information Center of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies which is the technical operator, Trend reports on Sept. 15 citing the ministry. A new system that allows paying for trips by using bank cards and through mobile devices has been installed in some city buses. It can also be integrated into the payment system for all modes of public transport. The card can be obtained at branches of "Azer-Turk Bank" OJSC, branches, and offices of "Azerpost" LLC. An opportunity will be created in the city to purchase it in special terminals. The functionality of the card is not limited by the option of paying in public transport. It can be used to pay for utilities, shopping, etc. For this project, a mobile application has been developed in the Azerbaijani, Russian and English languages, with the help of which it will be possible to obtain the information about the historical sights of Shamakhi and to establish the routes. For this purpose, while using the application, to point the camera of the mobile device on the Prepaid Card. The sponsor of the project is "Mastercard" while the regulator is the Azerbaijani State Road Transport Service under the ministry.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 09/15/2020

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Azerbaijani State Customs Committee Presents New E-Commerce Project

The State Customs Committee of Azerbaijan held a presentation of the 'Simplified Declaration - E-Commerce' project, Trend reports referring to the committee. As reported, the event was attended by the heads of the committee's appropriate bodies and the local media representatives. Chief of the committee's Secretariat Anar Suleymanov, informing about the project, said that as part of the steps taken by President Ilham Aliyev to achieve sustainable and dynamic development of the country's economy, improve the business environment, enhance transit and logistic capabilities, and ensure facilitated international trade, reforms were being carried out in the customs system. It was noted that along with the improvement of customs legislation, acceleration of border crossing processes, personnel, and structural reforms, and reconstruction of infrastructure, the need to realize global challenges on the agenda of the World Customs Organization in Azerbaijan had actualized the project's implementation. Suleymanov underlined that the 'Simplified Declaration - E-Commerce' project will play an important role in eliminating the "shadow economy" and will positively influence on upgrading the service. The new project will create conditions for ensuring more transparent and faster e-commerce, upgrading the

service, ensuring transparency of operations, and efficient use of the existing resources.

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Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan Plan to Implement New Projects in Transport Sector

Several events and projects are planned for the next few years in the field of rail and road cargo transportation between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan told Trend. The new projects will serve to further enhance bilateral cooperation, added the Uzbek MFA. "It is planned to expand cooperation by using the ports of the Turkmen coast of the Caspian Sea to access European and Middle Eastern markets, the Black and Mediterranean Seas, including within the framework of the promising Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-the Caspian Sea-the South Caucasus transport corridor," added the MFA. The countries are also considering further implementation of the Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman route project. "It is planned to carry out work on the modernization of roads and railways, further implementation of the project to create China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan transport route, " said the ministry. The cooperation in the transport sector has significantly developed in recent years, the ministry said. "The results of this activation of bilateral cooperation was the commissioning of rail and road bridges across the Amu Darya between Turkmenabat and Farap on March 7, 2017, and starting of the first block train on the route China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan on June 5, 2020," stressed the ministry. In general, referring to cooperation in the transport sector, the Uzbek MFA pointed out that it contributes to the economic development of the Central Asian states and neighboring regions. The issues of cooperation in the field of transport and transit are always relevant and are included in discussions at almost all levels of Uzbek-Turkmen cooperation, noted the ministry. "This relevance is due to the fact that transport routes that run through the territories of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are efficient, safe and connect large markets," the Uzbek Foreign Ministry said.

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UZBEKISTAN: Senate Approves Law "On Rights of Persons with Disabilities"

The seventh plenary session of the Senate is underway today in Tashkent. One of the documents on agenda is the Law "On rights of persons with disabilities". Today, more than 700 thousand people with disabilities live in Uzbekistan, including more than 100 thousand children with disabilities under the age of 16. The law is intended

to protect the rights and interests of representatives of the above category. Moreover, the adoption of the document set to improve the activity of medical commissions. Medical examinations would be free of charge, persons with disabilities would enjoy preferential treatment and get prosthetic and orthopaedic equipment. In addition, the document provides for the creation of special corridors, ramps, special seats in public transport, and facilities for entering and exiting bus stops.

From <https://uzreport.news/> 09/11/2020

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Knowing State Language Is Now Mandatory When Obtaining Citizenship of Uzbekistan

From now on, knowing the state language is compulsory for those wishing to get citizenship of Uzbekistan, according to the new version of the law "On citizenship". The document was adopted by the Legislative Chamber on February 18, approved by the Senate on February 28, and signed by the President on March 13 this year. The law was published on March 15 and came into force 6 months later, on September 15. The following requirements for obtaining citizenship of the Republic are now mandatory: - having a legitimate source of livelihood; - mandatory compliance with the Constitution of Uzbekistan; - knowing the Uzbek language.

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Uzbekistan Intends to Lift Ban on Religious Dress Codes

According to the MP Rasul Kuserbaev, the official ban on wearing hijabs in public will be lifted soon in Uzbekistan, Trend reports citing Kabar. According to the Article 184-1 of the Code of Administrative Responsibility (introduced into legislation in May 1998), the appearance of citizens of Uzbekistan (with the exception of religious organization officials) in public places with religious dress code entails the imposition of a fine from 5 to 10 'basic calculation values' (108 USD to 216 USD) or administrative arrest up to 15 days. Recently, the Legislative Chamber of Oliy Majlis (the Supreme Assembly) adopted a draft bill in the first reading on amendments and additions to the Bill "On freedom of conscience and religious organizations", which will pave the way to lifting the ban on religious dress codes in public. The draft bill tackles the following amendments: - the right of every person to receive professional

education in religious educational institutions, as well as the right of parents or guardians to teach their children the basics of religious practice and the rules of etiquette (home teaching); - Exemption from state duty payment when religious organizations apply to the court regarding the actions (inaction) of officials; - Exclusion of 'mahalla' in the registration process of a religious organization; - Reduction in the number of persons required to register a local religious organization from 100 to 50; - Lifting the ban on wearing religious dress code in public places. The bill will be proceeded through two more readings, after which it will be sent to the Senate for approval.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Aussies Call for Tougher Environment Laws

The equivalent of the national capital's population has supported a petition calling for stronger environmental protection laws. The petition is the most supported in the Australian Conservation Foundation's history, with close to 410,000 people signing it. ACF's chief Kelly O'Shanassy has sent it to Prime Minister Scott Morrison and his Environment Minister Sussan Ley, who are in the midst of tweaking the national protection laws. The changes are in response to an interim review of the laws, but rather than strengthening environmental standards the first move is to cut red tape. ACF's petition calls on the government to create a "new generation of national laws to protect nature and funding to restore ecosystems to bring our wildlife back from the brink". In his interim review, former competition watchdog Graeme Samuel found the current laws were ineffective and Australia's environmental trajectory is unsustainable.

He recommended an independent environmental watchdog, which has been rejected by the government. Instead the first changes set the stage for states to take over environmental approvals. They will have to abide by a set of national environmental standards, which have not yet been developed. The draft legislation underpinning the move is now set for the Senate after passing the lower house, despite the opposition's attempts to delay it. Debate over the bill in the House of Representatives occurred for less than two hours. Ms O'Shanassy says handing more power to the states will fast track more wildlife extinction. "It is not too late for the government to change its strategy, to instead strengthen Australia's environment laws and establish an independent regulator to enforce them, as Professor Graeme Samuel recently recommended," she said. "We appeal to Prime Minister Scott Morrison to listen to the experts - and listen to the people - by strengthening our failing environment protection laws." Labor and the Greens oppose the government's changes, and want Ms Ley to wait until Professor Samuel's final report is handed down next month

before changing the laws.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/03/2020

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Morrison Government 'Bully' on Green Laws

Independent MPs are furious with the Morrison government for throwing due process out the window and ramming controversial environmental laws through the lower house. Crossbench MP Zali Steggall flagged amendments to the bill but the government refused to allow them to be voted on. Instead, the coalition used its numbers to shove the bill through the lower house on Thursday night. Ms Steggall described the government as a "bully in action". "The PM and every coalition MP made a mockery of due process for legislation and bulldozed environmental and water protection," she said. "And they were laughing while doing it. This is how they represent you. If you care, contact your MP." The changes to the national environment protection laws pave the way for states to take over approvals. The states would have to abide by a set of national environment standards, which have not been developed.

The changes are in response to an interim review conducted by former competition watchdog Graeme Samuel. Professor Samuel also recommended installing an independent environmental umpire, but the government has rejected that. Independent Tasmanian MP Andrew Wilkie says the changes will water down environment protection. "(The bill) hands decision-making to state and territory governments who have shown time and time again to be conflicted and incapable of protecting the environment," he said. "The passage of the amendment through the House of Representatives was also a chilling demonstration of the government's complete contempt for democracy. "Most members of the house were prevented from speaking, and foreshadowed amendments were blocked without debate. The government acted again like an elected dictatorship." Environment Minister Sussan Ley was quick to defend the changes after outrage over the process. "There will be more reforms to follow," she said. "We will develop strong Commonwealth-led national environmental standards which will underpin new bilateral agreements with state governments." The bill is likely to be referred to a Senate committee for scrutiny, pumping the brakes on its progress. Labor and the Greens oppose the legislation.

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Federal Govt Demands NSW Redo Dam Plan

The NSW government has been ordered to redo the cultural heritage work included

in its proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall, documents leaked to the ABC reveal. WaterNSW plans to raise the wall by 17 metres to allow additional floodwater to be captured and temporarily held back, pending federal approval. The modification would give residents on the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley floodplain extra time to evacuate before a controlled release of floodwaters. However, parts of the Blue Mountains bushland would be inundated, which traditional owners say would destroy sites of significant cultural heritage. The federal environment department is concerned by the opposition of numerous traditional owners and rejects the state government's claim damage to cultural heritage sites would minimal, the leaked review show.

"The Department disagrees with the estimates that the proposed action will result in only a partial or no loss of heritage value from the initial inundation and the longer term effects of infrequent flooding events," it reads. Up to 1213 sites and artefacts - which include rock art, sandstone shelters and engravings - could be impacted, it notes. The review casts doubt over whether the project can proceed without the consent of traditional owners, and orders the state government redo its cultural heritage surveys. "To accurately understand, assess and mitigate impacts against indigenous cultural heritage values within the project area, the department recommends the Proponent re-conduct comprehensive heritage surveys with full engagement of the traditional owners," the review says.

"This is of importance when considering that the cultural landscape may have been significantly altered following the 2019-2020 bushfires." The project came under scrutiny after AAP revealed the Berejiklian government was actually planning to raise the dam abutments at each end of the wall by 17 metres, instead of the 14m originally proposed, to allow for future modifications to hold back additional water. WaterNSW insists the three-metre increase will not change upstream and downstream temporary inundation levels, durations and impacts.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/12/2020

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Green Bank Lives on in \$1.9b Energy Plan

Australia's green bank will have its remit expanded to include carbon capture and storage, green steel and hydrogen. The Morrison government is expanding the mandate of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and Australian Renewable Energy Agency as part of a \$1.9 billion package to develop low-emission technology. ARENA will be guaranteed baseline funding of \$1.43 billion over the next decade and \$193 million in grants for targeted programs. The government believes wind and solar projects are commercially viable without the need for government subsidies. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said limiting the agencies to certain technologies would let Australia down. "We can't have these artificial constrictions. A closed shop -

an ideological, frankly, closed shop - on how ARENA works," he told reporters in regional NSW on Thursday. "What matter is lower emissions. What matters is lowering costs. What matters is creating jobs."

Labor leader Anthony Albanese said the coalition had never liked ARENA or the CEFC, which were established under the Gillard government. "They have tried to abolish it and now they are trying to emasculate it," he told reporters in Sydney. "The fact is that this government don't support renewables." Left-wing think tank the Australia Institute argues the changes will adulterate the agencies to fund fossil fuel technologies. "The government champions clean hydrogen which is just clean coal 2.0, using the same failed technology of carbon capture and storage to support the same high-polluting fuels of coal and gas," the institute's Richie Merzian said. Carbon Market Institute chief executive John Connor said carbon capture and storage should not be used to prolong the scheduled closure of high-emissions power generation.

"The initiatives and funding announced today are important and can enhance Australia's ability to emerge from the COVID recession with a more resilient and cleaner economy," he said. A new Technology Co-Investment Fund will be set up with \$95.4 million to help businesses in agriculture, manufacturing, industry and transport enhance productivity and adopt new technologies. The package also includes money for a regional hydrogen export hub, microgrids and improved energy and emissions data. Energy Minister Angus Taylor has pushed for technology to play a central role in reducing Australia's emissions. He is expected to outline the federal government's energy technology roadmap at the National Press Club next week. Earlier in the week, Mr Morrison threatened to build a gas-fired power plant unless the private sector provides more baseload generation.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/17/2020

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Medical Care Plan Extended for Six Months

Telehealth, home delivery of medicines and hospital services already boosted to deal with the coronavirus pandemic will be extended to the end of March 2021. Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Friday will unveil a \$2 billion extension of the COVID-19 emergency response. The funding will go towards telehealth services provided by GPs, nursing, midwifery, allied health and allied mental health professionals, home medicine delivery, free COVID-19 pathology tests and further protective equipment. As well, there will be money for 148 GP-led respiratory clinics and an extension of hospital support, which also involves a private hospital agreement. The home medicines service has already delivered more than one million medicines at no additional cost to eligible patients. More than 10 million patients have benefited from telehealth services, the bulk of whom live in NSW, Victoria and Queensland. "We will

continue to provide Australians with critical health care and support to protect both lives and livelihoods," Mr Morrison said. Since March, the government has stumped up \$16.5 billion for the health response to coronavirus. Rural and remote Indigenous people won't miss out, with Medicare-subsidised pathology and testing at the point of care continuing in 86 communities in WA, NT, Queensland, SA, NSW and Victoria.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/18/2020

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PM Backs Aust Strategy on COVID-19

Success over the coronavirus is a combination overcoming both the health and economic challenges, saving lives and saving jobs, Prime Minister Scott Morrison says. Mr Morrison says considering Australia's response to the twin crises sparked by COVID-19, it has performed better than almost every other country. "We are in an extraordinary time. None of us could have imagined what 2020 would have become," the PM told the South Australian Liberal Party annual meeting in Adelaide on Saturday. "It has been a hard and a tough year like few we have ever known." The PM said the global economy would fall by six per cent this year and in the June quarter the Australian economy fell by seven per cent. He said having put in place strong health disciplines to suppress the virus, Australia's focus must also be on "getting the jobs back, getting the businesses open again".

"We cannot allow the virus to tell us how to live," he said. "We have to live with the virus. You can't pretend it's not there. "We are dealing with a set of conditions which mean you can't do government as usual. You can't do politics as usual. "You have to have an unprecedented response and you have to stay very focused on what you're trying to achieve." The meeting was held under COVID-19 restrictions with seats spaced 1.5 metres apart, though long lines to enter showed less strict compliance with social distancing. Mr Morrison was only able to go to Adelaide after the state government eased COVID-19 border restrictions on Thursday, dropping the two-week quarantine requirement. The PM said he had been "busting" to come to Adelaide and expected thousands of Sydneysiders to "be right behind me", providing an \$800 million boost to the state's economy.

South Australian Premier Steven Marshall told the meeting Adelaide was currently the safest city in the safest country and had led the nation in its response to the pandemic. He said the state had also arrested the "brain drain" of young people and skilled professionals leaving SA for opportunities elsewhere. The premier said latest figures to the end of March, which did not factor in the impact of the coronavirus, showed total migration from SA amounted to just more than 200 people, a significant turnaround. "There's much more work to be done but let's continue to work together," he said.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/26/2020

2、 Government System and Civil Services

Asia-Pacific

East Asia

CHINA: Deepening Reforms to Invigorate Businesses

The State Council, China's cabinet, has detailed multiple reform measures to improve business environment and invigorate the market. While China's business environment has seen remarkable progress in recent years, operational barriers still exist in the country, according to a circular released by the State Council, which listed reforms in four areas to spur business vitality. China will push for adopting fully online procedures for starting a business in order to further reduce the time required for setting up an enterprise to no more than four working days, said the circular. The circular pledged to simplify regulation and approval procedures while calling for new breakthroughs in the business registration system. The power of approval for businesses related to five categories of products, including steel bars for construction purposes, will be decentralized to provincial-level market regulators. Local authorities are urged to firmly implement the tasks, according to the circular.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/10/2020

China to Set Up Platform on Legal Supervision

Chinese top judiciary authorities have issued a guideline on setting up a national platform regarding the enforcement of rulings and legal supervision, according to the Supreme People's Court (SPC) on Thursday. The guideline, unveiled by the SPC and the Supreme People's Procuratorate, aims to improve the application of information technology and standardization in legal supervision by strengthening cooperation and information sharing between judicial organs through the platform. The process of procuratorial supervision, including opinions put forward by procuratorates and the transferring of case information, can be handled on the platform. Courts shall handle the suggestions made by procuratorates according to the law. If the case is complicated and controversial, a hearing shall be held and attended by personnel from the people's procuratorate at the same level. The platform is expected to be put into use by 2021.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/10/2020

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Premier Li Stresses Cutting Red Tape, Improving Business Environment

Premier Li Keqiang on Friday called for making new progress in cutting red tape to improve the business environment, boost the vitality of market entities and stimulate development momentum. Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks at a teleconference on issues including deepening reforms to streamline administrative approvals, delegating power to lower levels and improving regulations and services. Vice Premier Han Zheng, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, presided over the meeting. Such reforms in recent years have contributed to a substantial increase in market entities and employment, rapid growth of new business forms and models, and increasingly stronger economic resilience and development momentum, which played an important role in fighting the COVID-19 epidemic and spurring economic recovery, Li said.

Li stressed doing a good job in the implementation of macro policies and deepening the red tape-cutting reforms so as to help enterprises tide over difficulties and stimulate the vitality of market entities. He urged efforts to ensure stability of economic fundamentals, achieve the annual development goals, promote high-quality development, and form a new development pattern. The premier stressed solid implementation of the direct-channeling mechanism for fiscal funds to ensure that tax and fee reductions generate sound practical results and help maintain security in areas including employment, people's livelihoods, and operation of market entities. He stressed innovations on credit service models to make financing more accessible and favorable to enterprises, especially micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises. Li underscored implementation of the foreign investment law and supporting regulations as well as the negative list for foreign investment access, responding to concerns, and creating a better open business environment, so as to assure foreign investors of China's determination in opening up and enable them to benefit from China's opening-up policies.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/11/2020

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China to Improve Government Service, Support Firms

The State Council, China's cabinet, on Thursday decided to further streamline government administration and improve services. It also specified measures to support the country's state-owned and private firms, according to a statement issued after a State Council executive meeting, chaired by Premier Li Keqiang. The country will facilitate the inter-provincial handling of frequently-processed administrative items, such as the registration of market entities and applications for social security cards, according to the statement. The meeting also decided to simplify the procedures for residents and small companies to get electricity. The country will support the development of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as well as private companies. SOEs will be relieved the burden of offering social services and encouraged to strengthen major innovations, while more areas will be open to private companies, the statement said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/17/2020

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Top Political Advisor Stresses Reform, Innovation in Driving Growth

China's top political advisor Wang Yang on Wednesday stressed the role of reform and innovation in cultivating new drivers of economic growth. Wang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, made the remarks in Beijing at a symposium with heads of the central committees of non-Communist parties and the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC), as well as individuals without party affiliation. The symposium was held to discuss the results of research and studies carried out by the relevant parties and groups on promoting reform and innovation and cultivating new economic driving forces. Wang said that driving economic growth with reform and innovation is an inevitable requirement to cope with the severe and complex external environment, withstand the downward pressure on the economy, and achieve high-quality development.

It is also an important way to foster a new development paradigm with domestic circulation as the mainstay and domestic and international circulations reinforcing each other. He called on relevant parties and groups to improve their research results and asked the departments involved to further strengthen consultation work in terms of research and studies. At the symposium, the heads of the central committees of non-Communist parties and the ACFIC, as well as one person representing those without party affiliation, offered suggestions of their own, including modernizing industry chains, upgrading big-data and blockchain technologies, and urging state-owned enterprises to invest more in research and development.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/23/2020

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China Stresses Solid Efforts to Boost SOE Reform

China will take steps to implement the three-year action plan on reforming the country's state-owned enterprises (SOEs), according to a conference here on Sunday. The SOEs should become market entities with core competitiveness and push forward the mixed-ownership reform in an active yet prudent manner, said the national teleconference on the implementation of the action plan. Vice Premier Liu He, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and head of the State Council leading group for SOE reform, attended and addressed the conference, which is presided over by State Councilor Wang Yong, deputy head of the group. The conference urged the SOEs to play a larger role in leading innovation efforts as well as actions to improve the industrial and supply chains. Meanwhile, the SOEs shall act as a safeguard in terms of maintaining social development and improving people's livelihoods, according to the conference. The conference called on relevant departments to take responsibility for implementing the action plan and local authorities to seek innovative ways for the implementation.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/27/2020

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China to Promote Inter-provincial Government Affairs Services

China has issued a set of guidelines to promote inter-provincial government affairs services in a bid to further streamline government administration. According to the document issued by the General Office of the State Council, China will facilitate 140 items of inter-provincial government affairs services of high demand. The first batch of 58 such service items, including the registration of market entities, will be made available by the end of this year. The document clarified that priority should be given to services concerning people's livelihood and the interests of enterprises. It urged efforts to enable more administrative matters to be processed online. The capacity of a national coordinated government affairs service platform should be improved, the document said, calling for strengthened data sharing and universal rules and standards. Local authorities were urged to make specific plans to effectively implement the guidelines.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/29/2020

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Vice Premier Stresses Piloting Rural Homestead System Reform

Chinese Vice Premier Hu Chunhua said that the country's reform of the rural homestead system should be piloted steadily and prudently. Hu, also head of the central leading group of rural work, made the remarks while delivering a speech during a video teleconference on Tuesday. The reform, concerning the vital interests of hundreds of millions of farmers and the overall situation of social stability, requires long-term exploration to establish a new institutional framework, Hu noted. Hu stressed that work should be done in the registration and certification of homestead ownership and to improve homestead management to lay a solid foundation for steadily and prudently advancing reform. Efforts must be made to protect the legitimate rights and interests of farmers, he said. Local departments must attach great importance to and deliver meticulous planning of the pilot project of deepening the reform of the rural homestead system, according to Hu.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/29/2020

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JAPAN: Abe Set to Resign, Citing Worsening Health

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has told officials of his ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that he intends to resign, a senior party member said on Friday. Hiroshige Seko made the comment to reporters and it was carried live by public broadcaster NHK. Abe said he did not want to cause trouble by resigning suddenly but his ulcerative colitis has recurred and is at risk of worsening, the Jiji news agency quoted him as saying on Friday. Domestic media also reported that Abe had decided to resign. Abe is scheduled to hold a news conference at 5 p.m. Abe has battled the disease ulcerative colitis for years and two recent hospital visits within a week had fanned questions on whether he could stay in the job until the end of his term as ruling party leader, and hence, premier, in September 2021. As the news spread, Japan's benchmark Nikkei average fell 2.12% to 22,717.02, while the broader Topix shed 1.00% to 1,599.70. The resignation will trigger a leadership race in the LDP, the winner of which must be formally elected in the Diet. The new party leader will hold the post for the rest of Abe's term.

Whoever wins the party poll is likely to keep Abe's reflationary "Abenomics" policies as Japan struggles with the impact of the novel coronavirus, but may have trouble emulating the political longevity that may be Abe's biggest legacy. "The broad picture remains intact. In terms of economic and fiscal policy, the focus remains very much on reflation," said Jesper Koll, senior adviser to asset manager WisdomTree Investments. "Longevity will be a struggle." On Monday, Abe surpassed a record for longest consecutive tenure as premier set by his great-uncle Eisaku Sato half a century ago. Abe's resignation also comes amid an uncertain geopolitical environment, including an intensifying confrontation between the United States and China and ahead of the U.S. presidential election in November. The conservative Abe returned as prime minister for a rare second term in December 2012, pledging to

revive growth with his "Abenomics" mix of hyper-easy monetary policy, fiscal spending and reforms. He also pledged to beef up Japan's defenses and aimed to revise the pacifist constitution. Under fire for his handling of the coronavirus and scandals among party members, Abe has recently seen his support fall to one of the lowest levels of his nearly eight years in office.

Japan has not suffered the explosive surge in virus cases seen elsewhere, but Abe had drawn fire for a clumsy early response and what critics see as a lack of leadership as infections spread. In the second quarter, Japan was hit by its biggest economic slump on record as the pandemic emptied shopping malls and crushed demand for cars and other exports, bolstering the case for bolder policy action to avert a deeper recession. Abe kept his promises to strengthen defenses, boosting spending on the military after years of declines and expanding its capacity to project power abroad. In a historic shift in 2014, his government re-interpreted the constitution to allow Japanese troops to fight abroad for the first time since World War Two. A year later, Japan adopted laws scrapping a ban on exercising the right of collective self-defense or defending a friendly country under attack. But Abe proved unable to revise the U.S.-drafted, post-war constitution's pacifist Article 9, a personal mission that also eluded his grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi, who quit as premier in 1960 because of uproar over a U.S-Japan security pact.

From <https://japantoday.com> 09/01/2020

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Japan Considers Public-Private Body to Eradicate Malicious Online Retailers

Japan considers public-private body to eradicate malicious online retailers. In an effort to root out malicious online retailers, the government has been considering creating a system to share information with private enterprises. The internet has made shopping convenient, but this form of shopping has also caused trouble for consumers as they cannot see the sellers in person. Reports of cases in which fake brand-name products or defective items are sold online continue. In many cases, consumers who buy these have no recourse, as they usually have no way to contact the sellers or cannot reach them. The government will form a public-private consultative body as early as 2021 with the participation of online shopping site operators such as Rakuten Inc. and Amazon.com Inc. The government is also considering revising the Specified Commercial Transactions Law to crack down on malicious and illegal sales through online shopping and auction sites, and the new body will be formed based on the revised law.

The consultative body will impose confidentiality on the participating companies and share information such as the contact numbers and addresses of unscrupulous merchants and sellers. The companies will also mutually report on how they

responded to affected consumers. Some major tech companies have already joined forces, and the government hopes to use the information in consumer affairs. According to the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry, the online shopping market saw a 2.5-fold increase from ¥7.79 trillion in 2010 to ¥19.36 trillion in 2019. In recent years, the National Consumer Affairs Center of Japan has annually received more than 200,000 consultations regarding online shopping, and many of the complaints include being unable to reach the seller. In addition to forming a consultative body, the government will ask online shopping site operators to strictly check and manage information on sellers. The government is considering imposing penalties on sellers if their addresses and other information are found to be false in order to create an environment in which consumers can shop safely online.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 09/09/2020

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Suga Poised to Win LDP Leadership

Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, a longtime loyal aide of outgoing Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, is poised to win a ruling party leadership election on Monday, virtually ensuring that he replaces Abe this week in the nation's top job. Suga, 71, who has said he would pursue Abe's key economic and foreign policies, is expected to get the bulk of votes from 394 Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lawmakers and is likely to win a majority of 141 votes from the party's local chapters. The winner of the LDP race is virtually certain to be elected prime minister in a parliamentary vote on Wednesday because of the LDP's majority in the lower house. He will serve out Abe's term as party leader through September 2021. Abe, Japan's longest serving premier, said last month he would quit due to ill health, ending a nearly eight-year term. Suga has said he would continue Abe's signature "Abenomics" strategy of hyper-easy monetary policy, government spending and reforms while juggling the challenges of COVID-19 and a slumping economy, and confronting longer-term issues such as Japan's aging population and low birthrate.

Suga, whose resume is thin on diplomatic experience, faces geopolitical challenges such as building ties with the winner of the Nov. 3 U.S. presidential election and balancing concern over China's maritime aggressiveness with bilateral economic interdependence. Speculation is simmering that Suga will call a snap election for parliament's lower house as soon as next month to boost his chances of winning a full three-year term as LDP chief next year. A vote for the lower chamber must be held by late October 2021. Suga, the son of a strawberry farmer from northern Japan who got his start in politics as a local assemblyman, has since 2012 held the key post of chief cabinet secretary, acting as Abe's top government spokesman, coordinating policies and keeping bureaucrats in line. He has the image as more of a behind-the-scenes operator than a frontline leader but rose in opinion polls after he announced his candidacy to succeed Abe. He won support from most LDP factions,

outpacing his rivals, former defense minister Shigeru Ishiba and ex-foreign minister Fumio Kishida.

From <https://japantoday.com> 09/13/2020

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Suga Starts Work as New Prime Minister as Diet Convenes

Yoshihide Suga began work as Japan's new prime minister on Thursday, a day after assuming the top post and launching his cabinet. Suga attended an extraordinary session, opened by Emperor Naruhito, in the upper house of the Diet. Before the session, Suga told reporters at the prime minister's office: "I want to meet people's expectations by creating a cabinet that works for people and achieves results." He said he will appoint senior vice ministers and parliamentary vice ministers on Friday. Suga pledged to revive the economy and bring the coronavirus under control. He said he would further push forward policies laid out by his predecessor, Shinzo Abe, who stepped down due to ill health. Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato, who served as health minister under Abe, said the government will thoroughly execute the coronavirus response decided under the previous administration, which ranged from securing vaccines for all people to expanding tests. "The important thing is to prevent infections and bring economic and social activities back to normal and revive them," the new top government spokesman said.

In the longer term, Kato said the Suga government will tackle issues such as the low birthrate and the aging of the population as well as promoting decentralization, by eliminating sectionalism and checking vested interests. On the diplomatic front, Kato reiterated Suga's pledge to establish close ties with Japan's neighbors including Russia and resolve the issue of North Korea's abduction of Japanese nationals in the 1970s and 1980s and bring the abductees home through international cooperation. Suga retained eight ministers, including Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso, Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and economic revitalization minister Yasutoshi Nishimura, reflecting his pledge of continuity with Abe. Among the five new faces joining the cabinet was Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi, Abe's younger brother. The remaining seven members were either shifted from other posts or returned to positions they had held in the past. The appointments were spread across the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's seven major factions, including the five that carried Suga to an overwhelming victory over two rivals in the party's presidential election on Monday.

From <https://japantoday.com> 09/17/2020

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Suga Aims to Get New Digital Agency Running by Autumn 2021

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has asked the government to speed up preparations for his flagship new digital agency, his digital minister said on Friday, which a newspaper said he aims to get up and running by the autumn of 2021. Creating an agency to accelerate the digitalization of Japan's outdated government administration has been a key pledge of Suga's, who was elected premier on Wednesday. Takuya Hirai, digital transformation minister, said during a media briefing Suga had told him to accelerate preparations and that he and other government staff members would gather this four-day weekend to discuss the project, and a schedule. The Nikkei newspaper earlier reported that Suga's administration was working towards getting the agency off the ground by autumn next year and planned to submit a bill in parliament for its creation in January, without citing sources. Asked how long it would take to set it up, Hirai said: "I think the prime minister will give us specific instructions."

The agency will spearhead efforts to make administrative work more IT-friendly, and speed up the process by consolidating various functions spread across ministries, the Nikkei said. To prepare for the launch of the new agency, the government would create a committee that may be headed by an expert from the private sector, the newspaper added. In Japan, less than 12% of administrative work is transacted online, according to the Japan Research Institute think-tank. While the government has made "digital transformation" its main policy plank this year, the switch has proved difficult due partly to a vertically structured bureaucracy that hampers efforts to use common platforms for administrative work. Suga has pledged to make sweeping changes to overcome the digital woes, which were blamed for delaying delivery of cash payouts to help citizens weather the impact of the coronavirus.

From <https://japantoday.com> 09/19/2020

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Japan's Democracy Biased Without Women Participating: LDP Lawmaker

A senior Liberal Democratic Party lawmaker has urged her party to squarely face the lack of female presence in Japanese politics, saying the country's democracy will remain biased without a significantly higher number of women involved in decision-making at both the parliament and local assembly levels. Former Defense Minister Tomomi Inada, who has made no secret about her aim of becoming prime minister, asserted that women are hardly represented in the Diet even though they make up half of the population and 40 percent of the LDP membership. "If women do not have a place to discuss policies they want to see enacted, Japan's democracy cannot help but be biased," she said at a recent press conference in Tokyo. Inada herself has faced hurdles -- first in turning from a lawyer to become a politician and most recently, in running for LDP leadership. Yoshihide Suga won the LDP

presidency with the backing of the majority of LDP factions and replaced Shinzo Abe, who stepped down due to health reasons.

"I saw faction politics suddenly taking center stage during the presidential race...but I found it quite peculiar that Mr. Suga, who belongs to no faction, was elected through the power of factions," Inada said. Her faction, the biggest in the LDP that has deep ties with Abe, discouraged her by backing Suga, then the chief Cabinet secretary under Abe. During the LDP leadership race, a group of female lawmakers including Inada proposed to Suga and two other candidates that the winner place more women in the Cabinet and key party posts. Suga, however, only appointed two women to his Cabinet. "Seeing just two in the Cabinet, I was disappointed, realizing (the proposals) were not taken very seriously," she said.

Given the LDP's stable rule and no strong opposition force present, Inada said Japan may only get a female prime minister "when the LDP holds a sense of critical urgency to better Japanese democracy." Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike, 68, was the LDP's first-ever female candidate in the 2008 presidential election, but there has been no one to follow. Japan ranked 121st in the World Economic Forum's ranking on gender equality among 153 countries surveyed last year, and its percentage of female lawmakers in the House of Representatives stood at 9.9 percent in August. "In order to enhance Japanese democracy and ensure Japan a bright future, I want to create a society in which women have more of a voice in politics," Inada said. "I'd like to realize a free democratic and diverse political landscape that even in Japan, women aim to become prime ministers and girls who see them aim to become politicians," she said.

From <https://japantoday.com> 09/28/2020

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SOUTH KOREA: Coronavirus Pandemic Accelerates Digital Transformation

The coronavirus pandemic is accelerating digital transformation and the world needs to prepare for this structural change in a post-pandemic era, South Korea's finance minister has said. Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki made the remarks at an online meeting of the Group of 20 Finance and Health Ministers on Thursday, the ministry said in a statement. Hong said the pandemic has accelerated digital transformation and contactless solutions in businesses and society, while increasing the need for an eco-friendly economy. Hong also briefed participants about South Korea's stimulus packages to recover from the pandemic. In July, South Korea said it will invest 160 trillion won (US\$137 billion) by 2025 under the bold stimulus package that could create 1.9 million jobs and kick-start the coronavirus-hit economy. Unlike conventional infrastructure projects, the deal features 28 projects that will transform the nation's fossil fuel-reliant economy into an eco-friendly one and increase state

investment in artificial intelligence and fifth-generation (5G) telecommunication services. During the online meeting, G-20 ministers admitted vulnerability in coping with the pandemic. "We recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to strengthen health systems and has shown vulnerabilities in the international community's ability to prevent, detect and respond effectively to pandemic threats," they said in a statement. "This reinforces the need to deliver on commitments to strengthen health systems, particularly enhancing preparedness, prevention, detection and response capacities," the statement said.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 09/18/2020

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Smart Gadgets, Digital Services Boom amid Pandemic: Ministry

Smart devices and digital services gained popularity in line with growing demand for new tech services amid the contactless trend spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, the science ministry said Thursday. In a report, the science ministry said new tech services continued to rack up fast growth this year thanks to lifestyle changes amid the pandemic. Sales of smart speakers by South Korea's three major telecom operators surged nearly 50 percent in the past year. Cumulative sales of artificial intelligence (AI)-based speakers from the country's major telecom firms -- SK Telecom Co., KT Corp. and LG Uplus Corp. -- rose 45.7 percent to 8.6 million units in March this year from the previous year, according to the ministry. Internet-only banks, including Kakao Bank operated by the country's top messenger operator Kakao Corp., also boomed this year, as the total number of internet-only bank accounts grew 50 percent over the same period to 24 million. There were also 93 self-driving vehicles being tested in the country as of March, compared to 62 from the previous year. Other smart devices also experienced growth, as the number of registrations for internet-of-things devices grew 21.6 percent to 26.1 million in June from the previous year, while drone registrations jumped 41.7 percent to 13,234 units over the same period, according to the ministry. Earlier this year, South Korea laid out an ambitious stimulus plan, the digital New Deal, to develop new tech industries and create over 900,000 new jobs by spending 58.2 trillion won (US\$50 billion) by 2025.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 09/24/2020

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: To Reform Logistics System to Attract More

Investors

The Indonesian government has announced a reformed National Logistics Ecosystem (NLE) recently which was expected to ease the country's business community of logistics management. Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati on Thursday announced that the government is developing the reformed NLE to simplify the upstream to downstream process to cut the logistics cost from 23.5 percent to 17 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). The cost could be saved among others from the delivery order process and the issuance of letters for containers, she noted, citing that these services were previously open from Monday to Friday at 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. local time, and now they are open all day online. The minister expected such a way of operation would save the logistics cost by 402 billion rupiahs (some 27.06 million U.S. dollars) per year and cut the time by 91 percent. Logistics companies said that the improvement in the national logistics ecosystem would accelerate cargo traffics as the government has made the business process in the new system easier. "We are happy with the NLE as it helps us increase productivities," the Indonesian Trucking Association's General Chairman Gemilang Tarigan told a press conference on Thursday.

The Indonesian Logistics and Forwarders Association's Yukki Nugrahawan Hanafi said the effort to shorten the long logistics business process would make a new history in the logistics ecosystem. Hanafi said the NLE would support the development of the logistics industry in Indonesia. "We, the business sector, will also give our full commitment to the government and support the NLE." Other stake holders of the NLE include relevant ministries that have expressed readiness and support to the new logistics ecosystem which was expected to simplify the upstream to downstream process and cut the logistics cost. "The ministry fully supports the NLE which was expected to remove obstacles, accelerate process and reduce logistics costs in the domestic and international trading activities," Trade Minister Agus Suparmanto said on Friday. The Trade Ministry would simplify the licensing process related to the domestic and international services which would be integrated to the NLE to attract more investors, the minister said.

In addition, the ministry would also cooperate with provincial and district administrations to set up cargo terminals in an effort to increase the national export-import productivities, he said. Meanwhile, the Transportation Ministry would integrate the systems of licensing from the export-import to logistics services in the aspect of transportation in a bid to improve the inter-regional connectivity and accessibility management. Transportation Minister Budi Karya Sumadi called on logistics companies in a virtual press conference to actively take part in making the new NLE better with high competitive edge. The logistics cost in Indonesia is higher than that of other economies in Southeast Asia, according to the Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati. With the reforms, the transporting and loading-unloading process which previously underwent duplications in seven institutions would now take place

under a single submission system, and this would save about 4.03 million U.S. dollars per annum and cut the time by 74 percent. The logistics sector would then increase not only in efficiency but also its contribution to improving the competitive edge of the whole national economics, Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati told a virtual press conference.

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CAMBODIA: Sets Up Consumer Protection Committee with Strong Powers

Cambodia is to get a consumer protection committee with the power to jail offenders, close businesses or correct misleading information, the Khmer Times reported on Thursday. The government has issued a sub-decree on the organization and functions for the National Committee for Consumer Protection (NCCP), giving it powers to investigate both brick and mortar establishments and e-commerce. The notice was signed by Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen. "It aims to push and promote implementation of a law on consumer protection with efficiency and make sure every trade activity is credible and honest," the sub-decree said. The NCCP consists of officials from the Ministries of Commerce; Economy and Finance; Interior; Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation; Justice; Posts and Telecommunications; Health; and Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries; the National Bank of Cambodia; the Directorate-General of Consumer Protection, Competition and Fraud Repression (CCF); and the Council of Ministers. The NCCP will be tasked to prepare and promote the policy and strategic plan related to consumer protection and propose to the government checks and amends to the law and regulations related to consumer protection work if necessary. In addition, it is also able to give recommendations to the commerce minister to determine dishonesty, send warning letters and also propose that the government set a date for a National Day for Consumer Protection.

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MALAYSIA: PM's Coalition Wins Crucial State Election

Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin's coalition has won a crucial state assembly election in the eastern state of Sabah. A group of parties aligned with Muhyiddin's federal government won a slim majority of 38 seats out of the total 73 seats, unseating the previous state government, according to the results announced by the Election Commission after midnight Sunday. In a televised speech following the results, Muhyiddin thanked the voters of Sabah and urged the new state assemblymen to fulfil their mandate to their best ability. The election victory for

Muhyiddin came after a recent claim by the national opposition leader and former deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim that he had secured a "convincing" majority in the lower house of the parliament to form a new federal government. Muhyiddin insisted that he is still the legitimate prime minister, a position he held since March.

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SINGAPORE: PM Calls for Joint Efforts in Updating, Reforming Multilateral Institutions

Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong called for joint efforts in updating and reforming multilateral institutions, including the United Nations (UN), when he delivered a video message at the high-level meeting to commemorate the UN's 75th anniversary on Tuesday morning. Lee said all sides must work together to do the updating and reforming, so as to keep the institutions open, inclusive, and fit for purpose, to reflect current economic and political realities, and to respond effectively to shared challenges, including pandemics, climate change, extremist-terrorism, sustainable development, and cybersecurity. He said a rules-based multilateral system, with the UN at its core, is the best hope of all sides to build a stable international environment. For all its limitations, it has helped to level the playing field for all countries. "It has given small states like Singapore a voice, and a stake in the global commons," Lee said. "Major powers also benefit from a more peaceful and stable global environment, and when they take joint initiatives through multilateral institutions, it enhances their political legitimacy and moral authority." However, the prime minister said recent trends have exposed shortcomings of multilateral institutions, which include the inability to achieve consensus on major issues, the conflicts that continue to ravage societies, and the millions who still lack access to food, healthcare and education. He said the world was changing even before COVID-19. Geopolitical tensions were growing; globalization was showing fissures; isolationism, protectionism and unilateralism were pushing back against multilateral institutions and international cooperation. "The COVID-19 crisis has sharpened these trends, but it has also reminded us how interconnected and interdependent countries are, and why we all need to work together to defeat the gravest challenge of our time," Lee added.

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THAILAND: Finance Minister Resigns After 20 Days in Office

Thailand's Finance Minister Pridi Daochai resigned on Tuesday after performing duty for only 20 days. The royal gazette, published on Tuesday, said Pridi's resignation as the finance minister will take effect on Wednesday. In his letter of resignation, Pridi

cited "poor health" as the reason for calling it quits after starting his ministerial jobs on Aug. 13. Deputy Finance Minister Santi Phromphat will likely to perform as the acting finance minister until Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha names another person to replace Pridi. Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam dismissed as "groundless" rumors that Pridi had developed a serious conflict with some influential figures in government over the naming of senior officials as heads of several departments under his own portfolio. Early last month, Pridi had resigned as managing director of Kasikornbank to be named finance minister in the cabinet.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 09/01/2020

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99 Thai MPs Lodge Joint Constitution Amendment Bid to Stop Senators from Casting Votes for Future PM

A total of 99 MPs in Thailand filed a joint motion for constitution amendment on Tuesday in a fresh effort to stop all senators from casting votes for a future prime minister. A total of 76 opposition MPs and 23 government MPs lodged the joint bid to amend the 2017 constitution's Section 272 under which the 250 senators, earlier handpicked by Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, can take part in the voting for a post-election prime minister as they just did for the current one last year. Tuesday's charter amendment bid is primarily meant to deny the legislators in the Senate such decisive role alongside those in the House of Representatives in the picking of the future head of government. The 76 lawmakers in the opposition bloc, who signed up for the fresh charter amendment bid, include 54 MPs of the Move Forward Party, 10 MPs of the Thai Liberal Party, six MPs of the Prachachat Party, five MPs of the Puea Chat Party and one MP of the Thai People Power Party.

The 23 legislators of the government parties, who endorsed the amendment bid, include 16 MPs of the Democrat Party, one MP of the Bhumjaithai Party, one MP of the Charthaipattana Party and those of five splinter parties, each of which only has one MP and is practically viewed as a partner of the coalition government. Nevertheless, the Pheu Thai Party, the biggest opposition party, has declined to join Tuesday's move among the MPs on both sides of the parliament aisle and apparently preferred to focus on the planned amendment to the constitution's Section 256 instead. A separate motion has been earlier lodged at parliament to amend Section 256 to pave way for the setting up of the so-called Constitution Drafting Committee, members of which may include some who might be elected by the people and others who might be named by the prime minister.

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Thai PM Orders Law Enforcers to Extradite Red Bull Scion Home

to Face Trial

Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha on Tuesday told the press that he had already instructed authorities to seek help from Interpol to nab Red Bull scion Vorayuth Yoovidhya and have him extradited to Thailand to stand trial in the high-profile hit-and-run case that took place eight years ago. "Please rest assured that there is fairness in the Thai judicial system," said Prayut. "Interpol had already been informed and will issue a Red Notice to the suspect to have him provisionally arrested and held, and later sent back to Thailand to face charges." Just last week, prosecutors in charge of the case decided to indict the fugitive on charges of reckless driving causing the death of a junior police officer. Vorayuth has also been implicated with illicit drug use while taking the wheel of his Ferrari car before smashing into the police officer. The prime minister said that Interpol would alert its member countries of the Red Notice and expected an update from the Thai police within a week. Thai police and the Office of the Attorney-General (OAG) had previously decided to drop all charges against Vorayuth, indicating that the Red Bull family has already compensated the family of the dead police officer. However, the decision to withdraw charges against the scion had sparked national outcry, prompting leading law experts to demand a relaunch into the investigation. Justice Minister Somsak Thepsuthin had also given his word that all witnesses would be provided with maximum protection against possible reprisals.

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Thailand Names New Army Commander-in-Chief

Thailand on Tuesday named Gen. Narongphan Jitkaewtae as the new 42nd Thai Army Commander-in-Chief, replacing Gen. Apirat Kongsompong. At a ceremony outside the Royal Thai Army Museum, Narongphan, who will take over as the Army chief from Oct. 1, said on live TV that he will keep Apirat's policies and ideologies alive and maintain unity among military officers to provide unity for Thailand and the monarchy. "I pledge to all of you that I will continue the obligations, responsibility, policies and ideology of the army chief, General Apirat Kongsompong, to the fullest of my ability," Narongpan said. Meanwhile, King Maha Vajiralongkorn ordered on Sept. 15 the Bureau of the Royal Household to accept a transfer of Apirat from the retirement of the Royal Thai Army to the Bureau of the Royal Household in the position of Vice-Chamberlain of the Household.

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VIETNAM: Female Parliamentarians Play Important Role in

Securing Jobs, Income for Women Workers

A draft resolution titled 'The role of women parliamentarians in securing jobs and income for women workers' was adopted on Tuesday in the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians of AIPA (WAIPA) within the framework of the General Assembly of ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA 41). The draft is expected to be submitted for approval at the AIPA-41 on Thursday. Addressing the meeting, Vice Chairwoman of the National Assembly of Việt Nam Tòng Thị Phóng mentioned the severe impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on female workers. "Closing the gender gap in employment should be a top priority if we want to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls by 2030," she said. Delivering a speech at the meeting, Chairwoman of the National Assembly Committee for Social Affairs Nguyễn Thúy Anh, who presided over the meeting, recalled actions by Vietnamese parliamentarians in response to COVID-19, including reviewing and approving the bailout package for those affected by the pandemic, encouraging people to adhere to recommendations against the pandemic, while conveying citizens' needs and demands during the pandemic to authorised agencies.

Other activities included monitoring the implementation of policies against the pandemic and post-pandemic supporting policies; integrating relevant matters; supervising works of the National Assembly; as well as adjusting working plans and programmes to work with the Government to fight the pandemic. She also made recommendations for securing jobs and income for women workers. First, she mentioned enhancement parliamentary activities, monitoring of the State budget, representing women and assisting in building the capacity of women in response to the pandemic, as well as promoting women's leadership in emergencies. Second, she proposed the enhancement of parliamentary co-operation for a responsive and cohesive ASEAN Community while devising supporting measures for women workers and disadvantaged people amid the pandemic. Thúy Anh also suggested more exchanges to share experience in establishing and improving working policies for women and more learning and working opportunities for women. Participants at the event discussed the impacts of COVID-19 on female labourers and measures adopted by their parliaments to address challenges facing women during the outbreak as well as policies and actions to promote gender equality in their countries.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 09/08/2020

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Việt Nam Strives Towards Building Digital Government

On the basis of results achieved in the process of building an e-Government, Việt Nam is preparing to move to a digital Government according to the policy set out in Resolution 52- NQ/TW of the Politburo. The information was given at the 15th national conference on e-Government (eGov) held in HCM City on Thursday. The

conference was co-organised by IDG Việt Nam, Việt Nam Digital Communications Association, and the Department of Information and Communications of HCM City. Speaking at the seminar, Ngô Hải Phan, director of the Administrative Procedures Control Agency (APCA) under the Government Office, said the Government Office had co-ordinated with ministries, branches, localities, IT corporations, domestic and foreign experts to focus on building and implementing many important information systems as the foundation for the e-Government development of the country in the 2018-20 period. These information systems had been put into operation, creating a big shift in settling relations between the Government and agencies in administration.

This also provided impetus for the implementation of an e-Government and contributing to the realisation of the dual goals of economic development while minimising the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on people and businesses, he said. It was reported at the conference that the National Public Service Portal had provided 1,039 public services and 6,842 administrative procedures online at four levels by the end of last month. The portal had also reached over 60 million visits, over 235,000 registered accounts, more than 15 million synchronised records, and over 295,000 online records. The online payment system on the portal was also deployed from March, performing over 9,000 transactions. Currently, according to the e-Government development ranking of the United Nations, Việt Nam has increased two places, ranked 86th out of 193 countries, 24th out of 47 in Asia and 6th in Southeast Asia.

However, in order to reach the target to be in the top four countries in ASEAN by 2025 and among the top 70 countries in e-Government, there were still many things to be done, said the director, including listening to domestic and international experts and organisations in order to perfect the roadmap and choose suitable solutions for the country. Phạm Anh Tuấn, Deputy Minister of Information and Communications, said that the policy on building a digital Government was outlined in Resolution 52-NQ/TW of the Politburo. Accordingly, it targeted to basically complete the digital transformation for the Party and State agencies by 2025 and complete the building of digital government by 2030. To implement this policy, the Ministry of Information and Communications is currently preparing to submit to the Prime Minister to issue a national strategy on digital government for the 2021-2025 period.

Businesses slow in digital transformation

Many Vietnamese enterprises, especially small and medium enterprises, are still not fully aware of the role of digital transformation in the fourth industrial revolution. Many reports from the Việt Nam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) have shown that Vietnamese small and medium enterprises currently account for about 97 per cent of the total number of enterprises, but the level of science, technology and innovation is low. Up to 80-90 per cent of machinery used in Vietnamese enterprises is imported; of which, nearly 80 per cent is old technology from the 1980s to 1990s. Cisco Systems, a provider of information technology products and services for

businesses, conducted research on the digital growth index of small and medium-sized enterprises in Asia-Pacific. The study was conducted on more than 1,340 businesses in the region, including 50 businesses in Việt Nam.

Vietnamese SMEs are facing barriers in digital transformation, such as a lack of digital skills and human resources (17 per cent) or a strong information technology foundation to enable digital transformation (16.7 per cent). However, 18 per cent of Vietnamese SMEs have invested in cloud technology, 12.7 per cent invested in cybersecurity and 10.7 per cent invested in software and hardware upgrades. The Tin Tức (News) newspaper quoted Vũ Tiến Lộc, VCCI chairman, as saying that State agencies needed to continue to institutionalise and actively implement local technology innovation guidelines and policies. He recommended co-ordination among departments, agencies, branches and localities in promoting and implementing guidelines and policies on technology innovation. The State's policies in this area were not attractive enough, while procedures were still cumbersome and time-consuming, he said. It was also difficult for businesses to access preferential capital and other support sources, said the chairman. On the business side, Lộc said that it was necessary to have the right view and a clear sense of responsibility to innovate the business model, technology in production and management models based on digital technology. That was the key factor for businesses to move towards creative, sustainable and inclusive development goals, said the chairman.

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Police Must Stay Corruption-Free: Party Leader

Party General Secretary and President Nguyễn Phú Trọng told the police forces to be “truly worthy” of their mission to maintain security and order by being disciplined, organised, and committed to prevent and combat corruption in their own ranks. The Party leader made the statement at a Politburo meeting with the Standing Committee of the Police Party Central Committee in Hà Nội on Monday. Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc and Chairwoman of National Assembly Nguyễn Thị Kim Ngân also attended the meeting. Trọng told the police to work towards being exemplary and upright units that wouldn’t “do the wrong things” in pursuit of power, wealth and positions and tarnish the “reputation and honour” of the police. The Party leader stressed the importance of Việt Nam People’s Public Security alongside the Việt Nam People’s Army, calling them to the “sword and shield” in efforts to maintain political security and social order. The Politburo lauded the police forces’ enhanced internal inspections to discover and handle wrongdoings and offending officials. The Politburo acknowledged the outstanding results of the Party Committee of the Public Security Ministry in leading and directing the arrangement of the organisation, apparatus and personnel in a streamlined manner, reducing intermediate tiers, and enhancing the direct leadership of the Police Party Central Committee while ensuring

stability and effective operation.

