



Asia-Pacific Governance Watch

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1、Government Policy and Legislation

Asia-Pacific

East Asia

CHINA: Yangtze Delta Unveils Guideline to Improve Business Environment

China Adopts Normal Monetary Policy as Long as Possible: Central Bank Governor

Laws Amended to Further Regulate Use of National Flag, Emblem

China Adheres to Prudent Monetary Policy: Central Bank Governor

China to Further Improve Macro-prudential Policy Framework: Official

China Issues Revised Regulation on Science, Technology Award System

Procuratorate Issues Guideline for Pilot Free Trade Zones

Xinhua Headlines: Key CPC Session Draws 15-year Roadmap for China's Modernization

JAPAN: Suga Plans to Formulate Data Strategy

Japan, Mongolia to Cooperate on 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific'

Govt to Unify Personal Information Protection Laws to Smoothen Data Usage in Japan

Gov't Unveils Action Plan to Lower Mobile Phone Fees

Suga Outlines Carbon-Neutral Society by 2050

SOUTH KOREA: Moon Unveils Plan to Pour 10 Trn Won into 'Smart City' Scheme by 2025

Korea to Prepare Delicate Legal Push to Keep E-Commerce Market Fair

Moon Says S. Korea to Keep Working With WHO, Int'l Community on Coronavirus

Govt. Resumes Discount Coupon Program for Travel, Dining Sectors

South-East Asia

MYANMAR: To Implement 3 Programs for Peace with Increased Momentum in Post-2020

THAILAND: Emergency Rule over COVID-19 Extended Until End of November

VIETNAM: Tasks for Designing National Master Planning for Next Five Years Approved

NA Issues Development Strategy for State Audit Office to 2030

Việt Nam Pledges to Promote Rule of Law at National, Int'l Level

VN Launches Elderly Healthcare Programme in Response to Ageing Population

NA Deputies Mull Law on Residence

South Asia

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

Telangana Launches New EV Policy, Aims to Lure \$4 bn Investments

NITI Aayog Brings Model Act on Conclusive Land Titles

Central-West Asia

UZBEKISTAN: Intending to Regulate Legal Status of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons by a Single Law

Uzbekistan Adopts Law on Genomic Registration of Citizens

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Ministers Flag 'Big Changes' in Aged Care
Australia's Electric Car Plan in Slow Lane
Labor Looking to Overhaul Redress Scheme
Subsidy Scheme Could Exclude Wage Thieves
Aged Care Needs New Laws, Staff Ratios
Call for Broader Rights Comb of Virus Laws
Legal Centre Warns on Consumer Data Right Rule Changes
NEW ZEALAND: Ardern Defends Weed Silence, May Tweak Law
Government Delivers Plan for World-Leading Aquaculture Industry
Government Releases First National Voluntary Emissions Offset Guidelines

2、 Government System and Civil Services

Asia-Pacific

APEC Needs to Build Greater Food Systems' Resiliency
Structural Reform Agenda to Focus on Recovery and Resiliency:
APEC Policy Support Unit

East Asia

CHINA: Pledging to Build Open, Transparent Capital Market System
China to Continue Improving Its Special Transfer Payment Mechanism
JAPAN: Embarking on Long, Winding Road of Digital Administrative Reform
Suga Needs to Focus on Effectiveness as He Promotes Government Reform
Japan to Create Database to Prevent Sexual Predators from Babysitting
Prevent Cyber-Attacks on Tokyo Games Through Public-Private Partnership

South-East Asia

MYANMAR: President, State Counsellor Cast Advance Votes for General Elections
MALAYSIA: Penang Announces Half-Month Salary or Minimum

RM1,000 to State's Civil Servants

THAILAND: Gov't to Endorse Extraordinary Parliamentary Session to Avert Looming Political Crisis amid Protest

VIETNAM: PM Approves 2021 Public Service Workforce Plan

South Asia

INDIA: Deptt. of Fertilisers Ranked 2nd on Data Governance Quality Index

Indian Railways to Be World's Largest Clean Energy-driven Rail Transit System by 2023

NetApp India Appoints Ganesan Arumugam & Siddharth Nalawade Strengthening Its Leadership Team

Chandigarh Gets 'E-consent' Portal for NOC for Industries from Pollution Control Body

Now 33% Quota for Women in Punjab Govt Jobs, Approves Cabinet

Govt of India Provides Special Window to States for Meeting GST Shortfall

NSDL Taking e-Governance to Citizens' Doorstep

Uttar Pradesh's First Data Centre to Come Up in Greater Noida

Kailash Gahlot Meets Land Owing Agencies for Setting Up EV Infra

Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: To Establish Embassy in Cuba

UZBEKISTAN: Elected Member of UN Human Rights Council for First Time in Its History

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Coalition Forging Ahead with Work Reforms

Government Launches Business Red Tape Cuts

Committee to Examine Consumer Protections

ACMA Backs Telco Consumer Regulatory Reform

Even with COVID-19 Spread Near Zero, Chief Scientist Says Australia's Systems Are Ready

3、 Management, Capacity Building and Innovation

Asia-Pacific

COVID-19 Crisis Puts Migration and Progress on Integration at Risk

Social Dialogue Crucial to Tackling Impact of COVID-19 Says Global Deal Report

Regulators Seek Faster Fintech Innovation to Cope with Covid-19 District Selected for Smart City Innovation Program with Plug and Play

Open and Predictable Trade Environment Key to Food Security Resiliency

East Asia

CHINA: To Boost Employment with Multi-pronged Measures

China to Launch Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation Week

Chinese Premier Stresses Innovation, Entrepreneurship to Drive Growth

China Sees Stable Home Prices amid Control Policies

China to Step Up Engagement in Global Innovation Network: Premier

Global Developers Lured to China AI Innovation Platform

Shanghai Technology Exchange Opens to Drive Innovation

JAPAN: Firms Fall Woefully Short of Meeting Gov't Goals on Women in Management

Japanese Govt Eyes to Strengthen the Protection of Intangible Cultural Assets

SOUTH KOREA: Gov't to Remove Phone Numbers from Visitor Registrations to Protect Personal Info

S. Korea to Speed Up Development of Robot Tech, Lift Regulations

MONGOLIA: ADB to Help Manage Food Insecurity Risks amid Supply Disruptions Caused by COVID-19

South-East Asia

CAMBODIA: Central Bank Launches Mobile Payment Platform

MALAYSIA: PM Reaffirms Govt Commitment to Eradicating Income Inequality

PHILIPPINES: Mulling over Reopening Borders to Foreign Travelers

SINGAPORE: Adjusts Border Measures for Travellers over Covid-19 Closed

THAILAND: Highlighting the Importance of UHC in Fostering Health Security

Thailand to Implement New Model to Stem COVID-19

VIETNAM: Digital Tools Key to Regulatory Policy Making

Online Training on Diabetes for Healthcare Workers Set Up

Health Ministry Launches Action Month on Excess Cholesterol Prevention

Ministry of Health Tightens the Management of Medical Waste During Floods

South Asia

INDIA: Centre Launches ‘Mission Karmayogi’ for Capacity Building of Govt Employees

Online Education Reshaping Learning

PWD Installs Technology to Prevent Waterlogging at Minto Bridge, Delhi

DFI Launches Future Advanced Remote Management Platform - RemoGuard

Delhi Pollution: CM Kejriwal to Launch Green Delhi App Today

Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Opportunity to Support National Army Through “Kabinetim” App

Azerbaijani State Service to Put Up State Properties for Auction

Azerbaijan Approves Procedure for Maintaining Personal Records of Insured Persons

Azerbaijan Announces Recent Statistics on COVID-19 Cases Across Country

KAZAKHSTAN: Launching COVID-19 Contact Tracing App

UZBEKISTAN: Launching a Project on Automation of Air Pollution Monitoring

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: No Cost Pinned to Low Emissions Tech Map

Minister Warned over Energetic Statement
Govt Will Act Quickly on Disasters Report
NEW ZEALAND: More Government EVs Get the Green Light
New Zealand Contributes to Cyber Security Capacity Building in
the Pacific
Funding Boost for Technology Incubators

4、 Economic and Social Development and ICT

Asia-Pacific

International Community Renews Commitment to Address Tax
Challenges from Digitalisation of the Economy
1 in 6 Children Lives in Extreme Poverty, World Bank-UNICEF
Analysis Shows
Big Gender Gap in Students Attitudes and Engagement in Global
and Multicultural Issues, Finds New OECD PISA Report
Women and Girls Are at the Center of Economic Recovery Efforts
Webinar Advances New Regional Flyway Initiative to Support
Biodiversity Conservation and Livelihoods in East and Southeast
Asia

East Asia

CHINA: E-commerce Sites Offer New Sources of Income for
Overseas Merchants
Sales of Chinese Anti-poverty E-commerce Platform Top 3 Bln
Yuan
More Than 800 Million Chinese Use Online Payment: Report
China's Industrial Internet Sees Rapid Growth with 5G
Technology
China Development Bank Pledges Financing for Sustainable
Poverty Alleviation Efforts
Chinese Premier Stresses Steady Economic Recovery, Fulfillment
of 2020 Goals
ADB to Support Early Childhood Education in Municipality in PRC
China to Eliminate Poverty Among Youth via E-commerce
East China Province to Expand Digital Economy Scale
Virtual Reality Getting More Real as Industry Grows
China's 5G Development Showing Promising Results: MIIT
Cross-border E-commerce Business Through Xinjiang Port
Continues to Grow

China's Industrial Profits Restore as Economy Perks Up
China's Import Expo Offers Opportunities for Business, Boosts Global Economy
Shanghai Remains Hot Spot for Foreign Investment
Western China's Twin Cities Drive High-quality Development
Cross-border E-commerce Pilot Zone Opens for Business in Hinterland Province
Experts Optimistic About China's Prospects as New Development Proposals Adopted
JAPAN: Enhance Defense Capabilities in New Domains of Cyber, Space Security
Japanese Govt Aims to Deter Tech Giants from Monopolizing Data
Japan Enters Era of Fierce Competition over 5G Smartphones
Travel Industry Sees Wave of Digitization in Bookings
SOUTH KOREA: Aiming to Develop 50 AI Chips by 2030
5G Accessibility in Major Subway Lines at Over 75 Pct: Data
S. Korea's 5G Download Speed 2nd Fastest Globally: Report

South-East Asia

VIETNAM: Digital Skills for Teachers, Students Must Be Prioritised
HCM City E-Commerce Market Firmly on Growth Path
HCM City's Health Sector Sets Up Sites to Screen for Non-Communicable Diseases
HCM City Speeds Up Sub-Projects for Smart City Development
SGDT Works to Collect More E-Commerce Tax
Hospitals Urged to Take Part in Data Sharing

South Asia

INDIA: Digitisation Augmenting Education & Health in Narmada
Gujarat Connects 2700 Gram Panchayats Through Optical Cable Network
RAISE 2020: 'Artificial Intelligence', the Way Forward for India
India & Japan Inks Pact to Strengthen Cybersecurity
Chennai Metrowater Accelerates Installation of Digital Water Meters
India Is Constrained by Supply and Tech Startups Are Leading the Wave for Change
OT Security a Cybersecurity Challenge as Organizations

Experienced Intrusions in Past Year
SRI LANKA: E-Learning for Continuing University Education
Online Counselling for Children, Adolescents

Central-West Asia

ARMENIA: Provocations Hinder Development of ICT Throughout Region

AZERBAIJAN: By 2040 Number of Stations of Baku Metro to Double

Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy to Allocate Loans to Entrepreneurs via E-Credit Platform

UZBEKISTAN: Mirziyoyev Intends to Create "Digital Uzbekistan" by 2030

Hotels in Uzbekistan Will Provide Conditions for People with Disabilities

IT Park Announces Startup Competition "Tourism. The Path to Innovation"

Uzbekistan Expands Range of Ecosystem Services

Uzbekistan's Per Capita GDP Dips to 11.9 Million Soms

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Predicting Economic Outlook Difficult
More Stranded Australians Seek to Return

Cashless Welfare Card Goes Under Spotlight

SOLOMON ISLANDS: PM Sogavare Reiterates Need to Take Part in Economic Development

Economic Impact of COVID-19: Government Braces Itself
Opposition Leader on Current State of Economy

5、 Public Finance

Asia-Pacific

Global Agriculture and Food Security Program Donors Announce US\$300 Million to End Hunger and Malnutrition

World Bank Approves \$12 Billion for COVID-19 Vaccines

World Bank Issues Sustainable Development Bonds in

Scandinavian Currencies and Raises Awareness for Food Loss and Waste

World Bank Prices USD 6 Billion 5-Year Sustainable Development Bond

First FIN-SMART Roundtable on Financing Sustainable Maritime Transport

World Bank Prices Long-dated EUR 2 Billion 30-Year Sustainable Development Bond

COVID-19: Remittance Flows to Shrink 14% by 2021

East Asia

CHINA: \$200 Million in ADB Loans to Demonstrate a Low-Carbon and Resilient City Growth Model in Xiangtan

New Guideline Paves Way for Healthier Capital Market

JAPAN: BOJ Offers Brighter View on Regional Japan

BOJ to Start Feasibility Study on Digital Currency in FY 2021

SOUTH KOREA: Approving Us\$200 Mln in Aid for Developing Nations Fighting Pandemic

South-East Asia

INDONESIA: ADB Commits to Work with Indonesia for Sustainable Recovery from the Pandemic

Indonesia's State Income Recorded at 78.7 Bln USD till September

MYANMAR: \$30 Million ADB Loan to Scale Up COVID-19 Health Response

Myanmar's Border Trade Reaches over 10.5 Bln USD in FY 2019-20

\$484 Million ADB Loan to Fund New GMS Expressway in Myanmar

PHILIPPINES: Lower Chamber of Congress Approves Proposed 2021 Budget to Help Fight COVID-19

THAILAND: Central Bank Eyes Additional Debt Restructuring Package amid Grim Economic Outlook

Thai Central Bank to Ease Overseas Investment Rules to Temper Thai Baht

South Asia

BHUTAN: ADB Loan to Sustain Financial Inclusion, Economic Diversification

ADB, India Sign \$270 Million Loan to Improve Urban Services in 64 Madhya Pradesh Small Cities

ADB, India Sign \$300 Million Loan to Develop Rajasthan's Secondary Towns

India's GDP to Contract by 10.3% in FY 2020-21, Says IMF

MALDIVES: ADB Ramps Up Support for Renewable Energy

NEPAL: ADB Ventures Supports Clean Brick Production

Central-West Asia

AFGHANISTAN: ADB Provides Additional Financing to Enhance Agricultural Productivity

AZERBAIJAN: Central Bank to Host Auction on Bloomberg Trading Platform

Azerbaijan Amends Rules for Temporary Regulation of Credit Organizations amid COVID-19 Pandemic

Central Bank of Azerbaijan Grants License to Local Agro-Insurance Company

Two More Azerbaijani Banks Integrated into Instant Payment System

Azerbaijan's Central Bank Holds Deposit Auction

Azerbaijani Banks Foreign Currency Demand Disclosed

Procedure for Calculating Total Amount of Insurance Premiums Approved in Azerbaijan

Central Bank of Azerbaijan May Receive New Powers

Socio-economic Issues in Azerbaijan - in Center of Attention During COVID-19

GEORGIA: ADB Approves \$200 Million Policy Loan to Support Economic Recovery

UZBEKISTAN: Improving VAT Refund System

Uzbekistan Introduces New System of Lending to Women and Youth

Central Bank Presents Three Scenarios of Macroeconomic Development

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: ASX Lower, Dollar Eases on Rate Cut Talk

[Call for Payroll Tax Relief in NSW Budget](#)
[Rates Policy Now More Complex, RBA Admits](#)
[Virus Commission Advised on Federal Budget](#)
[ASX Ends Down, Dollar Above 71 US Cents](#)
[Centrelink Chases Thousands to Repay Debts](#)
[Cash for Workers to Fill Farm Shortages](#)
[PAPUA NEW GUINEA: ADB to Scale Up Operations by \\$1 Billion with Renewed Development Partnership Strategy](#)

6、 Private Sector

Asia-Pacific

[APEC Promotes Small Businesses & Patient Health with New Business Ethics Vision](#)
[Tourism, Small Businesses and COVID-19: 2020 APEC App Challenge Registration Opens](#)
[APEC Small and Medium Enterprises Ministers Issue Joint Statement](#)
[Going Digital Is Necessary for Small Businesses to Survive](#)
[ADB Must Increase Upstream Engagements in PPPs to Address Post-COVID Investment Gap — Independent Evaluation Report](#)

East Asia

[CHINA: Private Firms Issue More Bonds in Interbank Market](#)
[China's Software Industry Sees Rapid Recovery](#)
[China Details Measures to Improve Quality of Listed Companies](#)
[GDP, Industrial Output, Investment, Disposable Income, Housing Prices, Fiscal Revenue](#)
[China Unveils New Measures to Boost Private Businesses](#)
[World Bank Group Sanctions Two Chinese Engineering Companies for 18 Months](#)
[JAPAN: Support Small and Midsize Companies' Digitization to Strengthen Their Foundation](#)
[Japan Won't Join U.S. Plan to Exclude Chinese Firms from Telecom Networks: Report](#)
[Japan to Join Forces with U.S., Europe in Regulating Big Tech Firms](#)
[Businesses in Japan to Be Obligated to Recycle Plastic Waste](#)
[Govt to Ask Mobile Phone Firms Allow Users to Retain E-Mail](#)

Address

SOUTH KOREA: To Invest 7 TIn Won in R&D for Service Sector
S. Korea to Invest Over 20 TIn Won in Green Mobility Sectors
Moon

South-East Asia

MYANMAR: Approving 5 More Investment Enterprises with Total Capital of 132.8 MIn USD

THAILAND: Central Bank Prolongs Debt Moratorium for SMEs amid COVID-19

VIETNAM: Tech Firms Export More 5G Devices to the World
Government Considers Additional Support Policies for Industrial Sector

HCM City Licences 30,000 New Businesses in Nine Months

Việt Nam's Mobile Advertising Market Expected to Reach US\$211 Million in 2020

Private Sector, Non-State Enterprises to Be Placed at Heart of 10-Year Development Strategy

South Asia

INDIA: Ramesh Pokhriyal Inaugurates 'Gyan Circle Ventures' to Aid Entrepreneurs in Technology Business

96% of Businesses Making Employee-centric Future Workplace Strategy

Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Visa Company Working to Promote Contactless Payments

Azerbaijan Holds Auction on Privatization of State-Owned Enterprises

SMEDA Becomes a Member of Int'l Public-Private Partnership Association

Azerbaijan Expands Public-Private Partnership in Agricultural Sector

UZBEKISTAN: Mirziyoyev Instructs to Develop Strategy for Development of Automotive Industry

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: ASX Ends 1pc Higher, All Sectors Up

Small Businesses to Gain More Tax Breaks

Coal Plant Feasibility Study Handed \$770k

SOLOMON ISLANDS: Fisheries, Tourism Applications Cleared

1、 Government Policy and Legislation

Asia-Pacific

East Asia

CHINA: Yangtze Delta Unveils Guideline to Improve Business Environment

A guideline was issued Friday to further improve the business environment and better serve market entities in Shanghai Municipality and the provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang in the Yangtze River Delta region. It emphasizes a unified standard to facilitate enterprise registration in the demonstration zone of Yangtze River Delta integration across Shanghai and the two provinces, while it also lowers institutional costs for enterprises. The guideline will further promote more efficient government services to facilitate enterprises entering the market and boost the flexible flow of economic factors, said Wu Ying with the Shanghai Municipal Administration for Market Regulation. Covering a 358,000-square-km expanse, the Yangtze River Delta, consisting of Shanghai and the provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui, is one of the most populated and urbanized city clusters in China, contributing one-fourth of the country's gross domestic product.

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

[TOP↑](#)

China Adopts Normal Monetary Policy as Long as Possible: Central Bank Governor

By keeping its monetary policy prudent and within a normal range, China has been one of the few major economies in the world adopting normal monetary policy, China's central bank governor said. Keeping a normal monetary policy, positive interest rates as well as upward yield curve is generally conducive to the sustainable economic and social development, Yi Gang, governor of the People's Bank of China (PBOC) wrote in an article published in the China Finance, a PBOC-affiliated magazine. That also helps provide positive incentives for economic entities and

maintain the global competitiveness of the yuan-denominated assets, Yi said. Yi noted that the major developed economies have continuously adopted the ultra-low interest rates and quantitative easing since the 2008 international financial crisis and started to implement the policy of unlimited quantitative easing to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. While keeping its balance sheet stable, the PBOC has also maintained growth of effective credit loans, Yi said, adding that the average required reserve ratio for commercial banks has been lowered from 15 percent to about 9 percent since 2018. Besides, the central bank has smoothed the transmission mechanism of monetary policy through reform and marketized means, leading to a reasonable increase in money supply and social financing. The financial sector's support for the real economy, especially the manufacturing sector as well as medium and small firms has been further beefed up, he said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/11/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Laws Amended to Further Regulate Use of National Flag, Emblem

Amendments to the National Flag Law and the National Emblem Law were adopted by China's top legislature Saturday in Beijing. The amendment to the National Flag Law stipulates that national flags shall be displayed in government organs, organizations, plazas, parks and other public places on important holidays and anniversaries. People may wear national emblem on solemn occasions to express their patriotic feelings, says the amendment to the National Emblem Law. According to the amendments, contents about the national flag and emblem shall be included as an important part of patriotism education. Their history and connotations shall be taught in primary and secondary schools. The newly amended National Flag Law also stipulates that damaged, defiled, faded or substandard national flags should not be displayed or used, and the national flag should not be displayed or used in ways that dishonor it. Lawmakers approved the amendments at the closing meeting of a regular legislative session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, which started Tuesday. The amended versions of the laws will come into force on Jan. 1, 2021.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/17/2020

[TOP↑](#)

China Adheres to Prudent Monetary Policy: Central Bank Governor

China will continue to pursue a prudent monetary policy and financial policies that have been proven effective in mitigating the COVID-19 economic shocks, the country's central bank governor said Wednesday. China will continue to implement

and perfect the financial measures that have effectively reduced the impacts of COVID-19 on the economy and extend sustained support to micro and small businesses, the job market as well as green development, said Yi Gang, governor of the People's Bank of China, at the Annual Conference of Financial Street Forum 2020. According to Yi, the country's monetary policy has been timely and effective in response to the novel coronavirus outbreak and aims to better facilitate high-quality economic development.

Green recovery will get special importance, Yi said, adding that financial policy framework shall be improved to work closely with fiscal, industrial and technological policies to fuel green growth. The central bank will pursue a prudent monetary policy that is more flexible, appropriate and targeted while striking a balance between stabilizing growth and forestalling risks, he said. Keeping a normal monetary policy, positive interest rates and an upward yield curve is generally conducive to the sustainable economic and social development, as well as the global competitiveness of renminbi assets, Yi added. The conference, which runs from Oct. 21 to 23 in Beijing, features four parallel forums centered around financial cooperation and reform under global changes, offering an interactive platform for the finance and real economy.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/21/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

China to Further Improve Macro-prudential Policy Framework: Official

China will continue to improve the "twin pillar" regulatory framework that is in line with its own national conditions, a central bank official said Wednesday. This aims to support the formation of a new development pattern that takes the domestic market as the mainstay while letting domestic and foreign markets boost each other, said Pan Gongsheng, deputy head of the People's Bank of China. Pan, who also heads the State Administration of Foreign Exchange, was speaking at the Annual Conference of Financial Street Forum 2020 that opened here Wednesday. Pan said China will continue to improve the macro-prudential policy framework, issue macro-prudential policy guidelines in a timely manner and enhance the overall design and governance mechanism of China's macro-prudential policies.

Emphasis will be placed on improving the macro-prudential monitoring, assessment and early warning systems in key areas such as real-estate finance, the foreign-exchange market, the bond market, shadow banking and cross-border capital flows, he said. Pan particularly stressed the need to strengthen regulation of systemically important financial institutions and financial holding companies. It is necessary to strengthen coordination between macro-prudential policies, monetary policies and micro-prudential regulation policies, and give full play to the synergy of

those policies, according to Pan. Meanwhile, macro-prudential policies should coordinate with fiscal policies, industrial policies and credit policies, among others, to provide better financial services for the real economy, he said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/21/2020

[TOP↑](#)

China Issues Revised Regulation on Science, Technology Award System

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has signed a State Council decree to publish the revised regulation on the national science and technology award system. As an important and long-standing system, the national science and technology award system is a significant policy to encourage independent innovation, inspire the vitality of talent and foster a favorable environment for innovation. The revised regulation clarifies that the science and technology awards should serve the country's major strategies as well as the mid- and long-term development plan for science and technology. It highlights that China will increase the awards for basic research in natural sciences and applied basic research. The awards will be nominated by experts, scholars, organizations and authorities in relevant fields. Those who violate moral principles and engage in misconduct in research activities will not be nominated or awarded. The regulation also makes improvements to the system and methods of the review process. Those nominators and reviewers who undermine fairness and transparency will be held accountable and severely punished. The revised regulation will take effect on Dec. 1, 2020.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/27/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Procuratorate Issues Guideline for Pilot Free Trade Zones

China's Supreme People's Procuratorate on Wednesday issued a guideline on exercising procuratorial functions for the building of the pilot free trade zones (FTZs), with 15 measures put forward to provide better legal services. The guideline stresses enhancing the judicial protection of market entities in the FTZs, promoting the unification and standardization of judicial practices to protect the property rights of enterprises and the lawful rights and interests of employees. The principle of the dialectical relationship between punishing crimes and supporting reforms should be correctly understood, protecting the enthusiasm for institutional innovations while striking a balance between punishment and compassion to improve the accuracy in case handling, it says. The document also notes the need to accept public

supervision during the handling of cases and create a favorable environment for development in the FTZs.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/28/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Xinhua Headlines: Key CPC Session Draws 15-year Roadmap for China's Modernization

The Communist Party of China (CPC) has charted the course for China's development in the next 15 years to guide the country's march towards modernization. Details of the blueprint were unveiled in a communique issued after the conclusion of the four-day fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee on Thursday. The roles of innovation, real economy, a strong domestic market, rural vitalization and green development were underscored for China's growth. The session adopted the Party leadership's proposals for formulating the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035. Noting that "a victory is in sight" in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, the communique stresses that fully building a modern socialist China is part of the four-pronged comprehensive strategy for the 14th Five-Year Plan period.

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, made an important speech at the session. He also delivered a work report of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee to the session. The work of the Political Bureau was fully acknowledged, says the communique, adding that China has seen its economic growth beat expectations, people's living standards ensured, and the overall situation of society maintained stable over the past year. Progress made in the past five years was highlighted: China's gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to cross the 100-trillion-yuan mark in 2020; 55.75 million rural residents were lifted out of poverty; the annual grain output has remained above 650 million tonnes for five consecutive years; China has built the world's largest social security system, etc. The communique says China is still in an important period of strategic opportunity for development at present and for the foreseeable future, but there are new developments in both opportunities and challenges.

TARGETS THROUGH 2035

The session raised a set of long-range objectives for China to basically achieve socialist modernization by 2035. -- China's economic and technological strength, and composite national strength will increase significantly. A new stride will be made in the growth of the economy and the per capita income of urban and rural residents. Making major breakthroughs in core technologies in key areas, China will become a global leader in innovation; -- New industrialization, IT application, urbanization, and agricultural modernization will be basically achieved. China will finish building a

modernized economy; -- The modernization of China's system and capacity for governance will be basically achieved. The people's rights to participate and to develop as equals will be adequately protected. The rule of law for the country, the government, and society will be basically in place; -- China will become a strong country in culture, education, talent, sports and health. The well-rounded development of all people and social etiquette and civility will be significantly enhanced. China's cultural soft power will grow much stronger;

-- Eco-friendly ways of work and life will be advanced to cover all areas of society. Carbon emission will steadily decline after reaching a peak, and there will be a fundamental improvement in the environment with the goal of building a Beautiful China basically reached; -- The opening-up will reach a new stage with substantial growth of the country's strengths for participating in international economic cooperation and competition; -- The per capita GDP will reach the level of moderately developed countries. The size of the middle-income group will be significantly expanded. Equitable access to basic public services will be ensured. Disparities in urban-rural development, in development between regions, and in living standards will be significantly reduced; -- The implementation of the Peaceful China initiative will be promoted to a higher level. The modernization of national defense and the military will be basically achieved; -- People will lead a better life, and more notable and substantial progress will be achieved in promoting well-rounded human development and achieving common prosperity for everyone.

TARGETS FOR 14TH FIVE-YEAR PLAN

The session also laid down a set of guiding principles to be followed, and major economic and social development targets for the next five years. For the 14th Five-Year Plan period, China will speed up fostering a new development pattern where domestic and foreign markets can boost each other, with the domestic market as the mainstay, the communique says. China will strive to make new strides in economic development during the period. It aims to realize sustained and healthy economic development on the basis of a marked improvement in quality and efficiency. With new steps to be taken in reform and opening up, China will further improve its socialist market economy and basically complete the building of a high-standard market system. China's social etiquette and civility shall be further enhanced, while the core socialist values shall be embraced by the people. The country aims to make new progress in building an ecological civilization, boost the well-being of people, and enhance governance capacity.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

Several development priorities were highlighted. Placed at the top of the priorities is upholding the central role of innovation in the modernization drive and implementing the innovation-driven development strategy. The country must also continue to take the real economy as the focus of its economic development, unswervingly build itself into a manufacturer of quality and enhance its strength in cyberspace and digital

technology. It must nurture a strong domestic market and establish a new development pattern, comprehensively deepen reform in pursuit of a high-level socialist market economy, prioritize the development of agriculture and rural areas, fully advance rural vitalization, and push forward coordinated regional development and a new type of urbanization, among others.

The communique stresses that the overall leadership of the CPC must be upheld to realize the 14th Five-Year Plan and achieve the long-range objectives set for 2035. It also says that China is committed to maintaining lasting prosperity and stability in Hong Kong and Macao as well as advancing the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations and national reunification. China will hold high the banner of peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit, and strive to create a favorable external environment and promote the building of a new type of international relations and a community with a shared future for humanity, it adds.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/30/2020

[TOP↑](#)

JAPAN: Suga Plans to Formulate Data Strategy

The government plans to draw up a data strategy as early as next year as part of its growth strategy for a digitized society, The Yomiuri Shimbun has learned. Along with the establishment of a digital agency to promote the digitization of administrative services in a centralized manner, the government plans to position the new strategy as a key policy of the administration of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga. The government is also considering designating the prime minister himself as the chair of the ministerial meetings on the issue, according to government sources. The digital agency, which the government aims to establish by the end of next year, will be in charge of integrating administrative work at the central and local governments, and promoting the use of My Number social security and taxation identification cards. The strategy aims to create new services as well as social and economic activities by using personal and industrial data. The government plans to map out the outline of the data strategy by the end of this year and make a decision by around next summer, as a part of the growth strategy developed by the Suga administration.

In relation to the move, the government will reorganize the ministerial meeting on digital government under the IT Strategic Headquarters, which is headed by Suga, as early as this month. Under the reorganization plan, the chairmanship of the meeting will shift from the chief cabinet secretary to the prime minister, and members of the meeting will be expanded to include all Cabinet ministers. Through the reorganization, the government aims to promote a series of digital policies in a top-down fashion by the prime minister. Under the ministerial meeting, the government will set up a special task force to formulate the data strategy and a working group to compile basic concepts for revising the basic law on the formation

of an advanced information and telecommunications network society. The government hopes to present a vision of the nation's digital future by revising the law during next year's ordinary Diet session. It is considering appointing Keio University Prof. Jun Murai as a chair of the working group, whose about 10 members will include private-sector experts. Murai is said to be well versed in digital policy and was an early proponent of internet use in Japan.

Data is called "the oil of the 21st century" in light of its impact on economy and society. The government plans to present innovative data utilization measures for medical care and education in its data strategy, with the aim of realizing them through cooperation between the public and private sectors. Specifically, the government is considering compiling an "Infrastructure Ledger" of data on inspection, repair and construction records of aging roads and tunnels nationwide. By using artificial intelligence to improve the efficiency of maintenance and management of such infrastructure, local governments are expected to be able to reduce costs and labor. The government is expected to promote linking My Number with bank accounts to expedite tax procedures and payments of various benefits. In addition, it also may consider permanently allowing doctors to practice online, which is temporarily permitted due to the coronavirus outbreak, and promoting remote work that moves people from urban offices to rural areas.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 10/07/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Japan, Mongolia to Cooperate on 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific'

The foreign ministers of Japan and Mongolia agreed Friday to cooperate in promoting a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific," a vision that Tokyo is pushing with the U.S. and other "like-minded" countries to counter China's growing assertiveness in the region. Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi held talks in Ulaanbaatar on Friday with his Mongolian counterpart, Nyamtseren Enkhtaivan. Motegi's visit came after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo canceled a trip to Mongolia because of President Donald Trump's COVID-19 infection. Motegi, who agreed with counterparts from the U.S., Australia and India at "Quad" talks in Tokyo on Tuesday to seek more countries' support for the FOIP concept of security and economic cooperation in ensuring open sea lanes to the Middle East. China claims most of the South China Sea. The Japanese and Mongolian ministers said at a news conference Friday that they pledged further cooperation in achieving the FOIP, while agreeing to step up security, medical and economic cooperation. The two sides also signed a \$235 million emergency loan to help the pandemic-hit Mongolian economy and fund medical equipment. Japan and the U.S. have been pushing the FOIP as a way to bring together countries that share concerns about China's growing influence in the region.

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

Govt to Unify Personal Information Protection Laws to Smoothen Data Usage in Japan

The government plans to consolidate three current laws for protecting personal information into one to set common rules across the nation, as systems currently differ in line with local ordinances, The Yomiuri Shimbun has learned. Bills revising the laws on protecting personal information will be submitted to the ordinary Diet session next year. Unifying the definitions of personal information among the public and private sectors is expected to advance the use of data in the medical field and the providing of personal information in times of disaster which have been hindered by the current legal system's sectionalism. The proposed amendment will unite the Law on the Protection of Personal Information, which applies to the private sector, with the Law on the Protection of Personal Information Held by Administrative Organs and the Law on Access to Information Held by Independent Administrative Agencies, which both apply to the government and government-related organizations.

The current jurisdiction is divided between the Personal Information Protection Commission, which functions under the Cabinet Office, and the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry. The proposed revision will consolidate authority into the commission. For systems that differ between local governments, the proposed amendment will establish common rules nationwide. If a local ordinance does not conform to the rules, the municipality will be called on to amend it. But it will also create new operational guidelines that allow municipalities to take independent protection measures within the limits of the law. One foreseen example could be the creation of a partnership system for the LGBT which is not covered by national regulations. Laws and regulations on protecting personal information differ between the national government and 47 prefectures, 1,718 municipalities, special wards and other entities, which has long been a pending issue. In fact, the differences in the handling of personal information in times of disasters have become a barrier, leading to such problems as preventing victim information from being shared with private support groups or causing local governments to differ in their response to the release of the names of missing persons.

There have also been harmful effects in the use of a system for centralized management of information on people infected with the novel coronavirus. "A unified definition of personal information will help fix these problems," a government official said. One of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's signature policies is his plan to create a digital agency to promote the digitization of the government. One aim is, through a comprehensive review, to organize the legal systems on protecting personal information that vary between the national and local governments, and to make it

easier to standardize the system. A sweeping review of the personal information protection system is also meant to bring Japan in line with international standards. In 2018, the European Union enacted the General Data Protection Regulation, which regulates the flow of personal information in the EU. Through the proposed amendment, the government hopes to conform with the GDPR by taking such measures as making the Personal Data Protection Commission a centralized supervisory body.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 10/25/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Gov't Unveils Action Plan to Lower Mobile Phone Fees

The Japanese government unveiled Tuesday an action plan to spur competition among telecom firms in order to realize Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's push to lower domestic mobile phone fees, which are said to be high compared with other countries. Mobile carriers in Japan have been criticized for locking consumers into contracts that include complicated fee systems and make it difficult to switch to competitors. Under the action plan, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications will set up a website within the year explaining the potential merits of switching carriers and offering guidance on how to do so. The country's three biggest telecom firms -- NTT Docomo, KDDI and SoftBank -- will also be pushed to let smaller competitors rent their networks at a lower rate. "We will carry (the plan) out with a sense of urgency," communications minister Ryota Takeda said at a press conference. "We are confident this will bring fees more in line with international standards."

Lowering mobile phone fees has been one of Suga's pet causes since before he took office last month. He said in an August 2018 speech as chief cabinet secretary that mobile carriers in Japan were charging much more than overseas counterparts and that fees could be brought down by around 40 percent. Under the plan, the ministry looks to promote the use of eSIMs, or SIM cards that are directly embedded into devices and can be provisioned remotely. Detailed guidelines for how it will do so are to be drawn up by next summer. The ministry is also considering allowing users to continue using the email address they were issued by mobile carriers even after switching over, similar to the portability already available for phone numbers. From next fiscal year starting April, mobile carriers should not charge consumers a 3,000 yen fee to continue using the same phone number even after switching to a competitor if the application for the portability is made online, according to the ministry. Suga's efforts to bring down mobile phone fees have so far yielded limited results. In October last year, a legal revision came into effect banning mobile carriers from charging high data fees in exchange for subsidizing device purchases.

From <https://japantoday.com> 10/28/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Suga Outlines Carbon-Neutral Society by 2050

Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide has pledged to pursue all options for Japan to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. In the Lower House of the Diet on Wednesday, lawmakers asked Suga about his policy speech on Monday. The head of the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party, Edano Yukio, welcomed Suga's plan to realize a net zero carbon society by 2050, but he urged Suga not to boost reliance on nuclear energy in achieving the goal. Suga said the government aims to thoroughly save energy and introduce renewable energy to a maximum to reduce the level of reliance on nuclear power as much as possible. Suga added that achieving a carbon-neutral society by 2050 will not be easy. He stressed the importance of efforts by the energy sector, which is responsible for more than 80 percent of greenhouse gases. He said the government will pursue all options, including not only renewable energy but also nuclear power, and promised intensive debates with no foregone conclusion. Edano also raised the issue of six scholars who were not appointed as new members of the Science Council, Japan's leading academic body. Asking whether it was Suga's own decision not to appoint them, he also asked who made the decision and on what basis.

The law governing the council calls for the prime minister to appoint new members, based on their selection and recommendation by the council. Suga said the government's consistent view is that appointments are not necessarily required to be made exactly as recommended by the council, and the Cabinet Legislation Bureau approved this view. He said he made the decision as a person authorized to make appointments. He said he did so, bearing in mind that a state-funded institution must have the support and understanding of the public. He also stressed the need for diversity of members, with few chosen from among younger candidates or from the private sector and also the lack of balance in terms of universities or where they came from. Noda Seiko, Acting Secretary General of the main governing Liberal Democratic Party, said Japan's economy continues to be in a severe situation due to the coronavirus pandemic. She asked Suga how he plans to rebuild the economy.

Suga said he will promote the government's Go To campaigns, while making sure that anti-infection measures are in place, to support tourism, restaurants and events. He also said opening the country for international travelers, which is crucial for economic revival, will be resumed in phases in a manner compatible with the prevention of new virus infections. On diplomacy, Noda asked how Suga plans to develop relations with countries such as the United States and China. Suga said the Japan-US alliance is the centerpiece of the country's foreign policy and national security. He pledged to deepen ties with the US in dealing with North Korea and other regional issues, regardless of the outcome of the US presidential election. Suga added that stable relations with China are very important not only for both countries but also for the region and the international community. He said Japan will

say what it ought to say and will work with China on matters of shared concern. He said he is resolved to develop trust and cooperative ties with other nations and carry out active diplomacy.

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[TOP↑](#)

SOUTH KOREA: Moon Unveils Plan to Pour 10 Tln Won into 'Smart City' Scheme by 2025

President Moon Jae-in said Thursday that the government will invest 10 trillion won (US\$8.8 billion) into South Korea's "smart city" project nationwide by 2025, as the country aims to become a global leader in the field under the so-called Korean version New Deal initiative. The government plans to supply a relevant data integration platform to each of a total of 108 local authorities by the end of this year that would enable 60 percent of South Koreans to feel the impact of the smart city drive, according to Moon. He presented the vision during a visit to Songdo, a district on reclaimed land from the Yellow Sea located about an hour drive west from Seoul. Songdo is an iconic smart city built from scratch, designed to address the ills of conventional cities by taking advantage of such new technologies as ICT and big data. For instance, data sensors are embedded in energy grids, buildings and traffic hubs.

"The key to smart cities is to establish an intelligence-type city operation system by utilizing urban data collected from CCTVs and sensors," Moon said in his speech at the Smart City Integrated Operation Center of Songdo. Smart city has emerged as an "unavoidable future" for the sake of saving energy and creating eco-friendly cities to cope with climate change, he said. "The world will once again compete fiercely for the speed of developing and spreading smart cities," with global smart city market projected to grow to \$820 billion by 2025, he said. The government will pour 10 trillion won into related businesses by that year and create more than 150,000 jobs, he added. To that end, it plans to "speed up the construction of smart cities as a core project of the Korean version of New Deal that combines digital and green," he said. "First, (the government) will realize 'smart cities' nationwide more speedily" and it will also "digitalize the public infrastructure, like roads and railways," with the use of Internet of things (IoT) sensors, Moon stated.

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[TOP↑](#)

Korea to Prepare Delicate Legal Push to Keep E-Commerce Market Fair

Kim Jae-shin, vice chairperson of the Fair Trade Commission of South Korea, said legislation regarding the growing platform businesses would continue to evolve to secure fair trade and competition during the Korea Herald Biz Forum held Tuesday. Kim said the new legislation regarding the ecommerce market would be introduced in South Korea as the market was rapidly expanding, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a previous report by the government, the e-commerce transactions, which amounted to 25.2 trillion won in 2010, has grown to 135.3 trillion won in 2019. In the first half of 2020, online shopping purchases reached 74.3 trillion won. Speaking during the forum, held under the tagline of "Contact less, connect more" at The Shilla, Seoul, Kim said the laws regarding the e-commerce market needed to change, as many parties have become involved in an increasing number of online transactions. "The existing laws cannot fully cover complex relations among sellers, customers and platform operators."

The new legislation will aim to secure benefits for customers and small-sized businesses that sell services and products via online platforms, he said. Rules regarding contracts between online platforms and merchants, for instance, will be strengthened to prevent unfair practices. Platform operators that violate the new laws regarding contracts could also face fines up to 1 billion won. The FTC will introduce legislation that could prevent large-scale platform operators from monopolizing the e-commerce market, he said. The upcoming legislation will also allow the antitrust agency to look into mergers and acquisitions that hinder fair competition in the market. "The FTC here would carefully watch unfair business practices in the e-commerce market as large-sized platform operators could easily stay ahead of startups and other firms that try to newly enter the online markets," Kim said. Kim added the FTC plans to introduce the anti-monopoly legislation by July next year.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 10/27/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Moon Says S. Korea to Keep Working With WHO, Int'l Community on Coronavirus

President Moon Jae-in reaffirmed South Korea's commitment Thursday to continued cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the international community against COVID-19. He was replying to a Twitter message by WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus regarding Seoul's "effective" handling of the pandemic. Moon thanked him for speaking highly of what South Korea has done so far. "Korea's response has been relatively successful thanks to our people who have turned themselves into the main actors in disease prevention efforts," Moon tweeted. "We will continue to work with WHO and the international community to overcome the pandemic." Earlier this week, the WHO leader posted a rare tweet in Korean, which read South Korea's response has demonstrated that the solidarity and observance of verified public health measures can control the

coronavirus effectively.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 10/29/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Govt. Resumes Discount Coupon Program for Travel, Dining Sectors

The government on Friday resumed a national discount coupon program aimed at resuscitating the domestic travel and dining industries that have suffered severely from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasure Headquarters said the government will start releasing discount coupons for travel programs, restaurants and lodging facilities around the country, in stages at 2 p.m. Friday, as part of a 90.4 billion-won (\$76.2 million) project to revitalize domestic spending. The program was first introduced in August but was soon suspended due to a resurgence of new virus clusters. The travel coupons will offer 30 percent discounts on 1,112 tour products. Also if a person dines out three times, a 10,000 won refund will be offered on the fourth occasion. Separate coupons that offer 30,000 won to 40,000 won discounts for hotels and other lodging facilities will be distributed to 1 million customers starting Nov. 4. In light of concerns that the program, which promotes social gatherings, could end up prompting another mass outbreak, officials said the program is subject to change depending on the disease control situation. "We decided to resume the program based on a comprehensive review of the situation, where mass transmissions are under control and antivirus medical measures remain sufficient," a government official said.

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[TOP↑](#)

South-East Asia

MYANMAR: To Implement 3 Programs for Peace with Increased Momentum in Post-2020

Three programs for peace will be implemented effectively and harmoniously to establish a democratic federal union in the post-2020 period, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi said in her message to mark the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on Thursday. Suu Kyi, in her capacity as chair of the National Reconciliation and Peace Center, said that three programs -- national reconciliation and internal peace, democratic transition and establishment of a federal union, and implementation of the program for amendment of the Constitution will be implemented during the post-2020 period. Under the programs, negotiations will be conducted with non-signatory Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) to reach ceasefire agreements and to bring them to the political negotiations

while efforts will be made with increased momentum to consolidate the ceasefire agreements with NCA signatories. Efforts will also be exerted to uplift the rights of ethnic nationalities and to ensure that legal reforms are in harmony and measures taken in the administrative sector will be aligned towards equal rights.

In dealing with the democratic transition and establishment of a federal union, thorough negotiations and discussions will be held for a program for political and security integration, implementation of mechanisms, the state counsellor said. As for the third program, efforts will be made to formulate and implement programs systematically through consultations on how the Constitution should be amended, how the matter of drawing up state constitutions should be dealt with and how the program for security integration could be carried out harmoniously, she said. The third part of the Union Accord was signed at the fourth session of the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference which was held in August this year. Suu Kyi stressed that the signed Union Accord Part III contains precise policies for implementation, practical programs, steps for implementation and the aspirations of the future union which are needed for building the democratic federation union in the post-2020 period. Sen-Gen Min Aung Hlaing, commander-in-chief of Defence Services, said in his message that the military will work together with the people in establishing a united and strong union based on democracy and federal system in line with the desire of ethnic people and urged all stakeholders to participate in the works for the lasting peace and sustainable development of the country. The commander-in-chief also advised to elect capable candidates who can work for the country in genuine desire with a union spirit in the upcoming general election. So far, 10 ethnic armed groups have signed the NCA with the government since it was initiated in Oct. 2015 and the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conferences has been held four times since 2016.

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[TOP↑](#)

THAILAND: Emergency Rule over COVID-19 Extended Until End of November

Thailand has extended the emergency rule over the COVID-19 pandemic until the end of November. The cabinet of ministers, headed by Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, on Wednesday approved the one-month extension proposed by Center for the COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA), to Nov. 30. The emergency rule imposed nationwide has been extended for eight consecutive months. Prayut earlier said that no other laws could provide anti-pandemic, public health safety measures as effectively and promptly as emergency rule. Thailand has so far reported a total of 3,759 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 59 deaths and 3,561 recoveries.

From <https://www.bangkoknews.net/> 10/28/2020

[TOP↑](#)

VIETNAM: Tasks for Designing National Master Planning for Next Five Years Approved

The Government recently issued a decision to approve the task of making national master planning for 2021-2030 with a vision to 2050. The objective of the planning is to become a tool for the State in managing socio-economic development, aiming to mobilise, allocate and use national resources in an effective and suitable manner. The planning will also serve as a foundation for the designing of planning within the national planning system, as well as a basis for the building of a socio-economic development plan and public investment plan for five years and each year. It will support the building of development spaces of the country based on connecting the infrastructure system. One of the principles for designing the national master planning is to ensure defence, security and environmental protection. At the same time, it aims to ensure harmony between economic development and social stability and environmental protection, while enhancing the country's resilience to climate change and national disasters, as well as capacity to efficiently utilise natural resources and restore and promote cultural and natural heritage. Meanwhile, the making of the planning must ensure connectivity and the synchronism of sectors and regions. The master planning will be implemented in line with the Planning Law and Decree 37/2019/ND-CO issued on May 7 by the Government detailing articles of the Planning Law. The National Planning Council will direct the designing of the national master planning and submit it to authorised agencies.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 10/07/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

NA Issues Development Strategy for State Audit Office to 2030

The State Audit Office of Việt Nam, as an agency set up by the National Assembly, will operate independently and in accordance with the law, upholding the core values of Independence – Integrity – Professionalism – Prestige – Quality, contributing to the development of a stable, sustainable and transparent national finance sector in the period from 2021 to 2030. This is stated in the resolution on the development strategy for the State Audit Office of Việt Nam (SAV) in the period from 2021 to 2030 issued recently by the National Assembly (NA)'s Standing Committee. The development of the SAV should suit the real situation in the country while meeting requirements of the international integration process and matching international principles and practices in the field. The resolution sets the overall targets of developing the SAV into an effective and important tool of the Party and State in inspecting and supervising the management and use of public finance and assets; enhancing accountability and transparency of agencies funded by the State budget, effectively serving the operation of the NA and Government in performing their functions, and supporting People's Councils and People's Committees of localities in

performing management, supervision and decision-making work.

The SAV must enhance its capacity and efficiency in performing auditing activities through applying information technology, intensifying international co-operation, and ensuring transparency and professionalism, thus contributing to raising the State's capacity in management and governance of finance and public assets in service of socio-economic development in the period from 2021 to 2030. Regarding specific targets, the resolution calls for the building and perfection of the legal system to concretise the Constitution and laws on State auditing; along with the building of a professional, effective and efficient apparatus of the SAV. The number of SAV staff members will be decided by the NA Standing Committee, but not more than 2,700 by 2030. A goal set for the 2026-2030 period is to conduct regular annual audits of the budget balance at ministries, centrally-run agencies, provinces and centrally-run cities. Audits of operations, specialized audits, information technology audits, and audits of the environment will be promoted, towards accounting for 30 – 40 per cent of the total audits each year. Attention will be paid to detecting loopholes in mechanisms, policies and laws with a view to eradicating them.

The SAV will work to shift from conventional auditing procedures to digital auditing based on big data with the support of Artificial Intelligence in a proactive manner, and improve auditing capacity to meet the requirements of the Government's management administration work, and supervision work of the NA and People's Councils. Regarding international cooperation, professional integration will be the key pillar, towards the goal of quickly narrowing the gap in professional capacity between the SAV and counterparts in the region and the world. Multilateral cooperation will be geared towards raising the SAV's position in the international community through joining in the implementation and drafting of common auditing standards and rules. Meanwhile, bilateral co-operation will focus on the sharing of experience and technology to enhance the SAV's capacity. The SAV will organise a number of co-ordinated audits, send or receive auditors for training, and conduct cross-assessment with regional and global supreme audit agencies.

The SAV will work to complete its electronic working environment in the direction of integrating and sharing data, streamlining internal processes, building a database based on big-data technology and connected with the national financial and asset supervision system, so as to turn the SAV into a crucial tool in macro-economic planning and building development policies for the digital economy in Viet Nam. The resolution assigns the Government to direct relevant ministries and sectors to coordinate with the SAV and agencies of the NA to implement the SAV's development strategy. NA agencies are tasked with researching, instructing and coordinating with relevant agencies to perfect legal documents to ensure their consistency and uniformity, creating favourable conditions for the SAV to perform its functions and tasks in accordance with the Constitution. Based on the strategy, the SAV must build a plan for implementation and regularly report to the NA Standing

Committee on the outcomes of implementation and propose adjustments or supplements to the strategy, if necessary.

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[TOP↑](#)

Việt Nam Pledges to Promote Rule of Law at National, Int’L Level

Việt Nam will continue to co-operate proactively and responsibly with the UN and other countries to promote the rule of law at both national and international levels, Ambassador Đặng Đình Quý, head of the Vietnam mission to the UN has said. Addressing a meeting of the Legal Committee (Sixth Committee) of the UN General Assembly’s 75th session on Tuesday in New York, Quý emphasised the important role of the rule of law at national and international levels in socio-economic development, human rights assurance, and the maintenance of international peace and security. Activities promoting the rule of law at the national level should focus on protecting vulnerable groups, and ensuring fairness and equality, especially amid the ongoing complex developments of the COVID-19 pandemic, he said. The diplomat stressed international law and principles of the UN Charter are the basic foundation of the international system and called on countries to respect the principles of peaceful settlement of international disputes and uphold the role of international courts in peacefully settling international disputes and promoting adherence to the rule of law at the international level.

Regarding South China Sea (East Sea)-related issues, Ambassador Quý said Việt Nam is working with other ASEAN countries to build a peaceful, stable and prosperous Southeast Asia. He expressed deep concern at the recent developments in the East Sea, saying that these actions undermine trust among countries, increase tensions and affect peace, security and stability in the region. The ambassador urged all parties to comply with international law, especially the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), promote confidence-building, and refrain from unilateral actions that complicate the situation and increase tensions at the sea, peacefully settle disputes in accordance with the UN Charter, international law, including UNCLOS, and fully respect legal, political and regulatory processes of UNCLOS in defining maritime claims. The Legal Committee is one of the six main committees of the UN General Assembly, grouping representatives from all 193 UN member states, to review legal issues. Topics currently being discussed by the committee include the rule of law, reports of the UN Commissions on International Law and International Trade Law and measures to eliminate international terrorism.

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[TOP↑](#)

VN Launches Elderly Healthcare Programme in Response to

Ageing Population

A 10-year healthcare programme for the elderly will start in Việt Nam next year as part of the Government's response to the country's fast-ageing population. Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc has approved the healthcare programme, under which authorities at all levels will be required to develop planning and arrange funding for elderly healthcare by 2025. This funding will be maintained until at least 2030. Over the next five years, at least 70 per cent of elderly people aged over 60 and their caregivers will be informed about the programme and their right to care. That percentage is expected to increase by 85 per cent by 2030. Under the programme, at least 70 per cent of elderly people across the country will have medical check-ups once a year. By 2025, 95 per cent of the elderly will have health records, with that figure rising to 100 per cent over the following five years. Thanks to improved health records, it is expected that 70 per cent of elderly people who have non-communicable diseases will be detected and treated by 2025.

All elderly people who require care will receive the support they need from their families or the community by 2025. Intergenerational self-help clubs and other kinds of healthcare clubs will also be set up as part of the programme. The Intergenerational Self-Help Club (ISHC) model - community-based organisations that promote healthy longevity through a variety of inter-generational activities - was first launched in Việt Nam in 2006. There are now nearly 3,000 ISHCs nationwide with a total membership of around 160,000 people. ISHCs carry out social and cultural activities to promote psychosocial health such as games, performances and home visits, and they promote life-long learning through monthly talks, study visits and intergenerational cross-learning and sharing on a broad range of topics. They also focus on physical health by raising awareness of and promoting healthy and active lifestyles, for example, exercise, sports, hobbies, meditation and volunteerism, and thorough access to regular health screenings (monitoring weight and blood pressure), check-ups, treatment and insurance.

The model offers homecare services through volunteers. In order to achieve these goals, leaders at all levels have been urged to pay more attention to elderly healthcare. Primary healthcare services, non-communicable diseases prevention and control, regular health check-ups and health monitoring for old people need to be improved. Long-term healthcare models for old people are also expected to be developed. Under the programme, those who deliver healthcare services for the elderly will receive further training. Geriatrics will be included in tertiary/post-graduate training programmes at medical schools and universities. Việt Nam will also call for more resources for the programme, and is expecting increased engagement from the private sector. Việt Nam now has about 12 million elderly people aged from 60. The country officially entered the "ageing phase" in 2011, and is among the most rapidly ageing countries in the world. The proportion of older persons in the total population has increased to 11.9 per cent, and one in nine

persons was over the age of 60 in 2017.