The Police Party Central Committee has ensured prompt and effective analysis and forecasts of situations to consult the Party and State on many policies and guidelines while ensuring stability and security in strategic locations and important urban areas. The whole force has deployed measures to prevent, detect and effectively thwart the conspiracy and activities of hostile reactionary forces, political opportunists, and anti-State and Party groups and individuals, General Secretary Trọng noted. Police forces have ensured utmost protection and security for important political events, prevented and combated manifestations of straying from Party's political ideology, and implemented measures to ensure cybersecurity. He also complimented the police forces for their role in national efforts to prevent and control the COVID-19 pandemic. The police have performed well in preventing and suppressing crimes, handling many economic cases and major corruption cases, effectively fighting environmental crimes, high-tech crimes and smuggling, destroying many large transnational drug trafficking rings, solving many emerging complex issues such as "predatory credit" crimes with the involvement with foreigners. Concluding the meeting, Trọng expressed the belief that the People's Public Security forces would exert their best efforts to carry out their sworn duties and stand ready to sacrifice for the people and the Party and the country while maintaining strong moral principles and appropriate lifestyles.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 09/21/2020

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HCM City Proposes New Urban Administration Model

HCM City is proposing a new urban administration model that aims to streamline the state governance system and ensure people's rights and obligations. The new model is expected to help solve major problems faced by HCM City and promote the city's role in the southern region and the country's development. The city's population and economic scale and density is the largest in the country, which requires that administrative decisions should be carried out by grassroots-level authorities, residents and enterprises in a timely, precise, and organised manner, as required by the model. The urban administration model is also expected to help shorten the time to develop plans for socio-economic development. Speaking at a conference on urban administration in HCM City, Nguyễn Thành Phong, chairman of the city People's Committee, said the administration project was first proposed in 2007 and amended in 2013. Legal problems delayed its implementation last year. The city began abolishing People's Councils for a number of years ago in an effort to reduce overlapping functions and tasks of state governance and reduce expenditures.

As a result, governance improved, according to Phong. However, the elimination of the councils was stopped in 2016. In a rapidly developing urban area like HCM City,

People's Councils in districts and wards create an intermediate level that slows down the working process. And the authority assigned to councils is already limited. Abolishing these People's Councils helps to streamline administrative procedures. Phong said that next year HCM City will restart the elimination of these People's Councils. The councils in 19 districts and 259 wards will be abolished around mid-year. After the conference, the Ministry of Home Affairs will submit a proposal on the new urban administration model to the Government for consideration and will then submit it to the National Assembly for approval at its next meeting, Deputy Minister Trần Anh Tuấn said, adding that the ministry will issue detailed regulations soon on how to carry out the National Assembly's Resolution on building a new urban administration model in the city.

Thủ Đức City

In another city project, Thủ Đức City will be developed by merging Districts 2, 9, and Thủ Đức. The new city will have a People's Council and People's Committee. Thủ Đức City will be expected to take the core role to speed up the city's economy as the southern region's main economic zone. After establishment, the new city will contribute nearly 30 per cent of the city's gross regional domestic product and 7 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. Huỳnh Thanh Nhân, head of the Department of Home Affairs, said that Thủ Đức City will cover 211 square kilometres and be home to more than 1 million people. Thủ Đức City will be developed into eight centres including Thủ Thiêm International Finance Centre, Rạch Chiếc Health and Sport Area, High Technology Centre, Educational Technology Centre, Tam Đa Ecotechnology, Trường Thọ Residential Area, Long Phước University Area and Cát Lái International Port.

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South Asia

INDIA: Mr. Suresh Sethi Joins as MD and CEO - Designate at NSDL e-Governance

NSDL e-Governance Infrastructure Ltd., India's leading technological infrastructure provider, announces that Mr. Suresh Sethi has taken charge as the company's Managing Director and CEO – Designate. He was earlier the Founder, CEO, and MD of India Post Payments Bank. NSDL e-Governance's current Managing Director and CEO, Mr. Gagan Rai, who has been at the helm of affairs at the company for the last 25 years, is set to retire in February 2021. Mr. Suresh Sethi takes command of NSDL e-Governance at an exciting phase as the company aims to expand its geographical presence across the globe with its innovative and world-class solutions such as the National Unique Identity, tax-related services, recordkeeping of Pension accounts, e-sign, eKYC, etc. It also envisages elevating education financing in India with its

state-of-the-art education finance portals – Vidya Lakshmi, Vidyasaarathi, and Vidya Kaushal. Mr. Sethi will spearhead the company's growth efforts across India and also in international markets. Commenting on the development, Mr. Gagan Rai, Managing Director and CEO, NSDL e-Governance, said, "I am extremely happy to pass on the baton to Mr. Suresh Sethi. I wish him success as he takes on the mantle of leading NSDL e-Governance into an extraordinary growth phase. The future of our company looks exceedingly bright under him. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all the board members and colleagues who have shown tremendous support throughout my stint in the company and have been the key pillars in what has been a fabulous growth journey."

A firm believer in financial inclusion, Mr. Suresh Sethi has been pivotal in the development of India Post Payments Bank and is credited with creating the largest inter-operable banking infrastructure for the public good at scale. Mr. Suresh Sethi, Managing Director, and CEO – Designate, NSDL e-Governance said, "I am honoured to be a part of this great institution that has played a pioneering role in building the e-governance infrastructure for the nation. I look forward to working towards establishing the company as a Global Leader in the e-Governance and ICT space. The current pandemic has brought forth new challenges leading to the adoption of digital business models and a paradigm shift in e-governance services. NSDL e-Governance is well poised to offer formidable value propositions and unparalleled services in both B2B and B2C segments. Before the India Post Payments Bank, Mr. Sethi was the Managing Director at Vodafone M-Pesa. In his earlier stints, he was also associated with leading financial services companies such as Citigroup and YES Bank. As an industry veteran, he has held CXO and Managing Director positions at regional & global level across Business Strategy, Product Development, Sales & Client Management and Operations. He has extensively worked in the financial inclusion space leveraging fintech and digital-led innovation to make a difference.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 09/01/2020

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Simpliance Providing E-governance Platforms

Simpliance's specialist GRC platform is a structured approach for assessing, documenting, monitoring and auditing all core functions from both strategic and operations perspective. Unlike many other GRC applications, Simpliance is light on the pocket and super easy to setup, says Anil Prem D'Souza, CEO, Simpliance Technologies in conversation with Elets News Network (ENN). Simpliance provides technology-based governance, risk and compliance solutions to organizations varying from large corporates to start-ups. While Simpliance started with a focus on digitizing Labour Law Compliance in India, we have slightly pivoted to providing a complete digitally enabled Governance, Risk and Compliance Platform for

companies. Simpliance also hosts India's largest digital platform for automated Statutory Labour Law Compliance Management that helps organizations to comply, manage and monitor the health and risk status of labour legislations in their organization on a real-time and accurate basis. Our intelligent legal engine consolidates and auto configures all central and state laws, providing ease of monitoring and implementing labour law compliances on a single unified cloud platform. We are also the first company in India to catalogue and publish for free, all central and state labour laws in India with additional data such minimum wages, Labour Welfare Fund details, Professional Tax, State Wise Holiday Lists etc which is utilized by many legal, HR and compliance professionals for their day to day compliance requirements. We have close to 35000 subscribers till date with many more subscribing each day for our clear and transparent data on Indian Labour Laws. Simpliance's specialist GRC platform is a structured approach for assessing, documenting, monitoring and auditing all core functions from both strategic and operations perspective. Unlike many other GRC applications, Simpliance is light on the pocket and super easy to setup.

The GRC tools help business automate processes, improve compliance scores and develop risk management plans. By clear articulation of objectives, we consequently place processes and controls in place. The tool also assists to realign strategies when new risks emerge. We recognize the need to optimize business performance through managing risks, while being compliant. What solutions have been launched by you for labour laws? Automated Labour Law Compliance Software– Real-time labour law compliance monitoring tool with auto configuration and recurring activities, evidence management, scores and email alerts E-Audit Platform–Online cloud-based audit platform that allows online submission of evidences by auditees and online auditing by auditors ensuring the tracking, log, observation and recommendation are all visible to various stakeholders in the organization without the need for manual requesting & reporting. Automated POSH(Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace) Management Software–Our compliance engine auto configures all compliances related to POSH and enables redressal mechanism by logging and tracking of incidents. Subscription For Gazette Notifications– Email service that delivers the latest gazette notifications, amendments, acts and rules directly to the subscribers' inbox with a copy of the gazette notifications attached. Automated Compliance Checklist – Latest and most accurate checklist of all Statutory Compliances under relevant acts and rules applicable to an organization, customised to their industry, state and headcount.

What specific solutions have you developed for startups?

Simpliance is built both for start-ups as well as large corporates. Our automated compliance platform automatically sets up labour law compliance requirements for start-ups and also enables them to comply with them. With our services offering through sister concern Co-Achieve, we also help start-ups in any offline services that may be required to be compliant. What are your future plans? Our goal is to further

strengthen our position as a leader in the automated and digital statutory compliance market/industry. We have widened our products and service portfolio and are now also morphing in a technology-based Governance, Risk and Compliance management company. While Labour law compliance continues to be the focal point of our business, we are positive that we shall achieve similar success with our GRC modules as well. Automating operational level compliance is going to be the next-big thing for all functions in a business, and that's where we come into play.

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/> 09/01/2020

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Accenture Appoints Bhaskar Ghosh as Chief Strategy Officer

Global professional services company Accenture on Monday said that it has appointed Bhaskar Ghosh as its Chief Strategy Officer. Ghosh succeeds Simon Eaves who has now been appointed as the company's Managing Director of UK and Ireland effective January 1, 2021, with overall responsibility for Accenture's industries and services in those countries. Effective immediately, Ghosh will be responsible for the company's strategy and investments, including ventures and acquisitions. He will continue to lead the growth strategy for Accenture's Industry X business, which includes digital manufacturing and intelligent products and platforms. Ghosh most recently served as adviser to Julie Sweet, Accenture's Chief Executive Officer, on critical areas including growth and investment strategy, business performance, organisational effectiveness and restructuring. Previously, Ghosh was Group Chief Executive of Accenture Technology Services, directing strategy and investments, and leading platforms, products and global technology delivery. "Bhaskar brings incredible vision and business acumen to his new role as chief strategy officer," Sweet said in a statement. "Under his leadership, he helped grow Accenture into a technology industry powerhouse and expanded our data, cloud and security offerings." Olly Benzecry, who has served as managing director and chairman of Accenture in the UK and Ireland since 2011, will continue as chairman until he retires at the end of August 2021, Accenture said.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 09/07/2020

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Uttarakhand Govt to Launch 'Apuni Sarkar' Portal for Online Services

Taking major steps ahead with the digitization of government services, the Government of Uttarakhand is all set to roll out a new digital portal 'Apuni Sarkar' under the Centre's flagship Digital India programme. The new portal is likely to bring transparency in government operations, as this will bring all the state government notified services online. Trivendra Singh Rawat, Chief Minister of Uttarakhand

new portal jointly developed by Information Technology Development Agency (ITDA) of Government of Uttarakhand and National Informatics Centre (NIC) will bring 243 notified services under 'Right to Service' on the new online platform within the coming three months. Trivendra Singh Rawat, Chief Minister of Uttarakhand has already directed the state officials to fast track the portal project that will not just provide government services online but will also make all the services under e-districts portal on the new 'Apuni Sarkar' portal. To streamline the operations of the project, the state government has appointed all the departmental heads as the nodal officers for the implementation of the project. All the meetings will be chaired by the chief commissioner of the Right to Service Commission with the respective heads on a regular basis.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: New Credit Union Established

The State Tax Service under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy has registered a new credit union, Total Finance. The legal address of the company: Baku city, Nasimi district, 20 January street, building 23-a, apartment 50. Authorized capital of the company is 4,000 manat (\$2,352). Legal representative: Aytan Gafarova.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 09/08/2020

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KAZAKHSTAN: President Appoints New Deputy Head of Anti-Corruption Agency

By the order of the President, Dmitry Malakhov has been named new Deputy Chairman of the Anti-Corruption Agency of Kazakhstan, Trend reports citing Kazinform. Previous Deputy Head of the Anti-Corruption Agency has been relieved of the post by the corresponding decree.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 09/03/2020

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Minister Rules out Future Water Buybacks

The Morrison government has pledged to never return to water buybacks as it moves to shake up policing the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. Water Minister Keith Pitt on

Friday announced a funding boost for water recovery programs and grants for basin communities. "I won't be and the Commonwealth won't be performing water buyback at any point - that is from the prime minister down," he told the Farm Writers' Association of NSW. Former water minister David Littleproud previously threatened states with buybacks if they didn't deliver on water-saving projects. That leverage has evaporated with the minister's new pledge, which won't be legislated. Instead, the government will need to ensure water is returned to the environment through water-saving projects, which are lagging behind the basin plan's 2024 deadline. The government capped buybacks at 1500 gigalitres a year in 2015.

Labor's water spokeswoman Terri Butler said there hadn't been a buyback for some time. Under the changes, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's compliance functions will be merged with the river system's inspector-general. Ms Butler said the government had finally moved to empower the basin cop more than a year after appointing interim inspector-general Mick Keelty. "There is a crisis of confidence in this government's leadership in relation to the Murray-Darling Basin and water resources in this country," Ms Butler told ABC radio. Taxpayers will stump up \$38 million to set up the new office, which will need parliamentary approval, and boost compliance across the river system. "This will put to bed any perceptions that the MDBA is structured in a way that it could mark its own homework," Mr Pitt said. The Queensland-based minister said the basin plan was not a case of irrigation versus environment.

"It's about investing in the communities that value and sustain both. It is about getting the right outcomes, not a simplistic focus on numbers," he said. The government will also spend \$34 million extending a kitty designed to fund projects in the basin. In its latest round, the fund's projects included a \$600,000 golf driving range in the Victorian town of Cobram and a \$450,000 filtration system for Bourke's swimming pool in NSW. Mr Pitt said the program was aimed at creating a diverse economic future for communities hit by water recovery. There is also a \$20 million boost for projects to improve river and wetland health through erosion control and pest eradication. A separate program will shell out almost \$38 million for downstream river projects, working with the South Australian government. More than \$7 million will be spent on better monitoring of the river, while \$3.1 million will go to 20 new Indigenous rangers.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/04/2020

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Tax Cuts Not a Priority for Many: Survey

Just one in five Australians consider bringing forward already legislated personal income tax cuts as a priority for when Treasurer Josh Frydenberg hands down his budget on October 6. Instead, a new survey has found a greater number (30 per cent)

want to see income support like the JobSeeker dole payment boosted. The Australian Institute survey of 1017 respondents also found just over a quarter (26 per cent) want the government to spend on infrastructure and government services, like health and education. A mere 12 per cent thought the budget should be focused on decreasing the deficit. The federal government has flagged it is considering bringing forward tax cuts that are due in 2022. Another stage is due in 2024. It has also said infrastructure spending will be part of the mix in the budget, which was delayed from its traditional May release due to the pandemic.

The institute's executive director Ben Oquist said its research shows that bringing forward income tax cuts is not the priority for voters right now. "Not only would tax cuts miss the mark when it comes to economic stimulus, we now see that they aren't even broadly supported as a priority by Australian voters," Mr Oquist said. "There is mounting evidence that income tax cuts that disproportionately favour wealthier Australians are more likely to be saved than spent, rendering their economic stimulatory impact minimal."

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/13/2020

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Donation Disclosure System Flawed: Report

Australia's electoral watchdog has been told to lift its game when it comes to scrutiny of financial disclosures from political parties, candidates and donors. The auditor-general on Thursday released a report into the Australian Electoral Commission's handling of \$5.2 billion in financial disclosure returns over the past four years. The disclosure scheme was set up in 1983 to inform the public about the financial dealings of political parties, candidates and others involved in the election process. The audit report described the AEC's work as "partially effective", pointing out that not all required returns had been obtained, there had been limited analysis of the returns that are obtained and evidence showed some returns are incomplete. "Across the four-year period examined, while the AEC has obtained 5882 annual and election returns, as at 30 June 2020, 75 returns have not been obtained," the report said.

"There have also been delays with the submission of returns to the AEC with 22 per cent of annual returns and 17 per cent of election returns lodged after the legislated due date." It found the AEC does not make effective use of available data sources to identify entities that may have a disclosure obligation that have not submitted a return. And there is "insufficient evidence that the returns that have been provided are accurate and complete". Even with those returns that were obtained "there is limited analysis undertaken", the audit found. However, the AEC rejected the audit's approach, saying the report contained errors of fact and "superficial analysis". "The ANAO's decision to conduct this audit prematurely - before recent legislative

changes have had a chance to take effect - is akin to a building inspector assessing a two-storey house after only the first level had been completed," the AEC said.

"The AEC has not detected systemic issues, wilful or large scale non-compliance with the legislation." The audit found since 2015 only two prosecutions over breaches had proceeded, with a total of \$2000 in penalties applied - both of which took over 600 days to settle. The commission denied there was a need for a more heavy-handed approach to enforcement, saying it had found incomplete or incorrect disclosures were often due to administrative mistakes or misunderstandings, which were quickly rectified.

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Reforms Cut Cost and Time to Access Credit

Customers will get faster access to bank loans under a Morrison government relaxation of responsible lending laws introduced after the global financial crisis. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg on Friday defended the move, arguing it is crucial to free up credit as Australia navigates the coronavirus pandemic. "Responsible lending has become restrictive lending," he told reporters in Canberra. He said banks were becoming risk-averse to the point where loans weren't being granted over fears they would go bad. "We need our banks to be extending credit," Mr Frydenberg said. Under the new rules, lenders will be able to rely on borrower-provided information unless there are reasonable grounds to suspect it is unreliable. Borrowers will be made more accountable for providing accurate information to inform lending decisions, replacing the "lender beware" rules with a "borrower responsibility" principle.

Mr Frydenberg said consumers would no longer have to provide Netflix subscriptions, Uber Eats receipts or other unnecessary details to have credit card limits extended. "We're going to make it quicker to access credit, but while also keeping the consumer protections in place," he said. But Labor is concerned the proposal could tip the balance in favour of big banks and loan sharks. "We put these protections in there to put a brake on the 'sales culture' and they are chucking it away," Labor financial services spokesman Stephen Jones told AAP. "We are deeply concerned." The bill is expected to be referred to a parliamentary inquiry. Greens senator Nick McKim said the banking royal commission had shown a willingness to engage in unlawful and predatory lending. "And what's this government's response? Instead of making the banks abide by the law, they're changing the law to abide by the banks," he said.

The changes respond to concerns banks were being too slow to approve loans, with the government arguing a raft of strong protections are in place to protect consumers. Banks welcomed the announcement, while consumer advocates were critical of a

return to a "buyer beware" mentality. The new regime is slated to come into place from March, provided the changes to credit laws pass parliament. The government is also strengthening protections around "payday loans" and consumer leases to stop them being offered to people who can't afford them. A "fit and proper person" test for debt management companies representing consumers in disputes with financial services firms will also be introduced.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/25/2020

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3、 Management Capacity Building and Innovation

Asia-Pacific

12 Projects Qualified for the Smart City Solutions Competition

The joint innovation competition Tallinnovation of the city of Tallinn and the science and business park Tehnopol was successfully completed. Twelve project ideas with the potential to make the city's services and environment more convenient qualified for the competition. The size of the innovation fund this season was 50,000 euros. From the qualified projects, the jury will select the brightest, who have the opportunity to implement their product or service in an urban environment, create an important network of contacts, carry out pilot projects, use the city's financial support and receive feedback on their product or service. Those who did not manage to apply for the competition this season will have opportunity to do so during the next round of applications next year.

From <https://www.tehnopol.ee/> 09/02/2020

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Countries Have Responded Decisively to the COVID-19 Crisis, but Face Significant Fiscal Challenges Ahead

Governments have taken unprecedented fiscal action in response to the COVID-19 crisis, but countries will need to support economic recovery in the face of significantly increasing fiscal challenges, according a new OECD report. Tax Policy Reforms 2020 describes the latest tax reforms across OECD countries, as well as in Argentina, China, Indonesia and South Africa. The report identifies major tax policy trends adopted before the COVID-19 crisis and takes stock of the tax and broader fiscal measures introduced by countries in response to the pandemic, from its outbreak to June 2020. The report shows that while the size of fiscal packages in response to the COVID-19 crisis has varied across countries, most have been significant, and many countries have taken unprecedented action. It also points out that most countries

have adopted a phased approach to COVID-19, gradually adapting their fiscal packages as the crisis has unfolded. Initial government responses focused on providing income support to households and liquidity to businesses to help them stay afloat. As the crisis has continued, many countries expanded their initial response packages. The most recent measures and discussions suggest that the recovery phase will be supported by expansionary fiscal policy in a number of countries.

With countries facing such high levels of uncertainty, policy agility will be key and targeted support measures should be maintained as long as needed to avoid scarring effects, according to the report. Once recovery is well underway, governments should shift from crisis management to more structural tax reforms, but they must be careful not to act prematurely as this could jeopardise recovery. “Right now, the focus should be on the economic recovery. Once the recovery is firmly in place, rather than simply returning to business as usual, governments should seize the opportunity to build a greener, more inclusive and more resilient economy,” said Pascal Saint-Amans, Director of the OECD Centre for Tax Policy and Administration. “One path that should be urgently prioritised is environmental tax reform and tax policies to tackle inequalities”. Rising pressure on public finances as well as increased demands for fairer burden-sharing should also provide new impetus to reach an agreement on digital taxation. “Tax co-operation will be even more important to prevent tax disputes from turning into trade wars, which would harm recovery at a time when the global economy can least afford it,” Mr Saint-Amans said. Tax Policy Reforms 2020 also provides an overview of the reforms introduced before the COVID-19 crisis. It highlights continuation of a number of trends identified in previous years, including personal income tax reductions for low and middle-income households and the stabilisation of standard value-added tax (VAT) rates observed across many countries. Corporate tax rates have continued to decline, but at a faster pace than in 2019.

Areas where clear progress has been made include reforms to ensure the effective collection of VAT on online sales of goods, services and intangibles, and the adoption of measures in line with the OECD/G20 Base Erosion and Profit Shifting Project to protect corporate tax bases against international tax avoidance. On the other hand, progress on environmentally related taxes has been slow, with reforms being concentrated in a small number of countries and limited in scope. The report also notes that there has been a marked change in property taxation compared to previous years, with an increase in the number of reforms in that area, generally aimed at raising taxes. For more information and to access the report, visit www.oecd.org/tax/tax-policy-reforms-26173433.htm. Media queries should be directed to Pascal Saint-Amans, Director of the OECD Centre for Tax Policy and Administration (+33 1 45 24 91 08), David Bradbury, Head of the Tax Policy and Statistics Division (+33 1 45 24 98 15 97), 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 improve the economic and social well-being of

people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/03/2020

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More Can be Done to Ensure a Green Recovery from COVID-19 Crisis

Many countries are making “green” recovery measures a central part of stimulus packages to drive sustainable, inclusive, resilient economic growth and improve well-being in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. However some countries are also implementing measures that risk having a negative environmental impact and locking in unsustainable growth, according to new OECD analysis discussed by member country ministers today. New OECD analysis, Making the Green Recovery Work for Jobs, Income and Growth, indicates that OECD member governments have committed USD 312 billion of public resources to a green recovery, according to a preliminary estimate that will be refined in the coming months. However, a number of other measures within broader recovery packages are going into “non-green” spending such as fossil fuel investments. “It is encouraging to see many governments seizing this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ensure a truly sustainable recovery, but countries should go much further in greening their support packages,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría, during a Ministerial Roundtable to discuss the issue. “Climate change and biodiversity loss are the next crises around the corner and we are running out of time to tackle them. Green recovery measures are a win-win option as they can improve environmental outcomes while boosting economic activity and enhancing well-being for all.” (Read the full speech.)

The analysis finds that among OECD and other major economies, a majority of countries have included measures directed at supporting the transition to greener economies in their recovery strategies. These include grants, loans and tax relief for sustainable transport and mobility, the circular economy and clean energy research; financial support to households for improved energy efficiency and renewable energy installations; and measures to foster the restoration of ecosystems. At the same time, some countries have unveiled measures likely to have a direct or indirect negative impact on environmental outcomes. Some of these are temporary and form part of emergency economic rescue plans; others risk having longer-term implications. Measures include plans to roll back environmental regulations, reductions or waivers of environment-related taxes or charges, unconditional bailouts of emissions-intensive industries or companies, and increased subsidies of fossil fuel infrastructure investment.

“Addressing global issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, ocean degradation, and inefficient resource use is more important than ever as we seek to rebuild our economies and enhance resilience against future shocks,” said Spanish

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge Teresa Ribera, chairing the Roundtable. “Well designed and implemented stimulus packages can drive a recovery that is both green and inclusive, driving income, prosperity and jobs as well as accelerating action on national and global environmental goals.” The meeting included ministers of environment, climate or ecological transition from OECD member countries and Costa Rica as well as the European Commission Executive Vice President. The Roundtable is part of the preparations of the OECD’s Ministerial Council Meeting, which will take place on 28-29 October under the chairmanship of Spain and with Chile, Japan and New Zealand as Vice-chairs. This Roundtable comes just before the OECD releases its Interim Economic Outlook on 16 September.

The analysis notes that a period of low oil prices offers an opportunity to scale up the introduction of carbon pricing and continue phasing out support for fossil fuels. Taxing environmentally harmful consumption and production can mitigate environmental harm while improving economic efficiency. It is crucial that energy tax reforms do not increase the share of “energy poor”, as good access to energy services is essential for good standards of living. The distributional implications of other pricing instruments, such as taxes and charges on vehicle and fuel use should be also addressed. Similarly, reform of fossil fuel subsidies, which amounted to USD 582 billion in 2019 according to OECD and IEA data, should be accompanied by transition support for industries, communities, regions and vulnerable consumers. The OECD analysis underlines the need to monitor and evaluate the impact of recovery measures on environmental outcomes, something that was lacking after the 2008 financial crisis. It presents 13 environmental indicators that can be used to measure the impact of stimulus measures, including carbon intensity, fossil fuel support, exposure to air pollution, water stress and environmentally related tax revenue.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/14/2020

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Global Development Efforts Should Increase Focus on Fragile States in Light of COVID-19 Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic is aggravating inequality, poverty and insecurity in vulnerable, or fragile, countries and territories, making it more important than ever to focus development efforts on such places, according to a new OECD report. States of Fragility 2020 finds that progress on several UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – including the crucial Goal 16 relating to peace, justice and strong institutions – has stagnated or declined in fragile locations in recent years. The coronavirus crisis is hurting incomes and stability in already poor and vulnerable countries, as well as health and education – two key building blocks of sustainable development in fragile states. “COVID-19 is a global systemic shock that is

exacerbating fragility and risks, holding back progress on the Sustainable Development Goals,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. “As we continue to fight the worst health, economic and social crisis in nearly a century, we must put people at the centre of our development co-operation efforts on addressing fragility.” Defining fragility as the combination of exposure to risk in five areas – economic, environmental, political, social and security – and the insufficient capacity of the state or system to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks, the OECD estimates that 23% of the world’s population, and 77% of those classified before COVID-19 as extremely poor, live in “fragile” contexts. The report finds only small improvements in fragility in the 57 countries and territories it examines.

COVID-19 is adding to economic, health and societal vulnerabilities, exacerbating existing pressures driving fragility, conflict and violence, the report says. In places where violence is prevailing or increasing, mitigating the impact of COVID-19 will require greater peacebuilding efforts. Initial pandemic response measures taken by governments in some fragile locations risk compounding poverty, inequality, social fragmentation and political repression, thus adding to the root causes of conflict and fragility. The report notes that Official Development Assistance (ODA) has become an important source of support to help fragile states onto sustainable and self-reliant pathways. It calls for it to be protected and renewed to meet the challenges of the post-COVID-19 world, particularly as measures imposed to limit the spread of the virus are affecting the ability of civil society, multilateral and humanitarian organisations to operate in fragile locations.

From 2010 to 2018, members of the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) increased their bilateral assistance to priority sectors in fragile places, both in volume and as a proportion of total ODA. Humanitarian ODA also rose by 44% in the same period. Yet ODA for peace remains low compared to humanitarian and development finance. DAC members spent 25% of their ODA to fragile contexts on humanitarian assistance in 2018 but only 4% and 13% respectively on prevention and peacebuilding. The report says there is a need to focus more financing on targeting the underlying drivers of fragility. Addressing fragility also requires an approach based on local needs, priorities and resilience. Read the report at <http://www.oecd.org/development/states-of-fragility-fa5a6770-en.htm>. For further information, journalists are invited to contact the OECD Media Office (+33 1 45 24 97 00). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/17/2020

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New Tools for Researchers and End-Users

Mozilla has come out with a timely browser extension to encourage end-users to monitor YouTube's recommendation algorithm. Regrets Reporter (a play on the phenomenon of "YouTube Regrets") lets users send in reports about harmful videos that were recommended to them. Using this crowdsourced end-user data, Mozilla will collaborate with researchers, journalists, policymakers, and YouTube engineers to construct more trustworthy recommendation engines. Meanwhile, Mozilla Fellow Emmi Bevensee, working at the anti-Defamation League and in collaboration with Network Contagion Research Institute, Pushshift, Open Collective, and iDramaLab, has just released an open source tool to help researchers and activists monitor dis- and misinformation. The Social Media Analysis Toolkit (SMAT) uses data visualizations to analyze discussion on Twitter, Reddit, 4chan, and 8chan (Telegram, Parler, and Gab coming soon). While we wait for the outcome - (and implementation) - of the Digital Services Act, this is an important reminder that there are ways to address transparency and research challenges in the immediate-term that might exceed, and enhance, regulatory response

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Joint Ministers of Finance and Health Symposium on Universal Health Coverage in Asia and the Pacific: Covid-19 and Beyond

ADB, the Government of Japan, and the World Health Organization (WHO) jointly hosted this event, bringing together finance and health ministers to discuss accelerating progress toward universal health coverage in Asia and the Pacific in the new COVID-19 era. Countries in Asia and the Pacific have made great strides in poverty reduction and economic growth in the last 50 years. However, unfinished development agendas remain, including the need to further improve health outcomes and achieve and sustain universal health coverage. The current COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated problems, resulting in the tragic loss of life, livelihood, and economic progress. The symposium was held virtually as part of the 53rd Annual Meeting of the ADB Board of Governors (2nd Stage). View the full list of webinars and meetings. The first stage of the 53rd Annual Meeting comprised a reduced-scale meeting of the Board of Governors on 22 May, during which Governors approved ADB's financial statements and net income allocation in line with ADB institutional requirements.

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CNBC Debate: Resetting Asia - Technology, Investment, and Sustainability

The COVID-19 pandemic is reshaping economies across Asia and the Pacific. Social

and economic inequalities have been laid bare. A picture of a more sustainable future, with lower CO2 emissions and cleaner air, has been sharpened. Across economies, technology and innovation are transforming the delivery of products and services by the private sector and governments. The high-profile CNBC Debate asked: what role can technology play in propelling Asia's comeback while embracing the need to focus on sustainability? How can technology be used to make recovery faster and inclusive? What hazards and pitfalls need to be avoided? How can the private sector, government, and multilateral institutions ensure that this recovery is sustainable and inclusive? Panelists included ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa; Elina Kalkku, ADB Governor for Finland, and Under-Secretary of State of Finland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs; Mark Mobius, Founding Partner of Mobius Capital Partners; Alex Rusli, Chief Executive Officer of Digiasia Bios; and Marife B. Zamora, Board Director of PLDT, Inc, and former Chair of Convergys Philippines. The debate was moderated by CNBC Correspondent Dan Murphy. The CNBC Debate was streamed on 18 September 2020 during the 53rd Annual Meeting of the ADB Board of Governors.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/18/2020

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APEC Finance Ministers to Advance Fiscal Stimulus, Press for Digital Innovation

Finance Ministers from 21 APEC member economies pledged to continue to use all available policy tools to support the immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic and move towards a strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive recovery. Ministers met virtually on Friday against the backdrop of a major global economic and health crisis and together deliberated on fiscal and monetary interventions in mitigating the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting also endorsed a joint statement reflecting finance ministers' views on policy actions that are required to mitigate risks and fast-track recovery. "As the pandemic threatens to overwhelm health and economic systems around the world, member economies have responded with a wide range of measures including the containment of movements and bolstering healthcare services while at the same time providing financial support to households and businesses," explained Malaysia's Minister of Finance, Tengku Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz, who chaired the virtual APEC Finance Ministers' Meeting. Member economies have rolled out significant fiscal stimulus packages for up to 40 percent of the regional economy's collective growth domestic product, coupled with monetary easing policies to address the impact of the pandemic. The measures are targeted at protecting employment, bolstering health systems and providing direct support to households and businesses, including vulnerable communities and micro, small and medium enterprises.

Recognizing the protracted duration of the pandemic, ministers acknowledged the ongoing need to advance stimulus measures to help with recovery, while

underscoring the importance of improving fiscal sustainability and transparency to support long-term resilient development and future financing needs. "Due to the movement restrictions and the need to comply with social distancing requirements, it is interesting to observe how quickly the world embraced digitalization with more people and businesses turning to online shopping, contactless payment and online or mobile banking," Tengku Zafrul added. Ministers encouraged the expansion of financial services through digital tools, highlighting the need to accelerate digital adoption and innovation as it allows economies to advance financial inclusion operate despite the need for social distancing. Looking ahead, ministers are committed to bolstering momentum toward economic recovery by pushing structural reform efforts, keeping markets open, reinforcing global supply chains, investing in high quality infrastructure and health systems, protecting jobs, supporting communities and businesses and strengthening social protection. View the APEC Finance Ministers' Ministerial Statement.

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East Asia

CHINA: New Customs Practice Boosts B2B E-commerce Export

Two months after 10 Chinese customs began an experimental supervision mode to boost B2B e-commerce export, 12 more customs were added to the pilot program on Tuesday by China's General Administration of Customs. B2B e-commerce export refers to either direct export of goods from domestic businesses to overseas businesses by cross-border logistics based on their mutual deals over a cross-border e-commerce platform, or the export of goods by a domestic company to its overseas warehouse, from which the goods will be delivered to overseas buyers based on their deals over a cross-border e-commerce platform. Compared with traditional export, e-commerce B2B exporters, starting from Tuesday, will be given support in various forms, including one-off registration, streamlined declarations, expedited clearance at lower costs, as well as prior inspection and customs transit at the 12 newly-added customs nationwide, including Chongqing, Chengdu, Changsha, and Shanghai.

Between July 1 and August 30, the 10 pilot customs had inspected and cleared a total of 6.32 million batches of exported goods under the pilot program. "Customs clearance time is shorter under the new mode, which helps avoid overdue returns caused by unstable international transportation," said Li Ou, general manager of a logistics firm in Chengdu, which is about to ship a batch of goods to the United States via cross-border e-commerce B2B export. The pilot program will provide cross-border e-commerce B2B export enterprises in Chengdu, especially to micro, small and medium-sized ones, with more convenient channels, and help

"made-in-Chengdu" products to enter global industrial and supply chains, according to the municipal bureau of commerce. Also on Tuesday, 45 tonnes of clothing, shoes, daily necessities, and electronic accessories worth more than 2.5 million yuan (about 366,750 U.S. dollars), were declared to the Changsha Customs in central China's Hunan Province through the new mode and are being exported to the United States, Germany, Kazakstan, and other countries.

In Shanghai, local customs, taking into account the actual circumstances of small businesses, has introduced paperless processes of clearance for certain goods when a single consignment is worth less than 5,000 yuan. Customs statistics showed that the value of imports and exports transacted online by cross-border e-commerce enterprises reached 604.4 billion yuan in the first half of 2020, up by 6.7 percent year on year. Zhuang Rui, deputy dean of the Institute of International Economy at the University of International Business and Economics, said the number of customs agencies in the pilot program has more than doubled in just two months, showing the program is effective and helpful for enterprises. "It also reflects China's accelerating pace of opening up and the world's increasing demand for Chinese products. The expansion of pilot program is a win-win move," Zhuang said.

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China to Further Support New Business Forms and Models, Boost New Types of Consumption

China will take policy steps to boost new types of consumption by supporting new business forms and models, with a view to promote economic recovery, according to a statement issued Wednesday after a State Council executive meeting, chaired by Premier Li Keqiang. Consumption, as a key engine for growth, has been significantly affected by COVID-19 this year and become a drag on economic recovery. However, new forms and models of business based on the internet and digital technologies have generated rapid growth in new types of consumption despite the overall downward trend and demonstrated enormous potential. "COVID-19 has made a big impact on consumption," Li said. "For China to achieve positive growth this year, boosting consumption is vitally important. Efforts should be made in line with our own national conditions to expand channels of consumption and stimulate domestic demand."

Those at the Wednesday meeting agreed that it is important to remove consumption-related bottlenecks to economic growth and encourage market players to embrace innovation, so as to further unleash the potential of domestic demand and inject impetus into economic recovery. "Consumption growth is mainly driven by the market. And for various reasons, a great deal of efforts is needed to give a real boost to consumption," Li pointed out. The meeting urged expanding and upgrading

new types of consumption. Non-contact consumption will be promoted; online courses and remote diagnosis and treatment will be promoted; fitness and tourism sectors are encouraged to integrate their online and offline services; smart supermarkets powered by digital technologies will be developed; and supply chains that bring farm produce directly from fields to retailers will be improved.

Infrastructure supporting new types of consumption needs to be built at a faster pace. The coverage of 5G and Internet of Things networks will be prioritized in central business districts, industrial parks and transportation hubs. Rural commerce will go through digital upgrading. In the meantime, the commercial use of consumer data will proceed in a secure and orderly manner. "During our fight against COVID-19, new types of consumption have achieved rapid growth despite the downward pressure on the economy. From industrial goods to farm produce, and from medical services, education to tourism and fitness, new consumption has played a notable role in the COVID-19 response and demonstrated strong potential. Given its immediate benefit to the economy and promising prospect, we must make long-term plans for its future development," Li said. Tax policies that support the growth of new business forms and models will be introduced to boost new types of consumption.

Financial institutions will be encouraged to adopt new steps to reduce the cost of mobile payment. Measures will be taken to extend social security coverage to people working in new forms and models of businesses, and strengthen protection for flexible employment. Support will be given to enterprises in conducting "employee sharing." Traditional ways of consumption will be better leveraged as the mainstay while the positive effect of new types of consumption is to be strengthened. Support will be given to bricks-and-mortar companies that run online business as well as internet platform companies engaging in offline business. Companies are also encouraged to carry out online promotion to boost offline sales. "It is all the more important to nurture new growth drivers and promote economic restructuring by leveraging the growth of new consumption based on new forms and models of businesses," Li said.

The reform of government functions will be deepened to streamline the license approval procedures. Accommodating yet prudent regulation will be further implemented. The mechanisms for user rights protection and product tracing will be bolstered, and malpractices such as intellectual property right infringements, selling counterfeit products, cheating, swindling, and leaking private information will be cracked down on in accordance with laws to foster a safe and trusted environment for consumers. "Greater efforts must be made in transforming government functions to create a more enabling environment for new consumption to survive and thrive. Government authorities must work to enhance network building both online and offline, adopt a prudent yet accommodative regulatory approach, and provide greater support to the growth of these businesses," Li said. The meeting also outlined plans

to advance medical education in an innovative way to build a talent pool for protecting people's health.

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China Eases Restrictions on Domestic Airlines to Boost Aviation Market

China's civil aviation regulator on Tuesday announced adjustments to its management policies for domestic airline services in a bid to boost the virus-hit industry. China will lift restrictions on the maximum limit of weekly flights subject to approval, allowing airlines greater flexibility in arranging passenger flights involving airports of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, among other busy airports, the Civil Aviation Administration of China told a press conference. While easing the rules, the regulator specified detailed guidelines for applying flights to coordinate market competition and take into consideration the conditions of airport operation. Meanwhile, the regulator eased restrictions on regional airlines involving three major airports in the cities of Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. China's civil aviation industry continued to see a gradual recovery in August as key indicators reported visible improvements from a month ago, showed data. Airlines flew a total of 45.5 million passengers last month, down 25.6 percent year on year. The decline narrowed 8.5 percentage points from July. The domestic market saw an accelerated recovery, reporting 45.35 million passenger trips, the highest monthly volume this year.

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Xinjiang Encourages Innovation, Entrepreneurship to Generate Employment: White Paper

Xinjiang has been promoting innovation as a new engine for creating jobs, and encouraging people who are eager and eligible to start their own businesses, according to a white paper released by the State Council Information Office on Thursday. The region has advanced reform to streamline administration, delegate power, improve regulation and upgrade services, says the white paper titled "Employment and Labor Rights in Xinjiang." The local government eases market access, improves policies in support of business startups, and sees to it that guaranteed loans, interest subsidies, allowances and tax breaks for startups are implemented. Xinjiang currently has five business incubation demonstration bases at national level and 27 at provincial and equivalent level, which have fostered 1,412 micro and small businesses and created more than 10,000 jobs.

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China's New Business Forms to Empower Consumption

China will further vitalize consumption with new business forms as innovative driving forces, officials said. The country issued a guideline earlier this week on accelerating the development of consumption created by new forms of business. The guideline is aimed at shoring up weak links in new forms of consumption, removing institutional obstacles and deepening integration of online and offline consumption, said Gao Gao, deputy secretary-general of the National Development and Reform Commission. During the period of COVID-19 prevention and control, new business forms have led China to accelerate the expansion of consumption, while online consumption also surged. In the first eight months of this year, China's online sales of physical goods grew 15.8 percent year on year, compared with a decline of 8.6 percent for total retail sales of consumer goods.

Meanwhile, the construction and commercialization of the 5G network will also be pushed forward, said Li Ying, a senior official with the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. The ministry will continuously upgrade the base stations and relevant facilities while enhancing international cooperation to accelerate 5G development, Li said. Livestreaming e-commerce was also considered as a new engine of consumption. In the first half of the year, more than 10 million e-commerce livestreams were conducted nationwide, with more than 400,000 active livestream anchors, 50 billion viewers and 20 million items on for sale, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed. Consumption has become an important engine of China's economic development. In 2019, consumption contributed 57.8 percent to China's economic growth.

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Chinese Premier Stresses Innovation, Entrepreneurship to Bolster Rural Development

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has called for efforts to promote innovation and enhance the entrepreneurial environment in rural areas while injecting a new impetus into rural development to facilitate employment and income growth among farmers. Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks in an instruction delivered to a conference on innovation and entrepreneurship for new farmers and fresh business patterns, which kicked off Thursday in Nanjing, capital of eastern

Jiangsu Province. Innovation and entrepreneurship in rural areas have played a vital role in winning China's battle against poverty and promoting the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, said Li. The premier called for efforts to streamline government administration, enhance services as well as encourage mass entrepreneurship and innovation to bring back talent to rural areas, and encourage farmers to start their own businesses or find jobs near their homes. More efforts are needed to foster new development impetus in rural areas, improve farmers' livelihood, and provide stronger support for agriculture and rural modernization, said Li.

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Webinar Launches Joint Study on Digitalization of Food Supply Chains and Waste Management in the PRC

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Alibaba Local Services cohosted a webinar today to launch a new joint study on digitalization of food supply chains and waste management in the People's Republic of China (PRC). In the wake of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, food insecurity risks have increased due to rising unemployment, restrictions on people's movement, interrupted food production and processing, as well as supply chain and trade disruptions. Changes in food availability and affordability are also impacting nutrition, especially in poor households. Opening the webinar, ADB Director General for East Asia James Lynch highlighted the importance of taking a more comprehensive and systematic approach to improving food security and resilience and reducing the environmental impacts of food supply chains in the post-pandemic phase. "The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the vulnerability of food supply chains and highlighted the fragile interrelationship between the food and agriculture sectors and natural resources, climate change, biodiversity, and public health," he said. "E-commerce platforms played an important role in maintaining a stable food supply during the lockdown in the PRC, and digital technology can play a key role in establishing more resilient and sustainable food supply chains." ADB and Alibaba Group established a strategic partnership in November 2019 to support rural vitalization in the PRC. The new joint study with Alibaba Local Life Services is expected to focus on three areas: the role of digital technology in resilient and sustainable food supply chains; the role of digital technology in waste management, especially on plastics and food waste, along the food supply chain; and the potential of digital platforms to support sustainable development in the PRC.

"ADB's projects should increasingly leverage public and private partnerships in applying digital technologies to establish more resilient and sustainable food supply chains," said Mr. Lynch. "The strategic partnership with the Alibaba Group, and this joint study with Alibaba Local Services, is a great opportunity to benefit from

Alibaba's strong technological expertise." Together with ADB Chief Economist Yasuyuki Sawada, leading international experts and key officials from China Agricultural University, Chinese Academy of Science, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, International Fund for Agricultural Development, and International Food Policy Research Institute attended this event and served as panelists. Alibaba Local Services is a consolidated subsidiary of Alibaba Group, operating Eleme, a leading on-demand delivery and local services platform in the PRC, and Koubei, one of the country's leading restaurant and local services guide platforms for in-store consumption. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

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Chinese Vice Premier Stresses New Industries, Business Patterns in Foreign Trade

Chinese Vice Premier Hu Chunhua underscored Sunday the need to promote the development of new industries and business patterns in foreign trade. Hu, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during his inspection of China's eastern economic powerhouse Shanghai. He stressed fostering new industries and business patterns to boost the steady development of foreign trade and contribute to the formation of a new development pattern with the domestic market as the mainstay, while allowing domestic and foreign markets to boost one another. Hu visited a local import service platform and foreign trade enterprises, holding talks with foreign trade enterprises to hear their opinions and suggestions, and to learn about the major problems hampering the development of new industries and business patterns.

Hu said that the new industries and business patterns in foreign trade provide new impetus and direction for the sector's development, and will play an important role in stabilizing foreign trade and promoting the sector's transformation and upgrading. Efforts should be made to build favorable infrastructure for developing new industries and business patterns, and to pursue regulatory innovation in an active yet prudent manner to establish a regulation system tailored to the new industries and business patterns, the vice premier said. He called for more support in terms of taxation, financial services and foreign exchange for new industries and business patterns such as offshore trade, cross-border e-commerce and market purchase trade. Hu also inspected the preparations for the third China International Import Expo, which is scheduled for November in Shanghai.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/27/2020

JAPAN: FTC Must Continue to Train Watchful Eye on Data Oligopolies

Amid the ongoing transformation of society through digitization, the Fair Trade Commission has an increasingly important role to play in protecting the interests of the public. Former Assistant Chief Cabinet Secretary Kazuyuki Furuya, who originally served at the Finance Ministry, has assumed the post of the chairman of the FTC. His predecessor, Kazuyuki Sugimoto, held the post for 7½ years and raised the presence of the commission through such measures as regulations on IT giants. “We will deal strictly with the anti-competitive behavior of IT giants,” Furuya said at a press conference. It is hoped that the new chairman will demonstrate his skills at resolving issues while following Sugimoto’s path. In addition to cracking down on bid-rigging and cartels, the FTC also examines corporate mergers to ensure they will not lead to oligopolies and put consumers at a disadvantage. In the past goods-oriented economy, it was sufficient to look at the market shares of products, but the market structure has changed with the emergence of the IT giants known as “GAFA,” which includes Google and Amazon.

Huge amounts of data are accumulated by the IT giants, which run online shopping and search sites. This has led to improvements in the quality of services and more customers, accelerating their monopolization of the market. The FTC must protect consumers and businesses by preventing oligopolistic firms from engaging in such activities as imposing unilateral conditions on their business partners and using personal information without permission. As IT giants have overwhelming control in the digital advertising business, the actual state of the sector remains opaque. It is essential that the FTC examine the matter. The revival of regional economies, which are suffering from declining populations, will also require competitive policies that are not bound by traditional values. In 2016, the FTC stopped the business integration of Fukuoka City-based Fukuoka Financial Group, Inc., which has a bank in Nagasaki Prefecture under its umbrella, and Nagasaki City-based Eighteenth Bank, and the review process was protracted.

It may be more important for regional areas to strengthen their banking base through consolidation than to worry about regional monopolies. In November, a special law that works in tandem with the Antimonopoly Law will take effect, aimed at encouraging the realignment of regional banks. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has been promoting the need to realign regional banks, and the FTC needs to utilize a flexible approach that takes into account the situation in regional areas. The economic downturn caused by the novel coronavirus has made it more likely for the burden to be shifted from large companies to small and medium-sized companies. Furuya says he will focus on curbing the “bullying of subcontractors” by large

corporations. As ways of working diversify, the new chairman also cited as one of his tasks the development of an environment that protects freelance workers, who are in a weak position. The new FTC chairman must do his best to implement measures that pay attention to the vulnerable members of society.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 09/20/2020

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Communication Tech, AI Help Protect Japan Manufacturers from Pandemic

Amid the spread of the novel coronavirus, steelmakers and chemical companies are using new systems based on communication technology and artificial intelligence to avoid the so-called 3Cs — closed spaces, crowded places and close-contact settings — among workers at their production sites. It is hoped these systems will help prevent labor shortages and improve productivity even after the pandemic has been brought under control. Nippon Steel Corp. has decided to fully introduce a system by the end of this fiscal year that will allow its employees to instruct others from a distance. Cameras attached to the helmets of frontline employees who inspect and adjust equipment send detailed images of the equipment to skilled workers, and these workers then instruct the frontline employees as to the proper procedures and key points. Nippon Steel plans to double the number of camera setups so that about 20,000 workers on its frontlines can use them. Multiple sites can be supervised simultaneously by switching between images, requiring fewer workers as a result.

Executive Officer Masahiro Nakata said this “will lead to safety and efficiency on-site,” as the system can help prevent the virus from spreading more widely. Major glass manufacturer AGC Inc. has also introduced remote camera systems. As companies limit business trips due to the pandemic, Japanese engineers are watching overseas videos and instructing frontline workers in other nations. JFE Steel Corp. has compiled a database of equipment failures that have occurred at its steelworks over the past 30 years and the restoration procedures involved. When there is a problem and an employee enters a question, AI uses this database to indicate a solution. “We were able to reduce our recovery time by a maximum of 30%,” stressed managing executive officer Akira Nitta.

Mitsubishi Chemical Corp. has introduced new systems at 15 of its domestic bases to detect the causes of malfunctions using AI based on sensors attached to equipment and records of operations. These systems are also expected to help stop problems from occurring. Kobe Steel Ltd. has developed a system to predict the temperature of molten iron five hours after it is melted, using data from a large number of thermometers attached to the blast furnace. It can thereby prevent temperature drops in a furnace that could halt operations. Veteran workers in the manufacturing industries have typically passed on the specialized skills they

acquired through long experience to younger employees. However, in addition to the pandemic, the mass retirement of late '40s baby boomers and a shortage of workers have made it difficult for these master technicians to take sufficient time to share their expertise. Manufacturers are therefore making active use of the latest technologies.

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SOUTH KOREA: Regulator to Inspect Telcos' Management of User Location Data

South Korea's telecommunications regulator said Friday that it will inspect the country's three major telecom operators on their handling of user location data over concerns of mismanagement. The Korea Communications Commission (KCC) said the planned inspections of SK Telecom Co., KT Corp. and LG Uplus Corp. are meant to check whether they properly manage location data to ensure user rights. Under local laws, telecom operators can collect and manage user location data for a certain period of time, only after receiving user consent, according to the KCC. The move comes amid growing privacy concerns after the telecom operators handed over location data of individuals who participated in a mass demonstration in central Seoul last month to health authorities as part of anti-infection measures against the pandemic. Under the country's infectious disease control and prevention law, health authorities can request information of potentially infected individuals to track them and prevent the spread of disease.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 09/04/2020

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S. Korea to Allow Flexibility in State R&D Projects amid Pandemic

South Korea said Tuesday it will provide more leeway to companies participating in state-sponsored research and development (R&D) projects, as the new coronavirus pandemic has led to more uncertainties in global industries. Under the plan, the country will lift regulations in industrial R&D programs and allow companies to revise their research goals during their project as well, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. State-sponsored R&D projects were previously virtually banned from adjusting their goals or changing spending plans of their budget due to strings of regulations. With the COVID-19 pandemic causing economic jitters for businesses, the country said it will also ease the financial burden of private companies in state R&D projects, and induce more small and medium-sized firms to join hands with conglomerates. The industry ministry allocated 4.2 trillion won (US\$3.53) in its R&D budget for 2020, rising sharply from 3.4 trillion won from 2019. South Korea plans to disburse 4.9 trillion won in the area next year. The ministry said international R&D

projects, which currently account for less than 3 percent of the on-going programs, will account for up to 15 percent by 2023 by easing related regulations as well.

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Tech Competition Heats Up over Remote Work in S. Korea During Pandemic

South Korean tech firms are joining the race for the growing remote work market, industry officials said Friday, as businesses brace for a drawn-out fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The country's workplaces have been reshaped this year as many companies opt to keep their workers out of offices to avoid infection risks. A July survey by the Korea Economic Research Institute found that 75 percent of the country's largest companies have introduced flexible working systems, reflecting increasing demand for remote work tools. Kakao Enterprise Corp., an artificial intelligence (AI) unit of the country's largest mobile messenger operator, Kakao Corp., unveiled its corporate messaging service Kakao Work earlier this week. The platform, which offers remote work tools, such as videoconferencing and an AI assistant, has an interface similar to its parent company's KakaoTalk messenger.

Kakao Work is expected to challenge established platforms run by global tech firms, such as Microsoft Corp.'s Teams and Slack from U.S.-based Slack Technologies Inc., as it targets KakaoTalk's massive 45.5 million local user base. South Korea has a population of 51 million in comparison. Smaller software companies have also been in the spotlight in the race to develop remote work tools. Startup Madras check, which has developed work collaboration software for the country's largest automaker, Hyundai Motor Co., partnered with major telecom operator KT Corp. this month to develop a remote work platform using 5G enterprise networks. The partnership, which also includes videoconference developer SaehaComms Co. and virtual software firm Tilon Inc., aims to release the service, named KT Digital Works, by the end of this year and is also setting its sights overseas. "Based on Digital Works' local progress, we will target the global market with our partners," Park Yoon-young, head of KT's enterprise business group, said in a statement.

Samsung SDS Co., an IT service unit of Samsung Group, is eyeing more business by opening its enterprise cloud software, previously only available for Samsung affiliates. The company's Brity Works platform provides standard collaboration software, such as email, messaging, videoconferencing and AI chatbot services, as well as robotic process automation, in which an AI handles simple repetitive tasks. Analysts expect IT companies, such as Samsung SDS, to profit from the remote work trend, with no end in sight to the pandemic. "The experience of the pandemic has made investment in enterprise IT services, such as remote work solutions, a compulsory factor," Kim So-hye, an analyst at Hanwha Investment & Securities Co.,

said. The global collaboration tool market is expected to reach US\$13.6 billion in 2023, compared with \$11 billion in 2018, according to a report from the Samjong KPMG Economic Research Institute.

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S. Korea Censored over 200,000 Pieces of Online Data Last Year: Report

South Korea censored over 200,000 pieces of online data in 2019, a report showed Friday, marking a slight decline from the previous year. The Korea Communications Standards Commission (KCSC), the country's censorship body, took action against 206,759 pieces of online data last year, such as blocking public access or deleting them, down from 238,246 in 2018, according to an annual report from the Clinical Legal Education Center under the Korea University's School of Law. The Korea Internet Transparency Report, funded by Google and the country's top portal operator Naver Corp., is released annually by Open Net Korea, a local internet privacy advocacy group. The report showed that 160,803 pieces of online information, or 78 percent of the total, were blocked from public access last year, while 34,995 were deleted. It said pornographic or prostitution information consisted of 25.4 percent of the censored data, while gambling information took up 24.2 percent, followed by illegal food and drug data with 20.8 percent.

The report expressed concerns over the extent of censorship in the country. "It is difficult for the KCSC to escape criticism, considering the vast amount of data blocked or deleted," Oh Kyoung-mi, a researcher at Open Net, said in a briefing. The report also showed that the country's top two portal operators -- Naver and Kakao Corp., allowed state authorities to look into 3.1 million online accounts last year. While the number marks a drop from 8.3 million in the previous year, the report noted that last year's figure is still high compared with 722,876 accounts probed in 2016. "The data shows that searches and seizures are used as the main tool for internet monitoring," the report read. "Such a vast number of searches and seizures presents the most significant issue in communications monitoring."

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 09/25/2020

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S. Korea to Expand Support to Developing Nations for Virus Prevention: PM

South Korea plans to boost its support for developing countries as part of Seoul's contribution to the international fight against COVID-19, its prime minister said

Tuesday. "The government will expand humanitarian support and official development assistance (ODA) efforts regarding COVID-19 prevention in developing countries," Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun said in his pre-recorded speech to the virtual meeting of the United Nations' Initiative on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond. The prime minister also pledged that South Korea, as one of the first countries hit by the pandemic, will "continue to actively share" its experiences, success cases and know-how in terms of attempting to contain the new coronavirus. Chung also stressed that the government will submit its revised plan for "nationally determined contributions" (NDC) under the Paris Agreement, the greenhouse gas mitigation agreement within the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change reached in 2016. In 2016, Seoul set a 2030 target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 37 percent from business-as-usual, or BAU, levels. Chung also noted that South Korea is "giving positive consideration" to extending its participation in the G-20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative. The program allows suspension of debt repayment of poor countries until the end of 2020 to concentrate their resources on fighting the pandemic.

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South-East Asia

MYANMAR: Gov't Restricts Domestic Travel to Curb COVID-19 Spread

The Myanmar government announced the restriction of domestic travel to curb the spread of COVID-19 across the country on Thursday. The national level Central Committee for Prevention, Control and Treatment of COVID-19, in its message to the public, urged people not to travel except for health and other emergency matters. The country has been seeing increasing number of local transmissions during the second wave of the COVID-19 outbreak which hit again on Aug. 16. COVID-19 was first detected in Myanmar on March 23. "It took five months to discover 374 infection cases in the first wave of the disease. The number of infections quadrupled now although it's been only 24 days since the second wave started on Aug. 16," Dr. Khin Khin Gyi, director of Contagious Disease Prevention and Eradication Division of Public Health Department under the Health and Sports Ministry, told Xinhua. During the second wave of the disease outbreak, a total of 1,635 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with rocketing numbers of locally transmitted cases while eight deaths were reported from Aug. 16 to Thursday morning, the committee's message said.

Of them, 736 cases are from Yangon region while the rest are from other regions and states during the period. "Active cooperation and participation of the public are needed to reduce the number of infections by following the preventive measures and guidelines by the ministry," the director said. From March 23 to Thursday morning,

the number of COVID-19 cases totaled 2,009 and its death toll stands at 14, the ministry's figures showed. Meanwhile, the operation of international air services was suspended until Sept. 30, to prevent the importation of the disease through air travel while temporary entry restrictions to all incoming visitors, suspension of all types of visas including social visit visas and visa exemption services were also extended until the end of September. As part of the preventive measures for the containment of the disease, the government has imposed ban on public gatherings and nighttime curfews nationwide and stay-at-homes across the country.

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Myanmar Imposes Stay-at-Home Orders in More Areas amid Rising COVID-19 Cases

The Myanmar government will impose stay-at-home orders in more areas starting Saturday, said an order issued by the Ministry of Health and Sports on Friday. To effectively curb the spread of COVID-19, 11 townships in Mandalay, Bago, Ayeyarwaddy regions and Mon state will be put under the stay-at-home orders as the number of infected patients with no recent traveling history and no close contact with confirmed patients has been increasing in the areas, the order said. The government recently imposed the stay-at-home order in most areas except one township in Yangon region after the region has seen rocketing number of local transmissions during the second wave of the outbreak since Aug. 16. The stay-at-home orders was imposed in 10 townships of Yangon region and one in Sagaing region where most cases were reported in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Myanmar and the government later lifted the orders after seeing no new infections in the areas. According to the latest figures by the ministry, the number of COVID-19 cases reached 9,112, while its death toll stood at 174 as of Friday night. A total of 2,517 patients have been discharged from the hospitals, the ministry said. COVID-19 was first detected in Myanmar on March 23 this year and the first death was reported on March 31.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 09/25/2020

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THAILAND: Gov't to Roll Out Stimulus Package to Boost Spending amid Economic Fallout

Thailand's Ministry of Finance on Monday said it will roll out new measures designed to boost spending from low-income groups, as well as to support small businesses, which all had been adversely affected by the COVID-19 fallout. "We have set aside 45 billion baht (1.44 billion U.S. dollar) budget for this particular economic measure to boost consumption among grass roots people and support small businesses," said

Lavaron Sangsnit, director-general of the ministry's Fiscal Policy Office. Lavaron said the finance ministry is finalizing the details of the shopping stimulus. "The concept is that each person will get about 3,000 baht (96 U.S. dollars) from the government to partially pay for his/her own goods; but consumers must buy items at small businesses," said Lavaron, adding that small businesses are hard to survive in this challenging time. The Bank of Thailand had earlier forecasted that the Thai economy will shrink by 8.1 percent this year largely due to the fallout from COVID-19. Since tourism and exports are Thailand's two most important forms of revenue, Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha said it is vital to promote domestic spending while the Thai skies remain closed to entries from foreign tourists. The new economic measure is expected to be implemented from October to December, said the ministry.

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VIETNAM: MIC Enhances Network Security with Campaign

The Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) has launched the "Review and remove malware nationwide in 2020" campaign to enhance the country's network security. The campaign aims to reduce the malicious code infection rate by 50 per cent. It also aims to cut the number of Vietnamese IP addresses in 10 popular botnets – a collection of internet-connected devices infected by malware that allow hackers to control them – in half. It would also take Việt Nam out of reports on malware infection rates. The National Digital Transformation Programme, approved by Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc in early June 2020, says ensuring network safety and security is key to digital transformation. All IT equipment, products, software, information systems and investment projects have mandatory components on network safety and security. The ministry has clarified cyber safety and security a prerequisite for e-government development and digital transformation. However, according to security firms, malware infection in Việt Nam has decreased but still remained high compared to other countries. Statistics showed that Việt Nam has about 16 million IPv4 addresses, of which about three million IP addresses are regularly blacklisted by many international organisations, while two million IP addresses are regularly found in botnets.

The campaign will allow people to use malware prevention software for free via <https://khonggianmang.vn>. A representative from the ministry's Department of Information Security said the campaign is for businesses and home network systems and equipment. The group accounts for the majority of the IP addresses. The campaign would also contribute to improving the country's reliability in e-transactions, thus promoting socio-economic development and contribute to ensuring national defence and security. The department would co-operate with VNPT, Viettel, CMC, FPT, BKAV and Kaspersky to implement the campaign. The campaign would assess 10 major botnets that need to be treated with priority, build and deploy tools on a

large scale, whereby users get free downloads to inspect and remove malicious code from their computers. “After the campaign, we will evaluate results and plan to implement future campaigns,” the department said. The campaign has been implemented in all provinces and cities from the local to the central level, through specialised IT units of ministries, branches and localities, State groups and corporations, commercial banks and financial institutions. In addition, it has also received support from organisations, corporations and major security firms such as Kaspersky, Group-IB, FireEye, F-Secure and ESET. The campaign has been implemented gradually. The ministry hopes it will achieve positive results, contributing to clean malware from Việt Nam’s cyberspace. This will help ensure safety for transactions of agencies and enterprises, as Việt Nam is accelerating digital transformation towards the development of digital government, digital economy and digital society, it added.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 09/19/2020

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HCM City Improves Management of Food Safety, Traceability of Agricultural Products

A new HCM City regulation would make it mandatory for all agricultural products and foodstuffs to have traceability and geographical indications, and require packaging and branding under VietGAP standards to ensure food hygiene and safety. The new regulation, if approved, will be applied to retailers, wholesalers and distribution systems in the city. Speaking at a workshop held last week in the city, Nguyễn Huỳnh Trang, deputy director of the Department of Industry and Trade, said the city was working with the Food Safety Management Board to pilot an integrated food-safety management model for agricultural products and foodstuffs in the city and the southern key economic region. “The model requires cooperation between linkages associated with the sale of agricultural products via value chains to ensure food safety,” she said. Currently, HCM City and the provinces in the southern key economic region only conform to biosafety production standards because of a legal requirement. In addition, the application of VietGAP standards is still not compulsory.

Over the years, the city has promoted effective management of production and consumption chains of agricultural products, with traceability and geographical indications to ensure food hygiene and safety for consumers. However, the production scale remains small, and products, mostly raw ones, are only preliminary processed. The number of enterprises heavily investing in agricultural production still accounts for a low rate. In addition, wholesale markets associated with concentrated production areas have not developed in a coordinated way. The city’s food safety management is overseen by its Food Safety Management Board and Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Food-safety project

Trần Tiến Khai, head of the project management board at the HCM City University of Economics, said the city has assigned the university to work with the Department of Industry and Trade and localities in the region on a project “to enhance cooperation and production linkages associated with the consumption of agricultural products to ensure food safety”. The project will propose solutions to increase quality and yield in sustainable food value chains to ensure food safety for the domestic market as well as for exports, he said. Trang, deputy director of the Department of Industry and Trade, said it was important to connect production and consumption of agricultural products, especially high-quality agricultural products. Linking businesses with farmers would help the latter sell products at stable prices and reduce risks, she said. Farmers receiving investment from companies would receive agricultural seeds and materials at low interest rates and with more reliable quality. As a result, farmers would be able to better assure production and implement technical measures, and increase productivity and output.

Farmers would also be able to organise production on a larger scale and volume, lowering production costs and increasing incomes. For their part, companies would offer farmers commitments on quantity, quality, and time for product supply through affiliate contracts, according to Trang. Recently the city People’s Committee proposed a plan worth more than VNĐ840 billion (US\$36.5 million) to ensure food safety in the city’s agricultural sector over the next five years to the Ministry of Planning and Investment and the Ministry of Finance. Under the plan, the food-safety management system and infrastructure would be improved, and as a result, would help reduce food poisoning cases, disease and pollution. Of the total investment, nearly \$30 million is sourced from ODA loans, while the remainder comes from the city budget. The southern key economic region includes HCM City and the provinces of Đồng Nai, Bình Dương, Bà Rịa-Vũng Tàu, Bình Phước, Tây Ninh, Long An and Tiền Giang. The region has a population of more than 20 million. Each year the region consumes up to 1.5 million tonnes of rice, 500,000 tonnes of meat, 800,000 tonnes of seafood, 3 million tonnes of vegetables, and 1,500 million eggs.

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Health Ministry Launches Telehealth Network Connecting 1,000 Medical Facilities

The Ministry of Health on Friday launched a remote healthcare consultation and support (telehealth) network that connected 1,000 medical examination and treatment facilities with nearly 30 central or end-line hospitals of Hà Nội and HCM City. Speaking at the launching ceremony, Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc praised the health ministry for implementing the National Digital Transformation Programme through the development and implementation of the Remote

Examination and Treatment Scheme, a project aiming to improve and protect healthcare. PM Phúc said that expanding remote medical examination and treatment played an important role in the health sector's reform process in order to improve the quality of medical examination and treatment from central to local levels, improving the satisfaction of people using medical services. "People all over the country will have the opportunity to access and use high-quality medical services provided by doctors at higher levels right at the grassroots level, reducing patient congestion at central hospitals. People can be examined at home, while receiving consultation and treatment from a doctor through smart electronic devices," said Phúc.

PM also asked the health sector to expand the remote health care network to more than 14,000 health facilities across the country to achieve universal health coverage and connect the network with other countries around the world. Acting Minister of Health Nguyễn Thanh Long said that the health ministry has worked closely with the Ministry of Information and Communications, the Ministry of National Defence and Viettel Group to develop and implement the remote medical examination and treatment project in just two months. The project has developed a network of more than 1,000 medical facilities with 30 hospitals at the central level to provide counseling, examination and treatment activities to serve people in all parts of the country. "Through the project, the professional capacity of the grassroots hospitals will be raised, people across the country will enjoy higher quality medical services right at the grass-roots level while minimising hospital overloading due to reducing the large number of patients sent to hospitals at higher levels," said Long.

Associate Professor Lương Ngọc Khuê, Director of the Department of Medical Services Administration, said that with the technical support of Viettel Group after two-months of implementation, Việt Nam has reached the target of 1,000 telehealth points. Many complicated cases have been dealt with at grass-roots levels instead being sent to higher levels. The system has connected many remote areas such as Côn Đảo island of Bà Rịa-Vũng Tàu Province, Cô Tô islands of Quảng Ninh Province or the mountainous Mường Nhé District of northern Điện Biên Province. Prof. Dr. Nguyễn Lân Hiếu, Director of Hà Nội Medical University Hospital, said that his hospital organised two remote examination and treatment sessions a week. About eight to ten serious patients are seen online each session. After five months of implementation, the hospital has organised 40 working sessions. Of which, 293 cases received consultations and 162 hospitals have asked to join the connection. The event marks an important milestone of the health sector in 2020, contributing to the successful implementation of the Prime Minister's National Digital Transformation Programme.

To realise the Prime Minister's programme, the Ministry of Health issued a project on remote examination and treatment for the 2020-25 period on June 22. The project aims to strengthen the professional capacity of lower-level hospitals as well as bring the professional knowledge of medical experts at the central level to all people in all

corners of the country, especially remote, mountainous and island areas. The goal of the project is that all patients can be managed, consulted, examined and treated by doctors from the commune to the central levels. All people at the grass-roots level can access high-quality healthcare services provided by experts at higher-level medical facilities. According to the health ministry, there are currently 1,400 public hospitals and 275 private medical facilities, 30,000 general clinics, 11,500 commune and ward health stations providing medical examination and treatment services in the country. Deploying the telehealth system helps hospitals at provincial and district levels get deeper, faster, and broader medical technologies from central-level hospitals.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 09/26/2020

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South Asia

INDIA: Microsoft Imparts Digital Skills to 7.7 lakh Indians in Pandemic

Microsoft on Wednesday announced it has trained close to 774,000 learners in India as part of its global skills initiative launched in June this year, to help 25 million people worldwide gain more digital skills in the pandemic-hit year. In the three months since the launch, Microsoft, its professional networking platform LinkedIn and open source repository GitHub have reached 10 million learners in 231 countries and territories. Across 21 markets in Asia Pacific, more than 1.5 million learners across 21 markets in Asia Pacific have been reached to date. "Addressing and closing the skills gap is an urgent task, key to inclusive economic recovery and digital transformation," said Dr Rohini Srivathsa, National Technology Officer, Microsoft India. "While we are close to the halfway point of our goal to help 25 million people globally, we continue to strive in our commitment to drive societal progress and help improve lives of people in India by advancing their capabilities and expertise". Within India, the top learning paths are software developer, data analyst and digital marketing specialist. Globally, the most popular in-demand learning paths are software developer, customer service specialist, and data analyst. Microsoft on June 30 announced the global skills initiative to help 25 million people worldwide acquire new digital skills by the end of the year. The announcement comes in response to the global economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. "Covid-19 has created both a public health and an economic crisis, and as the world recovers, we need to ensure no one is left behind," said Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella.

"We're bringing together resources from Microsoft inclusive of LinkedIn and GitHub to reimagine how people learn and apply new skills -- and help 25 million people facing unemployment due to COVID-19 prepare for the jobs of the future". Earlier this month, Microsoft joined hands with industry-driven learning ecosystem Nasscom

FutureSkills to launch a nation-wide initiative that aims to skill 10 lakh students in Artificial Intelligence (AI) by 2021. Commenced from September 21, the initiative called "AI Classroom Series" will be placed in three modules. The online classes will include live demos, hands-on workshops and assignments through self-learning, virtual instructor-led training, and mentoring.

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India Ranked Among Top 50 Nations in Global Innovation Index

In the Global Innovation Index 2020 rankings, India jumped four spots and secured ranked 48th rank by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). Amidst the havoc caused by COVID-19 pandemic, the rankings came in as good news for India and also a sign of the wave of growth and development sweeping through the country. In the previous rankings in 2019, India was positioned 52nd in the world and 81st in the rankings of the year 2015. The ascending trends show a remarkable achievement by India to be in a league of highly innovative developed nations all over the globe. The WIPO had also accepted India as one of the leading innovation achievers of 2019 in the central and southern Asian regions, as it has shown a consistent improvement in its innovation ranking for the last five years. The consistent improvement in the global innovation index rankings is owing to the immense knowledge capital, the vibrant startup ecosystem, and the amazing work done by the public & private research organizations. The scientific ministries like the Department of Science and Technology (DST), the Department of Biotechnology and the Department of Space have played a pivotal role in the enriching the national innovation Ecosystem. The NITI Aayog has been working tirelessly to ensure optimization of national efforts in this direction by bringing policy led innovation in different areas such as EVs, biotechnology, Nanotechnology, Space, alternative energy sources, etc. The India Innovation Index, which was released last year by the NITI Aayog, has been widely accepted as the major step in the direction of decentralization of innovation across all the states of India. A constant thrust in monitoring and evaluating India's position in global rankings has been provided by the NITI Aayog, including the global innovation index. India must aim high and double its efforts in improving its ranking in the global innovation index. The call for 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat' by the Hon'ble Prime Minister could only be realized if India punches above its weight class and compete with global superpowers in developing scientific interventions. It is time that India brings a paradigm shift and aims to be in the top 25 countries in the next global innovation index rankings.

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Centre Launches 'Mission Karamyogi' for Capacity Building of

Govt Employees

In an effort to improve the creativity, proactiveness, professionalism, and digital literacy of the government employees, the Union Cabinet, on September 3, gave a nod to 'Mission Karmayogi', which is dubbed the biggest bureaucratic reform initiative aimed at building the capacity of the government employees. According to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the program will "radically" improve the government's human resource management practices and prepare civil servants for the future. A Capacity Building Commission is proposed to set up for the cause. Moreover, a council, headed by the Prime Minister and comprising select union ministers, chief ministers, eminent public HR practitioners among others will serve as the apex body for providing strategic direction to the program. As per the government, the programme will help in overcoming existing impediments like lack of lifelong & continuous learning environment, the evolution of silos at department level preventing shared understanding of India's development aspirations and diverse and fragmented training landscape and so on. The Centre has allocated a total sum of Rs 510.86 crore for the Mission Karmayogi which is to be spent over five years in the conditioning of as many as 46 lakh central employees. Mission Karmayogi has also been named the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPCSCB).

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/> 09/05/2020

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NetApp Strengthens India Leadership Team to Push Cloud Strategy

California-headquartered global Cloud data services company NetApp on Tuesday announced the appointment of two new executives to strengthen its India leadership team. The appointments of Ganesan Arumugam as Director of Channels and Siddharth Nalawade as Enterprise Head, NetApp India and Saarc are instrumental in driving the company's go-to-market vision to align with its Cloud strategy, NetApp said. "Both Ganesan and Siddharth carry rich and diverse experience across the IT industry. As we forge ahead with a cloud-led data-centric approach to accelerate digital transformation for our customers, these are very opportune leadership appointments for NetApp in India," Puneet Gupta, Managing Director, NetApp India Marketing and Services, said in a statement. Arumugam joins NetApp with leadership expertise and proficiency in sales and marketing within the IT industry. In his current role, he will oversee the channel strategy and bolster the ecosystem in India. With over 29 years of experience in organizations like Symantec, Parabl Systems, VMWare, and Hitachi Data Systems, he is well known in the partner community, and brings with him robust relationships across system integrators, distributors, and alliance partners. With an experience spanning 17 years, Nalawade will be responsible for the overall go-to-market strategy and sales, also helping scale

the company's cloud services offerings in the enterprise segment. Nalawade has built an expertise in the storage and converged infrastructure space with his 10 year stint at Dell EMC.

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How Cloud Computing Technology Affects the SEO Industry

Cloud computing is a collection of services and applications that users can access and use via a web browser. With cloud hosting, it is unnecessary to install software on your system. However, it can be accessed through the service provider's system. Cloud hosting is offered as three basic services: Platform As a Service, Software As a Service, Infrastructure As a Service. Cloud hosting is more popular now than ever before. Many are surprised to realize that cloud hosting can impact the search engine optimization rankings of websites and businesses online. This is because cloud hosting services make it easier and quicker to access platforms and software. Cloud hosting can increase the loading speed of a website. This is essential when discussing the experiences customers have when visiting a website. Customer experience is a major part of search engine optimization ranking as determined by search engines, such as Yahoo, Google, and Bing. Let's look at how cloud hosting and storage can impact SEO rankings. There is abundant evidence that changing to cloud hosting improves the search engine optimization ranking of many websites. The reason for this is that pages load faster. One of the most important metrics that is used when determining the ranking of a website is user experience. The higher the user experience, that is the more satisfied the user is with their interaction with the site, the higher the site ranks. Users have become impatient. If a website takes more than a few seconds to load, they navigate away. If the experience of switching between pages, accessing videos, or viewing a gallery is cumbersome, users will navigate away. This is where cloud hosting and secure cloud storage solutions have become invaluable. Unquestionably, quicker loading times are the primary way that cloud hosting services affect a website's SEO.

Bots and other malicious programs pose a major threat to websites and online services all the world over. Bots can make it possible for a hacker to get around a website security and give an unauthorized individual the ability to control a website. Some bots make it possible for hackers to have a good view of a website, allowing them to steal information, disrupt functionalities, and engage in other things that will impact the search engine optimization status of the website. One of the best ways to address unwanted malware attacks from bots is a robust web hosting service. Cloud hosting services offer strong security against bots. There's no such thing as 100 percent impenetrable security. However, cloud hosting offers some of the best security possible. One of the biggest benefits connected to cloud hosting is reliability. If your website is constantly down because you are using unreliable hosting, your

ranking is going to plummet. However, cloud hosting has proven itself to be a reliable source of hosting. Many cloud hosting providers can promise an uptime of 99.9 percent. Since there is a lot of competition in cloud hosting, hosting providers offer phenomenal customer service. If there is anything wrong with the hosting and you call the provider, you will usually get a quick response. This is an important benefit of cloud hosting, especially when compared to other types of hosting. People use their smartphones for just about everything from listening to the music to using business tools such as accounting apps. More people use their smartphones to access the Internet than accessing the Internet from desktop devices. Successful search engine optimization strategies must be formulated to take mobile users in mind.

Businesses that do not optimize for mobile are going to lose visitors. With over 3.7 billion people around the world using their mobile devices to access the Internet, this is a facet of search engine optimization that cannot be ignored. When you use cloud hosting, analytics and data are made available to search engines that allow the website to be easily tailored to smart phone access. Search engines are interested in knowing the location of hosting compared to the location of where the search is made from. Search engines are going to give higher priority to servers that are hosted locally because these are going to provide faster responses and information that is applicable locally. If someone is in Australia and they are looking for baseball equipment, the searches they are going to get will have an Australian extension. This only makes sense, especially when thinking about local search engine optimization for small businesses that are not looking to reach a global audience. Before cloud hosting, online businesses would need to purchase and maintain several domain names and websites so that they catered to the geolocations they were trying to target. However, cloud hosting allows for the creation of multiple sites at a low cost. The ease and availability of cloud-based systems to offer local hosting improves a website's chances of ranking well. Another way that cloud hosting improves search engine optimization is that it offers several resources and tools. Since the entire infrastructure is in a centralized place, service providers can offer their clients flexible capacity without it being expensive.

Tools, dashboards, and management consoles can also be offered, which improve the end-user's ability to manage their website remotely. Some of these tools can help website owners build unique strategies for search engine optimization. Cloud-based systems allow the owners of websites to monitor the activity of their users. This information can be analyzed. Changes can then be made in the search engine optimization strategy with the goal of reaching more customers. The popularity of cloud hosting comes from the benefits it offers. It provides a seamless Internet service that is secure and flexible. The number of malicious attacks decreases when using cloud hosting services. The speed of websites increase when businesses opt for cloud services. Websites that have few risks and are optimized for speed attract customers. This plays a role in a high search engine optimization ranking. This leads to improved SERP ranking, which creates a positive chain reaction that will

eventually benefit the business's bottom line.

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Smart Cities Assessment Framework & Street for People Challenge

Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister of State (I/C) for Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) launched the Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework (CSCAF) 2.0 and the 'Streets for People Challenge' during a virtual event organized by the Smart Cities Mission, MoHUA, on September 11. CSCAF aims to provide a clear roadmap for cities towards combating Climate Change while planning and implementing their actions, including investments. The rising number of natural disasters and incidences of adverse climatic conditions like cyclones, floods, heatwaves, water scarcity and droughts had adverse impacts on many of our cities and the economic growth. Durga Shanker Mishra, Secretary, MOHUA, senior officials of MOHUA and Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), Principal Secretaries (Urban Development) of State Governments and UTs, State Mission Directors of Smart Cities Mission, Municipal Commissioners/CEOs of Smart Cities, representatives of partner agencies / Bilateral / Multilateral Institutions and other key stakeholders attended the virtual function. This assessment framework was developed after a review of existing frameworks and assessment approaches adopted throughout the world followed by a series of an extensive consultative process with more than 26 organizations and 60 experts from different thematic areas. The framework has 28 indicators across five categories namely; (i) Energy and Green Buildings, (ii) Urban Planning, Green Cover & Biodiversity, (iii) Mobility and Air Quality, (iv) Water Management and (v) Waste Management. The Climate Centre for Cities under National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) is supporting MoHUA in implementation of CSCAF.

As the lockdowns lifted, cities face many challenges in providing safe, affordable, and equitable modes of transport that enable social distancing. Limited public transport options, narrow, crowded sidewalks particularly in market places and deterioration of mental health, are key issues that must be addressed on priority. Pedestrianisation of streets for walking and creating public spaces is a crucial step towards mitigating these issues. Cities around the world, such as Bogota, Berlin, and Milan have responded by transforming streets for walking and cycling, to ensure safe mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic. The 'Streets for People Challenge' is the response to the need for making our cities more walkable and pedestrian-friendly. The Challenge builds on the advisory issued by MoHUA for the holistic planning for pedestrian-friendly market spaces, earlier this year. The Challenge will support cities across the country to develop a unified vision of streets for people in consultation with stakeholders and citizens. Adopting a participatory approach, cities will be

guided to launch their own design competitions to gather innovative ideas from professionals for quick, innovative, and low-cost tactical solutions. It aims to inspire cities to create walking-friendly and vibrant streets through quick, innovative, and low-cost measures. All cities participating in the challenge shall be encouraged to use the 'test-learn-scale' approach to initiate both, flagship and neighbourhood walking interventions. The interventions can include inter alia creating pedestrian-friendly streets in high footfall areas, re-imagining under-flyover spaces, re-vitalizing dead neighbourhood spaces, and creating walking links through parks and institutional areas. To support the challenge, Fit India Mission, under Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, along with the India program of the Institute for Transport Development and Policy (ITDP) has partnered with the Smart Cities Mission.

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PM Modi Addresses Digital Conclave on World Youth Skills Day

On the occasion of World Youth Skills Day (WYSD), Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a digital conclave today at 11 am. The conclave has been organised by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship today which marks the fifth anniversary of Skill India Mission. This year's event is focussed on the importance of developing skilled youth. The PM speaking on the occasion said, "The biggest strength of the millennials is their ability to get skilled...The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has changed the work culture and started a concept of work from home; hence the youth are acquiring new skills to adapt to the new nature of jobs." In an effort to motivate the youth to become skilled and self-reliant and self-employable, the PM said, "Skill is something which you acquire and which is timeless and keeps improving with time, it is unique and makes you different from others, makes you self-reliant and also self-employable." WYSD is recognised by the United Nations and it was designated by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2014. At the time of passing a resolution, the UNGA had expressed concern at the unemployed youth, the majority of whom live in developing countries. It recognised that fostering the acquisition of skills by youth would enhance their ability to make informed choices with regard to life and work and empower them to gain access to changing labour markets. Highlighting the impact of Covid-19, the UN said that it has led to the worldwide closure of training institutions, threatening the continuity of skills development. It also said that nearly 70 percent of the world's youth are affected by school closures.

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UP Govt's Quest for Land for India's 'Biggest Filmcity'

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath announced that the Government of Uttar Pradesh will establish India's biggest Filmcity in Gautam Buddha Nagar. Since the announcements by the CM, the hunt for land began and the land which the former CM of UP, Mulayam Singh Yadav, proposed in 2005 for night safari has been one among the three pieces of land shortlisted for the Filmcity project. Noida Film CityThe site proposed by Mulayam Singh for the night safari is in Murshadpur village near to the Gautam Buddha University campus. The UP government has already acquired a 250-acre of the land plot and is looking forward to acquiring another 300 acres plot to make it a complete 500 acres of land area. The remaining two sites among the three shortlisted are – Sector 21 of the Yamuna Expressway. This site is the largest of the three with an area of 1000 acres and is in near proximity to the proposed international Jewar airport. The next site is an agglomeration of plots from a few neighbouring sectors in Noida including Noia sector 162, 164, 165 and 166. Following the bold declaration by the CM of building India's biggest and the most beautiful Filmcity, it came from the CM that the location will be finalised by Tuesday, September 22.

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PM Modi Inaugurates 7 Urban Infra Projects in Bihar

In another move towards transforming India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated & laid the foundation stones for seven projects worth Rs 541 crore to upscale the urban infrastructure in Bihar. Nitish Kumar, Chief Minister of Bihar was also present at the occasion. Of the projects rolled out by the PM today, four projects are related to water supply, two to sewerage treatment and one to riverfront development. PM Modi inaugurates 7 urban infra projects in BiharBihar Urban Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd. (BUIDCO) will be implementing the projects under the Urban Development and Housing Department of Bihar. Sewerage treatment plants (STPs) built under Namami Gange at Beur and Karmalichak by Patna Municipal Corporation (PMC) was inaugurated by the PM. The PM also inaugurated water supply projects under Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) in Siwan Municipal Council and Chapra Municipal Corporation. Both these projects will help local residents get pure drinking water 24 hours a day. Also, he laid the foundation stone of the Munger water supply scheme under AMRUT. Jamalpur water supply Scheme, again under AMRUT, was inaugurated by the PM. Further, the PM through the videoconference also laid the foundation stone of Muzaffarpur Riverfront Development Scheme built under Namami Gange. Three ghats of Muzaffarpur, Poorvi Akhada Ghat, Seedhi Ghat and Chandwara Ghat will be developed under the project. Basic facilities like toilets, information kiosk, changing room, pathway, watchtower etc. will be made available at the riverfront. Proper security arrangements, signage and adequate lighting will be arranged for at these ghats. During the inauguration ceremony, PM Modi said that

over 50 projects worth Rs 6000 crore have been approved in Bihar to keep river Ganga clean. Namami Gange project will change the lifestyle of the people, he added.

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Elets Webinar| Telangana's Agriculture Sector All Set to Serve amidst COVID-19 Crisis

The COVID-19 outbreak has been one of the biggest threats to humanity and has claimed more than a lakh of lives worldwide as of yet. The grim situation has made Governments across the globe to seriously brainstorm solutions to mitigate the pandemic. And, forums everywhere have started discussions on the effects of COVID-19 in various spheres including economy, ecology, society, businesses and so on to come up with alternatives to at least keep the system surviving. In one such webinar hosted by Elets Technomedia Pvt Ltd and moderated by Dr Ravi Gupta, Founder and CEO, Elets Technomedia, Dr B Janardhan Reddy, APC and Secretary, Agriculture and Cooperation Department, Telangana discussed the effect of COVID-19 on agriculture ecosystem, food supply chains and markets in reference to the State of Telangana. Dr Reddy, reminding of the significance of social distancing practice with his gestures, commenced the webinar with 'Swachh Namaskar'. The name 'Swachh', meaning clean, given to a regular gesture of respect and greet in India – namaskar – itself is an example of how seriously hygiene and social distancing is being followed in the country especially by the government authorities. The practice of Swachh Namaskar was introduced by him when he is the Commissioner & Director of Municipal Administration, Government of Telangana. It was a simple yet effective and innovative initiative. As a basic preventive measure against the COVID-19, 'Swachh Namaskar' is a practice people are following in Telangana and in other parts of the country as well. While addressing the webinar on the effect of COVID-19 on agriculture, Dr Reddy said that the COVID-19 situation has been hard-hitting for the farmers but thankfully in Telangana, the agriculture sector is doing well. However, "We are taking all the necessary steps required to aid the farmers", said Dr Reddy. Elaborating about the initiatives taken by the authorities, he said, "We are ensuring MSP to farmers and procuring the grains from their doorstep." Bank account details of the farmers have been taken and the money is directly transferred to their accounts, added Dr Reddy.

Moreover, he said that the proactive approach of the authorities has turned as a great help to minimise the effect of COVID-19 on agriculture. The government has worked on the water management aspect earlier because of which the reservoirs are full. Therefore, the river water is lifted and is being sent for farming. "The required measures have been taken to ensure that enough water is being supplied to the farmers for cultivation and we are at the level of maximum cultivation", said Dr Reddy.

Talking about the maximum cultivation in the state he added that Telangana is not only known as the 'rice bowl' of India but also the 'seed bowl', as 60 percent of the country's requirements are met by the state's produce. Considering the significance of technology in enhancing the functioning of processes and governance, Dr Reddy further addressed the supply chain management in the state of Telangana which is backed by technological interventions. He said, "Telangana is the only state where online crop recording is done. So, we have a database holding information about in which state which farmer is cultivating which crop and how much." This helps in stock recording, stock management and stock maintenance as well, he added. When asked about the logistics of the vegetables and their supply, Dr Reddy answered, the authorities are, at present, using as many as 300 vehicles on a daily basis to take vegetable from 12 centres in the state and supply the same to people. Also, to ensure the smooth functioning of the supply chain and that the vegetables are being delivered to every household, we are using GPS technology to track the vehicles, added Dr Reddy. Dr Reddy was of the view that with time people have changed their eating habits because of which the health factor has reduced and they have become more vulnerable to diseases. In this time of COVID-19 crisis when the only saviour could be prevention and strong immune system, it is necessary for people to focus on their health and try and boost their immunity, he added. Further, emphasising on the healthy eating habits, Dr Reddy said, fruits are rich in minerals and hence improves the immunity. "We have excluded fruits from our diets compromising our immunity", he added. Dr Reddy said, "With the help of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and other such groups, we are trying to spread awareness among people and make them change their eating habits. We started fruit days to make people include fruit in their diets." He concluded by saying that Telangana is in a good state to pass through the COVID-19 situation, as of yet. The State has enough food supplies to serve the population including those stranded in the state limits and the authorities are making efforts to ensure food to all. Moreover, our agriculture sector and farmers are in a good state as well.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 09/25/2020

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Kodak Alaris Revolutionising India's Information Management Industry

Vivek Naidu, VicePresident, Kodak Alaris India Pvt. Ltd. Successes that are happening one after another are definitely creating a platform for the technology vendors to participate, ensuring the proofs of technology are spread across the country, says Vivek Naidu, VicePresident, Information Management (India Cluster), Kodak Alaris India Pvt. Ltd., in a conversation with Arpit Gupta of Elets News Network (ENN). Give us an overview of Kodak Alaris Information Management, India. Kodak Alaris is at the forefront of global revolution around Information Management

(IM) and the future of digital transformation in India is extremely promising from the stand point of data adoption. Enterprises today deal with information in various forms and sizes. Traditionally, it used to be paper-based information, but in last 10-12 years, we've seen the influx of fax and email and now the social media. Moreover, the amount of data that has been generated in the past two years itself is more than what mankind has generated in all the years. The inability to harness this data leads to complexity and loss in productivity. This presents companies with a humongous challenge to tap into the value of their data through efficient digitalisation. The question is not whether the shift to digital needs to be made, but more importantly, where do companies begin? The answer is simple: digital transformation starts with information capture – the challenge Kodak Alaris solves better than anyone. IM encompasses all channels of information, which can be of value for an enterprise to have an impact on business outcomes. Kodak Alaris deals with this discipline with an aim of providing simplicity and ease-of-use, enabling enterprises to capture information from all forms and channels. Since there is an ingress of information from channels other than paper, we've diversified our outlook— digitising it, becoming the subset of Information Management.

As far as end-to-end capture of information is concerned, every piece of information has to be secured. How secure are your products and solutions? The first parameter that all technology vendors must follow to ensure security of information is to provide services as per global standards. Every piece of information we obtain whether on paper or via social media channels must comply with global standards. For instance, when creating images from papers in a specific format (Eg. pdf, tiff—which are fully secured and adhere to global standards), does not allow the user to edit any part of an image thereby preventing any form of distortion of the digital copy. Kodak Alaris conforms to all the global standards on inter-operability as well other security protocols. Elaborate on initiatives introduced by Kodak Alaris in 2017. We introduced IN2 Ecosystem with an aim to provide simplicity and ease-of-use to the end-customer. It is primarily an ecosystem of partners which include I Independent Software Vendors (ISV) I Business Process Outsource (BPO) I System Integrator (SI) Typically, when customers embark on the digitisation journey, they look for a holistic set of solutions from their partners who can provide technical competence of integrating all the pieces of solutions as well as provides the benefit of ease of doing business. Based on our experience, we have created a network of partners who can provide software packages to customers in areas like healthcare, payment banks, manufacturing etc. We have stitched together a network of partners who specialise in different areas.

Depending on the priorities of customers, we deploy a particular set of partners to engage with them. It is a win-win situation for partners, customers as well as Kodak Alaris. We achieved great success through the IN2 Ecosystem platform. In 2018, we are creating verticalised solutions for industry domains whose focus primarily is distributed scanning environment (organisations that have multi-location footprint or

have a larger geographical coverage). The focus is on vertical applications to capture distributed yet Indian market for scanning products is growing, and in order to capture the market segment, we are focussing on partnerships with ISVs with verticalised solution. In terms of innovation, Kodak Alaris launched a new category of scanners in 2017 called S2000 series with unique features such as Embedded Image Processing, Active Feed Technology and Controlled Output Scanning. The S2000 series includes two USBconnected models – Alaris S2050 and S2070 and two network/wireless models – Alaris S2060w and S2080w which deliver rated speeds between 50 Pages per Minute (PPM) and 80 ppm. Infact, our focus on the Digital India programme has increased all the more. The government sector in particular is transforming from a paper-based economy to adopting digital technologies like the e-office project which brings in digitisation at the core of every business operation. With a vision of creating a ‘transparent electronic marketplace’ the government is investing on various IT products which presents a big opportunity for scanners and information management.

What challenges and opportunities do you see underlying for the Information Management Industry? The first key challenge is the size and scale of the task of digitisation in ‘Digital India’. We have been working closely with the Government on this front and in one the digitising projects we undertook, land record documents dated back to the year 1850 have been digitized. Imagine, the volume of digitisation required for the papers starting since 1850. Secondly, adoption takes time, especially in a developing country like India. Thirdly, more investment is required. Digitisation of papers is just one part of the whole value chain. The more important part is how this can be deployed for the benefit of the citizens. Although the Government has rolled-out an innovative and tech-savvy idea around deployment of G2C (Government to Citizen) services, implementing it across the entire spectrum will require huge investments. The digitisation of Regional Transport Office (RTO), for instance, has brought a lot of transparency in operation. The challenge is of scale, adoption and seeking investment, however the opportunity for technology vendors lies in the intent of the government to usher digitisation. We also see opportunity in the fact that, successes that are happening one after another are definitely creating a platform for the technology vendors to participate, ensuring the fruits of technology are spread across the country. The Government is promoting ease-of-doing business across all States/UTs. Which are the States you’re looking to expand your company’s wing?

We’ve been significant number of partners in States like Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, to name a few. Our focus however is to participate and enable all the mission-mode projects which by definition itself is covering the length and breadth of the country. At present, we’re participating in the digital PR project in Kerala. Prior to this, we participated in a project for the High Courts of Punjab and Haryana. Given the intensity of these projects, one cannot reach completion in a single financial year, hence we target an investment cycle of

three to four financial years for a particular State and then the cycle moves to the next state. We have a very secular approach to expand our coverage, and our focus is to participate in all the 29 States and the UTs. However, keeping in mind the business reality and prioritisation, at any given point about seven to eight States remain in focus for 2-3 financial years and then the cycle moves forward.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Disclosing Funds Paid Within Social Security

More than 3.8 billion manats (\$2.2 billion) was paid in Azerbaijan within various types of social security from January through August 2020, which is 782.7 million manats that's \$460.4 million (25.7 percent) more compared to the same period of last year, Trend reports on Sept. 3 citing to the Azerbaijani Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population. The State Social Protection Fund paid pensions, allowances, scholarships, and targeted social assistance to nearly 2.6 million people from January to August 2020.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 09/03/2020

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Azerbaijan Boosts Exports in Agriculture

Azerbaijan increased export of fresh cherries and potatoes in the first half of 2020. Export of fresh cherries increased by 7 percent up to 19,950 tons, with revenues from the export of this fruit amounting to \$32.2 million, which is an increase by 8.8 percent. Russia accounted for 99.4 percent of fresh cherries export from Azerbaijan during the reporting period as 19,835 tons worth \$32.1 million were exported to this country in the reporting period. Furthermore, during the reporting period, Azerbaijan increased export of potatoes by 32 percent up to 81,275 tons. Revenues from potatoes export amounted to 433.7 million. Likewise, Russia accounted for 85 percent of all potatoes export from Azerbaijan in the reporting period. Thus, 69,155 tons of potatoes worth \$30.7 million were exported to Russia. Meanwhile, Ukraine increased import of potatoes from Azerbaijan up to 7,370 tons worth \$1.8 million during the reporting period. It should be noted that the in quantitative terms there was a growth by 2.9 times compared to the same period of 2019. Additionally, among other importers of potatoes from Azerbaijan in the first half of the year were Kazakhstan, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia and Turkmenistan. The volume of Azerbaijan's foreign trade turnover amounted to \$15 billion in the period between January and July 2020. During the reporting period, export amounted to \$9.1 billion,

which is 61.46 percent of the total volume of foreign trade. The volume of imports amounted to \$5.9 billion.

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Azerbaijan to Host First Online Forum of Entrepreneurs

Azerbaijan will host the '1st Online Forum of Entrepreneurs – Baku 2020' event on September 22-23 under the support from the Agency for Development of Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs), Trend reports on Sept.11 referring to the agency. As reported, the online forum aims to motivate entrepreneurs in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic period, as well as learning of the international experience. The main goals of the forum are also to promote entrepreneurial thinking, especially among young people and women, to boost interest in entrepreneurship, to motivate young people working in the field of social entrepreneurship and starting their own business, as well as to discuss the problems faced by entrepreneurs during the pandemic. During the online forum, the participants will get acquainted with the success stories of entrepreneurs working amid the current pandemic, study foreign experience through speeches of international rapporteurs. Businessmen from Turkey, Germany, Finland, United Arab Emirates, Georgia, Russia, Pakistan, Spain, and other countries will take part in the event as speakers and guests. The partners of the online forum organized by the SA Consulting LLC from the US are the youth public association Odlar Yurdu, SAT Group, Youth Center for Social Business, Business Club Networking.az, Majlis Business Network from Azerbaijan, and the Eurasian Economic Cooperation Organization. The deadline for the forum registration is 15:00 (GMT+4) on September 21.

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Azerbaijan Insurers Association to Study Experience of Foreign Countries

Closer cooperation of the Azerbaijan Insurers Association (AIA) with the Russian Union of Motor Insurers (RAMI) can expand the opportunities of the markets of the two countries, Chairman of the AIA supervisory board, Azer Aliyev said, Trend reports. Aliyev made the remark at an event dedicated to the new concept of the activities of the Azerbaijan Insurers Association and the function of a new approach to the insurance of the participants of the insurance market amid changing customer behavior following the COVID-19 pandemic. "In 2019, representatives of the Russian Union of Motor Insurers visited Azerbaijan. They were sharing their experience of reforms carried out in this area in Russia," Aliyev said. The chairman noted that the

ASA's priority is also to study the experience of the Baltic countries, the Turkish market, and other countries. "One of the main objectives of insurers is to adequately work in the conditions of changing customer behavior, as well as meeting all the necessary market needs, studying foreign experience in this direction will give an unambiguously positive result," he added.

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UZBEKISTAN: International Tourism Restrictions to Be Canceled

According to the decision of the Republican Special Commission of Uzbekistan, all restrictions on international tourism will be canceled from October 1, Trend reports referring to the press service of the Republican Special Commission of Uzbekistan. The Commission allowed the free movement of personal vehicles, local air, and railway travel, the operation of catering facilities (restaurants, cafes, canteens, tea houses), sanatoriums, boarding houses, camps, hotels, guest houses, beaches, hostels, rental cottages, and other recreation areas, operate museums and restore the movement of vehicles between all regions of the republic. Travel agencies inviting tourist groups (at least five people and no more than 15 people with full insurance against coronavirus) to Uzbekistan must arrange for tourists to undergo tests for COVID-19. If the result of the test is negative, tourists will not be quarantined for 14 days. If a tourist is found to have symptoms of coronavirus at a border point, he will have to pass a COVID-19 test at his own expense. If the result of the test is positive, the tourist is placed in a quarantine center in Uzbekistan at his own expense or returns to his country. Also, guests of Uzbekistan must strictly adhere to quarantine and sanitary and hygienic rules. Travel agencies will be responsible for ensuring that tourists comply with the rules.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Aged Care 'Needs Financial Redesign'

Federal Health Department secretary Brendan Murphy admits aged care is under financial pressure and needs a redesign around costing, funding and transparency. The aged care royal commission is examining how to best fund the sector into the future as Australia's population gets older and demand for services rises. "We do not dispute that overall the financial performance of the sector has deteriorated in recent years," Dr Murphy told the inquiry on Friday. "Many of the \$1.5 billion of COVID measures put in this year in fact have gone to supporting the viability of the sector. "We clearly accept that the system does need significant redesign and including in

the costing and funding and transparency of that system." Intergenerational reports have identified aged care as the fastest growing component of federal expenditure.

There is expected to be a significant rise in people needing care from 2030 when the baby boomer cohort enter their 80s, the commission previously heard. Former prime minister Paul Keating has advocated for a HECS-style loan scheme where money for aged care is taken out of people's assets after they die. Treasury secretary Steven Kennedy told the commission the idea was worth examining but the question of private contributions needed to be sorted out first. "We see people holding substantial superannuation assets at death," he said. "I would be more inclined to say; how do we get the superannuation system and aged care system working to allow people with the means to make a reasonable contribution to their aged care?" "The community has an expectation that those of us who are in a position to contribute more should contribute more to a full range of services."

Treasury deputy secretary Jenny Wilkinson said baby boomers' broadly would retire with more superannuation behind them than people who had entered aged care in recent decades. "The superannuation system is about 20 years in to having more than nine per cent compulsory contributions being made by individuals," she said. "Superannuation balances have been increasing in recent years. They are likely to increase substantially over the next 20." People entering aged care must fill out income and asset tests to determine how much they pay. The commission also has examined the merits of a hypothecated levy model, similar to Medicare, where people would be taxed specifically to fund aged care. Dr Kennedy said he was not sure such a model would be helpful in funding something as wide and complex as the health system.

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Push for Certainty on Recycled Content Use

Australia could almost double the amount of soft plastics recycled if two major road projects in each state used 1.5 per cent plastic content. Australian Council of Recycling chief Pete Shmigel says more must be done to ensure governments buy more recycled materials, and wants roads agencies to line up projects that will use them. "If we can just point on a map where we can put this stuff, we can get it fixed real quick and we don't have to go through all the rigmarole," he told a Senate inquiry on Friday. Another 100,000 tonnes of soft plastics could be used if two road projects per state used 1.5 per cent plastic content. This would nearly double the current amount recycled. The government has flagged rule changes to ensure recyclables are considered in contracts. The Senate committee is looking at proposed laws on recycling that would ban the export of waste plastic, paper, glass and tyres.

The changes aim to keep 645,000 tonnes of unprocessed recyclables onshore each year that would have been shipped overseas. The inquiry was told about health risks of discarded plastics. "I've seen albatross sadly feeding their chicks balloons and lighters and toothbrushes. And I've seen these chicks expire because obviously they can't digest these things," marine biologist Lawrence Chlebeck said. "As the plastics move further and further into our environment, affecting ecosystems on all kinds of levels, and it's really going to feed its way back and become more of a human health issue." National Waste and Recycling Industry Council chief Rose Read wants the bills tweaked to ensure producers take more responsibility. Ms Read also wants requirements for companies to increase the amount of recycled content used in their products and packaging. WWF Australia says the proposed legislation is a missed opportunity to address single-use plastics and plastics packaging. The group wants recycled packaging content goals to shift to mandatory product stewardship so that targets are met.

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recycled packaging content goals to shift to mandatory product stewardship so that targets are met.

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Australia in for Hard Road Out of Pandemic

Australians in and out of work face a long, hard and bumpy road as the nation recovers from the coronavirus pandemic. Those out of work were hit with a cut to their dole on Friday, as the JobSeeker supplement reduced from \$550 a fortnight to \$250. From Monday, the JobKeeper rate will decrease and be split into two-tiers for full-time and part-time workers. The full rate will go from \$1500 to \$1200 a fortnight, while people who worked less than 20 hours a week pre-pandemic will receive just \$750. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg revealed the deficit reached \$85.3 billion in 2019/20 as the government weighs job creation measures in the October 6 budget. "Yes, the hole in the Australian economy is significant. Yes, the road back will be long, bumpy and hard," Mr Frydenberg told reporters in Canberra. Prime Minister Scott Morrison will make a pre-budget address next Thursday at the National Press Club in Canberra.

The coalition has abandoned its budget repair strategy, laying the ground for big spending measures next month. National economic recovery relies heavily on Victoria continuing to squash the virus. The state recorded 14 new cases on Friday, as well as eight deaths, pushing the national toll to 869. Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews has raised the possibility of easing restrictions earlier than planned next month with infection rates tracking ahead of schedule. But there's not expected to be wholesale changes on Sunday when some freedoms will be restored. Mr Andrews faced an inquiry into the state government's bungling of hotel quarantine, saying he couldn't recall who decided to staff it with private security. The state's second wave has been traced to two Melbourne hotels, with the outbreaks linked to more than 750 deaths and triggering economically destructive lockdowns.