According to projections from the General Statistics Office, the population of over 60-year-olds is expected to reach 21 million, accounting for 20 per cent of the total population, by 2038, and 27 million, accounting for 25 per cent of the population, by 2050. According to the General Office for Population and Family Planning under the Ministry of Health, 65.7 per cent of elderly people in rural areas are farmers with low or unstable incomes. Up to 73 per cent of them live without pensions, face multiple challenges and are dependent on their offspring. Over 72 per cent live with their offspring while nuclear families are an increasing trend in Việt Nam, replacing traditional extended families. "Living alone is a disadvantage for the elderly as when they get older, they tend to rely on family more," said Nguyễn Doãn Tú, head of the general office. Moreover, their health limited them. With an average life expectancy of 73, they usually lived healthily to the age of 64, he said, adding that up to 96 per cent of the elderly had illnesses, mostly chronic non-communicable diseases.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 10/21/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

NA Deputies Mull Law on Residence

Most deputies agreed on the need to replace the manual method of residence management by household registration book and temporary residence certificate to e-management at a National Assembly discussion yesterday. They also agreed with the Government's proposal that the amended Law on Residency would take effect on July 1 next year. However, many deputies suggested there should be regulations to ensure the readiness of State agencies, avoiding causing problems for residents. They proposed household registration books and temporary residence certificates continue to be used until December 31, 2022, to show information about the place of residence. The deputies said the replacement to a new model of management was urgent and should be implemented from the time the law takes effect, but in the early stages when connections between ministries, agencies and localities with the National Database on Population and Database on Residence were not yet completed, people still need certain papers to verify their place of residence. Allowing people to continue using these papers would help prevent causing difficulties for people while easing the pressure on management agencies when the law becomes effective, they said.

Trần Thị Dung, a deputy from the northern province of Điện Biên, said the use of citizens' personal identification to update information on the National Database on Population was a progressive trend and a goal many countries in the world aim for. However, she said, it was necessary to consider carefully because household registration and residence books were related to people's daily life and the activities of agencies and organisations. According to the Government's plan, the connection

and sharing of information and databases with all ministries and local branches will not have been completed by 2025, she said. "It is impossible to ensure the efficiency of the national database by July 1, 2021," Dung said. Nguyễn Thị Lan, a deputy from Hà Nội, said the revised law would simplify procedures and paperwork in residency work by abolishing part or all of 13 groups of administrative procedures relating to permanent and temporary registration. The change would help people and be relevant to the trend of administrative reform, she said.

Lan shared her concern it may be too late if the replacement was only applied by December 31, 2022. "The country will not be able to keep up with international integration and the transformation of the technological revolution as well as its economic development," she said. The deputy proposed the Government and the Ministry of Public Security review manpower and resources to determine the appropriate timing to ensure the feasibility of the law. Addressing the discussion, Minister of Public Security Tô Lâm said the abolishment of household registration book was the people's desire. "Changing management methods would bring change and excitement for the people," he said. Lâm said more than 90 per cent of the national database has so far been collected, verified and put into the system with a target that management methods related to the household registration book and citizen identification will be deployed by July 1 next year. He said that there would be regulations relating to the transition period before the Law on Residency takes effect, adding that the compiling committee had a roadmap and determination to implement the law shortly.

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[TOP ↑](#)

South Asia

INDIA: 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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[TOP↑](#)

Telangana Launches New EV Policy, Aims to Lure \$4 bn Investments

With a vision to make Telangana a hub for electric vehicles (EVs) and energy storage systems (ESS), the Government of Telangana rolled out the ‘Telangana Electric Vehicle & Energy Storage Policy’ on October 30. The policy will be effective for ten years from the date of notification and will be reviewed by the Steering Committee as notified in the policy. Telangana Minister of IT KT Rama Rao and Transport Minister Ajay Kumar were also present at the policy launch. With the launch of the new EV & Energy Storage policy, the State government aims to lure private investments worth \$4 billion and generate employment for 120,000 people by 2030 through shared mobility, charging infrastructure development, and manufacturing activities. In regard with the subsidies and policies available under the Electronics Policy 2016, the new EV policy offers various incentives in the EV and ESS sectors like incentives have been made available for EV manufacturing, energy storage systems and related components in the State through capital subsidies, SGST reimbursements, power tariff subsidies, and more. Moreover, the policy also lays out a provision of 100 per cent exemption of road tax and registration fee for the first two lakh electric two-wheelers and first 20,000 electric three-wheelers purchased and registered in the State. Besides this, retro-fitment incentives have also been provided at 15 per cent for the first 5000 three-seater autorickshaws for a cost capped at Rs 15,000. The policy added that financing institutions would be encouraged to provide a hire-purchase scheme at discounted interest rates. For EV four-wheelers, 100 per cent exemption of road tax and the registration fee has been provided for the first 5,000 units purchased and registered. The exemptions are also made available for the first 500 EV buses and State Transport Units with an objective to encourage electric buses. As per the new policy, investment of over Rs 200 crore in plant and machinery or providing employment to more than 1,000 people shall be categorised as a megaproject. Further, the policy states that the government would facilitate setting up of an initial batch of fast charging stations in Hyderabad and other towns in a phased manner, by state entities and private players.

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[TOP↑](#)

NITI Aayog Brings Model Act on Conclusive Land Titles

The National Institute for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog has constituted a model Act on conclusive land titles which is expected to be adopted by the States. The act aims to facilitate easy access of credit to farmers, reduce the number of land-related litigations, make real estate transactions and land acquisition for infrastructure developments transparent. The new model Act proposes a list of titles on which objections and claims are called for. Following these claims and objections, the registers of the titles are notified and from then on the new registration process sets in. Also, the land dispute resolution officer and the land title appellate tribunal are temporary institutions which are dissolved as the work reduces, states the Act. Moreover, after three years of its notification, the registers of titles become conclusive without any external actions. The land titles which attain conclusivity are guaranteed by the state for their correctness and entail provision for compensation by the state in case of disputes. Countries like the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore have already adopted guaranteed title systems. However, in India transactions are done based on the presumptive land titles presently. As proof of land ownership, in India, documents like sale deeds are counted along with property tax receipts or survey documents. However, such documents are a mere proof of transaction but not a government-guaranteed title, hence, can be challenged. According to the Government, digitization of land records can aid in adopting the conclusive land guaranteed title system. Considering the stats, the government has done digitisation of over 90 per cent of land records under the Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme of the Department of Land Resources.

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[TOP ↑](#)

Central-West Asia

UZBEKISTAN: Intending to Regulate Legal Status of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons by a Single Law

The plenary session of the Legislative Chamber discussed the bill "On the legal status of foreign citizens and stateless persons in the Republic of Uzbekistan". No law regulates the legal status of foreign citizens and stateless persons in Uzbekistan today. Issues in this area are mainly regulated by outdated laws adopted in 1990-2000. The proposed document grants foreigners and stateless persons the right to inviolability and freedom of movement, employment and recreation, health, social security and pensions, marriage and family relations, education, access to public services, investment and entrepreneurship, and regulates many other issues. In particular, it determines the rules of residence on the territory of Uzbekistan on the basis of a permanent residence permit or identity card.

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[TOP↑](#)

Uzbekistan Adopts Law on Genomic Registration of Citizens

Uzbekistan plans to use genomic information for identification of the offences. MPs have adopted the draft "On state registration of the genome" in the second reading. "The DNA data will be used in the investigation of crimes and unsolved cases, in the search for missing citizens of Uzbekistan, foreigners and stateless persons, in determining the identity of unidentified corpses and in identifying relatives," the report says. Voluntary registration is carried out on a paid basis upon written application of individuals.

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[TOP↑](#)

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Ministers Flag 'Big Changes' in Aged Care

Senior cabinet ministers are promising big changes in aged care after a damning report criticised the federal government's coronavirus response. The aged care royal commission has made six urgent recommendations to fix deplorable conditions at some nursing homes during the pandemic. The government has been urged to fund more staff to allow family and friends to visit residents, and at least one infection control expert should be deployed to every nursing home to prevent more deaths. The government has also been told to increase funding for allied and mental health services in aged care and develop clear protocols around sending residents with coronavirus to hospital. Coronavirus has killed more than 660 people in aged care during the pandemic. Finance Minister Mathias Cormann has apologised for the Commonwealth's failures.

"Clearly we could have done better, there's no question," he told Sky News on Friday. "The recommendations in this report will help to further lift the performance across that very important sector and that is as it should be." The commission recommended a dedicated coronavirus plan for nursing homes be established, along with a national aged care advisory body. The government has accepted all six recommendations. Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton said everybody was sorry for the situation in aged care but argued it had been dire for years after decades of band-aid solutions. "There is a lot more work to be done and you will see that in the budget, in next year's budget, and there is a big change coming in aged care," the former health minister told the Nine Network. Mr Dutton said the Commonwealth had pumped an extra \$1.6 billion into aged care since the start of the coronavirus

pandemic.

"But it is not about money, it is about cultural change," he said. "The vast majority of people are good operators but we need to apply pressure to those that aren't suitable in the industry to exit and provide additional support for those delivering a very good service." Labor deputy leader Richard Marles said the Commonwealth needed to take responsibility for deadly failures in aged care. Mr Marles said the coalition had been in government for seven years and it was not good enough to try and shift blame for the coronavirus crisis. "This is a real indictment on them, the word that's used is deplorable, being the situation during COVID-19," he said. "It is the commonwealth government's responsibility and they need to act."

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[TOP↑](#)

Australia's Electric Car Plan in Slow Lane

The wheels are turning slowly on Australia's electric vehicle strategy as federal officials reveal they intended to finish it months ago. The Morrison government first announced its promised strategy in February 2019 but quickly pumped the brakes. It shifted gears during the election campaign to criticise Labor for setting a target of electric vehicles making up 50 per cent of all car sales by 2030. Fewer than 7000 electric cars were sold in Australia in 2019. Prime Minister Scott Morrison went so far as to claim Labor wanted to "end the weekend", while his senior ministers argued the opposition would also steal people's boats and trailers. Department of Industry deputy secretary Jo Evans said the electric vehicle strategy was expected to be finished in June this year, but the coronavirus pandemic shifted priorities. "We are still continuing to work on that," she told a Senate estimates hearing on Tuesday.

The department was given \$400,000 in last year's budget to come up with a plan for electric vehicle use in Australia. Electric vehicles have since been bundled into the government's future fuel's package, which received \$74.5 million in this year's budget. Senior government minister Simon Birmingham expects a consultation paper on the strategy to be released by the end of the year. The department's Kushla Munro said plenty of consultation had already occurred. "There has been a number of re-prioritisations that had to happen within the department because of COVID-19," she told senators. "A number of public servants were seconded to a number of different areas. The work has continued as it can do, the discussion paper is not yet finalised." Light vehicles account for about 10 per cent of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. Electric vehicles are estimated to make up just 0.2 per cent of the total vehicle fleet in Australia.

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[TOP↑](#)

Labor Looking to Overhaul Redress Scheme

Labor says an advance payment scheme for elderly and ill child sexual abuse survivors must form part of a national redress scheme. The federal opposition will seek to amend laws before parliament aimed at making a number of technical amendments to the scheme. Scotland operates a scheme under which those who were abused in care and are terminally ill or aged 68 and over can get fast-tracked access to support. There are concerns at the current rate of processing applications for redress it could take 45 years to clear the backlog. As of early September, the scheme had received almost 8000 applications and made 4275 decisions, including 3498 payments totalling \$286.6 million. But only 561 offers of redress had been made. Labor will also seek to amend the laws to require the minister to publicly name an institution that hasn't already signed up, and cut off any Commonwealth funding or tax deductibility.

As well, the opposition wants the maximum payment set at \$200,000 and ensure other types of payments do not impact on the redress. The government's proposed amendments make a number of minor changes including permitting a redress payment to be made to a person appointed by a court, tribunal or board to manage the financial affairs of the survivor. The Labor caucus approved the amendments, proposed by frontbencher Linda Burney, at its meeting in Canberra on Tuesday. "Eight years since the announcement of the royal commission, survivors are still waiting for redress, or dying and missing out altogether," Ms Burney told AAP. "Labor is willing to work constructively with the government to get the scheme working and delivering redress for survivors." An independent review of the scheme is under way, headed by former mental health commissioner Robyn Kruk.

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[TOP↑](#)

Subsidy Scheme Could Exclude Wage Thieves

Employers who sack staff to take advantage of taxpayer cash for hiring young workers could be excluded from the wage subsidy scheme. Corporations found to have underpaid workers or recently paid dividends to shareholders could also be cut out. The Senate will soon consider whether to reward businesses for hiring unemployed young people after legislation underpinning the program cleared the lower house. Greens leader Adam Bandt claims the Morrison government is simply setting up a slush fund for wage thieves. "In the biggest recession we've seen in generations, we shouldn't be subsidising profitable corporations or giving public money to corporations that underpay workers," he said on Tuesday. "If a big corporation is doing well enough to pay dividends during a pandemic, it doesn't need the public to pay part of its wages bill."

The Greens are also concerned the youth wage subsidy scheme could further fuel casual and insecure work. "We need to see the details to make sure this wage subsidy won't make the employment crisis worse," Mr Bandt said. "The government already seems confused about whether the scheme would allow employers to fire a decently paid full-time employee in order to recruit two young people on a subsidised minimum wage." The Morrison government has been badgering Labor to support the hiring credits since they were outlined in the budget. Labor called the coalition's bluff by pulling off a tactical manoeuvre and quickly pushing the bill through the House of Representatives. The bill will not get debated in the Senate until at least November 9, as budget estimates hearings are scheduled for this fortnight. Under the plan, employers that take on jobless people aged under 30 will receive \$200 a week, while those who hire people aged 30 to 35 will receive regular payments of \$100.

The federal government expects the \$4 billion program to help create 450,000 jobs over the next 12 months. Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese said Labor had no problem with young people being given support but was concerned 928,000 jobless people aged over 35 would miss out. The prime minister argues young people have been four times more likely to lose their jobs or have their hours cut during the coronavirus pandemic, and will spend years on the dole if they do not return to work quickly.

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[TOP↑](#)

Aged Care Needs New Laws, Staff Ratios

Mandatory staff ratios in residential aged care and new laws to protect the rights of elderly people are among 124 recommendations put forward to a royal commission probing the sector. The inquiry heard on Thursday the system has systemic failures, is rife with abuse and should be overhauled to ensure people receive high-quality care. Lawyers assisting the inquiry have submitted a 500-page document of recommendations which will be considered by commissioners before they deliver their final report in late February. Peter Rozen QC said there has been an absence of leadership by successive governments but this was a once-in-a-lifetime chance to make change. "Even though the aged care system caters for more than 1.2 million older people, governments have treated it as a lower-order priority," he said during the first day of closing submissions.

Key recommendations include a new planning regime based on demand-driven care access rather than a rationed approach, an independent process for setting quality standards and mandatory worker registration. There is also a desire for an independent authority to determine care prices, as well as an independent Australian Aged Care Commission regulator. Mr Rozen said a new Aged Care Act based on

human rights principles should be enacted to protect the rights of older people. After 97 days of hearings and 641 witnesses across more than two years, he said it was evident the amount of substandard care is "far too high" and abuse "remains rife". Almost half of the 10,000-plus public submissions referred to substandard care, he added.

He said 588 mentioned sexual assault, and the number of allegations reported to the federal health department increased from 426 in 2014-15 to 790 in 2018-19. "It is more than two reports per day of sexual assault on average, every day of the year.," Mr Rozen said. He said the rate of alleged sexual assaults per 100 residents nearly doubled over that period. Mr Rozen said the true figure of sexual assaults in aged homes was likely around 50 a week. "The weight of the evidence before the commission supports a finding that high-quality aged care is not being delivered on a systemic level in our system," he said. "The level of substandard care is unacceptable by any measure. "At least one in five people receiving residential aged care have received substandard care."

Mr Rozen said systemic failures included a lack of skilled staff, poor planning, poor governance and leadership from providers and a lack of transparency generally. "First and most importantly the aged care system needs to put people first. The preferences and needs of older people really should drive aged care," Commissioner Lynelle Briggs said. National president of the Health Services Union, Gerard Hayes, said the recommendations were a breakthrough moment and deserved support from both sides of politics.

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[TOP↑](#)

Call for Broader Rights Comb of Virus Laws

The impact of emergency powers on human rights must be given more attention, senators have been told. Australian Human Rights Commission president Rosalind Croucher is keeping a close eye on coronavirus restrictions imposed by governments. She's concerned about the way some of the measures are made legal, particularly when processes are used that reduce transparency and allow rules to be changed after parliament has agreed to them. "The checks and balances that ordinarily exist are integral to our democracy," she told a Senate inquiry on Thursday. "I am concerned of the lack of transparency explaining the continued justification for some emergency response measures, and even for identifying precisely which level of government is responsible for them." The effect on human rights of proposed federal laws usually has to be considered when a bill is developed.

But that hasn't been the case with some of the changes passed during the coronavirus pandemic. "We have a long way to go before it is over," Ms Croucher

said of the health crisis. "We need to embed a human rights scrutiny process better into all emergency responses, to ensure any intrusion on our rights is always fully justified and the debate is had at the time the restrictions are considered, not afterwards." Ms Croucher said doing so would help the public trust measures and comply with them.

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[TOP↑](#)

Legal Centre Warns on Consumer Data Right Rule Changes

A community legal centre has expressed concern that proposed changes to the Consumer Data Right rules puts people at risk. The idea behind the Consumer Data Right (CDR) – which is initially implemented under the Open Banking arrangements – is that people can "access data about themselves held by businesses, and direct that data to be shared with accredited third parties of their choice," according to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC). So an individual might make their banking data available to a different financial institution in the hope of securing better loan terms, or they might allow their electricity consumption details to be visible to another energy retailer when looking for a more competitive tariff. Consumers have always been able to provide such data manually – eg, by sending copies of electricity bills – but CDR is about granting access securely, automatically and efficiently.

Currently, the rules allow consumers to grant an accredited data recipient (ADR) access to their CDR data. But they do not allow the ADR to disclose the data to anyone else – even with the consumer's consent – except as necessary to deliver the good or service, such as when part of the supply is outsourced. The ACCC has proposed that (among other things) consumers should be able to give their consent for an ADR to "disclose CDR data to a trusted advisor who falls within a specified professional class, and disclose limited 'insights' derived from CDR data to any nominated person." The rationale is that such disclosure "is consistent with the principles of consumer choice and control which underpin the CDR regime," and only occurs at the customer's request and with their separate consent. The 'trusted advisors' would include accountants, lawyers, tax agents, BAS agents, financial advisors, financial counsellors, and mortgage brokers.

The ACCC points out that "Consumers routinely share their banking data with members of these professionals and we consider there will be consumer benefit in allowing this to occur via the CDR." As for 'insights', they would include such things as "income and expense verification, verification of payments, or outcomes of responsible lending assessments." Importantly, actual CDR data cannot be provided to such recipients. However, Financial Rights Legal Centre director of casework Alexandra Kelly thinks the new rules could enable access to private and sensitive

consumer data by companies which are not required to meet the CDR regime's higher security and safety standards for privacy. "This proposal will fundamentally undermine consumer trust and confidence in the CDR," she said. "It is also likely to open the floodgates to non-accredited companies to obtain sensitive data without having to meet higher privacy standards. In some cases they won't have to meet any privacy standards at all."

Financial Rights is also critical of the proposed new rules to allow more direct marketing and the sale of consumer data. "These proposals could result in financially vulnerable people being targeted by new Open Banking players and sold expensive credit and inappropriate debt and credit solutions they can't afford," Kelly said. "We urge the ACCC to reconsider these erroneous recommendations and instead put consumer interests at the heart of the new data regime." Financial Rights' submission to the ACCC seems to imply that it thinks the arguments about increasing consumer choice and improving the customer experience are little more than a smokescreen for reducing compliance costs despite a recent survey conducted by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner finding that "Eighty-three percent of Australians would like the government to do more to protect the privacy of their data."

The Centre called on the ACCC to design a different tiered accreditation proposal that is primarily concerned with consumers' best interests, with "strong, consistent and unavoidable safety and security measures"; a consent model that allows consumers to be genuinely informed and to easily withdraw their consent, and that "prevents pressure or dark patterns... [being] used by CDR participants to maintain consents". Furthermore, it appears to regard the proposal to allow disclosures to non-accredited persons as being fundamentally flawed. Among the objections are that: "Disclosure to a "trusted advisor" is not just inherently risky but is contrary to the entire point of the CDR to provide a safe and secure data environment "Referring to "Trusted" advisors is misleading since many will not have to provide a safe and secure data environment [and]

"Disclosure to "trusted advisors" facilitates the creation of two data protection regimes – one safe and secure environment, one with fewer if any consumer protections". Financial Rights also expressed concerns about the proposed rules around joint accounts. The ACCC consultation on proposed changes to the CDR rules closed yesterday. The Commission proposes to amend the rules in December 2020.

From <https://www.itwire.com> 10/30/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

NEW ZEALAND: Ardern Defends Weed Silence, May Tweak Law

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has defended her silence on the cannabis referendum, saying her public advocacy wouldn't have translated into successful legalisation of New Zealand's most used drug. On Friday, the Electoral Commission released preliminary results for the public poll, showing 46 per cent of Kiwis voted for the law reform, with 53 against. The results aren't final as roughly 500,000 "special votes" representing 20 per cent of the electorate are yet to be counted. Minutes after the results were released, Ms Ardern revealed she was a 'yes' voter on the issue, ending months of equivocation. The Labour leader was praised by 'no' campaigners Say Nope To Dope and savaged by 'yes' advocates for sitting on the fence through the debate. On Saturday afternoon she said she voted 'yes' because she didn't want to see "people imprisoned for personal possession" while having "concerns about young people's access".

"I weighed those issues up and I voted in favour," she said. "However I wanted every New Zealander to weigh those issues up independently of my view." In a live television debate during the election campaign, Ms Ardern admitted previously smoking the drug "a long time ago". The 40-year-old, who helped Labour to its biggest vote share since 1938 in the election a fortnight ago, said she doubted her own voice would have influenced people. "I don't actually. Ultimately New Zealanders made up their own mind," she said. "I asked every single New Zealander to vote for Labour and they didn't." Writing in the NZ Herald, former Labour prime minister Helen Clark expressed her disappointment with the vote - without criticising the current PM. "The case for legalisation was evidence-based ... a no vote cannot and will not deliver a cannabis-free New Zealand," she wrote.

Ms Ardern moved to end cannabis possession as a criminal offence last year when the parliament amended the Misuse of Drugs Act. Ms Clark suggests a further law change to discourage police to arrest Kiwis for marijuana possession and Ms Ardern hinted she may pick that idea up. "That change in the Misuse of Drugs Act does place an expectation on the police ... to take a health approach unless it's in the public interest not to do so," she said. "There's work to be done there and ensuring that has been the case." The final referendum results will be delivered on Thursday.

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[TOP ↑](#)

Government Delivers Plan for World-Leading Aquaculture Industry

The Government will work alongside the aquaculture industry to deliver economic growth and jobs for the regions as part of an ambitious goal for it to become a \$3 billion industry by 2035.

Speaking at the NZ Aquaculture Conference, Fisheries Minister Stuart Nash congratulated the industry on its work to grow the sector and New Zealand's

reputation for sustainable, healthy and high-value products. He also released the Government's strategy for the industry. "The strategy will build on that foundation, setting out a plan for Government to support the industry over the next seven years, built around objectives and actions needed to realise a productive, sustainable, resilient, and inclusive aquaculture industry", says Minister Nash. Alongside the \$3 billion goal, the New Zealand Aquaculture Strategy focuses efforts on: the development of sustainable open ocean and land-based farming

increasing farm efficiency increasing product value and environmental performance in existing inshore farming building resilience to environment change supporting the development and adoption of new technologies and practices to reduce the industry's contribution to waste and emissions. "This is a strong statement of Government support and partnership with industry toward an ambitious goal of \$3 billion in aquaculture sales by 2035. It is also an opportunity to strengthen Brand New Zealand by positioning ourselves as world-leaders and producers of sustainable, healthy, and highly valued seafood products." Aquaculture contributes significantly to regional development. It generated over \$600 million in revenue in 2018, and employed 3,000 people, especially in the regions. There is real potential for aquaculture to enrich our economy and our global reputation with Government, Iwi and Industry coming together.

"The Government's Coalition agreement recognised the path aquaculture has been on and the potential for the sector to further deliver economic growth for the regions. "The strategy looks to maximise the performance and value of the existing inshore farm footprint, and to enable the industry to sustainably extend farming into the open ocean and into modern land-based facilities." Also at the heart of the strategy is sustainability. It sets actions to make aquaculture more sustainable, reduce waste and emissions across aquaculture production, and plan for how the industry adapts to climate change. "There is already a lot of good work going on in this area between industry and Government, including initiatives that support environmental regeneration and improve the health of the environment, such as reef restoration projects already underway in the Hauraki Gulf and Marlborough Sounds.

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[TOP ↑](#)

Government Releases First National Voluntary Emissions Offset Guidelines

Minister for Climate Change James Shaw has today released New Zealand's first national guidance for local businesses to voluntarily offset their emissions. "There is huge appetite in New Zealand to act on climate change and reach net zero carbon dioxide emissions as a country", James Shaw said today. "It is going to take all of us, so I am really happy to announce consistent national guidelines that businesses can

use to properly offset their emissions. “The ambition of many New Zealand businesses to become carbon neutral has led to an increase in demand for voluntary emissions offsets. I am happy that today we are able to provide that. “The guidance outlines steps and principles that should be met in order for a voluntary offset to be deemed credible. “Importantly, the first steps to a credible, voluntary offset approach is to measure your emissions, then reduce them as much as practicable. Only after these steps have been undertaken should your remaining emissions be offset. “The guidance has been designed in collaboration with both offsetting users and providers, including members of the Climate Leaders Coalition,” James Shaw said. The guidance is available on the Ministry for the Environment website.

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[TOP↑](#)

2、 Government System and Civil Services

Asia-Pacific

APEC Needs to Build Greater Food Systems’ Resiliency

APEC member economies need to remain vigilant and proactive in their efforts to build greater resiliency in food systems and in addressing connectivity and supply chain obstacles in the trade of agricultural products, according to a new policy brief by the APEC Policy Support Unit. “APEC member economies are already facing challenges in food security due to shifts in consumer demand and growing population,” said Dato’ Haslina Abdul Hamid, Chair of the APEC Policy Partnership on Food Security. “The pandemic is adding pressure to food security in the region.” “Hence, we must pursue coordinated initiatives to keep food trade open, facilitate connectivity, and expedite customs clearance of food products,” she explained. The policy brief, Food Security Response Measures to COVID-19, analyses multifaceted challenges throughout the entire food system, from production to distribution and market access. It identifies the economic issues affecting food security and puts forward policy recommendations to strengthen regional food security. The report notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused major disruptions to the production of several food products, particularly those that require intensive use of labour, such as meat processing facilities and fruit and vegetable packing plants. Outbreaks among food production workers and the unavailability of temporary migrant workers could impact the economy’s ability to produce food.

“Member economies need to ensure that reductions in production capacity do not occur in multiple food sectors at the same time, which could potentially cause a breakdown in the overall domestic and international food supply chain,” explained

Carlos Kuriyama, Senior Analyst with the APEC Policy Support Unit. Most food products are shipped by sea. Although most of the major seaports in the region have remained open and shipping lines have continued to operate the analysis shows that there have been substantial delays in shipping times for sea freight due to reduced container capacity as well as stringent border measures to reduce the spread of the virus. To tackle distribution bottlenecks, the report recommends that APEC member economies establish clear guidelines at ports of entry concerning the mobility of shipping crews and other transport workers, as well as expediting customs clearance. Policymakers are also encouraged to accelerate wider applications of digital technology at the border.

Accelerating the adoption of digital tools will also help address the notable shift in consumer patterns of food products. For example, many restaurants have been forced to close. But others are offering delivery service to bring food directly to customers through digital platforms. The report highlights the case of small-scale farmers and fishermen in the region who have taken a similar approach and turned to e-commerce and mobile money for the first time in order to connect with buyers and suppliers. The report further recommends APEC economies to consider food trade as an essential component of food security and to avoid protectionist measures such as export restrictions and policies which are not based on evidence and scientific risk assessment. Senior agriculture and food industry officials as well as private sector representatives will convene virtually later this week to further discuss strategic measures to address the challenges caused by the COVID-19 crisis and improve resiliency in food systems. Following the meeting, agriculture and food ministers and senior representatives will also meet virtually at the Ministerial Policy Dialogue on Food Security on 27 October, chaired by Malaysia's Minister of Agriculture and Food Industries, Datuk Seri Dr Ronald Kiandee.

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[TOP↑](#)

Structural Reform Agenda to Focus on Recovery and Resiliency: APEC Policy Support Unit

APEC member economies need to act decisively to ensure that the next structural reform agenda contributes to building resilience in the region against crises and shocks, not only tackling the challenging tasks at hand, according to a new report. The final review of the Renewed APEC Agenda for Structural Reform (RAASR), an APEC Economic Committee initiative, was conducted by the APEC Policy Support Unit to assess member economies' progress on structural reforms efforts and to look for gaps which could be targets for future work. "Structural reforms remove structural barriers to improve access to economic opportunity and can even help economies to reach a higher growth trajectory," said Dr Denis Hew, Director of APEC Policy Support Unit. "In times of economic uncertainty, policymakers often resort to

structural reform to support recovery and boost growth,” he added. “It is extremely relevant and important today, given that governments in the region are battling both a health and economic crisis.”

APEC’s structural reform agenda is based on three pillars: 1) developing more open, well-functioning, transparent and competitive markets; 2) deepening the participation of all segments of society; and 3) establishing sustainable social policies. “To conduct a review on structural reform, we analyse the indicators agreed by economies ranging from ease of doing business, access to basic services and infrastructure, labour productivity and participation rate to business innovation, youth unemployment, and digital infrastructure,” explained Andre Wirjo, Analyst of the APEC Policy Support Unit, who is a co-author of the report. The final review finds that APEC has performed well in the areas of innovation and productivity across various metrics including labour productivity per person employed. However, more effort is needed to boost university-industry collaboration in research and development, among others. APEC has made some progress in terms of enhancing the efficiency of its labour markets, making them more flexible and agile. Yet, the report also noted that members should continue to make improvements in certain areas such as better linking employee pay to productivity.

The report further highlights the need for APEC to boost access to basic services and infrastructure as well as to enhance fiscal and social policies, noting that there are variation in performance among members. All the more crucial, members need to improve healthcare accessibility and social protection in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. “Collectively, APEC has made good strides towards advancing structural reform efforts,” said Wirjo. “However, members should continue making progress in advancing structural reform efforts through the APEC Economic Committee and other fora so that economies can rebuild better post-pandemic.” Inclusiveness is another key area in ensuring resiliency through structural reforms. The report recommends that members reinforce the importance of holistic approaches to structural reform efforts. On top of core structural reform efforts, member needs to work collectively across agencies to formulate supporting policies in areas such as human capital development and social protection.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 10/30/2020

[TOP↑](#)

East Asia

CHINA: Pledging to Build Open, Transparent Capital Market System

China will put in place an open and transparent capital market system, keep its hands off matters that are not subject to regulation, and foster a healthy market

ecosystem, the head of the country's securities regulator said Wednesday. The building of the fundamental system of the capital market demands firm determination and consistent actions, said Yi Huiman, chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, at the Annual Conference of Financial Street Forum 2020. While maintaining general stability, the fundamental system should also keep evolving with the development of the market, he said. The country will steadily promote the registration-based initial public offerings (IPOs) system throughout the capital market, Yi said, adding that with reform of the registration system taking the lead, China's capital market will see innovations in key mechanisms in the future.

Apart from the piloting of a registration-based IPO system on the ChiNext board, China has rolled out a raft of measures in recent years to make key institutional innovations, including the establishment of a sci-tech innovation board and the reform of the National Equities Exchange and Quotations, or the "new third board." Yi urged efforts to improve supporting measures to facilitate the development of institutions in the sectors of securities, funds and futures, so as to nurture world-class investment banks and wealth managers. While advancing institutional opening-up, the country will introduce policies to standardize and simplify channels for foreign investors to participate in China's capital market, and deepen the connectivity of domestic and foreign markets, Yi added. The conference, which runs from Oct. 21 to 23 in Beijing, features four parallel forums centered around financial cooperation and reform in the context of global changes, offering an interactive platform for finance and the real economy.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/21/2020

[TOP↑](#)

China to Continue Improving Its Special Transfer Payment Mechanism

China will work to expand the coverage of the directly funneled funds and improve the management of such funds as an effort to enable more efficient use of fiscal funds through reform to better serve the needs of economic and social development, the State Council's executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on Wednesday. The special transfer payment mechanism, designed to channel this year's increased fiscal funds straight to the prefecture and county-level governments, is an extraordinary measure in an extraordinary time and an important innovative step in macro regulation. Li has underscored that the newly increased funds must be utilized in a more targeted way. Practices and experiences gained must be timely reviewed for policy improvement. It was reviewed at the Wednesday meeting that by the end of September, among the two trillion yuan (about 299 billion U.S. dollars) of additional fiscal funds, 1.57 trillion of the 1.7 trillion yuan designated for localities had been delivered to primary-level government departments.

With the replenishment of fiscal resources, local governments have been in a better position to deliver tax and fee cuts, secure jobs, protect market entities and people's livelihood, support major projects and poverty reduction, and perform their functions. In the first three quarters, new tax and fee cuts exceeded two trillion yuan. The implementation of the sizeable-scale business support policies and the special transfer payment mechanism has secured more than 100 million market entities and nearly nine million new urban jobs, playing a critical role in promoting steady economic recovery. "The special transfer payment mechanism has played a critical role in enacting our relief policies of a sizeable scale. The highly effective approach shall continue to be well applied," Li said. To meet the main development goals and tasks set for 2020, greater efforts will be made to maintain the consistency and effectiveness of macro policies and ensure sound implementation of the special transfer payment mechanism to put the funds to more effective use.

It is also important to explore, building on this year's experience, the establishment of a regular special transfer payment mechanism and enable more efficient use of fiscal funds by advancing reform to better serve the needs of economic and social development. "Normally, funding from treasury bond is spent on designated projects. Yet this year we are facing a special situation. Funds raised from the special bond for COVID-19 control shall cover more areas, including current expenditure programs," Li said, "But primary-level governments must ensure that their spending is well-calculated." Coverage of the directly funneled funds will be expanded. Transfer payments that can be directly distributed under fiscal responsibilities shared by central and local governments, eligible special transfer payments, and general transfer payments of subsidy funding to guarantee basic fiscal capacity at the county-level can be included in the special mechanism.

This will essentially ensure full coverage of livelihood subsidies supported by the central government budget, on-time and in-full payment of teachers' wages for compulsory education, and greater support for the functioning of the primary-level governments. "The mechanism shall be further improved. The COVID-19 bond is a special step amid unusual times, and primary-level governments are responsible for principal repayment," Li said. The directly funneled funds will be better managed. Funding to be channeled through transfer payment can be allocated in advance as appropriate. Government departments nationwide need to step up efforts to ensure that the funds are distributed in a better calibrated, better regulated and more effective way. The meeting required accelerating data opening and sharing among government departments, and enforcing rigorous monitoring over the whole-process movements of the directly funneled funds. "Auditing and monitoring must be stepped up to ensure that the funds are channeled to the most needed areas and are put into effective use," Li said. "No muddying the waters or fishing for profit is allowed."

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/21/2020

[TOP↑](#)

JAPAN: Embarking on Long, Winding Road of Digital Administrative Reform

An office to prepare legislation related to digital reform was launched on Sept. 30 by the government, to serve as a control tower in promoting the digitization of public administrative services, a key policy of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga. Attention is being focused on the weaknesses beleaguering the administrative systems of central and local governments, and on how those shortcomings should be corrected. “We should recognize that our fight with the novel coronavirus was a digital battle that was lost.” That’s how Takuya Hirai, minister for digital transformation, summarized the flawed handling of the virus by the central and local governments. Symbolic of the lost battle was the uniform cash payment of ¥100,000 to all residents. The online application process for the outlay — which used electronic certificates encoded in My Number cards — was delayed, causing more than 100 local governments to suspend the internet procedure. Because the central and local governments’ computer systems failed to act in concert, local governments were forced to manually confirm if the information written on applications coincided with resident registries.

Other failures followed. For example, the central government was unable to hold online conferences between ministries, and some local public health centers sent faxes when reporting the number of infected patients to prefectural governments, including the Tokyo metropolitan government. In response to the proliferation of the internet, in 2001 the government mapped out the “e-Japan Strategy” to develop tech infrastructure. However, the coronavirus crisis has laid bare the delay in standardizing the digitization of public administration systems. One key problem in the central government is that ministries and agencies have separately procured integral IT infrastructure, such as local area network (LAN) equipment. The lack of a unified system meant ministries and agencies were unable to hold online conferences among themselves. Under the leadership of the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry, some ministries and agencies have been working to integrate their IT systems, but only a few have switched to a unified platform so far.

Circumstances differ among local governments depending on their size. A large proportion of local governments serving populations fewer than 200,000 purchased ready-made, prepackaged systems from tech firms. However, scores of core cities, ordinance-designated cities and special wards adopted individually tailored IT systems. Even local governments that purchased ready-made systems have asked makers to modify them, for instance, by adding fields to the certificate of residence, adopting unique specifications for printing documents or changing whether a document is printed vertically or horizontally. “When migrating to an improved or new system, each local government would need an individually tailored method, which would require a lot of effort and money,” said Kunihiko Matsushita, a director at TKC

Corp. who is an expert on administrative systems.

Because the tech systems of the central and local governments are not standardized, the strengths of digitization could not be used to coordinate among public organizations amid the coronavirus pandemic. The government plans to achieve by the end of fiscal year 2025 a common tech infrastructure among ministries and agencies using cloud computing technology, while deciding on standard specifications of such systems for local governments to promote greater adoption. The central government will provide financial support to local governments to renew their tech systems. The central government will also promote the acquisition of My Number cards by residents, with the goal of having nearly all residents possess one by the end of fiscal 2022. The electronic certificate encoded in My Number cards will become a type of information infrastructure to help prevent impersonation scams and enable users to safely make online applications for various purposes.

From next March, residents will be able to use the My Number card as their health insurance card. The government is also considering integrating driver's licenses into the card. "It is necessary to create, without delay, a society in which every sort of administrative procedure can be done promptly without going to a government office," Suga said. Efforts over the past two decades to digitize the government have petered out, so many challenges remain. A digital agency will be established next year. To succeed in integrating systems of ministries and agencies into the common tech platform, some of the vested powers of ministries and agencies need to be eliminated, such as those over budgets and manpower. With a centralized system, there will be increased concern regarding certain aspects, such as information leaks. Reinforcing measures against cyberterrorism will also be necessary.

Local governments — large ones in particular — have built unique tech systems. The switch to a new system will not be easy. Simplifying and streamlining administrative work befitting the digital era is also necessary. "The digitization of administrative services has made little progress because governments tried replacing analog administrative procedures with online ones in an offhand manner, thus failing to enhance their usefulness," said Eiji Kano, chief researcher at the Institute of Administrative Information Systems. "Unless governments review their administrative procedures and systems and cut down on waste, any attempt at standardizing the digitization of administrative procedures won't go well." The government needs to formulate a schedule reflecting the actual conditions of current administrative services.

The city government of Ube, Yamaguchi Prefecture, aims to create by the end of fiscal year 2022 a "smart local government" that will, in principle, relieve residents of the need to go to city hall for administrative services. Ube envisions the city hall of the future as a comprehensive portal that serves as an office window, allowing online applications for various administrative services, such as registration to move in or out

of the city; administrative procedures related to marriage, childbirth and child-rearing; and screenings for the designation of people in need of nursing care and making such a designation. The city government would also notify people subject to various medical checkups at the appropriate time. Such services have already been realized in some countries. Residents in Denmark and Estonia can have information about relocation immediately updated at administrative organizations and financial institutions via an online service.

According to the 2020 U.N. e-government ranking released by the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Japan placed 14th in access to online government services, barely managing to crack the top ranks. Japan has strong telecommunications networks compared to other developed countries, but the nation is rated low for the provision of administrative services online. "Japan lags in the provision of administrative services that are directly linked to the convenience of its people, and the gap with highly ranked countries, such as Denmark and South Korea, is widening," said Kyorin University's Prof. Kentaro Kogure, a scholar of politics. It is often difficult to visualize how digitization affects our daily lives. To accelerate the digitization of administrative procedures and services, it is necessary to quickly build systems in which people can realize the usefulness of such systems and spread public understanding.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 10/12/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Suga Needs to Focus on Effectiveness as He Promotes Government Reform

EditorialThe government needs to assess the effectiveness and impact of reforms to improve the lives of the people. It is hoped that the government will proceed with these reforms in such a way as not to cause confusion. A month has passed since the Cabinet of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga took office. Suga has given instructions to the relevant ministers in his Cabinet on a variety of issues, including the digitization of public administration and lowering mobile phone rates. It is likely that he is hoping to get his administration on a stable track by achieving results as soon as possible. Suga told reporters, "We will carry out what needs to be done with a sense of speed and without hesitation." The prime minister plans to submit a bill to the ordinary Diet session to set up the digital agency, which is considered a centerpiece of his administration's policy, with a view to establishing it next year. Successive cabinets have also made the digitization of government administration a key policy, but because each ministry and agency has built its own computer system, there is no mechanism yet in place for sharing information within the government. Cooperation with local governments has also been insufficient.

Putting administrative procedures online would be significant in speeding up the

processing of various applications and facilitating cooperation between ministries and agencies. It is vital that Suga appropriately review the progress made and pave the way for its implementation. As long as personal information is handled online, a mechanism to properly manage it is essential. It is necessary not to forget to take into account the needs of the elderly and others who are not able to make the fullest use of computers. Some people may be perplexed by the abolition of the use of hanko seals. It is important to consider the impact on the social activities of the people when discussing the issue. Suga has expressed his intention to make the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy the command post for policy. He has scrapped the Council on Investments for the Future, which, like the economic council, was chaired by the prime minister, and instead established a new growth strategy council headed by the chief cabinet secretary.

Many government councils have overlapping agendas and committee members. It is appropriate to reorganize organizations and secretariats that are no longer necessary and to make the policy-making process easier to understand. Regarding the refusal to appoint some of the candidate members recommended by the Science Council of Japan, Suga stated earlier that the decision was made with a view to ensuring comprehensive activities with a bird's-eye perspective. It cannot be said that the refusal to appoint is a threat to academic freedom. On the other hand, repeating abstract and cliched answers is not enough to gain the understanding of the people, let alone the parties involved. It is hoped that Suga will provide a detailed explanation of the reasons for his decision and the process. The spread of the novel coronavirus is still not under control. The government should continue its efforts to maintain employment, improve the systems at medical facilities and expand testing capabilities. The government must also consider new economic measures to alleviate the concerns of the public.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 10/17/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Japan to Create Database to Prevent Sexual Predators from Babysitting

Japan's health ministry will create a database of babysitters who have been convicted of sexual assault to prevent them from continuing to work with children unbeknownst to parents and local municipalities. The plan to create the database, which is likely to be rolled out in April, comes after two men who were registered with a babysitter matching app were separately arrested earlier this year for sexually assaulting children under their care. Babysitters, whether working independently or through an employer, are required by law to register with either the prefecture or city they work in. But because there is no centralized system for local municipalities to share information about babysitters who have been convicted of sexual assault, they can simply move to another city and work with children again. The database would

list babysitters who have been accused of sexual assault, then update their status if they are found guilty and issued an administrative order to stop work.

While the database is intended to be used by local municipalities, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare is considering making it available to employers and matching app operators so they can avoid hiring offenders. The health ministry is also mulling making part of the database viewable to the general public on the government's childcare portal Kokodesearch (<https://www.wam.go.jp/kokodesearch/ANN010100E00.do>). Even if uploaded to the portal, the information on convicted babysitters will likely be limited to administrative orders, with details of the sexual assault omitted due to privacy concerns. Demand for babysitters is on the rise in Japan as more women enter the workforce while nurseries struggle to meet swelling childcare needs. The government is targeting the share of women with jobs to increase from the current 77 percent to 82 percent by 2025 even though more than 12,000 children were unable to enroll at a nursery due to a lack of availability as of April this year.

From <https://japantoday.com> 10/25/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Prevent Cyber-Attacks on Tokyo Games Through Public-Private Partnership

To achieve the smooth implementation of the peace festival, various measures must be taken with the cooperation of the public and private sectors to protect against cyber-attacks. Russia's GRU military intelligence agency has been suspected of carrying out cyber-attacks targeting the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. According to the British government, the attacks were carried out against officials of the Games, sponsor companies and systems for logistics services prior to March this year when the postponement of the Games was decided. The GRU is believed to have conducted the reconnaissance ahead of the Olympics initially scheduled for this summer. Russia was not allowed to participate in the Olympics as a country due to its systematic doping problems. Some view the cyber-attacks as retaliation for exclusion from the international events. It is said that there was no actual damage on the Japanese side. Russia has denied the allegation, but if it is true, it cannot be tolerated. The Japanese government has declined to say whether there have been attacks from Russia. The Japanese side apparently does not want peace treaty negotiations with Russia to be negatively impacted, but the facts should be clarified.

During the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the GRU allegedly used cyber-attacks to obtain and release documents about candidates in order to manipulate public opinion. Britain has determined that the GRU was involved in the attempted poisoning of a former spy. The administration led by Russian President Vladimir Putin must take seriously the fact that such actions by opaque organizations, which

have their roots in the former Soviet Union, have damaged Russia's credibility. Sports and other events that attract international attention tend to be targets of cyber-attacks. At the 2012 London Olympics, a huge volume of suspicious data was sent to the stadium's power system. At the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, official websites and communications services temporarily went down due to a virus. Not only Russia but also China and North Korea are improving their cyber-attack capabilities. If major infrastructure is attacked, power outages and traffic congestion could occur, leading to possible large-scale accidents.

It is essential for the Japanese government to cooperate with the United States and European countries, which have advanced measures against cyber-attacks, and share knowledge on examples of cyber-attacks that exploit digital space, and the countermeasures. Last year, the National Center of Incident Readiness and Strategy for Cybersecurity, which is the Cabinet's control tower for dealing with cyber-attacks, set up a council to share information with local governments and major infrastructure operators. With the Olympics scheduled for next summer in mind, it is necessary for the public and private sectors to study various plots and make efforts to strengthen different kinds of systems. It is also important for the government to conduct drills in preparation for an attack after the Olympics start in cooperation with the organizing committee for the Olympics and Paralympics, business operators and other parties. It is hoped that such efforts will be repeated to prevent the damage from spreading.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 10/30/2020

[TOP↑](#)

South-East Asia

MYANMAR: President, State Counsellor Cast Advance Votes for General Elections

Myanmar President U Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi cast advance votes on Thursday for the general elections scheduled to be held on Nov. 8. The president and state counsellor casted their advance votes in Nay Pyi Taw, the capital of Myanmar where the government offices are located. According to the Union Election Commission (UEC), civil servants who need to perform their duties outside their constituencies, citizens who have to travel on the day of elections, election candidates, senior citizens and those who cannot go to polling stations and detainees are eligible for advance voting. The advance voting normally lasts for 10 days and will conclude on Nov. 7, a day before the elections. In the elections, the president and the state counsellor will contest seats in the House of Representatives (Lower House of parliament) for Tamwe township and Kawhmu township of Yangon region, respectively. U Win Myint won a seat in the Lower House in Ayeyarwady region's Pathein constituency in 2012 by-election and was elected as member of parliament representing Yangon's Tamwe township in the Lower House in 2015

general elections, while Suu Kyi contested a seat in the Lower House in the Kawhmu township in 2012 by-election and 2015 general elections. According to the commission, a total of 5,831 candidates involving candidates from 91 political parties and independent runners will take part in the elections which will be held across Myanmar on Nov. 8. A 60-day election campaign has begun in Myanmar in early September and will conclude in the first week of November. The ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) party won an absolute majority of parliamentary seats in the last general elections on Nov. 8, 2015, and has been running the government since 2016.

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[TOP↑](#)

MALAYSIA: Penang Announces Half-Month Salary or Minimum RM1,000 to State's Civil Servants

GEORGE TOWN: Penang today announced a half-month salary or minimum RM1,000 special financial aid to all 4,009 civil servants in the state in appreciation of their services. Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow, who announced the good news at the end of his two hour Budget 2021 speech during the state legislative assembly sitting here, said it would cost the state government some RM5.5 million. "The payment will be made in December. "It is hoped that the special financial aid will serve as a boost for the civil servants to continue to give their best. "The civil servants are the backbone to all of the state's planning, policy implementation and development," he said. Meanwhile, Chow also expressed the state's heartfelt appreciation and thanks to all frontline workers for their services and support to curb the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, and to help ensure stability and peace. He said they included the state Health Department, the National Security Council and all security forces, such as police, armed forces, the Fire and Rescue Department, the Civil Defence Force and Rela. Besides that, Chow also announced RM300 to some 1,587 Kafa supervisors and teachers, Sekolah Rendah Agama Rakyat teachers (343), Sekolah Menengah Agama Rakyat (263) and teachers and staff of Chinese private schools (590). He also announced RM200, which will be paid out in December, to some 320 Tahfiz, Pondok and Tardis teachers, all of which would cost RM898,900.00.

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[TOP↑](#)

THAILAND: Gov't to Endorse Extraordinary Parliamentary Session to Avert Looming Political Crisis amid Protest

Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha said on Monday the government will endorse the opening of an extraordinary session of parliament very shortly in a bid to avert a looming political crisis in the face of massive street protests. Prayut confirmed at the

Government House that the cabinet of ministers at Tuesday's meeting will consider supporting calls for the opening of the extraordinary parliamentary session very shortly to address the political situation, regarding the massive protests on Bangkok streets and in provinces. The House of Representatives and Senate, which are currently in recess and would be otherwise scheduled to open on Nov. 1, might not only find ways and means to defuse the looming political crisis but to promptly push for constitution amendment. Meanwhile, the Thai prime minister denied that the critical emergency rule, currently imposed in Bangkok to stem street protests, might as well cover its neighboring provinces or others. Neither will curfew be enforced in the Thai capital or anywhere else in the country, he said.

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[TOP↑](#)

VIETNAM: PM Approves 2021 Public Service Workforce Plan

Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc has approved a public service workforce plan for 2021. Accordingly, the total number of officials, civil servants and public employees, excluding those at the Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Defence and at commune level, will be streamlined to 249,650, a reduction of 3,867 compared to this year. Of the number, 247,344 people are to be employed by ministries, sectors, localities and organisations, while 1,068 others will work at representative offices abroad. The Minister of Home Affairs has been tasked with assigning workers to relevant agencies in keeping with the plan. According to the ministry, as many as 40,500 officials, civil servants, public employees, and workers were cut in 2015 and 2018, following a plan to streamline State agencies and downsize public staff. Of them, nearly 35,000 retired early, while 5,483 were made redundant.

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[TOP↑](#)

South Asia

INDIA: Deptt. of Fertilisers Ranked 2nd on Data Governance Quality Index

In the latest Data Governance Quality Index (DGQI), the Department of Fertilizers under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers has been ranked 2nd amongst the 16 Economic Ministries/Departments. The department also secured 3rd rank out of the 65 Ministries/Departments with a score 4.11 on a scale of 5. DGQI is a survey conducted by the Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office (DMEO), NITI Aayog to assess different Ministries/Departments' performance on the implementation of Central Sector Schemes (CS) and Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS). The DMEO, NITI Aayog has undertaken DGQI exercise wherein

self-assessment based review of data preparedness levels across the Ministries/Departments produced a DGQI scorecard. Accordingly, a survey was initiated with the objective of assessing data preparedness of Ministries/Departments on a standardized framework to drive healthy competition among them and promote cooperative peer learning from best practices. In this survey, an online questionnaire was prepared under six major themes of DGQI: Data Generation; Data Quality; Use of Technology; Data Analysis, Use and Dissemination; Data Security and HR Capacity and Case Studies. Weightages were assigned to the themes and sub-weightages to each question within every theme to arrive at final DGQI scores ranging between 0 to 5 for every scheme. To avoid straight-forward irrelevant comparisons, Ministries/Departments were classified into six categories: Administrative, Strategic, Infrastructure, Social, Economic and Scientific. The questionnaire was then shared with the Ministries/Departments, which are implementing CS / CSS schemes. Inputs have been collected from 65 Ministries/Departments implementing 250 CS / CSS schemes and their scores were accordingly calculated.

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[TOP↑](#)

Indian Railways to Be World's Largest Clean Energy-driven Rail Transit System by 2023

The Union Minister for Railways, Piyush Goyal, on October 4, said, the Indian Railways has embarked on a massive electrification drive and by 2023, the country will have the world's largest 100 per cent clean energy-driven rail transport system. Adding on the electrification of the railways, he said many works to set up an infrastructure for generating 20,000 MW of renewable energy is underway. Post completion of these works, the railways will fetch power from these sources for its operations. The minister made his statement in Kolkata while inaugurating an underground metro station of the city East-West Metro corridor. Goyal further said that the world is a witness to India's thrust towards environment-friendly modes of transport and this project will prove to be a significant step in the Centre's initiatives to build a green nation.

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[TOP↑](#)

NetApp India Appoints Ganesan Arumugam & Siddharth Nalawade Strengthening Its Leadership Team

NetApp (NASDAQ: NTAP), a global cloud-led, data-centric software company, announced the appointment of two new executives to strengthen its India leadership team. With the appointment of Ganesan Arumugam, Director of Channels and

Siddharth Nalawade, Enterprise Head, NetApp India and SAARC fortifies its commitment to driving growth and business success for its partner and customer ecosystem. In a world full of generalists, NetApp is a cloud storage specialist focused on helping businesses lead with data. The company has made strategic investments and bolstered its global as well as India leadership with laser focus. The earlier appointments of Cesar Cernuda, a Microsoft veteran, as Global President and in India, Puneet Gupta as Managing Director, Sales, India and SAARC, speak of this resolve. These leadership appointments are instrumental in driving the company's go-to-market vision to align with its cloud strategy. "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," said Puneet Gupta, Managing Director, NetApp India Marketing and Services. "I am excited to welcome leaders of such calibre who work with a passion for strong results and are committed to building diverse, high-performing teams." Ganesan 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, Parablu 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, Siddharth 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. Siddharth has built an expertise in the storage and converged infrastructure space with his 10-year stint at Dell EMC. Commenting on the team's expansion, Wendy Koh, VP, Channel and Alliances – APAC, said, "NetApp is at an interesting juncture of its growth with our industry-leading solutions for cloud data services and partnerships with the biggest public cloud providers. Adding new talent to our leadership team will further strengthen the channel partner ecosystem to support customers in their cloud transformation journey."

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 10/08/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

Chandigarh Gets 'E-consent' Portal for NOC for Industries from Pollution Control Body

For bettering the delivery of services and timely disposal of applications, Punjab Governor and UT administrator VP Singh Badnore launched the e-consent service on October 9. With the launch of the new online service, the industries can now apply for no-objection certificate online at <https://chocmms.nic.in/> and do not have to visit the office of Chandigarh Pollution Control Committee (CPCC) physically. Once

approved on the online portal, the Consent Order can be downloaded. The online service can be availed by industries as well as diesel generator owners. As per the Governor, the rolling out of e-consent portal for environmental clearance is a huge stride towards transparency in governance and fast delivery of services to the citizens. The portal will substantially save on the application's processing time and will allow officials to divert their energy to other productive works, he added. Any industry, prior to beginning its operations, require consent from the pollution control body in the UT to discharge any effluent (sewage or trade effluent) into a stream or well or sewer or on land, and/or emit air pollutants into the atmosphere. For Chandigarh, Chandigarh Pollution Control Committee (CPCC) issues the consent. Debendra Dalai, member secretary, CPCC, was of the view that normally physical copy of the consent was issued after approval of the competent authority. This was a time-consuming process which also sometimes results in leaving several important areas unattended. However, from now on the e-consent will be generated and issued to the industrial units automatically on the approval by the authority.

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[TOP↑](#)

Now 33% Quota for Women in Punjab Govt Jobs, Approves Cabinet

In a noteworthy move towards strengthening gender equality in the public sector, the Punjab cabinet gave a nod for 33 per cent reservation for women in direct recruitment in all government departments. The historic decision was taken on October 14 in a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh. In the meeting, the state cabinet approved the Punjab Civil Service (Reservation of Posts for Women) Rules 2020. This opened the door for inclusion of women quota in various government jobs for Group A, B, C and D posts. Later in the day, Aruna Chaudhary, Minister for Social Welfare, Women and Child Development, Punjab appreciated the move by the CM saying he has always backed the well-being and empowerment of women.