NSW broke its three-day streak without a coronavirus case being detected in the community. A man in his 50s in Sydney's southwest tested positive despite not having contact with a previously confirmed case. Queensland Chief Health Officer Jeannette Young said it appeared the infection would reset the border clock with NSW, but she would await the investigation result. Queensland has vowed not to fully open the border with NSW until the state records 28 days without community transmission. The federal government is in a slanging match with Queensland over troops being withdrawn from that border on September 30. Other hard borders in NSW, South Australia and the Northern Territory will retain Australian Defence Force personnel until at least mid-October.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/25/2020

Australia's Report on Agtech Confirms Technology Can Lead to a Fertile Future

Sensors, robotics, AI, and blockchain are outlined as some of the future technologies that can improve the sector's advancement. The horizon scanning report on the future of agricultural technologies has identified how adopting new technologies -- such as sensor, robotic, artificial intelligence (AI), data, biotechnology, nanotechnology, and distributed ledger -- could improve the sector's productivity, diversity, and profitability. The Future of Agriculture Technologies report [PDF] was released by the Australian Council of Learned Academics (ACOLA) on Tuesday, after it was commissioned by Australia's chief scientist Alan Finkel, on behalf of the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC), to undertake the project. "Australia's diverse agriculture, fisheries, and forestry sector is a AU\$69 billion industry ... however, reaching the government's goal of AU\$100 billion by 2030 will likely require more than just incremental technological advancements," Finkel said.

"Historically, Australian producers have been rapid adopters of innovation, and these emerging technologies will help our agriculture sector to transform and tackle current and future challenges." The report highlighted how the deployment of technologies, such as robotics, coupled with AI and Internet of Things (IoT), has the potential to generate vast amounts of data that could assist with complex decision-making and environmental monitoring, while allowing farmers to devote time to focus on complex tasks, for instance. It also added how data, AI, and IoT, if properly harnessed, could underpin other solutions such as asset automation and rapid testing of localised crops, resulting in cost reduction and increased investment in computational hardware, software, and algorithm development. Other opportunities that technology could bring to farmers, according to the report, include improving supply chain transparency and quality assurance using sensors and blockchain technologies.

At the same time, the report noted there is also an opportunity to increase involvement of primary producers and other community members, including supporting Indigenous landholders, while breakdown existing silos. Additionally, the report warned that national leadership and regulation would be necessary to ensure that appropriate data codes of practice are upheld, and greater transparency is promoted. "Innovation in our agriculture sector is critical for our economy, our food security and so much more. With a supportive policy environment, workforce and investment, we are confident that the future of agriculture in Australia will be one in which data analytics and artificial intelligence are as at-home on the farm as they are in any other high-tech industry," said Stewart Lockie, one of the chairs of the ACOLA expert working group.

The report into the future of agricultural technologies is the second report to be developed by ACOLA. The first examined the ethical development of AI and was released last July. The NSTC was charged with overseeing the development of these reports when the Australian government announced in 2018 it was replacing the then-existing Commonwealth Science Council to be the peak advisory body on science and technology to the ministry. At the time, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said that the government recognised the importance of science, research, and technology in "improving the competitiveness of Australian businesses and driving new jobs" and the council would provide independent advice in relation to this.

"The Council will identify Research Challenge projects and oversee horizon-scanning reports into long-term science and technology priorities, providing expert advice on issues such as health, emerging technologies, and education," the statement read. "These changes will enable a stronger voice for science and technology in the national conversation, ensuring deeper engagement with government and industry in the policy process."

From <https://www.zdnet.com> 09/29/2020

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Morrison Flags Research Incentive Changes

The prime minister has all but confirmed his government will change tack on research and development tax incentives. Legislation stuck in the Senate would effectively cut the scheme by \$1.8 billion. But out spruiking \$1.5 billion for manufacturing before the federal budget, Scott Morrison has signalled he is open to rethinking the changes. "We certainly want to encourage research and development," he told the National Press Club on Thursday. "Our answer to that question will be delivered by the treasurer next Tuesday night." The government is also extending tax deduction shortcuts for people working from home due to the coronavirus. People will be able to claim 80 cents for every hour they work from home until the end of this year, rather than calculating specific running expenses.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/30/2020

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4、 Economic and Social Development and ICT

Asia-Pacific

Countries Must Do More to Ensure Sustainable Development of Ocean Activities

Countries need to work together to defend the ocean from a steady rise in temperature, pollution and overfishing that threatens its ability to continue supporting marine life and providing food and income to billions of people, according to a new OECD report. Sustainable Ocean for All: Harnessing the benefits of sustainable ocean economies for developing countries says that with ocean-related economic sectors forecast to grow rapidly over the next decade, ensuring this development takes place in a sustainable way is critical. While the COVID-19 crisis is hurting key ocean-based sectors, such as tourism and shipping, demands on marine resources for food, energy, minerals, transport, tourism and leisure will persist as the global population grows towards an expected 9 billion by 2050. If managed sustainably, the ocean could have the capacity to regenerate, be more productive, and support more prosperous societies. This will require governments to support those sectors less equipped to foster sustainable ocean economies by facilitating their access to finance and policy evidence. “More than 3 billion people rely on the ocean for their livelihoods, and we are all dependent on it for supporting ecosystems, providing food and regulating the climate. Yet human activity is causing long-lasting and in some cases irreversible damage to it,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. “It is crucial that we invest in ocean-related sectors in a way that fosters environmental and economic sustainability and puts people’s well-being at the centre, especially as we shape the recovery from COVID-19.”

Noting that the poorest countries tend to be both the most exposed to the effects of ocean degradation and the least equipped to respond, the report calls for co-ordinated action and more effective international development co-operation to improve sustainability of the ocean economy. The United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, starting in 2021, should foster greater use of science and innovation to develop sustainable practices in a post-COVID world. The report calls on all countries to phase out government support for environmentally harmful economic activities and use instruments like fees, charges, taxes and tradable permits to discourage over-exploitation, pollution and greenhouse emissions and encourage conservation and sustainable development of ocean activities. Such instruments can also generate much-needed financing for ocean sustainability. Taxes relevant to ocean sustainability – in particular taxes on ocean-related pollution, transport and energy –generated at least USD 4 billion globally in 2018. The report’s analysis of six ocean-based industries (fishing, fish farming, fish processing, shipbuilding, maritime passenger transport, and freight shipping) shows that they contributed to more than 11% of GDP in lower middle-income countries and 6% of GDP in low-income countries in 2015, compared to less than 2% of GDP for high-income countries. In some low-income or island states, key ocean-based sectors like tourism can account for over 20% of GDP.

This reliance leaves developing countries highly exposed to the risks of deteriorating marine ecosystems, yet less than 1% of foreign aid is spent on conserving marine ecosystems and improving sustainability of ocean-related economic activities. The

USD 3 billion in official development assistance (ODA) that was allocated on average to ocean activities annually over 2013-18 has tended to focus on expanding activities like ports or shipping without including efforts to improve sustainability. Well-designed financing is essential to achieving sustainable ocean economies, yet data on ocean finance is scarce, and it is unclear how much of it contributes to sustainability. To help fill this gap, the report measures global development finance for the sustainable ocean economy and looks at private finance mobilised by ODA for ocean activities. It calls for environmental and social sustainability criteria relating to the ocean economy to be integrated into traditional financial services and investments, financial markets and credit markets. Read the report *Sustainable Ocean for All: Harnessing the benefits of sustainable ocean economies for developing countries*. Access the OECD platform on development finance for sustainable ocean economies. For further information, journalists are invited to contact Catherine Bremer in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 45 24 97 00). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/08/2020

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Unprecedented Falls in GDP in Most G20 Economies in Second Quarter of 2020

COVID-19 containment measures weighed heavily on economic activity in the second quarter of 2020, with unprecedented falls in real gross domestic product (GDP) in most G20 countries. For the G20 area as a whole, GDP dropped by a record (minus) 6.9%, significantly larger than the (minus) 1.6% recorded in the first quarter of 2009 at the height of the financial crisis. China was the only G20 country recording growth (11.5%) in the second quarter of 2020, reflecting the earlier onset of the pandemic in this country and subsequent recovery. GDP contracted by an average of (minus) 11.8% in all other G20 economies in the second quarter of 2020, when the effects of the pandemic began to be more widely felt. GDP fell most dramatically, by (minus) 25.2%, in India, followed by the United Kingdom (minus 20.4%). GDP also dropped sharply in Mexico (minus 17.1%), South Africa (minus 16.4%), France (minus 13.8%), Italy (minus 12.8%), Canada (minus 11.5%), Turkey (minus 11.0%), Brazil and Germany (minus 9.7% in both countries), the United States (minus 9.1%), Japan (minus 7.9%), Australia (minus 7.0%) and Indonesia (minus 6.9%). The contraction was less pronounced in Korea and Russia (minus 3.2% in both countries). Year-on-year GDP in the G20 area fell by (minus) 9.1% in the second quarter of 2020, following a contraction of (minus) 1.7% in the previous quarter. Among G20 economies, China recorded the highest annual growth (3.2%), while India recorded the largest annual fall (minus 23.5%).

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/14/2020

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Building Confidence Crucial Amid an Uncertain Economic Recovery

With the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to threaten jobs, businesses and the health and well-being of millions amid exceptional uncertainty, building confidence will be crucial to ensure that economies recover and adapt, says the [OECD's Interim Economic Outlook](#). After an unprecedented collapse in the first half of the year, economic output recovered swiftly following the easing of containment measures and the initial re-opening of businesses, but the pace of recovery has lost some momentum more recently. New restrictions being imposed in some countries to tackle the resurgence of the virus are likely to have slowed growth, the report says. Uncertainty remains high and the strength of the recovery varies markedly between countries and between business sectors. Prospects for an inclusive, resilient and sustainable economic growth will depend on a range of factors including the likelihood of new outbreaks of the virus, how well individuals observe health measures and restrictions, consumer and business confidence, and the extent to which government support to maintain jobs and help businesses succeeds in boosting demand. The Interim Economic Outlook projects global GDP to fall by 4½ per cent this year, before growing by 5% in 2021. The forecasts are less negative than those in OECD's June Economic Outlook, due primarily to better than expected outcomes for China and the United States in the first half of this year and a response by governments on a massive scale. However, output in many countries at the end of 2021 will still be below the levels at the end of 2019, and well below what was projected prior to the pandemic.

Real GDP Growth

%, year-on-year

Country	2019	2020	2021
Argentina	-2.1	-11.2	3.2
Australia	1.8	-4.1	2.5
Brazil	1.1	-6.5	3.6
Canada	1.7	-5.8	4.0
China	6.1	1.8	8.0
France	1.5	-9.5	5.8
Germany	0.6	-5.4	4.6
India	4.2	-10.2	10.7
Indonesia	5.0	-3.3	5.3
Italy	0.3	-10.5	5.4
Japan	0.7	-5.8	1.5
Korea	2.0	-1.0	3.1
Mexico	-0.3	-10.2	3.0
Russia	1.4	-7.3	5.0
Saudi Arabia	0.4	-6.8	3.2
South Africa	0.1	-11.5	1.4
Turkey	0.9	-2.9	3.9
United Kingdom	1.5	-10.1	7.6
United States	2.2	-3.8	4.0
World	2.6	-4.5	5.0
Euro area	1.3	-7.9	5.1
G20	2.9	-4.1	5.7

Forecasts are highlighted by the light grey background

Source: OECD (2020), "OECD Economic Outlook, Interim Report September 2020", OECD Economic Outlook: Statistics and Projections (database).
- Created with Datawrapper

If the threat from COVID-19 fades more quickly than expected, improved business and consumer confidence could boost global activity sharply in 2021. But a stronger resurgence of the virus, or more stringent lockdowns could cut 2-3 percentage points from global growth in 2021, with even higher unemployment and a prolonged period of weak investment. Presenting the Interim Economic Outlook, covering G20 economies, OECD Chief Economist Laurence Boone said: "The world is facing an acute health crisis and the most dramatic economic slowdown since the Second World War. The end is not yet in sight but there is still much policymakers can do to help build confidence." She added: "It is important that governments avoid the mistake of tightening fiscal policy too quickly, as happened after the last financial crisis. Without continued government support, bankruptcies and unemployment could rise faster than warranted and take a toll on people's livelihoods for years to come. Policymakers have the opportunity of a lifetime to implement truly sustainable recovery plans that reboot the economy and generate investment in the digital upgrades much needed by small and medium-sized companies, as well as in green infrastructure, transport and housing to build back a better and greener economy."

The report warns that many businesses in the service sectors most affected by shutdowns, such as transport, entertainment and leisure, could become insolvent if demand does not recover, triggering large-scale job losses. Rising unemployment is also likely to worsen the risk of poverty and deprivation for millions of informal

workers, particularly in emerging-market economies. The rapid reaction of policymakers in many countries to buffer the initial blow to incomes and jobs prevented an even larger drop in output. The Interim Outlook says it is essential for governments not to repeat mistakes of past recessions but to continue to provide fiscal, financial and other policy support at the current stage of the recovery and for 2021. Such measures should be flexible enough to adapt to changing conditions and become more targeted. Continued state support needs to be increasingly conditioned on broader environmental, economic and social objectives. Better targeting of support to where it is needed most will improve prospects, particularly for the unemployed and the low skilled – groups who too often miss out on training – and for youths. The report acknowledges that a balance needs to be struck between providing immediate support to strengthen the recovery while encouraging workers and businesses in hard-hit sectors to move into more promising activities.

Support also needs to be focussed on viable businesses, moving away from debt into equity, to help them to invest in digitalisation, and in the products and services our society will need in the decades ahead. Far stronger commitment needs to be devoted to address climate change in recovery plans, in particular conditioning support on greater investment in green energy, infrastructure, transport and housing. At the same time, and with the virus continuing to spread, investing in health professionals and systems must remain a priority. The OECD says global co-operation and co-ordination are essential, as greater funding and multilateral efforts will be needed to ensure that affordable vaccines and treatments will be deployed rapidly in all countries when available. The release of the Interim Economic Outlook follows an OECD Ministerial Roundtable at which Secretary-General Angel Gurría called for countries to go further in greening the stimulus packages they have announced to tackle the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in order to drive sustainable, inclusive, resilient economic growth and improve well-being. “Climate change and biodiversity loss are the next crises around the corner and we are running out of time to tackle them,” he said. “Green recovery measures are a win-win option as they can improve environmental outcomes while boosting economic activity and enhancing well-being for all.” For the full report and more information, visit the [Interim Economic Outlook](#) online. Other OECD policy responses to the pandemic are available on the [COVID-19 hub](#). Media queries should be directed to the OECD Media Office (tel: +33 1 4524 9700). *Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.*

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/16/2020

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New OECD PISA Report Reveals Challenge of Online Learning for Many Students and Schools

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to school closures across the world and forced teachers and students in many countries to adapt quickly to teaching and learning online. But a new OECD PISA report reveals wide disparities both between and within countries in the availability of technology in schools and of teachers' capacities to use ICT effectively. *Effective Policies, Successful Schools* analyses findings from the most recent OECD PISA 2018 test, involving around 600,000 15-year-old students in 79 countries and economies. On average across OECD countries in 2018, there was almost one computer available at school for educational purposes for every 15-year-old student. Yet in many countries school principals reported that the computers were not powerful enough in terms of computing capacity, affecting one in three students globally. "This crisis has exposed the many inadequacies and inequities in education systems across the world," said Andreas Schleicher, OECD Director for Education and Skills. "Disadvantaged young people have been particularly affected and every country should do more to ensure that all schools have the resources they need so that every student has an equal opportunity to learn and succeed." Differences between advantaged and disadvantaged schools were significant. In Brazil 68% of students in advantaged schools had access to sufficiently powerful digital devices, according to principals, compared to just 10% of students in disadvantaged schools. In Spain, there was a 40 percentage-point difference (70% vs. 30%) in the availability of sufficiently powerful digital devices between advantaged and disadvantaged schools.

Teachers' capacity to use technology varies widely. On average across OECD countries, 65% of 15-year-olds were enrolled in schools whose principal reported that teachers have the necessary technical and pedagogical skills to integrate digital devices in instruction. The proportion varied considerably between socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged schools. In Sweden, for example, 89% of students in advantaged schools attended such a school, but only 54% of students in disadvantaged schools did. On average across OECD countries, about 60% of 15-year-old students were enrolled in schools whose principal reported that teachers have sufficient time to prepare lessons integrating digital devices, ranging from close to 90% of students in the four Chinese provinces/municipalities that participated in PISA 2018 to little more than 10% of students in Japan. For some students, even the basics for learning are not available at home. On average across OECD countries, 9% of 15-year-old students do not have a quiet place to study in their home. Even in PISA top-performer Korea, one in five students from the 25% most disadvantaged schools reported they do not have a place to study at home, compared to one in 10 students in advantaged schools.

The report also compares other key aspects of school policies and equity. Overall, the PISA 2018 results reveal considerable disparities between advantaged and disadvantaged schools related to shortages of education staff and material resources, including digital resources. PISA shows that, already prior to the

pandemic, many schools faced shortages in resources. On average across OECD countries, 27% of students were enrolled in schools whose principal said that learning is hindered by a lack of teaching staff, and shortages of staff tended to be reported far more often by principals of disadvantaged schools (in 42 education systems) and by principals of public schools (in another 42 education systems). In 44 education systems, students attending schools whose principal reported greater shortages of teaching and support staff scored lower in reading. Ensuring that all schools have adequate and high-quality resources, and the appropriate support, is key if students from all backgrounds are to be given equal opportunities to learn and succeed at school, according to the report.

The findings also reveal how the foundations for education success are laid early. Students who had attended pre-primary education for longer scored better in PISA than students who had not attended pre-primary education. Between 2015 and 2018, the share of 15-year-old students who had attended pre-primary school for three years increased in 28 countries. Despite this advantage, in 68 out of 78 education systems with comparable data, students who had not attended pre-primary education were much more likely to be socio-economically disadvantaged and enrolled in more disadvantaged schools at the age of 15. This highlights how access to pre-primary education often reinforces educational disparities. When expanding pre-primary education, greater care must be taken to shift the emphasis from access to quality and from care to education, says the report. The report is available at <http://www.oecd.org/education/pisa-2018-results-volume-v-ca768d40-en.htm>. For more information, journalists should contact Spencer Wilson in the OECD Media Office (tel. + 33 1 45 24 81 18). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/29/2020

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ADB to Establish Regional Hub to Help Economies Improve Domestic Resource Mobilization and Tax Cooperation

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is establishing a regional hub to promote knowledge sharing and strengthen cooperation on tax policy and tax administration across economies in Asia and the Pacific and their development partners. “I firmly believe that one of the keys to success in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a world reshaped by COVID-19 (coronavirus disease) will lie in strengthening domestic resource mobilization (DRM) and international tax cooperation (ITC),” said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa in a seminar today at ADB’s 53rd Annual Meeting. The Regional Hub on DRM and ITC will focus on promoting DRM and ITC through close collaboration among finance and tax authorities of developing economies; international organizations such as the

International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the World Bank; and regional tax associations. Despite many developing economies having maintained strong and steady gross domestic product (GDP) growth in recent years, tax yields have not increased proportionately. Even prior to the pandemic, many economies did not achieve a minimum tax yield of 15% of GDP—a level now widely regarded as the minimum required for sustainable development. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the situation due to increased pressure on economies' expenditures and a decrease in tax revenue, leaving little room to further increase external borrowing.

Participants in the seminar discussed how governments must balance efforts to raise tax revenues and promote investments that can contribute to a robust recovery from the pandemic, and the need to earn the trust of taxpayers while seeking to increase the tax base. To improve tax yields in a fair and equitable manner, governments must also cooperate more closely, including to manage aggressive tax planning and combat tax evasion. This requires a higher level of participation in international initiatives such as the Inclusive Framework on BEPS (base erosion and profit shifting) and the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes. The regional hub will serve multiple functions such as institutional and capacity development, including the exchange of information; knowledge sharing across partners, international financial institutions, bilateral revenue organizations, and developing economies; and collaboration and development coordination across development partners. It will be an open and inclusive platform, with a focus on South–South policy dialogue. The regional hub will seek to bring together practitioners from tax policy bodies as well as tax administration bodies of developing economies to achieve meaningful progress in tax reform.

The synergy created in this hub will ensure strong value addition and effectiveness in the implementation of necessary reforms. In establishing the hub, ADB will also mainstream DRM and ITC in its operations such as technical assistance and policy-based lending to help governments enhance their capacity for DRM and adoption of international tax standards. Seminar speakers included Japan Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, and Minister of State for Financial Services Taro Aso; Indonesian Minister of Finance Sri Mulyani Indrawati; IMF Director for Fiscal Affairs Department Vito Gaspar; and OECD Director of the Centre for Tax Policy and Administration Pascal Saint-Amans. New Zealand Inland Revenue Commissioner and Chief Executive Naomi Ferguson moderated the seminar. Representatives from the World Bank, the Pacific Islands Tax Administrators Association, and the Study Group on Asian Tax Administration and Research also shared their views. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/17/2020

ADB, Clifford Capital Holdings Sign Landmark Deal Supporting Sustainable Infrastructure in Asia

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has agreed to invest up to \$95 million in Clifford Capital Holdings (CCH), a specialist financing and distribution platform for infrastructure and other real assets globally, headquartered in Singapore. ADB's investment will help to fund CCH's future growth plans, including in sustainable infrastructure financing in developing Asia. The transaction comprises a \$50 million investment from ADB and a \$45 million investment from the Leading Asia's Private Sector Infrastructure Fund (LEAP) to be administered by ADB. It is ADB's first investment in a Singapore entity since the opening of its Singapore Office in March 2020. ADB will have a shareholding interest of 6.3% in CCH immediately post-closing and a pro forma shareholding of 10.8% once all equity capital committed has been fully deployed. "Developing Asia and the Pacific needs \$1.7 trillion annually in infrastructure financing through 2030 to maintain growth, tackle poverty and address climate change," said Director General of ADB's Private Sector Operations Department Mike Barrow. "CCH is uniquely placed to attract long-term institutional capital to this underserved market. As a major multilateral investor, we are pleased to support CCH and its subsidiaries through their next stage of growth." "We are delighted to welcome ADB as a strategic shareholder in CCH and to partner with LEAP," said Group Chief Executive Officer of CCH Clive Kerner. "ADB fully supports our mission to provide innovative financing solutions to address the substantial infrastructure financing gap in Asia. Given the critical institutional role of ADB in the region and its experience in supporting tenable infrastructure development across Asia, we are confident that we have established the right partnership to complement our existing shareholders to capture new growth opportunities and generate sustainable value and long-term returns."

Most infrastructure investment in Asia is financed by the public sector, but those resources are not enough to meet the region's infrastructure financing needs. Greater public funding for COVID-19 responses will spur a greater reliance on private sector funding to close the gap. CCH's focus on financial innovation through securitization can help to meet these financing needs. Through its innovative and competitive financing solutions, CCH can help to position Singapore as a full-service infrastructure financing hub in the region. CCH is an integrated alternative investment platform with complementary companies, offering origination, distribution and investment management capabilities in the real assets sector, and operating on a financially sustainable and commercial basis. It aims to help address the substantial infrastructure financing gap in Asia, while closely aligning with Singapore's economic growth initiatives in the infrastructure, maritime and other real assets sectors. LEAP was established in 2016 with a \$1.5 billion capital commitment from the Japan International Cooperation Agency. It is focused on delivering high quality and sustainable private sector infrastructure projects that reduce carbon

emissions, improve energy efficiency, and offer accessible and affordable health care, education, and communication services to ADB's developing member countries. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

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ADB Vows to Be Developing Asia's Partner for Recovery from COVID-19

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is committed to partnering with developing economies in Asia and the Pacific to achieve their recovery goals from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, President Masatsugu Asakawa said in an address to ADB's Board of Governors today. "ADB will continue to earn your trust as a steadfast partner during the uncertain times we still face in our region as we build for a strong and lasting recovery," said Mr. Asakawa. "Our work toward a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive recovery stands on a foundation of mutual trust formed over decades of cooperation with you, our members." He was speaking at the opening of the Business Session of the second part of ADB's 53rd Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors, this year held in a virtual and abbreviated format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. ADB announced in April a \$20 billion package to help its developing members address COVID-19. This included rapid emergency grants and technical assistance to help governments meet urgent medical needs; a new COVID-19 Pandemic Response Option (CPRO), which is supporting countercyclical expenditure programs; and assistance for the private sector.

ADB has so far committed about \$11.2 billion in financial and technical assistance to fight the pandemic. Working closely with development partners, ADB has also mobilized about \$7.2 billion in cofinancing. As the region moves forward toward recovery, Mr. Asakawa said ADB will build on its relationship with its members to support them in six key areas. First, ADB will promote regional cooperation and integration to help members seize the opportunity that renewed globalization can offer in a post-pandemic new normal. "While there are some who suggest that recent border closures and travel restrictions are signs that globalization has ground irreversibly to a halt, I do believe that globalization will return, but it will take a different shape," Mr. Asakawa said. ADB will work with developing members to secure more diversified value and supply chains, and to promote regional public goods for better collective prevention of disease outbreaks, mitigation of climate change impacts, and enhancement of the regional financial safety net. Second, since COVID-19 has contributed to an increase in income inequality and absolute poverty, ADB will strengthen investments in health, education, and social protection, which

will better ensure safety and opportunities for all, while building the human capital that economies need to thrive in the long term.

Third, ADB will accelerate its efforts to tackle climate change in order to reach the goals established in its long-term Strategy 2030—to reach \$80 billion in cumulative climate investments and 75% of the total number of committed operations by 2030. Fourth, ADB will invest in information technology and data for health; education; financing for micro, small, and medium enterprises; and remote work—while also addressing both the digital divide and cyber security. Fifth, ADB will help its members strengthen domestic resource mobilization through international tax cooperation, since all key areas of development require that governments improve their capacity to mobilize financial resources while managing debt sustainability. And last, ADB will support the efforts of its developing members to secure safe and effective vaccines, and to formulate strategies for equitable delivery. To accomplish this, ADB will continue to strengthen collaboration with the World Health Organization; the World Bank; GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance; vaccine experts; and pharmaceutical companies. Over two days of online Annual Meeting events, ministers from ADB members, development and industry experts, journalists, and nongovernment organizations have discussed a range of issues confronting Asia and the Pacific. Other events today included the CNBC Debate, Resetting Asia: Technology, Investment, and Sustainability; and the Governors' Seminar on Developing Asia Beyond the Pandemic. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

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APEC Deepens Cross-Border Health Cooperation and Integration

Health officials from APEC member economies are stepping up cooperation to strengthen health capacity and address the impacts of the public health response to the looming health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19. Officials met virtually on Monday in preparation for the 10th APEC High-Level Meeting on Health and the Economy, which will be held this Wednesday. According to the WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard, there are approximately 31 million cases of COVID-19 infection globally, and almost one million deaths worldwide. The APEC region accounts for over 34 percent of the global COVID-19 infection and over 36 percent of total deaths. In addition, most APEC economies are currently facing second or third waves of the pandemic. “Our goal is to help facilitate coordinated actions and manage health challenges including sharing best practices and discussing openly about what works and what does not work so that we can all learn as we go,” said Michael Pearson, Branch Head, Office of International Affairs for the Health Portfolio, Canada, and Co-Chair of the APEC Health Working Group. Pearson

highlighted the importance for members to continuously strengthen cooperation and actions in ensuring health systems integration in the region against cross-border health threats such as COVID-19. Officials also discussed a multi-year strategic course of action to ensure a resilient health system in the region. Given the dramatic impact caused by the pandemic, members conceptualized vaccination approaches and support, reiterated the importance of keeping supply chains flowing smoothly and called for collaboration to deal with the secondary impact of the pandemic, such as mental health.

“The foundation of a strong economy lies in the productivity of its workforce which in turn depends on the health and fitness of its people,” said Dato’ Seri Dr Chen Chaw Min, Secretary General of Malaysia’s Ministry of Health in his opening remarks at the Second APEC Health Working Group virtual meeting. “A good health policy is a good economic policy.” Health Ministers and senior private sector representatives will convene virtually under the theme “Building a Resilient Asia-Pacific in a COVID-19 World” this Wednesday to explore steps forward for member economies in boosting their investments in health to drive sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the region. According to a recent report by APEC Policy Support Unit, about 20 percent of people in the APEC region are at risk of falling into extreme poverty as their healthcare burdens increase. The report highlights the necessity to increase funds for public health spending so that governments can expand access to healthcare and social protection. “The upcoming meeting will also highlight mechanisms for strengthening both supply chains and health systems and ways to harness the digital economy to fight the pandemic and foster innovation in health,” explained group’s Co-Chair, Dato’ Dr. Chong Chee Kheong, Deputy Director General of Health, Ministry of Health Malaysia.

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Trade in the Shadow of COVID-19: Going Forward Together, Not Apart

The global COVID-19 pandemic is a reminder that our world is an intimately connected place. Now is not the time to start cutting the connections that have raised millions from poverty and helped to build the global economy that we have today. Physical borders can be closed to those who might pass on the virus, but the crisis underlines the importance of other connections, such as trade. At a time when streamlining trade should be at the top of the agenda, so that critical goods such as food and medicine can move to where they are needed, too many have seen the pandemic as a reason to turn inward. Physical borders can be closed to those who might pass on the virus, but the crisis underlines the importance of other connections, such as trade. The global trading system has been tested by the pandemic’s effects.

Weaknesses in the current system have been exposed. There is no denying that. An overreliance on manufacturing in a single location for some goods is one indication that supply chains may be more fragile than previously thought. When factories closed to fight the virus, key medical goods suddenly became scarce. More subtle weaknesses have also been highlighted by the crisis. Global trade and the financial system that supports it has traditionally been a paper-intensive arena, with hand-delivered documents in triplicate needed to move goods at every stage. That system was already antiquated before the crisis. Now, the need to digitize the trading world is even more urgent.

Digitization has proven to be important in other areas as well. Beyond trade and supply chains, consider the situation in countries in which entire populations have joined the digital ranks—digital identifiers, electronic banking and accounts—versus those that have been slow to adapt. Governments that have been trying to help their citizens have found it much easier to deliver that help when they have access to solid records and mobile and digital banking. Another weakness exposed by the crisis has been found in the tariffs and other trade barriers that have come into play. As people searched for alternate sources of key products, they found some of them stuck behind trade barriers that seemed to have no reason to exist. A recent study found that out of 164 members of the World Trade Organization (WTO), only 50 do not tax imported medical devices. Seventy-nine governments went into the crisis taxing imported soap at rates of 15 percent or more, noted the study by Professor Simon J. Evenett of the Swiss Institute for International Economics and the Department of Economics.

There have been attempts to strengthen the global trade and supply-chain system, even while it is under such a strain. Some have looked to find solutions within the current systems by making it easier to find alternate suppliers of key goods. Others have seen the pandemic as an excuse to abandon the global system, at least when it comes to goods seen as strategically important to their national wellbeing. Instead of providing an opportunity to shore up any weaknesses in the system, there is now a danger that the global crisis will be used as an excuse to “onshore” more and more goods considered to be of key strategic importance. Instead of becoming stronger, the global trading system could be weakened further. Countries need easy access to medicines, medical equipment and other goods vital to the health of their populations. Few countries make everything they need themselves, which means the flow of trade in those goods needs to be through gates that are opened wider, not shut. If everyone starts trying to make everything themselves, the weaknesses exposed in the global system by the crisis could become gaping wounds. The reality of comparative advantage and its positive impacts on productivity, global growth and development may be in jeopardy. The system that has proven such a benefit to the world, even with its flaws, is now in even more doubt. That’s why it is important that the efforts to strengthen the global trading system continue and that they are ramped up even more as the crisis is overcome. The aim of this supply-chain mapping tool is

to identify blockages and other impediments to these critical goods being produced and distributed to where they're needed.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other multilateral institutions have been working to plug holes in the system, along with private-sector players that also have an interest in ensuring that global trade emerges from the crisis in better shape. When it became clear that essential medical items were becoming scarce and that alternate sources for those goods were hard to find, the ADB's Trade & Supply Chain Finance Program (TSCFP) began a project to map the supply chains for those products. The aim of this supply-chain mapping tool is to identify blockages and other impediments to these critical goods being produced and distributed to where they're needed. In May, the first phase of the project was completed: interactive maps that enable banks, investors, governments and healthcare professionals to pinpoint key companies in the supply of portable ventilators, N95 respirator masks, face shields, goggles, aprons, surgical masks and gowns. The maps consider the elements of each product down to its component metals and fabrics. Since then, the supply-chain maps have been extended to other products. We're looking at supply-chain maps for vaccines, including the distribution channels required to administer the drug when it becomes available. Anyone can use the tool, free of charge, through the ADB website.

The ADB is also working in more conventional ways to support those affected by the crisis. It has pledged \$20 billion for a range of measures to help its members through the crisis and has approved changes to streamline its operations for quicker and more flexible delivery of assistance. As part of that, working in partnership with commercial banks, the ADB is providing companies in Asia and the Pacific with additional working capital to meet expansion and other requirements. That support includes an additional \$200 million of supply-chain finance to help companies in areas that are critical to fighting the virus to ramp up production of items such as test kits, N95 masks and ventilators. Given that a single pool of supply-chain finance is typically used for a subsequent delivery over a period of 120–180 days, this facility could support more than \$400 million of financing over the next 12 months. Fifty-fifty risk sharing from partner commercial banks could boost support under the facility to \$800 million over the same period. Combined trade and supply-chain finance has amounted to almost \$2 billion in transactions supported so far this year from the ADB's Trade & Supply Chain Finance Program. Those deals have included 100 medical-supply transactions, such as for test kits, medical equipment, medicine and other goods, worth \$35 million and 520 food-security and agriculture-related transactions valued at \$455 million. We were already working to promote the digitization of trade finance before the pandemic, along with other international organizations and the private sector. The crisis has underlined the importance of those efforts.

We were already working to promote the digitization of trade finance before the

pandemic, along with other international organizations and the private sector. The crisis has underlined the importance of those efforts. Had this pandemic occurred even three years ago, the situation would have been much worse. In just a short time, the move toward digitization has gained pace and advanced far enough that a full-on disaster—banks not being able to function during lockdown—has been avoided. It has been inspiring to see people rising to the challenge that they now face. Compared with the financial crisis 12 years ago, the amount of coordination and oversight in trade finance today means problems can be spotted and attended to much more quickly. Still, we need to drive digitization through all component parts of the ecosystem: from exporters and suppliers to shipping, ports, customs, warehousing, finance, transport, buyers and importers. And interoperability between these component parts is required to realize seamless digital trade and supply chains. It now looks unlikely that this will be a short and sharp crisis followed by a quick return to normal. But if it is properly handled, the financial system can use the experience as an opportunity to enact necessary changes—and not just as an exercise in crisis management.

First of all, the ADB has been working with partners to promote digitization through online learning and certifications and to advance the global adoption of the Legal Entity Identifier (LEI), so that everyone agrees on a common method to easily identify the players involved. The LEI is a 20-digit, alphanumeric code based on an ISO standard developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The Global LEI Index provides open, standardized and high-quality legal-entity reference data. Countries without an ID (identity document) system don't need to create one. Governments can simply encourage, or require through legislation, companies to acquire LEIs. Countries that currently have ID systems should consider mapping these to LEIs for global harmonization. Global trade would benefit in a big way from having a single, trusted global entity that could verify the identities of companies that banks finance— showing who is who, and who owns whom, and what each owns. Secondly, the model digitization laws proposed by the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) need to be adopted globally. Global adoption of these model laws will render digital commercial documents legally enforceable. Without these laws, digitization will not advance materially. It has been coming anyway, but it needs to come faster.

Thirdly, to drive the interoperability of systems to create seamless digital trade, we are working with the International Chamber of Commerce and Government of Singapore to create digital standards and protocols. This important initiative will need to involve all component parts of the trade and supply-chain ecosystem: buyers and sellers, ports, customs, shipping, logistics and finance. Going forward, close coordination will be key. Now that we are beginning to see the scale of the problems we face, the entire trade and supply-chain ecosystem needs to lift its digital game. Fixes are needed so that global trade can continue to be an engine of growth and

employment for everyone. Implementing those fixes is important, but the weaknesses exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic should not be used as an excuse to give up on globalization. We need to continue striving to make it better, stronger. The crisis has shown how closely we are connected. Firming up those connections means growth and prosperity can continue once the pandemic is over. Steven Beck is ADB's Head of Trade and Supply Chain Finance Program. This article was originally published by International Banker.

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APEC Calls for Greater Investment in Health Systems

Issued by the APEC Health Working Group & APEC Life Sciences Innovation Forum. APEC member economies are committed to advancing coordinated actions and aligning initiatives towards strengthening health systems in the region amid the unprecedented impacts brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Meeting under the theme, "Building a Resilient Asia-Pacific in a COVID-19 World", APEC health ministers, academics, industry leaders and representatives from governmental and international organizations recognized the important role of investments in health systems and economic recovery packages to support the pandemic response and build resilient economies moving forward. "The effect of this pandemic has highlighted long-standing weaknesses in existing health systems and vulnerabilities in the global health response as the world struggles to reduce the human and economic toll of this pandemic," Malaysia Health Minister Dato' Sri Dr Adham Baba said as he opened the 10th APEC High-Level Meeting on Health and the Economy. Dato' Sri Dr Adham underscored the importance of strengthening the resiliency of health systems and supply chains to cope with the surge of demand during this pandemic, adding that "the longstanding under-funding and investment in health has impacted the capabilities of economies to cope during a global health crisis."

The APEC region accounts for over 34 percent of COVID-19 infections and over 36 percent of total deaths globally. The prolonged duration of the pandemic is also causing devastating impacts to the global economy. The APEC region's economy is expected to contract 3.7 percent in 2020, with total output loss estimated at USD2.9 trillion. Focusing on recovery and better health emergency preparedness, members and experts exchanged views on the importance of sustainable vaccination systems, particularly the need to strengthen systems to support equitable access and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines once developed. Members and experts called for a coordinated response to ensure open, secure, stable, and efficient global supply chains that will enhance access and availability of safe and effective medicines, including future COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. Members also discussed digital innovation and the vital role it plays to assist governments in pandemic management. Many economies have developed their own digital health

solutions, including mobile applications to facilitate contact tracing and exposure notifications, encourage the use of telemedicine and clinical management, as well as manage quarantine and self-isolation. "The pandemic has shown us the importance of leveraging digital health technologies and why we need to further encourage innovation and deepen collaboration in this area," Dato' Sri Dr Adham said. Hosted by Malaysia, the host of APEC 2020, the virtual meeting issued a joint statement reiterating members' commitment to continue regional cooperation to increase the effectiveness of pandemic response and planning.

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East Asia

CHINA: Foreign Trade Maintains Stable Growth amid Support Measures

China has seen continued recovery in foreign trade amid government measures to support firms in the sector, official data showed on Monday. The total value of foreign trade rose 6 percent year-on-year in August to 2.88 trillion yuan (about 421.14 billion U.S. dollars), according to the General Administration of Customs (GAC). In yuan terms, exports went up 11.6 percent and imports edged down 0.5 percent last month, GAC data showed. In the first eight months of 2020, the foreign trade of goods dropped 0.6 percent year-on-year to 20.05 trillion yuan, narrowing the decrease in the first seven months by 1.1 percentage points. During the January-August period, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations remained China's largest trading partner, with trade up 7 percent year-on-year to 2.93 trillion yuan, accounting for 14.6 percent of China's total foreign trade. Trade with the United States decreased 0.4 percent during the period, with imports from the country increasing 0.2 percent, GAC data showed. The private sector played a bigger role in propelling trade growth in the first eight months, with trade by private enterprises expanding by 8.5 percent to 9.21 trillion yuan and accounting for 45.9 percent of the total, up by 3.9 percentage points from the same period last year.

General trade edged up 0.5 percent year-on-year to 12.09 trillion yuan during the eight-month period, accounting for 60.3 percent of the total, 0.7 percentage points higher than one year ago. Exports of textile products including masks surged 37.8 percent. China has rolled out a series of policies including those aimed at optimizing services for firms and increasing export tax rebates to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on foreign trade. Official data showed China granted export tax rebates or exemptions worth 812.8 billion yuan in the first half of the year to relieve financial pressure on companies. The country has also stressed innovation in the sector, encouraging the use of cross-border e-commerce platforms and other digital tools to boost trade. In an interview with Xinhua in August, GAC head Ni Yuefeng said that

the country will advance reforms in the regulation of cross-border e-commerce to help businesses better tap into the global market. The GAC will also further simplify clearance procedures and cut logistics costs to optimize the business environment at ports, Ni said.

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China Imports More Major Commodities amid Improving Economic Activity

China's imports of major commodities including crude oil, iron ore and soybean climbed in the first eight months of the year, as the country's economic activity gradually recovered from the COVID-19 hit, according to customs data. Imports of crude oil surged 12.1 percent to 368 million tonnes during the January-August period, while refined oil imports rose 1.3 percent to 20.77 million tonnes, data from the General Administration of Customs showed. The country's soybean imports surged 15 percent from one year earlier to 64.74 million tonnes in the first eight months. About 65.07 million tonnes of natural gas were imported, up 3.3 percent from the same period last year. Iron ore imports climbed 11 percent year-on-year to 760 million tonnes during the period. The country's total imports of goods fell 2.3 percent to 9 trillion yuan (about 131.58 billion U.S. dollars) from January-August, compared to a decline of 2.6 percent in the first seven months. The trade surplus expanded 17.2 percent year-on-year to 2.05 trillion yuan.

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China, EU Broaden Prospects for Future Cooperation

As China and the European Union (EU) celebrate the 45th anniversary of their diplomatic ties this year, the world's two major powers are moving steadily to broaden prospects for future cooperation. During a video meeting on Monday, Chinese and EU leaders announced the official signing of an agreement on geographical indications (GI), committing to speeding up investment treaty talks to conclude negotiations within this year, and decided to strengthen environmental and digital cooperation. The meeting injected confidence into the bilateral relationship and opened up new areas for collaboration, experts said. EMBRACING COOPERATION POTENTIAL The agreement on GI between China and the EU is China's first comprehensive, high-level bilateral agreement on GIs, and the first major trade agreement between China and the EU in recent years, according to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The agreement makes it easier for Chinese products to enter the EU market and vice versa, said Cui Hongjian, a senior research fellow with the China Institute of International Studies. It sets an example for other economies in the world to cooperate in this field, Cui added. The negotiations of the investment treaty between the two sides, which started the first round in 2013, have attracted much attention. The progress made so far by the two sides have shown China and the EU's determination to have a rule-based bilateral treaty, said Cui. He said China and the EU should take a practical approach to resolve differences during the negotiations, as the two sides are at different stages of economic development. If concluded within this year, the treaty will send a positive message about China and the EU working together during trying times, and give a strong boost to business confidence on both sides, said Ambassador Zhang Ming, head of the Chinese Mission to the EU.

POWERING A DIGITAL FUTURE As the world is going digital, capturing new opportunities to push economic transformation and building a safer market environment in the new era are common challenges for China and the EU, which entails massive room for cooperation. At Monday's video meeting, leaders from the two sides decided to establish a so-called China-EU High-Level Digital Cooperation Dialogue and to forge China-EU green and digital partnerships. In February, the European Commission unveiled its strategy for data and Artificial Intelligence (AI), since the bloc is prepared to lead the next battle of "big data." As a collection of wide-ranging plans, the strategy includes creating a single European market for data and taking sector-specific actions for industrial manufacturing, "green" deals, mobility, and health.

For China, the leaps and bounds in emerging technologies, including 5G and big data, have spurred rapid growth in the digital economy over the past decades. In 2019, the country's digital economy hit 35.8 trillion yuan (about 5.25 trillion U.S. dollars), accounting for 36.2 percent of GDP, according to data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. China's digital trade totaled 203.6 billion U.S. dollars last year, accounting for 26 percent of the country's total trade in services. "The China-EU High-Level Digital Cooperation Dialogue officially opened cooperation in the area, which is a major growth point for the future economy," noted Cui.

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China's Economic Recovery Gains Steam, Key Indicators Further Improve

China's economic recovery continued to gather steam with major economic indicators further improving last month as the country's efforts to boost growth amid the COVID-19 slowdown gradually paid off. Retail sales of consumer goods, a main

gauge of China's consumption, returned to growth for the first time this year, rising 0.5 percent year on year in August, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The measurement of consumption fell 1.1 percent in July. Industrial output increased 5.6 percent year on year in August, accelerating from the rise of 4.8 percent registered in July. In the first eight months, industrial output expanded 0.4 percent from one year earlier, compared with a decline of 0.4 percent in the January-July period, NBS data showed. Fixed-asset investment edged down 0.3 percent year on year in the first eight months, further narrowing from a fall of 1.6 percent posted in the January-July period.

Private sector fixed-asset investment, which accounts for more than half of total investment, fell 2.8 percent in the January-August period, compared with a decline of 5.7 percent in the first seven months. Employment remained stable as the surveyed unemployment rate in urban areas stood at 5.6 percent in August, 0.1 percentage points lower than that of July. Meanwhile, the country's exports in August rose at a faster-than-expected pace, increasing 11.6 percent year on year, though imports edged down 0.5 percent from one year earlier. NBS spokesperson Fu Linghui said despite pressures from both the COVID-19 fallout and floods, the country's economy has sustained a steady recovery. The rebound in major indicators in August came as the economy extended its recovery, but Fu said the growth of some indicators still lagged behind their 2019 levels. The country's economic growth is likely to post "an evident acceleration" in the third quarter if recovery momentum continues in September, Fu said.

The country's GDP expanded 3.2 percent year on year in the second quarter, reversing from a contraction of 6.8 percent in the first quarter. To shore up the economy against the shock of COVID-19, the government has rolled out a raft of measures, including more fiscal spending, tax relief, and cuts in lending rates and banks' reserve requirements to revive the coronavirus-ravaged economy and support employment. Global credit rating agency Moody's has raised its growth forecast for the Chinese economy this year to 1.9 percent from 1 percent earlier, representing the firm's only upward revision for the 2020 growth of major economies. Looking ahead, Fu warned about challenges from home and abroad, saying current economic recovery remained unbalanced and there were still unstable and uncertain factors from the external environment. Wen Bin, chief analyst at China Minsheng Bank, said in a research note that macro-economic policies should continue to strengthen the recovery, enhancing support to major sectors and weak links.

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China Launches New Free Trade Zones for Greater Opening-up, High-quality Development

China on Thursday officially opened three new pilot free trade zones (FTZs) and expanded one as it seeks greater opening-up and high-quality development. The three new FTZs are in Beijing and the provinces of Anhui and Hunan, increasing the total number of the country's FTZs to 21, while the expanded one is in the coastal province of Zhejiang. The launch came after the State Council on Monday issued a master plan to outline the priorities for the three new pilot FTZs, and adopted a plan to double the area of the pilot FTZ in Zhejiang. China's decision to set up a new batch of pilot FTZs demonstrated the country's firm determination to accelerate the formation of a new development pattern through a higher level of opening-up, Vice Commerce Minister Wang Shouwen said at a press briefing on Monday. Experts believe that the new FTZs will further improve trade and investment liberalization and facilitation in China through a new round of system and mechanism reform and innovation. It will also grasp the strategic opportunities brought about by the scientific and technological revolution, and promote the transformation and upgrading of China's foreign trade and the development of strategic emerging industries.

Zhou Mi, with the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation under the Ministry of Commerce, said the new zones are a supplement to the layout of the existing 18 pilot FTZs. "From the coastal areas to the central inland regions, it shows that China hopes to promote diversified and higher-level opening-up," said Zhou. Experts said the expansion of the FTZ is an effort to boost the development momentum of the entire central region and further expand the entire Chinese market, and therefore, foreign-funded enterprises will focus more on the Chinese market in the future. Zhou believes that the three new FTZs will attach greater importance to the overall investment environment, seeking to meet more and higher demands of foreign investors to realize coordinated development with local companies and industries. "The new step provides foreign-funded enterprises with good expectations for China's continuous opening-up," Zhou said. "It also provides system innovation and more experimental attempts which can effectively cut investment costs and loosen investment restrictions."

Xu Xiangping, head of Hunan's commerce department, said the 21 FTZs cover the eastern, central and western regions, and each one has its strategic positioning and development goals. The Beijing pilot FTZ will focus on supporting the construction of an innovation center with global influence. It will accelerate the construction of a leading area for the expansion of trade in services and a pilot area for the digital economy. The new pilot FTZ in Hunan will focus on building a world-class advanced manufacturing cluster and an international investment and trade corridor linking the Yangtze River Economic Belt and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. It will also be a leading area for in-depth economic and trade cooperation between China and Africa. Expected to set the standard for opening-up in the inland region, the pilot FTZ in Anhui will focus on promoting the in-depth integration of scientific and technological innovation and the development of the real economy. It will accelerate the pace of its pioneering role in scientific and technological

innovation and the cluster development of advanced manufacturing and strategic emerging industries, and promote the integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta.

The expanded area in Zhejiang will focus on building a new type of international trade center and a global shipping and logistics hub, as well as the construction of a commodity resource allocation base centered on oil and gas. It will also see the construction of a digital economy development demonstration zone and a cluster area for advanced manufacturing industries. FTZs are the new high ground for China's reform and opening-up and an important platform to absorb foreign capital. Seven years into China's pilot FTZ mechanism, a total of 260 institutional innovations have been formulated and replicated nationwide with remarkable results. In the first seven months of 2020, more than 3,300 new foreign-funded enterprises were established in the already existing 18 pilot FTZs. These FTZs also reported an actual use of foreign investment of over 90 billion yuan (13.3 billion U.S. dollars) and contributed 2.7 trillion yuan of foreign trade, accounting for 16.8 percent and 13.5 percent of the country's total, respectively.

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China Further Eases Foreign access to Domestic Capital Market

China has further opened up its domestic capital market to foreign investors by introducing revised rules for the country's major inbound investment schemes. Foreign investors will enjoy easier market access and broader investment scope when investing via the dollar-denominated Qualified Foreign Institutional Investors (QFII) and the yuan-denominated Renminbi Qualified Foreign Institutional Investors (RQFII) schemes, according to the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC). The new rules, published by the CSRC, together with the People's Bank of China and the State Administration of Foreign Exchange, have combined the previous two separate sets of regulation for the QFII and RQFII schemes into one, lowering entry requirements and simplifying procedures to facilitate foreign investment.

The new rules, set to become effective on Nov. 1, will allow foreign investment into more areas such as stocks listed on the National Equities Exchange and Quotations, financial futures and private investment funds, said the CSRC. The rule revision would also enhance regulation including cross-market and cross-border regulation and strengthen punishment for irregularities, it said. The QFII and RQFII programs, introduced in 2003 and 2011, respectively, allow overseas institutional investors to move money into China's capital account to encourage controlled flows. In a bid to further open up the financial market, China scrapped quota restrictions on the QFII and RQFII schemes earlier this year.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/26/2020

What China's List of Top 500 Firms Tells About a Changing Economy

China unveiled its 2020 list of the top 500 Chinese companies Monday, reflecting resilience in the country's large firms that are underpinning the growth of the world's second-largest economy. At a time when the country is faced with mounting uncertainties abroad, China's big companies have stood up against the challenges and responded actively with structural upgrades, said Wang Zhongyu, head of the China Enterprise Confederation and China Enterprise Directors Association, which compiled the list. A closer look at the list revealed changes that are taking place to help the economy weather external shocks and achieve long-term, sustainable growth.

RISING REVENUES

The new list, issued for the 19th consecutive year, showed that the country's large firms have seen growing revenues over the years. Combined revenues of the top 500 firms hit 86.02 trillion yuan (about 12.65 trillion U.S. dollars) in 2019, up 8.75 percent year on year. The China Petrochemical Corporation topped the list, with revenues of 2.81 trillion yuan. It was followed by the State Grid Corporation of China and the China National Petroleum Corporation, which raked in revenues of 2.65 trillion yuan and 2.62 trillion yuan, respectively. The number of firms with revenues above 100 billion yuan rose to 217, up from 194 last year. When the first list was issued in 2002, only 10 firms joined the 100-billion-yuan club. "What's behind the changing data is the growth of Chinese companies in line with the economic boom of the country over the years," said Hao Peng, chief of the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission. "It showed the critical role that the firms have played in boosting the country's national strength and global competitiveness."

MORE INNOVATION

As the country rolls out incentives to support entrepreneurship and innovation, companies have seen more spending on research and development (R&D) as well as patent applications. Among the 500 firms, 431 reported R&D data. Their combined R&D spending totaled 1.08 trillion yuan, with the ratio of R&D expenditure to operating revenues rising to a historic high of 1.61 percent. Of the 396 listed firms that reported patent data, the number of patent applications surged 11.85 percent from a year ago to some 1.24 million, with invention patent applications rising for the 10th year in a row. The firms also played a bigger part in setting international standards, with 332 listed companies participating in the formulation of 7,571 items of global standards, increasing for the third consecutive year.

HIGHER GLOBAL EXPOSURE

Despite rising global protectionism, China has been unwavering in its opening-up efforts, producing various multinationals bringing foreign countries high-quality products as well as employment opportunities. The transnational index of the country's top 100 multinationals, an index measuring the global operation of firms based on their overseas assets, revenues and employees, rose for a sixth consecutive year to 16.1 percent, up 0.14 percentage points from a year ago, according to the confederation and association. China has more Fortune Global 500 companies than the United States for the first time this year, with 133 firms on the list. There were no Chinese companies on the list when the Fortune Global 500 list first came out in 1990. The combined revenues of China's top 500 firms account for some 88 percent of the combined revenues of the Fortune 500 companies of the large corporations in the United States, the confederation and association noted.

INDUSTRIAL UPGRADE

Firms in the manufacturing sector took the lion's share of the listed companies, with the number reaching 238, followed by 181 enterprises in the service industry. As the country encourages firms to move up the value chain, the list saw fewer companies in traditional manufacturing sectors such as ferrous metal production and more firms in advanced manufacturing and modern service sectors. The confederation and association also released a list of the country's top 500 service firms, which saw combined profits of these companies rising 11.71 percent year on year, 8.26 percentage points faster than a year earlier. While recognizing the progress that China has made in industrial upgrading, Wang said that the country still lags behind the internationally-advanced level in terms of supply chain dominance and core technologies, calling for more efforts from companies to catch up.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/29/2020

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Experts Laud Chinese Government's Efforts to Promote Xinjiang's Socioeconomic Development

As a result of the enormous efforts made by the Chinese government over the past decades, tremendous achievements have been scored in the socioeconomic development in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region with local people's livelihood being steadily improved, experts have said. The third central symposium on work related to Xinjiang was held here on Friday and Saturday, during which Chinese President Xi Jinping called for efforts to build Xinjiang featuring socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era and demanded law-based governance and long-term efforts to develop Xinjiang into a region that is united, harmonious, prosperous, and culturally advanced, with healthy ecosystems and people living and working in contentment. Naeem Bukhari, chief executive of Pakistan's Human Capital Management Institute, said China's policy on Xinjiang is very positive,

workable and productive, which has first established peace in the region and also changed its landscape with a number of infrastructure development projects and opportunities of employment, education and training. China's policy has been proven very correct and has provided a solid foundation for Xinjiang's development to meet the demands of the modern era, Bukhari said.

Tursunali Kuziev, a professor at Uzbekistan State University of World Languages, said with the support of the central government and other provinces and municipalities, Xinjiang has made unprecedented achievements in its socioeconomic development and in improving people's livelihood. People of all ethnic groups has a ever-growing sense of fulfillment, happiness, and security, he said. When he visited Xinjiang, he saw people of all ethnic groups benefiting from economic development and living a happy life. Xinjiang has shown social stability, he said, noting that the good situation in which people live and work in peace and contentment is mainly the result of the strong leadership of the Communist Party of China. Sonia Bressler, a French writer and sinologist, has visited Xinjiang on several occasions and published several books on the region. She said Xinjiang is an immense region dotted with deserts, mountains, where different ethnic groups live together. The commitment of governmental policies has made it possible to successfully create jobs and develop the region's economy, she said, adding that in this sense people's living conditions has improved, so does their sense of happiness.

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JAPAN: Using Apps to Pay Taxes Increasingly Accepted by Japan's Local Governments

There is a growing trend to allow people to pay taxes to local governments using mobile payment apps. Local governments want to increase the payment rate for taxes such as on automobiles and fixed assets, while technology companies want to promote their services. Usually, people have to bring a tax payment notice to a financial institution or convenience store to pay their taxes. For local governments that allow the new payment system, the notice will include a bar code printed on paper. Reading the bar code with a smartphone camera, a payment page opens on the phone and the payment can be completed using a smartphone payment app. Examples of such apps are PayPay and Line Pay, with which users have registered their credit card, bank account and other information. There are no additional fees to pay with such apps and users may sometimes receive rebates from the companies operating the apps based on the amount of the payment.

In September 2019, the number of local governments accepting the PayPay service was about 200, but this has grown to more than 400 in less than a year. The Osaka city government also accepts several cashless payment systems in addition to

PayPay and Line Pay. “Taxpayers’ lifestyles are becoming more diverse and we need to create an environment that makes it easier for them to pay their taxes,” a city tax collection division official said. How effective the system will be in practice has yet to be verified, but the official said that it aims to increase the tax payment rate by increasing the number of tax payment methods. The Tokyo metropolitan government started accepting payments via PayPay and Line Pay in June, when it sends out notices for each fiscal year’s first payment of levies such as the fixed assets tax. The move was made partly due to the fact that the spread of the novel coronavirus has brought attention to avoiding in-person interactions. “We were receiving inquiries asking if people could use smartphone payments,” a Tokyo government official said.

Technology companies are also seeing the benefits. The Line Pay service is accepted by about 400 local governments. The number of times the system was used to pay taxes in April was 1.5 times higher than in March, partly due to the spread of the novel coronavirus that caused people to refrain from going out. “Local taxes are a huge ¥40 trillion market,” a Line Pay official said. “If people can see how convenient it is to use, it will lead to increased use for payments at stores.” Many of the users of smartphone payment apps are young people. How to increase their use with the middle-aged and older generations, who pay taxes on many occasions, will be a major challenge in the future. The central government plans to promote the digitization of administrative services, but there are no plans to support smartphone payments for tax payments at this time, according to an official of the National Tax Agency. However, if payment apps become widely accepted among local governments, it may influence the central government’s decision.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 09/03/2020

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Preventing, Solving Crimes Using AI, Data to Detect Suspicious Activity in Japan

Smartphones can store highly detailed user location data, and the near-ubiquitous technology has been used in criminal investigations to root out the whereabouts of suspected criminal activity. For instance, the Google Maps app has a function called Timeline that provides users with a record of where they have been, the length of their stay, with the actual names of the establishments visited. Such functions are not limited to Google Maps alone. On iPhones, location information will continue to be recorded unless the device’s initial settings are changed. Location information is mainly determined in combination with the smartphone’s GPS, Wi-Fi hot spots and communication with mobile network base stations. In a large-scale vote-buying incident in connection with the July 2019 House of Councillors election, the prosecutors’ office analyzed data obtained from confiscated smartphones and searches for corroborative evidence followed. “Location information will become a

decisive factor in [criminal] investigations,” said a head of the business planning office at Tokyo-based AOS Data Inc. “It will also be useful for people to defend themselves, for instance, in the event of false accusations.”

Security cameras with artificial intelligence have proved powerful in preventing crimes such as shoplifting. In early August at drugstore Welcia Tanashi Ekimae Store in Nishitokyo, Tokyo, store manager’s smartphone chimed and displayed a message: “Detected.” The store security camera’s AI found a customer’s behavior suspicious. It has become a daily routine for the store manager to ask such a customer, “Are you looking for something in particular?” This security camera, dubbed AI Guardsman, was developed in 2018 by Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp. The camera’s AI can detect restless movements of individuals hanging around, over and over, in front of the same display shelf. It was in June last year when 14 AI Guardsman units were installed at the drugstore where 3,000 customers visit daily. Thereafter, the financial impact from shoplifting plunged from ¥1 million a month in damage to about ¥300,000 a month. “The AI keeps an eye on our blind spots,” the store manager said happily.

Meanwhile, AI has been incorporated into security drones. Secom Co. has developed an autonomous drone that can pursue a suspicious person upon detection. Sohgo Security Services Co. has also made public since July its experiment of a security drone that can avoid obstacles while flying. By analyzing big data related to past crimes, AI can create potential forecasts of future illegal activity. Such advanced technology is currently being utilized in police procedures. The Kyoto prefectural police in 2016 introduced an AI-powered crime prevention system, becoming the first police station in Japan to do so. The mechanism operates by analyzing a data set of crime locations, times and types from over the past 10 years. It automatically analyzes the data to predict where a crime is likely to occur next, displaying the information on a map inside of a several-hundred meter area.

Crime-prone zones — areas with purse-snatchings, sex crimes and so on displayed in red, yellow and blue on the map on a computer screen — are where police officers patrol more thoroughly. “It has proved effective in keeping crimes in check,” said Tomohito Tanaka, chief of the investigation support analysis center at the Kyoto prefectural police. The use of facial recognition technology, where AI instantaneously identifies or verifies who someone is by analyzing a facial image from a video source, is ongoing. While it has been introduced abroad to identify a dangerous person at a sporting event or to chase down the offender of a crime, it is currently utilized at some bookstores in Japan to prevent shoplifting. Facial recognition is also being used for immigration control at airports and in train stations at ticket gates. As such AI camera systems can gather personal data just by having someone walk in front of one, there are ongoing concerns regarding an individual’s right to privacy.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 09/09/2020

Self-Driving Buses Being Tested Across Japan Let You Pay with Your Face

Being cautious is certainly wise, but we really seem to be dragging our collective heels when it comes to self-driving vehicles. Considering in Japan reports of cars barreling straight into storefronts seem to happen frequently, it's hard to imagine even a flawed autonomous driving system doing much worse than humanity as a whole has been. But steps are being made, and an interesting development has come out of Maebashi City in Gunma Prefecture. More sparsely populated mid-sized cities such as this rely much more on vehicular transport, making it a great testing grounds for a new self-driving bus developed by a council of public transport companies, along with telecom giant NTT Docomo and Gunma University. Like any autonomous vehicle, the buses are kitted out with sensors to monitor surrounding traffic and signage and EW also synced with traffic information and geographic information systems through a 5G connection. Testing on a route with Maebashi Station and Chuo Maebashi Station is expected to begin this December.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry is holding a cross-country testing tour of self-driving buses, along with various regional bus companies. The Hyogo Prefecture leg has just wrapped up in Mita City, in which a six-kilometer route had been run completely without a human driver for about a month between late July and late August. Well, it was almost completely without a human. A minor software glitch required a human to take over for about four days of the trial run. Nevertheless, of the 1,306 passengers who rode the route, half said it was just as good as a human-driven bus when it came to accelerating and turning smoothly, and a further third said it was even better. However, when it came to stopping, over half of the passengers described it as "bad" and only a quarter called it as good as a human. So while performance was a mixed bag, most walked away impressed overall.

But perhaps the most appealing feature on both the Maebashi and Mita buses is their "face pass" (kao pass) system in which passengers have their face scanned and registered beforehand so that their account gets charged automatically once their face is detected boarding a bus. This can make the technology easier to use for seniors who aren't comfortable with other forms of electronic payment, since they wouldn't have to lift a finger. As for the rest of us, this also means an end to standing in line to get off the bus while someone fumbles around for exact change. Although COVID-19 has led to small changes in scheduling, these test runs are still pushing ahead and the response has been big, with 90 percent of riders on the Kobe test simply there to check it out rather than actually getting from point A to point B. This would suggest that the reality of self-driving buses are probably not too far away.

From <https://japantoday.com> 09/09/2020

Share Cyberattack Information to Improve Security in Japan

How should Japanese companies protect themselves from cyber-attack? The Yomiuri Shimbun interviewed Toshifumi Tokuda of IBM Japan, Ltd. Tokuda was born in 1963 and worked at an information security company from 1999. He started working at IBM Japan in 2007, where he is now in charge of cyber-attack response for companies. Below is an excerpt of the interview. Since last autumn, there have been ransomware attacks against famous Japanese companies as well. The attacks mostly targeted companies in steel, chemical, pharmaceutical and precision machinery industries. It seems all these cyber-attacks were meticulously constructed and took the method of entering a system from the point where the defense was weak before approaching the core. The traces of their entries were erased. The attacks must have been perpetrated by highly skilled hacker groups.

Their purpose is not only money. They are after companies owning certain industrial technologies as well as those in possession of technologies that can be diverted to military use. There are possibilities that certain countries use hackers to steal information and use it for the technical improvement of their own weapons. Cyber-attacks against Japan will probably increase in the future. The important thing is that the companies that have been attacked and relevant government organizations make public how they have been attacked. By sharing such information, other companies will be able to check the weak points in their own systems, making it easier for them to create protective measures. The government should more quickly train human resources in the cyber security field, which is currently lacking

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AI Speakers Play Growing Role in Daily Life of Elderly, Disabled

Smart speakers with artificial intelligence technology are increasingly being employed to help senior or disabled citizens in their daily lives, with their voice-activated functionalities proving especially convenient for those with mobility issues or wanting to connect. "Good morning, Alexa." The daily routine of Katsunori Endo, a 63-year-old resident of the northeastern prefecture of Yamagata, is to greet his AI speaker and ask for the day's weather and news. "It's convenient because it tells me the weather for specific regions," Endo said, adding that it will also tell him what happened on this day in history or seasonal dates, and so forth. Developed by e-commerce giant Amazon.com Inc., Alexa is a smart speaker capable of performing a plethora of tasks in response to voice commands, including providing real-time information and controlling several other smart devices as a home automation system. Smart speakers with added videophone functionality were distributed to

around 20 senior citizens last October by Kirari Yoshijima Network, a nonprofit organization in Kawanishi, Yamagata Prefecture, which supports and provides opportunities for local residents to socialize.

The organization expects that the virtual assistants will be able to help prevent dementia developing in those who live alone and have limited interaction and conversations with others. The videophone, which can be used by family members who are at distant locations to check on the wellbeing of their elderly relatives, also enables the user to connect with friends they are unable to meet in person due to the coronavirus pandemic. "It's helpful when evacuation information is broadcasted through the speaker during times of disaster. I want to use it to reach out to others in the neighborhood as well," said 73-year-old farmer Yuko Yamada. "I would be happy if the doctor could examine me through the screen" when the house is snowed in during winter, he added. The organization's secretary general, Yoshikazu Takahashi, 60, believes that enabling remote medical guidance will reduce the workload on nurses, and help them notice any unusual changes in a patient quicker.

In the future, he hopes to make it possible for users to also request car transport and order food through the AI speaker. But while these smart speakers may be a lifesaver for those with physical disabilities or visual impairments, their practicality for those who have difficulty speaking is questionable. Kiyotake Seiryu Shien school in Miyazaki Prefecture, southwestern Japan, tried to address this challenge last year when it carried out an experiment with an 18-year-old student who had both mobility issues and difficulties speaking. The student was asked to type her commands and use a text-to-speech tool to convey them to the AI speaker. "In the future, we want it to be a tool that can do things for the user when they are living alone, such as opening the curtains," said a teacher at the school. Takashi Watanabe, a professor of welfare technology at Nihon Fukushi University, Aichi Prefecture, said there are now many senior citizens who are alone at home and unable to meet others due to the coronavirus. "(AI speakers) are convenient as a means to maintain contact with society, and useful for those who are living independently but don't have a helper," he said.

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SOUTH KOREA: To Secure Coronavirus Vaccine for 60 Pct of Population

South Korea aims to secure enough new coronavirus vaccines to administer to 30 million people, or roughly 60 percent of the country's population, the health ministry said Tuesday. Under the COVID-19 vaccine plan discussed at the Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun, the country will seek to get vaccines for 10 million people from the COVAX Facility, set up by the World Health Organization

and global vaccine alliance Gavi, according to the Ministry of Health and Welfare said. The rest will be acquired through arrangements with private companies, the ministry added. It is estimated that two doses of vaccine are required for an individual to acquire immunity to the virus. The ministry said that based on demand and progress made by local pharmaceutical companies, the country will seek to secure vaccines for a further 20 million people that will allow everyone to receive vaccinations.

"The initial target of inoculating 60 percent of the population is to create herd immunity in the country that can reduce public fears about the coronavirus," Lim In-taek, head of the health industry policy division at the ministry, said. To get the vaccines from the COVAX Facility, the country submitted papers to join the international organization on Aug. 31 and will send a legally binding letter of confirmation by Friday. The country will pay an upfront payment of 172.3 billion won (US\$145.5 million) to join the facility by Oct. 9 and seek separate deals with global pharmaceutical companies. Of the total, 40 percent of the funds will go to COVAX Facility, with the rest to be used to secure shipments from overseas pharmaceutical companies like AstraZeneca, Novavax, Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson. Seoul is also eyeing vaccine development efforts by China's Sinopharm.

Lim said that while the government has taken a cautious approach toward securing orders from private companies, it should have no problems getting the vaccines for 20 million people in a timely manner. "The country plans to engage in concerted talks with any company that develops a safe and proven COVID-19 vaccine," the official said, adding that considerable progress has been made in talks so far with foreign firms. Vaccines that South Korea wants to secure from private companies will be determined based on safety, effectiveness, price and when they can be made available for use, Lim stressed, adding that several vaccines may be acquired going forward. Separately, he pointed out that local biotech company SK Bioscience has already signed contract manufacturing organization deals with foreign manufacturers to make coronavirus vaccine candidate materials in the country that should help meet local needs.

On domestic vaccine development, the health ministry said that at present the government is providing extensive support to three companies carrying out critical clinical tests. Seoul has also set up a special support center to facilitate the development of vaccines by local companies. The health ministry earlier said the country is seeking to develop a treatment material by the end of the year and a vaccine in 2021. It said detailed plans will be set in October, after discussions with experts, on prioritizing people who need to be vaccinated first, as well as on making a decision on how to handle the overall cost of vaccinations. On Tuesday, the country reported 106 more COVID-19 cases, raising the total caseload to 22,285. The number of deaths stands at 367, with the fatality rate reaching 1.64 percent.

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Moon Says Promoting 'Smart, Green' Industrial Sites Essential for Post-Coronavirus Economy

President Moon Jae-in stressed the significance of South Korea's push for "smart green industrial complexes" in the Korean-version New Deal drive, saying it is not a choice but an "indispensable" task to protect the environment and enhance the competitiveness of the country's economy. He made the remarks during a visit to the National Industrial Complex in Changwon, South Gyeongsang Province, 300 kilometers south of Seoul. He attended a government ceremony to unveil plans to promote eco-friendly, high-tech industrial complexes designed to raise productivity, while reducing the emission of pollutants. The president then toured the factories of Taelim Industrial Co. and Doosan Heavy Industries & Construction Co. in the compound. The Changwon facilities are being "transformed into a smart green industrial complex," with "grand innovation" under way toward the realization of a digital and low-carbon economy, he said in a speech.

The complex is one of the seven industrial sites nationwide that the government plans to transform into smart green industrial complexes in the initial phase of the initiative. The government aims to create a total of 15 smart green industrial towns nationwide by 2025 with an investment of 3.2 trillion won (US\$2.7 billion), through which 33,000 "good quality jobs" will be created, according to Cheong Wa Dae. Moon described those complexes as a "compass" of South Korea's economy that is seeking to become a "pacesetting" economy. President Moon Jae-in (4th from L) tours a factory of Taelim Industrial Co. at the National Industrial Complex in Changwon, South Gyeongsang Province, 300 kilometers south of Seoul, on Sept. 17, 2020. "It will also represent a strategy to revive the regional economy and foster balanced national development," he said.

Especially in the post-coronavirus and climate change era, those complexes will help cut energy consumption and environmental pollution by taking advantage of digital technologies, Moon said. "The transition to smart green industrial complexes, beyond smart industrial complexes, to protect the environment is not an option but an indispensable (task)," he added. President Moon Jae-in (3rd from L) is briefed on a gas turbine component during a tour of Doosan Heavy Industries & Construction Co. at the National Industrial Complex in Changwon, South Gyeongsang Province, 300 kilometers south of Seoul, on Sept. 17, 2020. Digital and green are two keywords of the Moon administration's New Deal project aimed at preparing for the new era, creating jobs and developing the South Korean economy's future growth engines. The government has picked 10 main programs -- data dam, artificial intelligence government, smart medicare infrastructure, green remodeling, green energy, environment-friendly future mobility, green smart schools, digital twins, SOC

digitalization and smart green industrial complexes.

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Robots Filling the Void in Post-Coronavirus World

The coronavirus pandemic has forced society to reshape how people interact, and robots are fast filling the void, even to the point of helping alleviate feelings of loneliness in a world where social distancing has become the new norm. While automatons were primarily utilized to perform menial tasks such as cleaning in the past, their ability to remove the need for close contact has now elevated their status and importance. In February, robot and technology solutions company Seikatsu Kakumei Inc began selling what it dubbed a "digital teleportation robot" package to help businesses carry out customer-facing activities during the pandemic. By helping shops, showrooms, conventions and trade exhibitions handle visitors, robots "can bring people closer to the normal state of communication," said CEO Yuko Miyazawa. "Being holed up in a room is unnatural for human beings," he added.

The service, which quickly became one of the Saitama-based company's most popular products, provides remote-controlled avatar robots to replace staff. The operator's face is shown in real-time on a tablet screen at the top of the robot, which can be navigated to lead customers to product displays. "People come because they want to see the actual product," Miyazawa said. "If that value is lost, then there's no difference to just shopping online." Since April, one of the company's biggest clients, major Japanese homebuilder Aqurahome Co, has stationed such avatar robots at 17 model houses across the country for agents to show around potential buyers, with plans to expand the service. In addition to helping them adhere to social distancing norms, robots are cost-efficient for businesses, which no longer need to pay for staff's travel costs to specific venues. And the experts or sales representatives who operate them remotely can be anywhere in the world.

Another effect of the pandemic is to nudge traditional companies, many of which have been reluctant to move away from a deeply entrenched "face-to-face" culture, toward embracing the possibilities technological change provides. "Companies that avoided carrying out their business activities due to infection fears have now turned to technology as a solution. And once the technology has solved the issue, they think, 'Hey, things are even better than before,'" Miyazawa said. Restaurants and stores have also been forced to think of new ways to operate while coexisting with the virus. In July, The Galley Seafood & Grill restaurant in Tokyo's Setagaya Ward opened with two "waiter" robots as part of its staff to create a contactless salad bar service. Guided by specially-coded stickers mounted on the ceiling that it "sees" through an upward-pointing camera, the autonomous commercial service robot can deliver salad bar dishes right to the customer's table.

Multi-sensor fusion technology, based on infrared, 3D mapping and machine vision, also enable the wagon-shaped robot to avoid people and other obstacles while moving. "Warm customer service used to be valued at restaurants, but the coronavirus pandemic has changed that way of thinking," said Hiroya Nakano, CEO of QBIT Robotics Inc. The Tokyo-based venture helps businesses integrate robotic systems procured worldwide -- in this case from Keenon Robotics Co, a company headquartered in Shanghai, China. Meanwhile, robotics company Telexistence Inc last month trialed using its sleek remote-controlled robot "Model-T" to restock drink shelves at a FamilyMart store in Tokyo's Toshima Ward. The human-sized robot, which has three-pronged hands that enable it to pick up items, is remotely operated by a "pilot" using a virtual reality terminal.

A latency of only 50 milliseconds in the end-to-end video transmission between the surrogate robot's camera and the pilot's display means there is virtually no gap between the visual and physical sensations, according to a press release by the company. Telexistence plans to deploy the robots to up to 20 branches by 2022, eventually rolling them out to all FamilyMart stores. They will be used to automate merchandise restocking, said to account for a large chunk of the workload in convenience stores, reducing the operational burden and infection risks for employees. Some fear that this reduction in human contact may harm people's mental and emotional wellbeing. But if robots are facilitating this state of affairs, their proponents say they may also be part of the solution. Romotto specializes in renting out small "communication" robots online for both personal and corporate use. With the click of a button, individuals can choose from six different kinds of robot for delivery to their doors, while businesses can choose from 11.

The service, which allows customers to rent a robot as easily as renting a car, aims to help people relax and alleviate feelings of isolation, says Yukinori Izumi, founder and CEO of the service's Fukuoka-based operator Rocket Road Co. "After talking with developers of around 17 different kinds of robots about making them accessible to the average person at a low price, I created the (Romotto) business model. And then the coronavirus hit," he said, adding that business has steadily risen since its launch on June 25. Around 90 percent of individual customers are women in their 20s to 60s, with Aibo, a robotic dog developed by Sony Corp, and RoBoHoN, a miniature humanoid robot created by Sharp Corp, the most popular, according to Izumi. "Men tend to look at robots as hardware, so they are only concerned with their specifications," he said. "But women see them as like a pet, or as a companion when they're lonely at home."

Aibo can be rented for a week for 15,000 yen with free delivery and return, while prices for RoBoHoN start from 7,900 yen depending on the model. A passion for creating high-quality apparel was Izumi's route into the world of robots. In 2016, he launched Robo-Uni -- said to be the world's only dedicated maker of customized

clothing for communication robots. Made from hi-tech material used in space and hospitals, the clothing is specially designed to prevent robots from overheating. "When we dressed a Pepper robot in clothes made for commercially-available fashion lines, it overheated in just an hour. But it didn't overheat at all when wearing our Robo-Uni clothes," said Izumi, who was soon contracted by all the big names in robot production, including SoftBank Robotics Corp, Sony and Sharp, to design uniforms for their creations.

But despite Robo-Uni being a pioneer in robot clothing, few people actually owned robots and even fewer thought of dressing them up. The Kyoto Prefecture native soon realized there was a need to expand the market to make his niche viable, and the idea for Romotto was born. Around 60 different types of robot clothing developed by Robo-Uni can be rented on Romotto together with the robot. If customers fall in love with their robot companion after renting, they can also buy the model and favorite robot apparel themselves. "If robots aren't wearing uniforms, it's hard to understand their roles," said Izumi, whose plans include creating unique uniforms to highlight the specific jobs robots will perform as they become more ubiquitous. "But if the robot is wearing a nurse outfit or a concierge suit, then people can immediately tell what they're there for," he said.

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S. Korea, China, Japan Agree on Cooperation for Economic Recovery

Top economic ministers of South Korea, China and Japan agreed Friday to step up cooperation to swiftly recover from the coronavirus pandemic, Seoul's finance ministry said. Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki, China's Finance Minister Liu Kun and Japan's Vice. Finance Minister for International Affairs Kenji Okamura held an online meeting earlier in the day during which they also agreed to bolster cooperation with Southeast Asian nations for an economic recovery. The ministers reaffirmed the importance of an open and rules-based multilateral trade regime, the ministry said. In June, South Korea, China, Japan and 10 Southeast Asian nations strengthened their emergency liquidity program to better cope with possible financial crises. The move came after a revised agreement of the regional financial safety net -- known as the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization (CMIM) -- went into effect.

The 13 countries agreed to revise the agreement in May last year to reinforce financial support, including the flexibility to extend the period of provision under the International Monetary Fund-linked portion of the CMIM agreement. The three ministers welcomed the revised agreement, saying that South Korea, China and Japan will continue to support the regional liquidity program. CMIM, launched in 2010, refers to the US\$240 billion pool that can be tapped through currency swap

deals in times of financial crisis. ASEAN comprises Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam.

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S. Korea Faced with Rapidly Population Aging

South Korea's population is rapidly aging as people aged 65 or older account for nearly 16 percent of its population, government data showed Monday. South Koreans in the age group stood at 8.13 million this year, or 15.7 percent of the country's population, according to the data from Statistics Korea. The number of people aged 65 or older is expected to keep rising down the road to reach 10.51 million in 2025, or 20.3 percent of the total population, putting the country on the threshold of a super-aged society. A country is defined as a super-aged society when at least 21 percent of its people are 65 or older. Asia's fourth-largest economy became an aged society in 2017, when the proportion of those aged over 65 years reached over 14 percent of its entire population. In 2060, the proportion is estimated to increase to as high as 43.9 percent. All areas of South Korea, except for the central administrative city of Sejong, are estimated to become super-aged in 10 years. In 2020, the number of people aged 65 or older is estimated to take up 14.8 percent of Sejong's population. The data also showed cancer was the leading cause of death in South Korea last year, with some 751 per 100,000 people dying of cancer. Cancer was followed by heart diseases (336 deaths), pneumonia (283), cerebrovascular diseases (232) and diabetes (87). About half of those aged 65 or older are provided with financial assistance, with some 31 percent depending on the country's state pension program, according to the data.

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Now Focuses More on Health Problems

Indonesian President Joko Widodo said here Monday his government should now focus more on efforts to overcome public health problems due to the COVID-19 pandemic than endeavors to recover the economy. The president ordered the Committee on the Mitigation of the COVID-19 and the Economic Recovery, the Health Ministry, the State Armed Forces and the State Police to focus on the COVID-19 mitigation before the economic recovery. "It means that we keep focusing on health, namely on the COVID-19 mitigation. It is the key," he told a cabinet meeting at the state palace here. The economic condition will be good, if the public health condition is ameliorating, he said, underscoring that efforts to recover the

domestic economy would much depend on the results of the application of policies on the COVID-19 mitigation. Data from the COVID-19 Task Force on Sunday showed the number of the COVID-19 cases in Indonesia reached 194,109 with the recovered patients totaling 138,575 and the dead tally recorded at 8,025 people.

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CAMBODIA: PM Says Globalization, Multilateral Trade Vital for Global Growth, Poverty Reduction

Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen said on Saturday that strengthening globalization and multilateral trade are crucial to supporting global economic growth and reducing poverty. The prime minister made the remarks at the Global Manufacturing and Industrialization Summit which was held virtually from Sept. 4 to 5 and co-hosted by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation and the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure of the United Arab Emirates. "We should continue strengthening the momentum of globalization, which has significantly contributed to economic growth and created unprecedented conditions that promote poverty reduction and livelihood of people from all walks of lives," Hun Sen said. "Indeed, in the globalization trend, everything is connected and interconnected," the prime minister said. "In this context, we must ensure that our cooperative mechanism can maintain the spirit of open-mindedness and support for multilateral trade, by speeding up our social and economic interlinkages to support each country's development in a sustainable and inclusive manner." Hun Sen said to restore global prosperity, countries should altogether respond urgently and responsibly to overcome the challenging issues, along with fears that have been dividing up countries, through the implementation of pragmatic strategies and actions aiming at strengthening the value of peace, dignity and solidarity with equal footing and mutual respects. "In this sense, each country should play more active and interactive roles in global governance in a flexible, constructive and responsible manner, especially to contribute to the global orders in order to maintain peace and security, the key prerequisites for trades and long-term sustainable and prosperous growth for the whole world," he said.

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THAILAND: To Reboot Economy by Reducing Living Costs, Promote Consumption, Employment

The Thai government's newly formed Center for Economic Situation Administration (CESA) said on Wednesday that its first priority in rebooting the economy is to reduce the cost of living, promote consumption and employment for new graduates.

Under this scheme, the Thai government will provide a 50-percent subsidy for products purchased from participating retailers and street vendors, but no more than 3,000 baht (96 U.S. dollars) per person. Those eligible for this subsidy must be at least 18 years old. The scheme aims to provide subsidies to 15 million persons and expects 80,000 retailers and street vendors to participate. On the tourism front, CESA is recommending discounts for accommodations, dining and transportation for domestic travelers. On the employment front, the government will pay 50 percent of the salaries of newly graduates as part of the incentives to encourage firms to hire fresh graduates and to keep them out of unemployment. Thailand's two main sources of income, tourism and export, have been badly hit by the COVID-19 pandemic despite the country witnessing zero local transmission in the past three months. The Bank of Thailand earlier forecasted the economy to shrink by 5.3 percent in 2020.

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Thailand to Extract High-Value Metals from Recycled E-Waste to Serve High-Tech Industries

Thailand's Ministry of Industry on Monday unveiled plans in developing a new recycling technology that enables the extraction of rare-earth metals from recycled industrial and household waste to serve high-tech industries. "Our focus is to tap into the industrial waste to extract high-value metals, ranging from rare-earth elements to gold, silver and platinum," said Teerawut Tunnukij, senior metallurgical engineer at the ministry's Department of Primary Industries and Mines (DPIM). "We have already created a technology to recycle neodymium from electronic waste, he said. Neodymium is a key component in high-power magnets needed for electronic equipment and the engines of electric vehicles. The DPIM also plans to extract nano copper oxide from electronic waste, such as copper from plants that produce electricity transmission cables. Nano copper oxide is a key material for coating medical equipment to make it bacteria-resistant. Teerawut also said that his department is doing research and development on special-grade titanium alloys used in robotic technology. The DPIM has so far developed 55 prototype recycling technologies and is working on another six to eight prototypes per year, he said. The new recycling technology is transferred to around 300 companies every year. According to DPIM, Thailand generates 500,000 tons of electronic waste per year, of which 80,000 tons are derived from industrial factories. Teerawut said that the 500,000 tons of e-waste contains recyclable metal worthy of an estimated 30 billion baht (959 million U.S. dollars).

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ADB Supports Thailand's Green, Social, and Sustainability Bonds for COVID-19 Recovery

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is assisting the Government of Thailand in designing, issuing, and monitoring innovative capital market initiatives as part of the country's recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in a manner aligned with the 2015 Paris Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. ADB's technical assistance through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) Catalytic Green Finance Facility (ACGF) includes bond framework development and external reviews to help Thailand's Ministry of Finance (MOF) and National Housing Authority (NHA) design green, social, and sustainability bonds based on global and ASEAN standards and best practices. ADB is also helping the government develop internal systems to monitor the use of bond proceeds and prepare post-issuance reports. These measures will help lay the groundwork for more green, social, and sustainability bond issuances. The initiatives include support for Thailand's first sustainability bond, a first-of-a-kind issuance by a sovereign in Southeast Asia. Issued by MOF's Public Debt Management Office in two tranches totaling THB30 billion (about \$964 million) on 13–14 August, the bond was oversubscribed three times, and its proceeds will be used to finance green infrastructure through the Mass Rapid Transit Orange Line (East) Project. It will also fund social impact projects supporting the country's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, such as public health measures, job creation through small and medium-sized enterprises, and local public infrastructure development with social and environmental benefits.

ADB also supported the NHA's maiden social bond, which was issued on 23 September in three tranches totaling THB6.8 billion. It is among the first social bonds issued by a state-owned enterprise in Southeast Asia. The bond will finance affordable housing in Thailand and promote sustainable communities. Other green and sustainability bonds are in development. "We are delighted to support these pioneering initiatives by the Government of Thailand," said Country Director of ADB Thailand Resident Mission Hideaki Iwasaki. "These social and sustainability bonds will help the country recover from COVID-19 by focusing on long-term, green, and inclusive infrastructure." "As countries face an increasing financing gap for climate-resilient infrastructure, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential for governments to tap into domestic and global capital markets with green and sustainability bonds," said ACGF Unit Head Anouj Mehta. ADB is preparing a new country partnership strategy to support Thailand's economic recovery with a pipeline of green and climate-resilient infrastructure projects. The strategy will also focus on rebuilding regional cooperation through the Greater Mekong Subregion program and other platforms. ADB's Private Sector Operations Department has been supporting green finance development in Thailand. Projects include a THB5 billion purchase of B.Grimm Power Public Company Limited's initial 5-year and 7-year green bonds in 2018. These were the first certified climate bonds to be issued in

Thailand. ADB purchased a THB3 billion tranche within Energy Absolute Public Company Limited's first green bond issuance of THB10 billion in 2019. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

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VIETNAM: Health Ministry Launches E-Portal for Prices of Medical Equipment

The Ministry of Health launched an electronic portal to publicise the prices of medical equipment at a ceremony on Wednesday in Hà Nội. The prices of medical equipment will be available at <https://quanlytrangthietbiyte.com/tra-cuu-ttb-y-te>. “The Ministry of Health will provide full information on medical equipment prices to create a basis for medical facilities to refer to and understand prices to handle shortcomings in bidding for medical equipment,” said Acting Minister of Health Nguyễn Thanh Long at the event. “Publicising medical equipment prices is one of the important steps in making the medical equipment market transparent in efforts to improve competitiveness,” said Long. Acting minister Long added that the listing of prices and the configuration of medical equipment as well as the winning prices of bidding packages in the future will be important references for medical facilities in evaluating and bidding for medical equipment, as well as handling shortcomings in the process.

Long added that the health ministry will work with the customs sector to get complete information on import prices of medical equipment to Việt Nam in order to make the entire process of purchasing medical equipment more public and transparent. “Our ultimate goal is to ensure people have access to quality healthcare services. This is an urgent task of the health sector. The medical equipment and pharmaceutical sectors are two areas that we will strongly reform in the near future,” added Long. Since April, the health ministry announced the medical equipment bidding results on its portal. The ministry has publicised winning bid prices of 50,000 pieces of medical equipment, providing the foundation for relevant authorities and hospitals in bidding for medical equipment. The health ministry will provide instructions and necessary information on the price of the device (device name, model, manufacturer, country of manufacture, configuration, basic technical features, warranty, training, tax fees, installation requirements and commercial conditions). The health ministry said that the market for medical equipment and materials in Việt Nam has experienced strong growth. The country's total investment capital for medical equipment increased to US\$1.68 billion in 2019 from \$515 million in 2010.

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South Asia

INDIA: Hackers Take Advantage of India's Loose Data Privacy Laws

India has some of the loosest data policy laws on the planet. Hackers have seen these loose data privacy laws as the opening they need to steal data and sell it on the black market. Regulations are changing, but many experts that are seeing the importance of data protection feel that they are not moving at a fast-enough pace. Since India lacks comprehensive privacy laws, little is being done to protect people's personal data. The Personal Data Protection Bill is an initial step by the lower house of parliament in India to provide a level of security. This bill is designed to regulate how the personal data of people in India is used by companies, the government, and law enforcement. In 2019, India's government passed an ordinance that permits people to voluntarily use official government issued IDs if they want to offer proof of identity when they go to the bank or perform other essential services. However, the same ordinance made it possible for digital pay companies, such as Amazon Pay and PayTm, to ask for the official ID as well. The way things are currently structured, there is the possibility that individuals would lose their access to key services if they did not share their personal information with the companies or agencies that provide them. Businesses have created several safeguards to address fraud. They protect merchants from online fraud.

Data Theft and Organized Crime

Much of the data theft is used as a way to commit financial fraud. According to the FTC report 1.7 million identity theft and fraud reports received in 2019 were fraud-related. Many individuals and organizations are taking steps to protect themselves by using VPNs and other security measures. But not all security measures offer the same level of security. Alex Williams from Hosting Data group tested over 20 popular VPN solutions and found out that not all VPN services offer the same layer of protection - the ones that guaranteed maximum protection against any threat used the AES-256 encryption, which is the strongest encryption standard. VPN is a great solution when it comes to protecting your online privacy and sensitive data from threats such as identity theft, or hackers stealing and selling your personal information on the Dark Web - but only if it offers strong encryption and no-logging policy. Some argue that banks are facing a worse situation than individuals with data theft and fraud. An example of the fraud an individual faces is scammers trying to get their one time password when they are doing a transaction. This is a scam seen in many parts of India. Gangs in Jharkhand are at the heart of these scams. Sadly, gangs will work with mobile shops. It's common for mobile shops that sell SIM cards to work with the criminals, allowing them to get access to the mobile phones of the individuals they have sold SIM cards to. This problem is only going to get bigger as COVID-19 continues affecting people in India and around the world. India, like other

countries, is relying on digital payments. The digital payment sector is expected to grow exponentially as more people are opting to purchase online. In India, digital payments accounted for 2.2 billion transactions during the first weeks of the coronavirus lockdown. This is 72.5 percent of the transactions carried out in India. Scammers will look at this and will see an alternative way to con people. People are getting what appears to be legitimate communications from the bank offering a loan moratorium.

How Privacy Laws around the World Compare with Those in India

GDPR is one of the strictest data privacy policies in the world. However, it's not the first privacy policy nor is it the last. Several countries around the world have strict data privacy laws. Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados is a policy that was crafted after GDPR. It has a similar scope and similar applicability. The major difference between Brazil's privacy laws and the GDPR is that the GDPR has fewer fines for noncompliance. Any company around the world that wants to do business with Brazil, which has the world's largest economy, will need to comply with Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados by 2020. If not, they can pay fines of up to €11.8 million.

Australia's privacy law is known as the Privacy Amendment. It has been on the books since February 2018. Organizations that have more than AU\$3 million in turnover every year will need to disclose data breaches if those data breaches pose a real threat of serious harm in 30 days from their discovery of the breach or face fines of €1.1 million. The Privacy Australia group's recent survey showed that approximately 39.2% of Australians cited hackers and other types of cybercriminals as the biggest threats to their online safety, while 30.1% cited Australian government surveillance. The US doesn't have a universal privacy law that affects all industries on the federal level. Each state can create its own privacy laws. These regulations are going to vary in applicability, penalties, and scope. California has the California Consumer Privacy Act. This is one of the strictest privacy laws in the country. It has a lot in common with GDPR. HIPAA is a privacy law that impacts how private medical data is used. There are other privacy laws that are used in the financial field. Japan's Act on Protection of Personal Information, came into law in May 2017. Both foreign and domestic companies must adhere to this law. Japan and the EU have reached reciprocal adequacy laws when it comes to each country's privacy laws. Japan has even created a white list of EU companies that are cautious when handling personal information. This is one of the earliest privacy laws on the books. South Korea's Personal Information Protection Act became law in September 2011. The GDPR shares many of the same provisions, including limiting when organizations can retain a person's data and requiring strict justification for retaining said data.

The above-mentioned PDPB was introduced into parliament in December 2019. There is still some ambiguity in some policies, and India's central government has a lot of power in deciding how this will be enforced and when exceptions can be made. Some tenants of this legislation include breach notification requirements, consent of

data subjects, the right to be forgotten, and hefty fines if there is noncompliance. In fact, the fines can be as high as four percent of global annual turnover. Critics of privacy policies like the GDPR say that while the protection offered by these policies is good, it's not enough. They point out areas where GDPR, HIPAA, and other similar policies failed to guarantee full compliance. India is taking steps in the right direction but has a long way to go. It owes it to its over one billion citizens to provide data protection and protect them against hackers.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 09/02/2020

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Pichai Commits \$1 Billion to Help Publishers Create Quality News

Alphabet and Google CEO Sundar Pichai on Thursday announced the company's biggest \$1 billion investment for the future of news, in partnerships with news publishers that would pay them to create and curate high-quality content for better online news experience. Pichai launched Google News Showcase that features the editorial curation of award-winning newsrooms to give readers more insight on the stories that matter, and in the process, helps publishers develop deeper relationships with their audiences. "We've signed partnerships for News Showcase with nearly 200 leading publications across Germany, Brazil, Argentina, Canada, the UK and Australia. The number of news publications will grow as we work to expand News Showcase to other countries including India, Belgium and the Netherlands," Pichai said in a blog post. Google News Showcase will start rolling out in Germany and Brazil from Thursday and come to other countries where local frameworks support these partnerships. News Showcase is made up of story panels that will appear initially in Google News on Android. The product will launch soon on Google News on iOS, and will come to Google Discover and Search in the future. "Other components like video, audio and daily briefings will come next," Pichai said. The \$1 billion investment is another step from Google to support the news industry. The publications include award-winning national titles like Der Spiegel, Stern, Die Zeit, Folha de S.Paulo, Band and Infobae, alongside regionally and locally significant publications such as El Litoral, GZH, WAZ and SooToday.

The company said from sending 24 billion visits to news websites globally every month to the Google News Initiative's (GNI) \$300 million commitment, including emergency funding for local publishers globally to help with the impact of Covid-19, it is helping small and medium-sized publishers accelerate their business growth. Google News Showcase, said Pichai, is distinct from other news products "because it leans on the editorial choices individual publishers make about which stories to show readers and how to present them". Google News Showcase builds on the existing news licensing programme, which is paying publishers for quality journalism and other news-related efforts like Subscribe with Google, Web Stories and audio news. "Both Google News Showcase and our financial investment - which will extend

beyond the initial three years - are focused on contributing to the overall sustainability of our news partners around the world," Pichai said, adding that the company aims to play its part by helping journalism in the 21st century not just survive, but thrive. "I have always valued quality journalism and believed that a vibrant news industry is critical to a functioning democratic society," he said.

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Ram Vilas Paswan Integrates Ladakh & Lakshadweep Under 'One Nation One Ration Card'

Recently, while reviewing the progress of the implementation of 'One Nation One Ration Card' plan, the Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Ram Vilas Paswan also took note of the requisite technical readiness of Union Territories of Ladakh and Lakshadweep and approved the integration of the two UTs with existing national portability cluster of 24 States/UTs. Both the UTs have completed the trial and testing of national portability transactions with other States/UTs in the national cluster. Following the addition of the two UTs, a total of 26 States/UTs are now seamlessly connected with each other under the 'One Nation One Ration Card' plan. Also, with the new plan, the migratory PDS beneficiaries in these 26 States/UTs can access their subsidised foodgrains at the same scale and Central Issue Prices from any Fair Price Shop (FPS) of their choice w.e.f. September 1, 2020. A total of more than 65 crore beneficiaries in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Ladakh, Lakshadweep, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Telangana, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, are now potentially enabled with an option to lift their subsidised foodgrains through 'One Nation One Ration Card' system. Remaining States/UTs are targeted to be integrated in national portability by March 2021.

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/> 09/03/2020

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Gurugram, Millenium City to Smart City

Gurugram Smart CityGurugram, which is a prominent city of Haryana, is considered to be one of the most influential places in North India. It has become real estate hub and a centre for corporate houses that have been providing lucrative job offers over the past decade. A large population from tier-II and tier-III cities is moving towards Gurugram due to the employment opportunities and other available facilities. With the State Government developing the city as a Smart City, it has led to the rapid development of projects, writes Priyanka Sharma of Elets News Network (ENN). The

current population of Gurugram is estimated to be close to 2.5 million and is expected to grow to 4.3 million by 2020. As the industrial and financial centre of Haryana, this city has witnessed the third largest increase in per capita incomes in India (after Chandigarh and Mumbai). Almost 45-48 per cent of Haryana's revenue accrues from Gurugram by way of excise duty, sales tax, stamp duty and registration. This is the hub of the prolific and massive real estate development that is happening in the State today. Although Chandigarh is the capital of Haryana and Punjab, Gurugram is considered to be the second capital of the State. Over the years, the Government has targeted Gurgaon as a city for attracting global investors and domestic capitalists over Chandigarh. Gurugram, earlier known as Gurgaon, may not have made it to the Smart Cities list of the Centre, but still is making itself smart in line with the vision of the Government of Haryana. Some of the projects where Gurugram has made a mark are: WASTE MANAGEMENT For effective waste management in Gurugram, foundation stones for 11 solid waste transfer stations were laid by the Chief Minister of Haryana Manohar Lal Khattar recently.

The stations will serve as temporary waste centres where the waste collected from households will be kept till it is transferred to Bandhwari for further processing. Residents will be required to segregate waste at source into two separate bins, categorised as dry and wet waste. They can even check the arrival time of garbage vans through an app. The State has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Ecogreen Energy Private Ltd to develop Haryana's first integrated solid waste management project. "We have signed an agreement with the Ecogreen company, selected through a global tender. They now collect door-to-door garbage and convert it into compost and also waste-to-energy. They will install a power plant there. Less than 10 per cent inert is used for the landfill. This is all in compliance with the Supreme Court order," said Narhari Banger, Additional Commissioner, Municipal Corporation of Gurugram while speaking to ENN. SMART SECURITY The Gurgaon Metropolitan Development Authority will install more CCTVs for enhanced security and better traffic management. The Rs 40 crore project will be implemented in the next two years. The city currently has around 60,000 CCTV cameras and they, too, will be part of the project. The CCTV feed will be monitored at the Police Commissioner's office and can be utilised by all the Gurugram departments. As a part of the project, 61 CCTV cameras have been installed in Old Gurgaon at 15 points between Sector 4/7 Chowk and Sadar Bazaar. Residents of Gurugram can utilise the control room through "Emergency Communication Box", in case of an emergency. There is also a provision to track criminals who try to harm the cameras.

"The Gurugram administration has opened a single window system for all clearances and approvals for a subsidy, net metering etc at the Renewable Centre in Leisure Valley, in Sector 29." SMART TRANSPORT The Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) has forwarded its report to the SMART TRANSPORT Haryana Mass Rapid Transport Corporation (HMRTC), to expand the metro route from HUDA City Centre to Dwarka Sector 21. Gurugram Rapid Metro is

also expanding. Work is in progress for the second phase of Gurugram's Rapid Metro from Sikandarpur metro junction to Gurgaon Sector 56. Fulfilling their promise of Smart transport in Gurugram, a special app is being designed for Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) expressway. There is an opportunity in short travel distances that makes this city walkable and cycle-friendly. This strength needs to be leveraged. The maximum daily trip length is less than 5 km, as per the Integrated Mobility Plan for Gurgaon. A bicycle sharing system will soon start in the Millennium city. China-based start-up Mobike will soon launch an app-based bicycle sharing service in the city. Under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Mobike and DLF Foundation, the project will start from Golf Course Road. The bicycles made by Mobike will have built-in GPS technology so that they can easily be tracked. The company will launch nearly 5,000 bicycles on Gurgaon roads.

HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE To protect homebuyers rights, Haryana has implemented Haryana Real Estate Regulatory Act (H-RERA). Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) has also launched the door-to-door tax collection service for its citizens.

"We have started door-to-door payment collection in collaboration with the ICICI bank. Residents can pay the property tax and utility bill at the click of a button by sitting at the comfort of their homes," Om Prakash Sharma, Chief Accounts Officer, Municipal Corporation of Gurugram. Detailed Project Reports of every area can be accessed through MCG website. No Objection Certificate for Fire and Emergency services can also be obtained online. It also provides a facility for online approvals of building plans. Any change or correction in Property Tax records can be done online. Marriages can be registered online too. MCG has started an online system to grant permissions, approvals and monitoring of outdoor advertisements. Trade licenses are issued online. Gurugram Police recently started Project Jagruk with the help of Home Credit India Finance Pvt. Ltd to create awareness amongst the police personnel on cybercrime and financial frauds. "The State has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Ecogreen Energy Private Ltd to develop Haryana's first integrated solid waste management project." **SMART GRID FOR SMART GURUGRAM** Gurugram is aiming at the 24x7 uninterrupted power supply to consumers. The city wants to make itself a diesel generator-free city, and for that, the Dakshin Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam (DHBVN) has launched a Smart Grid Project for the Millennium City. The project, at a cost of Rs 1,600-crore, will reduce AT&C (Aggregate Technical & Commercial) losses and overhead cost. The grid is integrated with the latest technology and it also ensures consumer participation. In phase 1, all the overhead 11 kV lines will be converted to underground except wherever it is not feasible.

There are also plans to lay optical fibre so that internet connectivity can be made possible. **SMART ENERGY** The energy roadmap for Gurugram needs to progressively increase the share of renewable energy resources and generation. Haryana is gearing up to contribute to India's ambitious target of generating 175

gigawatts of solar power by 2022, and Gurugram is in a position to leverage the state level policies to scale up an application and make more off-grid solutions possible. The plummeting cost curve of solar power generation is an opportunity. As energy demand and consumption grows steadily in the city, increased share of solar power will not only de-carbonise energy but also reduce toxic pollution from power generation. Haryana gets a high-intensity solar radiation for 320 days in a year; the state's overall solar potential is 4.5 GW. The Municipal Corporation of Gurugram is also undertaking LED streetlighting project worth Rs 50 crore. The Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) will replace more than 48,568 streetlights by LED this year, which in the tun, will save 11 million units per year for Gurugram. Under the New Solar Policy of 2016, Haryana has set itself a target of a solar renewable purchase obligation (solar RPO) which would be scaled up from the current 0.25 per cent to at least 8 per cent by 2021-22. The solar capacity target is 3,200 MW by 2021-22 — of this, 1,600 MW will be from rooftop solar. The policy encourages setting up solar plants on barren panchayat lands and on canals, enabling mechanisms for off-grid solar applications, creating a green energy fund and facilitating wheeling of solar through utilities. The scaling up of solar power generation will happen in diverse ways. Haryana's solar initiatives are spearheaded by the Haryana Renewable Energy Development Agency (Hareda). Currently, the State's solar power installed capacity is about 25 MW through rooftops and small solar power projects. Haryana is the second State after Tamil Nadu to have mandated the use of solar by buildings of and beyond 500 square yards.

Recently, a new solar policy has been unveiled. Net metering has been operationalised and the local administration has launched a 'single-window' for all clearances and approvals for solar PV and solar thermal. Research and development on solar power is being done at the Gurugram National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE). In Gurugram, 17 MW of solar rooftops have been installed without subsidy, while 1 MW has been installed with subsidy. Gurugram district has been allocated a large target for providing subsidy to the tune of 11 MW till March 2017 for grid-connected rooftop systems. The subsidy will be 30 per cent of the project cost or Rs 20,000 per kW, whichever is less. Haryana has put in place all the elements to operationalise net metering. The net metering regulations from Haryana Electricity Regulatory Commission (HERC) were issued in November 2014 and were further fine-tuned in July 2015. "Haryana's solar initiatives are spearheaded by the Haryana Renewable Energy Development Agency (Hareda). Currently, the State's solar power installed capacity is about 25 MW through rooftops and small solar power projects." Net metering ensures that consumers can become power exporters by installing net meters at their premises and exporting surplus power to the grid – this enables them to get a discount on their power bill (after offsetting exported units) from the Dakshin Haryana Bidyut Vitaran Nigam Ltd (DHBVNL). The Gurugram administration has opened a single window system for all clearances and approvals for subsidy, net metering etc at the Renewable Centre in Leisure Valley, in Sector 29. The application for subsidy, net meters etc can be made online. As per the policy, the

electricity generated from such systems will be cumulatively adjusted at 90 per cent of the electricity consumption during the financial year. In February 2016, Gurugram completed net metering of a 10-kWp rooftop grid-connected SPV power plant at Rajiv Gandhi Renewable Energy Park. In addition, in 2015-16, an incentive at 25 paise per unit was also provided on bills on the solar power thus generated. Several policy initiatives are in place – what is now needed is a time-bound implementation plan. The optimistic sign is that increasingly, solar photovoltaics are getting cheaper for large-scale deployment.

From <http://www.egovonline.net> 09/06/2020

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India-Sri Lanka Educational Institutions Now Connected Through High Speed Internet

To boost the academic collaborations between India and Sri Lanka, a gigabit connectivity between the National Knowledge Network of India and LEARN network of Sri Lanka has been set up in Colombo. On his official visit to Sri Lanka, Union Minister for Law and Justice and Electronics and IT Ravi Shankar Prasad inaugurated the connectivity. Sri Lankan Minister for Telecommunications and Digital Infrastructure Harin Fernando was also present on this occasion. After the launch from the headquarters of the Ministry of Telecommunications and Digital Infrastructure, Colombo, the Minister also held a video conference with officers of Ministry of Electronics and IT, Government of India present in Delhi and other connected educational institutions of India and Sri Lanka. Both the countries have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for enhancing cooperation between India and Sri Lanka in the IT sector, cyber security and e-governance. Prasad also inaugurated the use of eOffice software developed by National Informatics Center (NIC) by the Government of Sri Lanka.