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[TOP↑](#)

Govt of India Provides Special Window to States for Meeting GST Shortfall

The Government of India puts forth a special window of borrowing for states under Option-I for the borrowing of Rs 1.1 lakh crore or above, an authorisation for additional Open Market Borrowings of 0.5 per cent of their GSDP. The authorisation for increased OMBs of 0.5 per cent of GSDP has been issued by the Ministry of Finance on October 13 and are in relaxation of the reform conditions that were

stipulated for eligibility. Besides this, under Option-I, the States are also eligible to carry forward their unutilised borrowing space to the next Financial Year. Under the Special Window, the estimated shortfall of Rs 1.1 lakh crore (assuming all States join) will be borrowed by the Government of India in appropriate tranches. The amount so borrowed will be passed on to the States as a back-to-back loan in lieu of GST Compensation Cess releases. This will not have any impact on the fiscal deficit of the Government of India. The amounts will be reflected as the capital receipts of the State Governments and as a part of the financing of its respective fiscal deficits. Further, this will avoid differential rates of interest that individual States may be charged for their respective SDLs and will be an administratively easier arrangement. It may also be clarified that the General Government (the States and the Centre included) borrowings will not increase by this step. The States that get the benefit from the Special Window are likely to borrow a considerably lesser amount from the additional borrowing facility of two per cent of GSDP (from three per cent to five per cent) under the Aatma Nirbhar Package.

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[TOP ↑](#)

NSDL Taking e-Governance to Citizens' Doorstep

Gagan Rai, Chief Executive Officer and Managing DirectorWe are working very closely with the Governments and are the only company to issue PAN Cards and Aadhaar Cards on behalf of the Government of India. For Aadhaar Cards, we do handle the entire registration process as Registrar for Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), says Gagan Rai, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, NSDL eGovernance Infrastructure Limited in conversation with Harshal Desai of Elets News Network (ENN). How significant are the e-governance projects for citizens of the country? E-governance is all about providing services by the Government to the citizens in an electronic manner. It brings down the cost and increases the efficiency. It further increases the transparency within the Government system. The data can be used for policy formation in the future. So, there are several advantages of providing the citizens the facilities through e-governance. How has been the journey of NSDL e-Governance Infrastructure Limited? The company started in 1996 as CSD – Central Securities Depository, and we continued with our operations for about 8 – 9 years. After we had established CSD, we thought about other activities which could be undertaken. CSD was basically a Database Management company with transitional efficiency, and we realised that Tax Information Network was one of the projects that could be undertaken in order to make the most of our expertise and ability. As a CSD, the company developed its expertise in managing large and critical databases with transitional efficiency driven by Information and Communication technologies (ICT).

Second, such project was Central Recordkeeping Agency (CRA) for National

Pension System (NPS). Today, we are a 10-year-old company in this particular domain. Details of people registered with NPS are stored with us. Further, we are working very closely with the Governments and are the only company to issue PAN Cards and Aadhaar Cards on behalf of the Government of India. For Aadhaar Cards, we do handle the entire registration process as Registrar for Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI). As NSDL e-Gov had demonstrated its nationwide reach and expertise in implementing a turnkey project, it encouraged the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) to appoint NSDL e-Gov to set up Tax Information Network (TIN) in 2003. After setup of TIN, in 2004, NSDL e-Gov was identified by the Pension Regulator (PFRDA) to undertake the key responsibility of the Central Recordkeeping Agency (CRA) for the newly introduced National Pension System (NPS). The complete subscriber database for NPS is managed by us. Which other projects you are working on currently? We are working on number of other projects. NSDL e-Gov has now been shortlisted as the GSP (GST Suvidha Provider) by GSTN (GST Network) for implementing GST across the country. We are also e-sign service provider. E-sign service is an online electronic signature service that can facilitate an Aadhaar holder to digitally sign a document. NSDL e-Gov is empanelled by Controller of Certifying Authorities (CCA) to provide e-sign Services to Application Service Providers (ASPs).

If somebody wants to file a GST Return, it can simply be done by using the facility of the e-sign. Besides, the person can also go to one of our facilitation centres and can file the return. We have about 10,000 facilitation centres. Further, we also have offline facility to file GST Return. Besides these projects, we also have National Judicial Reference System (NJRS) where we have collated all the income tax judgements and appeals for the income tax department and created a very powerful search engine. These search results work as references for Income Tax Officers across the country. The system is also envisaged to assist in operational matters such as tracking status of appeals, setting reminders, etc. and assist in speedy appeal disposal, which will help the Income Tax Department in increasing their tax revenue. How do you ensure the security of the data stored within your systems? We have our own servers. We have a complete team of data security experts. Further, we do have a disaster recovery site. The data replication takes place at both the sites – the main site and the recovery site. The data is always transmitted in encrypted form. It is not possible for third party to read the data. What are your views on Cloudbased technologies? Cloud-based technologies are the future. We believe in it and make the most of Cloud computing in our system. We do have our own cloud where we store partial data of ours. Please brief us on your project management capabilities?

We call ourselves MSP – Manage Service Provider. We provide end-to-end solutions to governments. We assist our clients from conceptualisation to implementation – be it hardware, software or applications development, or any other infrastructure requirement. We are also running 24X7 call centres. We have developed expertise in

developing greenfield projects. We have also worked on some other projects i.e., record keeping of National Pension System which was already initiated by the Government and was present in physical form – we digitised it later. Which are the most exciting initiatives among all you have undertaken so far? Aadhaar authentication and e-KYC Services, e-sign which is an online electronic signature service that can facilitate an Aadhaar holder to digitally sign a document and GST Suvidha Provider are some of the services which have been very exciting for us. Please brief us on your Vidya Lakshmi and Vidhyasaarathi projects? Vidya Lakshmi is a first of its kind portal for students seeking education Loan. This portal has been developed under the guidance of Department of Financial Services (Ministry of Finance), Department of Higher Education (Ministry of Human Resource Development) and Indian Banks Association (IBA). The portal has been developed and being maintained by NSDL e-Governance Infrastructure Limited. Students can view, apply and track the education loan applications to banks anytime, anywhere by accessing the portal. The portal also provides linkages to National Scholarship Portal. While, Vidhyasaarathi project is to bring together all the stakeholders on a single online platform so that students can avail various educational finance schemes. What are challenges which might hamper the growth of digitisation in the country? We are going at a good speed. There are, however, several challenges. We have huge population. There are so many departments. When you talk about numbers – everything in crores, nothing is in thousands or hundreds. Second challenge is the complex nature of government departments and to streamline and digitise the data – especially the data which is already available in physical forms.

From <http://www.egovonline.net> 10/19/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

Uttar Pradesh's First Data Centre to Come Up in Greater Noida

In a significant move to strengthen e-governance in Uttar Pradesh, the State government on October 24 announced that UP's first data centre would be set up in Greater Noida. As reported by a national daily, the data centre project is worth Rs 600 crore and will be built on 20 acres of land area in Greater Noida. According to a government statement, the data centre will be a state-of-the-art facility equipped with advanced technology. It will not only strengthen the e-governance in the State but will also open up employment opportunities for the youth and will aid IT business in the State and elsewhere. As per the State, "Open access will power the data centre park. Due to lack of an appropriate data centre, data from all parts of the county including Uttar Pradesh is stored abroad," reports the national daily. The data centre project aims to keep data of the citizens safe within its boundaries. As per the government's spokesperson, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed the officials to arrange an appropriate land for the project. It is expected that following the setting up of the data centre UP will attract more companies to set up their businesses in the state.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 10/26/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Kailash Gahlot Meets Land Owing Agencies for Setting Up EV Infra

Kailash Gahlot, Transport Minister of Delhi held a meeting to identify various sites owned by the government departments for setting up of EV charging infrastructure in Delhi, on October 26. Senior officials from various land owing agencies namely Transport department, Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC), Delhi Integrated Multi-Modal Transit System Ltd (DIMTS), Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL), and Delhi Transco Ltd (DTL) attended the meeting. As reported by a national daily, Gahlot said, "Delhi has the distinction of having the maximum number of different land owing agencies. As per the EV policy we have in the national capital, we all understand the importance of setting up an EV-friendly ecosystem and its effective implementation." He expressed his contentment that all these agencies are working towards the goal of making Delhi the EV capital of India. The work on setting up of charging stations at various locations across Delhi is already ongoing and within a coming few weeks, the final list of charging stations and their locations will be out, added the Minister. As per the report, the government statement said, "It was decided that DTL will pool government land parcels and integrate a state-wise tender to install charging stations across Delhi."

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 10/29/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: To Establish Embassy in Cuba

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has signed an Order on the establishment of an embassy of the country in the Republic of Cuba (the city of Havana).

From <https://en.trend.az/> 10/29/2020

[TOP↑](#)

UZBEKISTAN: Elected Member of UN Human Rights Council for First Time in Its History

For the first time ever, Uzbekistan has become a member of the UN Human Rights Council for 2021-2023. The move is said to be part of purposeful efforts aimed at

enhancing the protection of human rights in the country, the significant stepping up by Uzbekistan of engagement into cooperation in this field, as well as following the positive assessments by international organizations on Uzbekistan's reform efforts. The 193-member U.N. General Assembly elected Uzbekistan, Russia, Cuba, Bolivia, France, Britain and several other countries to the 47-member council. Senegal, Nepal, Pakistan, Ukraine and Mexico were re-elected for a second three-year term. Council members cannot serve more than two consecutive terms. Candidates are elected by secret ballot in geographical groups to ensure even representation. The Asia-Pacific group, which included Saudi Arabia, was the only competitive race on Tuesday with five candidates vying for four seats. The new members will begin their term on Jan. 1, 2021.

From <https://uzreport.news/> 10/14/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Coalition Forging Ahead with Work Reforms

The Morrison government is ploughing ahead with workplace law reform despite a major bust-up between employer groups. An agreement between the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Business Council of Australia sparked divisions in the government's industrial relations working groups. Four employer groups angrily rejected a plan to give union-negotiated enterprise agreements approval preference in exchange for changes to the "better off overall test". Prime Minister Scott Morrison played down the split. "There's been a few disagreements along the way - not unexpected - but at the same time people have remained at the table," he told the National Press Club in Canberra on Thursday. Industrial Relations Minister Christian Porter, who is also attorney-general, is drafting an industrial relations reform plan for cabinet.

The working groups looked at casual employment, greenfields agreements, enterprise agreements, award simplification and compliance and enforcement. Labor jobs spokesman Brendan O'Connor said the government could achieve progress if it found areas of mutual benefit. "If it is about wage cutting or making work more insecure then there will be no consensus. Labor won't stand by and watch workers lose wages or lose job security," he told Sky News. He said the pandemic had exposed the insecure nature of work across many sectors. Mr Morrison has spent the week criticising the maritime union over a dispute with stevedoring company Patrick at Sydney's Port Botany. "Ensuring that we have an industrial relations systems that can employ more people, particularly now, is so crucial," he said. "We can't have the rather militant response and approach that we're currently seeing out there in Port Botany." The MUA on Thursday suspended its industrial action.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 10/01/2020

Government Launches Business Red Tape Cuts

Small businesses, childcare providers, farmers and drug companies are set to benefit from cuts to red tape under a plan by the Morrison government. Ben Morton, the assistant minister to the prime minister, was last year given the task of releasing the "animal spirits" in the economy by finding ways to reduce regulation. Mr Morton told a Business Council forum in Sydney on Friday the "stewardship approach" - where senior bureaucrats took CEO-style responsibility for ensuring red tape is fit-for-purpose and light touch - was bearing fruit. "I want to get to the point where the Commonwealth public service leadership drive their own deregulation buses within their portfolios," he said. "To remove regulation that is no longer necessary, streamline regulatory processes across jurisdictions, thereby eliminating duplication, and drive, where appropriate, the harmonisation of regulation."

He said farmers and businesses would benefit from streamlined agricultural levies laws, which would get priority in parliament. Firms would save about \$100 million in transaction costs by streamlining voluntary private sector action to support emissions reductions. A new electronic database had the potential to save \$2 million a year in red tape for medicines and medical devices businesses seeking to get their products to market. Childcare providers who receive the childcare subsidy will only have to lodge one approval application, rather than one each to state and federal authorities. And barriers will be removed to international students seeking to undertake courses such as first-aid and responsible service of alcohol. Mr Morton also announced a new role within the prime minister's department to work with ministers and agencies on measuring, benchmarking and evaluating regulator performance.

The department would also lead a pilot project, with the Australian Public Service Commission and Agriculture department, to lift the performance of agricultural export regulator. As well, funding will be provided in the federal budget to be delivered next Tuesday for extra work by the deregulation task force set up within the prime minister's department. "Importantly, deregulation agendas must not rise and fall - they must remain embedded in government," Mr Morton said. "It is like painting the harbour bridge - the work will never be completed, but it must never be paused."

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 10/02/2020

Committee to Examine Consumer Protections

An inquiry will seek to shed light on tourist, insurance and banking ripoffs when it hears from financial regulators. The House of Representatives economics committee

will probe the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, Australian Securities and Investments Commission and Australian Prudential Regulation Authority in Canberra on Friday. Committee chair and Liberal MP Tim Wilson said the coronavirus pandemic had created unprecedented disruption and uncertainty in the financial sector. Mr Wilson said it had also caused problems for people seeking to book travel and make claims on their insurance. Part of the hearing will involve questions being put to the Australian Energy Regulator.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 10/23/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

ACMA Backs Telco Consumer Regulatory Reform

Australia's telecommunications regulator, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), is backing reform of current regulatory safeguards in the telecommunications sector. The ACMA chair Nerida O'Loughlin says that with telecommunications now an essential service for Australian consumers and business, and with COVID-19 highlighting that more than ever, reliable communications are critical to consumers, businesses and government. "The majority of Australians are satisfied with many aspects of their telco services. But, as an essential service, consumers now want to be satisfied with all aspects of that service. And they are not, consumers expect more," she said. O'Loughlin pointed to new ACMA research conducted in late 2019 showing telco consumers, particularly businesses, are still battling with service outages and complaints handling.

The research found that two-thirds of businesses had at least one issue or fault in the six months prior to the research - and of businesses that experienced a loss of Internet service or an outage, 42% reported the impact as major. And a reported 40% of businesses with telco services made a complaint to their provider in the previous six months, with 21% of complaints taking more than three weeks to resolve. "It is hard to imagine how to be in business today without a reliable internet service, so these numbers are especially worrying," O'Loughlin said. The ACMA has also today published complaints data from telcos that prompts continuing concerns about their complaints-handling performance. The data shows that almost 1.4 million complaints to telcos were received over the 2019–20 financial year – down by 17.5% from last year.

"It is good to see the drop in complaint numbers. But the total number of complaints is still too high, especially compared with other essential services. We also know that reporting of complaints may have been impacted by consumers having difficulty contacting their telco provider during the COVID pandemic," O'Loughlin said. "Given these ongoing, systemic and impactful consumer issues, the ACMA strongly supports the government's reconsideration of the current telco consumer protection regime." The ACMA has made its case for change in its submission to the

government's Consumer Safeguards Review—Part C: Choice and fairness. "We propose that clear and properly enforceable rules made by the regulator replace current co-regulatory arrangements to deliver essential safeguards for consumers," O'Loughlin said. "We also propose that all telcos must be registered and that irresponsible telcos that rip off consumers can be deregistered by the ACMA.

"This review presents an opportunity to recast the rules and replace detailed, cumbersome, contested and often confusing industry codes with a clear set of rules about what is essential for consumers. This will also deliver savings for industry, freeing up valuable resources to deliver better outcomes for consumers and drive innovation into the future," O'Loughlin concluded.

From <https://www.itwire.com> 10/28/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Even with COVID-19 Spread Near Zero, Chief Scientist Says Australia's Systems Are Ready

He said he is 'pleased, proud, and rather confident' in the country's ability to cope with managing the transmission down to an extremely low level, including zero. Australia's Chief Scientist Dr Alan Finkel is preparing a report for National Cabinet into the systems for supporting contact tracing and outbreak management across all states and territories. The report is due in the coming weeks, and while Finkel said his team are yet to decide on its exact format, he said the focus would be on identifying the best practices that the various jurisdictions have. "Overall, I'm impressed with the preparation and the quality and the continuous improvement that all the states and territories are applying to managing contact tracing and outbreak management, they're all taking it very, very seriously -- even the states that have no cases," Finkel told Senate Estimates on Wednesday night.

"It's really encouraging to see that even in those circumstances of no community transmission for months, they're still training staff for a surged need should it happen, they're improving the digitalisation of their systems to support them should outbreaks occur." While Finkel said he has not had the opportunity to review any of the systems in place in comparable countries, such as in Europe or the United States, he said in terms of their COVID-19 case numbers, "it's hard to have confidence in those systems". "Just looking in an absolute sense at what I'm seeing in the states and territories in Australia, I'm actually pleased, proud, and rather confident in our ability to cope with managing the transmission down to an extremely low level, including zero," he said. Finkel said he was impressed at the lack of complacency shown even in states and territories where there have been minimal cases for months.

"In fact, I'm pleasantly surprised to see how conscientiously they're thinking about how things could go awry and optimise their system -- and even doing desktop

simulations of what the demand would be and where their resources would go should there be a surge in outbreaks ... knock on wood, none of us want to test the systems," he continued. With Victorians this week moving out of their second phase of lockdowns, Premier Daniel Andrews said the system in place in his state was "the best in the country", while also saying the system it was moving to would be emulated by others. "It's certainly not incorrect," Finkel said in response to Andrews' claims. "We need a few more weeks of testing the system, because it's all very new, but by design and implementation, it's very impressive." Finkel has been working with the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) "on the periphery", providing "advice, encouragement, and experience" on its new system.

Hesitant to provide any information that would be included in his National Cabinet report, Finkel said he has seen enormous progress in what the state has achieved. "The improvements have been manifest across all of the system -- it's the training of the workforce that is doing the work, the processes they're using, very much a transition from paper-based forms for sample collection and transmission of results to a fully digital process, and just efficiencies in every aspect of the system," he added. "Really, three months ago I'm not sure that you would have seen any figures about how quickly they could go from beginning to end, which is sample collection through to notifying close contacts that they have to isolate ... 48-hours ... I'm very comfortable with the performance of Victoria against that target."

During a hearing held in early August by the COVID-19 Select Committee, Secretary of the Department of Health Dr Brendan Murphy said that health services in Victoria were feeling "so pressured" that they decided not to use the federal government's COVIDSafe app. It was later confirmed that DHHS had told the Department of Health on July 16 it had paused using COVIDSafe app data, citing concerns that using the app's data would contradict its requirements with privacy laws. On August 1, it recommenced using the COVIDSafe app data. Over the last 24 hours, there have been 19 new cases of COVID-19 in Australia. Of the country's total 27,554 confirmed cases, 20,342 have been from Victoria.

From <https://www.zdnet.com> 10/29/2020

[TOP↑](#)

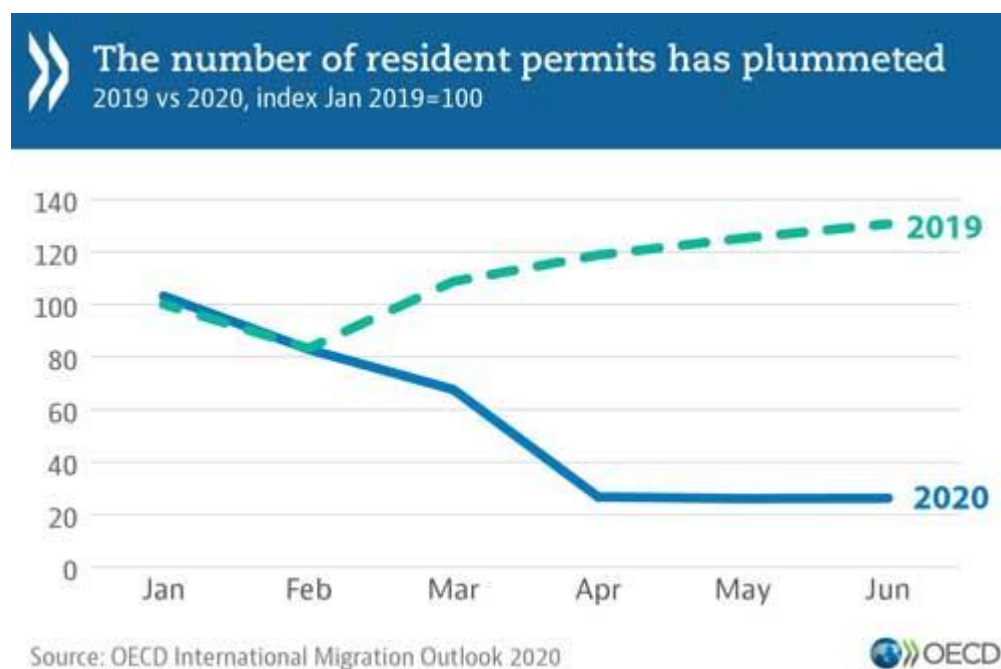
3、 Management Capacity Building and Innovation

Asia-Pacific

COVID-19 Crisis Puts Migration and Progress on Integration at Risk

Migration flows have increased over the past decade and some progress has been

made to improve the integration of immigrants in the host countries. But some of these gains may be erased by the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout. Governments need to secure the health and safety of all workers in essential activities and maintain spending on integration to help migrants continue to contribute to society and the economy, according to a new OECD report. The OECD International Migration Outlook 2020 says that the COVID-19 crisis has had unprecedented consequences on migration flows. Before the pandemic, permanent migration flows to the OECD amounted to 5.3 million in 2019, with similar figures for 2017 and 2018. Although there were fewer refugee admissions, permanent labour migration rose by more than 13% in 2019 and temporary labour migration also rose, with more than 5 million entries recorded in the OECD. Following the onset of the pandemic, almost all OECD countries restricted admission to foreigners.



© OECD International Migration Outlook - Graph: The number of resident permits has plummeted - Download the dataAs a result, issuances of new visas and permits in OECD countries plummeted by 46% in the first half of 2020, compared with the same period in 2019. This is the largest drop ever recorded. In the second quarter, the decline was 72%. Overall, 2020 is expected to be a historical low for international migration in the OECD area. There are strong signs that mobility will not return to previous levels for some time. This is due to weaker labour demand, persistent severe travel restrictions as well as the widespread use of teleworking among high-skilled workers and remote learning by students. “Migration will continue to play an important role for economic growth and innovation, as well as in responding to rapidly changing labour markets,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría, launching the report with European Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson. “We need to avoid rolling back on integration and reaffirm that migration is an integral part of our lives.”

Migrant workers have been on the frontline of the crisis. They account for a large share of the OECD medical workforce, with one in four medical doctors in the OECD, and one in six nurses. In many OECD countries, more than a third of the workforce in other key sectors, such as transport, cleaning, food manufacturing and IT services, are immigrants. Yet immigrants are facing a hard time in the labour market. Much of the past decade's progress in employment rates among immigrants has been wiped out by the pandemic. In all countries for which data are available, immigrants' unemployment increased more, compared to their native-born peers. The largest increases for immigrants were observed in Canada, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the United States. In Sweden, almost 60% of the initial increase in unemployment fell on immigrants. In the United States, unemployment of immigrants was lower than their native-born peers by almost one percentage point before the pandemic, it is now 2 percentage points higher.

Migrants are highly exposed to the health impacts of the pandemic as a result of working on the frontline during the pandemic but also vulnerabilities linked, for example, to housing conditions and poverty. Studies in a number of OECD countries found an infection risk that is at least twice as high as that of the native-born. Going forward, getting migration and integration policies right will be essential if we are to achieve a strong and truly inclusive recovery. Read the OECD International Migration Outlook 2020 and the accompanying report. For more information, journalists should contact the OECD Media Office (tel. + 33 1 45 24 97 00). Browse through all OECD contributions on tackling COVID-19. 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/> 10/19/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Social Dialogue Crucial to Tackling Impact of COVID-19 Says Global Deal Report

Social dialogue between employers, workers and government can play a central role in managing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in the workplace and has great potential in ensuring that the livelihoods and opportunities of those hardest hit are protected, according to a new report. Social Dialogue, Skills and COVID-19, published jointly by the OECD, ILO and Global Deal Partnership, says the pandemic has exposed and intensified underlying inequality and is having a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups already facing insecurity, such as the low-skilled, informal workers, youth and women. The report argues that social dialogue and collective bargaining have a key role to play in building back a more sustainable economy in which the benefits of growth are distributed across the whole of society.

Agreements between business, trade unions and governments have often played an important role in establishing the short-time working arrangements aimed at protecting incomes and firms during lockdowns. The key ingredients have been commitments by employers not to fire workers while unions accept shortening working times and a lowering of wages. Governments have then stepped in with benefits or wage subsidies to make up for the wage shortfalls.

Such agreements can help shore up consumer confidence by keeping workers in jobs and maintaining incomes. The report looks at how such arrangements have worked in a number of countries, including in Germany, Italy and France. In Denmark, the job retention scheme managed to limit the rise in unemployment to 0.1 percentage point between February and May 2020. In Korea, social partners agreed to lift the employment retention subsidy from 63% to 75% with additional emergency support available for small businesses and workers on non-standard contracts. The report points to the importance of involving all social partners in ensuring safe working conditions during the pandemic, particularly as individual workers may be even more reluctant to voice their concerns during the crisis for fear of losing their jobs. Social dialogue provides a forum to understand workers' concerns and negotiate balanced approaches. Presenting the report alongside ILO Director-General Guy Ryder and Swedish Trade Minister Anna Hallberg, OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría said, "Social dialogue has shaped the policies that supported workers and sustained the economy, helping to boost confidence during the crisis. Social dialogue's importance is not limited to the immediate management of the crisis. It also helps countries to meet their UN 2030 Agenda commitments and prepare for global trends such as digitalisation, globalisation and climate change."

Watch launch event

With many of the essential 'frontline' workers on low wages, such as those in healthcare, food processing, or for instance supermarket cashiers, setting appropriate minimum wages via statutory provisions and/or collective bargaining and achieving balanced decisions through social dialogue can improve standards of living. Fairness and equity will result in a more resilient labour market and a stronger economic recovery, the report says. Beyond the challenges brought by the COVID-19 crisis, labour markets are having to adapt to technological change creating a demand for new skills. The report says clear policies and mechanisms are needed to promote lifelong learning and skills development. Social dialogue is needed at national, sectoral and firm level, and involving workers in the decisions can facilitate effective adoption of the skills development programmes. The report is available at www.theglobaldeal.com/social-dialogue-skills-and-covid-19.pdf. Further information about the Global Deal is available from the OECD's Media Office (tel: +3314524 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/> 10/20/2020

Regulators Seek Faster Fintech Innovation to Cope with Covid-19

Central Banks and other regulators are accelerating innovative initiatives for digital financial services to broaden access during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a joint study by the World Bank and the Cambridge Centre for Alternative Finance at the University of Cambridge's Judge Business School. Access to affordable financial services is critical for poverty reduction and economic growth. For poor people, especially women, access to, and use of, basic financial services can increase incomes and resilience, and improve quality of life. Fintech innovations are helping reduce the cost of providing services, making it possible to reach more people, and reducing the need for face-to-face interactions, essential for keeping up economic activity during the pandemic. "This research helps us better understand the experiences of regulators as they face the impact of COVID-19 and seek to increase utilization of digital financial services and FinTech," said Caroline Freund, World Bank Global Director for Finance, Competitiveness and Innovation. "The findings show that COVID-19 has in many cases accelerated policies and programs that support a shift to digital finance, such as innovation offices and regulatory sandboxes."

The Global COVID-19 FinTech Regulatory Rapid Assessment Study identified that 72% of regulators had accelerated or introduced innovations on digital infrastructure, with none reporting the cancellation of any of those initiatives. Regulators from Emerging Market and Developing Economies (EMDEs) are more likely to have developed new initiatives or accelerated those underway. Almost two-thirds said that FinTech had increased in priority with the importance of digital financial services during the pandemic. Regulators from 118 central banks around the world took part in the survey. "Global challenges such as COVID-19 require global efforts and local solutions," said Bryan Zhang, Executive Director and Co-founder of the CCAF. "We hope that the global regulatory community will find this empirical study immediately and practically useful in facilitating policy learning, formulating regulatory innovation initiatives, and informing evidence-based regulation, both during the pandemic and beyond." "COVID-19 is accelerating the change in the way that people interact with financial services and it has led to unprecedented demand from developing countries to progress their transition to secure and inclusive digital finance," said James Duddridge MP, the UK's Minister for Africa at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), which supported this study. "I trust that this report will inform and inspire countries around the world, help support their FinTech regulatory strategies, and encourage greater collaboration across jurisdictions."

However, for most regulators of financial services, regulatory measures taken during COVID-19 are not FinTech specific, but are sector-wide policies which may have

implications for FinTech activities in relation to anti-money laundering (AML) and digital identity (49% of respondents), economic relief schemes (42%), business continuity plans (39%), measures to enhance cybersecurity (29%), and measures focusing on promoting employment and talent (17%). Regulators reported that they are taking actions to mitigate rising risks in the FinTech market during the pandemic concerning cybersecurity (78% referencing as a top three risk), operational risks (54%), consumer protection (27%), and fraud and scams (18%). In particular, 90% of surveyed regulators from advanced economies see cybersecurity as one of the top three increasing risks associated with FinTech activities.

Although 80% of surveyed regulators felt that they have been resilient and adaptable in their response to the challenges of COVID-19, they also identified key internal challenges when it comes to the regulation and supervision of FinTech activities. Most common are challenges in performing core regulatory functions such as on-site inspections of firms (49% overall, and 65% of respondents from advanced economies), coordination with other domestic agencies (39%), access to accurate and timely data (29%), increased demand on resources (29%), and restricted access to essential information or technology (28%). Regulators in jurisdictions with more stringent pandemic measures are more likely to have indicated that domestic coordination is challenging (46% vs 34%). The World Bank Group, one of the largest sources of funding and knowledge for developing countries, is taking broad, fast action to help developing countries strengthen their pandemic response. It is supporting public health interventions, working to ensure the flow of critical supplies and equipment, and helping the private sector continue to operate and sustain jobs. The WBG is making available up to \$160 billion over a 15-month period ending June 2021 to help more than 100 countries protect the poor and vulnerable, support businesses, and bolster economic recovery. This includes \$50 billion of new IDA resources through grants and highly concessional loans and \$12 billion for developing countries to finance the purchase and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 10/28/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

District Selected for Smart City Innovation Program with Plug and Play

District Tech has been selected alongside 15 other startups for the first batch of Plug and Play's smart city focused innovation program in Vienna. The 12-week program offers specialised support from the organiser's team, its global network and VCs around the globe. The program offers support from a diverse range of highly skilled mentors including; Claudia Winkler Founder & Lead Trainer at The Negotiation Academy, Gernot Schwendtner Cofounder & Startup Coach at WeGrow and Alper Kurt Growth Marketer at The Ventury. Each startup is matched with a mentor and also benefits from an exclusive 3-part webinar series that include business strategies

and pitch training. The program kicked off on October 5th, where the cohort had an initial one-on-one briefing and were matched with their mentor. During the program, each startup will work on a pilot project with one of Plug & Play's corporate partners. This will result in an expo day at the end of the program where the projects will be pitched in front of international corporations, VCs, scientists, press and media.

Plug and Play's specialist smart city innovation program partners startups with selected corporate partners to work on the challenges that smart cities face. The website states: "Our global smart cities network brings together players from all relevant industries across all continents of the world to accelerate innovation in cities. The discussion around Smart Cities has been around for a decade, but at Plug and Play we believe it is the right time to engage now – evolving technology, tangible impact and positive return on invest, as well as purpose driven outcomes demonstrate the urgency and the opportunity to become a driver of urban planning and innovation." District Tech empowers workplaces with a digital platform where users can engage with and have access to the latest news, amenities, community features and more. Lee Butz, CEO & Founder said: "I'm delighted District has been selected for Plug & Play's innovation program. We are excited to meet the varied corporate partners and pitch to their network to hopefully partner up with some of them on our platform." Click here to find out more about the program and here to find out more about District Tech.

From <https://district-tech.com/> 10/30/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Open and Predictable Trade Environment Key to Food Security Resiliency

Agriculture and food ministers and senior representatives from APEC's 21 member economies pressed for stronger cooperation and open and predictable trade regimes to ensure global food systems remain accessible, innovative, reliable, resilient, accessible and sustainable. "It is of utmost importance for APEC members to work together to enable the flow of essential goods, including agriculture and food products, across borders and to enhance our collective resilience to food supply disruptions," said Datuk Seri Dr Ronald Kiandee, Minister of Agriculture and Food Industries for Malaysia, host of APEC 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused major disruptions to the production of several food products, particularly those that require intensive use of labour, such as meat processing facilities and fruit and vegetable packing plants, according to recent report by the APEC Policy Support Unit. "The role of APEC as an international forum is to intensify cooperation and formulate coordinated response to help us prevent a health crisis from becoming a food crisis," said the APEC Secretariat's Executive Director Dr Rebecca Sta Maria.

"Members can consider specific areas including avoiding unnecessary export bans

and restrictions, lowering import tariffs and other quantitative import restrictions on food products, as well as pursuing initiatives to maintain connectivity and avoid supply chain disruptions,” Dr Sta Maria added. At the virtual Ministerial Policy Dialogue on Food Security on Tuesday ministers committed to intensify collaboration in relevant areas, especially food standards and safety assurance, connectivity, productivity, capacity building and reducing barriers to food trade. Minister Ronald Kiandee urged member economies to adopt an inclusive approach to food security to ensure that the vulnerable groups are not left behind during these challenging times. Ministers recognized that the risk of this pandemic is far greater for women and vulnerable groups and urged economies to focus efforts on building resilience to be better prepared to respond to future pandemics and other shocks.

“We need to have a sustainability mindset where we meet food security demands without compromising the well-being and ability of the future generation to fulfil their needs, as well as safeguarding natural resources,” he explained. He added that members need to address disruptions to employment and income sources. The growing adoption of technology in the agriculture sector such as smart farming and biotechnology can enhance food security by increasing efficiency and productivity, bridging production and consumers’ demands, and minimizing food loss and waste. Members are encouraged to invest in training and capacity building to equip farmers and producers with necessary digital skills. Ministers endorsed a joint statement, highlighting their commitment to bolster food security resiliency and efforts to prevent future pandemics.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 10/28/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

East Asia

CHINA: To Boost Employment with Multi-pronged Measures

China will adopt new pro-employment measures and enhance its support for key groups of job-seekers to meet this year's job creation targets, the State Council's executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on Friday. Premier Li Keqiang has underlined that employment is crucial to keeping economic fundamentals stable. It is important to implement the employment-first strategy and expand channels for employment. "The employment situation remains stable overall. Yet we shall not let down our guard against potential risks. From January to August, 7.81 million urban jobs have been created. We are well-positioned to achieve the target of creating 9 million new urban jobs for the entire year," Li said at the meeting. "That said, we must recognize the challenges in the employment prospect. The unemployment rate of certain groups of populations and regions remains high. Those employed have seen their income shrunk."

The Friday meeting underlined that creating sufficient jobs is essential for securing overall economic performance. Since the start of this year, local governments and competent departments have put job creation on the top of their work agenda and implemented strong measures to support employment, and the surveyed urban unemployment rate has dropped steadily from its February peak. Greater efforts are needed to support market entities and create jobs. The policies to help troubled companies and support employment and business start-ups must be well implemented. The measures to relieve business burden, secure jobs and expand employment need to be fine-tuned to better benefit micro, small and medium-sized businesses and industries that are particularly hard-hit and recovering at a slower pace. "In the first half of this year, we focused on helping businesses to keep their payrolls stable. Starting from now, our focus shall be shifted to adding new jobs.

We must not reduce the intensity of fiscal and financial support policies or the policies in improving the business climate," Li said. "We must place great importance on the employment of college graduates this year. We need to expand employment channels for key groups of people, to further tap the potential of employment." Support for key groups of job-seekers needs to be prioritized. College graduates will receive support for employment and business start-up, with skills training provided to make them better prepared for jobs, and market resources leveraged to create more job opportunities. Employment services will also be offered to college graduates who have yet to find jobs to support their transition from campus to career. The meeting said employment services and support for entrepreneurial activities will be stepped up for rural migrant workers. Public works programs for poverty alleviation purposes will be expanded in both investment sectors and geographical coverage.

Employment aid will be intensified for job-seekers in difficulty. "While we work to ensure we meet the employment targets and tasks for this year, we must pay special attention to supporting businesses in difficulty. Helping the market players to survive is of great importance in keeping employment stable," Li said, "we also need to take well-focused steps to increase the number of new market players and create more jobs." The employment potential will be further unlocked. Vocational up-skilling will continue to be promoted. Competent authorities are required to meet their due responsibilities to encourage flexible employment and create more jobs via multiple means. "As consumption serves as the primary driving force for growth, and consumer demand is more diversified, the space for flexible employment has increased accordingly," Li stressed. "Competent departments need to introduce support policies for flexible employment."

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

[TOP ↑](#)

China to Launch Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation Week

China will hold this year's national mass entrepreneurship and innovation week from Oct. 15 to 21, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) said Monday. The annual event will involve activities held across the country under the theme "Innovation leads entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship drives employment." Over 160 projects will be exhibited online to showcase the achievements of innovation and entrepreneurship in China. The event aims to help build a climate for innovation, entrepreneurship and creation, and unleash the driving forces of innovation, entrepreneurship and creation throughout society, according to the NDRC. Last year, the country held its national mass entrepreneurship and innovation week from June 5 to 11. The mass entrepreneurship and innovation policy, introduced in 2014, has been an effective driver for economic growth and the consistent transition between traditional and new growth engines. It has also contributed to the creation of new jobs and the increase in incomes.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/12/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Chinese Premier Stresses Innovation, Entrepreneurship to Drive Growth

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has called for efforts to promote mass entrepreneurship and innovation to enhance the resilience and internal driving forces of economic growth. Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks on Thursday while addressing the opening ceremony of the 2020 National Mass Innovation and Entrepreneurship Week in Beijing. China's continued efforts in deepening reform and opening-up and its innovation-driven strategy have led to tangible success, said Li. He noted that mass entrepreneurship and innovation has given birth to a large number of market entities in various sectors and created many jobs. Faced with the COVID-19 impact and the global economic recession, China has managed to stabilize its economy and achieve a relatively fast growth recovery, in which the strong resilience of hundreds of millions of market entities has played a fundamental supporting role, Li said. Well-implemented policies should further support the vast number of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises as well as individual business owners, Li said, stressing higher quality and efficiency of mass entrepreneurship and innovation. During a video inspection tour at several innovative enterprises, the premier encouraged them to innovate products and services to meet market demand, adding that the country will further study policies to support startups.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/15/2020

[TOP↑](#)

China Sees Stable Home Prices amid Control Policies

China's housing market remained generally stable in September, with slight month-on-month growth in home prices in major cities, official data showed Tuesday. New home prices in four first-tier cities -- Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen -- rose by 0.4 percent month on month in September, down 0.2 percentage points from a month earlier, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). On a monthly basis, new home prices edged up 0.3 percent in 31 second-tier cities, and rose 0.5 percent in 35 third-tier cities. Prices of resold housing in first-tier cities edged up 0.9 percent month on month in September, with the growth slowing by 0.1 percentage points than the previous month. Second-tier cities saw slower month-on-month growth of resold housing prices, while the price rise in third-tier cities remains unchanged from the previous month at 0.6 percent. On a yearly basis, Beijing saw new home prices up 3.8 percent last month, while new home prices in Shenzhen jumped 5.3 percent year on year.

The stable prices came amid sustained government efforts to rein in housing speculation over the past few years, with each city rolling out targeted measures to keep housing inflation within a proper range. China's home prices surged in 2016 when speculators took advantage of favorable lending policies to buy homes via leveraged borrowing, contributing to what many had feared as a "housing bubble." To contain the risks, central authorities have implemented various restrictive policies such as higher down payment ratio for second homes and crackdowns on shadow banking loans to speculators. In September, local governments continued to maintain the principle that "housing is for living in, not for speculation," and adopted measures to keep housing prices and market expectations stable, said Sheng Guoqing, a senior NBS statistician. September and October are traditionally considered peak sales seasons for developers as both demand and supply climb. Developers increased market supply last month with several firms introducing promotional policies to attract potential buyers, noted Zhang Dawei, chief analyst with real estate agency Centaline Property.

In addition, developers have stepped up bidding for land auctions in recent months. Land sales in 50 major cities exceeded 3.13 trillion yuan (about 468 billion U.S. dollars) as of Monday, up 17.9 percent from the same period in 2019, data from Centaline Property showed. China has seen a notable rebound in real estate investment in recent months as the economy gradually recovers from woes brought about by the COVID-19 epidemic. The latest NBS data showed that the country's property investment in the first nine months jumped 5.6 percent year on year, with investment in residential property rising 6.1 percent. With the real estate market gaining momentum, China has adopted stricter control measures to rein in housing speculation, Zhang noted, citing an increase in the number of housing policy adjustments by local governments in the past few months. Housing prices are likely to see a mild uptick in October, but targeted control policies will forestall rapid price hikes and help maintain a stable housing market, Zhang said.

China to Step Up Engagement in Global Innovation Network: Premier

China will continue to uphold the concept of win-win cooperation and engage more actively in the global innovation network, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said Thursday. Li made the remarks in a speech via video link at the opening ceremony of the 2020 Pujiang Innovation Forum in Shanghai. China will promote international exchanges and cooperation in fields including technology, talent and projects, and push forward global scientific and technological progress through the joint building of innovation platforms and sharing of results. Li said that the Chinese government attaches great importance to technological innovation, and has implemented an innovation-driven development strategy, strongly promoted mass entrepreneurship and innovation to push for sustained economic development and continuous improvement of people's livelihood. China has achieved significant progress in science and technology, said Li, adding that the country upholds the spirit of opening up and is committed to promoting international scientific and technological cooperation to achieve mutual benefits and win-win results in technological innovation.

Suddenly faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, China strengthened cooperation with the international community, shared scientific research data and information, jointly studied the strategies on prevention, control and treatment, and contributed to the global fight against the pandemic, said Li. "Through hard efforts, China's economy is expected to achieve positive growth for the full year," Li said. He stressed that China will consistently deepen reforms and expand opening-up, boost reforms aimed at streamlining administrative approvals, delegating power to lower levels and improving regulations and services, and continue to create a market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment. China will further develop the supporting and leading role of scientific and technological innovation, strengthen the development of the national innovation system, and accelerate the building of an innovative country, Li added. Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic also gave a speech at the ceremony through video link. Brnabic spoke highly of Serbia-China relations, and said that bilateral cooperation in scientific and technological innovation embodies equality and mutual benefit. As a comprehensive strategic partner, Serbia is willing to work with China to increase connectivity and promote digital transformation.

Global Developers Lured to China AI Innovation Platform

A Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) innovation platform has attracted more than 1.57 million developers from home and abroad. The platform was approved by China's Ministry of Science and Technology as one of the first batches of national open platforms for new-generation AI innovation in 2017. It is backed by Chinese voice-recognition giant iFlytek in Hefei, capital of east China's Anhui Province. China has seen a surge in the number of AI-related applications after the country issued a plan for new-generation AI development in 2017, aiming to become the main center for AI innovation in the world by 2030. Cutting-edge products based on AI technology were displayed on Friday at the iFlytek global developer festival, held in Hefei. The products are in fields like manufacturing, education, medical care, and smart city management.

"Chinese companies are very active in developing AI technology and applications, and we see the possibility and prospects of AI technology meeting the demands of society," said Liu Qingfeng, chairman of iFlytek. The number of developers on iFlytek's open platform increased 500,000 last year. The developers on the platform have so far churned out more than 900,000 applications, Liu said. "The platform will continue to expand, and iFlytek will provide more resources to global developers," Liu said. "I can communicate with peer teams on the platform and get more insight from the exchanges," said Shi Jun, a developer and doctoral student at the University of Science and Technology of China.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/26/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

Shanghai Technology Exchange Opens to Drive Innovation

The Shanghai Technology Exchange officially opened on Wednesday to promote innovation in the technology marketplace. The exchange was jointly established by the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Shanghai municipal government. Unlike other property rights exchanges, the Shanghai Technology Exchange will organize transactions of various scientific and technological achievements and technical services to help accelerate the science and technology transfer in the Yangtze River Delta and across the whole country, said Yan Mingfeng, president of the exchange. To date, the exchange has amassed a total of 20 universities and research institutes, 30 transaction service institutions, and 60 enterprises including state-owned and listed companies. Over 5,000 scientific and technological achievements are currently intended to enter the exchange, alongside companies with an intentional purchase amount of 400 million yuan (about 59.5 million U.S. dollars), as well as 1 billion yuan worth of subjects intended for listing. The transaction volume of technology contracts in China exceeded 2 trillion yuan for the first time in 2019, reflecting a strong market demand for technology. The Shanghai

Technology Exchange was established in 1993 and official preparatory work for its opening kicked off on Dec. 31, 2019.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/28/2020

[TOP↑](#)

JAPAN: Firms Fall Woefully Short of Meeting Gov't Goals on Women in Management

About one-fifth of Japanese companies have no female managers and most say women account for less than 10% of management, a Reuters monthly poll found, highlighting the struggle for the government's "womenomics" drive to make headway. The survey results come as Japan is seen to delay its target this year to raise the share of women in leadership posts to 30% as part of the government's campaign to empower women, dubbed "womenomics", and cope with Japan's aging population. The Reuters Corporate Survey, conducted Sept 29-Oct 8, found 71% of Japanese firms said women accounted for less than 10% of management, while 17% had no female managers at all. Asked how much scope there was to increase female managers, 55% said by around 10%, a quarter said by about 20%, one in 10 firms said by around 30%, while 5% saw no room for that. "Regardless of sex, we should hire talented people and promote them on their merits, rather than putting priority on the proportion," a chemicals maker manager wrote in the survey. A paper and pulp maker manager wrote: "We hire more female new graduates than male, but many female hires tend to leave the company after a while, making it hard to raise female managers."

The survey, conducted for Reuters by Nikkei Research, canvassed 485 large and midsize non-financial firms. About 240 firms answered the questions on condition of anonymity. The results were similar to the previous poll taken in 2018. Japan's global ranking on gender parity fell to 121st out of 153 countries in a World Economic Forum report for 2020. New premier Yoshihide Suga's 21-member cabinet has just two female ministers, and women account for just short of 10% of all lawmakers in parliament's powerful lower house. While aiming to follow his predecessor Shinzo Abe's policies including the coronavirus pandemic response, Suga has pledged to allow insurance coverage for expensive fertility treatments. On the pandemic impact on employment and wages, 47% of Japan firms suffered it, causing many to curb new hiring, slash wages and reduce staff, the survey showed. One third of firms expect employment to remain short of pre-pandemic levels at the year end, while a slim majority, 52% of firms, saw capital expenditure would undershoot their initial plans, dampening prospects for sustained economic recovery.

From <https://japantoday.com> 10/15/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Japanese Govt Eyes to Strengthen the Protection of Intangible Cultural Assets

The government plans to revise the Protection of Cultural Properties Law to strengthen the preservation and promotion of local festivals and cuisines, it has been learned. The main purpose of the revision is to add intangible cultural assets to the list of items that are subject to protection by law. Establishment of a system to study contemporary art is also planned from a perspective that the value of such works are expected to be highly appreciated in the future. The government plans to establish a planning and research committee within the Council for Cultural Affairs — the Education, Science and Technology Minister's advisory body — to start discussions and compile a report by the end of this year, before submitting a bill to an ordinary Diet session next year. The current law classifies cultural properties into two types according to their importance: designated cultural properties, which are protected under strict regulations and generous support; and registered cultural properties, which are subject to rather moderate regulations.

Specifically, designated cultural properties are subsidized by the government when repaired or purchased, and also have restrictions on exports and changes in the status quo. Registered cultural properties, on the other hand, receive subsidies for such treatment that are limited to a portion of the cost, and regulations are lenient, such as only requiring notification of a change in ownership, for example. Currently, registered cultural properties include tangible cultural properties and tangible folk cultural properties, and the government will try to revise the law to add intangible cultural and folk cultural properties to the list of registered properties as well. The proposed revision will newly include calligraphy and sake brewing, in addition to local cuisines and festivals. The actual registration will be decided after the education minister consults with the council. The bill will also include a system under which local governments can register their own cultural assets, and the registration is expected to involve some financial support.

Aside from expanding the list of items to be registered, the government will establish a system whereby the Cultural Affairs Agency can, at its commissioner's discretion, embark on studies of art fields whose values have yet to be determined. The new system will cover a wide range, including modern art, fashion and daily necessities. If their importance is recognized, they may be designated and registered as cultural properties and protected. This year marks 70 years since the enactment of the law. Cultural properties have been classified into tangible and intangible categories, and have been designated and registered according to their importance. However, fields with a short history or with insufficient academic research achievements have been virtually excluded from the scope of the designation. Depopulation on top of a low birthrate and lack of active successors has made it difficult for folklore culture in various regions to survive, leading the cultural agency to come up with ways to deal

with the situation.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 10/19/2020

[TOP↑](#)

SOUTH KOREA: Gov't to Remove Phone Numbers from Visitor Registrations to Protect Personal Info

The government is looking to exclude mobile phone numbers from handwritten visitor registrations, introduced to track coronavirus cases among visitors to multiuse facilities, to prevent possible breaches of personal information, its top official in charge of personal information protection said. Yoon Jong-in, chairman of the Personal Information Protection Commission (PIPC), said his agency is pushing to strengthen the management of handwritten visitor entry logs by doing away with mobile phone numbers from such forms. "Aware that there could be blind spots in the management of handwritten visitor entry registers, the government is now in the midst of devising various measures (to better protect personal information)," said Yoon in an interview with Yonhap News Agency at his office in Seoul last Friday. The PIPC established in 2011 became a central administrative agency in charge of affairs related to personal information protection in August, when the National Assembly passed three relevant bills.

Under the anti-COVID-19 social distancing rules, all visitors to multiuse facilities, such as restaurants, cafes and bars, must provide their personal details, including names, time of visit and phone numbers, through either a quick response code-based system or a handwritten form. Frequent leaks of personal information, however, have raised questions about the effectiveness of such paper forms. Aware of such criticism, the PIPC revised the rules on Sept. 11, allowing multiuse facility visitors to omit their names on the handwritten registrations. As the revision still failed to achieve the goal, the commission has begun to study ways to replace mobile phone numbers with something else. "Exposure of mobile phone numbers can lead to the leak of personal photos through mobile messaging apps. The public still has fears and anxiety about leaving their phone numbers on visitor entry logs. In this regard, we're now looking for ways to delete the space for mobile phone numbers from visitor registers," Yoon said.

Yoon Jong-in, chairman of the Personal Information Protection Commission, speaks during an interview with Yonhap News Agency at his office in Seoul on Oct. 23, 2020. (Yonhap) "It may be technically difficult but necessary to enhance public trust. The success of our quarantine efforts lies in the cooperation from the people, and the basis of the cooperation lies in the belief that all personal information is managed safely," he stressed. The PIPC chief also said his agency will investigate whether excessive personal information collection via thermal imaging cameras with a facial

recognition function violates the personal information protection laws. "Problems can arise as thermal imaging cameras take facial photos of individuals in addition to measuring their body temperatures. Based on investigations, we'll open discussions with quarantine authorities to devise countermeasures and new guidelines," Yoon said.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 10/26/2020

[TOP↑](#)

S. Korea to Speed Up Development of Robot Tech, Lift Regulations

South Korea said Wednesday it will allocate 194.4 billion won (US\$172.5 million) next year for the development of robot technology in the latest move to brace for the post-pandemic era. The figure represents a 32 percent hike from 2020, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. Under the blueprint, South Korea plans to have robots play bigger roles in terms of assisting workers through 2022, and eventually have them operate autonomously by 2026, the ministry said. The size of South Korea's robot industry is expected to reach 20 trillion won in 2025, up from an estimated 5.8 trillion won in 2018, becoming one of the world's top four players in the sector. Over the period, the number of local professional robot companies could rise to 20 from just six in 2018. South Korea plans to lift a set of regulations to pave the way for local firms to develop customized robots for four major areas, namely the industry, commerce, medical and public sectors.

"We plan to make preemptive efforts to adjust unnecessary regulations which may hinder adoption of robots in different industries," Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun said. The country has already kicked off efforts to revise 33 sets of related regulations in different industries. For example, South Korea plans to come up with new laws to allow self-driving delivery robots to run on the sidewalk by 2025. South Korea will provide subsidies on the purchase of caretaker robots by 2024 as well. Other projects also include setting new rules for valet parking robots or drawing up safety standards for those deployed in disinfection operations. The ministry said the robot industry could help South Korea better prepare for growing demand for contact-free solutions. The country will be able to utilize robots to maintain social activities during a crisis such as pandemics, it added.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 10/28/2020

[TOP↑](#)

MONGOLIA: ADB to Help Manage Food Insecurity Risks amid Supply Disruptions Caused by COVID-19

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$410,000 technical assistance (TA) grant to help manage food insecurity risks amid supply disruptions caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) disease pandemic in Mongolia. “Together with its severe economic impacts, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted food supply chains and increased the risks of food insecurity in Mongolia,” said ADB Director for Environment, Natural Resources, and Agricultural Development in East Asia Qingfeng Zhang. “With this TA, ADB's first focusing on assessing and mitigating the impact of pandemic on food supply chain disruptions, we aim to develop rapid response mechanisms to address food insecurity risks during the pandemic.” The poor, on average, spend 43% of their household expenditure on food and are particularly vulnerable to increases in food prices. The pandemic's adverse shocks of increased food prices and reduced household incomes exacerbate the risk of malnutrition among Mongolia's vulnerable and poor households.

Three in four poor households were negatively affected by the high prices of major food items. The strict quarantine measures and trade disruptions made maintaining food supply chains challenging. In April 2020, 58% of farm households were unable to sell products because of logistical disruptions. Aside from the COVID-19 pandemic, Mongolia faces a range of food insecurity risks, including extreme weather, natural hazards, pests, and diseases. Mongolia has one short growing season so not having a timely supply of agricultural production inputs would disrupt grain production. The vulnerabilities of Mongolia's food supply chain are likely to exacerbate supply disruptions during the crisis including a weak logistical and storage network, weak biosecurity and food safety arrangements, poor access to financial services among small and medium-sized enterprises and small-scale herders, and high dependency on food imports from the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. In addition to preparing a short-term response, the TA will assess the vulnerabilities of Mongolia's food supply chains, provide policy advice, build capacity to manage a wide range of food insecurity risks beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, and assist in preparing medium- to long-term strategy and action plan to establish more resilient food supply chains and reduce food insecurity risks. The TA will also support a feasibility study to establish a price monitoring system along food supply chains and emergency stock systems, and dialogue among public and private stakeholders to form coordinated actions to build more resilient food supply chains including the application of digital technologies

The TA is estimated to cost \$410,000, of which \$400,000 will be financed on a grant basis from ADB's Technical Assistance Special Fund. The Government of Mongolia will provide counterpart support. The TA complements other ADB COVID-19 assistance to Mongolia, which includes a \$15 million loan to support the wheat supply chain in Mongolia during the COVID-19 pandemic, a \$100 million COVID-19 Pandemic Response Option, \$30 million in additional financing for the Fifth Health Sector Development Program, and a \$26.4 million loan to lessen the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic through the Shock-Responsive Social Protection Project.

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/> 10/29/2020

[TOP↑](#)

South-East Asia

CAMBODIA: Central Bank Launches Mobile Payment Platform

The National Bank of Cambodia (NBC) launched a mobile payment platform on Wednesday, known as Bakong system, aiming to modernize the kingdom's payment system, said Director General of the central bank, Chea Serey. Speaking at the launching event, Serey said the NBC-initiated Bakong system is a core payment system that enables interoperability between banks and financial institutions with safety, efficiency, and cost-saving. "Bakong system is the backbone payment system for all institutions to be connected in just one system," she said. To date, 18 institutions including 16 banks and financial institutions as well as two mobile payment service providers have participated in the system, as another 24 institutions have been approved in principle to join it, Serey said. She added that the new system will facilitate money transfers and payments online in either Cambodian riels or U.S. dollars. "Through Bakong system, customers of each institution are able to transact mutually with efficiency, speed and cost-saving," she said. "Additionally, during the COVID-19 crisis, I hope the official launch of Bakong system today will help promote social welfare and also prevent the spread of the virus through facilitating e-payments from person to person seamlessly without involving cash," she noted.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 10/28/2020

[TOP↑](#)

MALAYSIA: PM Reaffirms Govt Commitment to Eradicating Income Inequality

KUALA LUMPUR: Strong foundations built over time made a fast-developing nation like Malaysia resilient and responsive in overcoming challenges, including those brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said after 63 years of independence, Malaysia has matured and continuously strives towards strengthening and diversifying its economy, apart from overcoming income equality to reduce poverty. "The pandemic has indeed challenged us further and given us a wake-up call. "On top of combatting and monitoring cases, every nation, including Malaysia, is forced to re-assess all that has been done and is to be done. "Though Covid-19 has brought us much challenge and pain, it has, at the same time, brought us together to think of what is best for the people – be it their health, jobs and

incomes, as well as their social well-being and welfare," said Muhyiddin in his speech at the opening of the Malaysia Urban Forum 2020 here today. Present were Housing and Local Government Minister Zuraida Kamaruddin; Urbanise Malaysia chief executive officer Norliza Hashim; and United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) executive director Datuk Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif. Muhyiddin stressed that the welfare and wellbeing of the rakyat has always been the priority of the Perikatan Nasional (PN) government in this challenging period.

"The PN government will continue to work with the private sector and financial institutions to ensure that we find ways and means to reduce the impacts caused by the Covid-19 pandemic," he said. He added that the present administration is committed to implementing poverty eradication efforts in the country. Despite the many policies and programmes implemented previously, Muhyiddin stressed that poverty remains a concern in Malaysia. "With the recent revision of the National Poverty Line Income (PLI) from RM980 to RM2,208, more than 400,000 households or 5.6 per cent of Malaysians have fallen within this. "The revision of the National PLI now takes into consideration optimum food requirements as well as quality and healthy eating, unlike in the past, when we used to only consider the concept of 'minimum'. "This is important, as a strong nation builds upon a healthy one. Hence, we must ensure our people have sufficient quality and nutritious food," he said. Since the pandemic, Muhyiddin said the government, through its ministries and agencies including the Housing and Local Government Ministry, has implemented several initiatives to assist the people and business community in several sectors, including those in urban farming. "I hope these good and relentless efforts will continue as we focus on 'food to table' to ensure there is no hunger and malnutrition among Malaysians, and to help reduce the burden of our poor households, especially those living in urban areas," he added.

From <https://www.nst.com.my> 09/28/2020

[TOP↑](#)

PHILIPPINES: Mulling over Reopening Borders to Foreign Travelers

The Philippines is studying the possibility of reopening its borders to foreign visitors from countries with low to medium coronavirus transmission, Cabinet Secretary of the Philippines Karlo Nograles said in an interview with state television Wednesday. Nograles said the country's inter-agency task force for the management of emerging infectious diseases is looking into whether the Philippines' healthcare capacity will be adequate should the country decide to ease travel restrictions to foreigners. "On the non-essential inbound, this is being studied. As I said, it is a step-by-step process. We must prepare the ground. We need to know the number of expected overseas Filipinos and if our country's carrying capacity and health care system can handle it," Nograles said. Nograles said the government is also looking into the low-medium

transmission countries and studying the "factor of reciprocity" for countries that have allowed Filipino travelers. "Because there are other countries that accept visitors from the Philippines, so we will look into the option of reciprocity," Nograles said. "If they are accepting Filipinos, if they have low transmission, maybe we can agree to accept visitors from these countries again as reciprocity," Nograles added. The Philippines banned the entry of foreign travelers into the country in March to contain the spread of the coronavirus. The country recently lifted the restriction on non-essential outbound travel for Filipinos effective Wednesday. The Philippines has reported a total of 362,243 confirmed COVID-19 cases, including 311,506 recoveries and 6,747 deaths.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 10/21/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

SINGAPORE: Adjusts Border Measures for Travellers over Covid-19 Closed

Travellers entering Singapore with recent travel history to Malaysia's Sabah, will be required to serve a 14-day Stay-Home Notice (SHN) at dedicated facilities, Singapore's Ministry of Health (MOH) said yesterday. The city state tightened regulation from earlier announcement that travellers from Malaysia are allowed to serve a 7-day SHN at home. As there has been an increase in cases in Sabah recently, all travellers entering Singapore from 11:59 p.m. local time Oct 14 (tomorrow), who have a travel history in the past 14 days to Sabah, will be required to serve a 14-day SHN at dedicated facilities, the MOH said. For now, travellers from other parts of Malaysia will continue to serve a 7-day SHN at their places of residence. The Multi-Ministry Taskforce, set up to fight the virus, regularly reviews the border measures, to manage the risk of importation and onward local transmission from travellers, taking into account the current situation in their source countries or regions, the MOH said.

Singapore also require travellers, who have recent travel history to Indonesia or the Philippines, and who are not Singapore citizens or permanent residents, to present a valid negative COVID-19 test result, to enter or transfer through Singapore, the ministry said. In another development, as the pandemic situation in Hong Kong has improved, travellers from Hong Kong can serve a reduced SHN period from 14 days at dedicated facilities, to seven days at their homes. All travellers are reminded to accurately declare their travel history. Strict enforcement action will be taken against false declarations. The COVID-19 test will continue to be administered before the end of the SHN period, the MOH said. As of yesterday, the MOH has preliminarily confirmed four new cases of COVID-19 infection, the lowest daily number in seven months, bringing the total recorded cases to 57,880. Among the four, two are new cases of locally transmitted COVID-19 infection, with one being in the community, and one residing in a dormitory. In addition, there are two imported cases, who had

both been placed in quarantine upon arrival in Singapore.

From <https://www.singaporenewstribes.com> 10/13/2020

[TOP↑](#)

THAILAND: Highlighting the Importance of UHC in Fostering Health Security

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai has emphasized the importance of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in fostering health security and well-being, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister highlighted Thailand's prominent and constructive role in advancing UHC at the United Nations Ministerial Meeting on UHC on 8 October 2020, according to a report from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The sideline event was co-hosted by Thailand, Japan, Georgia, as co-chairs of Group of Friends on UHC and Global Health, and the World Health Organization in a virtual format, during the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, to commemorate the first anniversary of the High-level Meeting on UHC and the adoption of the Political Declaration on UHC. In the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Don Pramudwinai said that the importance of UHC in fostering health security and well-being was clearly demonstrated in the following three areas: (1) strong health systems and preparedness in response to crisis, (2) the pivotal role and participation of people and communities as shown in the example of Thailand's village health volunteers, and (3) the value of promoting healthy lives and well-being for all, including the importance of disease prevention. The event underscored Thailand's prominent and constructive role in the global health arena, especially on UHC, which is well-recognized by the global community. Thailand, as Chair of the Foreign Policy and Global Health (FPGH) Initiative in 2017, successfully put forward two UN General Assembly resolutions, one marking 12 December as International UHC Day and the other calling for the convening of the HLM on UHC. Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Thailand to the United Nations in New York was also a co-facilitator for negotiations on the UHC Political Declaration, together with the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Georgia.

From <https://thailandnewsline.com> 10/10/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Thailand to Implement New Model to Stem COVID-19

Thailand's Ministry of Public Health said on Friday that it will be implementing the Swiss cheese model to stem the spread of COVID-19. According to Suwannachai Wattanayingcharoenchai, director general of the ministry's Department of Disease Control, the Swiss Cheese Model refers to the seven slices of Swiss cheese. The Swiss cheese model uses slices of cheese to visualize how interventions work

together, Suwannachai told a daily press conference. He explained that each intervention, including physical distancing, mask-wearing, hand washing and disinfecting, is depicted as an imperfect barrier to virus transmission due to their weaknesses just as cheese slices with holes. The interventions are combined like a stack of Swiss cheese slices, and just like some of the holes in the cheese are covered, virus transmission is decreased or even stopped, he explained. "Although the COVID-19 situation in Thailand is improving and better than those in other countries, people must comply strictly with the guidelines of the Ministry of Public Health," Suwannachai said. Thailand on Friday reported four new COVID-19 cases, all imported, from Nigeria, Britain, Ethiopia and Singapore. The total COVID-19 cases rose to 3,669, while death toll remained at 59.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 10/17/2020

[TOP↑](#)

VIETNAM: Digital Tools Key to Regulatory Policy Making

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed great challenges to the Government, but the Government's proactiveness was key to helping Việt Nam devise effective solutions in the fight against the pandemic, said Nguyễn Thế Trung, a member of the E-Government Advisory Group of the Office of the Government. He made the statement at the sixth ASEAN-OECD Good Regulatory Practice Network (GRPN) meeting which was held virtually on Monday. Although not much knowledge of COVID-19 was available at the time, the Vietnamese Government proactively responded to even the first case, Trung said. The Government has placed a priority on dissemination work to raise the awareness of the whole society so people can work together on disease prevention. "The good co-ordination between the health sector and technology is an effective way for Việt Nam to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic," Trung said. One of the most effective methods Việt Nam took and then many countries have adopted is to enable traceability as soon as the first case of transmission occurs. To control the pandemic, Trung said, Việt Nam has set up three pillars namely Government capacity and responsibility for anti-pandemic control, the response capacity of the health system and society's awareness and action in pandemic control.

Speaking at the meeting, Ngô Hải Phan, Director General, Administrative Procedure Control Agency under Office of the Government, said following the success of the first session, the second session would address the opportunities and challenges posing Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) governments and ASEAN that are increasingly utilising digital technology. Due to the need to limit human contact and the physical transfer of information, governments have widely implemented digital technology to maintain functions. This poses opportunities and challenges. On one hand, digital technologies can improve government processes, including reducing regulatory burdens that may hinder the

provision of important health, economic and social services. On the other, they pose a challenge for regulators to quickly adopt these technologies themselves, while also protecting society against unintended consequences. At the meeting, Ambassador of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to ASEAN, Jon Lambe, shared the challenges countries are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He emphasised that Việt Nam has emerged as a bright spot for pandemic prevention and fighting. The fact the meeting was hosted by Việt Nam was a testament to the success of the country in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Lambe said.

Hairil Yahri Yaacob, Deputy Secretary-General, Ministry of International Trade and Industry of Malaysia, said the meeting was a good opportunity for OECD and ASEAN countries to connect and share experiences in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on a global scale and post-pandemic recovery. In the current context, technology would help reduce the burden on the parties as well as the process of issuing regulations and applications of these regulations in the future, he said. According to Yaacob, the Malaysian government has called on regulators and the private sector to address the burden and bottlenecks in term of procedures for sectors, especially those affected by COVID-19, so they can overcome difficulties. He cited initiatives like the building of a portal for centralised consultation, quick removal of procedures and regulations that are bottlenecks and Establishment of a council chaired by the prime minister to address the concerns of businesses. Participants at the meeting also discussed good experience to aid post-COVID-19 recovery including digitising enforcement regulations (electronic inspection, electronic certification), principles of effective policymaking in the fourth industrial revolution and upgrading the regulatory management system.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 10/06/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

Online Training on Diabetes for Healthcare Workers Set Up

The Vietnam Association of Diabetes & Endocrinology has collaborated with Sanofi-Aventis Vietnam Co., Ltd. to establish an online training programme on diabetes. The programme marks the third phase of academic intensive training on Diabetes – iSTEP-D Plus, which was launched last year and is expected to reach more than 4,000 general practitioners across the country. iSTEP-D Plus Online includes three courses with 15 lively lectures delivered by leading endocrinologists that offer the latest specialized knowledge for Vietnamese general practitioners at grassroots hospitals. Course 1's academic content is fully delivered to registered healthcare experts, while Course 2's lectures are expected to be released in October 2020. After completing required courses and examination, healthcare workers will receive a certificate issued by the Vietnam Medical Association & Vietnam Association of Diabetes & Endocrinology.

As a constant effort to support convenient in-depth training for medical workers and improve healthcare quality for diabetic patients, the integration of online training course on mobile app MDCom is a breakthrough innovation from on-the-job training, in the 3rd phase of iSTEP-D Plus Vietnam roadmap (2019 – 2021). MDCom contains information on seminars and updates for medical staff. Prof. Trần Hữu Dàng, president of Vietnam Association of Diabetes & Endocrinology, said: “Following the success of iSTEP-D and iSTEP-D Plus program, iSTEP-D Plus Online marks a renovation in training in adaptation to the current digital trend, especially beneficial during Covid-19 pandemic.” “The project is expected to improve the healthcare worker’s professional capacity and contribute to the ultimate goal of optimizing diabetes disease control and enhance Vietnamese diabetes patient’s quality of life.” Emin Turan, CEO of Sanofi Indochina, said: “Technology is rapidly developing and dominating many areas, including medicine. Being one of the pioneering pharmaceutical corporations to implement digital innovation in Science and Training activities, Sanofi hopes iSTEP-D Plus Online will contribute to the effort of improving healthcare worker’s professional capacity.” In recent decades, the incidence of diabetes in Asia has increased significantly with the onset of illness in relatively young patients having a low BMI. Diabetes prevention and management is one of the top priorities of Asian countries’ public health care. According to statistics from the International Diabetes Federation, Việt Nam has 3.53 million people living with diabetes, and 80 deaths due to diabetes complications per day.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 10/14/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Health Ministry Launches Action Month on Excess Cholesterol Prevention

The Ministry of Health has launched an action month on prevention of excess cholesterol in the body as part of the national strategy for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) for the 2015-2025 period. Speaking at the launch ceremony in Hà Nội on Friday, Deputy Minister of Health Nguyễn Trường Sơn said that excess cholesterol caused cardiovascular diseases, one of NCDs that are the leading cause of death globally. “In Việt Nam, NCDs are the leading cause of death. For every 10 deaths, seven people die from NCDs, focusing on diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease,” said Sơn. In 2016, there were 548,800 deaths, of which 77 per cent were caused by NCDs in Việt Nam. For every 10 cardiovascular patients, three have high cholesterol levels and more than half of women aged 50-69 have high cholesterol, according to Sơn. It is estimated that Việt Nam yearly has an average of 12.5 million people with hypertension, 3.5 million people with diabetes, 2 million people with chronic heart and lung disease and nearly 126,000 new cases of cancer and mental disorders, according to the health ministry.

Experts said that globalization, urbanisation and environmental change were factors that increase unhealthy lifestyles, such as smoking, abuse of alcohol and beer, inadequate eating and physical inactivity. And it is these risk factors that lead to the development of NCDs, including excess cholesterol. The rate of excess cholesterol in Việt Nam was high, mainly derived from sedentary lifestyles, especially inadequate dietary and unbalanced nutritional habits of Vietnamese people. The action month aims to promote the prevention of NCDs in Việt Nam. During the month, the Ministry of Health will focus activities on strengthening communication and health education in the community and management of NCDs from the grassroots level. Free communication, consultation and testing sessions for people will be held in five provinces and cities and 15 hospitals across the country. Health experts suggested measures to reduce excess cholesterol, including minimising eating and drinking high cholesterol foods; adding beneficial fats from sea fishes and vegetable oils to daily diet, practising a healthy lifestyle; increasing physical activities such as regular exercise (walking, cycling, swimming); and giving up smoking or limiting alcoholic drinks.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 10/16/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

Ministry of Health Tightens the Management of Medical Waste During Floods

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has told health facilities in flood-hit areas to prioritise clean water and ensure the areas are thoroughly disinfected to stop the spread of diseases. The move followed a request from the Central Steering Committee on Natural Disaster Prevention and Control on the need to ensure the supply of clean water and environmental sanitation as well as proper management of medical waste at health facilities. The facilities were ordered to put plans in place and prepare containers for storage of clean water, disinfectants for water treatment and ensure personal hygiene in accordance with the guidance of MoH. When storms and floods occur, health facilities need to regularly check and monitor the flood and environmental sanitation as well as waste management in the facilities. They should promptly set measures to ensure adequate supply of clean water for medical examinations and treatment activities as well as for the daily life of health workers, patients, and their relatives. Containers for storage of drinking-water should be cleaned and disinfected before they are put into operation, the ministry said.

Disinfection solutions are recommended for medical wastewater while solid waste containers should be moved to higher ground. The embalming and storing of corpses (if any) must be carried out in line with MoH's guidance on funeral and cremation activities. In case smell is detected from the deceased body, it must be treated with antiseptic chemicals and sealed to avoid causing environmental pollution and

disease outbreaks. It was necessary to guide people to bury the corpse in higher ground or bring it to the crematorium as soon as possible. The health facilities should organise clean-up activities both inside and outside facilities and away from waste storage and flooded areas right after the water recedes, the ministry said.

Flood health risks

Earlier, the Ministry of Health issued a disease warning in the aftermath of floods in the central region. Floods can lead to a number of water-related diseases include acute diarrhoea, respiratory disease, eye and skin disease, dengue fever and increase the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, according to the Ministry. Rain and flooding create ideal conditions for bacteria, viruses and pathogens to multiply and infect humans. To prevent flood-related diseases, the ministry advised people to take proactive measures such as drinking boiled water and eating safe food. People should store water safely in order to prevent it becoming a breeding place for mosquitoes. They are recommended to change water in vases and bowls on alternate days, remove water from flower pots on alternate days and turn over all water storage containers when not in use. They are advised to use mosquito nets while sleeping even during daytime. They are also supposed to go to the nearest health facility when they have signs of diseases.

For the disease prevention, the Ministry assigned the National Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology to help hospitals in Hà Tĩnh, Quảng Bình and Quảng Trị while the National Institute for Occupational and Environmental Health will help Quảng Trị and Thừa Thiên – Huế and Nha Trang Pasteur Institute will help Đà Nẵng and Quảng Nam. Leaders of medical centres were asked to prepare drugs, chemicals and means of transportation for emergency treatment. In related news, Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc has ordered the supply of disinfectants for water treatment to central provinces which are hardest hit by natural disasters to prevent the outbreak of disease in the aftermath of the flood. Quảng Trị, Quảng Nam will receive 1 million disinfectant tablets while Hà Tĩnh will get 1.5 million and Quảng Ngãi, 200,000.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 10/28/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

South Asia

INDIA: Centre Launches ‘Mission Karmayogi’ 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/> 10/05/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

Online Education Reshaping Learning

India has been striding towards development with the growing technology, businesses, health, pharma, education, and more such sectors. However, COVID-19 pandemic has hit the industries hard but has also opened doors to opportunities. Addressing such aspects, Elets Technomedia organised India Transformation Summit from July 10 – to July 12. Anju Sharma, Principal Secretary, Higher and Secondary Education Department, Government of Gujarat addressed the summit on 'Challenges & Opportunities in the Education Sector During COVID-19 Situation'. Ms Sharma began by projecting an image of the changed scenario after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. She said, "The COVID pandemic brought forward a large number of issues which were unheard, unseen, unimagined. Situations like most people are working remotely, 70 to 80 per cent of or day to day work has been now kept aside, and the definition of normal has been revised and social distancing has become the trend." Speaking on the impact of the pandemic on the education system, Ms Anju said, "When the lockdown was announced in March we came on toes to plan how things would go ahead. A lot of challenges surfaced and one among the most prominent ones was students could no longer be called to the institutions. With this came another challenge of testing and conducting examinations remotely." Guidelines were issued by UGC, however, there was not much consensus and this posed another challenge. In addition, content in online teaching turned out to be another hurdle as institutions were not prepared for online teaching on such a massive scale all of a sudden and the staff, teachers were facing issues initially. However, with time processes got streamlined, staff and teachers got used to remote operations and no online has posed a major platform for the new-way teaching, she added.

Further, on the adoption of online education, Ms Anju said, “We started conducting a large number of webinars to keep the students engaged during the vacation period. The focus was on subject-specific learning and soft skills. For soft skills, we did a 50-hour course online and students can benefit out of this.” Talking about startups, the principal secretary said, “We are doing a lot of online work for startups other than the COVID challenge that we did. Moreover, a lot of online mentoring and webinars on innovation. Also, another significant initiative we took was we started a course on IPR which has been subscribed by over 51,000 people. These people are taking paid classes twice in a week for this 70-hour course. Also, a lot of other engagement with the startups were also taken up during this period.” When the academic year started, an important challenge was how to start regular online classes. We started a program called ‘Udayam’. Under this, using Microsoft software, regular online classes for the students were started. So, the regular timetables were drafted and accordingly teachers were given the freedom to take classes either from the institution or from their homes. “We also started a ‘buddy college’ wherein if your college does not have apt infrastructure then a nearby college is assigned where he/she can impart the online classes”, told Ms Anju. “Besides this, we developed a platform called ‘Cogent’ which is a part of Udyam and is a monitoring platform consisting of students’ details, teachers details for attendance, marks, tests, etc. We have also ventured into online content development and teachers are being trained to develop content online”, added Ms Anju. Speaking of the opportunities, she stated that as more and more people are moving to the online domain for studying there is an opportunity wherein physical learning can be focused on difficult areas of study or where practical knowledge plays an important role. So, segregation can be made with easy topics and subjects going online and difficult and practical subjects taught physically, said Ms Anju.

Ms Anju added, “Another opportunity of going online is a larger audience can be covered in a single lecture.” Concluding her session she said, “Though COVID-19 posed a major challenge ahead of the education sector with leveraging technology and implementing online education hurdles have been overcome and the new online education trend is setting in. The pandemic also opened immense opportunities especially covering a huge number of students as many as 5000 in a single lecture through online media has turned up as a boon, fruits of which we have just started reaping.”

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 10/08/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

PWD Installs Technology to Prevent Waterlogging at Minto Bridge, Delhi

Following adversity of waterlogging under the Delhi’s Minto Bridge due to heavy rains in the capital and a loss of life, the Public Works Department (PWD) came up

with technology to prevent such adversities in future. The newly installed system involves a water level indicator which has been placed in the underground slump of all the stormwater pumping stations and wifi-enabled smart CCTV cameras. As per a report published by the Times of India, the system provides live updates and feeds for active monitoring. If the water level crosses the critical mark, a hooter raises an alarm at the pumping station and the operator will start the drainage pumps to flush off the water. The pump operator also informs the traffic police to restrict the movement of vehicles if the water level crosses 15 cm mark. The two CCTV cameras have been placed-one each at the underpass and another at the pump station. The cameras are wi-fi enabled and can store up to seven days of footage. Moreover, the pumps can be started by field staff with the help of a mobile app, which also indicates the water level in the sump and CCTV camera footage. The newly installed system was activated on Thursday, August 13 for the first time. Senior officials along with junior and senior engineers got updated with the live feeds through the cameras. Realising the effectiveness of the system, the PWD is planning to install similar systems at other vulnerable spots in the city.

From <http://egov.eletsonline.com> 10/14/2020

[TOP↑](#)

DFI Launches Future Advanced Remote Management Platform - RemoGuard

As Industrial IoT demands rise in recent decades, the number of connected IoT devices drastically grow. However, the personnel responsible for equipment maintenance cannot meet the growing numbers of IoT devices; additionally, unexpected factors occur, e.g. the global pandemic. It seems like it is harder to maintain and repair the equipment in a timely manner. To tackle these challenges, DFI launches RemoGuard, a truly remote managing solution that not only monitoring the equipment remotely, but activating OS recovery swiftly even if the OS in the machine has crashed. RemoGuard benefits from Innodisk's innoAge and out-of-band (OOB) technology, and can timely predict equipment status before its shutdown and efficiently activate OS auto-backup and recovery despite host crashes. Furthermore, the data of device health status are collected automatically to the cloud, and users can easily monitor all connected devices through a customizable UX dashboard. Being fully automated and widespread, the point-of-sales applications, e.g. vending machines and self-kiosks, require an approach monitoring device status from any location. If those are shut down, not only will it require repair fees to fix the machine, but also will lose lots of transactions. It will incur additional traffic and labor costs to send technicians to fix these machines. RemoGuard ensures real-time updates and predictive maintenance preventing unexpected malfunctions and enabling OS recovery and auto-backup to reduce costly loss. "Synergizing with Innodisk, an industrial SSD leader in the market, DFI launches RemoGuard, providing high-performance embedded solutions with an innovative remote management

platform. It's an add-on service helping customers go through this hard time and looking into the prospective future of cooperation" said Steven Tsai, President of DFI.

"Working together with our AIoT ecosystem partner DFI on RemoGuard is a natural progression of Innodisk's long-term investments into AIoT and powerful software solutions," Randy Chien, President of Innodisk, said. "Innovative solutions like Innodisk's InnoAGE and DFI's RemoGuard can bring the future of edge computing to the present, and we couldn't ask for a better partner for this exciting journey." RemoGuard is the revolutionary milestone of remote management solution. Designed to maximize efficiency in device operations, it overcomes the current challenges in Industry 4.0 and is a ready solution to manage your IoT network.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 10/24/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

Delhi Pollution: CM Kejriwal to Launch Green Delhi App Today

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is all set to launch the Green Delhi mobile app today, as per the Delhi government officials. The app hosts features which enable the users to lodge complaints on violation of anti-pollution norms in the city. Environment Minister of Delhi Gopal Rai held a meeting, on October 26, discussing on the grievance redressal mechanism that the app offers. The application enables the users to upload pictures and videos of violation of anti-pollution norms and share the media along with the complaint. The app then allocates a unique number to the complaint through which the status of the complaint and action taken can be tracked. A statement from Rai's office said that there will be a time limit set for the grievance redressal of complaints received via the Green Delhi application. All the concerned departments will be connected to the app. All the nodal officers and their subordinates will be connected with the app for prompt actions, added the statement. The Delhi government has intensified its efforts to fight pollution in the national capital. The statement from the office of the Environment Minister highlighted, "Failure to address the issue on time will result in action against the concerned nodal officers. The nodal officers are also provided training to address issues. Through the Green Delhi application, people will be able to notify the government about burning waste, industrial pollution, dust, etc., by registering complaints online." Earlier on October 6, CM Kejriwal announced a seven-point action plan to fight the menace of air pollution in the capital. And, the Green Delhi mobile application is an essential part of the plan. The other points on the action plan include – dust-control strategies, tree transplantation policy and schemes to encourage electric vehicles, and more.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 10/29/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

AZERBAIJAN: Opportunity to Support National Army Through “Kabinetim” App

Every Azerbaijani lives with the desire to support our brave army in this period when the hearts of all compatriots pray for Karabakh. Despite the high level of supply of the Armed Forces by the Azerbaijani government, the donations to the Armed Forces Assistance Fund are constantly growing. Every compatriot demonstrates solidarity with our heroic soldiers on the front regardless of their profession and field of activity. Azercell also provides an opportunity for its subscribers to donate to the Armed Forces Assistance Fund in a more convenient and easy way. Thus, users can transfer funds 24/7 via Azercell's "Kabinetim" (“My Cabinet”) application from anywhere. Just launch the "Kabinetim" and make your contribution by selecting the "Donate to the Army" in the "Mobile Payment" section. There is no need for a credit card to make the transfer, it is enough to have a minimum balance of 3 AZN. The maximum one-time donation is 50 AZN, and the monthly limit is 500 AZN. It should be noted that the "Kabinetim" app was designed to make day-to-day and work processes of users more efficient, giving them the best customer experience.

Mobile app allows customer to fully control the mobile number and make certain payments. Hence, with the application you can control and top up the balance, activate internet packages and roaming internet packages, change the tariff package, make payments for communal and other communications services and etc. Available in Azerbaijani, Russian and English languages, "Kabinetim" also has an advantageous feature of operating without megabytes. The multifunctional "Kabinetim" application, which runs on both iOS and Android operating systems, can be downloaded from the App Store, PlayStore or Huawei AppGallery free of charge. In case the application is not updated automatically it is advised to use the link bit.ly/Kabinetim to download. It is worth noting that Azercell has supported our National Army in this decisive period for the history of our country. Thus, the company transferred 1 million manats to the Armed Forces Assistance Fund as a contribution to the Azerbaijani Army, fighting for the liberation of our occupied lands. Moreover, the major communications provider of the country also demonstrated its support to media representatives in the battle field, who are fighting in the information war. Azercell has transferred AZN 100 to the balance of all reporters and crew members sent to the frontline. Azercell is confident that the glorious march of the Azerbaijani Army will end with a great victory.

Karabakh is Azerbaijan! 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://en.trend.az/> 10/13/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Azerbaijani State Service to Put Up State Properties for Auction

The State Property Service under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy will hold an auction on November 17, 2020, Trend reports referring to the service. According to the data, 37 state property facilities will be put up for auction, including 24 small state enterprises and facilities, 12 vehicles, and one unfinished object. “Most small state enterprises and facilities will be privatized along with land plots. Both land plots and buildings have already been separately appraised,” the service noted. “Everyone can take part in the auctions. Also, those interested in the process can observe the progress of the auctions both in the Space for the provision of property services of the State Property Service, and online,” said the service. “Those wishing to participate in the auctions on the official website of the Service (emlak.gov.az) or 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 the customer,” the service added. On the day of the auction, by selecting the section "Electronic auction" on the e-services portal (e-emdk.gov.az), it is possible to join the auction.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 10/20/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Azerbaijan Approves Procedure for Maintaining Personal Records of Insured Persons

Azerbaijan has approved the "Procedure for maintaining personal records of the insured", Trend report with reference to the Cabinet of Ministers. According to the procedure, individual registration of insured persons under compulsory health insurance is carried out in the electronic information system of the State Agency for Compulsory Health Insurance based on a personal identification number (PIN). Individual registration is for the organization and maintenance of information about

each insured person under compulsory health insurance. The insured are persons whose health is insured on a compulsory or voluntary basis. Individual registration of the insured is carried out by transferring data from the Electronic Government information system to the Agency's electronic information system. To ensure the access of the insured to personal credentials, the Agency creates an individual account of the insured and provides access to the personal account through the Unified Access System (Asan Login). Individual registration is carried out to identify each person as an insured person and ensure the right to use compulsory health insurance services. Based on the personal data of the insured, information is collected about paid and accrued insurance premiums, the number of insurance premiums, insurance premiums payable, and a certificate of compulsory health insurance.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 10/23/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Azerbaijan Announces Recent Statistics on COVID-19 Cases Across Country

Recent statistics of COVID-19 cases in Azerbaijan have been published, Trend reports with reference to koronavirus.info. Most infection cases were registered in Baku (55.7 percent), followed by Absheron region - 14.6 percent, Aran zone - 10.4 percent, Ganja-Gazakh zone - 6.6 percent, Lankaran – 4 percent, Shaki-Zagatala zone - 2.7 percent, Guba-Khachmaz zone - 2.4 percent, Upper Shirvan - 1.5 percent, Upper Karabakh – 1 percent. In Nakhchivan, the infection statistics is 0.08 percent.

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[TOP↑](#)

KAZAKHSTAN: Launching COVID-19 Contact Tracing App

The Saqbol mobile app has been developed in Kazakhstan to control the spread of the COVID-19 infection and timely locate the virus's hotspots, Trend reports citing Kazinform. Using the app, the person with a positive COVID-19 result can anonymously inform users on his contacts in the last 14 days for 15 minutes and in a distance of 2 meters. According to the developers, the records of interaction between devices will be encoded. The Saqbol app is available on iOS and Android operating systems and uses Bluetooth to transmit encoded data. According to the Minister of Digital Development, Innovations and Aerospace Development, Bagdat Musin, the app will play its part in timely informing people on the possible infection and help curb its spread. The minister urged the citizens to use the app, calling for responsibility and conscience on the part of people. The app designed by National Information Technologies also includes such services as the COVID-19

self-diagnostic bot, i-Doctor, and i-Teka as well as provides updates on COVID-19 statistics in Kazakhstan.

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[TOP↑](#)

UZBEKISTAN: Launching a Project on Automation of Air Pollution Monitoring

The project is implemented by the Center of the Hydrometeorological Service (Uzhydromet) with the support of the Zamin Foundation, headed by Ziroat Mirziyoyeva and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), Trend reports citing Kabar. According to the Zamin Foundation, a meeting was held with the participation of representatives from the UN Economic Commission for Europe, UN Environment Program (UNEP), UN Development Program, State Committee on Ecology and Environmental Protection and others to discuss air quality, air monitoring and the general availability of air status information. Board Chairperson of the Zamin Foundation, Ziroat Mirziyoyeva, took part in the event. "Air pollution knows no boundaries. It affects all of us, and we must all work together to solve the problem: governments, scientific organizations, civil societies, academies, businesses and industries. Everyone has the right to breathe clean air. This is even more important now that we are facing a global public health crisis," said Bruno Pozzi, Director of Regional Office of the United Nations Environment Program for Europe. With the support of the Zamin Foundation and UNEP, the Uzhydromet is implementing the project "Automation of Air Pollution Monitoring" in three stages. It is noted that the first phase of the project has been implemented, merging 63 observation sites into a single analytical center. The results of the monitoring are available on the public online platform monitoring.meteo.uz and in the AirUz mobile application. The second stage provides for the installation of automatic air monitoring stations throughout the country and the adoption of international air monitoring standards. The third stage is the integration of monitoring results into the Unified Geo-information Database of the republic and international information systems. "The installation of the stations is funded by grants, and after full commissioning, air quality will be monitored hourly in accordance with international standards. Citizens will be able to know the exact level of air pollution by place of residence and its causes," the statement reads.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 10/24/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: No Cost Pinned to Low Emissions Tech Map

The Morrison government doesn't know how much investment would be needed to achieve the emissions reduction goal through its technology road map. The road map highlights five key low emissions technologies and sets price goals for them, in a bid to make them economically desirable. But a Senate estimates hearing on Tuesday was told there's no time frame for the goals and the department hasn't calculated how much it would cost. Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources deputy secretary Jo Evans said the issue was approached in terms of how much technology would be deployed if the price goal was met. "So we haven't necessarily backed that out to imply how much investment was that going to take," she said. Government minister Simon Birmingham defended the decision, saying costing would need constant re-evaluation.

"To try to put the type of figure you're seeking in relation to such a long time frame of quite variable steps to get there, is not a particularly practical objective to seek at this point in time," he told Labor senator Jenny McAllister. The government says the price goals would result in emissions reduction of 250 million tonnes a year by 2040. But that's a global figure and it's unknown how much of it is for Australia. Senator McAllister asked what reduction would be achieved through the plan by 2030, with officials promising to provide the analysis later. Officials have struggled to define clean or low emissions technology, as referred to in the road map. "If it's very low and close to zero then you're essentially clean," Ms Evans said. "That's as far as we could get, in the group of quite eminent minds who put themselves towards thinking about how can you talk about this in a sensible way."

Australia's emissions are expected to be higher than initially calculated because of the Paris agreement's rules. It puts a higher global warming potential on methane, resulting in it being the equivalent of more carbon dioxide. Ms Evans said the emissions budget would also change to reflect the rules. Greens senator Larissa Waters was unimpressed. "I can see how that might flow logically from an accounting perspective but we've just been advised that methane is more damaging to the climate than we realised," she said. "Are you really saying the response is to say we should be able to pollute more, rather than doing the opposite and realising that we need to take stronger action?"

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 10/20/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Minister Warned over Energetic Statement

Energy Minister Angus Taylor has been taken to task for straying into partisan politics during a ministerial statement in parliament. Mr Taylor on Thursday delivered a statement in the lower house on "Australia's energy future". It is standard practice when special leave is given for ministers to make such statements that they specifically relate to government policy and not be used for political attacks. However,

Mr Taylor used the speech to attack Labor over its climate and energy policies, and singled out the opposition climate and energy spokesman Mark Butler and Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese for criticism. When he completed his speech, manager of opposition business Tony Burke asked Speaker Tony Smith to explain the "expectations for ministerial statements". Mr Smith said he was "loathe to interrupt the minister" during the speech but needed to point out "how and why ministerial statements occur".

"There is no flexibility, tolerance or capacity to talk about anything other than that," he told parliament. "You can't talk about the opposition or anything else. It is a ministerial statement - it is not a political statement. "It is outlined very clearly in practice, very concisely." Mr Taylor was particularly scathing of Labor's approach to coal. "Coal - derided by many of those opposite - has provided generations of Australian workers with a good income and a comfortable home," he said. "To this day, it is the lifeblood of towns throughout rural and regional Australia. It has powered our industries, lifting millions of men, women and children out of absolute poverty." Mr Smith is also looking into whether Mr Taylor gave the wrong speech when wrapping up a debate about social services legislation in parliament. Ministerial "second reading" speeches can be used in court to interpret particular laws and there are concerns of potential legal consequences arising from the incident.

Mr Butler told parliament the minister's energy statement confirmed "how utterly bare this government is on energy policy". "This minister is the worst energy minister in living memory," he said, adding he had been able to work across the aisle with previous coalition ministers. The minister's statement came as powerful blue collar unions urged Labor to show greater unity on energy policy by strongly supporting coal and gas. Mining and manufacturing officials have given a presentation to more than 30 Labor members and senators about the need to support the fossil fuels, arguing they will be required for years to come. The officials warned Labor would continue to lose the support of blue collar workers unless some outspoken federal caucus members toned down their anti-coal and gas rhetoric.

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[TOP↑](#)

Govt Will Act Quickly on Disasters Report

The federal government will bring Australia's emergency service ministers together to respond "as quickly as we can" to a raft of recommendations from the royal commission sparked by last summer's devastating bushfires. Emergency Management Minister David Littleproud said the Commonwealth intended to work collaboratively with the states in response to the commission's 80 proposals. Fourteen of those are directed to the federal government, 23 to the states and territories, 41 are shared between the jurisdictions, and two are specifically focused

on the insurance industry and the Australian Building Code board. "The government does not intend to take a backward step on this. We intend to address these recommendations as quickly as we can," Mr Littleproud said. "The royal commission report outlines lessons for us all on how to better prepare for, manage and recover from natural disasters.

"There are lessons for governments, essential service providers, insurers, charities, communities and individuals." Last summer's fires burned through 10 million hectares, claiming 33 lives and destroyed 10,000 homes and other structures. More than 80,000 head of livestock were killed and millions of native plants and animals were lost. In its recommendations, the commission called for the federal government to have the power to declare a national emergency during natural disasters as part of a more co-ordinated approach to managing developing events. It also called for Australia to have its own aerial firefighting fleet and introduce more consistent warnings and fire danger ratings across the country. Amid fears fires, floods and other events will become more complex, more unpredictable and more difficult to manage because of climate change, the commission proposed a "whole of nation" response.

Governments at all levels should be engaged, along with Indigenous and other communities, to ensure effective disaster management, action and recovery. "This does not mean that the Australian government should take over from state and territory governments," the commission said in its report released on Friday. "Rather, it means that we need whole-of-nation, whole-of-government and whole-of-society co-operation and effort." The report has already prompted Fundraising Institute Australia to release new guidelines for fundraising during natural disasters. The guidelines call on its members to be accountable to donors, honest and accurate in their fundraising communications, to be extra mindful of people in vulnerable circumstances, and to report back as soon as possible to donors on the impact of their donations. In its report, the royal commission recommended the federal, state and territory governments create a single scheme for the regulation of charitable fundraising.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 10/31/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

NEW ZEALAND: More Government EVs Get the Green Light

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) is seeking to offer agencies greater choice of electric vehicles and electric vehicle suppliers. John Ivil, General Manager of New Zealand Procurement and Property, says Suppliers of electric vehicles who are not currently on the All-of-Government (AoG) Motor Vehicles contract are being encouraged to submit proposals to the Government Electronic Tender Service (GETS) by Friday, 13 September. Electric vehicles have

been available for government agencies to purchase through the AoG contract since 2016, but the industry has undergone significant change since then, says John Ivil. “The market is changing and we are doing everything we can to enable agencies to move with the market and make the most of today’s technology. “This is about creating more vehicle choice for agencies as more efficient options come into the market.”

Reducing emissions and increasing access to electric vehicles is part of the Government’s Broader Outcomes(external link) strategy, which prioritises areas where the Government’s annual procurement spend can help achieve broader cultural, social, economic and environmental outcomes. “We are committed to reframing how we make our purchase decisions so that we can achieve the most public value. This includes making choices to protect our environment by moving to a low emissions economy.” John Ivil says. The Government has a goal that its fleet should be emissions free, where practicable, by 2025/26. The Government Fleet Emissions Dashboard (updated quarterly) was established in April 2019 as a tool to provide agencies with greater transparency of their emissions profile and encourage the transition of their light vehicle fleet to lower emissions alternatives.

From <http://investinnz.co.nz> 10/28/2020

[TOP↑](#)

New Zealand Contributes to Cyber Security Capacity Building in the Pacific

Minister of Foreign Affairs Winston Peters and Minister of Broadcasting, Communications and Digital Media Kris Faafoi today announced a new initiative to support Pacific countries to respond to cyber security risks in the region. “With improvements in connectivity in the region, Pacific countries are seeing an increased risk of cyber security threats and New Zealand is committed to supporting our Pacific neighbours to provide a safe, secure online environment for their citizens and to maximise the benefits of a free and open internet while minimising cyber security risks,” Mr Peters said. New Zealand will provide NZ\$10m over five years to support Pacific countries as they develop national cyber security strategies, secure infrastructure and data, enhance online safety, and implement robust cyber-crime laws across the Pacific. “Building cyber capability in the Pacific is one of the priority actions of New Zealand’s cyber security strategy,” Mr Faafoi said. “As part of this initiative, we will be creating a dedicated Pacific Partnership Advisor role within New Zealand’s Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT NZ) to work with Pacific countries to lift their cyber security capability.”

From <http://investinnz.co.nz> 10/30/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Funding Boost for Technology Incubators

New Zealand Technology Incubators will receive an extra \$9 million in Government funding to support businesses to scale up and commercialise their ideas, says Research, Science and Innovation Minister Megan Woods. The new funding injection demonstrates the Government's commitment to promoting the commercialisation of advanced technologies from New Zealand's public research organisations. "Today's funding announcement is on top of the \$25.5 million support allocated in Budget 2019 for initiatives to promote the commercialisation of innovation. "The government has already introduced the 15% R&D tax incentive through Budget 2018, and more recently we announced refundability measures, meaning pre-profit business will be able to get cash back, which is of more use to them than a credit. "This Government is committed to building a modern economy and that means supporting innovators in the early phases of their business development.

"Callaghan Innovation has a great track record of supporting successful start-ups. And as the government's innovation agency, their incubator programmes have produced 45 new start-ups and attracted more than \$50 million in private capital, making a strong case for continued Government investment," says Megan Woods. An RFP process is currently underway to select incubators that are internationally connected, backed by sufficient capital and focused on pathways to global markets. This \$9 million dollars of additional funding over three years has been allocated specifically to the Technology Incubator Programme as part of a recent budget reprioritisation package.

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[TOP ↑](#)

4、 Economic and Social Development and ICT

Asia-Pacific

International Community Renews Commitment to Address Tax Challenges from Digitalisation of the Economy

The international community has made substantial progress towards reaching a consensus-based long-term solution to the tax challenges arising from the digitalisation of the economy, and agreed to keep working towards an agreement by mid-2021, according to a Statement released today. The OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework on BEPS, which groups 137 countries and jurisdictions on an equal footing for multilateral negotiation of international tax rules, agreed during its 8-9

October meeting that the two-pillar approach they have been developing since 2019 provides a solid foundation for a future agreement. Recognising that the negotiations have been slowed by both the COVID-19 pandemic and political differences, Inclusive Framework members said that the blueprints of the two-pillar approach released today reflect convergent views on key policy features, principles and parameters for a future agreement. They identified remaining political and technical issues where differences of views remain to be bridged, and next steps in the multilateral process.

Participants approved for public consultation a new Blueprint for Pillar One of the project, which would establish new rules on where tax should be paid (“nexus” rules) and a fundamentally new way of sharing taxing rights between countries. The aim is ensure that digitally-intensive or consumer-facing Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) pay taxes where they conduct sustained and significant business, even when they do not have a physical presence, as is currently required under existing tax rules. Participants also approved for public consultation a new Blueprint for Pillar Two of the project, which would introduce a global minimum tax that would help countries around the world address remaining issues linked to base erosion and profit shifting by MNEs. The absence of a consensus-based solution, on the other hand, could lead to a proliferation of unilateral digital services taxes and an increase in damaging tax and trade disputes, which would undermine tax certainty and investment, the OECD said. Under a worst-case scenario – a global trade war triggered by unilateral digital services taxes worldwide - the failure to reach agreement could reduce global GDP by more than 1% annually.

“It is clear that new rules are urgently needed to ensure fairness and equity in our tax systems, and to adapt the international tax architecture to new and changing business models. Without a global, consensus-based solution, the risk of further uncoordinated, unilateral measures is real, and growing by the day,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. “It is imperative that we take this work across the finish line. Failure would risk tax wars turning into trade wars at a time when the global economy is already suffering enormously.” A new economic impact analysis released today shows the combined effect of the two-pillar solution under discussion. Up to 4% of global corporate income tax (CIT) revenues, or USD 100 billion of revenue gains annually, could result from implementation of the global minimum tax under Pillar Two. The analysis also shows that a further USD 100 billion could be redistributed to market jurisdictions through Pillar One plans to ensure a fairer international tax framework.

The ongoing work will be presented in a new OECD Secretary-General Tax Report and discussed during the next meeting of G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, under the Saudi Arabian Presidency, on 14 October. For more information on the OECD/G20 BEPS Project, and to access a highlights brochure and FAQs, visit: www.oecd.org/tax/beps/beps-actions/action1/. A one-hour live

webcast will provide further details today, Monday 12 October at 15:00 CEST, during which experts from the OECD's Centre for Tax Policy and Administration will present these latest updates and answer questions. To register, visit: <https://oe.cd/taxtalks>. 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) 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/> 10/12/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

1 in 6 Children Lives in Extreme Poverty, World Bank-UNICEF Analysis Shows

An estimated 1 in 6 children – or 356 million globally – lived in extreme poverty before the pandemic, and this is set to worsen significantly, according to a new World Bank Group-UNICEF analysis released today. *Global Estimate of Children in Monetary Poverty: An Update* notes that Sub-Saharan Africa – with limited social safety nets – accounts for two-thirds of children living in households that struggle to survive on an average of \$1.90 a day or less per person – the international measure for extreme poverty. South Asia accounts for nearly a fifth of these children. The analysis shows that the number of children living in extreme poverty decreased moderately by 29 million between 2013 and 2017. However, UNICEF and the World Bank Group warn that any progress made in recent years is concerningly slow-paced, unequally distributed, and at risk due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. “1 in 6 children living in extreme poverty is 1 in 6 children struggling to survive,” said Sanjay Wijesekera, UNICEF Director of Programmes. “These numbers alone should shock anyone. And the scale and depth of what we know about the financial hardships brought on by the pandemic are only set to make matters far worse. Governments urgently need a children’s recovery plan to prevent countless more children and their families from reaching levels of poverty unseen for many, many years.”

Although children make up around a third of the global population, around half of the extreme poor are children. Children are more than twice as likely to be extremely poor as adults (17.5 percent of children vs. 7.9 percent of adults). The youngest children are the worst off – nearly 20 percent of all children below the age of 5 in the developing world live in extremely poor households. “The fact that one in six children were living in extreme poverty and that 50% of the global extreme poor were children even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic is of grave concern to us all,” said Carolina Sánchez-Páramo, Global Director of Poverty and Equity for the World Bank. “Extreme poverty deprives hundreds of millions of children of the opportunity to reach their potential, in terms of physical and cognitive development, and threatens their

ability to get good jobs in adulthood. In the wake of the massive economic disruption caused by the pandemic, it is more crucial than ever that governments support poor households with children now and rebuild their human capital during the recovery.”

Extreme poverty among children has not fallen as much as it has for adults; a larger share of the global poor were children in 2017, compared with that in 2013. All regions of the world experienced varying levels of decline in extreme poverty among children, apart from Sub-Saharan Africa, which saw a 64 million increase in the absolute number of children struggling to survive on \$1.90 a day, from 170 million in 2013 to 234 million in 2017. Child poverty is more prevalent in fragile and conflict-affected countries, where more than 40 percent of children live in extremely poor households, compared to nearly 15 percent of children in other countries, the analysis says. The analysis also notes that more than 70 percent of children in extreme poverty live in a household where the head of the house works in agriculture. The ongoing COVID-19 crisis will continue to disproportionately impact children, women and girls, threatening to reverse hard-won gains towards gender equality. Social protection measures have a crucial role to play to mitigate coping mechanisms by the poor and vulnerable in both the immediate COVID-19 response as well as the longer-term recovery.

World Bank and UNICEF data suggest that most countries have responded to the crisis by expanding social protection programs, particularly cash transfers. Cash transfers provide a platform for longer-term investments in human capital. Particularly when combined with other child development measures and coupled with high-quality social service provision, cash transfers have been shown to address both monetary and multidimensional poverty and improve children’s health, nutrition, cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes. However, many of the responses are short-term and not adequate to respond to the size and expected long-term nature of the recovery. It is more important than ever for governments to scale up and adjust their social protection systems and programs to prepare for future shocks. This includes innovations for financial sustainability, strengthening legal and institutional frameworks, protecting human capital, expanding child and family benefits for the long term as well as investing in family-friendly policies, such as paid parental leave and quality child care for all.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 10/20/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Big Gender Gap in Students Attitudes and Engagement in Global and Multicultural Issues, Finds New OECD PISA Report

Schools and education systems are failing to give boys and girls across the world the same opportunities to learn and apply their knowledge of global and multicultural issues, according to a new report on the first OECD PISA assessment of the

knowledge, skills and attitudes of students to engage with other people and cultures. Are Students Ready to Thrive in an Interconnected World? focused on students' knowledge of issues of local and global significance, including public health, economic and environmental issues, as well as their intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes. Students from 27 countries and economies took the test. Students, teachers, parents and school principals from around 66 countries and economies completed a questionnaire*. The results reveal a gender gap in access to opportunities to learn global competence as well as in students' global and intercultural skills and attitudes. On average across OECD countries, boys were more likely than girls to report taking part in activities where they are expected to express and discuss their views, while girls were more likely than boys to report taking part in activities related to intercultural understanding and communication.

Boys, for example, were more likely to learn about the interconnectedness of countries' economies, look for news on the Internet or watch the news together during class. They were also more likely to be asked by teachers to give their opinion about international news, take part in classroom discussions about world events and analyse global issues with their classmates. In contrast, girls were more likely than boys to report that they learn how to solve conflicts with their peers in the classroom, learn about different cultures and learn how people from different cultures can have different perspectives on some issues. These gender differences could reflect personal interests and self-efficacy but could also reflect how girls and boys are socialised at home and at school, according to the report. "Education is key to helping young people navigate today's increasingly complex and interconnected world," said Andreas Schleicher, OECD Director for Education and Skills. "The schools and education systems that are most successful in fostering global knowledge, skills and attitudes among young people are those that offer a curriculum that values openness to the world, provide a positive and inclusive learning environment and offer opportunities to relate to people from other cultures."

The findings reveal the key role teachers play in promoting and integrating intercultural understanding into their classroom practices and lessons. Most teachers reported that they are confident in their ability to teach in multicultural settings. But the lack of adequate professional development opportunities in this field is a major challenge. Few teachers reported having received training on teaching in multicultural or multilingual settings. More than 90% of students attended schools where principals reported positive multicultural beliefs among their teachers. Yet students who perceive discrimination by their teachers towards immigrants and people from other cultural backgrounds, for example, exhibited similar negative attitudes. This highlights the key role of teachers and school principals in countering or perpetuating discrimination by acting as role models. The report found a strong link between students learning activities at school and having more positive intercultural attitudes. Also, speaking two or more languages was positively associated with awareness of global issues, interest in learning about other cultures,

respect for people from other cultures and positive attitudes towards immigrants.

On average across OECD countries, 50% of students reported learning two or more languages at school, 38% reported learning one foreign language and only 12% reported not learning any foreign language at school. The largest share of students (more than 20%) who reported not learning any foreign language at school were observed in Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia and Scotland. By contrast, in 42 countries, more than 90% of students reported that they learn at least one foreign language at school. The report is available at <http://www.oecd.org/education/pisa-2018-results-volume-vi-d5f68679-en.htm>.

Journalists are invited to contact Andreas Schleicher (tel. + 33 1 45 24 93 66) in the OECD's Education and Skills Directorate or the OECD's Media Division (tel. + 33 1 45 24 97 00).

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 10/22/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Women and Girls Are at the Center of Economic Recovery Efforts

Gender and economic development ministers and senior officials from APEC member economies will intensify their efforts to advance women's economic empowerment in a bid to broaden and strengthen economic recovery in the Asia-Pacific. Meeting virtually on Wednesday, members committed to put women and girls at the center of economic recovery efforts, by creating opportunities that can further unlock their potential, remove barriers and better drive economies towards a swift, inclusive and sustainable recovery. "The impact of the current health and economic crisis is being felt disproportionately by women and girls across the APEC region due to the existing gender inequalities," said Malaysia's Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, Datuk Seri Rina Mohd Harun, in her opening remarks at the High-Level Policy Dialogue on Women and the Economy. "Women face higher levels of economic hardships, income and job losses, forced to take more hours of unpaid care work and more susceptible to face domestic violence." "Despite all the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, our main attention and commitment to enhance the women's agenda, especially in strengthening the socioeconomic well-being of all women and girls in this region, remains indispensable," she added.

A recent report by the McKinsey Global Institute calculated that women's jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable to this crisis than men's. Women may also be at greater risk or exposure due to occupational sex-segregation—according to a United Nations' policy brief, women make up 70 percent of the health workforce and are more likely to be frontline health workers, especially as nurses, midwives and community health workers. Datuk Seri Rina highlighted the importance of APEC not only as a policy

forum, but as a platform to advance regional joint actions towards providing equal access to resources and opportunities for women and girls to benefit from and contribute to redeveloping our economy. “It is critical for APEC economies to adjust our policies urgently to support, empower and effectively address the varying degrees of multidimensional and damaging impacts on women and girls in the region during this pandemic,” she added. Recognizing that more effort is needed, especially in the area of women’s participation in the digital economy, leadership and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), Datuk Seri Rina urged member economies to intensify public partnerships and engagement with the private sector. She stressed the role of the La Serena Roadmap on Women and Inclusive Growth as an important guide for members for achieving the women’s empowerment agenda.

Endorsed in Chile, last year, the roadmap seeks to encourage actions in several cross-cutting areas affecting economic growth for women. This includes access to capital and markets, labor force participation, access to leadership positions, education, training and skills development. The roadmap also encourages promoting more access for women in the context of a constantly changing world of work, as well as advancing sex-disaggregated data collection and analysis. “Women workers and women-led small businesses continue to bear the brunt of the negative side effects of travel restrictions, lockdowns and social distancing regimes because women are in consumer-facing services sectors,” explained APEC Secretariat Executive Director, Dr Rebecca Sta Maria in her remarks at the forum. “It is in this context that APEC’s continued leadership is necessary. We need to focus on not just the challenges but also on the role that women are playing in dealing with the pandemic, their contributions and their role in the recovery.” Dr Sta Maria underlined the significance of trade in promoting gender equality and the need for member economies to focus on inclusive trade and investment policies so that “the policies facilitate unlocking otherwise untapped potential of women and girls in the region.” Gender and economic development ministers and senior officials agreed on a joint statement at the meeting, reflecting their views to advancing women’s economic empowerment to strengthen post-pandemic economic recovery and resilience.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 10/01/2022

[TOP ↑](#)

Webinar Advances New Regional Flyway Initiative to Support Biodiversity Conservation and Livelihoods in East and Southeast Asia

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) cohosted a webinar on 16 October to facilitate the development of a new regional initiative to support biodiversity conservation and livelihoods, focused on the wetlands of East and Southeast Asia. The Regional Flyway Initiative under early development aims to focus international support on the

most threatened wetlands of East and Southeast Asia. Bringing together global experts, the webinar hosted presentations on the threats and challenges facing wetland biodiversity in the region, case studies by international development agencies, and perspectives from national agencies. A highlight of the webinar was the interactive question-and-answer session, which facilitated feedback and suggestions to develop the initiative. Opening the webinar, Director General of ADB's East Asia Department James P. Lynch and Director General of ADB's Southeast Asia Department Ramesh Subramaniam emphasized the timely opportunity to build on the global awareness and momentum for green economic recovery that has resulted from the coronavirus pandemic. "For ADB, this includes a growing effort to incorporate biodiversity conservation in operations and, at the same time, support livelihoods for a greener and more sustainable future," said Mr. Lynch. "Regional flyways and wetlands are well suited to support from development agencies, due to the potential for large-scale, multi-sector approaches involving biodiversity conservation, livelihoods, and sustainable development," said Mr. Subramaniam. He noted that the initiative will directly support implementation of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Core Environment Program Strategic Framework and Action Plan endorsed by the GMS Environment Ministers in 2018. He stressed that nature-based solutions should be central to the post-pandemic economic recovery plans of GMS countries.