From <http://www.egovonline.net> 09/08/2020

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Chennai Metrowater Accelerates Installation of Digital Water Meters

In order to ensure the judicious usage of water, the Chennai Metrowater has expedited the work to fit digital water meters with automated meter reading (AMR) in commercial properties in the city. As of now, around 5,300 commercial properties using water more than 5,000 kilolitres including hotels, industries, and educational institutions have been provided with the AMR meters. The remaining properties of the total of 12,708 will be provided with the facility soon. According to Metrowater officials, the software for automated reading is in the development process. The software, once developed, will enable officers to read and monitor water meters and

raise bills from their area and head offices. An official said that the smart meters are being procured from Hitron, a French company. In the second phase of the exercise more commercial establishments will be identified for the installation of smart meters and possibly the process will be expanded to cover domestic consumers as well. The project is taken under the Smart City Mission at a cost of Rs 9.5 crore. The initiative will help incorporating a behavioral change among the citizens to track their water consumption and pay as per the amount of water consumed. The Metrowater has begun billing as per volumetric consumption and soon engineers will not have to go door-to-door to raise bills or read meters. In addition, Metrowater has earmarked Rs 5 crore to install smartcard-based water dispensers in some of the filling posts that were not covered during the first phase of the Smart City project.

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/> 09/14/2020

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NTT Com Launches Data Network Services in India

IT and telecom services provider NTT Communications Corporation (NTT Com), has launched the international data network services in India through its affiliate NTT Communications India Network Services (NTTCINS). The company has already established its two data centres in Mumbai and Bangalore, through Netmagic, a subsidiary of NTT Com. NTT has decided to invest \$160 million for its data centre expansion in India. Netmagic is also one of the leading managed hosting and cloud service providers in India. The new data services will help the customers to high-quality infrastructure services as well as the management and security services to meet their Information and Communications Technology (ICT) outsourcing needs. "India has been a key strategic market for us with the accelerating shift of IT services from traditional enterprise data centres into the cloud-based services," said NTT Com President and CEO Tetsuya Shoji. "For the past few years, our business in India has consistently grown over 35% annually. With further expansion of data center foot print and addition of international data network services to our service portfolio, we aim to meet the growing market needs for Mobility, e-Commerce, Internet of Things (IoT), Cloud and Big Data.

From <http://www.egovonline.net/> 09/19/2020

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GPS Tracker for Bikes and Cars: How Delhi-based Startup Onelap Is Securing Vehicles Differently

Are you worried about your vehicle's security? If yes, then you are reading the right article because, in this article, you will get to know about how you can make your vehicle secure using GPS tracker. The GPS technology had come a long way since

1973 when it first came into existence, from just route mapping to track even the smallest of things. As we all know that vehicles are very costly asset, whether it's a bike or car or any other vehicle. The average price of a motorcycle in the country is ₹80K, which isn't a small amount to pay in one go for any person. If someone is putting so much money in one go, the person must also want to use that asset for a long time, but what if someone steal your vehicle the day after purchasing it. Generally, a small thought about the vehicle theft can bring fear to in any vehicle owners' minds. With Onelap you can save your vehicle from all this by making your motorbike secure through its GPS tracker for bike and car. Onelap isn't a giant in the market in the GPS category, but definitely, it is the fastest-growing company in the sector. Not only that, it is ranking #1 on Amazon for the past two years in the GPS category. Onelap was started by Shubham Choudhary & Vishal Sharma in the final year of their Engineering in 2016. Their primary aim is to develop a solution that eradicates fear of vehicle theft from vehicle owners' minds regarding their car or fleet's security. In the initial days, both the founders observed that the telematics industry is very unorganized but with huge potential & there is a great need for good quality fleet management software & they also find out that the global automotive telematics market size was valued at \$50.4 billion in 2018, and is projected to reach \$320.6 billion by 2026. Onelap started sales and operations in Sep 2017 from Vishal house's basement. Within 8 months of its launch, it was in the top 5 best-sellers on Amazon.

It wasn't a comfortable journey for the founders. Mr. Shubham Choudhary, an Electrical & Electronics Engineer who is a Graduate of AKGEC College, was a Robotics Enthusiast in his college days and participated in various National Level Robotics competitions. He was the team leader of his Robocon team. Mr. Vishal Sharma, a Software Engineer, is a graduate of the University of Delhi & participant of the Meizu App Mania contest hosted by digit.in in his college days, where developers from all over the nation participated and he was ranked top five in that competition. Vishal had to leave his recently joined job at Bluestone to achieve the start-up dream. Mr. Shubham also had to let go of his lucrative job offer from National Instruments. Onelap Telematics headquarters is based out of Delhi. Still, under 1 year, it has increased its base from North India to Pan India & now, after 4 years, its products are used by the people in Qatar, South Sudan & Zimbabwe. In such a brief span, Onelap has established itself in 4 countries. It is compatible with over 1500+ GPS devices from various manufacturers, and it is also compatible with any vehicle such as bike, car, truck, bus, scooter, etc. Because of their loyal customers & clients, they are generating excellent revenue even that through Bootstrapping. In the first financial year 2017-18, their Revenue was INR 7 Lakh, but in the next financial year 2018-19, their Revenue increased by leap & bounds to nearly INR 1 Crore. In the next financial year, Onelap aims to generate Revenue of INR 4 Crore. "We are bootstrapping from Day 1 & planning never to go to a VC. Onelap is an easy to use software for vehicle management. Our most powerful source of marketing is word of mouth only. We are on a mission of building G.O.A.T. asset management software."

Onelapis now used by clients like Vivo and IdeaForge. One of our clients, Sandeep Murada, a small business owner, uses this GPS tracking device for all his delivery vans. He said that "Onelap GO is a very useful solution for small fleet-based business because it provides important data regarding your business through which you can build your plans to make your business progressive in all aspects."

1. Alert from theft:

It is one of the most crucial features of these bike trackers because it saves your vehicle from theft or suspicious activity. Now you think how a small GPS device can alert you from any suspicious activity. Let me tell you how. Suppose you usually go to the office on a bike, but while you're parking your two-wheeler in the office parking area, a suspicious person keeps an eye on your bike for few days, and you're not aware of that. Now, one day that suspicious person decides to steal your motorcycle, and he tries to steal it. If, you have the Onelapdevice installed in your bike, you will get an instant anti-theft alarm on your mobile &or can track him if bike already stolen.

2. Safe-Zone:

After seeing the subheading, you must be thinking in your head that how such a small GPS device can draw a safe zones for the user, but actually this thing is done using Onelap GPS tracking app. After installing Onelap, you can mark a particular through Geo-Fence, a safe-zone, so that whenever your motorcycle enters or exits that area you will receive an instant notification on your smartphone with timestamps. Also, you can make unlimited safe-zones according to your needs and requirements.

3. Real-Time Tracking:

As we have discussed in the first point that with the help of this tracker, you will get instant notification whenever someone tries to steal or tow your vehicle, but it will only alert you. For catching that person who has stolen your bike, withOnelap's real-timeGPS tracking is very handy because it gives you the exact location of that person who is riding your motorcycle without letting him know.

4. Speed Alerts:

It is a feature that comes into play when you give your bike to your friend or someone else to ride temporarily. With the Onelap GPS tracking device in your vehicle, you can set a speed limit according to your convenience. Whenever the person crosses that speed limit, you will get instant notification on your mobile application.

5. Portable:

Onelap GO is a portable GPS tracker; you can install it anywhere throughout your motorbike. This GPS tracker needs a very tiny space. It is wireless so that nobody can know that you have installed a GPS tracker on your motorcycle.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 09/20/2020

SRI LANKA: E-Learning for Continuing University Education

In response to the ongoing concerns in relation to the COVID – 19 virus, the Sri Lankan government has encouraged all Universities, Campuses, Higher Education Institutes to promote e-learning to ensure uninterrupted university education during this prevailing situation. This timely and valuable decision should be highly appreciated because e-learning has the power to move towards more effective and efficient teaching and learning process in any situation, if we use it correctly with a clear understanding. However, in the Sri Lankan higher education sector, E-learning is still at the initial stage. Therefore, to help you to understand more on the e-learning environment, I decided to share the meaning of e-learning and to inform you on how to make e-learning a success. What is e-learning? E-learning is a very broad, inclusive term for learning which occurs through the medium of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Different terms are used to describe learning through ICT and these terms provide different/varying meanings – they are not synonyms. Commonly used terms are;

Digital teaching and learning (DTL),

Virtual learning communities (VLC),

Technology enhanced learning (TEL),

Mobile learning, web-based learning,

Online learning, distributed learning,

Computer assisted instruction (also called computer-based training or internet-based learning),

Computer mediated communication,

Virtual classrooms,

I-campus

Computer-driven interactive communication.

The term electronic learning represents as “e-learning”. However, due to these inconsistencies of terms and their meanings, there are diverse and conflicting definitions of e-learning. This makes it difficult to find a single definition of e-learning. As studied by researchers, it is a risk in adopting an inclusive definition of e-learning because e-learning definition connects its different elements and features, which can obstruct the understanding of the concept. Therefore, following definitions can be selected as an appropriate definition of e-learning based on technological and teaching/learning perspectives.

The Commonwealth of Learning who empowers individuals through learning that leads to economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation, defines e-learning as “using information and communication technologies (or ICT) to expand access to education and to enhance and transform teaching and learning”. E-learning is part of a teaching and learning continuum that starts with face-to-face teaching in support of the use of information and communication technologies (ICT)

at one end and fully online distance learning at the other end. As we move along the continuum from fully face-to-face teaching, technology is used to replace the face-to-face elements. Initially, this has very little impact on how teaching is organized and how learning occurs because the technology is used primarily to enhance the face-to-face teaching. But as we move further along the continuum, the nature of teaching and how it is organized is increasingly affected by the use of ICT. In a blended learning environment, fewer face-to-face sessions are held as technology is used increasingly to deliver teaching and to facilitate learning. And the nature of the face-to-face sessions changes. Instead of coming to class to listen to a teacher, students come to discuss, and to work and collaborate in small groups. Once we reach the right end of the continuum there is no longer any face-to-face teaching and we have fully online learning in which all teaching is technology-mediated. During this interim crisis period, fully online teaching and learning is expected to continue with a collaborative and constructivist perspective. The educational institutes around the world are shifting towards to more constructivist approaches because they understood that the new ways of teaching and learning are required to meet the needs of a new generation of learners i.e. digital natives. Sri Lanka also understood the importance of new pedagogy to move towards student-centered and activity-based teaching and modern assessment. By doing this, students will benefit from modern pedagogical and assessment methods via online.

How to make e-learning sustain and success? Most of higher education institutes in Sri Lanka use their own Learning Management Systems (LMS) as an e-learning method which mostly apply as a supplementary tool to the face-to-face education. During the closure of universities in the light of the rapidly changing situation due to the ongoing Covid – 19 outbreaks in Sri Lanka, the University Grants Commission requested that the use of e-learning for continuing university education to students wherever possible. Therefore, continuing education through fully online mode could be a newer experience for universities, their academics as well as students. Hence, higher education institutes should use strategic dimensions to formulate and implement coherent internal and external processes in order to optimize the learning potential of integrating e-learning into their programs and courses. During this interim crisis period, we cannot expect that all universities have fulfilled the following strategic dimensions but after the prevailing situation in the country returns to normalcy, to face into any situation in near future all universities or higher education institutes should revisit and refine their strategic planning processes and plans for e-learning systematically through building the capacity of universities to drive, sustain and scale up their e-learning practices. Otherwise, due to the sudden requirement e-learning would continue somehow based on capacity of individual departments or faculties but that has limited sustainability and scalability within and across programs in the university. Therefore, it is important to adhere to the following strategic dimensions by each university for building the e-learning capacity and thereby making e-learning success.

These strategic dimensions were identified from previous research on e-learning/blended learning implementation.

1. A clear vision should be grounded in the institution's philosophies for learning and teaching in e-learning environments. Therefore, the universities should design a shared institutional vision by anticipating the ultimate goal and outcomes they want to achieve from institutional, student, as well as academic staff perspectives.

2. Universities should empower students to be future-ready with 21st century skills like collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creativity and computational thinking, it's becoming increasingly important to equip students with the technology skills they'll need to thrive in a digital economy. Skills like cloud computing, artificial intelligence, machine learning, productivity and more are already in demand in organizations around the world, yet jobs remain unfilled, and the talent gap persists and is set to widen. Therefore, universities can no longer be places for gaining content knowledge through the transmission of PowerPoint presentations; the curriculum should therefore develop higher-order thinking and 21st century competencies at the program and course levels. As an appropriate approach to meet these curricular outcomes, e-learning must therefore be pedagogically appropriate.

3. Academic staff has a crucial role for the successful implementation of e-learning. Although academics are experts in their respective fields, they may not have the expertise and experience to plan for and implement e-learning in their courses. Hence, the introduction of e-learning challenges academic staff to rethink their roles in a technology-enhanced learning environment. Therefore, universities should definitely provide continuing professional development for e-learning.

4. Although today's students can be branded as "Digital Natives", it has to be accepted that not all university students own digital devices that support e-learning. However, to support such university students, a couple of years back the Sri Lankan government has introduced laptop loan scheme. This is a special offer that provides an interest free bank loan of Rs. 75,000 to all government university students to purchase a computer of their choice. On the other hand, students mostly use technology for the purposes of entertainment and communication. They lacked experience of using technology for learning, generating and constructing knowledge. Therefore, providing learning support such as technical support and educational guidance to use technological tools strategically for their learning is essential.

5. The integration of e-learning into current learning and teaching practices in higher education requires establishing an appropriate plan for technological infrastructure, facilities, and technical and service support. Lack of knowledge of pedagogy, lack of understanding of how technology and content influence and constrain one another, and how teaching and learning change when particular technologies are used are all perceived to have a strong influence on academics' technology integration. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has instructed the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka (TRCSL) to provide free Internet facilities for all

undergraduates in State universities, who had registered for e-learning. This is timely important decision, so students may without interruption continue with their education. Not only during the crisis period but in everyday life, providing equity of access to IT/ICT, supplying rural broadband services, establishing National broadband policy, and decreasing cost of access to internet and other technologies are important to upscale e-learning opportunities.

6. National and institutional level policies are essential for organizational change and development. Universities should formulate an e-learning master plan and corresponding policies, specific guidelines and mechanisms to promote academics staff to engage in e-learning. This will help each university to promote and motivate their all academic staff members to use e-learning equally and equity, otherwise those who have capacity and self-interested on e-learning will only engage with it and other academics may eliminate from e-learning.

7. In terms of e-learning, university should build up two types of partnership: internal and external. Internal partnership encompasses inter-faculty collaboration for working together with the technology and teaching to promote and support e-learning. External partnership includes public and private sector collaboration to access and explore different learning technologies and shape the direction of future e-learning practices in universities with industry experts.

8. E-learning practices have to informed and driven by research and evaluation because revisions and modifications are always mandatory for the quality improvement of learning and teaching in universities. As informed by previous research, pilot projects need to be conducted to test possibilities and potentials before moving to large-scale implementation of e-learning is deliberated. This kind of pilot projects may help universities to identify and address potential problems and evaluate academic staff and students' reactions to a new initiative before moving to its large-scale implementation. However, due to the urgency of current situation in Sri Lanka we should continue e-learning without thinking whether we did the pilot project or not. After the prevailing situation in the country returns to normalcy, we should consider this as a pilot project to identify issues and academics and students' reactions. So that we will be able to implement successful e-learning program in near future under any circumstances. The above mentioned strategic dimensions allow universities or higher education institutes to reflect upon their existing e-learning strategies, identify gaps in these strategies with respect to their vision for how e-learning may enhance learning and teaching and possibly develop new strategies or revise existing ones to address these gaps. There is no argument that e-learning is the best solution for education in the prevailing situation in the country due to COVID-19. Therefore, we should take this situation as a lesson to go forward with e-learning. (The writer is a Digital Teaching and Learning Technologist and Head/Senior Lecturer, Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya)

From <http://www.dailynews.lk> 09/30/2020

Central-West Asia

Azerbaijan, China's Alibaba Mull Cooperation in E-Commerce, Logistics

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies of Azerbaijan held discussions on logistics, e-commerce and internet technologies with "Alibaba Group", the Chinese giant multinational technology company, the ministry said on September 1. During the video meeting with representatives of "Alibaba Group" with the participation of Minister of Transport, Communications and High Technologies Ramin Guluzade, discussions were held on the establishment of logistics and relevant warehousing infrastructure in Azerbaijan, opportunities for cooperation in the data centre and "cloud" infrastructure, e-commerce and other areas. Besides, the sides also agreed to establish a working group on cooperation. Addressing the event, Guluzade stressed the importance of establishing and developing cooperation with "Alibaba Group". He said that various projects are being implemented in the country to develop the information society, increase the ICT knowledge of the population, and promote the use of electronic services.

Furthermore, the minister noted that the concept of "Government Cloud "(G-cloud) was adopted by the Presidential Decree dated June 3, 2019, on measures to create a "government cloud "(G-cloud) and provide "cloud" services. Furthermore, Guluzade said that since 2016, Azerbaijan's Postal Service "Azerpoçt" LLC has been implementing a regional transit postal centre (HUB) project to implement international e-commerce. As part of the project, e-commerce products ordered by "Azerpoçt" LLC from China have been received by Azerbaijan's Silk Way Airlines and imported to the country, processed as a mail and delivered to CIS and other countries since 2016. At the meeting, a presentation on the company's "Alibaba Cloud Computing" and "Tmall.com" divisions has been held by a representative of "Alibaba Group". It should be noted that "Alibaba Group" provides sale services from consumer to consumer (C2C), from business to consumer (B2C) and from business to business (B2B) through web portals, including electronic payment services, search engines and cloud computing services.

Representatives of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Azerbaijani Embassy China attended the meeting, and "Alibaba Group" representatives Sami Farhad, Director General of the Globalization Office, Laurie Luo, Director of International Government and Public Relations, Shi Feng, Deputy Director, General Manager of the Digital Public Sector, and Tony Chen, Deputy Director of External Relations, "Tmall" Imports and Exports attended the meeting. It should be noted that earlier, on April 7, the founder of "Alibaba Group" Jack Ma and Alibaba foundations sent humanitarian aid to Azerbaijan as part of the fight against COVID-19 pandemic.

Azerbaijani Economy Ministry: Digitalization - Important Component of Economic Dev't

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that now new technologies, innovation, and digitalization are an important component of economic development, Deputy Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan Rovshan Najaf said Trend reports. Najaf made the remark at a webinar organized by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) within the 53rd Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors on the 'Results and development ways' topic. The deputy minister said that the countries of Central Asia should expand economic ties. During the meeting, the important role of digitalization during the pandemic was discussed. Digitalization can actually create conditions for the expansion of various industries, such as electricity, transport, food transportation, economics, trade, and, finally, attracting investment. The deputy minister believes that attracting investments is also extremely important for the region and this can be realized through partnerships between the public and private sectors. "ADB and Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program are following these initiatives and countries should prioritize foreign investment in attractive infrastructure projects. Since there was a budget cut in the pandemic period, the use of private investment in this area will be quite effective," noted Najaf. "In addition, simplification of procedures in transport, transit and logistics transportation using digital platforms will surely accelerate the transportation of goods between countries," Najaf added. During the webinar, the parties exchanged their views on the promotion of regional cooperation during the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a negative impact on global and regional trade.

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Digital Growth: Working Towards Gender Equality in IT in Azerbaijan

Social stratification is a natural process, and no country has been able entirely to overcome it. Even if we consider the Internet as a means of accessing the information on an equal basis for all, gaps remain in the digital space, whether gender, social, or cultural. The situation in Azerbaijan is as follows: women are actively involved in the development of the information society and the digital economy. They are active users of information technologies (IT), but they rarely act as producers. Men still occupy the highest positions in the tech sector. IT will play an important role in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. Technology allows women and girls to access information and resources that are

important for their work and participation in public life. By gaining access to IT, women will have more opportunities to express their views in society, government, and globally. It also gives women real-time freedom of action, which can be of particular value to women in situations of social exclusion.

In the modern age, there are tremendous opportunities for the development of the digital economy. Countries all over the world have developed strategies in this direction. But in recent years, gender equality in the digital economy has also been highlighted as an important factor. Special attention is paid to it in Azerbaijan as well, with women playing an important role in IT. Women now account for 29.7% of the 26,500 employees working in the field. The number of women using technologies is on the rise every year. For example, nowadays 47% of employees who use the Internet are women. Women are actively involved in social media. In Azerbaijan, 34% of Facebook users and 36% of Instagram users are women. The country has special platforms for women. The Girls Code platform is an example of this. This aims to ensure women's active participation in the IT sector, building successful careers, reducing gender inequality in the IT sector, and further increasing the number of women in this field. Currently, more than 1,000 women are members of this platform, which has held several pieces of training and awareness-raising events. "As you can see, there is gender inequality in all sectors in the world.

It is important to solve this problem. Women's involvement in ICT can strengthen and stimulate economic growth. Women are not only a labor force, but they also add new and different skills to jobs and increase productivity. Women can add more creative elements, a more comprehensive approach to this sector", - said Rashad Azizov, head of the Innovations and Digital Development Department of the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and High Technologies. He noted that in general, the legal framework covering the gender issue is in place both at international and national levels. Azerbaijan has signed up to international conventions guaranteeing gender equality and women's rights, and equal rights and opportunities for men and women are enshrined in the constitution and law. "To develop the ecosystem, the first step is to raise the level of coordination. The ecosystem currently consists of government agencies, higher education institutions, non-governmental organizations, gender resource centers, and training centers. It is believed that a platform is needed to strengthen the coordination here.

The second step is to hold a Women's ICT Forum and discuss the current situation, problems, and expectations," Azizov noted. Increasing women's access to the digital economy To this end, the ICT LAB Application and Education Centre in Azerbaijan has implemented a project called "Digital Girls", a national education program with the assistance of UNESCO. The goal of the project is to reduce the digital gender divide, develop women's digital skills, and support the personal development of women in the country. As part of the project, 560 students and young girls were trained in digital skills and computer technology, personal development

skills, and ways to achieve success using these skills. The girls also learned about the possibilities of building a successful career in the ICT field. The pieces of training were organized at schools in Baku and Khirdalan, as well as in Agdam, Shamakhi, Mingachevir, Zagatala, Gabala, Agdash, and Shabran.

Shabnam Mammadova, the co-founder of the ICT Women's Club, which trains and educates women on innovation, believes there is a stereotype in Azerbaijan that technology is not a women's business, and that women should not be involved in innovation. "Every woman should believe in herself. Regardless of their jobs, women need to develop the confidence that they can become strong professionals in this field. Regardless of what society thinks or what stereotypes it has, women need to have self-confidence. The field of information technology is changing rapidly. A technology that was relevant yesterday may lose its relevance today. To do this, we need to keep up with rapidly changing trends. The skills should be constantly advanced", - Mammadova noted. She believes the main thing that leads to success is the presence of a goal. "To achieve success without a goal is unreal. You need to know where you are going. The second key factor is discipline. The goal can have a 'wow' effect, but without discipline, the desired result will not be achieved. Another important factor leading to success is teamwork. Correct teamwork and communication.

Because the idea and goal can be very bright, but if there is no correct communication with people and the team, there is no success in this direction" - Mammadova said. Mammadova believes that in recent years, information technology has become more accessible even for women living in remote villages. This made it easier for women to access the Internet, social media, and various web platforms. Women are increasingly interested in IT, and recent years have seen a positive trend towards an increase in the participation of women in information technology. "Women's ability to think creatively and critically is a sign of success. In terms of technology, women have the skills, and their success is quickly seen. I am a co-founder of Femmes Digitales, which brings together top technology executives in the country. During the last six years, hackathons, pieces of training, workshops took place in Baku and in the regions covering various topics, to generate interest in IT among girls who are on the verge of choosing a profession, gaining knowledge and success in this area, turning ideas into a business," Mammadova said.

EU support for the digital economy and society The European Union is also supporting this effort through its EU4Digital Initiative. EU4Digital supports the development of the digital economy and society across the Eastern Partnership region – including Azerbaijan – as a key catalyst for economic growth and jobs. Areas of support range from developing high-speed broadband to building cybersecurity, developing skills, and creating more jobs in the digital industry. Women are particularly important to the digital industry, says EU4Digital's ICT Innovation expert Anna Pobol: "The increased participation of women in the ICT

domain has the potential to further boost the economy, not just by simply adding women to the workforce (through the reduction of barriers to entry), but because women add new skills to the workplace, which results in productivity and growth increase.” She cited a recent IMF staff study, which found that women and men do not substitute, but rather complement each other in the production process, creating an additional benefit from increasing women’s employment in growth. “In other words, adding more women to the labor force would normally bring bigger economic benefits than the scenario where an equal increase in male workers occurs.” Pobol said EU4Digital sought to involve women in all of its ongoing activities, specifically targeting the needs of women in networking and training.

“Our newly-launched WomenGoTech activity supports women aiming to find their place in a digital economy,” she added. The activity supports women’s tech mentorship programs and seeks to empower local beneficiaries to launch such programs in their own countries, including Azerbaijan. Last month, the project brought together more than 15 experts from Eastern partner countries for a virtual training that highlighted barriers and challenges for women to participate in the tech sector, as well as existing initiatives to increase female participation in tech-intensive workplaces. Shabnam Mammadova from the ICT Women’s Club said feedback from women who took part in pieces of training under the ‘Digital Girls’ project last year showed the experience had played a big role in their lives. Their interest in IT changed their vision. Even if they had not ended up working in IT, they understood the importance of applying technology. Mammadova agreed that gender equality was not just about stacking up the numbers of women in the workplace: “I know women who have special skills. For example, there are women in data analytics, women working to shape new solutions and digital services. The encouraging trend is that in the last 3-4 years there has been a very positive trend in planning women’s IT careers. I think the number of IT specialists will increase in the near future”, - she said.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 09/23/2020

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Electronic Water Portal launched in Azerbaijan

Following the decree of Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev ‘On some measures in the field of providing electronic services of state bodies’, the Electronic Water Portal of Azersu OJSC has been launched, the company told Trend. “This system is used for the first time in the housing sector,” said Emil Ahmadov, Head of the electronic management and modern technologies department of Azersu OJSC. The portal has been available to citizens since September 2020. Many electronic services offered by Azersu OJSC are integrated on a single portal platform. This system is also important in terms of minimizing communication between citizens and officials. Access to the Electronic Water Portal is carried out through the Asan Login. After

entering the system, the subscriber's code, his/her phone number, and e-mail address are recorded. Taking into account that the system is integrated into the e-government portal when registering, information about the user immediately appears in the system. Via the portal, users can get notifications and pay for services for the use of drinking water and wastewater disposal. At the same time, subscribers can receive information about all their payments through the system.

The portal also helps to clarify controversial issues related to future payments. Through the portal's "population" group on the portal, consumers can be notified by providing readings from mechanical meters. It will further be possible to purchase technical specifications, check water samples, and register new users. The system also allows tracking the status of execution of requests addressed to Azersu OJSC. Thus, citizens can follow online the execution of their appeals to the department from the date of their submission. They will also be able to receive information on the current stage of the appeal, the date of the last execution, and on the responsible persons. In the case that additional time is required to consider applications, the citizen is informed about this online. The portal created the possibility of "online chat" for citizens who can use this opportunity around the clock. Currently, some services of the system are active in pilot mode. The portal regularly works to expand the range of services provided. Its mobile version will be launched in 2021.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 09/25/2020

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UZBEKISTAN: Rosatom Intends to Launch Data Processing Center

Rosatom plans to launch data processing centers (DPCs) in Uzbekistan and Turkey. This was reported by the Director of Economics and Finance of the Rosenergoatom concern (part of Rosatom») Sergey Migalin. Rosatom has already started construction of a data center in Innopolis. Some "several billion rubles "will be invested in server equipment and deployment of the virtual environment and commercial cloud of Rosatom.

From <https://uzreport.news/> 09/14/2020

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Int'l Road Transport Union Supports Transport Infrastructure Digitalization in Uzbekistan

The upgrading of border crossings with Afghanistan and Kazakhstan is a result of Uzbek government support for the road transport sector and of the valuable contribution of International Road Transport Union's (IRU), of which Association of International Road Carriers of Uzbekistan (AIRCUZ) is a member, Senior Manager of

Content and Media Relations of IRU Marina Iordan told Trend in an interview. Moreover, according to her, IRU sees merit in the upgrading of border crossings with Afghanistan at Termez Logistics Center and Kazakhstan at the Konysbaeva checkpoint. "IRU welcomes recent transport infrastructure developments in Uzbekistan and enjoys a positive working relationship with the Uzbek government; the sides met on July 1, 2020, to discuss further collaboration on transport digitalization and the implementation of eTIR in Central Asia," Iordan noted. According to her, sides also held a workshop on July 7, 2020, to discuss the use of eTIR in the Pakistan-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan corridor. The workshop provided a forum for key stakeholders to develop ideas and business models for the transport of goods under the International Road Transport (TIR) system. "Uzbekistan has been a strong supporter of eTIR and is spearheading its implementation in Central Asia. IRU will continue to assist Uzbekistan in its digitalization work, with a view to facilitating trade and transit for increased prosperity throughout the region," Iordan stated.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Data Suggest Economy Still on Shaky Ground

A drop in exports and a weakening construction sector suggests the economy is still on shaky ground after collapsing into recession as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Exports fell sharply in July after being one of the rare bright spots during the economy's record 7.0 per cent crash during the June quarter. Australian Bureau of Statistics data on Thursday showed the international trade balance of goods and services surplus almost halved in July to \$4.6 billion from \$8.1 billion in June. This was the result of a four per cent fall in exports in the month compared to a seven per cent surge in imports. Commonwealth Securities senior economist Ryan Felsman questioned whether the escalating political spat between Australia and China is starting to bite with rural exports falling 15.1 per cent in July, the biggest monthly decline since January 1983.

"Our largest trading partner has recently imposed tariffs, duties and anti-dumping measures on our wine, barley and beef exports," Mr Felsman said. But ANZ economists do not expect the decline in the trade surplus is the beginning of a trend because of demand from China for resources, particularly iron ore, over the coming months. National Australia Bank global head of research Ivan Colhoun said imports had weakened sharply in recent months partly because of supply chain disruptions during the pandemic. "This month's data, however, shows a strong bounce in imports, likely reflecting some recovery in supply chains," he said. New construction data also showed the industry remains in deep decline, not helped by the harsh COVID-19

restrictions in Victoria.

The Australian Industry Group/Housing Industry Association performance of construction index fell 4.8 points to 37.9, well below the 50-mark that separates contraction in the sector from expansion. "The sharp fall in activity in Victoria was a major factor in the downturn while border restrictions in other states have hampered builders and constructors who are reliant on interstate supplies and the availability of tradies from across borders," Ai Group head of policy Peter Burn said. The first recession since the early 1990s has already seen the number of people unemployed rise to over a million people and Treasury predicts a further 400,000 jobs could be lost by Christmas. But Treasurer Josh Frydenberg believes there is hope for the future and has promised to make job creation part of next month's budget. "There is a light at the end of the tunnel, and the Morrison government is absolutely committed to getting Australians back to work," he told parliament.

Even so, leading economists are bracing for a bumpy road to recovery. Westpac chief economist Bill Evans said the June quarter national accounts were "devastating but not an unexpected collapse". "Clearly we won't see another collapse in consumer spending but we have seen this movement to stage four restrictions in Victoria," Mr Evans said about the outlook for the September quarter. He expects Victoria will be a big negative on growth in the September quarter, leaving the national result broadly flat. But in the December quarter, with Victoria's restrictions wound back to a degree, it could see the national economy grow by 2.5 per cent.

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Cyber Attacks on Australia Getting Worse

Australian families and businesses are being urged to safeguard their cyber security as criminals and foreign governments ramp up attacks. A new report from the Australian Cyber Security Centre paints a grim picture of the rapidly increasing threat. National security agencies receive one report of cyber crime almost every 10 minutes. Australians lost \$634 million to scams in 2019 alone and cybercrime is estimated to cost the national economy up to \$29 billion each year. The federal government warned in June that a wide range of political and private sector organisations were coming under cyber attack from a "sophisticated state-based cyber actor". The government did not say which government was responsible, but security experts believe China, Russia and North Korea are the most likely culprits. Defence Minister Linda Reynolds said the cyber security threat continued to climb over the past few months.

"That threat has not diminished since then - in fact it has increased," Senator Reynolds told reporters. It is understood the sophistication and quantity of attacks

have both gotten worse. Calls to the cyber security centre have increased by 300 per cent since the public warning in June. Not all calls are from people targeted by specific attacks, but it is clear people are becoming more aware of the growing threat. Hackers doing the bidding of unfriendly governments are attempting to drive disinformation and meddle in the economy, politics and critical infrastructure like energy grids. "This type of activity really does blur what we previously understood to be peace and war," Senator Reynolds said. "We now call it that grey zone in between." Criminal networks operating online are aiming for low-hanging fruit. Instead of targeting confidential or highly classified information, they are sweeping up personal details to commit fraud and identify theft.

"At one end of the spectrum there are opportunistic cyber criminals who target Australians and Australian companies for financial gain," Senator Reynolds said. "At the other end of the same spectrum, there are sophisticated and very well resourced state-based actors who are seeking to interfere in our nation." The defence minister said responsibility for cyber security must be shared by all Australians. "We (the government) can observe, we can gain intelligence, we can analyse it, and we do," she said. "But ultimately, it is up to every single Australian and all companies to make sure they take the best possible protections they can." The federal government is seeking greater powers to protect private sector assets such as electricity grids, communication lines and big banks from hacking attacks. There is currently no requirement for critical infrastructure providers to report an attack.

The government wants to ensure the most serious incidents are reported to its cyber security centre, and is not ruling out introducing a mandatory system. The coalition also wants to give security agencies easier access to private sector assets during cyber attacks. The emergency powers would primarily be discharged on a voluntary basis. But the government also wants security agencies to be able to take charge when companies are unwilling to cooperate. Legislation underpinning the powers is expected to be introduced to federal parliament by the end of the year.

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Data to Show Recession Impact on Consumers

A slump in consumer and business confidence could be confirmed in coming days after confirmation last week the Australian economy is in recession for the first time since the early 1990s. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg has described the situation, which has put more than a million people out of work with the likelihood that another 400,000 will join the dole queue by the end of the year, as "devastating". The economy shrunk by an unprecedented seven per cent in the June quarter, marking the second consecutive quarter of negative growth necessary to confirm Australia is in recession. The weekly ANZ-Roy Morgan consumer confidence gauge is due on

Tuesday and the monthly Westpac-Melbourne Institute consumer sentiment survey will be released on Wednesday. Consumer confidence is a pointer to future household spending.

National Australia Bank's monthly business survey is also released on Tuesday, which economists expect will show a further drop in confidence as a result of Victoria's harsh COVID-19 restrictions. With Victoria accounting for around 25 per cent of national output, some economists are concerned the recovery from the recession could be delayed. This has put added pressure on Mr Frydenberg, who is due to hand down his delayed 2020/21 federal budget on October 6. Mr Frydenberg has already flagged the government may bring forward already legislated personal income tax to help fuel spending. But business groups and economists believe he will need to do a lot more to stimulate the economy. Market Economics managing director Stephen Koukoulas said the Reserve Bank of Australia is already setting interest rates at effectively zero.

"We have just got to throw the kitchen sink at the economy to keep people employed, to keep businesses open," he told Sky News on Sunday. The Business Council of Australia wants a 20 per cent investment allowance for all businesses, which it calculates will cost the budget \$10 billion a year. "It is about getting business investing again," the council's chief executive Jennifer Westacott told ABC television's Insiders program. "Business investment has been woeful. It is in free fall." She hasn't given up on a cut in the corporate tax cuts for big business. "We've now got a bizarre 2-tier tax system," she said. "At some point, some government in the future is going to have to deal with this." Businesses with a turnover of less than \$50 million are tracking towards a tax rate of 25 per cent, but larger businesses are stuck at 30 per cent. In the meantime, Australian shares look set to extend Friday's hefty fall with the futures market pointing to a 0.6 per cent decline on Monday.

The local market will get little help from US markets, which fell again on Friday night and ahead of Monday's US Labor Day holiday. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.6 per cent to 28,133.31, the S&P 500 lost 0.8 per cent to 3426.93, and the Nasdaq Composite dropped 1.3 per cent to 11,313.13. The Australian share market tumbled over three per cent on Friday, its biggest drop since the start of May. The S&P/ASX200 benchmark index closed down 187.1 points to 5925.5 points.

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Trade Agreements Fuel Farm Exports to Asia

Australia's free trade agreements have fuelled a rise in agricultural exports, with sharp increases in produce flowing to Asia in the past two decades. The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences on Friday released a

report into the impact of trade agreements. Australia sends more than three-quarters of its agricultural exports to Asia, up from a little over half 20 years ago. "That growth can be directly attributed to our trade within the Asian region, and indirectly with Australia's FTAs with several Asian countries, including ASEAN, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea," the report says. Asia's portion of Australia's agricultural exports has risen from about half a per cent 20 years ago to 76 per cent in 2019/20. In the same period, exports to China went from a seven per cent share to 29 per cent, while Association of Southeast Asian Nations now have an 18 per cent share.

That makes China and ASEAN Australia's two biggest farm export markets. The report found Japan and Korea remain important markets despite relatively stable demand compared to China and ASEAN. It said Australia's overlapping agreements with some countries led to greater market access and trade liberalisation. But multiple agreements can also increase complexity for exporters and increase costs where there are varied rules. ABARES also nominates agreements currently being negotiated with the European Union, UK and India as having key importance to future trade. The bureau's head of agricultural forecasting and trade Jared Greenville said 81 per cent of exported produce is now destined for countries Australia has a deal with. "The importance of FTAs to Australia's agricultural export performance cannot be overstated," he said on Friday. The value of agricultural exports to countries Australia has FTAs with is estimated to be about \$39 billion. According to the report, Australia is now among the top 15 agricultural exporters in the world, with the sector exporting about 70 per cent of production to 192 countries.

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Aged Care Funding Under Inquiry Spotlight

Former prime minister Paul Keating is expected to speak about financial reforms needed to support aged care in Australia at a royal commission probing the sector. The inquiry will from Monday examine funding models and the most appropriate ways to support delivery and regulation of aged care. An independent report released by the aged care royal commission last week found there is not enough transparency in the sector's use of government and client funds. It found the sector had received about \$25 billion in government and consumer funds in 2018/19. The commission will also examine how the sector is regulated and if changes can be made to ensure greater sustainability, stability and transparency. Mr Keating is listed to give evidence on Monday, with former treasurer Peter Costello to speak on Wednesday as part of the seven-day Sydney-based hearing. It is set to hear from 43 witnesses, including consumer bodies, aged care providers with different scale and operating models, as well as economists and the sector regulator. Professors from Japan and the Netherlands will speak about the lessons Australia can learn from

other countries. The federal government is under pressure over its handling of the sector amid the COVID-19 pandemic and deadly outbreaks at nursing homes.

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Job Figures to Highlight Budget Challenge

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg will get a better idea of the jobs challenge he faces as he puts his delayed budget together when labour force figures are released this week. The government says the budget - due to be delivered on October 6 after being delayed from its traditional May release - will have a "singular focus" on jobs. Economists expect Thursday's August job figures will show the unemployment rate ticking up to 7.7 per cent, its highest level in 22 years as a result of the restrictions being put in place earlier this year to limit the spread of COVID-19. The jobless rate has already jumped from 5.1 per cent in February to 7.5 per cent in July as the coronavirus pandemic forced the economy into recession for the first time since the early 1990s. The number of people in employment as of August is expected to fall by around 35,000, ending two months of exceptionally strong increases as restrictions were unwound, only to be thwarted by a second COVID-19 wave in Victoria which triggered a harsh lockdown.

There are varying views where the unemployment rate will end up, with Westpac economists expecting a peak of around eight per cent in coming months, while National Australia Bank is looking at 10 per cent early next year. The Treasury and the Reserve Bank have also pencilled in 10 per cent as a peak, but by the end of this year. The central bank will release the minutes of its September 1 board meeting on Tuesday. At that meeting the board agreed to leave the cash rate at a record low of 0.25 per cent, while extending its term funding facility to support the banking system during the crisis. Tuesday will also see the release of the weekly consumer confidence index - a pointer to future retail spending. Last week, the ANZ-Roy Morgan confidence index rose one per cent, despite confirmation the economy had slumped into recession, although the survey was taken before Victoria announced an extension of its harsh lockdown.

Meanwhile, Australian shares look set for an uninspired opening following on from a mixed finish on Wall Street on Friday, with technology stocks there again under attack after early gains. Australian shares fell a fourth straight week after the S&P/ASX200 benchmark index dropped by a further 0.8 per cent to 5859.4 on Friday. The All Ordinaries index also lost 0.8 per cent to 6038.9. Australian SPI futures finished with a modest four point gain at 5852, after trading a 5864-5813 range. In the US, the Dow Jones Industrial Average closed up 0.5 per cent to 27,665.64, the S&P 500 gained 0.05 per cent to 3,340.97 and the Nasdaq Composite dropped 0.6 per cent to 10,853.55.

Jobs Market Still Challenging: Frydenberg

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg concedes Australia's labour market is still challenging despite a surprise fall in unemployment. The jobless rate unexpectedly fell to 6.8 per cent in August, bucking widespread predictions of a slight rise. "The labour market is still very challenging," Mr Frydenberg told Sky News on Friday. "There is a lot of uncertainty out there in the economy - not just here in Australia but globally - and that's a reflection of the nature of the virus." Roughly 111,000 people gained employment in August, the third month of exceptionally strong results. Over half the massive jobs losses in April and May have been recovered. However such strength masked a 42,400 drop in employment numbers in Victoria, where restrictions remain. Mr Frydenberg, a Victorian MP, said businesses in the state were still hard hit by lockdowns.

"I'm hoping and the prime minister is hoping those restrictions can be eased as quickly as it is COVID-safe to do so," he said. "Once that happens more business will reopen, more people will get back to work and that will be good news for the overall economy." Australian Industry Group chief executive Innes Willox said while the latest job figures were promising, he expected the next six months to be tough as people wean their businesses off JobKeeper wage subsidies. "So we might be in for a rough ride here," Mr Willox said. "People do have to start trying to find their way back into the workforce, employers need to start to be able to find ways to employ again." Trade Minister Simon Birmingham admits the economic recovery won't be plain sailing. "That's why our plan for the budget handed down next month is all about jobs," Senator Birmingham told Nine.

"Jobs driven by infrastructure, by skills, by taxes, by making sure that all systems of the economy we make as efficient and as effective as possible to create even more of those jobs." Senator Birmingham, who is tipped to replace Finance Minister Mathias Cormann when he retires at the end of the year, reaffirmed the government was looking at bringing forward legislated tax cuts.

Gas Fires Up Labor Union Energy Plan Rift

A rift is brewing between Labor and a major union over the role of gas in Australia's future. Australian Workers' Union national secretary Daniel Walton wants Labor to embrace natural gas as a transition fuel to help support more renewable sources.

That position would put the opposition in line with the government, which is planning a gas-fired economic recovery out of the coronavirus pandemic. "Instead of continuing to impotently hedge, Labor must embrace gas and we must explain why," Mr Walton wrote in Nine newspapers on Friday. "Spewing out environmental buzzwords about the evils of fossil fuels while refusing to take a hard position just isn't good enough. "Labor needs to tell a good economic story on energy and it needs a good economic storyteller to step up. Any more equivocating is not just morally indefensible, it's strategically moronic."

Labor's energy spokesman Mark Butler ruffled some feathers within the party this week by saying Australia's future prosperity can't be based on coal and gas. The main critic within Labor is its resources spokesman Joel Fitzgibbon, who wants the opposition to embrace gas to help manufacturing. But debate within the party has become tense, with Labor frontbencher Mark Dreyfus reportedly calling Mr Fitzgibbon "the idiot for Hunter" in debate over its energy policy. Labor has not finalised its official energy policy but frontbenchers were on Friday quick to express their support for gas in the short term. "Gas will have a role to play but the future is overwhelmingly renewable," shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers told the ABC.

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Net Zero by 2050 'Life or Death Deadline'

Australia is under increasing global pressure to adopt a target of net zero emissions by 2050, with the Fijian prime minister labelling the goal a matter of life or death. Frank Bainimarama is an outspoken advocate for climate action and says while the coronavirus pandemic has crippled economies, climate change is more devastating. "Any later than 1st January 2050 will be too late to achieve net zero emissions," he told a Smart Energy Council forum on Wednesday. "These aren't aimless targets, they are life or death deadlines backed by science. "This isn't about focusing on words over deeds, quite the contrary. Clearly-stated plans and meaningful actions aren't mutually exclusive." Prime Minister Scott Morrison has rejected calls to adopt a net zero emissions goal by 2050, instead pushing the target into the second half of the century. Mr Morrison has said he is "more focused on the doing".

Mr Bainimarama also urged countries to use the coronavirus recovery to transition to clean energy, saying its far-reaching benefits will span generations. He praised Jacinda Ardern for pledging to reach 100 per cent renewable energy by 2030. "Our neighbours in New Zealand get it," Mr Bainimarama said. The Business Council of Australia is also urging the Morrison government to adopt the 2050 target. Labor has committed to net zero by 2050 but doesn't have an interim goal. The party's energy spokesman Mark Butler concedes Labor has a lot of work to do to develop its suite of policies for the next election. "I certainly see my job as continuing to articulate as

often as I can, as loudly as I can, Australia's opportunity and responsibility, frankly, to be a renewable energy superpower." China recently committed to net zero emissions by 2060, which former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull believes will spur more investment in renewable projects.

He criticised the government's gas-fired recovery plan, saying the \$4 per gigajoule goal was unrealistic. "There are people who are trying to persuade the government to literally spend billions and billions of dollars to pay for infrastructure to in effect subsidise gas," Mr Turnbull said. "And that is what is bonkers. Because it's a transitional fuel and we run the real risk that you'll be funding what will become inevitably stranded assets." Mr Turnbull says the government must focus on regional areas that rely on coal generators, which will inevitably close. Meanwhile, a stocktake commissioned by the Australian Conservation Foundation shows there were more than 27,000 full-time jobs in renewable energy and 58,000 jobs in energy efficiency last year. While clean energy makes up just a fifth of electricity supply, it has more jobs compared to electricity generation by coal (12,167) or gas and oil (22,003).

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5、 Public Finance

Asia-Pacific

Tax Inspectors Without Borders: Supporting Developing Countries to Increase Tax Revenues Despite COVID-19 Challenges

The international community continues to make progress towards strengthening developing countries' ability to effectively tax multinational enterprises, despite the adverse impact of the COVID-19 crisis on domestic resource mobilisation efforts. Tax Inspectors Without Borders (TIWB), a joint OECD/UNDP initiative launched in July 2015 to strengthen developing countries' auditing capacity and multinationals' compliance worldwide, has gained increased relevance in the COVID-19 era as a practical tool to help developing countries collect all the taxes due from multinational enterprises. To-date, TIWB assistance has delivered more than USD 537 million in additional revenue for developing countries up to June 2020, according to its latest annual report. The report was presented today by OECD Secretary-General, Angel Gurría, and United Nations Development Programme Administrator, Achim Steiner, during a ministerial panel discussion in the margins of the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly. The meeting was co-hosted by the Permanent Mission of

Finland to the United Nations, the OECD and UNDP.

With programmes across Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the TIWB initiative has 80 completed and ongoing programmes in 45 countries and jurisdictions worldwide. An additional 19 programmes have been requested and are in the pipeline. The report notes strong support from a broad range of partners, including regional and international organisations, as well as key donors of official development assistance (ODA). Sixteen countries have deployed their serving tax officials to provide hands-on, learning-by-doing assistance to auditors in developing countries. Among the partner administrations are those engaged in South-South co-operation including India, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria and South Africa. The success of the current TIWB model has also triggered the expansion of the initiative on tax crime investigations and the use of information exchanged automatically between governments, both of which will help fight Illicit Financial Flows. New programmes will also cover tax treaty negotiations, the extractives and environmental tax issues. "Despite the constraints that the COVID-19 crisis has imposed, the TIWB initiative remains fully 'open for business' thanks to measures instituted to support experts in continuing to deliver assistance remotely," said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. "Not only are we open, but we are extending the TIWB focus to provide support in other areas of taxation to fight against corruption and promote integrity." "Tax Inspectors Without Borders is playing a key role in helping developing countries to recover from the pandemic - their new service aims at increasing domestic revenues while supporting the transition to greener, more sustainable economies," said Mr Steiner, UNDP Administrator.

In his address to the meeting, H.E. Ville Skinnari, Finland's Minister for Development Co-operation and Foreign Trade, said "I congratulate UNDP, OECD and the wider UN-system to promote tax justice and domestic resource mobilisation. We have done our homework in Finland, too: In June this year we launched Government of Finland's new Taxation for Development Action Programme." To lead TIWB into this new phase of expansion, the Former Vice Minister of Finance of Georgia, Ms. Rusudan Kemularia, has been appointed Head of the TIWB Secretariat. Prior to joining the OECD, Ms. Kemularia also worked as a Rector of the Finance Academy, Head of the Legal and Financial Policy Departments, Secretary to the Parliament, and Co-Chair of the Tax Dispute Resolution Counsel from 2008-2019 in Georgia. Watch the TIWB ministerial panel discussion on 'Supporting Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond Through the Tax Inspectors Without Borders Initiative' Access the TIWB Annual Report 2020. For further information, please contact the TIWB Secretariat or Lawrence Speer in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 45 24 79 70), or Sangita Khadka at UNDP (+1 212 906 5043).

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More Efforts Needed from Governments, Regulators and Business to Unlock Full Potential of Sustainable Finance

Governments and regulators should urgently work together to improve the data used for environmental, social and governance (ESG) investing, according to a new OECD report. The OECD Business and Finance Outlook 2020 says that ESG investing has grown steadily in recent years, with ESG ratings, indices and other financial products proliferating to meet demand. Yet market participants across the board are still missing the relevant, comparable and verifiable ESG data they need to properly conduct due diligence, manage risks, measure outcomes, and align investments with sustainable, long-term value. “Finance has a critical role to play in ensuring a truly sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that will create better and greener jobs, boost income and lead to more sustainable and resilient growth,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. “But finance can only deliver better environmental, social or governance outcomes if investors have the tools and information they need.” The Outlook highlights a number of challenges with current ESG-based investment and finance strategies that need to be fixed to support markets in building back better. Close engagement on the part of regulators and policymakers with the industry, including institutional investors and lenders, ratings and index providers, and international standard setters, will be critical.

The different methodologies used vary in scope and tend to have low transparency, with few generally accepted, consistent, comparable and verifiable indicators on which to base assessments. In practice, this means that a company might achieve a high ESG score from one service provider, and a much lower score from another. This fragmentation and lack of comparability means investors cannot properly assess companies’ performance on ESG-related investment goals, such as limiting exposure to carbon emissions. This means that current practices cannot be relied on to manage climate transition risks and to green the financial system, at a time when these are rising priorities for investors and policymakers alike. Fragmented ESG frameworks and inconsistent disclosure requirements also mean that both institutional investors and corporates cannot properly communicate on their ESG-related decisions, strategies and performance criteria, with beneficiaries and shareholders. This in turn makes it hard for such beneficiaries to assess how their savings are used, and for companies to attract financing at a competitive cost that fully considers ESG factors.

Market supervisors have a big role to play by encouraging greater relevance and clarity in reporting frameworks for ESG disclosures. This includes transparency on how metrics are calculated, weighted and interpreted in the assessments of ESG performance. Most urgent, according to the Outlook, is the development of a common set of global principles and guidelines for consistent, comparable and verifiable ESG data. The report also highlights other priorities for boosting ESG investing. These include putting in place guidelines to enable banks to scale up ESG

integration and due diligence in their lending; the role state enterprise ownership should play in driving better ESG outcomes; and ensuring fiduciaries such as asset managers and boards better manage material ESG risk, including when investments are exposed to longer-term sustainability risks, as in the case of infrastructure financing. Also released today by the OECD's New Approaches to Economic Challenges (NAEC) team, The Financial System brings together a range of experts to discuss how to improve financial resilience. For further information, journalists are invited to contact Spencer Wilson in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 45 24 97 00). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/29/2020

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Donors Agree Replenishment of More Than \$4 Billion for ADB's Grant Funds

Donors have agreed to a replenishment in excess of \$4 billion for the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Asian Development Fund (ADF) 13 and Technical Assistance Special Fund (TASF) 7, for the 4-year period from 2021 to 2024. The total size of the replenishment represents a 7% increase in comparison to the previous replenishment, which covered the 2017–2020 period. Total resources are allocated between ADF 13 and TASF 7: about \$3.5 billion and about \$0.5 billion, respectively. Of the total replenishment size, more than \$2.3 billion, or 58%, will be funded by contributions from 30 donors including 2 new donors: Azerbaijan and the Philippines. The remaining \$1.7 billion, or 42%, will be funded by internal resources, including net income transfers from ADB's ordinary capital resources and income from ADF's liquidity investment. The total replenishment size is expected to increase further as three more donors confirm their pledges. ADF is the largest special fund of ADB and finances grant operations in its poorest and most vulnerable members. The fund is replenished every 4 years. "We highly appreciate our donors' support for ADF 13 and TASF 7, even as their own economies are under pressure from the heavy health and economic toll of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic," said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa. "Our assistance will be critical in responding to the COVID-19 crisis and building an inclusive and sustainable recovery in the poorest and most vulnerable countries of the region."

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a devastating toll in terms of human lives and health, jobs, growth, and economic progress in Asia and the Pacific. Gains in reducing poverty are threatened, inequalities will increase, and progress against the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are likely to be set back, especially in low income countries which include fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCAS) and small island developing states (SIDS). To help these countries cope with the crisis and ensure robust sustainable and inclusive recovery, ADF grants together with

ADB's concessional loans will deliver more than \$16 billion in assistance to the poorest and most vulnerable members in 2021–2024. ADF 13 will be the first ADF round to support implementation of ADB's corporate strategy—Strategy 2030—during its full cycle and will fund key agendas in eligible countries, which include a majority of FCAS, such as Afghanistan, and SIDS. For the first time, ADF will include a thematic sub-window to incentivize governments to consider ambitious projects significantly supporting regional cooperation and integration; regional public goods such as regional health security, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation; and SDG 5's transformative gender agenda.

Other priority areas targeted in ADF 13 include quality infrastructure in line with the G20's principles, strong governance, development of private sector operations, and debt sustainability through the implementation of the Sustainable Development Finance Policy, in close coordination with the International Development Association (IDA) and the International Monetary Fund, which will also improve debt transparency. All of these special areas become even more relevant in the context of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. TASF 7 will continue to support capacity building, policy advice, and knowledge production and will have an increased focus on how to help ADF and concessional lending countries strengthen debt sustainability. The replenishment meeting was held on the eve of the second stage of ADB's 53rd Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors, held this year over two days in a virtual and abbreviated format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Other events held on 16 September included a meeting of the Governors of Pacific Developing Member Countries, an ADB Institute webinar on the Economic Impacts of COVID-19 in Asia, and the 15th informal meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Finance Ministers. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/16/2020

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ADB Approves \$1 Million Grant to Build Disease Resilient and Energy Efficient Centralized Air-Conditioning Systems

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$1 million knowledge and support technical assistance project to deploy smart, energy efficient, and disease resilient centralized air-conditioning (CAC) systems in its developing member countries (DMCs). This will help to improve energy efficiency and mitigate the risks of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and other airborne viruses in public buildings. Studies suggest that viruses such as the one causing COVID-19 can survive in the air for several hours, and droplet transmission can be prompted by

air-conditioned ventilation while standard CAC systems are not effective in filtering viruses and other pathogens. Additionally, up to 50% of the energy consumed in public buildings in developing Asian cities is used by inefficient CACs, which are often old and not regularly maintained. CACs also rely heavily on hydrofluorocarbons, a greenhouse gas potentially thousands of times more potent than carbon dioxide. ADB's project will focus on proper design and operation of CAC systems to prevent virus transmission through advanced solutions and technologies such as high-efficiency particulate filtration, proper humidification, and ultraviolet air purification to reduce airborne contaminants. These technologies will be integrated with smart digital control systems to reduce energy consumption and disease transmission risks associated with operating CAC systems. Studies suggest that technology can help to reduce the energy consumption of air conditioners by up to 45%.

“While the threat of climate change has been clear for some time, humanity has also had to confront a once-in-a-century pandemic this year,” said ADB Energy Sector Group Chief Yongping Zhai. “Improving resilience to diseases and mitigating climate change are priorities for our developing members. This project will help address both health- and climate-related concerns associated with air-conditioning systems in public buildings and help to make cities more livable.” The project will also improve knowledge and build capacity among ADB’s developing members on energy efficiency and virus transmission risk of CACs in typical public buildings, and pilot smart digital technologies in CACs in selected developing members. The project will be financed by the High-Level Technology Fund and the Clean Energy Fund under the Clean Energy Financing Partnership Facility, both of which will each provide a \$500,000 grant. The project complements ADB’s \$20 billion assistance announced on 13 April to help its developing members manage the COVID-19 pandemic and the bank’s climate change mitigation programs. ADB is targeting \$80 billion in cumulative climate financing from its own resources by 2030 and for at least 75% of its country operations to feature climate adaptation and mitigation initiatives. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

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ADB Sells \$4 Billion Dual-Tranche 3- and 10-Year Global Benchmark Bonds

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) returned to the US dollar bond market with the pricing of a 3-year global benchmark bond worth \$3 billion and a 10-year global benchmark bond worth \$1 billion, proceeds of which will be part of ADB’s ordinary capital resources. “We are pleased with the consistently reliable and strong support

of our investors as we launched our last US dollar benchmark outing for 2020 with a dual tranche 3- and 10-year transaction,” said ADB Treasurer Pierre Van Peteghem. “This has been a record-breaking year for us with over \$24 billion raised in the global benchmark market through six outings. This strong support gives us the resources to provide much-needed assistance to Asia and the Pacific, especially during these challenging times.” The 3-year bond, with a coupon rate of 0.25% per annum payable semi-annually and a maturity date of 6 October 2023, was priced at 99.893% to yield 14 basis points over the 0.125% US Treasury notes due September 2023. The 10-year bond, with a coupon rate of 0.75% per annum payable semi-annually and a maturity date of 8 October 2030, was priced at 98.852% to yield 22.66 basis points over the 0.625% US Treasury notes due August 2030.

The transaction was lead-managed by BNP Paribas, Nomura, RBC Capital Markets, and TD Securities. A syndicate group was also formed consisting of ANZ, ING, and Standard Chartered. Both tranches achieved wide primary market distribution. On the 3-year bond, 36% of the bonds were placed in Asia; 29% in Europe, Middle East, and Africa; and 35% in the Americas. By investor type, 55% of the bonds went to central banks and official institutions, 25% to banks, and 20% to fund managers and other types of investors. On the 10-year bond, 46% of the bonds were placed in Asia; 22% in Europe, Middle East, and Africa; and 32% in the Americas. By investor type, 54% of the bonds went to central banks and official institutions, 18% to banks, and 28% to fund managers and other types of investors. ADB plans to raise around \$30 billion to \$35 billion from the capital markets in 2020. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

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East Asia

JAPAN: Households, Firms Keep Hoarding Cash at Record Pace as COVID-19 Strains Broaden

Japan’s currency in circulation and bank deposits rose at a record annual pace in August as companies and households continued to pile up cash to guard against the coronavirus- driven income slump, central bank data showed on Wednesday. The data underlines the difficulty of prodding companies and households to start spending again, even as the economy gradually re-opens after lockdown measures were lifted in May. Japan’s M3 money stock - or currency in circulation and deposits at financial institutions - rose 7.1% in August from a year earlier, marking the biggest increase since comparable data became available in 2004, Bank of Japan data showed. The rise topped a 6.5% gain in July. Bank deposits surged a record 15.3%

in August from a year earlier, as the hit to sales from COVID-19 prompted companies to continue to hoard cash as a precaution. Cash in circulation rose 5.5% in August, matching the pace of gain in July, the data showed. "Some households may be holding cash at home instead of parking them in bank accounts, as the pandemic makes them cautious of visiting bank branches, a BOJ official told a briefing. Japan's economy sank deeper into its worst postwar contraction in the second quarter as the coronavirus jolted businesses more than initially thought, data showed on Tuesday, underscoring the daunting task policymakers face in averting a steeper recession.

From <https://japantoday.com> 09/10/2020

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Online Financial Service Frauds Show Need to Balance Convenience, Safety

Even if the convenience of financial services through the internet is enhanced, it is meaningless unless security is ensured. It is necessary for the public and private sectors to reconstruct safety measures so that customers can utilize online financial services with peace of mind. The number of cases in which malicious third parties illegally withdraw customers' money through online financial services has been increasing. At SBI Securities Co., a major online securities firm, about ¥100 million was illegally withdrawn from the securities accounts of six customers. It was a scheme in which a third party acquired the identification numbers and passwords of securities account owners, illegally logged in to the accounts to sell stocks and get money, opened bank accounts falsely using the names of the real securities account owners and then transferred the money from the stock sales into them.

If such crimes continue, the credibility of online financial services could be shaken. Investigative authorities are urged to do their best to uncover the criminal methods and detect the perpetrators. About 190 cases of unauthorized withdrawals of money from bank accounts by abusing NTT Docomo Inc.'s e-money payment service have been confirmed at 11 banks as of Wednesday, with the damage totaling about ¥28 million. At Japan Post Bank, where the damage accounts for much of that total, bank accounts have also been used to illegally withdraw money by abusing services provided by payment service providers other than NTT Docomo. Seven companies, including PayPay Corp., were confirmed to have suffered damage. An illegal remittance using a debit card with Japan Post Bank's prepaid function was also found.

To remove the anxiety of users, it is indispensable to take thorough preventive measures. What cannot be overlooked is the fact that the fraudulent actions have exploited the gap between payment service providers and banks in their cross-industry partnerships. It could be that each side heavily relied on the assumption that the other party was taking measures. To confirm someone's identity

when linking a bank account to an online payment service, two-step authentication is effective. This means users are asked to reenter a confirmation number sent via mobile phone short message service or other means. However, many of the companies hit by the fraudulent actions have not introduced the system.

Japan Post Bank said that it had strongly urged payment service providers to adopt two-step authentication, but the operators stated to the contrary that they did not hear such a message from the bank. At a press conference, Bank of Japan Gov. Haruhiko Kuroda urged banks to practice proper risk management covering their business partners. The entire industry, which is tasked with online financial services, should tackle the problem. There are also many points that need to be reviewed in dealing with the problem after the fraudulent actions were uncovered. It is said that in some cases, NTT Docomo shops initially did not respond appropriately to inquiries from victims, saying that they could not disclose information. It took a week for NTT Docomo to hold a press conference after it received the first report from a bank about the damage. Japan Post Bank was also late in disclosing the facts. Every possible effort must be taken to minimize the damage by disclosing specific information promptly.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 09/25/2020

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Japan FY2021 Budget Requests Likely to Top ¥100 Tril

Budget requests by government ministries and agencies for fiscal 2021 will likely exceed 100 trillion yen (\$947 billion) for the seventh straight year, a Kyodo News tally shows, with the possibility of the sum reaching another record-high. The budget with the initial requests to be compiled for the first time under the administration of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga does not fully include costs for responding to the new coronavirus pandemic. When reflected, the total could top the record high of 102.66 trillion yen for fiscal 2020. The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare made the largest request of around 33 trillion yen due to a continued increase in social security spending on the back of Japan's aging population. The Defense Ministry is asking for a record 5.4 trillion yen, as it seeks to bolster the country's capabilities in new domains such as cyberspace and outer space. Japan is struggling to restore its fiscal health, the worst among major economies, with over 1,100 trillion yen in public debt. Suga, who took office last week to succeed Shinzo Abe, faces the difficult task of working toward achieving the government's target of a surplus in fiscal 2025, given additional spending for measures against the virus outbreak. The Finance Ministry estimates 25.5 trillion yen will be needed for debt-servicing costs for the next fiscal year, which will be up 9.2 percent from fiscal 2020. The ministry postponed the deadline for the budget requests from the usual deadline at the end of August by a month due to the pandemic.

From <https://japantoday.com> 09/28/2020

SOUTH KOREA: Internet Banking Transactions at New Record High in H1

South Korea's internet banking services continued to grow in the first half, with the number of users and daily transactions rising to new highs, central bank data showed Monday. The number of internet banking, including mobile banking, came to 164.8 million as of end-June, up 3.5 percent from six months earlier, according to the data from the Bank of Korea (BOK). The figure is the simple sum of all registered users at 18 internet and mobile banking service providers in the country, meaning the same person may count multiple times toward the sum, according to the BOK. The tally came as the number of mobile banking users gained 6 percent to 128.3 million compared with six months earlier. The portion of mobile banking users accounted for 77.8 percent of total internet banking users. The daily use of online banking services reached 208.1 million cases as of end-June, up 25.5 percent from the end of last year. Mobile banking accounted for 60.5 percent of the total use of online banking services in the January-June period. The value of daily financial transactions via internet banking came to 55.3 trillion won (US\$47.2 billion), up 10.9 percent from six months earlier, the BOK added.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 09/28/2020

South-East Asia

INDONESIA: State Revenue Per August 2020 Reaches 69.5 Billion USD

The Indonesian Finance Ministry recorded the state revenue till August 2020 at 1,028.02 trillion rupiahs (some 69.5 billion U.S. dollars) or 60.2 percent of the amended state budget that amounted to 1,699.9 trillion rupiahs (about 114.8 billion U.S. dollars) as stated in the presidential regulation number 7, year 2020. The amount was lower than 1,189.3 trillion rupiahs (80.3 billion U.S. dollars) in the same period last year, or 54.9 percent of the target in 2019 state budget which totaled 2,165.1 trillion rupiahs (146.3 billion U.S. dollars), Vice Minister of Finance Suahasil Nazara told a working meeting with the House of Representatives here Monday. The state revenue consists of the tax income of 795.95 trillion rupiahs (53.8 billion U.S. dollars) and the non-tax income of 232.07 trillion rupiahs (15.6 billion U.S. dollars), he said, adding that the debt ratio till the end of August 2020 reached 34.53 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Annually, the debt ratio to the GDP till the end of August 2020 showed an increase compared to that in the same period of the previous year, namely 29.8 percent, he noted. The debt ratio was up among others

due to the increase in the issuance of state securities and the widening state deficit in an effort to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, he said. In the presidential regulation number 72, the state deficit was predicted to touch 6.34 percent of the GDP until the end of 2020 or 1,039.2 trillion rupiahs (70.2 billion U.S. dollars).

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 09/07/2020

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ADB, KfW Partner to Boost COVID-19 Response and Financial Inclusion in Indonesia

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and KfW, the German state-owned development bank, today signed agreements for €450 million (about \$525 million) in cofinancing to improve Indonesia's coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic response and enhance financial inclusion in the country. KfW will support two ADB programs in Indonesia—the COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support Program (CARES) with €250 million and the Promoting Innovative Financial Inclusion Program, Subprogram 1 (PIFIP) with €200 million. ADB Director General for Southeast Asia Ramesh Subramaniam, KfW Director for East and Southeast Asia Christian Krämer, and KfW Head of Division for Sustainable Economic Development Florian Sekinger signed the memoranda of understanding for cofinancing. "ADB is very pleased about the excellent partnership with KfW in supporting Indonesia's development agenda," said Mr. Subramaniam. "Our close collaboration increases the effectiveness and value of our support to the government in advancing its reform initiatives, particularly on boosting competitiveness, expanding financial inclusion and clean energy, while supporting its development priorities in the medium and longer term."

As a result of ADB's response, ADB's lending program in Indonesia is expected to reach \$10.7 billion from 2020 to 2023. ADB also expects to mobilize around \$5 billion in cofinancing for both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19-related collaboration in this period. ADB's new country partnership strategy for Indonesia provides an entry point for identifying strategic areas of mutual interest with various partners. CARES, approved by ADB in April, aims to support the government's stimulus package geared to expand existing social assistance programs, boost resources for COVID-19 prevention and control, and safeguard productive sectors and workers from the economic downturn. Meanwhile, the proposed PIFIP will support the government's ongoing efforts to further enhance financial inclusion, through better policy targeting and tracking; boosting access to finance for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises using innovative technology; and strengthening Indonesia's regulatory framework for digital finance, data privacy, and consumer protection.

"KfW is pleased to provide significant cofinancing contributions for both CARES and

PIFIP," said Mr. Krämer. "With the cofinancing for CARES, KfW will join ADB's efforts to help alleviate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. PIFIP, in addition, will enhance the access of small and medium enterprises to financial services." KfW also said it is committed to further strengthen the collaboration with ADB in Indonesia and other member countries in the region.

The support will form part of the cofinancing partnership totaling \$6 billion that ADB and KfW launched in 2014 and renewed in 2017 and 2019. The partnership (2014–2019) has yielded 19 cofinanced projects focused on education, energy, finance, health, industry and trade, and public sector management. The \$4.39 billion provided by KfW for these projects was complemented with \$7.31 billion from ADB. Germany is the second-largest bilateral cofinancier of ADB projects. The additional cofinancing from KfW will help ADB address the region's vast infrastructure needs, estimated by ADB at \$1.7 trillion annually until 2030, including climate adaptation and mitigation costs. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

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CAMBODIA: ADB Approves Nearly 128 Mln USD Loan to Help Expand Power Grid

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a 127.8-million-U.S.-dollar loan to support the construction of transmission lines and substations in Cambodia, a bank press statement said on Friday. The project will help provide Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia, and three other provinces with stable and reliable electricity supply, the statement said. "The Grid Reinforcement Project, along with ADB's ongoing assistance to Cambodia in power system planning, shows that adequate, reliable, and environmentally sustainable power supply can be provided at reasonable cost to support equitable development," said ADB country director for Cambodia Sunniya Durrani-Jamal. The government has set energy sector development as a national priority, as more robust electricity supply will boost economic productivity and the quality of life, the statement said. It added that while Cambodia has made significant progress in expanding lower-cost power generation in the past 15 years, its existing transmission infrastructure is reaching capacity and needs to be expanded and reinforced to avoid supply interruptions. The project will help the Electricite du Cambodge, Cambodia's national electricity utility, strengthen its transmission infrastructure by financing the construction of four 115-230 kilovolt transmission lines and 10 substations in Phnom Penh and Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Cham, and Takeo provinces.

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MYANMAR: Foreign Trade Reaches Over 33.5 Bln USD in 11 Months of FY 2019-20

The total trade between Myanmar and foreign countries reached over 33.5 billion U.S. dollars in 11 months of the present fiscal year (FY) 2019-2020, according to figures released by the Commerce Ministry on Sunday. From Oct. 1, 2019 to Aug. 28, 2020, Myanmar earned over 15.9 billion U.S. dollars from export while its import shared over 17.6 billion U.S. dollars. The country's trade deficit of present FY recorded over 1.6 billion U.S. dollars, up from over 941.6 million U.S. dollars compared to the corresponding period of FY 2018-2019. Meanwhile, this FY's total foreign trade increased by over 1.6 billion U.S. dollars compared to the same period of last FY when it was over 31.9 billion U.S. dollars. Myanmar exports its agricultural products, animal products, marine products minerals, forest products, manufacturing goods and others while importing capital goods, intermediate goods and consumer goods. About 80 percent of the country's trade with foreign countries is done through sea route and its border trade is conducted with neighboring China, Thailand, Bangladesh and India.

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Myanmar Earns Over 1.8 Bln USD from Mineral Export in Over 11 Months of FY 2019-20

Myanmar earned over 1.8 billion U.S. dollars from mineral export in over 11 months of present fiscal year (FY) 2019-2020 which started in October, figures of the Ministry of Commerce showed Sunday. As of Sept. 18, the mineral sector ranked the third place with most export value, following the manufacturing and agriculture sectors among other export. This FY's figure showed an increase of over 398 million U.S. dollars, compared to the same period of last FY 2018-2019 when it registered over 1.4 billion U.S. dollars. During the period, the country's export value totaled over 17 billion U.S. dollars while its import shared over 18.5 billion U.S. dollars, the ministry's figures said. Myanmar mainly exports agricultural products, animal products, marine products, minerals, forest products, manufacturing goods and others to foreign trade partner countries. About 80 percent of the country's external trade is done through sea-borne trade and its border trade is being conducted through 17 border gates with neighboring countries.

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\$180 Million ADB Loan to Improve Water Supply in Yangon City, Myanmar

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$180 million loan to construct a 34-kilometer water transmission system that will help transfer 818 million liters of water a day to Yangon, the largest city in Myanmar. “The Yangon City Water Resilience Project will address critical water infrastructure needs associated with bulk water supply in Yangon City and strengthen water security,” said ADB Principal Urban Development Specialist Alan Baird. “It will help improve the resilience of the country’s major economic hub and support inclusive, sustainable economic growth. Safe, piped water also comes with better sanitation and hygiene, which is critical to controlling the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).” Yangon accounts for 23% of Myanmar’s gross domestic product. At 5.2 million people, it has 10% of the country’s population. The city’s population rose 2.2% a year on average from 2014 to 2019, but fewer than half of the households have access to piped water. For many of those customers, water services are intermittent and water quality varies. The Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) is seeking to address these issues with the support of ADB. ADB’s assistance will help the government build new infrastructure, such as an intake structure at the Ngamoeyeik Reservoir, an online pumping station 900 meters downstream, and a dedicated 2.4 meter-diameter pipeline connecting the reservoir to the Nyaungnhapin water treatment plant. The project will contribute to YCDC’s efforts to reinforce the resilience of the water supply system and expand service areas. The project will strengthen YCDC’s ability to operate and manage water services and become more responsive to climate change. It will help YCDC to prepare a roadmap to strengthen its self-financing capacity and meet the growing demands for water services. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

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MALAYSIA: International Reserves Stand at 104.4 Bln USD

Malaysia's central bank, Bank Negara, said on Friday that its international reserves stood at 104.4 billion U.S. dollars as of Aug. 28. The central bank said in a statement that the reserves position is sufficient to finance 8.6 months of retained imports and is 1.1 times total short-term external debt. The international reserves consist of 97.3 billion U.S. dollars in foreign currency reserves, 1.3 billion U.S. dollars in International Monetary Fund Reserves Position, 1.1 billion U.S. dollars in Special Drawing Rights, 2.2 billion U.S. dollars in gold and 2.5 billion U.S. dollars in other reserves assets.

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PHILIPPINES: Secures Nearly 9 Bln USD Foreign Loans, Grants to Fight COVID-19

The Philippines has so far secured a total of 8.83 billion U.S. dollars in borrowings, loans and grant assistance for the government's coronavirus disease (COVID-19) response efforts from its development partners and the commercial markets, the country's Department of Finance (DOF) said on Sunday. Of the total amount, the DOF said 5.98 billion U.S. dollars is budget support financing from the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the French Development Agency and the Japan International Cooperation Agency. A total of 2.35 billion U.S. dollars was sourced from the government's latest global bond offering that fetched its lowest ever coupon in the U.S. dollar market, the DOF added. The DOF said the remaining 496.36 million U.S. dollars is from grant and loan financing from the Philippines' development partners for various COVID-19 specific projects. Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez said that total government borrowings for 2020 and 2021 are projected to reach 3 trillion pesos (roughly 61.7 billion U.S. dollars) to support priority expenditures necessary for the country's swift recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and public investments in infrastructure and social services.

Dominguez added that borrowings are expected to settle at 2.3 trillion pesos (roughly 47.3 billion U.S. dollars) in 2022, with funding in favor of domestic sources. He said the debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio is projected to settle at 54 percent this year, 58 percent in 2021, and 60 percent in 2022. Dominguez added that these projections are still lower when compared to the country's all-time high debt level of 71.6 percent of GDP in 2004. In 2019, he said the debt-to-GDP ratio fell to a historic low at 39.6 percent, "owing to President Rodrigo Duterte's prudent cash and debt management policy backed by steady economic growth." COVID-19, however, forced the government to impose the necessary lockdowns to save lives and protect communities, which, expectedly, led to nationwide work stoppages and a subsequent drastic contraction of the economy that overturned most of the economic gains, he said. The lockdowns severely curtailed economic activities and muted the government's revenue-generation capacity, with total revenue collection reaching only 1.7 trillion pesos (roughly 35 billion U.S. dollars) in the first seven months of 2020, or 7 percent lower than the revenue take in the same period last year, with 85 percent of the revenues coming from tax collections, and equivalent to a negative growth of 12 percent. Increased government spending amid lower revenue collection pushed the fiscal deficit to 700.6 billion pesos (roughly 14.4 billion U.S. dollars) in the first seven months of the year, which is six times higher compared to that in the same period in 2019. "The effects of this pandemic would have been much worse had it caught us in a weak fiscal position. Fortunately, when it hit us, we had sufficient means to fight the battle and ramp up public spending," Dominguez said. The Philippines now has 237,365 confirmed COVID-19 cases, including 184,687

recoveries and 3,875 deaths.

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ADB Approves 500-Mln-USD Loan to Boost Philippines' Disaster Resilience

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Thursday approved a 500-million-U.S. dollar policy-based loan to allow the Philippines' quick access to emergency financing in the event of disasters triggered by natural hazards or public health emergencies. "The Philippines has been hit by several major disasters in recent years, including typhoon Haiyan in 2013, the Taal volcano eruption in January 2020, and the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic," ADB Vice-President Ahmed Saeed said in a statement. "This new contingent disaster financing instrument will help the government manage fiscal risks posed by those shocks and lessen the economic and social impacts on people's livelihoods and the country's economy," Saeed added. Located in the Pacific Ring of Fire, the Philippines is among the most disaster-prone countries in the world, including active volcanoes, frequent earthquakes, and an average of 20 typhoons per year with floods and landslides. Nearly three-fourths of the country's population are vulnerable to multiple natural hazards, and such disasters worsen poverty in typhoon-prone provinces along the country's eastern seaboard. The Manila-based multilateral lender said disasters cost the Philippines 0.7 percent to 1.0 percent of GDP every year, including about 43.5 billion pesos (roughly 890 million U.S. dollars) caused by earthquakes and around 133 billion pesos (roughly 2.7 billion U.S. dollars) from typhoons. "The Disaster Resilience Improvement Program will support government policy reforms aimed at ensuring the government to quickly address the needs of vulnerable segments of the population following disasters. It will also strengthen the Philippines' overall response to disasters and pandemics," ADB Financial Sector Specialist for Southeast Asia Benita Ainabe said. The ADB noted that it had provided significant post-disaster support to the Philippines since the 1980s, especially after typhoon Haiyan, saying its rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance for damaged public assets in the Southeast Asian country is valued at around 1.8 billion U.S. dollars in inflation-adjusted terms. It has also provided at least 1.8 billion U.S. dollars in loans and grants to assist the government in its urgent COVID-19 response, the ADB added.

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THAILAND: Cabinet Approves Cuts to Contributions to SSF to Ease Financial Burden

The Thai cabinet on Tuesday had approved cuts to contributions to the Social Security Fund (SSF) to 2 percent from 5 percent from employees' base salaries from this month to November. Based on the new rate, an SSF member will now chip in up to 450 baht (14.45 U.S. dollars) a month from 750 baht (24 U.S. dollars) previously during the three-month period, said Ratchada Thanadirek, deputy spokeswoman to the Prime Minister's Office. The cuts were meant to ease the financial burden of employers and employees during this economic hardship triggered by the COVID-19 outbreak, Ratchada said. According to the Labour Ministry, the measure will ease the financial burden for 12.8 million SSF members by 13 billion baht (417.2 million U.S. dollars) and for 4.9 million employers by 11 billion baht (353 million U.S. dollars). The new measure will also add in 24 billion baht (770 million U.S. dollars) to circulation. The contribution cuts have been the second round announced this year. In March, the cabinet approved cuts to 1 percent for employees and 4 percent for employers during March-May. This year's cuts were all due to easing financial burdens as COVID-19 crept in.

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Thailand's National Budget Bill for 2021 Approved by Senate

Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha on Tuesday announced that the Senate had approved the national budget bill for fiscal year 2021 after Monday's six-hour debate in Parliament. The draft set the budget for the next fiscal year at an estimated 3.285 trillion baht (104.6 billion U.S. dollars). Prayut said many senators debated the budget allocations for several ministries and departments. However, one of the key concerns for most of the senators was the budget allocation earmarked to buy COVID-19 vaccines when they become available. This year, many senators stressed the importance in stemming the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore have very few objections in agreeing to divert budget to solve the COVID-19 crisis, said Prayut. Of the 224 senators present in the upper house, 218 voted in favor, no one voted against and six abstained, Prayut said. The prime minister also expressed his gratitude to the senators for approving the bill, and pledged to use the budget efficiently and in a transparent manner for the sake of all people. Prayut said he will submit the bill within 20 days for endorsement by His Majesty the King after which it will be announced in the Royal Gazette.

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Thai Cabinet Approves Borrowing of 47.4 Bln USD from ADB to Revive Economy

The Thai cabinet agreed on Tuesday to borrow 1.47 trillion baht (47.4 billion U.S. dollars) from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to revive the country's economy ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic. The fund will be used to finance various economic stimulus programs, budget deficit, infrastructure investments and bailout of pandemic-hit state enterprises, according to the Thai Government House statement. It also said the public debt-to-GDP ratio will widen to 57.23 percent in 2020-21, near the legal limit of 60 percent. The statement said the government and the Bank of Thailand had jointly unveiled a 1.9-trillion-baht stimulus early this year to cushion the blow from the pandemic but has so far spent only about a third of the amount. Of the total, 387.4 billion baht will be used to repay existing debt under management, which totals 1.28 trillion baht. The cabinet had also approved 291 billion baht in investment by 44 non-listed state enterprises in next fiscal year starting from Oct. 1. Meanwhile the Thai government is set to target a disbursement rate of 95 percent of the budget to finance key projects including the industrial estate in the Eastern Economic Corridor and the mass transit project in Phuket. The total investment of state enterprises, including eight publicly listed firms, will increase to 432 billion baht, all aimed to reboot the Thai economy, the statement said. Thailand's Ministry of Finance said on Tuesday that the Thai economy is likely to shrink less than 8.5 percent projected earlier this year, as helped by the government's stimulus measures to revive the economy hit hard by the COVID-19 outbreak.

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VIETNAM: One of Country's Poorest Districts Sees 72% Rise in Per Capita Income in Five Years

Poverty-reduction models in Ninh Thuận Province's Bắc Ái District have resulted in sustainable poverty reduction, according to the district's People's Committee. The mountainous district is listed as one of the country's 62 poorest districts under Government Resolution 30a, which addresses sustainable poverty reduction, issued in 2008. The district has 10 ethnic minorities, with ethnic Raglai accounting for more than 87 per cent of its population. Farmer Ca Dá Thị Yến, of the district's Phước Chính Commune, has benefited from the district's poverty reduction models and escaped poverty. Since 2017, she has received two soft loans worth a total of VNĐ90 million (US\$3,900) from the Việt Nam Bank for Social Policy to grow crops and buy cows for breeding. Commune agricultural officials provided her with instruction on breeding cows, making cowsheds, and growing grasses to feed cows. She now has 12 cows, and has escaped poverty. Yến is one of many poor people in the district who have benefited from the poverty reduction models.

The district since 2015 has implemented 62 poverty reduction models for plant cultivation and animal husbandry, and has built a new-style rural area. During the

period, as many as 28 agriculture extension models helped localities produce high-value products and adapt to climate change. The farming models include cultivation of grapefruit, durian, honeydew melon, dragon fruit, banana, medicinal plants, hybrid corn, and high-yield cassava, and the raising of cows, goats, sheep and pigs. The district has also allocated forest areas to local households so that they can both protect and exploit forest resources, and earn an income. Many co-operatives and co-operative groups in the district have provided vocational skill training to rural labourers. The Phước Thắng General Services Co-operative in Phước Thắng Commune, for example, provides mat weaving training to local Raglai women, which helps them earn additional income in their free time. In 2015-19, the district mobilised more than VNĐ1.1 trillion (\$47.3 million) from central and local budgets and other sources for rural transport, irrigation, power and social welfare projects, and provided vocational skills, jobs and soft loans for local households.

The investment for infrastructure and other projects has helped boost the district's economic growth by 15 per cent each year during the period. Last year, the average income per capita in the district increased to VNĐ17.2 million (\$740), up 72 per cent against 2015. As many as 371 poor households last year in the district escaped poverty, reducing the poverty rate to 34.2 per cent. The district has 2,601 poor households and 832 near-poor households. Despite the achievements, the district faces obstacles in poverty reduction since its economy depends on farming, which is affected by drought and other factors. The south-central province has the least rainfall in the country, so localities normally face drought in the dry season. Hồ Xuân Ninh, chairman of the district's People's Committee, said the district would seek more investment sources to build new-style rural areas and implement poverty reduction programmes under multidimensional poverty standards this year. The district will also restructure agricultural production by adapting to climate change, and will transfer the application of advanced techniques to farmers. The district aims to provide more jobs and improve the lives of locals, he said.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 09/11/2020

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South Asia

BANGLADESH: ADB Approves \$160 Million Loan to Improve Sewerage System in Khulna

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$160 million loan to establish a sustainable and inclusive sewerage system in Khulna, Bangladesh's third-largest city and center of south-west economic corridor. The Khulna Sewerage System Development Project will develop a centralized sewerage system that will benefit 880,000 residents in the city. It will include a 269-kilometer (km) sewer network, eight pumping stations, two sewage treatment plants, and about 27,000 property-level

sewer connections. A fecal sludge treatment plant will also be part of the project to provide inclusive sanitation services to areas where sewer connections are not feasible. This project builds on an earlier ADB-funded project, which improved Khulna's water supply for 875,000 beneficiaries by switching the water source from groundwater to surface water. "This project continues ADB's commitment to support the Government of Bangladesh's efforts to meet people's basic needs amid rapid urbanization and growth through effective sewage management," said ADB Urban Development Specialist for South Asia Jaemin Nam. "In addition to infrastructure improvements, the project will embark on a citywide sanitation and hygiene campaign to raise awareness on safe sanitation services." Khulna has a population of about 1.5 million and a population density of 6,877 people per square km, well above the national average of 1,240 people per square km. Commercial and industrial activity is expected to grow in the coming years, and this will further put pressure on urban services and infrastructure, including sewage management. The project will strengthen the institutional capacity of the Khulna Water Supply and Sewerage Authority in sewage management services, including asset management, project preparation and management, and introduction of sewerage tariff policy.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/29/2020

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INDIA: ADB Approves \$300 Million Loan to Develop Rajasthan's Secondary Towns

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$300 million loan to finance inclusive water supply and sanitation infrastructure and services in secondary towns of Rajasthan, India. The project is expected to build citywide access for improved water supply services for around 570,000 people and enhanced sanitation services for about 720,000 people in at least 14 secondary towns. These localities have 20,000–100,000 residents. "Partnership with ADB helps ensure a longer-term policy dialogue on deepening financial sustainability and institutional strengthening, particularly in local governments, and introduces new good practices," said ADB Senior Urban Development Specialist for South Asia Na Won Kim. "Specifically, ADB will help ensure that the project incorporates practical lessons and innovations. The use of smart technologies and a cost-effective system are the key innovative features that could be widely replicated in other cities in Rajasthan and beyond."

Through the project, water supply systems in at least eight project towns are expected to improve by 2027, with about 100,000 households including all urban poor households, benefiting from five new or rehabilitated water treatment plants and 1,350 kilometers of distribution networks. Citywide sanitation systems based on the most cost-effective solutions will also be developed. The project will build on three earlier related projects and sector reforms funded by ADB in Rajasthan. Since 2000, the government has implemented two multisector urban investment projects

supported by ADB, benefiting more than 7 million people in 21 cities. The third project, Rajasthan Urban Sector Development Program, implements water supply and sanitation investments in six major cities. The project will strengthen the institutional capacity of the local governments and the Rajasthan Urban Drinking Water, Sewerage, and Infrastructure Corporation Limited, a corporate entity established with ADB's technical support. The project will provide enhanced support to women and vulnerable groups through skills training, paid internships, and community engagement and awareness activities.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/25/2020

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ADB to Invest \$15 Million in Avaada Energy to Expand Renewable Energy Capacity in India

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has signed an agreement to invest \$15 million in INR equivalent in Avaada Energy Private Limited (AEPL) to help the company to scale up photovoltaic solar energy generation capacity in India. This is ADB's second investment in AEPL after a first round of \$50 million invested in April 2019. The latest investment will come from ADB's Ordinary Capital Resources and from Leading Asia's Private Infrastructure Fund (LEAP), each of which will invest \$7.5 million. LEAP was established in 2016 by the Japan International Cooperation Agency to finance high quality and sustainable private sector infrastructure projects. The agreement was signed by the Director of Infrastructure Finance, South Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia at ADB's Private Sector Operations Department Shantanu Chakraborty and Chair of AEPL Vineet Mittal. "The project is part of ADB's ongoing support to India's renewable energy sector and will help the Government of India meet its targets for clean power generation," said Mr. Chakraborty. "We are pleased to enhance our commitment in AEPL and expect this investment to send positive signals to global investors to continue supporting the growth of renewable energy in India."

"ADB's investment reinforces the strong support of international development community to India's efforts at ramping up its clean energy generation," said Mr. Mittal. "It also validates AEPL's strong track record and commitment to create cleaner and more sustainable power generation in India." AEPL is a leading developer of solar energy projects in India through utility scale, rooftop, and off-grid solar facilities. The company has almost 1 gigawatts (GW) of operational capacity, and with the second round of equity investment will be well placed to expand capacity to more than 3.5 GW. ADB has supported the development of renewable energy in India since 2007, when it financed initial wind projects under the independent power producer (IPP) model. ADB has subsequently financed solar IPPs through projects under the National Solar Mission and various state policies. The project will contribute to the Government of India's strategy to increase the share of renewable

energy generation capacity from about 20% in 2018 to 40% by 2030. It reflects ADB's commitment to provide cumulative climate finance of \$80 billion from 2019 to 2030.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/28/2020

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PAKISTAN: ADB Approves \$300 Million Loan to Develop Capital Markets

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) today approved a \$300 million policy-based loan to help strengthen Pakistan's finance sector by supporting measures to develop competitive capital markets and encourage private sector investment in the country. "Capital markets act as a major catalyst in transforming the economy into a more efficient, innovative, and competitive marketplace," said ADB Senior Project Officer Sana Masood. "The reforms proposed under this program will lower the cost of financial intermediation and facilitate private sector investment to generate sustainable growth and job opportunities. It will also mitigate the negative impact of capital market instability on the economy and help to diversify Pakistan's financial system." Currently, Pakistan's capital markets play a limited role in financial intermediation and resource mobilization. The Pakistan Stock Exchange lacks depth in terms of the number of investors and the number of companies raising capital. Fewer than 250,000 individual investors, or less than 0.1% of the population, have a stock investing account, and the Pakistan Stock Exchange lags most of its regional peers on market capitalization as a percentage of gross domestic product. "Institutional strengthening of the debt management office will develop the government bond market on a sustainable basis," said ADB Principal Financial Sector Specialist Syed Ali-Mumtaz H. Shah. "Establishing a special tribunal for capital market-related cases would significantly enhance investor confidence in the equity market."

ADB has supported the development of Pakistan's financial markets through three policy-based loans over the past two decades. The Third Capital Market Development Program will augment the size and capacity of capital markets and support reforms that enhance the institutional and regulatory capacity of relevant government bodies. It will also diversify the investor base, develop important market infrastructure such as surveillance systems, and improve the supply of alternative financial instruments. Additionally, the program will help the government to strengthen its debt management proficiency. The government and ADB have agreed to anchor the program to the design of a long-term national capital market master plan to build strong government ownership and coordination across the agencies. ADB will also provide an \$800,000 technical assistance to support the implementation of key reform actions under the program.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/28/2020

Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: ADIF Continues Compensating Depositors of Closed Banks

Azerbaijan Deposit Insurance Fund (ADIF) has paid 529 million manats (\$311.1 million) of compensation to 22,343 depositors of the Ata Bank, Amrah Bank, AG Bank, and NBC Bank. According to the ministry, 3,900 depositors of AG Bank received compensation worth 77.7 million manats (\$45.7 million), 3,800 depositors of NBC Bank - 110.9 million manats (\$65.2 million), 9,000 depositors of Atabank - 209 million manats (\$122.9 million), and 5,500 depositors of Amrah Bank - 131.4 million manats (\$77.2 million). Payments of compensation to depositors of Atabank and Amrah Bank have been carrying out since June 1, 2020, and is paid in non-cash through debit cards of Kapital Bank OJSC, the ADIF noted. The fund added that payments of compensation to depositors of AG Bank and NBC Bank began on June 16, 2020, and is paid by bank transfer via debit cards of the International Bank of Azerbaijan (IBA) OJSC. The Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) has earlier revoked the licenses of these banks.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 09/18/2020

Foreign Investments to Fixed Capital Hits \$1.9bn in 1H2020

Foreign enterprises and organizations directed AZN 3.3 billion (\$1.9bn) to the fixed capital in Azerbaijan during the period of January-August 2020, local media reported with reference to the State Statistics Committee. According to the report, 87.3 percent or AZN 2.9 billion (\$1.7bn) of the funds directed to the fixed capital at the expense of foreign countries and international organizations belonged to UK, U.S., Turkey, Japan, Switzerland, Malaysia, Norway, Russian and Iranian investors. Moreover, 53.3 percent of the total amount of funds of the fixed capital was directed to industry and 21.4 percent to construction during the first eight months of the year. Some 12.1 percent of the total funds were directed to the transport and storage, 3.5 percent on professional, scientific and technical activities, 1.9 percent on agriculture, forestry and fisheries, 1.8 percent on public administration, defense and social security, 1.4 on education. Additionally, 1.3 percent of the funds was allocated to information and communication, 0.9 percent on trade and repair of vehicles, 0.4 percent to accommodation and catering of tourists, 0.5 to public health and social services, 0.4 percent to administrative and support services, 0.3 percent to financial and insurance activities, recreation, entertainment and art, and 0.2 percent to other services.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 09/22/2020

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Azerbaijani Finance Ministry's Securities in Great Demand

Baku Stock Exchange (BSE) held an auction on placement of Azerbaijani Finance Ministry's medium-term state bonds worth 20 million manat (\$11.7 million). The interest payment term is 728 days. During the auction, 10 investors submitted 14 bids in the price range from 96.6621 manat (\$56.86) with a yield to maturity (YTM) of 9.88 percent to 100.35 manat (\$59.02) with the YTM of 7.81 percent per bond. According to the decision of the Finance Ministry, the cut-off price of bonds amounted to 100.0544 manat (\$58.85) with the YTM of 7.97 percent, and the weighted average price was 100.0676 manat (\$58.86) with the YTM of 7.96 percent. The total amount of orders at nominal prices amounted to 83.9 million manat (\$49.35 million), and the placement volume – 20 million manat (\$11.76 million). Maturity date of the bonds is September 20, 2022. Bidders must fulfil their obligations to acquire bonds till Sept. 23, 2020 (T+1).

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 09/23/2020

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Central Bank of Azerbaijan Discloses Amount of Foreign Currency Bought by Local Banks

The Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) held a foreign exchange auction with the participation of the State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan (SOFAZ), during which Azerbaijani banks bought \$70.7 million, Trend reports citing CBA. According to CBA, the banks' demand at the auction amounted to \$70.7 million and was fully met. As a result of the auction, the weighted average rate of the manat to the US dollar amounted to 1.7 AZN / USD. In accordance with SOFAZ's data, from January through August 2020, SOFAZ sold the foreign currency in the amount of \$5.4 billion at currency auctions, which is by 25 percent more compared to the same period of last year. SOFAZ plans to sell foreign currency worth \$6.8 billion at currency auctions this year. The CBA began to hold foreign exchange auctions through unilateral sale of foreign currency in competitive conditions since January 2017.

From <https://uzreport.news/> 09/24/2020

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Compensation of Closed Azerbaijani Banks Ongoing

The Azerbaijan Deposit Insurance Fund (ADIF) paid compensations worth 534 million manat (\$314.1 million) to 22,581 depositors of the closed banks - Ata Bank,

Amrah Bank, AG Bank, and NBC Bank, reports referring to ADIF. According to the information, 4,000 depositors of AG Bank received 78.3 million manat (\$46 million), 3,800 depositors of NBC Bank - 112.8 million manat (\$66.3 million), 9,000 depositors of Atabank - 211.1 million manat (\$124.1 million), and 5,500 depositors of Amrah Bank received 131.8 million manat (\$77.5 million). Payments of compensation to depositors of Atabank and Amrah Bank are carried out from June 1, 2020, and are paid in non-cash form through debit cards of Kapital Bank OJSC. Payments of compensation to depositors of "AG Bank" and "NBC Bank" began on June 16, 2020, and are paid in non-cash form through debit cards of the International Bank of Azerbaijan (IBA) OJSC.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 09/24/2020

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UZBEKISTAN: Finance Ministry Lowers State Budget Revenue Expectations

Revenues to the state budget for the current year set to dip by 2.6 trillion soums. The total revenue of the treasury will amount to 125.8 trillion soums, according to the forecast of Finance Ministry. The state budget revenues over the past eight months amounted to 82.9 trillion soums, with the share of taxes reaching 63.5 trillion soums. 17 trillion soums of income tax and 10.4 trillion soums of subsoil use tax were received between January - August.

From <https://uzreport.news/> 09/05/2020

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Rating Agency Revealed Uzbekistan's Economic and Investment Potential

RAEX-Europe credit rating agency presented the recently updated credit rating of Uzbekistan, as well as information about its growing financial market and stable banking structures, Trend reports with reference to Dunyo information agency. An information event dedicated to the economic and investment potential of Uzbekistan, which was organized by the Consulate General of Uzbekistan in Germany in conjunction with the RAEX rating agency, was held in Frankfurt am Main. Representatives of the public and political, business circles, banking and financial structures of Belarus, Belgium, Germany, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands, Russia, and Uzbekistan got acquainted with the modern development of Uzbekistan, as well as with an active course of reforming the socio-political and trade-economic spheres. The speaker of RAEX-Europe explained that the rating of Uzbekistan, repeating last year's BB indicator (speculative rating, which means that there is a possibility of credit risks development, especially as a result of negative economic changes that may occur over time) with a stable outlook, due to the preservation of

the positive dynamics of economic growth of Uzbekistan, despite the global pandemic and its negative impact on national and international trade. The speaker also noted the importance of structural reforms in the public sector in maintaining the positive economic trend of Uzbekistan, which is why there is an inflow of foreign investment in the country. Representatives of the Agency for State Assets Management and Investment Promotion of Uzbekistan, as well as Avesta Investment Group and Asia Frontclear Management B.V. private companies also introduced the presentation of banking and financial reforms and trade and economic opportunities of Uzbekistan, The representatives presented the active course of the government aimed at creating all conditions for local and foreign investors, including after the pandemic.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 09/16/2020

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Budget Provides \$211m for Fuel Security

The Morrison government is investing \$211 million to build new domestic fuel storage facilities while backing local refineries to stay open. The initiative to secure Australia's long-term fuel supply, while keeping prices low for customers and creating 1000 new jobs, will form part of the government's October 6 2020/21 budget. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said Australia's fuel security was essential for national security and that the country had been fortunate not to have experienced a significant fuel supply shock in over 40 years. "Our positive changes to the fuel market will ensure Australian families and businesses can access the fuel they need, when they need it, for the lowest possible price," Mr Morrison said in a statement. "Fuel security underpins our entire economy. Not only does it keep Australia moving, the industry supports thousands of people across the country and this plan is also about helping keep them in work.

He said like all sectors of the economy, the COVID-19 pandemic is having an impact on Australia's fuel industry and was a reminder not to be complacent. "We need a sovereign fuel supply to shield us from potential shocks in the future," he said. Minister for Energy Angus Taylor said Australian refineries are under significant financial pressure and the government is committed to working with the sector to ensure it has a long-term future. "Almost all Australians are reliant on fuel and it is the lifeblood of so many sectors in our economy," Mr Taylor said. "Our farmers and miners rely heavily on diesel to do their jobs and provide services, while the transport sector sources 98 per cent of its energy from liquid fuels." The package includes \$200 million in a competitive grants program to build an additional 780 million litres of onshore diesel storage.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/13/2020

Government Flags Eased Rules for Borrowers

Relaxed rules around property loans are expected to help thousands of Australians get into their first home sooner. However, Labor has warned despite the benefits of more people being able to access finance, the government must ensure lending is responsible and Australians don't get in over their heads. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg on Friday announced new rules, earmarked to start in March 2021 if parliament gives them the nod, under which lenders will be able to rely on borrower-provided information unless there are reasonable grounds to suspect it is unreliable. Borrowers will be made more accountable for providing accurate information to inform lending decisions, replacing the "lender beware" rules with a "borrower responsibility" principle.

Mr Frydenberg says it is essential more credit is made available to boost the economy, which has been kicked into recession by the coronavirus pandemic. Housing Industry Association managing director Graham Wolfe says access to finance and banks' lending practices are the biggest hurdles to home ownership. "This plan does not solve all the problems around access to finance and credit, however HIA believes it is a move in right direction," he said. "Banks will still have to maintain appropriate application procedures and there is a mutual responsibility on the customer to supply accurate and truthful information when applying for a loan." Shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers says the coalition government has form when it comes to siding with banks and shonky lenders. "The (financial services) royal commission recommended that these protections not be wound back or watered down - we need to take that recommendation seriously," he said.

"We want to make sure that people who have the capacity to pay loans back get access to finance. "But equally we need to make sure that people don't get in over their head, don't find themselves in a debt trap." Private house sales rose 3.6 per cent in August and sales for the three months to August were up 36.5 per cent on a year ago. In the first half of September home prices in the five mainland states were down 0.2 per cent compared with the end of August.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/26/2020

Budget Sweetener to Promote Great Outdoors

Australians are being tempted to take an interstate trip through extra funding for outdoor attractions. Next week's budget will sprinkle Commonwealth cash over a range of environmental tourism projects. The money will be used to upgrade hiking

huts in the Tasmanian wilderness, fix walking tracks in northern NSW, build water crossings in Victoria and restore heritage sites in South Australia and the Northern Territory. Almost two dozen national parks and world heritage sites will share a slice of the \$33.5 million pie. The Tourism and Transport Forum welcomed the funding boost for regions decimated by coronavirus restrictions. "We know that nature-based tourism is a major drawcard for many Australians as interstate borders ideally continue to reopen in the lead-up to Christmas," TTF chief executive Margy Osmond said on Thursday.

"These investments are critical right now to prepare for the return of domestic tourists hungry for a slice of Aussie nature and landscapes." Another \$20 million will be spent restoring native shellfish reefs lost to over-fishing and dredging, creating diving spots in at least 11 coastal communities smashed by bushfires and the virus. Townsville's aquarium will get a \$5 million face-lift and marine park operators will be offered \$3.2 million to monitor the Great Barrier Reef. The funding announcements follow an earlier promise of \$250 million for regional tourism initiatives. The tourism peak industry body is confident demand will return as Australians look to escape cabin fever. But it is concerned people are still thinking twice about booking plane tickets and choosing destinations within four hours driving distance of their homes. The TTF wants the budget to include \$50 million for a marketing campaign promoting domestic travel by air.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/30/2020

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From Budget Promise to Big Deficit Reality

Back in April 2019 Josh Frydenberg handed down his first budget, a month earlier than tradition because of the then pending federal election. It had been a dramatic few months for the MP from Kooyong in Victoria. Eight months earlier he had been elected deputy of the Liberal party as a result of the leadership spill which propelled Scott Morrison to prime minister. With his new authority, Frydenberg chose the Treasury portfolio and was handed what his Liberal predecessors, Joe Hockey and Morrison, had failed to deliver - the prospect of a budget surplus. It would be the first since fellow Victorian Peter Costello was treasurer, 12 years earlier. On that budget night, Frydenberg announced a \$7.1 billion surplus for 2019/20 and further surpluses as far as the eye could see, as the economy enjoyed a record expansion of over 25 years.

"Tonight, I announce that the budget is back in the black and Australia is back on track," Frydenberg beamed to his cheering fellow ministers and backbenchers. It was a budget that contained billions of dollars worth of personal tax cuts to take to the

election when Labor was peddling \$382 billion of tax hikes - a figure drummed up by Frydenberg's office rather than Treasury. Even mugs were made, brandishing the "Back in Black" slogan. On October 6, Frydenberg will hand down his second budget, again not on the traditional day in the second week of May. The circumstances are quite different. COVID-19 made sure of that. There was no surplus in 2019/20 as promised - instead a record \$85.3 billion deficit - the economy is in its first recession since the early 1990s, and the long-time strategy to pursue surpluses has been shelved.

And if economists are right, the treasurer will announce a massive \$200 billion deficit for 2020/21 and further deficits as far as the eye can see. The next year will be a real test for Frydenberg to get thousands of people back into work in the run-up to the federal election. It will also be a test for the treasurer's own future leadership ambitions. Frydenberg, 49, has been a rising star in the party that he joined 21 years ago. Before being elected to the House of Representatives in 2010, he was a senior adviser to then foreign minister Alexander Downer and prime minister John Howard, followed by five years with Deutsche Bank. He quickly climbed the political ladder under Tony Abbott's prime ministership - Parliamentary Secretary (2013-14), Assistant Treasurer (2014-15) and Resources Minister (2015-2016). He was handed the poisoned chalice of the highly-politically charged environment portfolio under Malcolm Turnbull in 2016, a role he held up until the 2018 leadership coup. However daunting that might have been - trying to get backbenchers to agree to a climate change policy after 10 years of in-fighting - it probably pales into insignificance compared to the challenge he faces now.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/30/2020

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Manufacturing Priorities to Receive \$1.5b

Australian manufacturers across six priority areas will receive more help to expand in high-value areas through an almost \$1.5 billion budget boost. But Labor has accused the government of neglecting the sector for the best part of a decade. The prime minister on Thursday unveiled the coalition's manufacturing strategy, which targets mining, food and drink, medical products, recycling and clean energy, defence and space. Industry-led teams of experts will design road maps for each area by April next year, with goals for the next two, five and 10 years. "People have talked about picking winners. No. We're setting priorities," Mr Morrison told the National Press Club in Canberra. He argued industrial relations reforms, lower taxes, cutting energy costs and boosting training would help all manufacturing businesses.