Many of Asia's wetlands are under severe threat from agriculture, economic development, climate change, and other factors, and this is also threatening the resources needed by people, participants heard. The wetlands of East and Southeast Asia support some of the highest biodiversity values in the world, as well as essential resources for millions of people. These wetlands lie within the East Asian–Australasian Flyway, a vast migration route extending across more than 20 countries from the Arctic Circle in the north to Australia and New Zealand in the south, which provides seasonal stopover sites for over 50 million waterbirds (ducks, geese, cranes, and shorebirds) of more than 200 species. Wetlands also provide food and water for communities and maintain ecosystem services such as flood regulation and carbon sequestration. International development agencies have traditionally had a relatively small role in biodiversity conservation, but this is quickly changing, especially with the global drive toward "nature-positive" approaches for sustainable development. "To scale up our operations in these areas, we recognize the urgent need to further strengthen our partnerships for wetland and biodiversity conservation across Asia," said Director General of ADB's Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department Woonchong Um.

ADB aims to launch the Regional Flyway Initiative with partners at the 15th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity to be held in the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 2021. The Regional Flyway Initiative forms part of ADB's growing portfolio for nature-positive approaches and green development. ADB's first "biodiversity road map" is under preparation and will aim to scale up

biodiversity conservation in ADB operations. ADB is also planning to expand support for biodiversity conservation in its operations in the PRC. The webinar was jointly organized with the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership Secretariat and Center for East Asian-Australasian Flyway Studies. Taking part in the event were leading experts from civil society organizations, including BirdLife International, International Crane Foundation, and Wetlands International, representatives from government agencies, and the development agencies Agence Française de Développement (AFD), and KfW. 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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[TOP↑](#)

East Asia

CHINA: E-commerce Sites Offer New Sources of Income for Overseas Merchants

Meria, a Texas-based Zumba instructor, lost her source of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but all thanks to a Chinese cross-border e-commerce site, she was able to secure another job. Using MyyShop, a new SaaS (software as a service)-based platform launched by DHgate.com, Meria started selling workout outfits and dance shoes online. While dampening several sectors, the pandemic also accelerated the pace at which businesses are becoming more digital-savvy, Diane Wang, CEO of DHgate.com, said in an interview with Xinhua. According to Wang, e-commerce companies should provide considerate services rather than just a platform and help merchants move their offline businesses online. The COVID-19 pandemic has dealt a heavy blow to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) worldwide, and cross-border e-commerce provides them with a safe haven to weather the storm, analysts said.

Wang reckons that platforms like Myyshop, which empower virus-hit global SMEs, are "transfusing blood" to the capillaries of the world economy. As traditional modes of trade were disrupted when people were stranded at home amid the pandemic, cross-border e-commerce has emerged as an indispensable part of the global trade, said Wang. In the first half of the year, China's trade volume via cross-border e-commerce platforms, under the oversight of customs authorities, increased 26.2 percent year on year. The sector saw expansion as authorities unveiled a slew of preferential policies. In April, the State Council decided to set up 46 new, comprehensive cross-border e-commerce pilot zones, bringing the total number to 105.

On July 1, the country's General Administration of Customs began pilot regulations for B2B e-commerce export, offering supportive measures, such as simplified export declarations and paperless customs clearance, to enterprises. The program was expanded to more areas starting from Sept. 1. Thriving cross-border e-commerce not only plays a critical role in China's future economic development but also brings new opportunities to the rest of the world, said Huang Qifan, vice chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges. "We want to be the Chinese partner of global newbies to tap into the cross-border e-commerce market so that they can truly benefit from economic globalization," Wang said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/05/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Sales of Chinese Anti-poverty E-commerce Platform Top 3 Bln Yuan

A Chinese e-commerce platform selling products from the country's poverty-stricken areas has seen its sales exceed 3.1 billion yuan (about 455.2 million U.S. dollars). The platform, fupin832.com, sells products from 832 counties that are or were on the state list of poverty-stricken areas. Over 68,000 agricultural products are so far available on the website, which was launched on Jan. 1, said the platform. In a bid to support poverty relief through the consumption of products from poor areas, the platform has integrated online display, online trading, logistics tracking, online payment and product tracing. The platform was co-founded by the All China Federation of Supply and Marketing Cooperatives, the Ministry of Commerce, and the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/06/2020

[TOP↑](#)

More Than 800 Million Chinese Use Online Payment: Report

The user size of online payment services in China reached 805 million by June, up by 37 million from March, according to the latest statistical report on China's internet development. The report, released by the China Internet Network Information Center, said that June's number accounted for about 85.7 percent of the country's total internet population. In the meantime, the number of mobile payment users expanded to 802 million, or 86 percent of mobile internet users, according to the report. The first half of 2020 saw the total amount of online payments increasing by 18.61 percent year on year to nearly 197 trillion yuan (about 29 trillion U.S. dollars), it added, citing data from the People's Bank of China. The report also found new growth potential for the online payment market. The proportion of online payment users aged 40 and

above grew by 4.5 percentage points from March to June, while the proportion of rural online payment users increased by 2.7 percentage points.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/07/2020

[TOP↑](#)

China's Industrial Internet Sees Rapid Growth with 5G Technology

A computer screen connected to a numerically-controlled machine tool shows the amplitude curve of the machine in real-time. A total of 38 sensors installed in the machine tool collect information in time to forewarn malfunction. This is a scene at an experimental base for numerical control equipment and smart manufacturing technology of Shanghai SmartState Technology Co., Ltd. A single sensor generates several megabytes of data per second, said Jiang Hucheng with China Mobile, the communication provider of the project. The 5G network, with its large bandwidth and short delay, can meet the demand of the high-frequency data, he added. The "5G + industrial internet" applications can be seen everywhere in the plant. Automatic guided vehicles connected to the 5G network automatically pick up and transport materials, as well as submit products for inspection. Cameras connected to the 5G network collect workshop scenarios in real-time and upload them to the security system.

With the boom of new infrastructure construction, China has accelerated the application of 5G-based industrial internet. The industrial internet is covering more vertical industries in China, said Yu Xiaohui, vice president of the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology. With the support of the industrial internet, information such as the latest products and solutions can be shared among enterprises in a more timely manner, thus improving the traditional industrial production process and boosting industrial upgrading, said Tang Shuilong with Shanghai SmartState Technology Co., Ltd. According to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, more than 800 "5G + industrial internet" projects are under construction nationwide and the number is expected to exceed 1,500 by the end of the year. Data showed the country's industrial internet registration has exceeded 4 billion.

Last month, the Committee for the Promotion of Industrial Internet was established to promote the wider, deeper and higher-level integration of industries and information technology at the 2020 China International Fair for Trade in Services in Beijing. Local authorities in China also unveiled a series of policies to accelerate the development of the industrial internet. East China's Shandong Province has recently released a circular to encourage the use of cloud technologies in 11 categories of industrial equipment including chemical plants, wind power equipment, photovoltaic equipment and engineering machinery. Hunan in central China in July announced to set up the

first "5G + industrial internet" pilot zone in the province to accelerate the promotion and application of industrial internet is advantageous industrial clusters. The "5G network has greatly improved in all aspects of performance, and it is the base for the implementation of the industrial internet," said Xiang Ligang, an expert in the communications field.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/08/2020

[TOP↑](#)

China Development Bank Pledges Financing for Sustainable Poverty Alleviation Efforts

The China Development Bank (CDB), one of the country's policy banks, has established a loan issuance plan to promote relocation programs under the country's poverty relief efforts. The lender has pledged to step up financial support in the next five years for the follow-up development of these programs. Priority will be given to facilitating the development of industrial parks and related enterprises, enhancing the construction of supportive infrastructure in resettlement regions, and improving local public services. The bank also said that from the start of 2020, new loans for resettlement projects will have lower rates to facilitate the subsequent development of these projects. Founded in 1994, the CDB was designed to finance major national projects and development strategies.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/12/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Chinese Premier Stresses Steady Economic Recovery, Fulfillment of 2020 Goals

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on Monday called for efforts to consolidate the momentum of steady economic recovery and growth, as well as to ensure the fulfillment of this year's development goals. Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks while presiding over a symposium on the economic situation via video link. Vice-Premier Han Zheng, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, attended the symposium. A raft of government policy measures, especially tax and fee reductions, have extended the economic recovery in the past few months, while speedy growth of new market entities helped expand employment, according to reports delivered by governors of Liaoning, Jiangsu, Fujian, Jiangxi and Shaanxi at the symposium.

Noting that the domestic and external environment is still complex and uncertainties are on the rise, Li urged both confidence and profound analysis of difficult problems

in carrying forward the momentum of steady economic recovery and growth. Li called for efforts to address development challenges by reforms and opening-up, clinch a decisive victory in the fight against poverty, and realize economic growth for the year. Tax and fee reductions, which are key to steady economic recovery, should be further implemented in the remaining months, said Li, emphasizing that funds should be channeled to market entities in full. Coverage of inclusive finance should be expanded to extend effective financial services to micro, small and medium-sized firms, as well as struggling sectors.

Li called for accelerating development of new growth drivers with efforts to motivate market forces and explore new business models. Local government should rev up the integration of online and offline consumption, promote the coordinated growth of new and traditional consumption and fuel economic growth with consumption potential, Li said. He also underlined the importance of deepening the reforms of streamlining administrative approvals, delegating power to lower levels and improving regulations and services to spawn and nurture new market entities, as well as to enhance the resilience and vitality of the economy. In the meantime, Li stressed securing people's basic livelihoods and advancing the employment of college graduates, migrant workers and other key groups.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/12/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

ADB to Support Early Childhood Education in Municipality in PRC

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$100 million loan to support the reform and development of early childhood education (ECE) in Shangrao Municipality in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The program is the first loan to comprehensively support a municipal ECE program and ADB's third results-based lending program in the PRC's education sector. "Access to quality ECE is limited in Shangrao, particularly in rural areas and for disadvantaged children," said ADB Senior Education Specialist Asako Maruyama. "Although high-quality ECE brings social and economic benefits, especially to disadvantaged children, and reduces intergenerational inequality and poverty, such gains remain unrealized due to limited access to quality ECE." Shangrao is a poor, rural municipality of Jiangxi Province, with mountains and hills accounting for 75% of its total land area. Households bear the cost of ECE in the form of tuition and other fees regardless of whether ECE provision is public or private. This discourages low-income families from enrolling children in ECE. The program aims to increase the total number of children receiving quality 3-year ECE in Shangrao Municipality, which lags in the national ECE goals.

The ECE system in Shangrao suffers from a severe shortage of qualified ECE teachers and staff. Stimulating learning environments rich in ECE support and resources are often absent in rural areas. ECE teachers and staff are not always well

prepared to interact with children in meaningful ways and to improve children's learning and developmental outcomes. Systematic ECE quality assessment and monitoring, including on the quality of ECE staff–child interactions, is not currently conducted. Aside from increasing provision of affordable 3-year ECE in Shangrao, the program aims to establish systems for preparation and professional development of ECE teachers, principals, and childcare staff. This will include the development of competency frameworks for ECE teachers, principals, and childcare staff. The program will also develop models and mechanisms for improving the quality of ECE and strengthen systems for assessing, monitoring, and ensuring quality. The program is a result of ADB's operational and knowledge work in the PRC's education sector for more than 25 years. ADB will support the development and regional sharing of knowledge, models, and practices under the program using various knowledge platforms. 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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[TOP↑](#)

China to Eliminate Poverty Among Youth via E-commerce

The All-China Youth Federation has rolled out a program as a targeted measure to help young people eliminate poverty with new business forms such as e-commerce. A group of representatives was selected to promote fine local products and folk culture through new modes and bridge the domestic industrial chain and the supply chain. The ten representatives, including famous Chinese live e-commerce anchors, influencers, and online business people, were selected based on their outstanding performance in new types of businesses. The members will pass on their experience via both online and offline channels to help young people with employment related to the industrial chain and the supply chain or trying to start their own business to shake off poverty.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/19/2020

[TOP↑](#)

East China Province to Expand Digital Economy Scale

East China's Shandong Province plans to ramp up efforts to bring its digital economy to a world-class level by 2030, according to a press briefing held in the capital city of Jinan on Monday. The province aims to foster innovative enterprises and industrial clusters in Jinan and build it into a national leading technology center in computing power, arithmetic, and algorithms based on its advantages in computing power

infrastructure. Jinan has attracted 56.6 billion yuan (about 8.4 billion U.S. dollars) in investment, covering 68 projects in 12 categories to expand its digital industrial scale. By 2022, the city is expected to see the industrial scale of the digital sector surpassing 530 billion yuan, accounting for over 47 percent of its total GDP, supported by technological innovation in servers, supercomputing, quantum information, software, artificial intelligence (AI), and blockchains. By 2030, the digital industrial scale is expected to exceed 1 trillion yuan, and the digital economy will account for over 60 percent of the total GDP, according to a provincial plan. In 2019, the digital economy in Jinan took up about 39 percent of GDP, and more than half of the country's AI computing power in China comes from Jinan, said Ji Peide, director of the municipal bureau of industry and information technology.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/19/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

Virtual Reality Getting More Real as Industry Grows

In a year that seems more "virtual" than ever, with the world struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic, China is embracing the booming virtual reality (VR) industry and making it more real in terms of integrating this technology in various fields to envision a better-off and safer society. The 2020 World Conference on VR Industry kicked off on Monday in Nanchang, capital of east China's Jiangxi Province. The two-day event focused on the key and common problems in VR industry development, discussed industry trends and solutions, and illustrated the latest achievements in the field. This year's conference has prompted businesses to sign projects with contracted amounts totaling 66.2 billion yuan (about 10 billion U.S. dollars), according to organizers.

MORE APPLICATIONS, DEEPER INTEGRATION

VR technology has been exposed to the public in more fields in the past years, such as gaming, livestreaming, shopping, and tourism. Besides these familiar life scenarios, it is also integrating with other significant industries. More than 160 exhibitors, including Huawei and Microsoft, have presented their products and projects on VR, AR (augmented reality), and MR (mixed reality) technologies at an expo during the conference. Jiangxi Copper Corporation Limited presented its VR application scenarios at the expo. Staff can monitor mining sites, whose images can be projected on screens in VR form, inside their offices. With such a vivid and intelligent approach, the company said they could increase the qualified rates of selected copper grade and sulfur grade by 11.34 percent and 4.43 percent, respectively. The application of VR in the mining process not only drives the working efficiency but also ensures the safety of workers. As technologies create a better life for humankind, the VR industry is no exception, especially in healthcare fields.

It has brought more possibilities to medics. Wearing VR glasses, a doctor can clearly see lung images, even fine structures, of COVID-19 patients in three dimensions. Telemedicine has undergone rapid development based on 5G, VR, and other technologies in this extraordinary year, as such methods play a significant role in treating critical COVID-19 patients. The First Affiliated Hospital of Nanchang University and Jiangxi Suojian Technology Limited Company, a VR enterprise, inked an agreement in 2018 to establish a VR medical innovation lab. Medical staff and students have access to an app which gathers clinical cases and then have virtual practices any time they select a case, said Li Weicai, chairman of the company. "In the field of medical education, virtual simulation teaching is applied to the skills training of students, enhancing their knowledge and improving teaching," said Wang Yunyun, with the education department of the hospital.

The VR industry cannot survive without the support of infrastructure construction. Ongoing 5G construction has laid solid foundations for the future development of the VR industry, said Ke Ruiwen, chairman of China Telecom. China has now built over 600,000 5G base stations, and the number of connected devices on the network has exceeded 150 million, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT). Wang Zhijun, vice minister of MIIT, said the ministry would help facilitate the high-quality development of China's VR industry, accelerating the industrial integration of VR with other technologies, such as 5G and artificial intelligence. It would also help with promoting industrial agglomeration and deepening international cooperation to achieve win-win results in the global market.

INDUSTRY NOT VIRTUAL BUT REAL

The VR industry is getting more real, as industry leaders diligently develop equipment and devices to meet the technological standards for better user experiences. Zhang Yong, CEO of Alibaba Group, said that VR and many aspects of society are changing, and many scenarios in science fiction are becoming a reality. Huawei, Microsoft, and other enterprises presented their new VR devices during the conference. He Gang, head of Huawei's mobile phone product line, unveiled a VR glass game set and said Huawei would release more high-quality VR games and applications in the future. "We cannot live without VR or AR in an intelligent world, as they can improve production efficiency," He said. "Now, students can wear special glasses to 'walk' into a specific simulation site in real-time to understand how chemical reactions occur and understand the essence of the phenomena."

According to the think tank CCID under the MIIT, China will likely ship 8.2 million VR devices in 2020, with more than 25 million users. What is more realistic about the VR industry is also manifested in its growing value. Besides the 66.2 billion yuan in contracts this year, during the conferences in the previous two years, a total of 261 projects were inked, worth 128.4 billion yuan. Ren Aiguang, an official with the MIIT, mentioned China's VR industry has also faced obstacles despite rapid growth, such as an immature business model and shortages of professional and versatile talents.

China has witnessed a maturing and expanding VR industry as the country pushes for the high-quality development and extensive application of new technologies. According to the MIIT, China's VR market will amount to 54.45 billion yuan by 2021.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/20/2020

[TOP↑](#)

China's 5G Development Showing Promising Results: MIIT

China's 5G network development has achieved good results, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT). The country now has over 690,000 5G base stations. More than 500,000 of these were built in 2020, achieving the target set at the beginning of this year ahead of schedule, Wen Ku, an official with the MIIT, told a press conference on Thursday. China's 5G mobile phone shipments from January to September reached about 108 million, Wen said. With the rapid rise of 5G users, the number of terminal devices connected to the network exceeded 160 million by Monday, Wen added. 5G is playing an important role, especially in stabilizing investment, promoting consumption and fostering new drivers of economic development, the official said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/22/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Cross-border E-commerce Business Through Xinjiang Port Continues to Grow

Cross-border e-commerce business at the Alataw Pass, a major land port in northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, continues to grow thanks to increasing customs clearance efficiency. By Monday, the Alataw Pass had exported more than 42 million cross-border e-commerce parcels worth over 1 billion yuan (about 149.6 million U.S. dollars) since the port launched cross-border e-commerce business in January. The outbound parcels, mainly packed with toys, apparel, shoes and other small commodities, are transported to countries including Italy and Germany. The Alataw Pass aims to become a hub of logistics, trade and settlement connecting Asian and European countries. Customs at the Alataw Pass have simplified declaration procedures and provided 24-hour reservation services to improve clearance efficiency. The port has also launched a road-rail transit service to shorten delivery time. Parcels from major online shopping platforms including Alibaba and Amazon have been shipped via the port, according to the port customs.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/27/2020

[TOP↑](#)

China's Industrial Profits Restore as Economy Perks Up

Profits of China's major industrial firms maintained an upward momentum in September as production demands have gradually warmed up amid solid efforts to contain COVID-19 and bolster economic development, official data showed Tuesday. Profits of the country's major industrial firms totaled 646.43 billion yuan (about 96.5 billion U.S. dollars) in September, increasing by 10.1 percent year on year, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed. The growth narrowed 9 percentage points from August, said NBS senior statistician Zhu Hong. Despite pressure from the COVID-19 epidemic as well as the grim and complex domestic and international environment, China's industrial companies saw a steady recovery in their profits as supply and demand further improved, Zhu said. In the third quarter, profits in the industrial sector rose 15.9 percent year on year, widening by 11.1 percentage points from that in the second quarter.

A total of 31 of the 41 surveyed industrial sectors reported profit growth in the period, with 24 sectors registering a double-digit increase, said Zhu. Auto manufacturing, nonferrous metal smelting and rolling, and general-purpose equipment manufacturing were among the sectors that saw the most prominent recovery, with profits in the auto industry expanding 53.8 percent year on year, extending the 26-percent increase in the second quarter. Zhu attributed the growth to policy support in advancing infrastructure construction and boosting consumption, as well as warming investment and increasing consumer demands. Earlier data from the China Passenger Car Association showed the country's sales of passenger vehicles, including sedans, sport-utility vehicles, minivans and multipurpose vehicles, rose 7.3 percent year on year to 1.91 million units in September.

Meanwhile, the raw material manufacturing industry reversed the downward trend by gaining 23 percent year on year in the third quarter, the NBS data showed. Despite the recovery, industrial enterprises still face pressure in maintaining profit growth as revenue and profit growth in the first nine months remained in the negative territory, Zhu said, citing the 2.4-percent contraction of the industrial profits during the period. To propel continuous improvements of the industrial economy, Zhu called for more efforts to stimulate the vitality of market entities and help enterprises solve difficulties in production and operation. Profits of industrial firms may experience fluctuations in the next few months, but the adaptability of domestic enterprises remains relatively strong amid improving demand and encouraging policy environment, said Zhou Maohua, an analyst with China Everbright Bank.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/27/2020

[TOP↑](#)

China's Import Expo Offers Opportunities for Business, Boosts Global Economy

The China International Import Expo (CIIE), the world's first import-themed national-level expo, offers new opportunities to global business and helps boost the world economy by promoting international trade, an export director of South America's largest meat producer has said. As the third CIIE draws near, Minerva Foods, a Brazil-headquartered leading beef producer and exporter, hopes to drum up more business and continue to expand its sales in the fast-growing Chinese market, Celia Sampaio, a director responsible for the multinational's beef exports, said in a recent interview with Xinhua. "Without a doubt, the fair plays a positive role for the world economy" as it promotes global trade, Sampaio said ahead of the expo, which will take place on Nov. 5-10 in the financial hub of Shanghai.

"It should be noted that the CIIE is the first world fair dedicated to imports, so leading companies from countries have the opportunity to do business at the event," she said. The company has taken part in the first and second editions of the expo, where it has gained "extremely positive experiences that gave us a better understanding of the Chinese market, as well as a (chance to) approach several clients," the director recalled, expecting that the fair could bring new business opportunities to her company. According to Sampaio, China is a significant market for Minerva Foods, accounting for approximately 40 percent of the company's consolidated export earnings in the past 12 months ending June 30. Sampaio said she believes that attending the event to present products is "the right thing to do."

"Through our geographic diversification, which includes seven plants authorized to export beef to China in Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, we understand that we are well positioned to meet the demand for our product in the Chinese market," she added. Selling its products to more than 100 countries, the multinational company accounts for about 20 percent of all meat exported from South America. It also has operations in the meat processing industry and live cattle exports. As this year's event takes place amid the novel coronavirus pandemic, Sampaio said she was confident organizers would take all necessary precautions to prevent COVID-19 infections. "We have no doubt that all measures and protocols to prevent the (spread of the) novel coronavirus will be applied at all the stages of the event," Sampaio said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/27/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

Shanghai Remains Hot Spot for Foreign Investment

Despite the global downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic, China's financial hub of Shanghai remains a hot spot for foreign investment. The city's foreign capital inflows rose 6.1 percent year on year to about 15.52 billion U.S. dollars in the first three

quarters of 2020, local authorities said Thursday. A total of 38 regional headquarters of foreign-funded multinational companies and 14 foreign-funded research and development (R&D) centers were established in Shanghai in the first nine months, raising their total numbers to 758 and 475 respectively, according to the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce. Data showed that the nearly 60,000 foreign-funded enterprises in Shanghai now contribute more than a quarter of the city's gross domestic product, over a third of its tax revenue, and about two-thirds of its foreign trade volume.

To further attract foreign investment, Shanghai will hold a city promotion convention during the upcoming third China International Import Expo from Nov. 5 to 10, inviting guests from foreign companies, investment promotion agencies and other related institutions, according to the municipal government. Shanghai has always attached great importance to improving the business environment. Visits have been made and 15 government-enterprise meetings held this year to help foreign companies tide over the difficulties brought by COVID-19. The city also came up with many preferential policies for foreign investment. Various measures taken by Shanghai not only helped foreign companies resume operations amid the epidemic but also boosted their confidence in the Chinese market, said Arjan Van Der Oort, CFO of Boehringer Ingelheim of China's Mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan. According to him, the German pharmaceutical giant will take root in China and has made up its mind on an additional investment of about 530 million U.S. dollars in the next five years.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/29/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

Western China's Twin Cities Drive High-quality Development

Every morning early, a freight train loaded with electronic information products, auto parts, and other goods departs the Tuanjiecun station of southwest China's Chongqing Municipality and heads for Germany. Around the same time, a train full of cargo heads for Poland from more than 300 km away in Chengdu, capital of the southwestern Sichuan Province. Launched in Chongqing and Chengdu in 2011 and 2013, respectively, the China-Europe freight train services have significantly shortened the distance between western China and Europe. So far, more than 10,000 freight trains have linked the two cities with Europe, accounting for more than 40 percent of the total number of China-Europe trains in China. Located in southwest China, the Chengdu-Chongqing area, with Chengdu and Chongqing as the core, has a population of about 120 million and an economic aggregate of nearly 7 trillion yuan (1.04 trillion U.S. dollars).

On Oct. 16, Chinese authorities reviewed a plan that aims to turn the Chengdu-Chongqing area into a crucial driver of the country's high-quality development. Statistics show that China's three major economic circles use about

2.8 percent of the country's land to support about 18 percent of China's total population. The economic circles of Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei, the Yangtze River Delta, and Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao contribute about 38 percent of the country's GDP. "The aim of proposing the Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle is to cultivate another economic engine," said Yao Shujie, deputy director of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Chongqing University. For many years authorities have explored the synergetic development of the Chengdu-Chongqing area. For example, in 2015, the Chengdu-Chongqing High-Speed Railway began operation, with a commuting time of about 1.5 hours.

Now, relying on the international logistics channels, the Chengdu-Chongqing area has changed from a hinterland into a frontier of opening-up. During the first three quarters of this year, China's exports and imports grew by 0.7 percent year on year, while those of Chongqing and Sichuan rose by 11.4 percent and 22.7 percent, respectively. During the COVID-19 epidemic, despite the obstruction of global shipping and air transport, the China-Europe freight train services played an important role in the transportation of international goods and relief supplies, maintaining the stability of the global industrial and supply chains. In addition to the China-Europe freight trains, Chengdu and Chongqing were also major initiators of an international land-sea passage, which has become the fastest way for China's western region to reach the sea and has expanded to 240 ports in 94 countries and regions.

"The Chengdu-Chongqing area has become a window of China's opening-up to Eurasia," said Li Jing, vice president of Chongqing Technology and Business University. For a long time, the development of China's eastern and western regions has been uneven. "The Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle will promote the development of the western region," said Yao. The economic aggregate of the Chengdu-Chongqing area accounts for 33.25 percent in China's western region. Despite the impact of COVID-19, the Chengdu-Chongqing area has led the country in economic growth. As an electronic information industry base, the area has become a world-class industrial cluster with its strong production capacity. "As a leader in the development of western China with convenient transportation, the Chengdu-Chongqing area is capable of undertaking industrial transfers from coastal areas, thus stimulating the potential of domestic demand in western China," said Yao.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/29/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Cross-border E-commerce Pilot Zone Opens for Business in Hinterland Province

The first comprehensive cross-border e-commerce pilot zone in northwest China's hinterland province of Qinghai was officially opened for business on Thursday in the city of Haidong. The Haidong pilot zone received approval last December and focuses on areas including an online service platform and the construction of systems for information sharing, financial services and intelligent logistics, according to Song Jian, director of the management committee of the Qinghai Caojiapu Bonded Logistics Center (Type B). The business model adopted in the zone allows e-commerce platforms to import unsold goods from overseas and store them in bonded warehouses before being sold, undergoing customs clearance and being delivered to consumers. The zone's official launch is of great significance to creating a fair and competitive market environment and building a platform for cross-border e-commerce cooperation between China and Central Asia, West Asia, South Asia and Mediterranean countries, Song said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/29/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Experts Optimistic About China's Prospects as New Development Proposals Adopted

Experts worldwide have spoken highly of China's development achievements and expressed hope that China will make even greater achievements, which will benefit world economic recovery amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The fifth plenary session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) concluded Thursday adopted the CPC Central Committee's proposals for the formulation of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035. Mao Xuxin, principal economist at the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, a London-based economic think tank, said the proposals "set a practical blueprint for China's economic growth and social development in the coming years." China, he noted, will speed up the transformation from high speed growth to high-quality development, with improved economic structure, breakthrough in core high technology industries, and balanced growth across inland and coastal regions.

Also, China's development pattern will "move Chinese firms up the global value chain and enhance the core competency of the Chinese economy," Mao added. Christine Bierre, editor-in-chief of France's Nouvelle Solidarite magazine and an expert at the Schiller France Institute, said that China has made remarkable achievements during the 13th Five-Year Plan period, especially in the areas of poverty alleviation and the Belt and Road cooperation, demonstrating the superiority and efficiency of China's policy planning. China's new development proposals pay more attention to the quality and efficiency of economic development with measures in such aspects as expanding domestic demand, opening up to the outside world, green development, and scientific and technological innovation, which will boost

China's prosperity and development and also contribute to the recovery of the world economy in the post-pandemic era, Bierre added.

Likewise, China attaches great importance to science and technology and environmental protection, which is conducive to its long-term and stable development, said Sykhoun Bounvilay, general secretary of the Laos-China Friendship Association. Cavince Adhere, a Kenyan international relations researcher with a focus on China-Africa relations, said China's poverty reduction is a monumental contribution to global sustainable development goals. He also praised China in its ecological revolution, which has placed a premium on the harmony between humans and the environment, saying the global best practices so far consolidated by China in its environmental protection and development twinning provide easy picks for other nations.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/29/2020

[TOP↑](#)

JAPAN: Enhance Defense Capabilities in New Domains of Cyber, Space Security

It is important to steadily build up defense capabilities in light of changes in the security environment and advances in military technology. The Defense Ministry's budget request for fiscal 2021 totaled a record ¥5.4898 trillion. If the increased defense spending is approved, it will be the ninth year in a row the defense budget has increased. The emphasis in the request is on dealing with the new defense domains of space, cyber and electromagnetic waves. China and North Korea are enhancing their capabilities in these new domains. If Japan's satellites and defense systems are attacked, Aegis-equipped vessels and fighter jets will be neutralized. It makes sense to strengthen cyber-defense and space surveillance systems. For the space-related domain, the ministry is appropriating ¥72.4 billion. This includes costs for designing satellites to monitor space debris and other countries' satellites. The budget request also calls for research on a satellite constellation, in which many satellites are launched to serve as a missile defense system. The aim is to detect and track hypersonic glide vehicles developed by China and Russia, which are considered to be difficult to intercept.

The concept of building a defense network in space has been proposed by the United States. The government is considering the possibility of joint operations between Japan and the United States. The feasibility and cost-effectiveness of this plan must be thoroughly assessed. As for cyber-defense, the ministry plans to reorganize the existing organizations and create a joint force of the Ground, Maritime and Air Self-Defense Forces. There is an urgent need to develop specialist personnel. Meanwhile, in conventional domains, the ministry requested ¥66.6 billion for the

purchase of state-of-the-art fighter jets. The cost of refurbishing the destroyer Izumo for operating fighter jets is included in this request. The security environment around Japan is becoming increasingly severe. However, with the worsening fiscal situation, it is impossible to procure expensive equipment endlessly. The government needs to set priorities and introduce defense equipment in a planned manner. It is essential to review the equipment and improve efficiency.

The ministry intends to decide on alternatives to the land-based Aegis Ashore missile defense system at the end of the year. In addition to destroyers and merchant ships, facilities like oil rigs have been mentioned as candidates for installing radar and other equipment. The deployment of new destroyers would increase the burden on the Maritime Self-Defense Force, which is short on personnel. There are still concerns about safety for vessels like privately owned merchant ships. Multifaceted studies must be done on this issue. The United States has demanded Japan and other allies put defense spending at 2% of their gross domestic products. Japan's defense expenditures in fiscal 2019 equaled 0.9% of its GDP. Japan's provision of bases keeps the United States in a dominant position in the Asia-Pacific region, contributing to the U.S. national interest. The Japanese government should tenaciously explain this fact to the United States.

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[TOP↑](#)

Japanese Govt Aims to Deter Tech Giants from Monopolizing Data

With an eye on tech giants, the government will discuss creating a new system to prevent data oligopolies. The scope of data usage is expected to expand rapidly in various fields, including autonomous driving and medical care, in addition to existing services such as search engines and social media. By making it easier for individuals and businesses to manage their own data, the government aims to prevent specific companies from monopolizing data. Discussions will be held at a public-private council that was launched Thursday by the government's Headquarters for Digital Market Competition. The entity, named the "trusted web promotion council," includes business leaders, professors and representatives from information technology start-ups among its members. The council will identify points of contention and compile a road map for creating a necessary system by next spring. Facebook Inc. and other tech giants allow people to use the IDs they created to use the companies' social media platforms when logging in to other services. It has been pointed out that this approach makes it easier for tech giants to grasp how people use other operators' services.

Considering this situation, one of the points of contention the council is expected to discuss is a scheme under which individuals and companies retain and manage their

own highly secure single IDs for using services such as searching, emailing and logging in to social media. The scheme is aimed at making it difficult for specific entities to collect an excessive amount of data. For the management of these single IDs, the council is expected to look into using blockchain, a technology designed to prevent tampering with data. The council is also expected to consider having a third-party organization manage these single IDs and their data on behalf of individual users, as it is cumbersome for them to do so on their own. To prevent data oligopolies, some U.S. companies and organizations are trying to establish international rules that allow individuals and companies to independently manage their own data. The European Union has already introduced regulations that prohibit personal information from being taken out of its territory, in principle. The government intends to take part in international discussions by identifying technical and other issues.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 10/15/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Japan Enters Era of Fierce Competition over 5G Smartphones

Apple Inc. has decided to release its new iPhone 12 lineup of smartphones, the company's first handsets to support the 5G high-speed wireless communication standard. In doing so, it is following in the footsteps of such businesses as Samsung Electronics Co. of South Korea and Huawei Technologies Co. of China. Apple's entry is sure to intensify the competition, but there are challenges to be faced, such as the limited reception area of 5G smartphones. "Today we bring 5G to iPhone. This is a huge moment for all of us, and we are very excited," said Apple CEO Tim Cook. He described the benefits of 5G, including high-quality video, in an online presentation on Tuesday. With 5G technology, smartphone users can download a two-hour movie in three seconds, compared to five minutes with the current 4G. Apple is rolling out four 5G-enabled iPhones. The type that has attracted the most attention is not the mainstay 12, but the 12 mini. The screen size of the 12 mini is 5.4 inches, smaller than the 6.1 inches of the 12.

Apple has emphasized the handiness of the 12 mini, calling it the smallest, thinnest and lightest 5G smartphone in the world. Prices for the 12 mini start at ¥74,800, before tax, compared to ¥85,800 for the 12. Samsung Electronics and Huawei Technologies, the market leaders in 5G smartphones, were ahead of Apple in launching their products beginning last year. Google also started selling such phones on Thursday. As competition proceeds among the key makers, they are likely to lower prices, which will help widen use of the products. U.S. research firm IDC estimates that shipments of 5G smartphones will continue to increase, and surpass those of 4G phones by 2024. IDC analyst Nabila Popal said prices for 5G smartphones are dropping rapidly and more consumers will choose them. Popal added that the launch of 5G phones by Apple, which has a large customer base, will

have a significant impact on the market.

Main players in the Japanese market will probably be Sony Corp., Sharp Corp. and the four companies of the U.S., China and South Korea. Sharp released a new 5G-capable Aquos model this spring, and plans to launch in spring next year a new model that will retail for ¥30,000 to ¥50,000. Sony is also scheduled to release a new 5G-capable Xperia model on Saturday. However, it remains to be seen whether 5G will fully spread, because of the limited areas where 5G is available and the fact that no innovative services using 5G have emerged. The economic downturn caused by the spread of the novel coronavirus is also thought to have made many consumers hesitant to buy a new smartphone. Hideaki Yokota of MM Research Institute Ltd. said, "Expansion of the coverage area is essential for the spread of 5G smartphones."

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 10/16/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Travel Industry Sees Wave of Digitization in Bookings

The travel industry is experiencing a wave of digitization as it faces unprecedented headwinds due to the spread of the novel coronavirus. Although the government's Go To Travel (see below) tourism promotion campaign is gradually bringing back domestic tourism, there is currently no prospect of a recovery in the number of foreign visitors to Japan. The Yomiuri Shimbun is following the industry as it continues to search for ways to survive. The following is the first installment of a series looking at efforts by the tourism industry. "Hello. You can take a tour in Tokyo without it being too crowded," a jinrikisha rickshaw driver called out as he offered rides in front of the Kaminarimon gate at Sensoji temple in the Asakusa district in Taito Ward, Tokyo. Asakusa was blessed with clear autumn weather on Oct. 18 as the previous day's rain lifted. The Nakamise-dori shopping street was packed with tourists.

"Recently, the lively voices of people have come to be heard," said Koji Ojima, president of Warabiya souvenir shop on the street. However, Warabiya's sales are down 90% from the previous year. "At one point, I thought about changing the business model," he said. The period when the business' performance was at its worst still comes to mind even now, he said. The state of emergency issued in April effectively brought the tourism industry to a halt. Major travel agencies such as JTB Corp., KNT Co., and HIS Co. have temporarily closed their outlets one after another. The total transaction value of 47 major travel agencies in May dropped 97.6% to ¥9.5 billion from the same month in the previous year. "The coronavirus has pushed us to the limit of our traditional business model," a source at a major travel agency said. "The travel business is a low-margin, high-volume business. We can't do business if we don't have the numbers."

The travel industry is said to be in the business of meals, transportation and accommodation. Travel agencies combine these three elements to create package tours, making money from the sales commissions paid by each operator. However, travel agencies generally earn only about 10% of the total cost of a tour package as commissions. According to the consolidated financial results for the fiscal year ended March 31, the Japanese travel industry's largest firm, JTB, generated sales of ¥1.2 trillion, but operating profit — which represents profit from its core business — was ¥1.3 billion, with operating profit on sales at 0.1%. The operating profit margin was hovering around 0.5% before the spread of the virus. Travel agencies urgently need to cut costs. JTB is planning to close about 100 outlets, or 20% of all its outlets nationwide, over a period of about five years, while HIS will close 80-90 outlets, or a third of its 260 outlets, by next summer.

“The era of having many outlets is over,” HIS President Hideo Sawada said. Online travel agencies have turned this difficult situation into a strength. “We’ve been inundated with bookings, and there are areas where subsidies are about to run out,” said an official of NTT Docomo Inc., which operates the online booking site d Travel. With the lifting of the ban on travel to and from Tokyo on Oct. 1, website traffic peaked around noon on Oct. 7. The travel agency had to stop selling discounted products online at about 9 a.m. on Oct 9. The shortage of subsidies spread to Jalan.net and Yahoo! Travel, and both websites took steps to lower the maximum discount to ¥3,500 from Oct. 10. The Japan Tourism Agency quickly reviewed the allocation of the subsidies to maintain the discount rate, resulting in a strong showing by online travel agencies.

The industry dubbed this phenomenon the “OTA bubble.” OTA stands for “online travel agent.” Not having brick-and-mortar stores, such online travel agencies can keep rents and labor costs low. AirTrip Corp., which operates a travel booking site, posted consolidated sales of ¥24.2 billion in the fiscal year ended September 2019, about one-fiftieth the sales of JTB, but its operating profit margin was much higher than that of JTB's at 3.1%. Another strength of AirTrip's business is the fact that users can complete their reservations using a computer or smartphone without having to meet face-to-face at a travel agency's outlet. “The novel coronavirus will accelerate travel agencies' shift to digital technology,” said Keiichi Tsujino, a specially appointed professor at Ryutsu Keizai University and an expert on the travel industry. “We will do our best for a tourism recovery. We are waiting for visitors, so we would like to ask for cooperation,” Aomori Gov. Shingo Mimura, said and bowed to executives from JTB, Nippon Travel Agency Co., East Japan Railway Co. (JR East) and other companies at a hotel in Tokyo on Oct. 19.

He came to Tokyo to ask travel agencies to plan a tourism campaign for the Tohoku region, which will begin next spring. In response to Mimura's request, Tetsuro Morisaki, president of View Travel Service Co., a subsidiary of JR East, said, “We will

plan a product that is suitable for 'Beyond Corona.'" For major travel agencies, the ability to plan and propose trips for customers is their lifeline. As a countermeasure against the novel coronavirus, there are new plans for "less crowded" tourism and "staycations." Expectations remain high for agencies to lead the way in travel styles of this kind. When Hiroshi Tabata, the former commissioner of the Japan Tourism Agency, was leaving his post in July, he offered a few words to the executives of a travel agency: "In order to establish a new style of travel, the ability to plan and propose trips as a 'travel concierge' is being tested. Now is the time to change." Go To Travel users can receive a discount of up to 35% on travel costs for a maximum saving of ¥14,000 per person per night. They can also use coupons at their travel destinations to get up to 15% off for a maximum saving of ¥6,000. This is part of the emergency economic measures in response to the spread of the coronavirus, and the budget for the project is about ¥1.3 trillion.

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[TOP↑](#)

SOUTH KOREA: Aiming to Develop 50 AI Chips by 2030

South Korea targets to develop up to 50 types of artificial intelligence-focused system semiconductors by 2030, the ICT ministry said Monday, as the country strives to take a leading position in the semiconductor sector beyond its traditional foothold in memory chips. AI chips refer to high performance and power efficient semiconductors that specialize in AI services. Early this year, South Korea placed big bets on developing the next-generation chips with a plan to spend around 1 trillion won (US\$871 million) until 2029. The ICT ministry said it plans to acquire homegrown technology to develop such chips by 2022, while fostering 3,000 experts in the sector over the next 10 years. Under the state-led plan, the country aims to capture 20 percent of the global AI chip market by 2030. The ministry said it plans to utilize 70 billion won from the local semiconductor fund, formed last year, to help AI chip companies in research and development as well as mergers and acquisitions.

The country's move to nurture the AI chip sector comes as it seeks a new growth engine in the semiconductor industry. The AI chip market is expected to grow rapidly, reaching US\$117.9 billion by 2030, compared with \$18.5 billion this year, according to the Korea Information Society Development Institute. New AI services, such as self-driving cars, are expected to help propel the sector. South Korea holds a tight grip over the global DRAM memory chip market. Samsung Electronics Co. and SK hynix Inc., the two major chipmakers, held a combined 73.6 percent of the market in the second quarter this year. But the market is expected to decline by 0.5 percent annually until 2024, according to market tracker Gartner. Samsung said in July that it would hire 1,000 new experts for chip design and artificial intelligence by the end of this year.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 10/12/2020

5G Accessibility in Major Subway Lines at Over 75 Pct: Data

The average accessibility of the fifth-generation network in major subway lines in South Korea reached over 75 percent, a lawmaker said Monday, as the country races to boost nationwide coverage. The high-speed network's accessibility stood at 76.3 percent across 12 subway lines in six major cities across the country, according to Rep. Kim Sang-hee of the ruling Democratic Party, citing data from the Ministry of Science and ICT. The country's three major telecom operators -- SK Telecom Co., KT Corp. and LG Uplus Corp. -- have recently focused on installing the latest generation network in public locations, such as subways. In July, they said 5G networks were installed in the capital region's subway Line No. 9 and eight other subway lines in four major cities, including the southern port city of Busan. The latest generation network's availability, however, was far below the national average in certain subway lines in the capital, the lawmaker said.

The network's availability in Seoul Metro's Line No. 3 and No. 8 both stood at around 27 percent. Only Line No. 9 had availability higher than the national average, at 89 percent, out of the five subway lines in the capital surveyed by the ICT ministry. The lawmaker called for better availability of the network in the capital's subways, saying the cumulative number of people who used the subways reached 2.7 billion last year. South Korea had 8.66 million 5G users as of August, accounting for 12.4 percent of the total 70 million mobile accounts in the country. The three carriers promised in July to install 5G in all subway lines across the capital metropolitan region by mid-next year.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 10/19/2020

S. Korea's 5G Download Speed 2nd Fastest Globally: Report

South Korea's 5G download speed is the world's second fastest, reaching an average speed of 336.1 megabits per second (Mbps), a report showed Tuesday. The country was only behind Saudi Arabia, which delivered an average 5G download speed of 377.2 Mbps, according to a report from industry tracker Opensignal, which tracked data between July 1 and Sept. 28 in 15 countries with 5G networks. South Korea's average 5G download speed over the period was also 5.6 times faster than its average 4G download speed of 60.5 Mbps. The latest data mark an improvement for South Korea's 5G network, which recorded an average download speed of 312.7 Mbps in an August report from Opensignal. The time South Korean 5G users spend connected to the network also rose, reaching 22.2 percent, up from 20.7 percent found in the previous report.

Many countries that have deployed 5G, including South Korea, currently offer the network's services on non-standalone mode, requiring support from the 4G network. South Korea, however, ranked fifth in terms of 5G accessibility in the latest data, with Saudi Arabia at 37 percent, Kuwait at 27.7 percent, Thailand at 24.9 percent and Hong Kong at 22.9 percent. The latest data comes as the number of 5G users in South Korea has picked up in recent months, since its commercial roll out in April last year. As of August, the country had 8.7 million 5G mobile accounts, up some 800,000 from the previous month.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 10/20/2020

[TOP↑](#)

South-East Asia

VIETNAM: Digital Skills for Teachers, Students Must Be Prioritised

Teachers and students should have access to information technology (IT) to take full advantage of humanity's knowledge, Minister of Education and Training Phùng Xuân Nhạ said on Thursday. He made the comments at the ASEAN-UNICEF conference on 'Digital Transformation of the Education System Throughout ASEAN' held by the Ministry of Education and Training in collaboration with the ASEAN Secretariat and UNICEF Việt Nam. The conference was organised as part of Vietnam's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2020 and in the context of the bloc's education sector working to ensure students are safe and their studies are not interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nhạ called on education ministers in the bloc to work towards adopting effective policies and a legal framework on digital transformation in the education sector, emphasising that these would improve management and teaching quality. Education ministers should build a common set of criteria on digital skills in the region, he said, noting it would pave the way for technologies to be applied in the education sector both thoroughly and systematically.

Sharing Việt Nam's efforts in promoting digital transformation, Nhạ said that as the country targets students in all grades being equipped with digital skills, IT is taught at primary schools and focuses on digital skills, the application of IT, and computer science. The application of IT in teaching and knowledge-sharing has developed in Việt Nam, he said, adding that the ministry holds e-learning lesson design contests to improve teachers' capacity in digital transformation while building digital learning and teaching data in the sector. At the end of the conference, ASEAN education ministers adopted a joint statement that affirmed the importance of efforts to promote digital skills and digital transformation in the education sectors of member states. They agreed to facilitate safe access for students to opportunities for digital study, co-operate with relevant bodies in open education resources, and support the

building of the ASEAN statement on digital transformation in the education system.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 10/16/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

HCM City E-Commerce Market Firmly on Growth Path

Vissan JSC has launched an online store chain on Loship, the Vietnamese e-commerce platform operating its own fleet of one-hour delivery. Its products like fresh meat and processed foods are also available on e-commerce platforms Sendo and Tiki and the Now app, and the company said it plans to further diversify its online sales channels to offer more convenience to customers. Retailers like Saigon Co.op and Big C have also enhanced sales via online channels and telephone and home delivery services. According to the HCM City Department of Industry and Trade, city enterprises have embraced digital transformation and are promoting online sales, achieving good growth in this channel, especially during the Covid-19 outbreak. According to experts, with the growing middle class, relatively young population and robust consumer spending, Việt Nam, especially HCM City, has been experiencing high growth rates in its retail sector. Technology has been changing consumer behaviour, with more people buying online, they said.

This has prompted supermarket and convenience store chains to pay more attention to the online channel, besides expanding their physical distribution networks and improving in-store experience for customers, they added. In a report on e-commerce development, the department said the HCM City market has enjoyed double-digit growth annually since 2015. Sales in the online segment were up sharply, particularly during the Covid-19 outbreak, it said. Around 90 per cent of the city's residents have access to the internet, making it easy for them to search and shop for goods online, according to the department. Many people also choose refer to information about goods and evaluate and compare prices mainly online before deciding to make a purchase online or offline, it added. With fierce competition in the market, retailers in the e-commerce market have constantly made efforts to improve their business model and develop new technologies to improve the customer experience. They have also entered into partnerships with online payment service providers and e-wallets to offer customers various payment options.

Nguyễn Anh Đức, general director of Saigon Co.op, the owner of Co.opmart, Co.opXtra, Co.op Food and other supermarket chains, said Việt Nam's e-commerce market is forecast to achieve a breakthrough and continue to maintain high growth over the next five years. "Saigon Co-op will continue with its unique e-commerce development strategy based on existing points of sale and enhancing the use of new technology and digitisation to keep up with market trends. "Saigon Co-op will exploit the e-commerce model effectively, perfecting an e-commerce website and developing omni channel." Lê Trí Thông, CEO of Phú Nhuận Jewelry Joint Stock

Company, said since gold and jewellery are high-value goods so there is always a need for in-store experience. But this has changed with its revenues from online sales rising significantly in recent times. The company has set up an online order processing centre in each region to ensure harmonious development of both online and offline sales channels. According to market research companies, despite the rise of digital channels, physical channels still dominate the retail scene in Việt Nam.

This underscores the need for businesses to develop omni-channel strategies, and provide seamless consumer experiences that integrate both online and offline consumer journeys across all their touchpoints, they said. There is huge demand for online shopping, but many consumers are still concerned about the poor quality of products, the huge disparity between what is advertised and delivered and leakage of personal information, according to experts. To gain consumers' trust, their products should have certified origins and they should control fake and poor quality goods on their platforms, they said. Phan Bích Tâm, country manager of the Mobile Marketing Association in Việt Nam, said businesses need to adopt responsible marketing strategies to help build customers' trust in online shopping. The HCM City People's Committee has assigned the Department of Industry and Trade to draft a plan for developing the e-commerce sector in the next five years in order to create a legal framework for the sector in line with the current trend.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 10/16/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

HCM City's Health Sector Sets Up Sites to Screen for Non-Communicable Diseases

HCM City's health sector targets providing screening for non-communicable diseases such as hypertension and diabetes for 12,500 people aged over 40 by the year end. The goal was set at a conference discussing the city's project on responses to non-communicable diseases in the 2020-2022 period held last week. The project is being carried out by the Department of Preventive Medicine under the Ministry of Health with technical assistance from the non-government Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH). It is being implemented in Hà Nội, HCM City and Khánh Hòa Province until December 2022 to increase access to services related to non-communicable disease prevention, and to treatment and care at the primary health care level. The project's beneficiaries are people aged 40 and over. In HCM City, the project started in September in District 8 which is home to nearly 180,500 people aged over 40. At all 16 medical stations in District 8, the screening points are used to screen and manage hypertension and diabetes. The district has 97 collaborators who regularly visit residential areas to talk about hypertension and diabetes in an aim to improve residents' awareness. The goal is to have around 12,250 people in the district screened for hypertension and diabetes by year end. Doctor Nguyễn Hữu Hưng, deputy director of the city Department of Health, said the

rate of non-communicable diseases incidences is increasing in the community, but not everyone is aware of the danger level.

In the past, the city implemented many programs to control non-communicable diseases in the community. A typical example was the project "Communities for Healthy Hearts" implemented in 2016 with technical assistance from PATH. Through blood pressure measuring sites located in residential areas, households, cafes, and hair and nail salons, many people were screened for early detection of high blood pressure. From this project, people's awareness about high blood pressure improved. The number of people screened for detection, diagnosis and treatment increased at grassroots-level health facilities, he said. Free blood pressure measuring points, especially at Co.op mart supermarkets, traditional markets, and residential areas, brought positive results. Dr. Nguyễn Tuyết Nga, chief representative of PATH Office in Việt Nam, said that Việt Nam has around 18.9 per cent of people with hypertension, while 4.1 per cent of people suffer from diabetes and the rate is increasing. Hypertension and diabetes are silent but extremely dangerous conditions with high mortality rates, Nga said, adding that 8 out of 10 Vietnamese deaths are due to non-communicable diseases. The prevention and control of non-communicable diseases needs more attention, she said. In recent years, PATH has co-operated with the Ministry of Health and localities to carry out many projects to control non-communicable diseases in the community, she added.

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[TOP ↑](#)

HCM City Speeds Up Sub-Projects for Smart City Development

HCM City is speeding up the progress of key sub-projects under the project to turn the city into a smart city from 2017 to 2020 with a vision to 2025. The smart city building project aims to resolve problems such as unsustainable economic growth, flooding, traffic congestion and pollution, and improve interaction between the city's administration, businesses and residents. It gives priority to four key sub-projects, including a smart urban operation centre, a centre for receiving and processing urgent information, a control centre for surveillance cameras, and a database management system under the city's existing common-use shared data warehouse. According to the city's Department of Information and Communication, the city will enhance disbursement of all planned capital this year to implement ongoing sub-projects on schedule. The smart urban operation centre worth VNĐ969 billion (US\$41.8 million) began in 2019 and will be completed in 2022. With a total investment of VNĐ993 billion (\$42.8 million), the centre for receiving and processing urgent information is expected to operate by 2025. The control centre for surveillance cameras will be implemented from 2019 to 2022, with a cost of VNĐ549 billion (\$23.7 million). Around VNĐ49 billion (\$2.1 million) is needed to build the database management system in the 2019-22 period. Dozens of other sub-projects are also

being implemented. Võ Thị Trung Trinh, deputy director of the department, said there have been obstacles to sub-projects' progress, including a lack of efficient coordination between departments and agencies in determining information technology application. Guiding documents related to conditions and order and procedures for implementing public investment projects have not been clear enough. The city authority is continuing to receive feedback on measures to build a smart city from residents and the business community.

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[TOP ↑](#)

SGDT Works to Collect More E-Commerce Tax

Due to the rapid development of e-commerce, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, regulating the sector has become increasingly complex for tax authorities, according to Vũ Mạnh Cường, director of the Inspection Section under the General Department of Taxation (GDT). Cường was speaking at a press conference reviewing the fight against smuggling, trade fraud and fake goods in Hà Nội last week. "The COVID-19 pandemic has enhanced the habit of buying and selling via e-commerce, mostly in Hà Nội and HCM City, with developed information technology platforms," Cường said. He said the tax industry has accelerated efforts to collect tax from those who do business on e-commerce platforms, especially YouTube, Google and Facebook, and found tax violators. Cường said they have collected tax arrears of VNĐ13.9 billion (US\$604,000) from those earning a living from social networks. According to data provided by commercial banks, there were 18,304 individuals and organisations that earned VNĐ1.462 trillion on Google, Facebook and YouTube so far this year.

Per the Law on Cyber Security, Cường said foreign enterprises earning income in Việt Nam are obliged to declare and pay taxes with local tax authorities, with Netflix included. "With the case of Netflix, we have co-ordinated with the Anti-Money Laundering Department from the State Bank of Vietnam to list how much tax is to be collected for its activities in the past few years." "Netflix leaders have worked with the Ministry of Finance and the GDT to set up a data office in Việt Nam as well as carry out all relating tax obligations," he added. Cường said the taxation industry has deployed many solutions and worked with other ministries and departments to collect e-commerce taxes. It has worked with the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MoIT), the ministry of Information Communication (MIC) to collect information and data and management measures for online business activities to tax offices. At the same time, local commercial banks were responsible for providing data of relating online trading requested by the GDT so tax officials can make a database to compile a tax management mechanism for businesses in the e-commerce sector.

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[TOP ↑](#)

Hospitals Urged to Take Part in Data Sharing

The exchange of clinical information among health providers should be facilitated to improve the quality of patient care and delivery of services and reduce the cost of care, experts have said. Data sharing among hospitals needs to be fostered with the rising use of electronic health records that allow physicians to enter a patient's record number and view the patient's medical history, current medications, images and reports of diagnostic procedures, according to Dr. Phan Xuân Trung from Medic Medical Centre. "Data sharing among hospitals also makes it easier for patients to access remote health examinations and revisits to their physicians," Trung said at a roundtable meeting held on October 22. "The electronic health record enables clinicians to exchange and continuously update a patient's clinical data. "Hospitals need to use specialised software that integrates information from all departments of a hospital to facilitate the exchange of clinical information and connected healthcare," he said. Hứa Phú Doãn, deputy director of the Medical Technical Consultation Centre, said that health authorities needed to create regulations on the exchange of clinical information as part of an assessment of a hospital's digital transformation. Digital transformation in the healthcare sector is the integration of digital technology into all aspects of how patients, healthcare providers and regulators interact and coordinate, according to Doãn. Nguyễn Hữu Tùng, deputy chairman of the Medical Practitioner Society in HCM City, said that information technology adoption rates across healthcare systems remained low. It was vital to replace paper-based information systems with the implementation of digital transformation in hospital data management, he said.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 10/27/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

South Asia

INDIA: Digitisation Augmenting Education & Health in Narmada

Elets Technomedia organised a three-day virtual India Transformation Summit from July 10 to July 12, 2020. The summit brought in light the growth and development of India in the past few years. Jincy R Williams, District Development Officer (DDO), Narmada district, Gujarat participated in the summit and addressed on 'Local Governance through Digital Transformation'. Narmada is one of the aspirational districts of Gujarat. It has an undulating terrain with around 14 per cent of its area under forest cover and 18 per cent of its population is predominantly tribal residing in villages. Hence, digital interventions have been quite a challenge in Narmada, said Ms Williams while opening her address. Addressing digital interventions in Narmada, she added, "Despite all the challenges that surfaced while implementing digital interventions in the district, we came up with innovative solutions, especially for the

field of education and health.” Considering the remoteness of Narmada district, especially the 290 villages, there was a need to introduce some offline programme as well for improving education in the district. Also, it was difficult for the district administration to monitor the presence of the teachers and other monitoring staff in the schools. To tackle all such inherent challenges in the district, we had to develop a special application named e-pen with the help of a Hyderabad-based IT firm. The application was developed such that it can function both in online as well as offline mode, told Ms Williams. She added, “This application helped in monitoring the staff as now teachers can register their attendance on a real-time basis on the application. We, basically, wanted to ensure that the teachers mark their attendance in the real-time, the work on the field can be ensured, and the knowledge sharing and all the other messages from the district authorities reach them in real-time.” This has been a successful programme in the district, told Ms Williams.

Adding on digit interventions in education, Ms Willams mentioned, “We also have a command and control centre for education in the district with which the programme we started was also linked... We have used this programme for knowledge sharing and also for the clarification of complaints that we receive and we found the programme to be successful.” Talking about measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic-induced lockdowns, she said, “We have also tied up with different agencies and NGOs to help us with digital transformation, especially in the field of education.” Further, she mentioned that in the district, the teaching of GCERT couple was conducted through Diksha app as well as through QR codes in the textbooks of GCERT.” Speaking of the health sector, Ms Williams said, “We have also tied up with Piramal Foundation. Recently, NITI Aayog has developed a programme named – ‘Surakshit Dada Dadi, Nana Nani’ programme and Piramal Foundation is working closely with the district to help the elderly through digital interventions. We have around 56,000 elderly people in the district. We have collected the database of all the senior citizens with the help of Piramal Foundation and we track them to ensure their safety. Besides this, we are also doing knowledge sharing and fulfilment of the needs of the Piramal Foundation and many other NGOs.” Concluding her address, Ms Williams said, “As we are able to augment the education services in the district and help the senior citizens by our various initiatives in the health sector, we have been able to bring in a certain level of digital penetration in the Narmada district. Hence, the attempt to augment the education and health sector using technology has been successfully implemented.”

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 10/05/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

Gujarat Connects 2700 Gram Panchayats Through Optical Cable Network

In a major move towards digitisation, the Gujarat government has connected 2700

Gram Panchayats with the optical fibre network, said Gujarat Chief Minister, Vijay Rupani on October 6. The move will aid these 2700 villages connected under the BharatNet project to get easy access to 22 different government services, as reported by The Indian Express. As of now, 32,961 km optical fibre has been laid underground which will provide the data connection to the Gram Panchayats at a speed of 100 mbps free of cost. The optical cable network connects the Gram Panchayats with the state data centre at Gandhinagar. As the national daily reported, the CM said, "We are ready to connect 3500 villages. However, due to the upcoming bypolls in eight seats and the moral code of conduct, we are restricting it to 2700 villages in the first phase. By December, 8000 villages will be part of this network... This is the first time in India where people in villages are connected digitally." The state will provide as many as 22 services online at the e-gram centres in the 2700 connected villages. The services will range from those related to ration cards, widow certificate, income certificate, language-based minority certificate to nomad-denotified caste certificate, CM Krushi Sahay and various affidavits. Earlier, these services were being provided through Seva Setu programme which was initiated by CM Rupani. Of the 2700 villages connected, 745 villages are in Banaskantha, 309 in Ahmedabad and 201 in Junagadh.

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[TOP↑](#)

RAISE 2020: 'Artificial Intelligence', the Way Forward for India

In the evening on October 5, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated 'Responsible AI for Social Empowerment (RAISE) 2020.' Ravi Shankar Prasad, Union Minister for Electronics & IT, Communications & Law & Justice; Ajay Prakash Sawhney, Secretary, Ministry of Electronics & IT; Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog; Professor Raj Reddy, Turing Awardee, Padma Bhushan awardee, former Co-Chair, US President's IT Advisory Committee; Mukesh Ambani, Chairman, Reliance Industries Ltd; and Dr Arvind Krishna, CEO, IBM India were present at the occasion. The RAISE summit is a five-day summit and constitutes of 45 sessions from October 5-9, with the participation of around 300 speakers from the government, industry and academia. At the inaugural ceremony, the PM emphasised that at every step of history, India has led the world in knowledge and learning and in today's age of IT as well, India is making outstanding contributions. Further, he highlighted the government's commitment to make India a hub for IT. The PM said, "India has also proved to be the powerhouse of the global IT services industry. We will continue to digitally excel and delight the world. We want India to become a global hub for AI... Our approach to this is powered by the core principles of teamwork, trust, collaboration, responsibility and inclusivity." Adding on, the PM underlined that India's national programme for AI aims to rightfully use the tech for solving societal issues. He also highlighted that we must ensure that human intellect should always be a few steps ahead of AI. "While we discuss AI, let us also have no doubts that human

creativity and human emotions continue to be our greatest strength. They are our unique advantage over machines. Even the smartest of AI cannot solve mankind's problems without blending with our intellect", said the PM.

The IT minister in his address laid emphasis on developing AI capabilities in the country. He said that the government has set up AI centres of excellence and that more such centres will be set up to train the youth. Adding on, the minister said, "Technology at times overwhelms us, but we welcome AI to generate development and promote equity. India's resource of demographic dividend will play a key role in promoting pools of skilled professionals to take the country's AI ecosystem forward. India's application of AI will become a beacon for the world." Mukesh Ambani, while addressing the summit, said India has the power of data generated by over a billion Indians that would catapult it to becoming a leading global AI player. A generation at such a huge capacity will unleash the proliferation of digital enterprises that will create faster growth, better standards of living and superior opportunities across society, he added. Placing his point of view at the session, Dr Arvind Krishna said, "At a global level, AI will unlock USD 15.7 trillion in productivity by 2030 and it has the potential to not only boost economic growth but improve the livelihoods of millions around the world." Addressing the summit, Professor Reddy underlined the benefits of AI in bridging language gap in the country and improving resilience for managing pandemic situations. "Using AI, anyone can translate from any language to any language ride in a self-driving car and play Chess at Grandmaster level. Looking forward, we can expect AI to help eliminate lockdowns, replace one-size-fits-all education by personalizing education based on individual student capabilities and interests, watch any movie and talk to anyone in any language and empower the people at the bottom of the pyramid", pointed out Dr Arvind.

A session on the way forward for transforming the world using AI followed the inaugural ceremony. The session featured tech talks by Professor Reddy, Kant, and Sawhney. The session was moderated by Abhishek Singh, President & CEO, NeGD and CEO, MyGov. As of yet, over 61,000 stakeholders from academia, the research industry and government representatives from 140 countries have registered to participate in RAISE 2020. From agriculture to fin-tech and healthcare to infrastructure, India is witnessing rapid development in the integration of artificial intelligence. On the back of its technological prowess and the richness of its data, India can become the AI laboratory of the world and contribute to inclusive development.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 10/06/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

India & Japan Inks Pact to Strengthen Cybersecurity

To strengthen the security of cyberspace, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime

Minister, Narendra Modi has given a nod for signing a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) between India and Japan. The MoC will enhance mutual interests including capacity building in the area of cyberspace; protection of critical infrastructure; cooperation in emerging technologies; sharing information on cybersecurity threats/incidents and malicious cyber activities, as well as best practices to counter them; developing joint mechanisms for practical cooperation to mitigate cyber threats to the security of Information Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure etc. With the inking of the pact, India and Japan commit to an open, interoperable, free, fair, secure and reliable cyberspace environment. Also, both the countries commit to promoting the Internet as an engine of innovation, economic growth, and trade and commerce that would be consistent with their respective domestic laws and international obligations, and with their wide-ranging strategic partnership. India and Japan, through the MoC, affirm cooperation in the international arena including in the United Nations. The partner countries pacts to discuss and share strategies and best practices to promote the integrity of the supply chain of ICT products. Strengthening the security of ICT infrastructure through Government-to-Government and Business-to-Business cooperation and continuing dialogue and engagement in Internet governance fora is another aspect of the pact. Finally, it also supports active participation by all the stakeholders of the two countries in these fora.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 10/08/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

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/> 10/14/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

India Is Constrained by Supply and Tech Startups Are Leading the Wave for Change

It is a crucial need for the government to come up with digital rights and laws. When competing with global giants like China and the US, Indian IT the ecosystem needs more capital, said Padma Shri Awardee TV Mohandas Pai in a webinar series, 'Talk with the Legends' organized by VideoMeet, made-in-India video conferencing app. At the webinar hosted by Dr Ajay Data, Founder of VideoMeet. Mohandas further added, "India has an average population of approximately 4.5 lakh IT experts and with each year three to four lakh experts get added to the list. As skilled IT experts continue to grow, they are on the lookout for better opportunities. 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' is a dream half-achieved if the required funding is not available for the app developers; therefore, policymakers need to pay attention to introducing measures that will aid in raising capital." The discussion also focused on the ongoing digital dominance debate by Google Playstore and introduced the concepts of data sovereignty, and the threat data monopoly imposes on a nation like India. Appreciating the current government's efforts on banning Chinese apps, Pai said, "The time is certainly ideal to utilize this huge potential and ban of Chinese apps has given Indian IT experts the space to explore, experiment and conquer. India is a country constrained by supply, not by demand and tech startups are leading the wave for change." According to him, the sectors which show promising future growth trajectory and immense job opportunities are pharmaceuticals, FMCG, Digital marketing, IT, and data-driven companies. Technologies such as Big Data, AI and Machine Learning propose strong business models that can sustain via automation and engagement in customer services.

The talk enlightened the audience about changing nature of businesses, digital transformation among sectors and the zeal among young Indians to combat the slowdown caused by the pandemic. The session was attended by thousands of users via Laptop, Smartphones and Tablets on VideoMeet application. Mr Pai is currently heading the Manipal Global Education, a leading international provider of supreme quality higher education services. He has been associated with the leading Indian MNC, Infosys for more than 17 years as a senior officer and hired more than 250,000 applicants over varied domains of business consulting, IT and outsourcing services. Being at the centre of IT transformation in India, he added, "India is a country with passionate people who are not going to let the slowdown hit them; September has been a good month, and October has possibilities of getting even better. There are no easy ways to success; hard work is the ultimate deal that will lead you to the pinnacle. It is an opportune time for startups to grow and look out for

funding, and not get disheartened about the GDP fall. As the market will only get normal, once the relentless and skilled workers are back in the market with a similar kind of energy.” Dr Ajay Data, host of the interaction upon concluding an enriching discussion said, “The virtual meetings have helped us bridge the gap of physical distance to a great extent during the pandemic. It has opened up opportunities which businesses were not willing to take due to the credibility issues. Talk with Legends is one such effort in a similar direction that is helping VideoMeet to bring a variety of IT stalwarts under one umbrella for creating a fruitful and knowledgeable discourse.”

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[TOP ↑](#)

OT Security a Cybersecurity Challenge as Organizations Experienced Intrusions in Past Year

Fortinet, a global leader in broad, integrated and automated cybersecurity solutions, on July 20, announced the findings of its 2020 State of Operational Technology and Cybersecurity Report. The survey finds that operational technology (OT) leaders are highly respected in their organizations and that their teams are vital to their companies' bottom lines. Cybersecurity continues to be an integral part of their daily work and that work continues to be a struggle. The survey of OT leaders conducted by Fortinet indicates that only eight percent of respondents had seen no intrusions over the past 12 months. The finding also shows a significant percentage of organizations have not extended some elements of basic security hygiene into their OT environments. OT Infrastructures Still Lack Core Cybersecurity Protection: The majority of responding organizations reported that they had been largely unsuccessful at preventing cybercriminals from exploiting their systems. Among those surveyed, it was also found that:

90 percent have experienced at least one intrusion in the past year

72 percent have experienced three or more intrusions in the past year

26 percent have experienced six or more intrusions in the past year

The impact of these exploitations was also noted by respondents, with more than half 51 percent documenting lost productivity, 37 percent seeing operational outages impacting revenue, and 39 percent having their physical safety put at risk—a significant concern considering the inherent dangers of industrial facilities. OT leaders also noted the commonality of specific attack methods, including malware (60 percent), phishing (43 percent), hackers (39 percent), ransomware (37 percent), denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks (27 percent), and insider breaches (18 percent). OT Infrastructures Still Lack Core Cybersecurity Protection: The report also revealed gaps in many OT infrastructures that include security. For roughly 40% – 50% of those organizations surveyed, the following protocols and security features were missing:

Nearly four out of 10 do not have Security Information and Event Management

(SIEM)

Half of them do not have a Technical Operations Center (TOC)

Half of them do not have a Security Operations Center (SOC)

More than half do not have a Network Operations Center (NOC)

47 percent yet to implement Internal network segmentation

59 percent yet to implement Network access control

While more than half 58 percent of organizations are seeing their budgets increase in 2020, it should also be noted that 15 percent are instead seeing a decrease in funding, which could be attributed to COVID-19-related revenue losses. OT Leaders Have Broad Responsibilities That Often Include Cybersecurity: OT leaders typically report to higher-ranking individuals within the organization, such as a VP, COO, or the CEO. The overwhelming majority (80 percent) are also regularly involved in making cybersecurity decisions, with half having the final say in those decisions. 64 percent of OT leaders have also taken on the responsibility of embedding security within the operations process, and 71 percent are regularly involved in IT cybersecurity strategy. Because cybersecurity is a top priority for these individuals, trends show that matters related to OT security will soon become the responsibility of the CISO, if they are not already. The inevitability of this shift is highlighted by the fact that most 61 percent respondents stated that they expect their CISO to take on all OT security responsibilities in the coming year. This is likely due to the increased risk of connected OT systems and their impact on business continuity. OT Leaders Still Struggle with Security Measurements and Analysis: The survey found that between 36 percent and 57 percent of organizations lack consistency when it comes to measuring items on a list of standard metrics. Among the most commonly tracked and reported areas are vulnerabilities (64 percent), intrusions (57 percent) and cost reduction resulting from cybersecurity efforts (58 percent). Conversely, less than half of organizations (43 percent) are known to report on tangible risk management outcomes, and 39 percent to 50 percent do not routinely share basic cybersecurity data with senior executive leadership.

Respondents also cited security analysis, monitoring, and assessment tools as among the most essential features in security solutions, with the majority 58 percent ranking these specific attributes in the top three. Despite the prioritization of these features, however, 53 percent reported that security solutions hinder operational flexibility and half reported that they create more complexity. Rajesh Maurya Regional Vice President, India & SAARC at Fortinet said, "OT leaders find it challenging to deploy the right security tools and keep up with increasingly sophisticated cyber threats that await their newly-connected systems. As OT systems lose their air gaps and become integrated with IT systems, OT leaders will need to reinforce security awareness by implementing best practices, bolster their systems with centralized visibility and take a proactive approach to security to turn the tables on cybercriminals and help protect their critical OT infrastructures".

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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-earning.

From <http://www.dailynews.lk> 10/30/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

Online Counselling for Children, Adolescents

Health Promotion Bureau of Sri Lanka together with Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists Association of Sri Lanka has launched a series of counseling sessions online for children and adolescents who are presently confined to houses due to the COVID-19 epidemic. According to the Health Promotion Bureau of Sri Lanka, this move was taken considering the psychological complications that children and adolescents may go through during the COVID-19 lockdown. The Bureau said children and adolescent having to stay inside houses for a long period of time without outdoor activities and usual friends and peers may develop such mental complications and issues. The said counseling sessions in video format will be streamed via the Facebook page of Sri Lanka College of Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists from this week onward.

From <http://www.dailynews.lk> 10/30/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

Central-West Asia

ARMENIA: Provocations Hinder Development of ICT Throughout Region

Minister of Transport, Communications and High Technologies of Azerbaijan Ramin Guluzade took part in the roundtable on the role of digital technologies during and after the COVID 19 pandemic, co-organized by International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and top officials of Vietnam within ITU Virtual Digital World 2020 online event, the ministry told Trend. The roundtable was also attended by ICT officials from a number of ITU member countries. Following the opening speeches of ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao, Minister of Information and Communications of Vietnam Nguyen Manh Hung, and Director of the ITU Radiocommunication Bureau Mario Manievich, the Azerbaijani minister spoke in detail about the work being done in Azerbaijan to combat COVID-19 and minimize the impact of the pandemic.

Guluzade noted that during the pandemic, the country's citizens have been provided with high-quality transport, postal and telecommunications services, as well as Internet and mobile communications, and the resilience of the telecommunications infrastructure has been enhanced in line with demand. The minister stressed that government agencies have created new information systems, as well as special websites, a mobile application used as a citizen notification system, and a tracking system for the infected people. He said that during the pandemic, implementation of the Connected Schools and the Connected Government projects aimed to provide videoconferencing services to structures has been launched in Azerbaijan.

Guluzade stated that the country is currently fighting on two fronts: the pandemic and the military aggression of Armenia. He also added that due to the recent military provocations of Armenia, telecommunications and ICT infrastructure in several districts of Azerbaijan were either completely destroyed or heavily damaged.

“In recent days, as a result of the Armenian aggression, 63 Azerbaijani civilians, including children, were killed, and 293 civilians were injured,” he pointed out. In conclusion, the minister noted that, despite all the difficulties, the Azerbaijani government will continue its efforts to expand the development strategies. Armenian Armed Forces fired ballistic missiles using operational-tactical missile systems at Azerbaijani Gabala and Kurdamir districts from the territory of Armenia at about 09:00 (GMT +4). At about 07:00, the forces fired 3 missiles in the direction of the Siyazan district, at about 09:00 - two missiles at Gabala and one missile at Kurdamir district. The target of the Armenian Armed Forces was the civilian population and civilian infrastructure. A 17-year civilian resident of Gabala district was injured. Armenian Armed Forces launched a large-scale military attack on positions of the Azerbaijani army on the front line, using large-caliber weapons, mortars, and artillery on Sept. 27. Azerbaijan responded with a counter-offensive along the entire front. As a result of retaliation, Azerbaijani troops liberated a number of territories previously occupied by Armenia, as well as take important, strategic heights under control.

The fighting continued into October 2020, in the early days of which Armenia has launched missile attacks on Azerbaijani cities of Ganja, Mingachevir, Khizi as well as Absheron district. The conflict between the two South Caucasus countries began in 1988 when Armenia made territorial claims against Azerbaijan. As a result of the ensuing war, the Armenian Armed Forces occupied 20 percent of Azerbaijan, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region and seven surrounding districts. The 1994 ceasefire agreement was followed by peace negotiations. Armenia has not yet implemented four UN Security Council resolutions on the withdrawal of its armed forces from Nagorno Karabakh and the surrounding districts.

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[TOP↑](#)

AZERBAIJAN: By 2040 Number of Stations of Baku Metro to Double

By 2040, it is planned to increase the total length of the Baku Metro lines from the current 36.7 km to 76.2 km, and the number of stations from 25 to 51, Trend reports referring to the Baku General Plan for 2020-2040. According to the plan, the metro will continue to play a leading role in the public transport system of Baku and will provide the main communication between the most densely populated areas of the agglomeration and the central regions. The 28 May metro station will remain the

central hub of great importance to the metro network. By 2027, it is planned to separate the green and red lines at the 28 May - Jafar Jabbarli transition station, as well as create a new infrastructure.

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[TOP↑](#)

Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy to Allocate Loans to Entrepreneurs via E-Credit Platform

As of October 13, 2020, about 3,000 applications for a new business loan have been registered through the Electronic Credit Platform (e-credit) created by the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy, Trend reports citing the ministry. The applications were registered under the credit guarantee mechanism, said the ministry. According to the ministry, decisions on 346 applications have already been made to allocate loans for a total of 90 million manat (\$52.9 million). At present, other applications are being considered, and within a set period, that is, 7 or 10 working days, entrepreneurs will be informed about the results through the platform. The provision of business loans via this electronic system gives entrepreneurs such advantages as online application for business loans, simultaneous consideration of their applications in authorized credit institutions, and the Ministry of Economy, as well as tracking the status of applications in real-time. With the help of the e-credit, entrepreneurs' access to loans is expanded, and time and expenses are saved.

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[TOP↑](#)

UZBEKISTAN: Mirziyoyev Intends to Create “Digital Uzbekistan” by 2030

From August 1, 2021, all state mandatory payments, including duties, fees, and fines will be made online. Within the framework of the Presidential Decree Digital Uzbekistan - 2030, over 400 information systems, electronic services and other software products in various areas of socio-economic development will be carried out automatically. By the end of the 1st quarter of 2021, digital transformation projects will be implemented in 29 model districts and cities. At least 5 percent of the total funds of investment projects, as well as international financial institutions, foreign government financial organizations and donor countries will be directed to the “digital” modernization program. In accordance with the Decree, the “Digital Department” project will be implemented in the Ministry for the Development of Information Technologies and Communications and the Ministry of Justice, as well as in their affiliate bodies. From January 1, 2021, all administrative procedures and operational processes will be transferred to paperless electronic document management and office work.

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[TOP↑](#)

Hotels in Uzbekistan Will Provide Conditions for People with Disabilities

Hotels in Uzbekistan are now obliged to create rooms with special conditions for people with disabilities, according to the Law of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev “On the rights of persons with disabilities” signed on October 15. The law defines the basic principles for ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities. The document provides a number of issues related to the social protection of disabled people: – Organizations are committed to create conditions for ensuring access of persons with disabilities to sports, recreation and tourist facilities, including on a free basis; – The government guarantees free general secondary, extracurricular, specialized secondary and vocational education for children with disabilities; – Persons with disabilities enjoy an additional two percent quota for admission to higher educational institutions on the basis of a state grant; – Persons with disabilities enjoy the right to free spa treatment, children with disabilities are provided with medicines, medical devices and special medical nutrition products; – Persons with disabilities have the right to receive social housing on preferential terms; – Hotel owners are required to equip at least one room of the total number of rooms available to persons with disabilities who use a wheelchair, as well as to ensure the installation of displays and voice-over devices for announcements that meet the needs of persons with hearing and vision disabilities; – Local state authorities have the right to establish additional social guarantees for persons with disabilities at the expense of the local budget. The law comes into force after three months from the date of its official publication, i.e. at the beginning of the next year.

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[TOP↑](#)

IT Park Announces Startup Competition "Tourism. The Path to Innovation"

IT Park has announced a startup competition "Tourism. The path to Innovation". The total prize of the fund is 1.5 billion soums. The competition aims at supporting the country's tourism sector, as well as the development of innovations in the tourism industry, the disclosure of tourism potential and service. The new product must have the prospect of implementation and market entry, and be applicable to a specific consumer. The product or technology must have advantages over existing analogues, investment attractiveness, and economic efficiency.

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[TOP↑](#)

Uzbekistan Expands Range of Ecosystem Services

Uzbekistan develops and implements improved ways of sustainable forest management, and as a result, the range of ecosystem services is expanding, Trend reports citing nuz.uz. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) project on "Sustainable Forest Management in Mountainous and Valley Areas of Uzbekistan", implemented by the Representative Office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Uzbekistan, together with the State Forestry Committee of Uzbekistan, is aimed at sustainably maintaining the target dynamics ensuring continuous, degraded multipurpose forest management, conservation and enhancement of productivity, sustainability and biodiversity of forests. The project implementation includes four components: information management systems for sustainable forest management; multifunctional forest management leading to carbon sequestration improved forest and wood resources, and other benefits; scaling up sustainable forest management with carbon sequestration by strengthening an enabling environment; monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge sharing.

Improved methods of sustainable forest management are being developed and put into practice in cooperation with the State Forestry Committee of Uzbekistan, Forest Research Institute, design organizations, and forestry. As a result of these measures, the range of ecosystem services is expanding, joint activities are being implemented to increase the area of forests and forest cover, thereby contributing to an annual increase in carbon sequestration, and other social, economic, and environmental benefits are realized. The work is being carried out at four demonstration plots representing different types of forest ecosystems in Uzbekistan - Syrdarya, Dekhkanabad, Kitab, and Pap state forestry. The demonstration areas of the project are located in both mountainous and valley regions of the forest fund. When sustainable forest management is ensured, these areas can make an impressive contribution to reducing carbon emissions, protecting nature, and improving the living standards of local people. Removing barriers to sustainable forest management will contribute to increased forest cover, social and economic benefits from forests, and improved forestry efficiency.

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[TOP↑](#)

Uzbekistan`s Per Capita GDP Dips to 11.9 Million Soums

Uzbekistan's GDP in January-September grew 0.4%, the State Statistics Committee said on October 27. In the same period of last year, growth was 5.9%. At market prices, the GDP volume comprised \$39.4bn. The GDP price deflator increased by 111.8%. The structure of GDP was dominated by the gross value added of

manufactured goods worth \$23.2bn, with services amounting to \$13.1bn and net taxes on products \$3.1bn. Per capita GDP dropped to \$1,203, 1.5% down y/y.

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[TOP↑](#)

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Predicting Economic Outlook Difficult

Scott Morrison admits forecasting the economic outlook is difficult given the global uncertainty caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Next Tuesday's budget will include an updated set of economic forecasts for the next four years, including growth, employment and wages. "We are living in the most uncertain times any of us have seen in trying to get an understanding of what these numbers will be," the prime minister told the National Press Club in Canberra on Thursday. "In that environment, I think Treasury's task, and the Reserve Bank's task - the OECD and others - their task is very, very difficult." He said the government can do everything it can to boost the economy through the measures to be announced in the budget, but it is also vulnerable to what happens in the global economy. A spread of economic figures released on Thursday highlighted the volatility that has been running through the economy during the pandemic, and shows what impact Victoria's harsh COVID-19 lockdown has had.

Job vacancies - a pointer to future employment growth - soared by a record 59.4 per cent in the three months to August, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In the May quarter, job vacancies had collapsed by 43 per cent, the largest fall in the 40 years of the survey. It overtook the previous record fall of 27 per cent during the 1990s recession. "The large bounce in job vacancies is an encouraging sign that a recovery in labour demand is occurring," National Australia Bank economist Tapas Strickland said. Meanwhile, Melbourne's tough COVID-19 restrictions may be easing but the state capital's housing market remains under pressure. New figures show Melbourne house prices fell by a further 0.9 per cent in September and are now 5.5 per cent below a peak recorded in March. Prices are up just 3.1 per cent on the year.

This, and a soft Sydney market, dragged the national value of housing down for a fifth straight month. Nationally, house prices were down 0.1 per cent in September to be 4.8 per cent up on the year, the CoreLogic hedonic home value index showed. Still, the national fall in prices was the smallest decline since values started to reduce in May this year. Even Sydney, where prices fell 0.3 per cent in the month, the rate of decline has been consistently easing. Sydney prices are up 7.7 per cent on the year, the strongest annual rise among Australian capitals. "Prices have held up much better than feared back in March," AMP Capital chief economist Shane Oliver said. "But that's mainly because JobKeeper, the increase in JobSeeker, the bank payment

holiday and other support measures protecting heavily indebted households and property investors have headed off distressed sales."

Victoria's virus restrictions also continued to weigh on Australia's manufacturing sector, which suffered slower orders and inquiries nationwide. The Australian Industry Group performance of manufacturing index fell 2.6 points to 46.7 in September, indicating a faster pace of decline than in August. Index results below 50 points indicate the sector is in contraction. The prime minister used his press club speech to outline a \$1.5 billion budget boost for manufacturing, targeting mining, food and drink, medical products, recycling and clean energy, defence and space.

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[TOP↑](#)

More Stranded Australians Seek to Return

The number of Australians seeking to return home has almost doubled since August, an inquiry has heard. A Senate estimates committee was told on Tuesday there were 32,300 Australians who have put their names forward to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to return, as the coronavirus pandemic continues. The figure was 18,800 in late August. The committee heard DFAT had advised the number would rise as that was the usual scenario in any crisis situation. Labor senator Penny Wong asked why the number was rising while the government continued to state it was doing all it could to get Australians home. "The goal as stated by the prime minister was to get people home by Christmas," Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet deputy secretary Alison Frame said. She said a multi-agency task force including the acting chief medical officer Paul Kelly had been working on the issue with the states and territories and airlines.

Modelling had been done to get all 4000 of the Australians listed as "vulnerable" home by Christmas, as well as gradually reduce the number of other Australians seeking to return, the committee heard. A facilitated flight is due to deliver Australians to the Howard Springs facility outside Darwin on October 23. Extra accommodation capacity would be opened up with the start of the New Zealand travel bubble, Ms Frame said. Labor frontbencher Kristina Keneally questioned how Tony Abbott had been allowed to leave Australia twice while more than 30,000 were stranded. Australian Border Force boss Michael Outram said the former prime minister had been given an "auto-exemption" from restrictions because he was travelling for government business. Mr Outram said Mr Abbott, who has been working as a trade adviser to the British government, qualified as ABF considered foreign government business exempt.

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[TOP↑](#)

Cashless Welfare Card Goes Under Spotlight

Community groups are expected to speak up on the government's plan to make the cashless welfare card permanent, after it was revealed the responsible minister hasn't yet read a report evaluating the program. The Morrison government revealed plans in this month's budget to make the debit card permanent in its current trial sites, and to move welfare recipients in the NT to the system. Legislation cementing the plan is before parliament, with a Senate inquiry to put it under a microscope next Thursday. Greens senator and deputy committee chair Rachel Siewert is dumbfounded the government is moving forward with the plans before receiving an evaluation of the debit cards by the University of Adelaide. Social Services Minister Anne Ruston told a Senate estimates hearing she hasn't read the report, but the department had received a draft without some key data.

Senator Siewert says it's not good enough for the department to provide a summary of the draft before the bill is debated. "Why should we, the community, have any faith in that given their flawed summaries before?" she told AAP. "They're pushing ahead with making these permanent, with very short notice when the community hasn't got the evaluation, when we haven't got the evaluation, when the government hasn't got the evaluation." Taxpayers won't know how much making the cards permanent would cost as it's a commercial deal. The plan will affect welfare recipients in the South Australian region of Ceduna, the East Kimberley and Goldfields in Western Australia, and Bundaberg and Hervey Bay in Queensland. Almost 25,000 welfare recipients in the Northern Territory and Cape York will also be shifted on the cards from another system.

The cards freeze 80 per cent of Centrelink payments so the money can only be spent on essential items. It prohibits people from spending money on alcohol, drugs and gambling. Senator Siewert says it takes away people's sense of control. She's been told about many issues with the scheme, including rent payments being delayed, resulting in it being an issue people have to manage. The card not only attracts stigma but excludes people from making big purchases with cash. "It's people on low incomes that are more likely to use cash, because they need cash for the second-hand economy. So you're excluded from that as well," Senator Siewert said. An independent study of the cards from earlier this year found the cashless debit system does more harm than good. An auditor-general report from 2018 found the Department of Social Services inadequately monitored and evaluated the scheme, making it hard to tell if there had been a reduction in harm.

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[TOP↑](#)

SOLOMON ISLANDS: PM Sogavare Reiterates Need to Take Part

in Economic Development

Prime Minister Hon. Manasseh Sogavare, MP says there is a need for Solomon Islanders to participate actively in economic development activities. The Prime Minister made the call following an invitation to visit and talk to members of the North West Guadalcanal Development Association (NWGDA) this week. Chairperson of the NWGDA told the Prime Minister and his delegation that the association was established this year when the Government announced its Economic Stimulus Package initiative as a way to properly organise local farmers who are willing to participate in such activities. Members of the association covered different areas including copra, cocoa, noni, vegetables gardening, poultry, duck farming, fisheries, and tourism. According to the Prime Minister, the culture of dependency is becoming a norm in our society, resulting in a decline in rural based economic development activities.

“There is a need for more Solomon Islanders to take part in activities that will contribute to the economic development of the country,” he said. Prime Minister Sogavare stated that the strength of the country lies in the rural areas. Prime Minister Sogavare acknowledged that the NWGDA is a classic example of a great initiative that will motivate and engage people in activities that will bring positive economic outcomes for country. He further acknowledged that this in turn would benefit the people’s livelihood and wellbeing. He also congratulated the executive and members of the NWGDA for setting a benchmark for others to follow. PM Sogavare also took the opportunity to visit the Pisei Noni Farm owned by the Chottu family. The Prime Minister was accompanied by some members of the Cabinet and Government Caucus.

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[TOP↑](#)

Economic Impact of COVID-19: Government Braces Itself

With repatriation flights set to re-start in the coming weeks, the government is bracing itself for the huge costs involved. It is understood the cost of repatriating close to 1,100 Solomon Islands nationals home will be around SBD\$100 million. The estimated SBD\$100 million does not include risk allowance for frontline workers. An SBD\$20 million contingency warrant had to be authorized by the Finance Minister in 2020 to cater for risk allowance. But even that is not enough, as it is understood almost half of the provision was already used early this year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was before there were confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country. The government is now tightening its finances as the strain of COVID-19 hits hard on its pocket.

In an earlier statement Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance, Mckinnie

Dentana, says that his office has circulated guidelines to the whole of government, putting in measures to ensure funds or resources are prioritised to protect the country from COVID-19. Apart from repatriation costs and risk allowance to frontline workers the containment of the virus comes at a huge cost. It will cost the government SBD\$1500 per person per day for accommodation and meals. “Expected quarantine and other related costs is expected to run up to the end of December 2020 or even early 2021” Dentana told Solomon Times Online (STO) as they prepare for the upcoming repatriation exercise. The challenge for the government now is finding the resources to fund these upcoming exercises, some of which will have to be borrowed. The economic outlook is also a challenge, with the global economic shock caused by the virus still far from recovery.

Experts have already warned that the COVID-19 pandemic is a global economic shock like no other. There will be disruptions to economic activities – both on the demand side and supply side. Developing countries are especially vulnerable, the Solomon Islands is already anticipating huge drop in revenue as demand for commodities decline.

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[TOP ↑](#)

Opposition Leader on Current State of Economy

The Leader of Opposition, Hon. Matthew Wale, has expressed grave concern about the current state of the economy and the impact it is having on families and households throughout the country. The Opposition Leader said there appears to be little hope going forward, with many families and households struggling. Wale said the problems in our economy predates the covid-19 pandemic and the government has had enough time to address them but have not done so. “COVID-19 has exacerbated an already precarious economic situation. The \$309 million stimulus payments will have a short-term effect on the economy, provided it is directed at the right sectors with the highest potential impact. However, the delay in the way these payments are issued and injected into the economy are likely to dampen any such positive effects.

“The government has had ample time to prepare a budget that is attuned to the challenges and uncertainties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic,” says Wale. The Opposition Leader however stressed that government fiscal policy targeted at the immediate short term situation that does not address some of the structural issues in the economy are likely to perpetuate the hardships faced by families and households. “I am concerned about families and households being able to put food on the table, especially those in urban areas. “School fees, public transportation, electricity, water, gas, clothing are basic costs that all urban families and households have to provide for themselves, on top of putting food on the table. “But even rural households and

families are feeling the same hardships at present,” Wale said. Wale said the government should be exploring policy initiatives to create many jobs in the immediate short term, as the current approach is simply not good enough.

The Opposition Leader went on to add, “It is negligence of the highest order for the government to simply stand by and watch the deteriorating economic situation. “The current stimulus program is inadequate on its own to both sustain economic activity and provide meaningful jobs for our people in the short to midterm. Anyone closely following what the government is doing will see clearly that this government has no sense of direction”. He said the government has run out of ideas on what to do to lift the economy, and this does not give much hope to the citizens of this country. “Solomon Islands is surviving in large part thanks to the generosity of foreign donors. Citizens should be talking to their members of parliament directly to get a sense of what they are doing about this situation,” the Opposition Leader added.

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[TOP↑](#)

5、 Public Finance

Asia-Pacific

Global Agriculture and Food Security Program Donors Announce US\$300 Million to End Hunger and Malnutrition

Today during the launch of the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) Replenishment Period 2020-25, hosted by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), donors increased their contributions to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2) – a world with zero hunger. As part of GAFSP’s first replenishment period to raise US\$1.5 billion over five years, Australia, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Germany, Norway, and Spain announced over US\$300 million in new contributions to GAFSP – meeting its yearly replenishment target for 2020. This new funding will allow GAFSP to continue its support for smallholder farmers, businesses, and countries to achieve food security by launching a new Call for Proposals in early 2021 to support COVID-19 response and recovery. The World Bank Group works with partners to build food systems that can deliver adequate, safe, affordable and nutritious food to people in a sustainable way, both in times of crisis and beyond. The World Bank serves as host, Trustee, and is one of GAFSP’s implementing partners, which include regional and multilateral development banks and the Rome-based agencies.

“GAFSP encourages its partners to push the envelope in our field,” said Martien van Nieuwkoop, Global Director, Agriculture and Food Global Practice, World Bank, “For

instance, it was one of the instruments that pushed us at the World Bank to pay more attention to nutrition and the quality of food in our focus on agriculture – something that has been underlined as critical during this pandemic.” GAFSP’s replenishment comes at a critical moment as progress towards achieving SDG2 by 2030 is at risk. According to new research from the Centre for Development Research (ZEF), Cornell University, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), donors must spend an additional US\$14 billion a year on average between now and 2030, roughly double what they currently spend on aid for food security and nutrition, to end hunger sustainably. Rising global hunger and food insecurity, already compounded by climate change, conflict, and economic instability, are further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Gerd Müller, German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, expressed his strong support for GAFSP’s replenishment, “GAFSP partners are partners against hunger. GAFSP was founded during a crisis and has been successful in crisis. It was the answer to the global financial and economic crisis in 2008 and to rising food prices. In the current COVID-19 crisis, GAFSP has shown again that it can respond.” GAFSP’s event was part of a larger moment, convened by the German government, to take stock of what has worked and identify good practices in agriculture and food and nutrition security in order to meet the SDGs by 2030. GAFSP partners came together to reinforce the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships and focus on concrete actions and interventions, including how GAFSP is an effective instrument to respond to current crises. Most recently, in response to COVID-19, GAFSP allocated close to \$60 million in additional financing to 16 ongoing public sector and producer organization-led projects in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, East Africa, Ethiopia, Haiti, Honduras, Lao PDR, Mali, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda, Yemen, and Zambia.

“Australia is a long-standing supporter of GAFSP,” said Honorable Alex Hawke, Minister for International Development and the Pacific, Australia “GAFSP has a strong track record in delivering results for smallholder farmers. It can play an important role in addressing hunger in this COVID-19 period and beyond.” Launched in 2010, GAFSP delivers targeted financing for agricultural investments to strengthen resilient and sustainable agriculture systems in International Development Association (IDA) countries. From farm to fork, GAFSP-financed investments have supported more than 13 million farmers and their families, including more than 5 million women and girls, who now benefit from higher incomes, higher agricultural productivity, and better opportunities for themselves and their communities. An additional \$1.5 billion would enable GAFSP to help at least 30 countries build sustainable and resilient food systems, increase yields for at least 10 million farmers, and create more than a million on- and off- farm jobs. “In Liberia, we have seen firsthand the positive impact that our partnership with GAFSP has had in addressing food and nutrition security,” said Honorable Jeanine Cooper, Minister of Agriculture,

Liberia. “Farmers have better access to markets, inputs and new technologies, and agricultural productivity has increased. In the face of climate change and a global pandemic, we must continue to invest in our farmers to build stronger and more resilient communities.”

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[TOP↑](#)

World Bank Approves \$12 Billion for COVID-19 Vaccines

The World Bank’s Board of Executive Directors today approved an envelope of \$12 billion for developing countries to finance the purchase and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, tests, and treatments for their citizens. The financing, which aims to support vaccination of up to a billion people, is part of an overall World Bank Group (WBG) package of up to \$160 billion through June 2021 to help developing countries fight the COVID-19 pandemic. It adds new financing to the World Bank’s COVID-19 emergency response programs that are already reaching 111 countries. This financing package helps signal to the research and pharmaceutical industry that citizens in developing countries also need access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines. It will also provide financing and technical support so that developing countries can prepare for deploying vaccines at scale, in coordination with international partners. In implementing the program, the World Bank will support multilateral efforts currently led by WHO and COVAX.

“We are extending and expanding our fast-track approach to address the COVID emergency so that developing countries have fair and equal access to vaccines,” said World Bank Group President David Malpass. “Access to safe and effective vaccines and strengthened delivery systems is key to alter the course of the pandemic and help countries experiencing catastrophic economic and fiscal impacts move toward a resilient recovery.” Developing countries will have different ways to acquire and deliver approved vaccines. The approach draws on the WBG’s significant expertise in supporting large scale immunization programs for vaccine preventable diseases, as well as public health programs to tackle infectious diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases.

In addition to purchasing COVID-19 vaccines, the WBG financing will also support countries to access to COVID-19 tests and treatments, and expand immunization capacity to help health systems deploy the vaccines effectively. This includes supply chain and logistics management for vaccine storage handling, trained vaccinators, and large-scale communication and outreach campaigns to reach communities and households. The new financing builds on the broader World Bank health program, which focuses on strengthening the health systems and health service delivery. The Bank’s robust network of technical advice and implementation support capacity, already working on the ground in many developing countries with

partner agencies, will help to further strengthen these systems. The International Finance Corporation (IFC), the WBG's private sector arm, is also investing in vaccine manufacturers through its \$4 billion Global Health Platform. The aim is to encourage ramped-up production of COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics in advanced and developing economies alike—and to ensure that emerging markets gain access to available doses.

World Bank Group COVID-19 Response

The World Bank Group, one of the largest sources of funding and knowledge for developing countries, is taking broad, fast action to help developing countries strengthen their pandemic response. We are supporting public health interventions, working to ensure the flow of critical supplies and equipment, and helping the private sector continue to operate and sustain jobs. We will be deploying up to \$160 billion in financial support over 15 months to help more than 100 countries protect the poor and vulnerable, support businesses, and bolster economic recovery. This includes \$50 billion of new IDA resources through grants and highly concessional loans.

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[TOP↑](#)

World Bank Issues Sustainable Development Bonds in Scandinavian Currencies and Raises Awareness for Food Loss and Waste

The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD, Aaa/AAA) priced new Norwegian krone- and Swedish krona-denominated Sustainable Development Bonds raising approximately US\$ equivalent 550 million while engaging with Scandinavian investors to raise awareness for the importance of combatting food loss and waste. These challenges are outlined by Sustainable Development Goal 12.3: halving food waste by 2030.

The NOK 4 billion 5-year floating rate bond and SEK 1 billion 5-year fixed rate bond both mature on October 23, 2025. The bonds are the first dual-tranche issuance for IBRD in Scandinavian currencies and the first time IBRD has launched a floating rate note in NOK. Nordea Bank Abp and Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken (SEB) acted as joint lead managers for these transactions. Over 30 investors including Deka Investment, the Folksam Group, Handelsbanken Treasury, Kommunalbanken (KBN), Länsförsäkringar Treasury, Nordea Asset Management, Odin Forvaltning, Sandnes Sparebank, Sbanken ASA, SpareBank 1 SMN, SpareBank 1 SR-Bank ASA, Sparebank 1 Østlandet, Sparebanken Sør, Sparebanken Vest, Storebrand Asset Management, Storebrand Bank ASA and Union Investment Privatfonds GmbH participated in the bonds. Scandinavian investors accounted for 95% of the NOK bond and 85% of the SEK bond with German, Japanese and UK based investors rounding out the remainder of investor participation.

*“Supporting countries to address the climate and social impacts of food loss and waste is a key priority for the World Bank as we work together to eliminate extreme poverty and increase shared prosperity,” said **Jingdong Hua, World Bank Vice President and Treasurer**. “Food loss and waste affects us all. We thank Scandinavian investors for their support and are gratified to see continued attention to this challenge.” “The Covid-19 pandemic has laid bare long-standing problems in the global food system,” said **Geeta Sethi, Advisor and Global Lead for Food Systems, World Bank**. “Food loss and waste reduction is a critical, yet underutilized, tool at the disposal of countries to help them address some of these challenges while meeting climate commitments and food security goals.” “KBN, the Norwegian Agency for Local Governments, aims to be a leading financial institution in the area of climate risk, sustainability, and green finance solutions,” said **Kristine Lien, Portfolio Manager, Kommunalbanken AS**. “Through our Green Bond program, we finance the Norwegian local government sector’s transition to a climate-resilient and low-carbon society. Sustainable and more efficient food production, ensuring food security and safety alongside waste management are pressing concerns and play important roles in achieving targets in the Paris Agreement. KBN is proud to be contributing to this important work through participating in the IBRD’s Sustainable Development Bond to raise awareness for food loss and waste.”*

*“We are always on the lookout for investments that not only deliver favorable returns, but also promote sustainable social development,” said **Jerk Matero, Senior Portfolio Manager, Nordea Asset Management**. “Nordea Asset Management is pleased to support the World Bank in raising awareness of the challenges the world faces due to food loss and waste, as well as the positive impacts of tackling this global issue.” “Sparebanken Vest was pleased to participate in the World Bank’s Sustainable Development Bond to raise awareness for food loss and waste,” said **John Hopp, Head of Treasury, Sparebanken Vest**. “This bond represents both a safe and sustainable investment for Sparebanken Vest. The World Bank has been a pioneer and leader in the rapidly growing ESG investment space. At Sparebanken Vest we are extremely focused on being a leader in Norway’s movement towards sustainable banking and socially responsible business practices. Investments like this align well with the bank’s own long-term ESG strategy.”*

World Bank bonds support the financing of sustainable development projects and programs in member countries. This includes \$4.6 billion in lending that IBRD is providing to middle-income countries to address food loss and waste from farm to fork, with investments in infrastructure, access to markets and logistics, and waste management. Reductions in food loss and waste can deliver diverse dividends, including combatting hunger, supporting sustainable food production, diets and consumption, and ultimately in addressing climate change, given that losses and waste generate eight percent of annual global greenhouse gas emissions. The bond issuance comes shortly after the [launch of the World Bank’s flagship report](#), *Addressing Food Loss and Waste: A Global Problem with Local Solutions* on

the first International Day of Awareness for Food Loss and Waste Reduction on September 29, 2020 and will be followed by a virtual panel discussion on October 16, World Food Day, hosted by Nordea, including speakers from the World Bank and Nordic firms Too Good to Go and Swedbank Robur. Since March 2019, when the World Bank launched the [first Sustainable Development Bond to raise awareness of food loss and waste](#), a range of banks, asset managers, insurance companies and pension funds globally have shown their support. The World Bank has issued US\$2.7 billion equivalent in over 35 Sustainable Development Bonds with investors to raise awareness for food loss and waste challenges.

Investor Breakdown by Type

	NOK	SEK
Banks/Bank Treasuries/Corporates	81%	48%
Central Banks/Official Institutions	13%	2%
Asset Managers/Insurance/Pension Funds	6%	50%

Transaction Summary

Issuer:	World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD)	
Issuer rating:	Aaa /AAA (Moody's/S&P)	
Currency:	NOK	SEK
Maturity	5-year	5-year
Amount:	NOK 4,000,000,000	SEK 1,000,000,000
Settlement date:	October 23, 2020	October 23, 2020
Maturity date:	October 23, 2025	October 23, 2025
Issue price:	107.443%	99.975%
Issue yield:	DM+2	0.055%
Denomination:	NOK 10,000	SEK 10,000
Coupon:	3-month NIBOR + 150 bps paid quarterly	0.050% per annum
Listing:	Luxembourg Stock Exchange	Luxembourg Stock Exchange
ISIN:	XS2247545234	XS2247546554
Clearing system:	Euroclear/Clearstream	Euroclear/Clearstream
Lead managers:	Nordea Bank Abp and SEB	Nordea Bank Abp and SEB

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[TOP ↑](#)

World Bank Prices USD 6 Billion 5-Year Sustainable Development Bond

The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD, Aaa/AAA) priced today a global benchmark USD 6 billion Sustainable Development Bond maturing on October 28, 2025. Very strong demand from global investors for the USD benchmark led to an orderbook of over USD 9 billion, with nearly 180 investor orders, anchored by central banks and official institutions. Other investors included bank treasuries, asset managers, as well as pension and insurance funds. The 5-year benchmark pays a semi-annual coupon of 0.500% per annum and has an issue price of 99.887% and a final spread of 17.7 basis points over the 0.25% US Treasury September 2025 reference bond, offering investors a yield of 0.523%. Joint lead managers for this transaction are Barclays, Deutsche Bank, Morgan Stanley and RBC Capital Markets. *“This is a terrific result; the level of investor demand with our second-largest ever orderbook, reflects the strong support for the World Bank and its sustainable development mandate. This benchmark, and all of our Sustainable Development Bonds, help us serve our member countries, including efforts to respond to the health, social, and economic impacts of COVID-19 and work toward a sustainable and inclusive recovery,”* said Jingdong Hua, Vice President and Treasurer, World Bank.

Investor Distribution

By Investor Type		By Region	
Central Banks/Official Institutions	44%	EMEA	35%
Asset Managers/Insurance/Pension Funds	40%	Americas	33%
Banks/Bank Treasuries/Corporates	16%	Asia	32%

“In this challenging year it has been an honor to partner with the World Bank as they play an increasingly crucial role in helping economies respond to the coronavirus crisis. With a high quality orderbook of over USD 9 billion, investors have once again demonstrated their strong demand for the World Bank which delivered an incredibly successful USD 6 billion Sustainable Development Bond. As always, it is a privilege for Barclays to have worked on this spectacular transaction with the World Bank,” said Lee Cumbes, Head of Public Sector EMEA, Barclays. *“The World Bank has successfully launched its seventh USD benchmark in 2020, reaching an impressive size of USD 6 billion. Once again, the World Bank benefited from strong support from its investors which underscores its importance to the USD market. The quality of the orderbook was superb and illustrated the enviable position that the World Bank commands with leading central banks and real money investors across the globe. We are honored to have the occasion to work alongside the World Bank team yet again as they lead by example in the Sovereign, Supranational and Agency (SSA) market,”* said Achim Linsenmaier, Managing Director, Global Head of DCM Public Sector Origination, Deutsche Bank.

“Another strong outcome for the World Bank, capitalizing on a calm period in the market, issuing the second largest SSA USD benchmark in 2020, only behind their own 5-year benchmark printed earlier in April this year. The large deal size is

supported by a high quality orderbook amounting to over USD 9 billion, with almost 180 accounts participating, yet another testament to the appeal of the World Bank's credit. Morgan Stanley is very proud to have been involved," said Ben Adubi, Head of SSA Syndicate at Morgan Stanley. "The World Bank's very successful return to the USD market demonstrates a market leading access to liquidity that has once again reinforced its status as the benchmark USD issuer in the SSA market. The combination of credit quality, liquidity, and an opportunity to support sustainable development remain the World Bank's most effective calling cards," said Jigme Shingsar, Managing Director, RBC Capital Markets.

Transaction Summary:

Issuer:	World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD)
Issuer rating:	Aaa/AAA
Amount:	USD 6,000,000,000
Settlement date:	October 28, 2020
Maturity date:	October 28, 2025
Issue price:	99.887%
Issue yield:	0.523% semi-annual
Coupon:	0.500% semi-annual
Denomination:	USD 1,000
Listing:	Luxembourg Stock Exchange
Clearing systems:	Fedwire, Euroclear, Clearstream
ISIN:	US459058JL88
Lead managers:	Barclays, Deutsche Bank, Morgan Stanley and RBC Capital Markets
Senior co-lead managers:	Wells Fargo, NBF, BMO and CastleOak

For more information on the World Bank Group and COVID-19

www.worldbank.org/en/who-we-are/news/coronavirus-covid19

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[TOP ↑](#)

First FIN-SMART Roundtable on Financing Sustainable Maritime Transport

More than 50 leaders from the financial, public and private sectors participated in the first "Financing Sustainable Maritime Transport (FIN-SMART) Roundtable" on 27 October. The high-level virtual Roundtable was hosted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the World Bank Group. The FIN-SMART Roundtable is a platform for regular

dialogue among key maritime stakeholders on addressing the financial challenges related to the transition of shipping to a more sustainable and resilient future. The Roundtable aims to support accelerating financial flows—particularly in developing countries—for the decarbonization of the maritime sector, in line with country priorities and the goals of the IMO Initial Strategy on the reduction of GHG emissions from ships. Participants will also address the sector's COVID-19 recovery needs. Speaking at the opening of the meeting IMO Secretary-General Mr. Kitack Lim highlighted the importance of maritime transport in the global economy as an engine of growth and a driver of social development. He called for strong support to accelerate finance for sustainable maritime transport, in particular in decarbonization and sustainable recovery post COVID-19. "These will be only possible with targeted investment and strategic partnerships, particularly addressing special needs of developing countries, LDCs and SIDS," he said.

Mr. Josué Tanaka, Managing Director of Operational Strategy and Planning, Energy Efficiency and Climate Change at EBRD, said, "What brought us here today is to exchange ideas on how to support the development of the long-term decarbonization of the shipping industry and create financial products to achieve this. It is the EBRD's ambition to support the formulation of a low-carbon pathway for the shipping industry that aligns industry stakeholders, encourages the uptake of technological solutions and develops the instruments to enable the necessary investments. These activities require close cooperation based on strong partnerships." Mr. Binyam Reja, Global Transport Manager at the World Bank, said: "Shipping is not only a cornerstone to international trade, but it is also key to sustainable development. By helping unlock sustainable maritime investment and finance, FIN-SMART will both promote the decarbonization of the sector and create in-country business opportunities and jobs." During the inaugural meeting participants looked for concrete opportunities to help accelerate global financing for sustainable shipping, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Among the options were identifying priorities and investment opportunities across the maritime supply chain, as well as addressing barriers to financial flows, and harnessing support for country reform efforts.

The need for innovative and tailor-made solutions to close the existing finance gap was a main discussion topic. These include exploring new financing models and risk sharing mechanisms, showcasing existing financial solutions to promote replication and scaling-up, and increasing awareness about the potential role financial institutions can play. Participants acknowledged the critical importance of fostering collaboration and strategic partnerships to ultimately address the sustainability challenges of the maritime sector. The FIN-SMART Roundtable will meet regularly and bring in additional important stakeholders to the workstreams discussions, from the public and private sectors, civil society and international organizations. Subsequent discussions will involve multiple dedicated workstreams on the identified topics. More than 50 senior officials participated in the inaugural meeting, including representatives from IMO, EBRD and the World Bank Group; and participants from

the maritime industry, donor countries and other States.