The government will make the vast majority of almost \$1.5 billion of manufacturing spending in Tuesday's federal budget available for grants. Major projects boosting collaboration, turning manufacturers' ideas into products and supply chain integration

will share in up to \$1.3 billion of grants over four years. Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese said the plan came from the same party which had dared the car industry to leave Australia. "The only thing that Scott Morrison has managed to manufacture in his time in government is announcements, rather than actually manufacturing jobs," he told reporters in Sydney. Australian Industry Group chief executive Innes Willox said there was merit in the six priority areas but cautioned against excluding yet to be discovered industries. "Industrial success is full of surprises and it is critical that we do not disadvantage businesses from succeeding outside the selected areas," he said.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union is calling for a seat on the industry-led panels drafting the road maps. National secretary Steve Murphy said 61,000 jobs in the sector were lost between March and June, as he floated redirecting \$18 billion in energy spending to manufacturing. "The best 10-year plan in the world is meaningless if manufacturing businesses keep collapsing at that rate. We need immediate action to support our industry," he said. A further \$107.2 million will identify supply chain vulnerabilities of critical goods and services with medicines and medical equipment the initial focus. Food, chemical and plastics will follow, while cash will be made available for businesses to address issues in supply chains. A manufacturing modernisation program will be extended by a further \$52.8 million, with industry expected to spend \$3 for every dollar the government invests. The scheme will fast-track technology upgrades and allow up to 150 local businesses to invest in ready-to-start projects.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/30/2020

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Asia-Pacific

East Asia

CHINA: Recovering Civil Aviation Sector Creates Opportunities Globally

China's recovering civil aviation industry is generating new opportunities for global players amid the country's resilient economy and push for wider opening-up. Meanwhile, the global civil aviation industry has begun to emerge from the shadow of the COVID-19 outbreak. The resumption of civil aviation is underway in China, said Liu Fang, secretary general of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

"ICAO and the entire global aviation community are moving safely and steadily towards a new horizon. It's a horizon where our lives and our world will return to normal again, where international air transport will be standing ready to expand the commercial market and supply chains," she said. Liu made the remarks through a video comment at the Second "Air Silk Road" International Forum held during the 2020 China International Fair for Trade in Services in Beijing.

SIGNIFICANT RECOVERY Leading the global air traffic recovery, China's reviving civil aviation industry is fostering new business opportunities for the global market and industry players. "Withstanding harsh challenges, China's civil aviation industry has taken the lead with a steady recovery worldwide," said Zhang Qing, an official with the Civil Aviation Administration of China. By the end of August, daily average flights handled by China's civil aviation industry came in at 13,000, around 90 percent compared with the volume before the pandemic outbreak. Meanwhile, the country's daily air passenger volume reached 1.6 million, about 80 percent of the volume in the same period last year. Its domestic routes saw the passenger volume recover to around 90 percent compared with last year. The country's air passenger and air cargo sectors are both gradually recovering, thanks to the government's effective epidemic control measures and supportive policies.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES Amid challenging times of the global civil aviation sector, industry players around the world are paying close attention to China's wider opening-up and large market. "China is the second-largest overseas market of Air France KLM and the largest in Asia. We are delighted and honored to resume our passenger flights to China, which marks a big step in rebuilding our global network," said Toon Balm, general manager of Air France KLM Greater China. Air France KLM has been playing its role in bridging the air cargo between China and Europe to ensure efficient transportation of vital supplies and maintain the global supply chain. Boeing has launched the Confident Travel Initiative to develop new solutions that could minimize health risks associated with air travel and raise more safety awareness amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The U.S. plane-maker has joined hands with Chinese airlines to provide technical support for safely ensuring disinfection works.

ENGINE FOR GROWTH China is expected to maintain the momentum of a steady recovery in the second half of the year. The IMF forecasted China to achieve what could be the sole positive annual GDP reading among major economies. "As an important engine for global economic growth, China's recovery is critical to the global economy," said Merlin Swire, chairman of Swire Pacific Limited. "Although the COVID-19 pandemic has posed serious challenges to the world, we all have witnessed China's resilience during this difficult time." Hong Kong Aircraft Engineering Company Limited (HAECO), Swire's engineering arm, has been expanding its business in Xiamen, east China's Fujian Province. Besides providing comprehensive aircraft engineering and maintenance services, HAECO Xiamen is

also sharing its experience and knowledge with industry partners. To date, it has provided more than 1,800 student-courses to employees of the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC), developer of China's C919 passenger aircraft. "We are delighted to be a partner for COMAC and to play our part in developing the Chinese domestic aviation industry," Swire said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/09/2020

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China Revising Industry Catalogue to Encourage Foreign Investment

China will significantly increase items on the industry catalogue that encourage foreign investment and help foreign-funded firms to receive benefits from preferential policies, Vice Commerce Minister Wang Shouwen said Tuesday. The Ministry of Commerce (MOC) will continue to implement the negative list for foreign investment and expand the scope of businesses encouraging foreign investment, sharing the market and opportunities in China with foreign investors, Wang said at the launching ceremony of an online international fair for investment and trade. Wang also noted that the ministry will further improve the foreign investment service system, help foreign-funded firms solve difficulties and well implement the foreign investment law and relevant regulations to create a stable, fair, transparent and predictable business environment. During the January-July period, actual use of foreign direct investment (FDI) on the Chinese mainland rose 0.5 percent year on year to 535.65 billion yuan (about 78.3 billion U.S. dollars), MOC data showed. In July, FDI expanded 15.8 percent year on year to 63.47 billion yuan, marking the fourth consecutive month for the country to witness positive FDI growth.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/09/2020

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Chinese Firms Willing to Invest More in EU if Business Environment Improves: Survey

Chinese companies in the European Union (EU) have a less favorable view than last year on the ease of doing business in the bloc, but they are willing to increase investment when the situation gets better, a survey published on Thursday shows. The survey, conducted by China Chamber of Commerce to the EU (CCCEU) and Roland Berger, a global strategy consultancy, is part of CCCEU's annual recommendation report titled "Acting for Common Future: Chinese Enterprises in the EU Striving for Growth amid Slowdown and Regulatory Hurdles." The survey finds that Chinese companies in the EU gave a score of 70 points to the general business environment, slightly lower than 73 points in 2019. When asked to assess the overall

business environment, close to 60 percent of the interviewees cited "a slight decline," and 10 percent "a significant decline." The survey also finds that if the ease of doing business in the EU improves, 60 percent consider investing more and close to 20 percent intend to increase "significantly."

According to the survey, Chinese businesses have somewhat less favorable views in three aspects concerning the ease of doing business: political environment, macroeconomic and sector-specific environment, and labor market. Nearly three in four respondents (72 percent) believe that the EU market is grimmer than last year, and 55 percent experience more difficulties in hiring European and foreign talent. On the contrary, they have more favorable views than last year on the EU's infrastructure and Research and development (R&D) sector: 56 percent see greater connectivity between China and the EU, and 53 percent point out more frequent scientific exchanges and joint research. Based in Brussels, CCCEU was founded in 2018 by a group of Chinese enterprises. It represents up to 70 members and chambers in member states, covering about 1,000 Chinese companies in the EU.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/10/2020

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China's Top 500 Private Firms Show Stronger Innovation Capability: Report

China's top 500 private enterprises saw steady growth in their ability to innovate during 2019, according to a report released by the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC). Within the leading 500 firms, the key technologies of 402 companies were mainly developed independently, accounting for 80.4 percent of the total, says the 2020 survey and analysis report on China's top 500, which is based on 2019 data. The number of valid patents obtained by the top 500 increased by 8.46 percent in 2019, while the figure for international patents also grew significantly, according to the report. The enhanced innovation capability was fueled by hefty research and development (R&D) investment. According to the report, the biggest spender on R&D spent 131.6 billion yuan (about 19.2 billion U.S. dollars) in 2019, with the second biggest spending 20.7 billion yuan. The report also highlights figures for R&D intensity, the proportion of R&D expenditure to main business revenue.

Among the top 500 private companies, 59 had an R&D intensity of more than 3 percent in 2019, while five companies surpassed 10 percent. In 2019, the top 500 private enterprises accelerated their transformation and upgrading, enhanced their innovation capability and sharpened their core competitiveness, said Huang Rong, vice chairman of the ACFIC. Meanwhile, they made efforts to forestall and defuse major risks, carry out targeted poverty alleviation, prevent and control pollution, as well as play an active role in implementing major national strategies and the coordinated regional development strategy, Huang added. Among the leading 500

firms, 403 engaged in fighting pollution, 355 in targeted poverty relief, 291 in rural vitalization and 191 in the Belt and Road construction, according to the report.

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Xi Stresses Promoting Healthy Development of Private Sector

Chinese President Xi Jinping has stressed efforts to unite people from the private sector around the Communist Party of China (CPC) to better promote the healthy development of the private sector. Xi, also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks in an instruction on related work. The non-public sector of the economy is an important part of the socialist market economy, and it is of great significance to promote the healthy development of the sector and personnel engaged in the sector, Xi said. He emphasized that it is an important task to unite and guide people in the private sector. The instruction was conveyed at a video teleconference held in Beijing on Wednesday, highlighting the united front work relating to the private economy. Wang Yang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, and head of the CPC Central Committee's leading group on the united front work, attended the meeting and delivered a speech.

Wang stressed that united front work personnel should stay on top of the development and demands of private enterprises, and make concerted efforts to fully implement the policies of the CPC Central Committee to support the private sector. They should also help private enterprises overcome current difficulties to enhance their confidence in further development, Wang said. Mechanisms for communication and consultation between government and businesses and for safeguarding the rights and interests of private enterprises should be improved, Wang said, adding the role of chambers of commerce and federations of industry and commerce should be brought into full play.

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China Zheshang Bank Increases Lending to Private Firms

China Zheshang Bank, one of the country's major joint-stock commercial banks, saw its outstanding loans to private enterprises grow rapidly in the first half of the year. At the end of June, the Hangzhou-based bank's such loans surpassed 620 billion yuan (about 91.7 billion U.S. dollars), up 10.42 percent from the beginning of 2020, and accounted for 63.54 percent of the bank's total outstanding loans to firms, the bank's

president Xu Renyan said at a press conference in Beijing. Xu said growth in Zhesang's lending to private businesses outpaced the bank's other kinds of loans. Other examples of the bank's support to the private sector include robust inclusive-financing loans to micro and small businesses, and loan prime rate-linked favorable pricing of bond issuance which had cut financing costs for private firms by over one percentage point. Xu said the bank will continue to promote innovation in technological applications and business models, and better serve private enterprises and the real economy.

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JAPAN: Public, Private Sectors Should Respond to Elderly's Growing Desire to Work

In order to maintain the vitality of society in the face of a declining population, it is necessary to create an environment in which elderly people who wish to work can do so. The government has released the results of a survey on economic life for people aged 60 and older. The rate of respondents who answered that they would like to work even after age 65 was 60%, including 20% who said that they want to work "as long as possible while they can." In Japan, the low birthrate and aging population are causing concern about future labor shortages. If healthy elderly people are able to work as long as possible, and that can lead to an increase in the number of people who support society, it becomes more likely that social security can be sustained. It is also expected that the number of people who earn an income will increase, stimulating consumption.

The challenge is how to improve the working environment for people in their late 60s. According to the survey, 90% of men and 60% of women in their early 60s are working, while in their late 60s, the percentage drops to 60% for men and 40% for women. In April next year, under the revised Law on Stabilization of Employment of Elderly Persons, companies are obliged to make efforts to provide employees with employment opportunities until the age of 70. Major home electronics retailer Nojima Corp. has introduced an employment system that allows all employees to work until the age of 80 if they wish. Even after retiring at 65, they will be employed in such capacities as temporary employees on one-year contracts. Work patterns and pay will be determined according to each individual.

If the employment of elderly people is continued, it may be necessary to review the overall personnel and wage systems. It is hoped that each company will sufficiently discuss the matter with its labor union and promote discussions on the review. Some small and midsize firms lack the know-how to improve their systems for that purpose. The government has established a mechanism to subsidize the cost of designing

such systems, and this should be made widely known to encourage companies to improve. There are large differences in physical strength among elderly individuals. Companies should allow elderly employees to work flexibly so that they can adjust their working hours and days, while paying attention to managing their health. Work-related accidents such as falling during work are also likely to occur. It is important to create a safe workplace such as by eliminating uneven floors in passages.

There are also many people who want to be reemployed by another company after reaching retirement age. The government has set up counters to help people who want to continue to work throughout their lives find jobs at 300 locations among Hello Work public job placement offices nationwide. At the Hello Work counters, advisers draw up lifelong employment plans for job seekers and ask them about their desired occupation, income and work style. At the same time, Hello Work officials ask local companies to help them find jobs suitable for the elderly. A fine-tuned response to requests from elderly job seekers is the key to their reemployment. There are various options for the elderly, such as starting a business based on their past experience, or working for a venture company or a nonprofit organization. The central and local governments and companies need to further devise ways of utilizing the knowledge and ability of elderly people.

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Japanese Companies Increasingly Target of Ransomware Cyber-Attacks

Cyber-attacks, invisible to the eye, are becoming more sophisticated and common sense as it relates to security measures is changing. How should companies and individuals prepare for this ever-looming malice? While artificial intelligence (AI) and big data have been used to prevent crimes and investigate criminal cases, concerns have emerged over this surveillance society. Ransomware is a type of computer virus that steals or encrypts corporate data, after which the perpetrators demand a ransom for data recovery. This type of malware has gone on a rampage. In Japan, damage to Honda Motor Co. and several other companies and organizations have increasingly come to light. On an English-language site on the dark web, where anonymous information exchanges are possible, a hacking group posted a message that uncooperative companies that have hidden the success of its cyber-attacks will be named on the site. The names of companies from around the world have been listed with the claim that the hacking group has successfully carried out cyber-attacks to steal their data. In early July, a mold manufacturing company based in Aichi Prefecture was also named, and some of its stolen data was revealed.

With the click of a button, site users can download internal documents for free. For the Aichi-based company, the documents included order forms, vouchers, blueprints and photos of equipment that company employees had taken on their overseas business trips. The hackers tried to obtain a ransom from the company in return for the rest of the stolen data, urging the firm to fill a designated form to contact them. The company told The Yomiuri Shimbun that it had made public the fact that internal documents about its clients had been leaked by a cyber-attack, but it had not known about any threatening posts. "We have been apologizing to our customers," a company official said. "We didn't pay any ransom." A succession of companies have suffered damage from ransomware. In February this year, an overseas unit of heavy-industry manufacturer IHI Corp. was hit by a cyber-attack and its internal documents were revealed on a site operated by the perpetrator of the attack. The data was encrypted and the perpetrator demanded money for data recovery. However, the company refused to pay.

In October 2018, the Uda City Hospital in Nara Prefecture experienced disruptions in its electronic medical record system for two days. An attacker encrypted the electronic medical records and demanded a ransom to recover the data. The hospital did not pay the ransom and recovered the data the following year. On the dark web, a wide variety of illegal products are listed on a black market. The items on the market include numerous "trophies" from cyber criminals, and some of them have been stolen from Japan. On one English-language site, apparent credit card numbers are sold, of which more than 4,000 cards are claimed to be from Japan. A single credit card number sells for around \$130 (about ¥14,000). Information about access to computers and servers that are vulnerable and can be easily hacked is also sold on the site. A piece of such information costs around ¥750. There are more than 100 pieces of information related to "Tokyo," which can be purchased with highly anonymous cryptographic assets. A Japanese-language site promotes sales of guns. According to research conducted in July by Tokyo-based information security company Trend Micro Inc., the right to access the network of a Japanese medical university was sold for \$999.

Katsuyuki Okamoto, an official of the company, said there is a black market that allows users to connect to it without using anonymizing software. "There are also some black market sites in which users get infected with viruses and have their information stolen just by browsing them," Okamoto said. "It's better not to connect to such sites casually." Ahead of the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, which have been postponed until next summer, cyber-attacks on Japan are expected to suddenly increase. As major international events tend to be targeted by hackers, the government has launched national efforts to deal with cybersecurity issues. The National center of Incident readiness and Strategy for Cybersecurity (NISC), the government's control tower to take measures against cyber-attacks, has designated 23 sectors related to the Tokyo Games, such as communications, electricity and railway sectors, as "critical service areas." It has checked about 300 business

operators in the areas to see if they have taken appropriate measures.

The Olympic Games in the past have repeatedly been targets of cyber-attacks. The 2012 London Games came under a distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack in which massive amounts of data were sent to the power system of the Olympic stadium to overwhelm it. At the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, a computer virus dubbed “Olympic Destroyer” was used to disrupt the system, making ticket issuance unavailable for a while. In Japan, the National Police Agency has placed sensors on the internet to detect suspicious communications that appear to be cyber-attacks. The average number of cases of suspicious communications detected by a single sensor last year was 4,192 a day, which means one case detected about every 20 seconds. The figure rose 52.3% from the previous year, hitting a record high. “Due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, the number of companies that are operating with staff working from home has increased,” an NISC official said. “It’s important to establish a system that can also monitor attacks remotely.”

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 09/07/2020

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Social Media Operators Must Prevent Online Defamation, Be Aware of Their Responsibility

Defamation on the internet is becoming more serious. It is important to adopt a wide range of measures, both in terms of prevention and redress. The Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry has drawn up measures to deal with online defamation mainly on social media. It has become a social problem in many countries, and in Japan, people infected with the novel coronavirus and medical workers have also been affected. It is significant that the government has come up with comprehensive measures. One of the main pillars of the measures is an expansion of the scope of information disclosure concerning people who post slanderous messages and materials. The identification of a person who posted such messages is essential for seeking damages or an apology, but until now, multiple court proceedings have been necessary, putting a heavy burden on victims. The phone numbers of people who make defamatory posts have been subject to disclosure requests since September. This change is expected to make it easier to find out the names and addresses of offenders, thus leading to an increase in the number of cases in which only a single court proceeding is required. It is hoped this will lead to the prompt resolution of damage claims for online defamation victims.

To expedite the redress process, the government is also considering the establishment of a new information disclosure system. The envisaged system will allow a court to decide whether to disclose the information of an abuser without a lawsuit if a victim files a complaint. However, the reality is that the information disclosure process is used mainly by companies to discourage people from posting

critical comments. If disclosure requirements are relaxed, there is a risk that companies will obtain information about people who post critical comments and put pressure on them. It is hoped that the ministry will deepen discussions carefully to design the system while giving consideration to the balance between freedom of expression and redress for victims. It will also be necessary to consider measures to prevent the abuse of disclosure procedures. The government was prompted to draw up measures in response to the death of Hana Kimura, a female professional wrestler who committed suicide in May after she had received abuse on social media over her behavior in a TV program. The production of a TV show that easily sparks criticism may also have been part of the problem.

It is crucial for social media platform operators to strengthen such voluntary efforts as removing malicious posts. The government and platforms are urged to work together to create guidelines that will be useful in making decisions on the removal of posts and set up a third-party organization that will provide consultation services for social media operators. The response of overseas operators holds the key. Social media platforms operated by overseas operators have been the main stages for such online defamation, but it is hard to say their explanations to users about their responses to inappropriate posts have been sufficient. Social media has become an indispensable part of people's daily lives. The providers of such services should be aware of their social responsibility and increase the transparency of their operations. It is hoped that the government will urge operators to accelerate their efforts. Anonymous slander is as cowardly as throwing stones from the shadows. People should not post comments that they would not say face-to-face. Such awareness should be shared by all users.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 09/07/2020

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SOUTH KOREA: Science University, Microsoft to Help Local SMEs Expand into Overseas Markets

A South Korean state-run science university and U.S. tech giant Microsoft Corp. said Monday that they will join forces to help local small and medium enterprises (SMEs) expand into overseas markets. Under the arrangement that is part of the larger Microsoft-Ministry of SMEs and Startups program, a total of 6.15 billion won (US\$5.2 million) has been earmarked this year to assist startups specializing in artificial intelligence (AI), the Gwangju Institute of Science and Technology (GIST) said. "GIST will handle local investment, technology transfer and personnel training, with Microsoft to be tasked with offering know-how in product development, consulting and securing U.S. investment," the university, 330 kilometers south of Seoul, said. It said some 30 SMEs with growth potential in AI will likely receive support this year, with an average of 170 million won being provided to each firm. Those with distinct growth potential can receive up to 400 million won for two years, with the money to

be used in related research and development. The support offered by the program is expected to help South Korean companies accelerate their technological growth, help secure investments and make it possible for them to go abroad, GIST said. Related to the latest joint effort, the school, which has been at the forefront of helping tech SMEs, said that it has provided support to 16 companies in the past five years and secured various investments totaling 20 billion won as 2019, which have gone into assisting businesses.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 09/01/2020

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S. Korea OKs Remote Access to Networks by Employees of Financial Firms

South Korea's financial watchdog said Thursday that it will allow employees of financial companies to remotely access internal networks, paving the way for a work-at-home system amid the coronavirus pandemic. The move came seven months after the Financial Supervisory Services (FSS) granted remote access to networks by essential financial personnel on a temporary basis. Currently, financial companies are required to separate their networks to try to prevent any potential security breaches by hackers. The watchdog has revised regulations on network separation to ensure employees of financial companies can access their work systems remotely at any time. Still, financial companies need to maintain strengthened network security in case their employees work at home. The measure is set to take effect next month.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 09/17/2020

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Mobile Carriers Step Up Partnerships for Future Mobility Services

As the global transport sector braces for future mobility services like flying taxis, South Korean telecom operators are strengthening partnerships with both auto giants and startups alike to join the industry shift. Major local carriers have emerged as key players in the transport shake-up as network infrastructure and technology are crucial in developing future vehicles. Earlier this week, major telecom firm KT Corp. joined hands with the country's largest carmaker, Hyundai Motor Co., as well as Hyundai Engineering & Construction Co. and the Incheon International Airport Corp., to develop an urban air mobility (UAM) service. Under the agreement, KT will develop and test a communications platform that connects and manages the flying vehicles, while Hyundai Motor will be responsible for their production. Hyundai E&C has agreed to develop the vehicle's takeoff stations, and Incheon International Airport will research a potential UAM shuttle service.

The partnership comes after South Korea announced in June plans to commercialize UAM by 2025, which promises to slash city dwellers' time stuck in traffic. The transport ministry estimates the value of the local UAM market to reach 13 trillion won (US\$11.2 billion) by 2040, with the global market size estimated at 730 trillion won. KT said it is considering plans to further develop UAM as a last-mile delivery service by utilizing its nationwide infrastructure of communication facilities as delivery stations for the vehicles. Its local rival LG Uplus Corp. is also setting its sights on future mobility via a partnership with Hanbul Motors, a local importer of auto brands under France's PSA Group, such as Peugeot and DS Automobiles, a premium spin-off of Citroen. Under the partnership, the telecom operator will introduce connected car technology to the two brands in South Korea.

LG Uplus said it will first apply its navigation platform to DS' new electric vehicle (EV), the DS 3 Crossback E-Tense, and expand features, such as a voice-recognition system that can control smart devices at home. A model poses with the DS 3 Crossback E-Tense at a showroom in southern Seoul on Sept. 21, 2020. LG Uplus Corp. partnered with local auto importer Hanbul Motors to introduce connected car technology to the brand. (Yonhap) The telecom operator also teamed up with local mobility startup Autonomous a2z Co. in June to develop a self-driving car platform using its 5G network. LG Uplus said its vehicle-to-everything technology, which incorporates the latest generation network, allows vehicles and traffic infrastructure to communicate seamlessly and ensure passenger safety. SK Telecom Co., the country's top mobile carrier, currently operates the taxi-hailing service T Map Taxi, based on its navigation app that boasts 12.5 million monthly active users. The telecom operator also partnered with local social venture Coactus Ltd. in 2018 to launch another taxi-hailing app for hearing-impaired drivers.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 09/22/2020

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One-Third of SMEs Say Unlikely to Survive for Over 1 Year Amid Virus

Nearly 3 in 10 smaller companies in South Korea think they may not stay afloat for one year or longer due to the impact of the prolonged coronavirus impact, a poll showed Tuesday. The survey of 50 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), taken by the Federation of Korean Industries, showed 34 percent responding they won't likely keep their heads above water should the current coronavirus-induced crisis persist. Twelve percent of the respondents said they will not be able to stay afloat for just six months. The outbreak of the novel coronavirus here, whose first confirmed case was reported in late January, has battered South Korean companies, especially SMEs, by denting domestic demand and exports. Nearly 27 percent

replied cutting ordinary expenses is their top option to cope with the coronavirus outbreak, followed by job cuts (21.5 percent), business restructuring (20.4 percent), wage reductions and temporary business suspensions (7.5 percent each), and asset sales (6.5 percent). About 65 percent of the surveyed firms also forecast their sales will decline in the second half of the year from a year earlier due to slumping exports and private consumption, with 37.5 percent of them expecting a decrease of more than 30 percent. Forty-two percent projected South Korea's economic crisis sparked by the coronavirus outbreak to continue for one year, with 30 percent saying it may grip the nation for two years. Nearly 60 percent of the respondents are dissatisfied with government support measures, with only 10 percent expressing satisfaction, according to the findings.

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Retail Sales Pick Up amid Stimulus Packages

The retail sales in Indonesia improved in August as the government distributed stimulus packages to boost the purchasing power which has been dashed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The retail sales decelerated by 12.3 percent in July annualized compared with the 17.1-percent drop in June, a survey by the central bank, Bank Indonesia showed on Wednesday. The narrower drop in July were attributed primarily to the improvement of sales of foods, beverages and tobaccos. The retail sales in August were estimated to settle at minus 10.1 percent on a yearly basis. For the next three and six months (till October 2020 and till January 2021), the price pressure was forecast to rise as indicated by the indexes of price expectation in October of 133.7 and 157.7 in January, which are higher than the indexes in the previous months of 131.5 in September and 156.1 in December. The survey involved 700 retailers across 10 major cities in the country, including the capital of Jakarta.

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CAMBODIA: Raising 2021's Minimum Wage for Garment Industry Despite COVID-19 Impact

Cambodia on Thursday set a new monthly minimum wage for the kingdom's garment and footwear industry at 192 U.S. dollars for 2021, up 1.05 percent from the current 190 dollars, although the sector has been badly hit by the impact of COVID-19, Labor Minister Ith Samheng announced. The minister said that Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen decided to increase two dollars to the minimum wage for next year and it will take effect on Jan. 1, 2021. "Taking into account the wellbeing of the

workers, the prime minister decided to raise two dollars to the 2021's minimum wage for the garment and footwear workers although the sector has been adversely impacted by the COVID-19," Samheng told reporters. The garment and footwear industry is Cambodia's biggest export sector, employing about 750,000 people in approximately 1,100 factories and branches, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, currently, some 120 factories still suspended their operations, affecting around 50,000 workers, he said. The Southeast Asian country saw a 5.4 percent drop in the garment and footwear export to 3.78 billion U.S. dollars during the first half of this year compared to the same period last year, according to government data. Speaking on behalf of the garment and footwear manufacturers, Nang Sothy, co-chair of the Government-Private Working Group on Industrial Relations, said the slight hike in the 2021's minimum wage was acceptable. "Wage increase during the COVID-19 pandemic is a difficulty for the employers, but to maintain the fraternal spirit between employers and employees, it is acceptable," he told reporters. Ath Thorn, president of the Cambodian Labor Confederation, said he was not satisfied with the new minimum wage, but due to the COVID-19, it was difficult for the confederation to demand a higher wage for the workers.

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MYANMAR: Approving Investment Enterprises with Nearly 5,000 Local Jobs

The Myanmar Investment Commission on Tuesday approved seven investment enterprises which can create 4,915 employment opportunities for locals, according to the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA). The investment capital of 347.85 million U.S. dollars and 23.4 billion kyats (17.89 million U.S. dollars) from the enterprises entered the country's manufacturing, real estate, hotel and tourism, and service sectors, respectively. According to the DICA's latest figures, Myanmar has attracted over 5 billion U.S. dollars in investment from 228 permitted foreign enterprises as of Aug. 31 in present 2019-20 fiscal year which will end on Sept. 30. During the period, power, oil and gas, and manufacturing sectors attracted the most foreign investment. Singapore, China and Thailand are largest investors in Myanmar, the DICA's figures showed. Regionally, Yangon region absorbs 60 percent of the country's investment from both home and abroad, followed by Mandalay region with 30 percent and the rest flows into other regions and states.

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THAILAND: Gov't Provides One-Year Financial Support for Employment of New Graduates in Public, Private Sectors

The Thai government is providing a one-year financial support for the employment of new graduates in both public and private sectors throughout Thailand, confirmed Labor Minister Suchart Chomklin on Wednesday. The government-run Center for the Economic Situation Administration has approved a sum of 23.47 billion baht (about 753 million U.S. dollars) in financial aid for the hiring of an estimated 260,000 new graduates by government agencies, state firms and private firms in all 77 provinces nationwide from Oct. 1, 2020 until Sept. 30, 2021, Suchart said. That sum of money will be withdrawn from the 400 billion baht (about 12.82 billion U.S. dollars) fund, earlier earmarked to finance the country's economic restoration and stimulus measures. The government will pay half the total of a monthly pay for each of the graduates while the workplaces where they may be hired for jobs will cover the balance, according to the labor minister. The government will monthly pay a maximum of 7,500 baht (about 240.53 U.S. dollars) to an employed graduate of a bachelor's degree, a maximum of 5,750 baht (about 184.41 U.S. dollars) to an employed graduate with a high vocational certificate and a maximum of 4,700 baht (about 150.73 U.S. dollars) to an employed graduate with a vocational certificate. The government's paychecks will be transferred directly to the employees' bank accounts on monthly basis.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 09/02/2020

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Another Thai Gov't Grant Designed to Help Small-Sized Vendors

The Thai government's latest grant measure to be provided to about 15 million people is primarily designed to help small-sized vendors and alleviate the people's daily cost of living, deputy government spokeswoman Traisulee Traisoranakul said on Friday. Traisulee categorically dismissed criticisms that department stores and convenience stores, including 7-11s, would largely benefit from such government grant measure scheduled to begin next month. She said it is designed to stimulate domestic consumption on the part of eligible recipients and help with the businesses of small-sized traders such as grocers, food stall vendors, street peddlers and those at open markets nationwide. Under the government's grant measure for about 15 million Thais, aged 18 years and over, the government will pay half the price of a product or service and the recipient will pay the balance. For each recipient, the government grant will be provided at a maximum of 3,000 baht (about 95.63 U.S. dollars), Traisulee said. That is viewed as a follow-on to the so-called Taste, Shop and Spend financial aid campaign, earlier provided by the government to stimulate domestic consumption nationwide. Nevertheless, the number of vendors and stores to join in the latest measure is expected to considerably increase, compared to that under the Taste, Shop and Spend campaign, she said.

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VIETNAM: HCM City Rolls Out Digital Transformation Programme to Enhance Small Firms' Competitiveness

The HCM City Business Association yesterday unveiled a digital transformation programme for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to help improve their competitiveness. The programme will be implemented in collaboration with the HCM City Computer Association and its members as a part of the city government's efforts to help SMEs gain better access to digital transformation solutions at reasonable costs. Under the scheme, a committee for digital transformation under the management of the HCM City Business Association and a digital transformation training centre for enterprises will be established. A portal will be built to support the digital transformation efforts, and a digital transformation solution package called Service Catalog will be established to support businesses. The business association also introduced two basic digital transformation packages, the X-Starter (for start-ups) and X-SME (for SMEs), to be provided by reputed members of the computer association.

Speaking at a press conference held yesterday to announce the programme, Chu Tiến Dũng, chairman of the HCM City Union of Business Associations, stressed the importance of good infrastructure and a legal framework for digital transformation. "Enterprises have recognised the importance of technologies in their operations and management. Digital transformation will be the element to help them improve their competitive capacity and develop sustainably." "The association is willing to support and assist enterprises in undertaking digital transformation if they face any hurdles in implementation," he told Việt Nam News. Lâm Nguyễn Hải Long, chairman of the computer association, said his association is working with other business groups in the city to publish a catalogue of IT products for enterprises' digital transformation efforts. He recommended that the city should provide free IT infrastructure for SMEs, and IT enterprises should offer digital transformation services at reduced prices.

The city should choose local enterprises to provide technologies for the programme because similar projects are already being carried out by IT enterprises in other provinces and cities, he added. HCM City aims to become a smart city with e-government, e-enterprises and an electronic society by 2030, and set up a database by that year to assist with this. By 2030 it also aims to push all public services online and provide them on multiple platforms, including mobile devices. The e-economy is expected to account for 40 per cent of the city's economy. The rate of individuals and enterprises having electronic accounts for payments will exceed 85 per cent. To obtain these goals, the city will strengthen communications and improve the awareness of its workers, the public and enterprises and create shared databases. Experts said the digital transformation would affect all areas of the economy like health, education, transport, finance-banking, tourism, agriculture, logistics, environment, and energy.

PM Launches Nationwide Campaign to Support Businesses

The Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc has issued Decision 1322/QĐ-TTg approving the national programme to support businesses to improve productivity and quality of products and goods in the 2021-30 period. The decision, which was issued at the end of last month, is considered a new push to support enterprises amid the Fourth Industrial Revolution that strongly affects the competitiveness of enterprises. In order to continue to strongly spread this activity, the national programme to support enterprises to improve their efficiency in the 2021-30 period sets the goal of supporting enterprises on the basis of applying solutions of standards, technology, management systems, and improvement tools, contributing to increase the proportion of the total factor productivity (TFP) to economic growth, and quality improvement, efficiency and competitiveness of the economy. In this programme, the Government has set a number of specific targets for the coming period. Specifically, in the 2021-25 period, it is targeted to have the harmonisation rate of the national standard system with international standards and regional standards reach about 65 per cent.

It also targets training and certifying about 600 quality productivity experts at ministries, agencies, localities and enterprises. In the 2026-2030 period, striving for the harmonisation rate to 70-75 per cent and training and certifying standards for about 1,000 experts, of which about 200 experts are certified with regional and international qualifications. To realise these goals, the Prime Minister will strengthen communication, specifically, it is necessary to promote guidance on the application of management systems, productivity and quality improvement tools, especially supportive tools for smart production and services in enterprises. Along with that, building and developing a database of good productivity practices to serve businesses and other related databases; paying attention to the honour and reward of collectives and individuals with high achievements in productivity and quality activities; and encouraging enterprises to participate in the National Quality Awards.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 09/26/2020

South Asia

SRI LANKA: Mobitel Empowers Police with hi-Tech Body Cameras

As part of supporting the nation's fight against COVID-19, Mobitel, Sri Lanka's

National Mobile Service Provider introduced the latest Body Cameras to Sri Lanka Police at an event held at the Police Park Headquarters recently. The landmark event which took place under the patronage of the Senior Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Sri Lanka Police, Deshabandu Tennakoon had the presence of officials representing both the Police and Mobitel (PVT) Ltd. Further, Mobitel also made a financial contribution to support the ongoing efforts of the Police in curtailing the spread of COVID-19 along with food packs meant to be distributed among Police personnel who are managing checkpoints for hours to safeguard the people of Sri Lanka. Mobitel believes that Sri Lanka Police need to be appreciated for their outstanding efforts and for tirelessly working around the clock to keep people safe. The contribution showcases Mobitel's unwavering commitment in times of national crisis to partner with the Tri-Forces and the Health Sector while simultaneously helping Sri Lankans avail of its diverse digital healthcare and superior mobile experience during this challenging time. Mobitel is sharing the government's responsibility in facilitating the safety of citizens at this critical time through a variety of other digital measures. As the caring network provider, Mobitel introduced numerous packages ranging from special Pre-Paid plans to Bonus Data add-ons, Free Health Advisory services, Digital Payment solutions, Data extensions and many more to help its customers to carry out their day to day activities without any hassle. Furthermore, both local and international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and Sri Lanka Health Promotion Bureau are leveraging on Mobitel's superior reach to communicate vital messages about COVID to raise awareness across Sri Lanka. In a time of the crisis facing the nation, Mobitel remains a pillar of strength and refuge not only for its customers but for the rest of the country as well.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 09/30/2020

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Azercell Named “The Company of the Year” at the International Level

The leading operator becomes a three-time winner of the world-famous STEVIE 2020 award. Azercell Telecom LLC, proved leader of national telco sector with its new brand identity, has taken its achievements and success from the national to the international level. Thus, the mobile operator won the title of "The Telecommunication Company of the Year" among hundreds of companies in the prestigious STEVIE 2020 competition. The company was ranked on the top in this nomination and won the Gold Award. Azercell also received the Bronze Award in the nominations "The most innovative company of the year" and "The most valuable corporate responsibility company". The panel of juries composed of independent international experts highly evaluated the initiatives of Azercell in the field of

digitalization and application of innovative technologies, as well as its activity in corporate social responsibility.

The juries highlighted Azercell's role in the introduction of next-generation technologies both in the country and in the South Caucasus, its initiatives to bring the latest innovative solutions to the local market, and at the same time to pursue a highly socially responsible policy. They characterized the leading mobile operator of Azerbaijan as "the most successful company of the region", "company becoming on a par with the most advanced mobile operators in the world" and "the winning brand". It should be noted that highly reputable companies, such as Google, Microsoft Corporation, Turk Telecom, Vodafone Turkey, Etisalat, Dell Technologies, Maersk Company, HP Inc., UNESCO ICHCAP, IBM and etc. are among the winners of this international competition in different years. "STEVIE" International Business Awards is the world's only international, all-encompassing business awards program that evaluates the achievements of companies operating in various industries. This year, the awarding ceremony will be held in December in Paris.

For more information, please contact news@mcs.az The leader of the mobile communication industry, the largest taxpayer and the biggest investor of the non-oil sector of Azerbaijan "Azercell Telecom" LLC was founded in 1996. Currently, 5 million subscribers choose Azercell services. Mobile operator controls 49% of market share; while its geographical coverage constitutes 99.2% (excluding the occupied territories); and population coverage 99.8%. Azercell was the pioneering mobile operator to introduce a number of innovations in Azerbaijan, including GSM technology, advance payment system, mobile internet services, 24/7 call center service (*1111), 7/7 Front Office service, Azercell Express offices, M2M services, 4G technology, mobile and online customer care services and customer services through social media, mobile e-signature service "ASAN Imza" etc. Azercell tested 5G pilot network for the first time in the country in the frame of "Bakutel 2019" exhibition. Rapidly increasing 4G network of Azercell covers nearly 60 regions of the country, including Baku and Absheron peninsula. According to the results of mobile network quality and wireless coverage mapping surveys by international systems, Azercell's 4G network demonstrated the best results among the mobile operators of Azerbaijan. Azercell is the only company in Azerbaijan and CIS region which has been awarded Gold Certificate of International "Investors in People" Standard.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 09/14/2020

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Self-employed SMEs in Azerbaijan provided State Support in Business Planning

Azerbaijan's Agency for the Development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) provides support for the preparation of business plans to individuals involved

in the self-employment program in cooperation with the State Employment Service under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population. According to the agency, from August through September 2020, specialists from the Khachmaz Center for Small and Medium Business (SMB) Development and 'SMB Friends' on the Guba-Khachmaz economic region provided consulting services on drawing up business plans to over 70 citizens from the Khachmaz, Guba, and Gusar districts. As the agency said, in the coming days, via the self-employment program, citizens from Siyazan and Shabran districts will also be provided with the support for drawing up the business plans. The agency noted that following the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers dated July 25, 2020, persons registered in the local structures of the State Employment Service as unemployed, applicants and involved in the self-employment program due to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) in 2020 will be provided with materials, equipment, and other property without involvement in training. These funds will be transferred to the abovementioned persons based on their business plans.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 09/17/2020

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Azerbaijan's State Service on Property Issues to Put Up Several Enterprises for Auction

The State Service on Property Issues under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy will hold an auction on October 20. According to the service, 17 enterprises operating in the transport, construction, repair, poultry, and production sectors will be put up on the auction. Joint-stock companies to be put up for privatization are located both in several districts of the country and in the capital (Baku). All those willing to participate in the auction can not only place an electronic order for the selected state property but also join the online auctions. Those interested in the process can come to the Property Services Zone of the State Service on Property Issues on the day of the auction, as well as observe it without registration online. Persons wishing to bid on the official website of the State Service on Property Issues (emlak.gov.az) or on the privatization.az portal, after registering, must pay a deposit of 10 percent of the initial auction price of the property, thereby obtaining the status of a customer.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 09/23/2020

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Share of Private Sector in Industry Hits 78.4 Pct in 2020

The share of the private sector in Azerbaijan's industry sector amounted to 78.4 percent in the period between January and August, local media has reported. Moreover, the share of industrial products in the total volume of production was 85.7 percent, while the share of industrial services was 14.3 percent. Furthermore, cost

of goods and services produced in Azerbaijan in the industrial sector amounted to AZN 19.7 billion (\$11.5bn) during the period of January-August 2020, which is by 3.4 percent less compared to the same period of 2019. Some 74.3 percent of industrial production falls on mining, 22.8 percent on processing, 2.1 percent on production, distribution and supply of electricity, gas and steam, and 0.8 percent in the sector of water supply, waste treatment and recycling. Likewise, as of September 1, stocks of finished products at industrial enterprises' warehouses amounted to AZN 311.4 million (\$183.1M), taking into account reserves created in previous periods. In addition, at the warehouses of industrial enterprises there were other products purchased from other enterprises and intended for sale in the amount of AZN 85 million (\$49.9M). The volume of production in Azerbaijan's non-oil and gas sector increased 13.6 percent during the period between January and August in 2020. However, the decline in the industrial production was due to the decline in production in oil and gas sector by 4.9 percent, and increase in the non oil and gas sector.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 09/28/2020

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GEORGIA: ADB Approves First Sector Development Program to Support Sustainable Water Supply and Sanitation Services

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) today approved \$150 million (in euro equivalent) in loans to improve water supply and sanitation services in Georgia and help the government craft an integrated approach to the sector's development. Under the Sustainable Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Development Program, ADB will provide a \$130 million policy-based loan and a \$20 million project loan. "Presently, the management and operation of water supply and sanitation in Georgia is inefficient," said ADB Principal Urban Development Specialist Heeyoung Hong. "This compromises the sustainability of the sector and leaves disparities between urban and rural areas' access to reliable water supply and sanitation services. This program aims to help Georgia improve governance and efficiency of the sector and ultimately improve services for more households and businesses." Water supply in Georgia ranges from four hours to 24 hours per day, posing a significant health risk during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. About 92% of urban and 64% of rural residents receive piped water, while 84% of urban and 20% of rural residents have access to sewerage systems. Only 36% of the total population benefit from wastewater treatment.

ADB's policy-based loan will support the government's efforts to develop a cohesive water supply and sanitation policy that balances development in urban and rural areas. It will help improve the legal, regulatory, and institutional environment to pave the way for new investments and private sector engagement. It will strengthen the capacity of local governments and the United Water Supply Company of Georgia (UWSCG), a state-owned enterprise, to enable them to adequately meet the demand

in urban and rural areas. The project-based loan will fund operation and maintenance capacity and equipment of UWSCG. It will help to prepare for national-scale rural water supply and sanitation development. In Telavi city, a regional center that has an average of four hours of water supply daily, the rehabilitation of water systems and the creation of new reservoirs and wells will ultimately enable 24-hour water supply. The number of household connections will also be increased, and metering will be raised to 100% from the current 40%. ADB will also administer a \$250,000 technical assistance, which will introduce an asset management system with high-level technology for water supply in selected cities. Of this amount, \$225,000 will be financed on a grant basis by ADB's High-Level Technology Fund, while the government will provide the remaining \$25,000.

ADB has been helping to improve water and sanitation in Georgia since 2011 when it began supporting UWSCG through a multitranches financing facility of up to \$500 million. This increased access to water supply and sanitation services and benefited over 300,000 people in 12 cities. In July, ADB announced a \$40 million investment in Georgia's first-ever green bonds with proceeds to upgrade water supply and sanitation in Tbilisi and nearby municipalities, and refinance debt of renewable energy and water operations. The green bonds were issued by Georgia Global Utilities JSC, whose main subsidiary, Georgian Water and Power LLC, is the largest privately-owned utility company in the country, serving around 1.4 million customers.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/30/2020

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UZBEKISTAN: ADB Approves \$200 Million Loan to Improve Power Sector

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) today approved a \$200 million policy-based loan to strengthen Uzbekistan's power sector by improving its financial sustainability and ensuring adequate investment in critical infrastructure. The Power Sector Reform Program will provide budget support and targeted policy actions aimed at restructuring the power sector to enable competition and create a conducive environment for private investment. The program will also streamline sector oversight to ensure fair and transparent competition and consumer protection. "Reliable and affordable electricity supply is essential for driving economic growth and socioeconomic development," said ADB Energy Specialist Seung Duck Kim. "As a first of its kind in Uzbekistan's energy sector, this policy-based loan will be critical to support complex reforms and deepen private investment. By encouraging private sector participation, the program will support the government's ultimate objectives of creating jobs and improving the quality of life. Clean energy transition will be at the center of reforms to accelerate the development of modern and reliable energy infrastructure that will put greenhouse gas emissions into structural decline." While Uzbekistan is fully electrified, the quality of service is poor and unreliable due to

transmission bottlenecks and aging power generation and distribution assets.

The power sector has also struggled to fund new investments because of its weak financial performance. The government has initiated structural and policy measures to improve oversight in the power sector and financial sustainability. It has also moved towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the electricity supply chain and improving energy efficiency by upgrading regulatory standards and adopting a district heating efficiency improvement program. ADB's program supports these reforms, with the goal of increasing private sector participation in power generation to at least 15% in capacity terms and improving revenue collection to 99% by 2023. The measures will help reboot the economy and bring new employment opportunities as the country recovers from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The program was jointly developed with the Agence Française de Développement, which will provide cofinancing of a €150 million loan (around \$169 million). The program also benefits from close development partner coordination and harmonized technical assistance support from ADB, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the World Bank. ADB sector reform support for Uzbekistan has focused on improving the internal management system and institutional strengthening of Uzbekenergo, the state-owned power utility. Since 2018, ADB has expanded its support to the policy reform agenda, including a new tariff methodology, a sector master plan, transaction advisory support for public–private partnership projects, and policy advisory on the design and structure of the reformed power market.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/28/2020

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Online Retail Giant Fishpond's Customers Left High and Dry

Popular online retailer Fishpond has been overrun with furious complaints from customers who have been left high and dry by the company after ordering products during the pandemic. The e-commerce business has seen its supply chains disrupted due to the coronavirus but it has refused to provide refunds to customers whose delivery never arrived citing the fact it is a “small company”. The business, which is part of larger company WorldFront, operates through a network of fulfilment centres in US, UK, Australia and New Zealand and employs about 100 people, and pulls in hundreds of millions in revenue each year. The Auckland-based retailer appears to have fallen on hard times but Fishpond has continued to take payment for items it is has been unable to deliver for the past four months. Customers who have managed to get a response from the company when seeking a refund say they have been given the run around and accused the business of using stall tactics and going

dark.

WA woman Lisa Ashley ordered some eye cream in early May. "It's now September 2nd, and I still haven't received my order," she says. "I wrote them in July asking for a refund and they asked me to be more patient due to COVID delays. I waited three more weeks to no avail. Despite my requests to them I was ignored." Sunshine Coast woman Jodi Salmond says she won't be using Fishpond again after ordering four books on April 28. When more than ten weeks went by without delivery, her repeated efforts to contact the company seemed fruitless. "I know COVID-19 has hit everybody pretty badly. In terms of not receiving something on time, that's not the biggest issue. It's more the communication," she told Yahoo News Australia. More than three months after purchase, two of the books recently turned up while she was passed on to a third party supplier for one of them.

"I have continually chased up with them - the third party - I've e-mailed them about eight to ten times to no response whatsoever," she said. Fishpond did eventually offer a refund for the fourth book which has still not turned up this week but only offered a store credit. "I'm not really interested in shopping there ever again," Ms Salmond said. "I haven't left a review on their website just yet because I still want the books and I want to see where this goes." "They are scam artists" Others have been quicker to vent their frustration on the company's website as well as various customer review sites. "I have had the same experience as others on this site. Very frustrating when you can't contact them. Appalling business if they are taking people's money and not sending any goods. Surely they can't get away with this," one Sydney woman wrote last week on review website TrustPilot.

Dozens of other complaints posted in recent days have accused the normally reliable company of scamming shoppers. "They are scam artists, the site should be shut down," exclaimed one. "I ordered something from them 3 months ago and they eventually admitted they cannot supply it. Now they have stopped replying to any communication and I'm still waiting for a refund! Avoid this scam company," another complaint posted last week says. "All evidence indicates that this is scam. DO NOT ORDER FROM FISHPOND. Tracking is a farce, order never received and no-one replied to my emails," another customer posted. Left with no other recourse, countless shoppers have reported launching a chargeback via their bank.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/03/2020

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Tax Break Lure for Foreign-Based Companies

Foreign-based companies could soon be lured to Australia with the incentive of tax breaks. Acting Immigration Minister Alan Tudge is spearheading a plan to entice international talent and business with a program that hinges on financial incentives

and visas for skilled workers. Mr Tudge is focusing on the advanced manufacturing, health and financial services sectors. He wants entrepreneurs - scientists, investors and technology developers - to come to Australia and generate wealth and jobs. Cabinet minister Peter Dutton hopes the plan gets off the ground. "We need to grow jobs," he said on Friday. "It's OK that we've got support in place at the moment with JobKeeper and JobSeeker - that's fine and that's a good thing - but to get to the next stage we need to have investment." Australia has plunged deep into recession after the economy shrank seven per cent in the June quarter.

More than one million Australians are unemployed and 400,000 more are expected to join the dole queue before Christmas. The jobless rate is still expected to climb to 10 per cent by the end of the year and remain stubbornly high for months. Labor deputy leader Richard Marles wants to hear more than "hope" from senior government ministers. The opposition argues tax breaks alone are no substitute for a comprehensive plan on jobs. "Small business is facing the biggest crisis it has in Australia's history and we hear nothing from this government about what they are going to be doing for them," Mr Marles said. "We need to have a jobs plan from this mob right now." Prime Minister Scott Morrison is likely to fast-track personal income tax cuts in the October budget to get Australians spending again. Speeding up the legislated tax cuts will see high-income earners keep an extra \$11,000 a year. But low-income earners will only get about \$250.

Mr Morrison attempted to brush off questions about why big earners including himself should receive much more money than others. "I understand what the current legislated program is and that is the legislated program," he told reporters. "Any changes we might make to that will be announced in the budget, and that's in October." National retail trade rose 3.2 per cent in July as restrictions started to ease across most of the country. Turnover for the month was 12 per cent higher than July 2019, dominated by sales of household goods, clothing and takeaway food. Online sales made up 9.8 per cent of total retail turnover. There were rises in all states and territories but Victoria, where fresh outbreaks of coronavirus triggered a second round of lockdowns. Retail turnover in Victoria fell 2.1 per cent, the Australian Bureau of Statistics found. Sales are forecast to slump in August due to the Victorian shutdown but could pick up again in September, depending on the state government's "roadmap" out of restrictions.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/04/2020

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Small Businesses Want Super Rise Deferred

Small businesses have asked for a legislated superannuation guarantee rise to be deferred for two years. National advocate Kate Carnell has warned business owners

will be crippled if they are forced to pay staff 0.5 percentage point more super from next July. Ms Carnell has written to the treasurer proposing tax offsets she believes will ensure workers end up with a similar amount of retirement savings. "We have to get the balance right by ensuring small businesses aren't hit with rising costs and workers are no worse off," she said on Friday. Ms Carnell said the proposed tax cuts would cost no more than \$6 billion per year. "Ultimately, by implementing this proposal, the federal government would be supporting small businesses and all Australians who deserve a dignified retirement."

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/11/2020

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NEW ZEALAND: Fonterra Returns to Annual Profit

New Zealand's Fonterra expects to continue paying dividends after asset sales and a focus on its domestic business helped the world's largest dairy exporter get back into profit. The company reduced its debt by more than \$NZ1 billion in fiscal 2020 and paid a final annual dividend of five NZ cents per share, compared with no payout last year. "This year marks a return to paying dividends, a position we expect to maintain in the future, assuming normal operating conditions," Chairman John Monaghan said on Friday. Fonterra last year unveiled a "back to basics" strategy that called a halt to the previous management's failed overseas expansion plans and pledged to cut debt by focusing on domestic production. This helped the dairy exporter report a net profit of \$NZ659 million for the year ended July 31, compared with a loss of \$NZ605 million in fiscal 2019 that was largely driven by asset write-downs.

For fiscal 2021, it has kept its earlier guidance for the farmgate milk price - the price it pays to farmers for milk - of between \$NZ5.90 and \$NZ6.90 per kilogram of milk solids. It also forecast normalised annual earnings per share between 20 NZ cents and 35 NZ cents, compared with 24 NZ cents per share a year earlier. Fonterra accounts for about 30 per cent of the world's dairy exports and is New Zealand's largest company. Its best known brands include Anchor milk and Mainland cheese.

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