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[TOP ↑](#)

World Bank Prices Long-dated EUR 2 Billion 30-Year Sustainable Development Bond

The World Bank (IBRD, Aaa/AAA) priced today a 30-year euro-denominated benchmark bond maturing in January 2051, raising EUR 2 billion from institutional investors around the globe to support the financing of its sustainable development activities. Credit Agricole CIB, Goldman Sachs International, and Morgan Stanley are the lead managers for the transaction. The bond will be listed on the Luxemburg Stock Exchange. The EUR 2 billion bond was oversubscribed, with an orderbook reaching over EUR 4 billion from more than 120 orders. The bond offers investors an issue price of 98.241% and a coupon of 0.125% per annum, equivalent to an annual yield of 0.185%. This equates to a spread versus the reference Bund of +36.7 basis points. "This is another milestone - the bond extends our yield curve and offers investors a new liquid 30-year reference point. We are happy to see such strong investor demand for this long-dated benchmark. This benchmark, and all of our Sustainable Development Bonds, help us serve our member countries and further the World Bank's sustainable development mission," said Jingdong Hua, Vice President and Treasurer, World Bank.

Investor Distribution

The bonds were placed mostly with investors in Germany and France, with about one third placed with investors in other European countries and the rest of the world. By investor type, the distribution was 85% with asset managers, insurance companies and pension funds, 10% with banks, bank treasuries and corporates, and 5% with central banks and official institutions.

Joint Lead Manager Quotes

"The World Bank has really hit the sweet spot of the market at the perfect time with this transaction, combining fine pricing with an orderbook of exceptional quality. The momentum in the EUR primary market has been very strong over the last few days and with increasing appetite for duration and a good window of issuance ahead of the ECB meeting and further supply to come, the issuer has managed to align all the stars and offer a rare treat to investors, another testimony of the unique attraction of the World Bank name in the market," said Eric Busnel, Deputy Global Head of Sovereign, Supranational and Agencies (SSA) Debt Capital Markets, Credit Agricole CIB. "Another tremendous outcome for the World Bank, printing their largest ever 30-year benchmark at EUR 2 billion. The high-quality orderbook, which was heavily oversubscribed, was also the largest ever the issuer has collected for a transaction in the long end of the curve. Such a successful issuance less than a week after the

pricing of their USD 6 billion 5-year USD benchmark is further indication that the World Bank's investor following is truly global and that it encompasses a very diverse range of accounts," said Ben Adubi, Head of SSA Syndicate, Morgan Stanley.

"A fantastic return to the long-end of the curve in EUR for the World Bank, achieving their largest benchmark in the 30-year tenor at EUR 2 billion. The World Bank took advantage of appetite for duration and no competing supply in the longer end of curve to launch their new on-the-run 30-year, which was immediately met with strong demand. The high quality and size of the orderbook ultimately allowed the World Bank to price at almost no new issue concession, further highlighting the World Bank's incredible global investor following," said Maud Le Moine, Head of SSA Origination, Goldman Sachs International.

Transaction Summary

Issuer:	World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD)
Issuer rating:	Aaa/AAA
Amount:	EUR 2,000,000,000
Settlement date:	November 3, 2020
Maturity date:	January 3, 2051
Issue price:	98.241%
Issue yield:	0.185% annual
Coupon:	0.125% annual
Denomination:	Euro 1,000
Listing:	Luxembourg Stock Exchange
Clearing System:	Clearstream, Euroclear
Lead managers:	Credit Agricole CIB, Goldman Sachs International, Morgan Stanley
ISIN:	XS2251330184

With annual issuances on average between US\$55-US\$65 billion, World Bank bonds support the financing of programs that further the Sustainable Development Goals. World Bank bonds are aligned with the Sustainability Bond Guidelines published by the International Capital Market Association. The World Bank is also a member of the Executive Committee of the Green Bond and Social Bond Principles. A key priority for the World Bank's capital markets' engagement is building strategic partnerships with investors to promote the importance of private sector financing in

sustainable development.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 10/27/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

COVID-19: Remittance Flows to Shrink 14% by 2021

As the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis continues to spread, the amount of money migrant workers send home is projected to decline 14 percent by 2021 compared to the pre COVID-19 levels in 2019, according to the latest estimates published in the World Bank's Migration and Development Brief. Remittance flows to low and middle-income countries (LMICs) are projected to fall by 7 percent, to \$508 billion in 2020, followed by a further decline of 7.5 percent, to \$470 billion in 2021. The foremost factors driving the decline in remittances include weak economic growth and employment levels in migrant-hosting countries, weak oil prices; and depreciation of the currencies of remittance-source countries against the US dollar. "The impact of COVID-19 is pervasive when viewed through a migration lens as it affects migrants and their families who rely on remittances," said Mamta Murthi, Vice President for Human Development and Chair of the Migration Steering Group of the World Bank. "The World Bank will continue working with partners and countries to keep the remittance lifeline flowing, and to help sustain human capital development."

The declines in 2020 and 2021 will affect all regions, with the steepest drop expected in Europe and Central Asia (by 16 percent and 8 percent, respectively), followed by East Asia and the Pacific (11 percent and 4 percent), the Middle East and North Africa (8 percent and 8 percent), Sub-Saharan Africa (9 percent and 6 percent), South Asia (4 percent and 11 percent), and Latin America and the Caribbean (0.2 percent and 8 percent). The importance of remittances as a source of external financing for LMICs is expected to amplify in 2020, even with the expected decline. Remittance flows to LMICs touched a record high of \$548 billion in 2019, larger than foreign direct investment flows (\$534 billion) and overseas development assistance (about \$166 billion). The gap between remittance flows and FDI is expected to widen further as FDI is expected to decline more sharply. "Migrants are suffering greater health risks and unemployment during this crisis," said Dilip Ratha, lead author of the Brief and head of KNOMAD. "The underlying fundamentals driving remittances are weak and this is not the time to take our eyes off the downside risks to the remittance lifelines."

This year, for the first time in recent history, the stock of international migrants is likely to decline as new migration has slowed and return migration has increased. Return migration has been reported in all parts of the world following the lifting of national lockdowns which left many migrant workers stranded in host countries. Rising unemployment in the face of tighter visa restrictions on migrants and refugees

is likely to result in a further increase in return migration. "Beyond humanitarian considerations, there is a strong case to support migrants who work with host communities on the frontline in hospitals, labs, farms, and factories," said Michal Rutkowski, Global Director of the Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice at the World Bank. "Supportive policy responses by host countries should include migrants, while origin or transit countries should consider measures to support migrants returning home. Origin countries must find ways of supporting returning migrants in resettling, finding jobs or opening businesses. The surge in return migration is likely to prove burdensome for the communities (to which migrants return) as they must provide quarantine facilities in the immediate term and support housing, jobs, and reintegration efforts in the medium term.

According to the World Bank's Remittance Prices Worldwide Database, the global average cost of sending \$200 was 6.8 percent in the third quarter of 2020, largely unchanged since the first quarter of 2019. This is more than double the Sustainable Development Goal target of 3 percent by 2030. The cost was the lowest in South Asia (5 percent) and highest in Sub-Saharan Africa (8.5 percent). Banks are the costliest channel for sending remittances, averaging 10.9 percent, followed by post offices at 8.6 percent, money transfer operators at 5.8 percent, and mobile operators at 2.8 percent. Despite being the cheapest, money transfer and mobile operators face increasing hurdles as banks close their accounts to reduce risk of non-compliance with anti-money laundering (AML) and combating terrorism financing (CFT) standards. To keep these channels open, especially for lower-income migrants, AML/CFT rules could be temporarily simplified for small remittances. Further, strengthening mobile money regulations and identity systems will improve transparency of transactions. Facilitating digital remittances would require improving access to bank accounts for mobile remittance service providers as well as senders and recipients of remittances.

The World Bank Group, one of the largest sources of funding and knowledge for developing countries, is taking broad, fast action to help developing countries strengthen their pandemic response. It is supporting public health interventions, working to ensure the flow of critical supplies and equipment, and helping the private sector continue to operate and sustain jobs. The WBG is making available up to \$160 billion over a 15-month period ending June 2021 to help more than 100 countries protect the poor and vulnerable, support businesses, and bolster economic recovery. This includes \$50 billion of new IDA resources through grants and highly concessional loans and \$12 billion for developing countries to finance the purchase and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

Regional Remittance Trends

Remittance flows to the East Asia and Pacific region are projected to fall by 11 percent in 2020 to \$131 billion due to the adverse impact of COVID-19. China and the Philippines are the region's top recipients, while as a share of GDP, the top

recipients are Tonga and Samoa. Remittance costs: The average cost of sending \$200 to the region increased slightly to 7.1 percent in the third quarter of 2020. The five lowest-cost corridors in the region averaged 2.5 percent, while the five highest-cost corridors, excluding South Africa to China, which is an outlier, averaged 13.3 percent. Remittances to countries in Europe and Central Asia are estimated to fall by 16 percent to \$48 billion as the pandemic and fall in oil prices are likely to have wide-ranging impacts on economies, with nearly all countries in the region posting double-digit declines of remittances in 2020. The depreciation of the Russian ruble is also likely to weaken outward remittances from Russia. Remittance costs: The average cost of sending \$200 to the region fell slightly to 6.5 percent in the third quarter of 2020 from 6.6 percent a year ago.

Remittance flows into Latin America and the Caribbean are expected to be about \$96 billion in 2020, a decline of 0.2 percent over the previous year. Remittances to Colombia, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic registered positive year-on-year growth between the months of June and September after falling sharply in April and May. Flows to the region's top recipient, Mexico, held up in part because migrants were employed in essential services in the United States and eligible migrants also benefitted from U.S. stimulus programs. Remittance costs: The average cost of sending \$200 to the region rose slightly to 5.8 percent in the third quarter. In many smaller remittance corridors, costs continue to be high. For example, the cost of sending money to Haiti and the Dominican Republic exceeds 8 percent.

Remittances to the Middle East and North Africa region are projected to fall by 8 percent in 2020 to \$55 billion due to the projected persistence of the global slowdown. Remittance inflows to Egypt, the region's largest recipient, have so far been countercyclical to the crisis, as Egyptian workers abroad increase one-off transfers to their families back home. Flows are likely to eventually decline due to lower oil prices and slower economic growth in the Gulf countries, with major remittance-receiving countries likely to register falls in remittances. Remittance costs: The cost of sending \$200 to the region rose in the third quarter of 2020 to 7.5 percent, compared with 6.8 percent a year ago. Costs vary greatly across corridors: the cost of sending money from high-income OECD countries to Lebanon continues to be in the double digits.

Remittances to South Asia are projected to decline by around 4 percent in 2020 to \$135 billion. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, the impact of the global economic slowdown has been somewhat countered by the diversion of remittances from informal to formal channels due to the difficulty of carrying money by hand under travel restrictions. Pakistan also introduced a tax incentive whereby withholding tax was exempted from July 1, 2020, on cash withdrawals or on the issuance of banking instruments/transfers from a domestic bank account. Bangladesh registered a large increase in remittance inflows in July after the floods that inundated a quarter of its landmass. Remittance costs: At just under 5 percent in the third quarter of 2020, South Asia was the least costly region to send \$200 to. But costs are well over 10

percent in some corridors (from Japan, South Africa and Thailand, and from Pakistan to Afghanistan).

Remittances to Sub-Saharan Africa are expected to decline by around 9 percent in 2020 to \$44 billion. Within the region, remittances to Kenya have so far stayed positive, though flows are likely to eventually decline in 2021. All major remittance-receiving countries will likely see a decline of remittances. As the COVID-19 pandemic affects both destination and origin countries of Sub-Saharan migrants, the fall in remittances is expected to further lead to an increase in food insecurity and poverty. Remittance costs: Sending \$200 remittances to the region cost on average 8.5 percent in the third quarter of 2020, representing a modest decrease compared with 9 percent a year ago. Sub-Saharan Africa is the costliest region to send remittances to. The promotion of digital technology, combined with a regulatory environment promoting competition in the remittances market and review of AML/CFT regulations, are essential to lowering remittances fees for the region. Detailed regional and global analysis is available in the Migration and Development Brief 33 available on www.knomad.org and blogs.worldbank.org/peoplemove. Brief 33 highlights developments related to migration-related Sustainable Development Goal indicators for which the World Bank is a custodian: increasing the volume of remittances as a percentage of gross domestic product (17.3.2), reducing remittance costs (10.c.1), and reducing recruitment costs for migrant workers (10.7.1).

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[TOP↑](#)

East Asia

CHINA: \$200 Million in ADB Loans to Demonstrate a Low-Carbon and Resilient City Growth Model in Xiangtan

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved \$200 million in loans to support Xiangtan municipal government, in the People's Republic of China (PRC), as it shifts to low-carbon, resilient, and smart city development. "Xiangtan is an old industrial city undergoing rapid urbanization and industrial transformation that is committed to achieving carbon peaking by 2028," said ADB Senior Urban Development Specialist Na Won Kim. "To support this target, the assistance will take a sector development program approach to bring well-designed low-carbon and climate-resilient infrastructure, information, and knowledge platforms, and policy reforms that will provide an enabling environment and the right incentives to stimulate low-carbon behaviors and practices." Xiangtan's growth has led to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions increasing by 4.5% a year during 2005-2016. The municipal government has taken measures to reduce carbon emissions, including closing down heavily polluting industrial plants, promotion of low-carbon technologies, deployment of clean vehicles, restoration of wetlands and forests, and expansion of green areas.

But coal contributes 96% of the energy sources supplied to the grid in Xiangtan while renewable energy resources such as solar and wind power are limited. Much more effort will be needed to substantially reduce GHG emissions to meet the 2028 target without impacting economic growth.

The Xiangtan Low-Carbon Transformation Sector Development Program will help the municipal government transform public transport through 60 kilometers of dedicated bus lanes with transit signal priority, real-time bus information, transforming street layout for better walking and cycling access, redesigning the access at two railway stations for easy mode-shift, and improving road safety at school zones. The municipal government will construct a new hospital with a green building certificate, including use of passive building design and integrating advanced clean energy technologies, water-saving features, and extensive flood resilient measures using ecosystem-based solutions. An unused government building will also be retrofitted to house the Asia Low-Carbon Training Center, showcasing green and low-carbon building techniques and features. The transformative impacts of physical investment will be augmented by smart city platforms, including intelligent transport, industrial energy and utility management, building energy management, early flood warning, and environmental monitoring assessment systems using information and communication technology and the internet of things. Policy actions set the vision and targets for Xiangtan's low-carbon development, and provide enabling mechanisms, regulations, and guidelines to sustain low-carbon and resilient city growth. The Xiangtan municipal government will run the Asia Low-Carbon Training Center to share their low-carbon transformation experience and knowledge with other PRC cities and elsewhere in Asia.

ADB is providing two loans—\$150 million for the project activities and a \$50 million policy-based loan to be paid in two tranches contingent on completion of key reforms to drive low-carbon innovations and system transformation. The program's total cost is at \$395.88 million, of which \$195.88 million is provided by the PRC government. The estimated completion date for activities under the project loan is the end of 2025. 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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[TOP↑](#)

New Guideline Paves Way for Healthier Capital Market

With a new guideline aimed at improving the quality of listed companies, China is reinforcing efforts to better leverage the role of the capital market to support the real economy. The guideline, recently unveiled by the State Council, provides "comprehensive, systematic and targeted arrangements" for improving the quality of

listed companies, said Yan Qingmin, vice chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC), at a press briefing Monday. It details 17 measures in six areas including better corporate governance, perfecting the exit mechanism and raising penalties for illegal acts. "The guideline will facilitate stable and healthy development of the capital market and help it better serve quality development of the real economy," said Yan. While non-financial listed companies account for half of the total profits of China's major enterprises, the quality of listed firms still falls short of the mark, he said, adding that COVID-19 has affected the operation of some companies and posed new challenges.

As of Oct. 9, there were more than 4,000 listed companies on the Chinese mainland, with a total market value of around 74 trillion yuan (about 11 trillion U.S. dollars), official data showed. As the cornerstone of the capital market, listed firms now face some prominent issues such as share-pledging risks, fund misappropriation and irregular guarantee, according to Yan. The guideline demands strengthening risk control mechanism, setting deadlines for resolving such problems and increasing policy support in response to major emergencies. Previous efforts to tackle the problems proved effective. For instance, outstanding share-pledged financing was down from its peak by over 25 percent by the end of August, and all other major share-pledging risk indicators showed a turnabout, according to Li Ming, a CSRC official in charge of overseeing listed firms. To crack down on market irregularities, the guideline mandates higher penalties for fraudulent issuance of shares, illegal information disclosure, market manipulation and insider trading.

A special campaign will be launched to enhance corporate governance of listed firms, promote best practices and increase transparency, Yan said. China's major bourses have promised to step up various efforts. Shanghai Stock Exchange said in a statement it will further reform and improve underlying institutions such as those for registration-based initial public offerings (IPOs), market exits, mergers and restructuring, and refinancing. The quality of listed firms has become more important as the Chinese economy will place heavier reliance on direct financing rather than bank lending, said Dong Dengxin, a finance expert with the Wuhan University of Science and Technology. Meanwhile, with progress in the registration-based IPO system, China's capital market is becoming more tolerant of listed companies, with fewer administrative restrictions. Dong said this requires stronger protection of investors' interests. "Only by enhancing corporate governance and quality of operation of listed firms can investors be better protected," he said.

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[TOP ↑](#)

JAPAN: BOJ Offers Brighter View on Regional Japan

The Bank of Japan raised its economic assessment for most of the country's nine

regions to say they were starting to pick up, underscoring the central bank's growing conviction the economy is emerging from the worst hit of the coronavirus pandemic. BOJ Governor Haruhiko Kuroda also said the world's third largest economy was likely to continue recovering thanks in part to the boost from fiscal and monetary stimulus measures. The upbeat view reinforces market expectations the BOJ will hold off ramping up stimulus for now, and focus on pumping money into the economy with existing lending programs. "Once the impact of the coronavirus pandemic subsides globally, Japan's economy is likely to continue improving further as overseas economies resume steady growth," Kuroda said in a speech to a quarterly meeting of the BOJ's branch managers on Thursday.

In a report released after the meeting, the central bank raised its assessment for eight of Japan's nine areas including regions home to major manufacturing hubs such as Osaka and Nagoya. It maintained its assessment for the remaining region. "While economic conditions remain severe in many regions due to the pandemic, they are starting to rebound or show signs of a pick-up as business activity gradually resumes," it said. The BOJ next meets for a rate review on Oct. 28-29, when it also releases fresh quarterly economic and price projections. Japan suffered its biggest economic slump on record in the second quarter as the pandemic crippled demand. Analysts expect any rebound to remain modest as fears of a second huge wave of infections weigh on consumption. The BOJ expanded stimulus in March and April by ramping up asset buying and creating a new lending facility to ease corporate funding strains. It has kept policy steady since then.

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[TOP↑](#)

BOJ to Start Feasibility Study on Digital Currency in FY 2021

The Bank of Japan said Friday it will start a feasibility study on digital currency in fiscal 2021 beginning in April as the expansion of cashless payments and cryptocurrencies has forced central banks to consider their response to technological innovations in recent years. The BOJ currently has no plan to issue digital currency. But it will collaborate with other central banks and fintech firms in the study. The BOJ "will explore general purpose CBDC in a more concrete and practical way by conducting experiments, rather than confining itself to conceptual research as before," it said in a statement, referring to central bank digital currency. "The bank considers it important to prepare thoroughly to respond to changes in circumstances in an appropriate manner." So far, no major central banks have officially decided to issue CBDC. However, Peoples' Bank of China Governor Yi Gang said in May that the Chinese central bank has started trial payments of digital yuan in some cities, a move seen as an apparent challenge to the international currency system based on the U.S. dollar.

The BOJ said demand for cash in circulation will not drop significantly for the time being. But the central bank said it "might provide general purpose CBDC as a payment instrument alongside cash" if public demand for cash weakens and "if private digital money will not substitute for the functions of cash sufficiently." Following the feasibility study, the BOJ plans to go into further trials that would also involve payment service providers and end users. In the private sector, three Japanese megabanks and companies providing cashless payment established a consortium in June to study interoperable electronic money that could lead to the introduction of the "digital yen." The BOJ in July set up a new division to explore the possible issuance of digital currency. In a related development, seven major central banks, including the BOJ, the U.S. Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank, and the Bank for International Settlements said Friday that CBDC could promote innovative payments. CBDC could "promote more resilient, efficient, inclusive and innovative payments" if risks are effectively overcome, the lenders said in their first joint report on CBDC.

The seven central banks -- the BOJ, the Fed, the ECB, the Bank of England, the Bank of Canada, Swiss National Bank and Sweden's Sveriges Riksbank -- had jointly launched their study on CBDC in January. They also agreed on other foundational principles, such as that CBDC should "do no harm" to monetary and financial stability and "coexist with cash and other types of money in a flexible and innovative payment ecosystem." The report also said "a CBDC must be convenient and available at very low or no cost to end users," while the system should be "extremely resilient to operational failure and disruptions," possibly triggered by cyberattacks and other threats, and ensure effective protection from counterfeiting. The report said transfers between CBDCs could be realized through international collaboration from the outset, but it also said "national priorities and domestic circumstances will determine designs (of CBDCs)." There will be no "one size fits all" CBDC, it added.

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[TOP↑](#)

SOUTH KOREA: Approving US\$200 Mln in Aid for Developing Nations Fighting Pandemic

South Korea's finance ministry said Monday it has approved US\$200 million in health care aid for three Asian nations to better combat the coronavirus pandemic. The approval is part of the nation's plans to provide more than \$400 million in loans and grants to developing nations this year to help them push for health projects against the novel coronavirus. The three nations are the Philippines, Cambodia and Bangladesh. The fund is expected to help developing nations build testing and tracing systems to fight the virus and expand containment facilities in the nations, the ministry said. Globally, more than 42 million people have been infected with the new coronavirus, and more than 1.1 million people have died, according to a tally by

South-East Asia

INDONESIA: ADB Commits to Work with Indonesia for Sustainable Recovery from the Pandemic

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) commits to support Indonesia in achieving inclusive and sustainable recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and boosting its medium-term economic outlook. As part of this commitment, ADB has launched a new publication on green recovery in Southeast Asia, as economies, including Indonesia, are taking a wide range of concerted measures to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and guide recovery. The publication urges policy makers to use green and innovative financing approaches to help catalyze public and private infrastructure investments that are required to bolster recovery. ADB's recently adopted its 2020–2024 Country Partnership Strategy for Indonesia focuses on improving people's well-being, accelerating economic recovery, and strengthening resilience. The strategy aims to help Indonesia emerge stronger from the COVID-19 pandemic, with focus on building back better and greener, catalyzing investment and jobs, and boosting the economic outlook. It has a wide range of projects and programs involving financial and knowledge support and technical assistance to support Indonesia. "In this context and on the back of our ongoing and planned support to Indonesia, ADB believes that the adoption of the omnibus bill on job creation, along with other appropriate policy, institutional and regulatory measures, will help Indonesia's recovery and boost the medium-term economic outlook, including for investment and quality jobs," said ADB Country Director for Indonesia Winfried Wicklein. "At the same time, ADB is looking forward to supporting the Government of Indonesia towards achieving more equitable labor market outcomes and addressing concerns on environmental sustainability."

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[TOP↑](#)

Indonesia's State Income Recorded at 78.7 Bln USD till September

Indonesia's state income was recorded at 1,159 trillion rupiah (some 78.7 billion U.S. dollars) till Sept 30, or 68.2 percent of the 2020 state budget totaling 1,699.9 trillion rupiah, Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati said here Monday. According the minister, the state income dropped by 13.7 percent based on the year-on-year (yoy)

basis compared to some 91.1 billion U.S. dollars in the same period last year when the income grew by 2.25 percent compared to that in September 2018. "The state income is still in accordance with what we projected. The income is under pressure because businesses and tax payments are under pressures," Indrawati told a press conference. The minister pointed out that the state income decreased as the tax revenues contracted by up to 14.1 percent (yoy), namely some 60.6 billion U.S. dollars or 63.5 percent of the target in the 2020 state budget, which was expected to reach about 95.4 billion U.S. dollars. The minister further said that the state income was also supported by non-tax revenues totaling some 17.7 billion U.S. dollars or 88.7 percent of the target in the 2020 presidential regulation no. 72, namely 19.9 billion U.S. dollars. In addition, the state income from grants was recorded at some 387.1 million U.S. dollars significantly surpassing the target as stated in the 2020 presidential regulation no. 72, amounting to some 88.3 million U.S. dollars, she added.

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[TOP↑](#)

MYANMAR: \$30 Million ADB Loan to Scale Up COVID-19 Health Response

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$30 million loan to boost Myanmar's response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, especially in areas with a high minority population but inadequate access to health care and other essential services. The loan, as additional financing to the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Health Security Project, will help the government make immediate investments in 31 district and township hospitals across the country, including improving clinical care and management, infection prevention control, and human resource capacity to help the health system respond to COVID-19 and other future public health threats. "ADB's fast-track financing through the ongoing health security project will help scale up the government's response to COVID-19 based on its health sector continuity plan, which aims to ensure that regular health services continue to be provided during the pandemic," said ADB Senior Social Sector Specialist Rikard Elfving. "The investment will focus on hospitals serving vulnerable groups, including minority populations challenged by poverty and inadequate access to essential services such as health care. It will help the Ministry of Health and Sports ensure the efficient delivery of resources to district and township hospitals and improve their ability to respond to public health threats."

The additional financing will improve clinical management and services by providing emergency departments with equipment for the assessment, isolation, and treatment of COVID-19 patients. The project will also upgrade laboratory and hospital equipment, including for the supply of oxygen, electricity, water, and other essential inputs. The loan will help hospitals prevent and control infection by improving

isolation facilities and medical waste management systems. Hospital staff will be provided with personal protective equipment (PPE) and trained in assessing patients with respiratory infections and clinical management for COVID-19 and related illnesses. They will also receive training on detecting gender-based violence and associated referral options. The new assistance will complement the \$250 million COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support Program ADB approved on 21 August, which was funded through the COVID-19 pandemic response option (CPRO) under ADB's Countercyclical Support Facility. CPRO was established as part of ADB's \$20 billion expanded assistance for developing member countries' pandemic response. Earlier this year ADB committed \$6.6 million from the GMS Health Security Project to help strengthen Myanmar's early response to the pandemic, such as the purchase of medical equipment and supplies, including thermal scanners, PPE, laboratory equipment, and respiratory ventilators for intensive care.

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[TOP↑](#)

Myanmar's Border Trade Reaches over 10.5 Bln USD in FY 2019-20

Myanmar's trade with foreign countries through border gates reached over 10.5 billion U.S. dollars in the previous fiscal year (FY) 2019-2020 which ended on Sept. 30, according to the latest figures released by the Commerce Ministry. Over the year, the country's export via border gates earned over 7.1 billion U.S. dollars while its import shared over 3.4 billion U.S. dollars. According to the ministry's figures, the last fiscal year's border trade increased by over 294 million U.S. dollars, compared to the same period of FY 2018-2019 when it recorded over 10.2 billion U.S. dollars. During the period, Muse topped the list of border checkpoints with the most trade value of over 4.8 billion U.S. dollars, followed by Heekhee with over 2 billion U.S. dollars, the ministry's figures said. The country conducts border trade with neighboring China through Muse, Lweje, Kanpikete, Chinashwehaw and kengtung, with Thailand via Tachilek, Myawady, Kawthoung, Myeik, Hteekhee, Mawtuang and Maese gates, with Bangladesh via Sittwe and Maungtaw and with India through Tamu and Reed border gates. Myanmar mainly exports agricultural, animal and marine products, minerals, forest products, manufacturing goods and others while capital goods, intermediate goods and consumer goods are imported to the country.

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[TOP↑](#)

\$484 Million ADB Loan to Fund New GMS Expressway in Myanmar

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$483.8 million loan to build a

64-kilometer (km) expressway connecting the capital of Bago region and the township of Kyaikto in Mon state in Myanmar and support economic development along the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) East–West Economic Corridor. “The Second GMS Highway Modernization Project will help the government build the four-lane, climate-resilient expressway and help ensure more efficient, safer movement of goods and people along the GMS economic corridor,” said ADB Senior Transport Specialist Shihiru Date. “The project will help strengthen Myanmar’s connectivity with Thailand and other countries along the GMS corridor and promote trade, tourism, and investment, as well as climate resilience and environmental sustainability.” The Government of Myanmar aims to increase investment in transport infrastructure to 3% of gross domestic product by 2030, up from an average of 1% from 2005 to 2018. The project will help improve the ability of the Ministry of Construction to manage the country’s major toll highways and implement social and environmental safeguards. It will include a new community-based road safety program for villagers along the Bago–Kyaikto corridor. The expressway will include a 2.3-km bridge across the Sittaung River. The Japan International Cooperation Agency will finance the New Sittaung Bridge construction with a 27.78 billion Japanese yen (\$254.8 million equivalent) loan. Transport has been a key sector of ADB’s support for Myanmar since 2012, with a focus on GMS corridors and rural–urban links, among others.

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[TOP↑](#)

PHILIPPINES: Lower Chamber of Congress Approves Proposed 2021 Budget to Help Fight COVID-19

The House of Representatives of the Philippines on Friday approved the proposed a 4.5-trillion-peso (92-billion-U.S. dollar) national budget for 2021 to assist the country's efforts to fight COVID-19. The members of the lower chamber passed the proposed budget for 2021 on the third and final reading with 257 yes votes, six no votes, and zero abstention. The proposed budget will be transmitted later this month to the Senate for more scrutiny before it will be sent to President Rodrigo Duterte for approval. The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) said the proposed 2021 budget aims to sustain the government's efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic by further strengthening the healthcare systems, ensuring food security, increasing investments in public and digital infrastructure, and helping communities cope with the impact of the pandemic. The DBM said the theme "Reset, Rebound and Recover: Investing for resiliency and sustainability" this year is "consistent with the Duterte administration's goal of saving lives and protecting communities while making different sectors of the economy stronger and more agile." According to the DBM, the 2021 budget is 9.9 percent higher than the 2020's 4.1-trillion-peso (84-billion-U.S. dollar) national budget and equivalent to 21.8 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). The Philippines continues to grapple with an increasing

number of coronavirus cases despite the strict seven-month lockdown measures the government imposed in mid-March to contain the spread of the virus. The Philippines has confirmed 351,750 COVID-19 cases, including 6,531 deaths and 294,865 recoveries.

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[TOP↑](#)

THAILAND: Central Bank Eyes Additional Debt Restructuring Package amid Grim Economic Outlook

The Thai central bank on Wednesday said in its weekly press conference that it was working out an additional debt restructuring package using targeted measures to help borrowers in a grim economy hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The additional package is intended to improve the efficiency of existing measures and address borrowers' problem in a targeted manner, said Mathee Supapongse, assistant governor of the Bank of Thailand (BOT). The package will include a debt holiday, soft loans and other related measures, said Mathee. The BoT had previously rolled out two phases of debt relief measures, with the first having started in April and the second from July. The first-phase program is due to expire on Oct. 22, while the second phase will expire at the end of this year. The BoT has discussed with financial institutions about borrowers' debt-servicing ability, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and retail customers, to evaluate the outlook following the upcoming end of the second-phase debt relief measures, said Mathee. He said the Thai economy continued to see uneven economic recovery, as the debt repayment ability of low-income earners, SME businesses and tourism operators are still in a fragile stage. Therefore the central bank is encouraging financial institutions to help customer segments with debt restructuring and the central bank will offer incentives for this assistance, Mathee said. Meanwhile, Don Nakornthab, senior director for BoT's Economic and Policy Department, said the central bank forecast that Thailand's economic recovery will take at least two years to return to the pre-pandemic era. The sluggish economic recovery will mainly affect tourism and export sectors, Don said.

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[TOP↑](#)

Thai Central Bank to Ease Overseas Investment Rules to Temper Thai Baht

The Thai central bank on Wednesday said in its weekly press conference that it will ease overseas investment rules by early next year, allowing more capital outflow, to temper down the strong Thai baht currency. The Bank of Thailand (BoT) will increase the limit on foreign currency deposits and allow money transfers between foreign

currency deposits held by individuals and companies, said Mathee Supapongse, assistant governor of the Bank of Thailand (BOT). Mathee said that the pledge to ease rules on capital outflow follows the Thai baht's surge from a 17 month low in April that threatens to create more challenges for the Thai economy, which relies heavily on tourism and export. These factors have been hurt by the virus pandemic, and continued baht gains pose a risk to export competitiveness, he said. "We're looking to create an ecosystem that will make it easier for Thai investors to invest abroad," Mathee said. "Therefore this new measure will not only help reduce the pressure on the baht but also diversify risks." Mathee said that the Thai baht had rallied more than 6 percent from this year's low in April, prompting the central bank to warn that if the currency were to strengthen quickly, it could hurt the nation's economic recovery. "Thailand has been grappling with currency strength for a number of years," Mathee said, adding "Therefore the proposed changes to capital outflows rules will provide flexibility to all categories of investors."

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[TOP↑](#)

South Asia

BHUTAN: ADB Loan to Sustain Financial Inclusion, Economic Diversification

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$30 million loan to support Bhutan's policy reforms in financial market development. These reforms and improvement of the technical capacity of regulatory and financial institutions aim to increase private sector access to the financial market, improve financial inclusion, and enable economic diversification in Bhutan. "The ultimate goals of these reforms are greater stability, efficiency, and inclusiveness so that the financial market could play its pivotal role in development," said ADB Financial Sector Specialist for South Asia Manohari Gunawardhena. "The program will address financial sector deficiencies and vulnerabilities and help improve compliance through planned implementation of risk-based supervision." The objectives of the program are aligned with key result areas of Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan, 2018–2023, such as macroeconomic stability, economic diversification, improving access to finance, and poverty reduction. Specifically, it will support the government's Financial Sector Development Action Plan, which covers the banking system, nonbank financial institutions, financial inclusion, and financial literacy. The loan will build on the first \$30 million subprogram extended by ADB and implemented from January 2018 to October 2019. ADB has been instrumental in helping strengthen Bhutan's financial system, including the central banking role of Royal Monetary Authority of Bhutan as the single regulator of banks and nonbanks through the adoption of the Financial Institution Act of 1992. 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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[TOP↑](#)

ADB, India Sign \$270 Million Loan to Improve Urban Services in 64 Madhya Pradesh Small Cities

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India have signed a \$270 million loan to develop water supply and integrated storm water and sewage management infrastructure and strengthen capacities of urban local bodies for improved service delivery in the state of Madhya Pradesh. This is an additional financing to scale up the scope of the ongoing Madhya Pradesh Urban Services Improvement Project, which was approved in 2017 with a \$275 million loan. It will expand the outcome of the current project by covering additional 64 small cities, benefiting 185,000 households that consist of about 1.3 million people. The signatories to the loan agreement were Sameer Kumar Khare, Additional Secretary (Fund Bank and ADB), Department of Economic Affairs in India's Ministry of Finance, who signed on behalf of the Government of India, and Takeo Konishi, Country Director of ADB's India Resident Mission, who signed for ADB. "The project will improve livability in selected cities with provision of universal access to basic water and sanitation services for the residents," said Mr. Khare after signing the loan agreement. "This is aligned to the vision of the Government of Madhya Pradesh to improve urban infrastructure services with universal coverage of piped water supply in all urban local bodies by 2025."

"Through this project, ADB will continue innovative approaches and good practices of the ongoing project including universal coverage with 100% household metering, full operation and maintenance cost recovery, and reducing nonrevenue water," said Mr. Konishi. "The provision of inclusive water and sanitation services to the urban poor will help achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6 or access to clean water and sanitation for all." The project will receive support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, specifically for the integration of Citywide Inclusive Sanitation principles into the planning, design, implementation, operation, and maintenance of the sanitation subprojects. As in the previous loan, the project will support the continued institutional strengthening and capacity building of the Urban Development and Housing Department and Madhya Pradesh Urban Development Company Limited. The project will pilot an integrated urban development approach to improve urban service delivery and infrastructure of two urban local bodies. ADB's technical support will provide a significant model that can be used to replicate and scale up the enhancement of urban livability in other localities.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 10/13/2020

[TOP↑](#)

ADB, India Sign \$300 Million Loan to Develop Rajasthan's Secondary Towns

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India have signed a \$300 million loan to finance inclusive and sustainable water supply and sanitation infrastructure and services in 14 secondary towns of the state of Rajasthan. The signatories to the Rajasthan Secondary Towns Development Sector Project were Sameer Kumar Khare, Additional Secretary (Fund Bank and ADB), Department of Economic Affairs in the Ministry of Finance, who signed for the Government of India, and Takeo Konishi, Country Director of ADB's India Resident Mission, who signed for ADB. "The project aims to provide better quality and more sustainable water supply and sanitation (WSS) services in the project towns that will improve quality of life in these towns, including for the poor and vulnerable," said Mr. Khare after signing the loan agreement. "The investments in WSS with 10-year operation and maintenance contracts will ensure improved and sustainable service delivery in line with the state government's urban sector development plan."

"ADB incorporated practical lessons from the three earlier urban sector projects it has funded in Rajasthan since 2000 and included innovations such as the use of smart technologies and cost-effective systems," said Mr. Konishi. "The project will empower urban local bodies and strengthen their institutional capacity, deepen sector reforms, and build resilience of communities to manage health pandemics." Through the project, water supply systems in at least eight project towns are expected to improve by 2027, benefiting more than 570,000 people. Citywide sanitation systems will benefit about 720,000 people in at least 14 secondary towns. 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. Enhanced support to women and vulnerable groups will be provided through skills training, paid internships, and community engagement and awareness activities.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 10/13/2020

[TOP↑](#)

India's GDP to Contract by 10.3% in FY 2020-21, Says IMF

India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is estimated to contract 10.3 per cent in fiscal 2020-21, states a report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The forecast, released on October 13, displays a grave image of the drooping Indian economy wherein the trends are falling more than what was anticipated. The IMF, earlier in June, had forecasted a 4.5 per cent drop in GDP which is way behind what the latest forecast projects. The slump, possibly a consequence of the nationwide lockdown, is estimated to be seen in the first quarter of the coming financial year. The IMF, in its

biannual World Economic Outlook, has said that all the markets coming up and developing economic regions are expected to contract. Even the emerging Asian economies will face the slump. “Latest forecasts are much larger for India as the GDP is expected to contract more severely as estimated in June quarter. Hence, the country’s economy is projected to shrink by 10.3 per cent in 2020 before witnessing a rebound by 8.8 per cent in 2021,” stated the report. Gita Gopinath, IMF Chief Economist, said that many developing economies and emerging markets are managing the COVID-induced crisis with limited resources as many of are constrained by increased debt and higher borrowing costs. Further, she added, “Such economies need to prioritise spending for health and uplifting poor to maximise efficiency. Where debt is unsustainable, it should be restructured to clear finances to deal with the crisis.”

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[TOP ↑](#)

MALDIVES: ADB Ramps Up Support for Renewable Energy

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$7.74 million concessional loan and a \$2.73 million project grant to scale up the ongoing project, Preparing Outer Islands for Sustainable Energy Development (POISED), which is transforming the existing diesel-based grids into renewable-energy-based hybrid systems covering 160 outer islands in Maldives. The project will expand renewable-based hybrid systems, distribution grid upgrades, energy management systems, and supervisory control and data acquisition systems in additional 12 outer islands. It will also install solar-photovoltaic-based ice-making machines in four outer islands to support fisheries, develop and introduce a climate- and disaster-resilient electricity distribution system in one outer island, and pilot test a solar-photovoltaic-battery-operated ferry for transportation. The ongoing POISED project has replaced inefficient diesel-based power generation grids and installed more than 9.5 megawatts (MW) of solar photovoltaic capacity, 5.6 megawatt-hours of battery storage, 11.6 MW of energy efficient diesel generators, and its associated investments in 70 outer islands.

“Maldives’ geography, with its scattered islands and atolls, make generation and distribution of electricity very challenging and expensive. It is also vulnerable to climate and disaster risks and has been heavily dependent on diesel,” said ADB Senior Energy Specialist for South Asia Jaimes Kolantharaj. “This assistance reaffirms ADB’s ongoing commitment to develop and finance climate- and disaster-resilient as well as sustainable infrastructure in South Asia.” This project will continue to build the capacity of the Ministry of Environment and the electricity utilities, State Electricity Company Limited and FENAKA Corporation Limited, in implementing renewable energy grid projects.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 10/30/2020

NEPAL: ADB Ventures Supports Clean Brick Production

The Asian Development Bank's (ADB) venture capital arm ADB Ventures has provided the Good Bricks System, a non-fired brickmaking solution in Nepal, a \$125,000 grant to reduce the industry's harmful impact on the environment and health. The grant gives ADB Ventures the option to make a future equity investment in the Good Bricks System. South Asia is home to nearly a quarter of total global brick production. Demand for bricks is being fueled by rapid urbanization and the need to construct housing and transport infrastructure. In Nepal, traditional brickmaking requires approximately 1,600 kilns to burn nearly 1 million tons of coal every year. It causes around 600 annual deaths, adding \$46 million every year to public health costs. The Good Bricks System, a product of InnoCSR Co. Ltd., uses materials technology from the Republic of Korea to make high-quality bricks with soil, soil stabilizer, and cement. It is cost-competitive and reduces production time by six-fold. It also cuts greenhouse gas emissions and improves working conditions for employees, many of whom are women.

"The Good Bricks System is an opportunity to disrupt an industry that has not changed for many years, but which has a huge impact on the environment and human health," said ADB Principal Investment Specialist Dominic Mellor. "ADB's extensive operations in transport and urban infrastructure across South Asia can be leveraged to support technology solutions like the Good Bricks System." "ADB Ventures' support is a vote of confidence in our technology's potential to transform a dirty industry, and in our business model's potential to scale commercially," said InnoCSR Group Chief Executive Officer Sam Yoonsuk Lee. ADB Ventures supports and invests in early-stage technology companies solving big development problems in emerging Asia and the Pacific. Its investors include Finland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Government of the Republic of Korea, the Clean Technology Fund, and the Nordic Development Fund.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 10/29/2020

Central-West Asia

AFGHANISTAN: ADB Provides Additional Financing to Enhance Agricultural Productivity

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved an \$18.28 million grant as additional financing for a project that aims to enhance agricultural productivity in northeast Afghanistan. The additional financing for the Panj–Amu River Basin Sector

Project will improve access to water and enhance the resilience of watersheds to disaster and climate risks by expanding project activities in the provinces of Badakhshan, Kunduz, and Takhar. It will also help improve water access and management in six additional provinces: Samangan, Baghlan, Bamyan, Panjshir, Parwan, and Wardak. The additional financing will support the expansion of forestry and rangeland protection from 10,000 hectares to 27,760 hectares; installation of physical infrastructure and revegetation and reforestation; improvements in water availability to rural households for irrigation and other uses; and preparation of watershed resource management plans. “Agriculture remains a major engine of growth for Afghanistan and plays an important role in improving the lives of the Afghan people,” said ADB Senior Project Officer Mohammad Hanif Ayubi. “This additional financing will help Afghanistan in its recovery from COVID-19 by improving water availability for irrigated agriculture and creating more employment opportunities for rural communities.”

The Panj–Amu River Basin is a major production center for wheat, rice, vegetables, and fruit. Increasing agricultural productivity in the area is expected to help address food insecurity and increase per capita incomes in rural communities. ADB approved the Panj–Amu River Basin Sector Project in October 2016 with the provision of a \$26 million grant and the administration of a \$50 million grant from the European Union. The project is helping to rehabilitate and upgrade irrigation infrastructure, including main, secondary, and tertiary canals. It promotes watershed management to protect irrigation schemes from floods and improve water distribution to downstream users, particularly during dry seasons. It also addresses key climate change adaptation needs under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The project provides capacity building support for water users, irrigation associations, and relevant government agencies to operate and maintain irrigation infrastructure. It helps to improve farmers’ knowledge and skills through hands-on training using demonstration plots and community-based natural resource management publications.

ADB has committed more than \$879 million in grants (including ADB-administered cofinancing) in the agriculture, natural resources, and rural development sectors in Afghanistan since 2002. This has supported more than 16 key irrigation and agricultural infrastructure projects to increase farming productivity, improve food security, promote agribusiness, and enhance water management. About 350,000 hectares of irrigated land have been rehabilitated and upgraded, while work continues on another 300,000 hectares. The completed projects have generated around 2 million short- and long-term jobs and benefited more than 9 million people.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 10/29/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

AZERBAIJAN: Central Bank to Host Auction on Bloomberg

Trading Platform

The Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) will hold a deposit auction for banks on October 12, 2020 in order to attract 100 million manat (\$58.8 million) for a period of 14 days, Trend reports with reference to the country's Central Bank. According to the bank, the auction will be held on the Bloomberg trading platform in the format of a hybrid auction from 11:00 to 11:15 Baku time. The interest rate corridor on the funds raised at the auction on October 5 was set within 6.01 - 6.49 percent. As reported, the Central Bank plans to put up for auction 100 million manat (\$58.8 million), while the amount may increase from the announced at the auction by no more than 20 percent. Meanwhile, at the deposit auction on October 5, 2020, the CBA raised 150 million manat (\$88.2 million). The CBA began holding deposit auctions in June 2016.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 10/11/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Azerbaijan Amends Rules for Temporary Regulation of Credit Organizations amid COVID-19 Pandemic

The Board of the Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) has amended 'the procedure for temporary regulation of the activities of credit organizations amid the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Trend reports referring to CBA. Following clause 3 of part III of the Action Plan, in pursuance of clause 10.2 of the Azerbaijani president's decree dated March 19, 2020 No. 1950 'On several measures related to reducing the negative impact on employment in the country and on business entities', an action plan has been developed to mitigate the potential negative impact of the pandemic on the banking sector of Azerbaijan, The above plan defined the classification of credit and risk groups in banks and local branches of foreign banks operating in Azerbaijan, as well as the capital stability ratio and the procedure for its calculation. According to the rule, from March 1, 2020, interests on a loan have been subsidized to legal entities that are in a satisfactory classification category and were approved by the order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan No. 135s dated April 4, 2020.

It is expected that in the event of restructuring loans to individuals engaged in entrepreneurial activity, without opening a legal entity, the loan's classification category won't worsen until the end of September 2020 until the restructuring. At the same time, if concessional loans which were in a satisfactory classification category as of early March 2020 and issued at the expense of government agencies were restructured by September 30, 2020, the classification category of the loan won't deteriorate before the restructuring. According to the amendment, the period until September 30, 2020, has been changed to January 1, 2021. It means that, in the event of a restructuring of loans to legal entities with subsidized interest rates and individuals doing business without opening a legal entity, the category will not deteriorate before the restructuring until January 1, 2021. In particular, during the

restructuring of concessional loans, which since March 1, 2020, have been classified as satisfactory and issued at the expense of funds created by the state structures, the category of loan classification before restructuring won't worsen until January 1, 2021. It is reported that this rule is aimed at reducing the negative impact of sharp fluctuations on the economy of Azerbaijan and macroeconomic stability.

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[TOP↑](#)

Central Bank of Azerbaijan Grants License to Local Agro-Insurance Company

The Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) has issued a license to the United Agricultural Insurance Company, in order to carry out insurance activities, Trend reports with reference to the Azerbaijani Agricultural Insurance Fund. The United Agricultural Insurance Company is the managing company for agricultural insurance operating in Azerbaijan, said the fund. The parent companies will act as insurance intermediary companies in the agricultural insurance system, the fund noted. The authorized capital of the company is 2.2 million manat (\$1.29 million). Its founders are the following 7 insurance companies: PASHA Insurance, Gala Insurance, Mega Insurance, Xalq Insurance, AzSigorta, Baki Sigorta, and Azerbaijani Industry Insurance OJSC, with an equal share in the authorized capital - 312,500 manat (\$183,823) each. By the decision of the CBA, the minimum authorized capital of the United Agricultural Insurance Company was determined at 1 million manat (\$588,235). However, in order to ensure financial stability and observe prudential norms, the company has the right to establish authorized capital in an amount exceeding the minimum volume established by the state.

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[TOP↑](#)

Two More Azerbaijani Banks Integrated into Instant Payment System

As part of measures being taken to expand the coverage of the instant payment system, two more Azerbaijani banks have been integrated into the system, Trend reports with reference to the CBA. According to the CBA, Azer-Turk Bank OJSC and TuranBank OJSC through the branch network provided customers with the opportunity to use the functionality of the instant payment system. As a result, the 24/7 mode for calculations between individuals and legal entities, as well as government agencies, became possible to carry out through simplified identifiers (FIN code, mobile number, e-mail) on bank accounts and immediately reflect the flow of funds in the bank recipient's account. The system of instant payments, created by the Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) within the framework of the state program to

expand digital payments in Azerbaijan for 2018-2020, approved by the order No. 508 of the president of Azerbaijan dated September 26, 2018, has been put into operation in real mode since October 1, 2020. Currently, 15 banks and the State Treasury Agency of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Finance are integrated into this platform and work continues to expand the coverage of the system, as well as to increase the range of digital solutions provided to users.

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Azerbaijan's Central Bank Holds Deposit Auction

On October 19, 2020, the Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) held a deposit auction, attracting 150 million manat (\$88.2 million), Trend reports citing the CBA. The supply during the auction reached 611.1 million manat (\$359.4 million). The weighted average interest rate on deposit transactions concluded within the auction amounted to 6.01 percent. The funds were raised for a period of 14 days. The CBA started holding deposit auctions in June 2016.

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Azerbaijani Banks Foreign Currency Demand Disclosed

The Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) held a foreign exchange auction with the participation of the State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan (SOFAZ) on October 20, 2020, and sold \$63.8 million to Azerbaijani banks, Trend reports citing CBA. The demand from Azerbaijani banks was fully provided despite a decrease of 1.4 percent compared to the previous auction. The average rate of manat has been formed at 1.7 manat (\$1) at the auction. The first foreign exchange auction during a long period was held on March 10, 2020, with the participation of the State Oil Fund. Azerbaijani banks purchased \$323.2 million at that auction. The CBA began to conduct currency auctions through a one-way sale of currency in a competitive environment in mid-January 2017. A decision was made in March 2020 to hold the extraordinary currency auctions in connection with the increased demand of the population for foreign currency amid the failure of the OPEC + deal, which led to a sharp drop in oil prices.

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[TOP↑](#)

Procedure for Calculating Total Amount of Insurance Premiums Approved in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijani Cabinet of Ministers has given an explanation to the decision No 405, which approved the 'Procedure for calculating the total amount of insurance premiums paid from the state budget', Trend reports. The total amount of insurance premiums is calculated on the basis of the total number of Azerbaijani citizens who are considered to be insured and who have received refugee status in Azerbaijan, foreigners and stateless persons taken under the guardianship of the mission of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Azerbaijan. The amount is also calculated in accordance with the number of military personnel undergoing urgent active military service, those arrested, persons deprived of their liberty for a certain period of time and for life (with the exception of those serving sentences in settlement colonies).

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Central Bank of Azerbaijan May Receive New Powers Socio-economic Issues in Azerbaijan - in Center of Attention During COVID-19

Azerbaijan hasn't evaded the COVID-19 pandemic, and to prevent this disease from spreading, the country's leadership started to take timely preventive measures, Azerbaijan's Deputy Prime Minister, Deputy Chairman, Executive Secretary of the New Azerbaijan ruling party (YAP) Ali Ahmadov said during "Economy for people" the international inter-party forum of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) held via videoconference, Trend reports. According to him, since the beginning of the pandemic, Azerbaijan's strategy has been to responsibly and effectively implement all the main principles of the World Health Organization (WHO) and apply the positive experience gained in the fight against the pandemic both in the past and in the present period. "Experience has proven and continues to prove the wisdom of this approach to the coronavirus pandemic in Azerbaijan. Timely sanitary and epidemiological measures have significantly reduced the rate of transmission of coronavirus," he said. Ahmadov noted that as in all countries, the pandemic is accompanied by certain socio-economic consequences in Azerbaijan. "Against the background of a drop in GDP by 10 percent or more in a number of economically developed countries, we can say that Azerbaijan has one of the most optimistic scenarios in this context. However, this is not a reason to reduce attention to the fight against the economic and social consequences of the coronavirus," he said. "The model of the Azerbaijani government's actions in this area largely coincides with the activities of many governments. This model, firstly, provides support to the population, in particular its low-income part, secondly, huge support to small and medium-sized businesses, and thirdly, payment of wages to citizens who lost their income as a result of the introduction of serious quarantine restrictions," Ahmadov stressed.

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[TOP↑](#)

GEORGIA: ADB Approves \$200 Million Policy Loan to Support Economic Recovery

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) today approved a \$200 million policy-based loan to support Georgia's recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic by addressing key fragilities in the country's public financial management and social protection systems. The Fiscal Resilience and Social Protection Support Program is part of ADB's comprehensive and integrated package of support to help Georgia mitigate the pandemic's adverse health, social, and economic impact. "This program's policy actions are critical in dealing with the economic impact of COVID-19 and ensuring macroeconomic stability in the medium to long term while continuing to protect the livelihoods of those most affected by the crisis," said ADB Young Professional Rogerio de Almeida Vieira de Sa. "The program will benefit senior citizens in particular who are disproportionately exposed to the impacts of COVID-19." While Georgia's public health response has been generally effective in containing the spread of COVID-19, the pandemic is having a significant impact on the economy through a marked slowdown in tourism and foreign direct investments. The pandemic also created a large financing gap as public expenditure to fund the government's anti-crisis measures increased while tax revenues declined.

The ADB program aims to strengthen the management of public exposure to fiscal risks and deepen domestic markets for government securities. These measures seek to reduce the share of general government debt denominated in foreign currency and minimize public exposure to refinancing and currency risks that threaten macroeconomic stability, which is a prerequisite for economic recovery. The program will also help ensure the fiscal sustainability of social protection programs that were expanded during the crisis. It will support government reforms to the national pension scheme, benefitting senior citizens and other social protection systems to promote an inclusive return to economic growth. The program complements ADB's \$100 million loan approved in May to support the government's anti-crisis measures, including tax deferrals for small and medium-sized businesses, temporary payments for pandemic-affected workers, and free access to COVID-19 diagnostic and treatment services.

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[TOP↑](#)

UZBEKISTAN: Improving VAT Refund System

Uzbekistan has improved applications for value-added tax (VAT) reimbursement through the State Tax Committee's information system and the VAT payment process. Previously, the State Tax Committee used to return the excess amount of VAT to the taxpayer's bank account by submitting conclusion and accompanying documents to

the Treasury by courier service units and entering them into the program by Treasury employees through human intervention. The VAT refund process required a certain amount of time and human intervention. From now on, payment orders generated on the basis of VAT refund applications submitted through the new taxpayer's personal account will be sent electronically to the information system of the Ministry of Finance and executed automatically without human intervention.

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Uzbekistan Introduces New System of Lending to Women and Youth

A new credit system for women and youth is being introduced in Uzbekistan. A corresponding decree was signed by President Mirziyoyev. According to the document, non-governmental educational institutions will educate women and youth in entrepreneurship in special courses. The training program is subject to approval by the Agency for Business Development and the Higher School of Business and Entrepreneurship. Upon completion of courses, they will receive a certificate and will be able to get micro-loans without collateral in the amount of up to 33 million soums for the organization of their business. Credit up to 225 million soums will be available to those who have founded their own Microfirm or small business. A loan of this size will be issued on the basis of a guarantee from third parties and other types of security provided for by law. These loans can be obtained for up to 3 years, including a grace period of up to 6 months at the Central Bank's main rate (currently 14%). Loans will be issued through "Mikrokreditbank".

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[TOP↑](#)

Central Bank Presents Three Scenarios of Macroeconomic Development

The Central Bank of Uzbekistan on October 22 approved the main directions of monetary policy for 2021 and the period 2022-2023. "2020 was a very difficult year for our country and the global economy. The crisis, which began under the influence of the global pandemic, is characterized by simultaneous deterioration of both internal and external economic conditions and fluctuations in supply and demand. The global economy and the main foreign trade partners of our country are experiencing economic decline against the background of a sharp slowdown in economic activity, falling commodity prices and instability of financial markets," the Central Bank notes. Taking into account the degree of uncertainty, the forecasts were developed based on three different scenarios: • main (a gradual recovery of the economy); • optimistic (faster recovery); • risky (slower recovery). In all three

scenarios, the Central Bank's target of 5% inflation by the end of 2023 and its ongoing goals to ensure the stability of the banking and payment systems will remain unchanged. Main scenario If the situation with the pandemic gradually improves.

As the economies of foreign trade partners recover gradually, external demand will reach the pre-crisis level in the second half of 2022. Economic activity and aggregate demand in the country will approach pre-crisis levels by the end of 2021, and the economy will return to its potential level by 2023. Budget revenues will restore. The consolidated budget deficit is projected to fall to 2.5% of GDP in 2022. Structural reforms will continue and regulated prices will be liberalized in 2022-2023. The current "relatively tight" monetary policy environment will continue until the end of 2021. Optimistic If the situation around pandemic improves faster, and there will be no quarantine anymore, antiviral vaccines and medicines will be available globally from the second half of 2021. Due to the gradual recovery of the economies of major trading partners, external demand is expected to reach pre-crisis levels in the second half of 2021, and the price of gold will decline as the global economy recovers. Domestic economic activity and aggregate demand are expected to approach pre-crisis levels by mid-2021, and the economy will reach its potential by 2022. At the same time, in contrast to the main scenario, it is planned to revive the growth rates in the transport, services and tourism sectors.

Together with the recovery of economic activity, state budget revenues will grow relatively faster, and the consolidated budget deficit will decrease to 2% in 2022. At the same time, the logical completion of the process of liberalizing regulated prices in 2022-2023 and attracting FDI are among the key factors of economic growth. In the case of an optimistic scenario, the current "relatively tight" monetary policy conditions will be maintained. At the same time, the inflation rate in 2021-2022 will be slightly lower than in the baseline scenario. Risky If the global situation will worsen and global constraints will continue in the years 2021-2022. The economies of foreign trade partners will recover slowly, external demand will reach the pre-crisis level only in the second quarter of 2023, gold prices will continue to grow. Under the risky scenario, domestic economic activity and aggregate demand are projected to reach pre-crisis levels only by the end of 2022, the economy will reach its potential level after 2023, and the consolidated budget deficit will remain at 6-7%. Under this scenario, the process of liberalizing regulated prices is likely to be delayed until 2023.

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[TOP↑](#)

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: ASX Lower, Dollar Eases on Rate Cut Talk

Australia's share market finished lower and the Aussie dollar edged down towards 70

US cents as the Reserve Bank gave more suggestions of a rate cut next month. The S&P/ASX200 benchmark index fell by 44.8 points, or 0.72 per cent, to 6184.6 on Tuesday. The index closed above 6200 on Monday, which has been a level of resistance, but failed to reach new heights following a negative US lead. The All Ordinaries finished lower by 38.8 points, or 0.6 per cent, to 6396.8. A speech by a Reserve Bank official and board meeting minutes held plenty of interest, given earlier suggestions by Governor Philip Lowe of monetary policy easing. RBA assistant governor for financial markets Christopher Kent said easing could gain a bit more traction since the economy was opening up. Telling a webinar about the cash rate and three-year bond yield target, Mr Kent said: "They could all go a little lower than they currently are".

Economists expect a cut in the cash rate to 0.10 per cent from 0.25 per cent at the November 3 board meeting and similar cuts to the three-year bond target and the term funding facility. The minutes of the RBA's October 6 board meeting reiterated a commitment to keep highly accommodative policy settings as long as required. ThinkMarkets analyst Carl Capolingua noted the ASX rose after Mr Kent's comments, but fell after the meeting minutes. He was unsure why the market dropped, but said this may have been because the minutes did not confirm a rate cut in November. The Aussie dollar dropped during the session. It was buying 70.63 US cents at the start of trade but was down to 70.41 at the close. Consumer confidence rose for a seventh straight week to its highest level since late-May. The ANZ-Roy Morgan index was higher after a tax-cutting federal budget and expectations of a rate cut.

On the ASX, the heavyweight financial and materials sectors were lowest by 1.24 and 1.14 per cent respectively. Only information technology was up. It gained 1.69 per cent. That was mostly due to Afterpay, which hit a record \$105.80 after revealing it would offer Westpac transaction and savings accounts. The buy now pay later provider expects to gain insights into users' finances to help develop more services. Afterpay shares finished up by 4.51 per cent to \$101.94. Westpac shares finished down 1.44 per cent to \$18.51. The bank had the biggest slump of the big four. ANZ did best, lower by 0.97 per cent to \$19.32. Afterpay rival Zip Co extended its reach. It said users will be able to pay at any store that accepts Visa cards. Zip users will scan their phone and digital wallet on any terminal that reads Visa cards. Shares were up early, but finished lower by 1.39 per cent to \$7.07.

BHP posted a 7.2 per cent rise in first-quarter iron ore production, supported by stable demand from China. The miner said it produced 74 million tonnes of iron ore in the three months ended September 30, up from 69 million tonnes a year earlier and slightly above a UBS estimate of 73.5 million tonnes. Shares ended down 1.64 per cent to \$35.90. Among major rivals, Rio Tinto slipped 1.5 per cent to \$94.13 while Fortescue gained 0.59 per cent to \$16.92. Earlier, Wall Street's main indexes closed lower. Lawmakers struggled to agree on a coronavirus stimulus deal prior to the November 3 elections. The Aussie dollar was buying 70.36 US cents at 1728 AEDT,

down from 70.88 US cents at the close of trade on Monday.

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[TOP↑](#)

Call for Payroll Tax Relief in NSW Budget

Business NSW is calling for payroll tax relief in next month's state budget, saying this will boost jobs growth across the state. In a pre-budget submission, the lobby group proposes the introduction of an automatic payroll tax rebate, based on taxable payrolls recorded during the COVID-19 period. "The federal budget rightly supported a business-led jobs recovery, and businesses will now be looking for similar support in the form of payroll tax relief in the state budget," Business NSW Chief Executive Nola Watson said in a statement on Tuesday. "It's inconsistent for the federal government to provide incentives for businesses to hire staff while the NSW government taxes those newly created jobs." Ms Watson cited internal data showing that 86 per cent of businesses located in a CBD who rely on foot traffic believe they will be at risk when coronavirus support measures end.

A payroll tax rebate could flow automatically to employers without them having to apply, complementing the federal government's jobs push. "More needs to be done to reduce the economic impact by making some risk-based changes to current restrictions," Ms Watson said. The group also wants changes in transport protocols and public health orders to give employers and staff the confidence to return to the office, particularly in the Sydney CBD. NSW Treasurer Dominic Perrottet will hand down his budget on November 17.

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[TOP↑](#)

Rates Policy Now More Complex, RBA Admits

The Reserve Bank of Australia admits its monetary policy tools have become more complex in supporting the economy through the pandemic. Assistant Governor for financial markets Chris Kent has used a webinar speech to explain the central bank's policy operations, at a time of heightened speculation of a further easing in interest rates. "In a world of unconventional policies, assessing the stance of monetary policy is not as straight forward as it once was," Dr Kent said. "It used to be that looking at the board's cash rate target, and coming to a view on its likely path, provided a reasonable summary of the stance of monetary policy." But on March 19 the RBA introduced a new package of measures other than cutting the cash interest to a record low 0.25 per cent.

It also set a 0.25 per cent target for the three-year Australian government bond yield

and introduced a Term Funding Facility (TFF), which provides funding to banks, also at 0.25 per cent. "Some of the tools influence interest rates directly in a way that gives us greater control over a wider range of rates than previously," Dr Kent told the IFR Australia DCM Roundtable webinar. This was particularly the case for the three-year bond yield target. His comments come as economists speculate the central bank is on the brink of cutting rates at its November 3 board meeting. In a speech last week, Governor Philip Lowe said the board had been considering what more it could do to support jobs, incomes and businesses. As the economy opens up after the coronavirus-induced lockdown it was reasonable to expect a further monetary easing would now have a greater impact, he added.

Economists expect a cut in the cash rate to 0.10 per cent and similar reductions to its three-year bond target and the TFF, as well as an expanded bond buying program for maturities greater than three years. The minutes of the RBA's October board meeting are due later on Tuesday and will be dissected by economists to see to what degree a possible easing in policy was discussed by its members.

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[TOP↑](#)

Virus Commission Advised on Federal Budget

The prime minister's hand-picked coronavirus commission provided advice to government on its recent budget, including on the unemployment benefit. Commission chair Nev Power has told a Senate estimates hearing he provided "input" into the process. "We provided a business perspective around JobKeeper and JobSeeker," he said on Tuesday. Labor senator Katy Gallagher attempted to ask if the commission had advised government not to increase the rate of unemployment benefit JobSeeker, as the budget did not outline a long-term rate. Finance Minister Mathias Cormann put a stop to the questioning. "Hang on, hang on, hang on, hang on," he said. The COVID-19 commission was originally set up for six months as a coordination commission closer to the start of the coronavirus pandemic, to provide advice to government on rebuilding the economy. But it was later rebadged as an advisory board, with its budget now \$6.5 million for two financial years. The advisory board has 20 full-time staff and two contractors.

The rebadged commission now works within the highest levels of federal government, giving it access to cabinet information while providing it more protection from revealing its work. Mr Power said he and Prime Minister Scott Morrison discussed potential staff before making calls to see if they were interested. "We worked on it together," he said. "The objective was to make sure that we had an appropriate set of skills and contacts that could cover the broadest possible areas of the economy." Commissioners are paid \$2000 a day and can only work a maximum of two days a week. The advisory board has multiple task forces focused on particular areas of the

economy, including manufacturing. The manufacturing arm, which was headed by a Saudi oil and gas company board member Andrew Liveris, recommended the government expand the gas industry, which was quickly given the nod by Mr Power. Mr Power is a non-executive director of Strike Energy but has said he would not attend board meetings or vote on strategic matters while in his commission role, to prevent conflict of interest issues.

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[TOP↑](#)

ASX Ends Down, Dollar Above 71 US Cents

Australia's share market has closed lower after Wall Street finished down on economic stimulus concerns, while the dollar crept above 71 US cents. The S&P/ASX200 benchmark index finished lower by 18 points, or 0.29 per cent, to 6173.8 on Thursday. The result was a recovery from a low early in the session of 6100.6. The All Ordinaries closed down by 19.4 points, or 0.3 per cent, to 6383.7. CMC Markets chief market strategist Michael McCarthy said the result was a big recovery, and noted healthcare and consumer staples were mainly responsible. Energy was the biggest drag, down 1.85 per cent. Financials finished lower by 0.47 per cent. ASX investors could not overcome their US peers' concerns that politicians will not agree on economic stimulus for the coronavirus-ravaged nation before the November 3 election.

Uncertainty about stimulus has been cited as the reason for any US markets' losses for weeks, but Mr McCarthy wondered whether it was still so influential. "Most of the traders and institutional investors I talk to say (stimulus) will be delivered after the election," he said. "They've been looking at manufacturing data around the globe." There was better news for the local economy. Australian Bureau of Statistics data showed just under a third of businesses reported a fall in monthly revenue in October, compared with nearly half in July. The ABS also found just seven per cent of businesses reported a decrease in their number of employees, compared with 13 per cent three months earlier. On the ASX, Crown Casino improved by 2.03 per cent to \$8.55 after management changes in the wake of regulators' investigations. One director, John Horvath, said he will retire following a protest vote at the annual general meeting. Executive chair John Alexander had already flagged he will retire.

The NSW Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority has been looking into Crown's fitness to operate a new Sydney casino. AUSTRAC is investigating possible breaches of anti-money laundering laws. Pathology services provider Healius was the best big performer and surged by 9.3 per cent to \$3.76. Its first quarter unaudited revenue was \$493 million, up from \$419 million in the prior corresponding quarter. Healius provides coronavirus testing and said its commercial testing was growing rapidly. In energy, Santos reported record third quarter production but the results

came after a four per cent drop in crude oil prices. Shares were lower by 1.93 per cent to \$5.08. Westpac shares were lower by 0.48 per cent to \$18.60 after it sold its 10.7 per cent stake in buy now pay later provider Zip Co to investors. Among the bank's main rivals, ANZ was lower by 0.51 per cent to \$19.50, the Commonwealth dropped 0.49 per cent to \$69.33 and NAB shed 0.46 per cent to \$19.41.

In mining, BHP rose by 1.02 per cent to \$36.48, Rio Tinto gained 0.97 per cent to \$96.22 and Fortescue was lower by 1.06 per cent to \$16.79. Earlier in the US, Wall Street's three major averages closed lower as investors worried whether difficult negotiations in Washington would produce a deal for a US coronavirus stimulus package. On Friday, Republican President Donald Trump and Democrat challenger Joe Biden will have their last debate before the election. The Aussie dollar rose above 71 US cents. It was buying 71.07 US cents at 1727 AEDT, higher from 70.74 US cents at the close of trade on Wednesday.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 10/22/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

Centrelink Chases Thousands to Repay Debts

Centrelink is chasing almost 15,000 Australians who are owed money or will have their debts cancelled through the controversial welfare recovery scheme. Services Australia officials confirmed to a Senate estimates hearing on Thursday \$697.1 million had been paid back as of October 26. That money has gone to 402,000 Australians, making up 94 per cent of the owed pool. Services Australia originally said on Thursday that around 40,000 Australians were still owed money or would have their debts cancelled but later corrected the record to say the figure was about 14,600 people still being sought. Some 3300 people able to get refunds have died. Services Australia chief Rebecca Skinner said the agency had tried to contact the people multiple times through various methods. She confirmed there was no time limit for them to get in touch in order to be refunded.

"If they contact us we will process their debt," Ms Skinner said. Centrelink is restarting the welfare recovery scheme from Monday after it was paused due to the pandemic. Income averaging is no longer used as the sole proof for a possible debt. The "robodebt" automated welfare recovery scheme matched Australian Taxation Office and Centrelink data to claw back overpaid welfare payments. It was ruled unlawful last year, with the Federal Court saying Centrelink could not have been satisfied the debt was correct. The Morrison government announced in May it would repay all debts, estimated to cost about \$721 million. The scheme is facing a class action lawsuit. The previous Labor government introduced a similar process in 2011 but had each case reviewed by a department staff member, while the coalition moved to a fully-automated system in 2016.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 10/29/2020

Cash for Workers to Fill Farm Shortages

Would-be farm workers will be able to access up to \$6,000 to cover relocation and travel expenses, as growers grapple with dire staff shortages. With the peak harvest and picking season underway, farmers are struggling to find workers to get their fruit and vegetables to market and grain in the silo. For many, it is their first bumper season after years of drought and bushfires. Coronavirus border restrictions have sapped farmers of overseas workers, with professional services firm EY recently estimating the horticulture industry alone is down 26,000 workers. That prompted the federal government to include youth allowance concessions and relocation payments for would-be farm workers in the 2020 budget. The incentives come into effect from Sunday and the National Farmers Federation is urging school leavers and university students to take advantage over summer.

"There are currently thousands of positions vacant on farms across the country, including picking mangos in the Northern Territory, harvesting wheat in the WA Wheatbelt and picking cherries in Young," NFF chief executive Tony Mahar said in a statement. "The NFF encourages young Australians who have had their overseas holiday plans dashed, to consider seeing more of their own backyard, while at the same time contributing to the noble task of sustaining Australians."

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 10/31/2020

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: ADB to Scale Up Operations by \$1 Billion with Renewed Development Partnership Strategy

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has endorsed a new country partnership strategy (CPS) for Papua New Guinea (PNG) covering 2021–2025. A blueprint for ADB's operations in PNG, the new CPS focuses on developing the transport and energy sectors; reforming state-owned enterprises; promoting private sector development and investment; and assisting the government in achieving their development goals. ADB's Country Operations Business Plan for 2021–2023 accompanies the new CPS and presents an indicative lending program of \$2.9 billion, including projects in the transport, energy, public sector management, education, water and sanitation, and finance sectors. ADB operations in the country will be significantly scaled up, with future support earmarked at \$2.7 billion for 2021–2023, compared to the existing portfolio of \$1.7 billion. There are also planned new interventions in technical and vocational education and training and social protection. In keeping with ADB's Strategy 2030, the new CPS focuses on capacity development, project readiness, and institutional strengthening.

“PNG’s economy has been increasingly battered by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said ADB Pacific Department Director General Leah Gutierrez. “ADB’s wider package of assistance through the CPS will immediately support stabilization of the fiscal situation and recovery efforts by improving public financial management, investing in essential infrastructure, and creating a more business-friendly environment.” Support for the transport and energy sectors will account for more than 75% of new lending in the CPS period, with smaller interventions in water and urban infrastructure. A further 15–20% of lending is expected to support improvements in public sector management, likely through policy-based lending operations to assist economic and public sector reforms.

ADB will continue improving land, maritime, and aviation connectivity through rehabilitation work on the Highlands Highway and build on the success of the Civil Aviation Development Investment Program, which is improving the safety of 21 national airports. ADB will keep supporting PNG’s efforts towards achieving universal health coverage. The CPS will help accelerate progress in gender equality. The Private Sector Development Initiative, cofinanced by ADB and the governments of Australia and New Zealand, is working with PNG to improve the environment for business and supports the economic empowerment of women in PNG. The CPS was finalized during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has added significant stress to the PNG economy.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 10/08/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

6、 Private Sector

Asia-Pacific

APEC Promotes Small Businesses & Patient Health with New Business Ethics Vision

APEC strengthens its commitment to push for patient health and cross-border trade with the launch of a bold, new vision for the next five years to reinforce business ethics and integrity in health-related sectors. The plan comes to fruition under the world’s largest ethics pacts to strengthen ethical business practices in the medical device and biopharmaceutical sectors. “Ethical business practices play a crucial role amidst the COVID-19 pandemic as healthcare systems in the APEC region face major challenges,” said Joseph C. Semsar, Deputy Under Secretary for International Trade, at the US Department of Commerce, which oversees the initiative. “The vision reflects the urgency and commitment from public and private stakeholders in the region to further promote ethical environments to ensure a culture that upholds

patient trust in which small and medium enterprises can sustainably operate and innovate across the region,” he added. The Vision 2025 for the Business Ethics for APEC SMEs Initiative was announced virtually earlier this week at the 2020 APEC Business Ethics for SMEs Virtual Forum, by a diverse set of stakeholders including government agencies, representatives from patients and patient organizations, healthcare providers and professional organizations, medical device and biopharmaceutical organizations and researchers and academia across APEC economies. “Vision 2025 is about constantly setting and then doing everything we can to meet and exceed the highest ethical standards on behalf of the patients we serve,” said Scott Whitaker, President and CEO of the Advanced Medical Technology Association (AdvaMed). “These efforts are particularly important as APEC economies and the medical technology sector, especially our small and medium-sized businesses, respond to the pandemic in order to save lives and serve patients.”

In addition, the vision breaks new ground in an effort to measure the positive impact of ethical business practices, taking the conversation beyond the costs of corruption and providing new evidence of the advantages realized by organizations that embrace integrity. “Biopharmaceutical companies, large and small, know all too well the importance of ethics and business integrity. And the work of APEC in this area has been crucial and demonstrating how ethics creates value across the health economy”, said Thomas Cueni, Director General of the IFPMA and Industry Co-Chair of the APEC Biopharmaceutical Working Group on Ethics. “As we tackle COVID-19, building trust by conducting business with integrity is vital in ensuring confidence in innovative vaccines and medicines both to treat COVID-19 as well as delivering existing medicines and vaccines.” The annual forum also proposed to modernize the preceding ethics principles for the medical devices sector and biopharmaceutical sector and further bolster capacity building initiatives for small business owners, directors and distributors. Speaking during the forum’s plenary session, APEC Secretariat Executive Director, Dr Rebecca Sta Maria highlighted the importance of keeping trade open during this unprecedented time, adding that closer collaboration between policymakers and private sector in business ethics is important “to keep the integrity in the supply and distribution of medical products of the highest standard so that we can ensure progress towards recovery.”

From <https://www.apec.org/> 10/16/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Tourism, Small Businesses and COVID-19: 2020 APEC App Challenge Registration Opens

The annual APEC App Challenge is now inviting talented software developers and designers from all across the 21 APEC member economies to contribute to the regional effort of mitigating the adverse impact of COVID-19 on the tourism

industry—a key sector across the region. “The tourism sector has been the first sector to be impacted by this pandemic and will probably be the last to recover,” explained Dr Rebecca Sta Maria, APEC Secretariat’s Executive Director. “APEC policymakers are working hard to revive the sector, including creating more travel bubbles and providing incentives and stimulus measures. We are sure that there are other ideas that could benefit this effort. We would very much welcome creative innovation and ideas from youths and talent in the region.” The region-wide coding competition, supported by APEC, the Asia Foundation, and Google, will be held virtually from 23 October to 2 November this year. Participating teams are challenged to build new mobile or web tools that can help small businesses in the tourism industry better navigate and respond to the varied impacts of COVID-19 on the sector. “The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on small and medium-sized businesses that support the tourism and hospitality industry across the APEC region,” said John Karr, Senior Director for Technology Programs at the Asia Foundation. “The 2020 APEC App Challenge will demonstrate how digital tools and services can help these businesses survive during this difficult time.”

Participants will have two weeks to complete their products, after which the top teams will demonstrate their apps to a panel of judges during a virtual pitch session. Winners will receive cash prizes and other exciting opportunities. Announcement of the winners will be made during the APEC Annual Ministerial Meeting this November. As the 2020 host economy, one of the priorities of Malaysia is to promote and mainstream efforts across APEC to leverage digital technologies to achieve balanced, inclusive, sustainable, innovative and secure growth. Malaysia has recently recalibrated its theme this year to focus on building a resilient future. “Small businesses are integral to economic growth across APEC economies,” said Andrew Ure, Head of Public Affairs for Google Asia-Pacific. “This year’s challenge aims to help small businesses in the tourism sector learn the digital skills that will help them get back on their feet and grow.” To join the 2020 APEC App Challenge, interested developers should register their teams of two to six members by October 22. All team members must be citizens or residents of APEC member economies.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 10/20/2020

[TOP↑](#)

APEC Small and Medium Enterprises Ministers Issue Joint Statement

Ministers in charge of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the APEC region issued a statement following their virtual meeting held on 23 October 2020. The statement reflects the outcome of the 26th APEC SME Ministerial Meeting chaired by Malaysia’s Minister of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives, Dato Sri Dr Haji Wan Junaidi Bin Tuanku Jaafar. Their joint statement addresses the unprecedented effects of the COVID-19 crisis on micro, small and medium enterprises, including

women-owned businesses, which contributes to contributing 40 to 60 percent to gross domestic product (GDP) in the APEC region. It calls for economies to intensify cooperation, further promote market access, embrace the digital economy and address challenges for small businesses to go digital.

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[TOP ↑](#)

Going Digital Is Necessary for Small Businesses to Survive

APEC member economies must work together to promote and encourage the transition of the region's micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to the emerging digital economy, urged Malaysia's Minister of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives, Dato Sri Dr. Haji Wan Junaidi Bin Tuanku Jaafar. "Going digital is not an option, it has to be done. It is a necessity to survive," he said in his opening remarks of the APEC 26th Small and Medium Enterprises Ministerial Meeting held virtually on Friday. APEC ministers in charge of small and medium enterprise policy exchanged views to address the severe economic impact of the pandemic to MSMEs and detailed steps to build more resilient, inclusive and sustainable environment for the sector. MSMEs play a significant role in the region's economic growth, contributing around 40 to 60 percent to the growth domestic products of most APEC economies. As a response to the pandemic, APEC members have been providing support measures for the sector ranging from tax reliefs, wage subsidies, interest rates reduction, soft loans and refinancing, so that business owners and managers can sustain their operations and continue to contribute to the global economy. "In the new normal, businesses must pivot their strategies and business models to adapt to the digital economy and incorporate innovation and technology in order to remain resilient," he added. "Besides all the fiscal stimulus, it is equally imperative to support MSMEs to go digital while helping them to adjust and overcome the challenges."

He cautioned members of the multi-faceted challenges and concerns of going digital, including data privacy, cybersecurity, digital fraud and the digital divide. He highlighted the importance of strengthening cooperation and collaboration within APEC member economies "during and beyond this pandemic." APEC has been consistent in acknowledging the significant contribution MSMEs give to the region's economy and employment. In her remarks at the meeting, Dr Rebecca Fatima Sta Maria, Executive Director of the APEC Secretariat, highlighted that policy work undertaken by other APEC groups can contribute to helping MSMEs in the region. "Support for MSMEs in APEC is cross-cutting and requires close partnership within our fora and the private sector," she said. "We need to advance progress in structural reforms, trade facilitation and digital initiatives such as the single window implementation to make it easier, faster and cheaper to do business in the region and to ensure seamless flow of good and services within economies and across the borders." During the meeting, ministers endorsed a joint statement focusing on

member economies' commitment to support MSMEs in restarting and reviving their businesses through digitalization, innovation and technology. Ministers also endorsed a new five-year vision to reinforce business ethics and integrity in health-related sectors called Vision 2025 launched earlier this month at the 2020 APEC Business Ethics for SMEs Virtual Forum under the world's largest ethics pacts to strengthen ethical business practices in the medical device and biopharmaceutical sectors.

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[TOP↑](#)

ADB Must Increase Upstream Engagements in PPPs to Address Post-COVID Investment Gap — Independent Evaluation Report

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) needs to develop a strategic approach toward supporting public–private partnerships (PPPs), with focus on upstream engagements, to address the infrastructure investment gaps in its developing members, says a report released by ADB's Independent Evaluation Department (IED) today. PPPs are more imperative now to minimize the negative impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on governments' budgets, which are already under pressure. ADB's Support to Public–Private Partnerships, 2009–2018, assessed the institution's effectiveness in supporting PPP activities and how best it can respond to the PPP demands in different country contexts and across key sectors. ADB approved \$22.1 billion of PPP interventions during the review period, comprising \$10.8 billion in public loans, \$11.1 billion in private sector facilities, and \$223 million in 126 technical assistance with significant PPP elements.

The evaluation report found that ADB's support for PPPs has delivered positive developmental outcomes, mostly through targeted downstream investments. Its downstream activities, both in public and private projects, contributed to increased private sector participation in building public infrastructure. However, ADB's upstream support for the long-term enabling environment for PPPs was not able to achieve the much-needed change to crowd in the private sector and was not well coordinated with downstream project development and financing activities. The lack of value-for-money analysis, high costs compared to benefits, high associated risk of projects, and minimal advocacy for linked sectoral and state-owned enterprise reform have undermined ADB's contributions. "To be fully responsive to the needs of governments or private sector, ADB needs to proactively engage with governments at an early stage of infrastructure planning for the development of local capacity to screen and select projects using cost-benefit and value-for-money analyses," said IED Director General Marvin Taylor-Dormond. "It needs to provide a strong and concerted institutional response to address the scale and urgency of the infrastructure and social services provision gaps in Asia and the Pacific."

According to the report, the lack of updated sector, regulatory, and policy frameworks, as well as limited institutional capacity and state-owned enterprise dominance, have slowed the pace of PPP investments among ADB's developing members. Risk mitigation products addressing the needs of private project developers and institutional investors in ADB's PPP projects are not sufficiently available. "Well-designed and implemented PPPs can transfer risks from the public sector and effectively mobilize private sector-led design, construction, operational, maintenance, and financial expertise to deliver greater efficiency gains and service quality," said IED Director Nathan Subramaniam. "Managing and appropriately pricing project risk in a way that can mobilize existing private sector capital resources is a substantive challenge, but ADB needs to expand the use, scale, and scope of its risk mitigation products and improve its monitoring and evaluation systems to achieve and track long-term beneficial outcomes through PPPs."

ADB's public policy-based loans have contributed to improved PPP policies and processes in Bangladesh, India, Mongolia, Nepal, and the People's Republic of China (PRC). ADB has also delivered strong support to institutional capacity building in key markets, including the PRC, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, developing PPP centers, supporting the development of government-led infrastructure funds, and training local government officers. However, it needs to be careful in the selection and prioritization of projects to maximize development outcomes and minimize financial strain on the governments. The report recommends ADB to prepare a PPP directional guidance paper, strategically engage with governments at an early stage of project development, seek to expand the use and scale of available risk mitigation products, provide political risk and partial credit guarantees to facilitate private sector investment in PPP infrastructure projects, and improve its monitoring and evaluation systems for PPP transactions. The report also recommends ADB to separate its PPP Thematic Group Secretariat from the Office of Public-Private Partnership and assign the management of the Asia Pacific Project Preparation Facility (AP3F) and other key donor and institutional relationships in support of PPPs to the newly created PPP Thematic Group Secretariat to improve the coordination of ADB's engagement with PPPs for delivering quality infrastructure outcomes.

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[TOP ↑](#)

East Asia

CHINA: Private Firms Issue More Bonds in Interbank Market

China's private companies issued more bonds in the interbank market in the first eight months of the year amid government efforts to ease the financing strain on cash-starved firms. Bonds issued by the country's private firms in the interbank market totaled nearly 350 billion yuan (about 51 billion U.S. dollars) in the

January-August period, up 64 percent year on year, according to the People's Bank of China. China has further improved bond financing tools in its interbank market, including introducing credit risk mitigation warrants, which so far has achieved notable results, said Cao Yuanyuan, deputy secretary-general of the National Association of Financial Market Institutional Investors. Since the start of the year, 52 private companies have issued bonds by leveraging such supportive tools.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 10/05/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

China's Software Industry Sees Rapid Recovery

China's software industry has seen rapid recovery as revenue and profit growth gathers steam, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. Software companies reaped nearly 5 trillion yuan (about 734.2 billion U.S. dollars) in revenues from January to August, up by 10 percent year on year, compared with an 8.6-percent increase in the first seven months. In the first eight months, the profit of the software industry reached 602 billion yuan, up by 5.9 percent year on year. However, software exports declined by 1.3 percent year on year in the first eight months to 29.7 billion U.S. dollars.

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[TOP ↑](#)

China Details Measures to Improve Quality of Listed Companies

The State Council, China's cabinet, has detailed multiple measures to improve the quality of listed companies. China will strengthen institutional construction of the capital market, step up market oversight, optimize the structure and development environment of the listed companies, and improve the quality of information disclosure, according to a guideline released by the State Council. The guideline said channels for institutional investors to participate in corporate governance should be improved and the implementation of the standard internal control system should be accelerated in order to improve the governance of listed companies. Measures to implement a registration-based system and allow more qualified foreign investors to make strategic investments in listed companies on the Chinese mainland should be put into effect to encourage listed companies to become better and stronger, the guideline said. Meanwhile, measures to strengthen the exit mechanism for listed companies and solve the prominent problems of listed companies will also be carried out, according to the guideline. The guideline added that efforts should be made to step up punishment for irregularities such as market manipulation and insider trading, improve the comprehensive regulatory system for listed companies, and establish a sound information-sharing mechanism.

GDP, Industrial Output, Investment, Disposable Income, Housing Prices, Fiscal Revenue

The following are the highlights of China's business news from the past week: -- China's gross domestic product expanded 4.9 percent year on year in the third quarter of 2020, faster than the 3.2-percent growth in the second quarter and the 6.8-percent slump in the first quarter, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed Monday. -- In the first three quarters, industrial output went up 1.2 percent year on year, reversing a decline of 1.3 percent in the first half of this year. -- Fixed-asset investment went up 0.8 percent year on year in the first three quarters of 2020. Total fixed-asset investment came in at 43.65 trillion yuan (about 6.5 trillion U.S. dollars) during the period. -- China's per capita disposable income stood at 23,781 yuan in the first three quarters, up 3.9 percent from the same period last year in nominal terms, NBS data showed.

After deducting price factors, per capita disposable income rose 0.6 percent year on year, returning to positive territory for the first time this year. -- China's housing market remained generally stable in September, with slight month-on-month growth in home prices in major cities, NBS data showed Tuesday. New home prices in four first-tier cities -- Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen -- rose by 0.4 percent month on month in September, down 0.2 percentage points from a month earlier. On a monthly basis, new home prices edged up 0.3 percent in 31 second-tier cities, and rose 0.5 percent in 35 third-tier cities. -- China's fiscal revenue rose 4.5 percent year on year in September, marking the fourth consecutive month of gain this year, according to data released by the Ministry of Finance Wednesday. The country's fiscal revenue came in at 14.1 trillion yuan in the first three quarters, down 6.4 percent year on year.

China Unveils New Measures to Boost Private Businesses

Chinese authorities have rolled out new measures to beef up support for private enterprises. Efforts will be intensified to reduce corporate costs for private enterprises, strengthen the support of scientific and technological innovation, and improve the supply of land and other key resources, according to a guideline recently released by six central departments including the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC). The guideline aims to solve current problems for private

enterprises and accumulate long-term momentum for their future development, Zhao Chenxin, deputy secretary-general of the NDRC, told a press conference on Monday. Some specific measures will be taken to support the development of private enterprises, such as the continuation of tax and fee cuts and further reductions in energy and internet prices. Zhao said the NDRC will strictly implement the guideline alongside other central departments to further optimize the business environment for private enterprises and unleash their vitality.

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[TOP↑](#)

World Bank Group Sanctions Two Chinese Engineering Companies for 18 Months

The World Bank Group today announced the 18-month sanctions of China National Electric Engineering Company Limited (“CNEEC”) and its wholly owned subsidiary, China Electric Design and Research Institute Company Limited (“CEDRI”), both international engineering companies, in connection with fraudulent practices as part of the Lusaka Transmission and Distribution Rehabilitation Project in Zambia. CEDRI has been sanctioned with debarment with conditional release, which makes the company ineligible to participate in projects and operations financed by institutions of the World Bank Group. The debarment is part of a settlement agreement under which CEDRI admits responsibility for the underlying sanctionable practices and agrees to meet specified corporate compliance conditions as a condition for release from debarment. CNEEC has been sanctioned with conditional non-debarment, which means that it remains eligible to participate in projects and operations financed by institutions of the World Bank Group as long as it complies with its obligations under the settlement agreement. Otherwise, the conditional non-debarment will convert to a sanction of debarment with conditional release, and the company then will become ineligible to participate in World Bank Group projects and operations until the conditions for release set out in the settlement agreement are met.

The project was designed to increase the capacity and improve the reliability of the electricity transmission and distribution system in Lusaka, Zambia. According to the facts of the case, CEDRI engaged in fraudulent practices by failing to disclose a conflict of interest and by presenting false documents with CNEEC’s company name in order to meet the requirements of a contract under the project. CNEEC, as a controlling affiliate of CEDRI, failed to oversee CEDRI’s misconduct. The settlement agreement provides for reduced periods of sanction in light of both companies’ cooperation. As a condition for release from sanction under the terms of the settlement agreement, the companies commit to developing an integrity compliance program consistent with the principles set out in the World Bank Group Integrity Compliance Guidelines. CNEEC and CEDRI also commit to continue to fully cooperate with the World Bank Group Integrity Vice Presidency. The debarment of

CEDRI qualifies for cross-debarment by other multilateral development banks (MDBs) under the Agreement for Mutual Enforcement of Debarment Decisions that was signed on April 9, 2010.

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[TOP↑](#)

JAPAN: Support Small and Midsize Companies' Digitization to Strengthen Their Foundation

Amid growing momentum for digitization in society due to the spread of the novel coronavirus, small and midsize companies have been noticeably slow to respond to the move toward digitization. The government needs to strongly support their efforts for that purpose. Immediately after taking office, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga instructed Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Hiroshi Kajiyama to study ways to boost productivity and strengthen the business foundation of small and midsize companies. The trend toward digitization must be expanded to small and midsize companies to vitalize the economy. The business conditions of small and midsize companies have been hit harder by the coronavirus crisis than those of large companies. According to the Tankan quarterly economic survey for September released by the Bank of Japan, recurring profits for the current fiscal year are expected to decrease by about 21% for large enterprises compared with the previous year, while those for small and midsize companies are expected to decrease by about 46%. This is likely because many small and midsize companies operate in the service industries, such as accommodation and restaurant businesses, and in many cases large companies' cost-cutting measures have had a direct negative impact on small and midsize companies.

For the time being, it is important to take steps to secure the necessary funds for these companies, such as government-affiliated and private financial institutions providing virtually interest-free and no-collateral loans. However, it is also indispensable to support efforts by small and midsize companies to continue operations by taking measures against the coronavirus. To that end, one effective option is to facilitate the use of information technology. Gymnastics classes and yoga classes where students receive instruction remotely via the internet are said to be booming. Some areas have created services that allow customers to order by smartphones and make cashless payments at small eating and drinking establishments using such services. In one example, when a chamber of commerce and industry launched a website to introduce products from companies with stocks of food, there was a flood of inquiries. In the manufacturing industries as well, ordering products and holding business meetings online is spreading. Amid the coronavirus disaster, many small and midsize firms have little room for investment. The government should help them through such measures as expanding subsidies for the introduction of information technology.

Another factor behind the delay in digitization is a shortage of human resources. In September, the government launched a project called the "digitization support team" in which private-sector experts versed in information technology advise small and midsize companies struggling to cope with digitization. The government is urged to identify the problems facing each company and take detailed measures in line with their individual circumstances. A long-established ryokan inn in Kanagawa Prefecture, which had been on the verge of bankruptcy, developed its own system for reservation management and salary payments, among other tasks. In addition to reducing the clerical burden on employees, the inn used IT to share information among staffers to improve the quality of its services, which led to a sharp recovery in its business performance. Currently, the inn is reportedly selling the system to other companies. It is also important for small and midsize companies themselves to take the step of reviewing their operations to improve efficiency, while sharing with each other examples of their success in this area.

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[TOP↑](#)

Japan Won't Join U.S. Plan to Exclude Chinese Firms from Telecom Networks: Report

Japan has told the United States that Tokyo will not, at the moment, join Washington's plan to exclude Chinese firms from telecommunications networks, the Yomiuri newspaper said on Friday, citing several sources. Japan will take its own steps to respond in case there are worries over security issue, while Tokyo will cooperate with the United States, the paper said. The U.S. State Department published in August an update of a plan called the "Clean Network" calling for telecom companies, cloud service providers, and mobile apps of Chinese origin to be kept out of the United States. The United States is pressing allies to bar Huawei from next generation 5G mobile phone networks on security grounds. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo mentioned the "Clean Network" plan when he met Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi in Tokyo earlier this month, the Yomiuri said.

Japan told the United States that Tokyo cannot join a framework which excludes a specific nation but will reconsider if there is any change to the current U.S. plan, according to the report. Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato, the top government spokesman, responded to the Yomiuri report by saying his understanding was there was no exchange of views on the "Clean Network" plan during the meeting between Pompeo and Motegi but the U.S. explained its overall cybersecurity efforts. "Our nation wants to continue to strengthen cooperation in the area of cybersecurity with the U.S." Kato said during a news conference on Friday. Japan will also take steps to secure cybersecurity safety by taking steps to reduce

supply chain risks when procuring information and communication equipment, he said.

From <https://japantoday.com> 10/17/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Japan to Join Forces with U.S., Europe in Regulating Big Tech Firms

Japan will join forces with the United States and Europe to take on any market abuses by the four Big Tech companies, the new head of its antitrust watchdog said on Monday, a sign Tokyo will join global efforts to regulate digital platform operators. Kazuyuki Furuya, chairman of Japan's Fair Trade Commission (FTC), also said Tokyo could open a probe into any merger or business tie-up involving fitness tracker maker Fitbit if the size of such deals are big enough. "If the size of any merger or business-tie up is big, we can launch an anti-monopoly investigation into the buyer's process of acquiring a start-up (like Fitbit)," he told Reuters. "We're closely watching developments including in Europe." EU antitrust regulators in August launched an investigation into a \$2.1 billion deal by Alphabet unit Google's bid to buy Fitbit that aimed to take on Apple and Samsung in the wearable technology market. Japan is laying the groundwork to regulate platform operators. Among them are big tech giants dubbed "GAFA" - Google, Apple, Amazon and Facebook - that face various antitrust probes in western nations. Multi-national companies like GAFA have similar business practices across the globe, which makes global coordination crucial, Furuya said.

"We'll work closely with our U.S. and European counterparts, and respond if to any moves that hamper competition," he said. "This is an area I will push through aggressively," he said, adding the FTC was ready to open probes if digital platformers abuse their dominant market positions against consumers. Furuya, who assumed the post in September, also said the FTC would conduct research into Japan's mobile phone market to see whether there is any room for improvement to spur competition. Any such move would help Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's push to slash Japan's mobile phone charges, which he has repeatedly criticized as too high. Furuya countered the view that helping the government meet its policy priorities could undermine the FTC's position as a body mandated to act independently from political meddling. "If there's a policy priority for the government, there's no doubt the FTC should think about what it can do on that front," Furuya said. "By participating in the government's debate on policy issues, we have been reflecting our thinking in the process. This is something our organisation should do."

From <https://japantoday.com> 10/20/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Businesses in Japan to Be Obligated to Recycle Plastic Waste

The government has decided to oblige businesses that produce a large amount of plastic waste at offices and factories, including packaging and building materials, to recycle them. Most plastic waste currently generated by businesses is incinerated, but the government aims to improve low recycling rates by making businesses separate the refuse and recycle it. The decision was presented Tuesday at a meeting of an advisory panel of experts from the Environment Ministry and the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry. The two ministries will compile a plan for the new system by the end of this fiscal year and will study submitting a bill to an ordinary Diet session next year. The system is expected to start in or after fiscal 2022. Plastic waste from offices, factories and other businesses varies widely, including packaging, building material, office supplies and food containers. Most of the waste is incinerated together with other combustible waste, and only a few companies outsource the disposal to recycling companies.

Under the new system, the government will oblige businesses to systematically separate and recycle waste to improve recycling rates. In addition to the existing plastic bottle and combustible waste categories, businesses will be required to separate the waste into a plastic refuse category and hand it over to waste disposal companies engaged in recycling. Independent stores and businesses with a low quantity of plastic waste will be obliged only to make efforts to introduce the system. The government will also set guidelines for companies that manufacture plastic products, such as detergent bottles, plastic bottles and office supplies, to design environmentally friendly products. Specifically, the companies will be obliged to use less harmful plastic by introducing lighter packaging or using plant-derived biomass plastic with a smaller environmental impact.

Recycling of plastic waste has been sluggish because it costs more than incineration or burial in landfills. According to the Plastic Waste Management Institute in Tokyo, the nation's total plastic waste was 8.91 million tons in 2018. This includes both industrial waste from factories and household or office waste. Of the total, 4.62 million tons, or 52%, was waste from businesses. Business waste accounts for an even more considerable portion of the total when such office waste as food containers is included. The recycling rate for all plastic waste is less than 30%. In July, the government announced a plan to ask municipalities across the country to collect all household plastic waste together, starting fiscal 2022. By regulating plastic waste from both households and businesses, the government hopes to promote recycling.

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[TOP↑](#)

Govt to Ask Mobile Phone Firms Allow Users to Retain E-Mail Address

The government intends to ask mobile phone companies to establish a system in which subscribers can retain their cell phone e-mail addresses even if they change contracting firms, it has been learned. The Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry plans to urge cell phone companies to comply with this policy as part of efforts to increase competition among the firms, according to sources. Should the hurdles of changing a contracting carrier be lessened, competition among mobile phone firms is expected to increase, leading them to lower their service fees, they said. The ministry plans to include the proposal in a policy for reforming mobile phone rates, which is expected to be finalized by the end of this month.

With the introduction of the mobile number portability (MNP) system in 2006, mobile phone users have been able to retain the same phone number even if they switch providers. However, users are not allowed to retain their e-mail address if they switch phone carriers, as e-mail addresses with such domains as @docomo.ne.jp. are tied to the particular contracting mobile phone firm. The ministry believes that if mobile phone users are given the option of retaining their e-mail addresses, then new demand for switching mobile phone carriers will be created. Thus, the government plans to ask mobile phone companies to design specific plans to accommodate this change, the sources said. The ministry also intends to request that the firms allow customers to keep their subscriber identity module (SIM) card even if they change companies, they said. A SIM card, inserted into mobile phones, stores a user's subscription information.

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[TOP↑](#)

SOUTH KOREA: To Invest 7 Tln Won in R&D for Service Sector

South Korea will invest 7 trillion won (US\$6.2 billion) in research and development for the service sector over the next five years, Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki said Tuesday. The funding is partly aimed at promoting contactless services in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, Hong said. Next year, the government will raise its R&D spending for four service sectors -- tourism, public health, content and logistics, Hong said. The government will also expand financial and tax benefits for service firms to make inroads into foreign markets, Hong said. As part of the efforts, the government will increase loans for new technology firms to 450 billion won next year from 380 billion won this year.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 10/27/2020

[TOP↑](#)

S. Korea to Invest Over 20 Tln Won in Green Mobility Sectors Moon

President Moon Jae-in said Friday the government plans to invest more than 20 trillion won (US\$17.7 billion) in electric vehicles and other areas of green mobility by 2025. The president announced the investment plan, part of the administration's ambitious Korean New Deal initiative, as he traveled to a manufacturing plant of Hyundai Motor Co. in the southeastern industrial city of Ulsan. It was the latest in his ongoing series of tours of key sectors of the New Deal project. "The government is moving fast toward the goal of becoming the No. 1 competitive nation in the future car industry by 2030. The next five years will serve as the golden time to lead the industry," Moon said. Moon shared the government's vision to supply 1.13 million electric vehicles and 200,000 hydrogen cars by 2025, while accelerating shipments of such vehicles to North America, Europe and China.

The president also pledged to nurture and develop the encompassing peripheral industry, including those of secondary battery and auto parts, into a next-generation growth sector with estimated annual sales worth 13 trillion won. Moon also announced the government's plan to introduce the world's first fully commercialized level 4 autonomous vehicles, referring to cars that can fully run without the intervention of people, by 2027. After arriving at the venue in Hyundai's Nexo hydrogen fuel cell car, Moon lauded the Korean automaker for making history by selling over 10,000 models of the hydrogen car on Friday. He also praised the company' management and union for providing support to the local community hit hard by COVID-19. "Not only is Hyundai's Ulsan plant the (industry) leader when it comes to innovation but it is also the No. 1 company in terms of overcoming the new coronavirus crisis and cooperation between the management and union, as well as future vision," Moon said.

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[TOP↑](#)

South-East Asia

MYANMAR: Approving 5 More Investment Enterprises with Total Capital of 132.8 Mln USD

Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC) recently approved five more investment enterprises in the country, local media quoted the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA) as saying on Thursday. The commission approved operation of new enterprises and increasing investment capital amount by the existing enterprises. The investment capital of 105.8 million U.S. dollars and 35.6 billion kyats (27 million U.S. dollars) from the permitted enterprises was engaged in the country's livestock and fishery, manufacturing, real estate, oil and gas and other

services sectors, creating 688 job opportunities for local citizens. According to the DICA's latest figures, Myanmar has attracted over 5.5 billion U.S. dollars of investment from 245 permitted foreign enterprises in the fiscal year 2019-2020 which ended on Sept. 30. During the period, power, oil and gas and manufacturing were the top three sectors attracting most foreign investments. In the fiscal year, the countries with largest investors in Myanmar were Singapore, China and Thailand, 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.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 10/29/2020

[TOP↑](#)

THAILAND: Central Bank Prolongs Debt Moratorium for SMEs amid COVID-19

Thailand's central bank on Saturday announced on its website an extension of grace period of debt moratorium for Thai small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as many of their businesses have been adversely impacted by COVID-19. The Bank of Thailand (BoT) extended the debt moratorium period to June next year for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with a credit line below 100 million baht (3.2 million U.S. dollars) and difficulty in servicing existing debts, the BoT said. The extension grace period will end on June 30, 2021. The extension would only apply to targeted SMEs that cannot cope with repaying loans to financial institutions due to business operations not being fully recovered, said the BoT. The debt relief measures were initially implemented by the central bank on April 23 and were scheduled to end on Oct. 22. The BoT indicated that the value of debtors receiving debt relief measures in the formal banking system totals 6.89 trillion baht (22 million U.S. dollars), with 1.35 trillion baht (4.3 million U.S. dollars) attributed to SME loans of 1.05 million accounts.

"SME debtors whose creditors are specialized financial institutions, with loans totaling 400 billion baht, will continue to be under the debt moratorium scheme for another six months," said Roong Mallikamas, BoT's assistant governor. "The majority of SME debtors, owing a combined 950 billion baht to commercial banks and non-bank companies, also intend to repay their debts." "The BoT has been monitoring the situation closely and expects that there won't be a lot of debt defaults in a very short time after the debt moratorium scheme ends," Roong said. Roong also said that debtors are still shouldering interest burdens during the debt moratorium, while targeted measures are a means to discourage moral hazard, as some debtors, who have not been heavily affected by the crisis, may opt to take this opportunity to delay debt repayment. The BoT assistant governor said she is optimistic to an eventual economic recovery. Businesses related to drinks, agriculture, appliances and petrochemical products have seen a good recovery,

according to Roong. The assistant governor also believed that the Thai government's much touted Special Tourist Visa (STV) scheme offered to long-term tourists would help the tourism industry slowly pick up.

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[TOP↑](#)

VIETNAM: Tech Firms Export More 5G Devices to the World

While the commercial 5G network is not yet operational in Việt Nam, local tech firms are exporting their 5G technology to the world. VinSmart, for example, has agreed to ship about 2 million of its Vsmart 5G smartphones to the US under outsourcing contracts this year. "5G technology gives a new player like VinSmart a chance to compete with big players in the world," said Lê Thị Thu Thủy, vice chairwoman of VinSmart. Just established in Hà Nội last year, the Vingroup unit became the first producer of 5G smartphones in Việt Nam. Thủy said it would export its own brand's 5G equipment to North American markets next year. In a recent press conference in Hà Nội held by VinSmart and Qualcomm, Thủy told Việt Nam News that Vingroup has invested tens of millions of US dollars in developing R&D labs, production lines and employing local talents. Thủy also said VinSmart spent a lot to have licenses to use the US-based Qualcomm's technology, one of the leading 5G providers and the most well-known chipset providers in the world. The firms partnered up in December 2018 with a patent licensing agreement covering multimode complete terminals and Qualcomm has supported VinSmart in developing, manufacturing and selling branded multimode complete terminals such as 4G/5G smartphones to the US market.

Since the partnership, VinSmart has launched 13 smartphones based on the Qualcomm Snapdragon Mobile platforms both in Viet Nam as well as in Spain, Russia, and Myanmar. This July, it launched its first 5G-enabled smartphones, the VinSmart Aris series. Besides, smartphones, Qualcomm has also worked with VinSmart in developing 5G product categories such as MiFi (mobile WiFi routers), Customer Premise Equipment (CPE), Wi-Fi 6 Smart Home, AI Edge and Camera, and 5G laptops for both the Vietnamese and international markets. Without a commercial 5G market in Việt Nam, Qualcomm and VinSmart use a lab 5G environment to make sure the devices are compatible with most network operators globally. Thiều Phương Nam, country director for Việt Nam, Laos and Cambodia at Qualcomm, said: "VinSmart's first 5G-enabled smartphone produced in Viet Nam is evidence of Vingroup's capacity to research and develop 5G terminal devices, making it ready for the transformation of the telecoms infrastructure in the country. This creates confidence that Viet Nam can be on par with global peers on 5G technology in the future, and is good evidence for Việt Nam's acceleration in the Industry 4.0 era."

Mentioning Qualcomm's most important target is to help to bring 'Made in Viet Nam' products to the world, Nam added: "We are working to expand 5G technology not only in the smartphone industry but also in distance learning, health care, internet of things and smart manufacturing in the country." In June, Qualcomm opened its first research and development facility in Southeast Asia in Hà Nội, aiming to develop wireless technologies and internet of things (IoT) technology and provide testing services to local manufacturing partners. Beside VinSmart, its other partners include the local tech firms Bkav, Viettel and VNPT. Four days ago, CEO of Bkav Group Nguyễn Tử Quảng announced on his Facebook page that a batch of AI View security cameras built with Qualcomm's technology will be exported to the US market this month. He also said four lines of AI View cameras of the firm have been certified to comply with US FCC standards. The first batch of Bkav products with 5G technology was exported to India in June, Quảng added. Chinese firm Huawei also sees Việt Nam as a promising 5G market and recently said it hopes to develop its 5G network in the country in industry, connectivity, cloud computing, artificial intelligence and computing. According to Qualcomm's leaders, 5G will boost local digital transformation and enhance tech-related manufacturing which currently accounts for 17 per cent of GDP. Last year, Viettel was the first Vietnamese firm to complete a 5G network trial, followed by Vinaphone and Mobiphone. Though the Ministry of Information and Communications' plan to commercialise the 5G network with entirely domestically produced equipment this month is not complete, Thủy from VinSmart told Việt Nam News: "Whenever the 5G network reaches a wide coverage in Viet Nam, we will be very ready to serve the local market." Viettel, Vinaphone and Mobiphone have also told the media they expected to commercialise their latest mobile network technology in 2021.

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[TOP ↑](#)

Government Considers Additional Support Policies for Industrial Sector

The Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) said it had advised the Government to implement a number of policies to support Việt Nam's industrial sector, especially the support industry. "The ministry is in the process of reviewing and amending Government Decree 68 on the development roadmap of the industrial sector 2016-2025 and development strategy for textiles and footwear," said Nguyễn Hữu Thành, deputy head of MPI's Department of Industrial Economy. In the meantime, measures have been taken to aid domestic businesses, boost demand and mitigate the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the initial outbreak of the novel coronavirus, a large number of Việt Nam's industries have been hit hard as raw material supply was severely disrupted due to strict measures imposed to limit the spread of the virus. As of recently, however, the bigger problem is how to find markets for Vietnamese products as the industries have slowly regained their

production capacity. "In order to find new markets, the ministry has been working closely with trade agencies. It has also recommended the Government to reduce business fees and extend deadlines for business taxes, all done to encourage and help businesses get on their feet sooner," Thành said. In addition, the Ministry of Finance has been working on a plan to offer a slew of tax incentives for support industry businesses. The plan would allow businesses with investment to build or expand production capacities finished before 2015 to benefit from corporate income tax incentives for a duration of five years until the end of 2020.

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[TOP↑](#)

HCM City Licences 30,000 New Businesses in Nine Months

HCM City has licenced nearly 30,000 new businesses with combined registered capital worth a total of VNĐ667 trillion (US\$28.64 billion) as of the beginning of October, according to the municipal Department of Planning and Investment. The number of newly-established enterprises declined 7.5 per cent compared to the same period last year, though registered capital was up 34.7 per cent year-on-year. The southern hub lured \$3.25 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) in the first nine months of this year, down 28 per cent from a year prior. Up to \$407.4 million was poured into 719 newly-licensed projects, \$283.8 million added into 163 underway projects and \$2.56 billion invested in 2,911 share trading deals. Trade was the leading sector in FDI attraction with more than \$751 million, accounting for more than 23 per cent of the total. It was followed by the property sector with \$726.8 million and science-technology with \$685.5 million. The department said that in the future, the city will prioritise three investment areas: smart city, highly interactive and innovative urban area in eastern HCM City, and regional and international financial centre construction.

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[TOP↑](#)

Việt Nam's Mobile Advertising Market Expected to Reach US\$211 Million in 2020

The mobile advertising market in Việt Nam is expected to reach US\$211 million by the end of this year, according to the "Việt Nam Mobile & Smartphone Application Report in the first half of 2020" released by Appota Group - a digital entertainment company. The report said Việt Nam ranks 6th in Southeast Asia in terms of mobile ad spending and accounts for the largest share of the digital industry. Due to COVID-19, the increasing trend of users using the internet means businesses are choosing digital advertising and promotions in response to the pandemic. Of which, mobile advertising accounts for more than 60 per cent of total digital ad spending. Also

according to the report, 47 per cent of surveyed businesses said they increased their budgets for digital media channels, 31 per cent of businesses increased their promotion budgets, 28 per cent focused more on selling on online channels, and only 25 per cent changed their logistics system. Đặng Thái Sơn, Marketing Director of Appota Group, said the above figures showed that online advertising is increasingly dominating the market, especially advertising content on mobile devices. It is forecast that the spending level in this sector will increase further in the coming years. Therefore, this is fertile ground for digital content advertisers and marketers.

Under the pandemic, the general advertising trend has become digital-focused as digital consumption skyrocketed. Average downloads per app in Việt Nam reached 256,290, which was significantly higher than the global average of 154,794 downloads per app. In Việt Nam, the cost-per-install (CPI) rate is relatively inexpensive and has shown a declining trend. Even with the effects of COVID-19, app usage and downloads have still been rising sharply. For developers, this is the golden period to launch their mobile applications and reach Vietnamese app users. Reward videos is also a popular advertising format in the COVID-19 era, especially for game apps on Android. Advertising for businesses is also driven by conversion rates as businesses focus more on generating revenue as fast as possible to make up for financial damage caused by the pandemic. Developers today are discovering and defining new ways to make integrated video ad formats even more appealing. At the forefront of this advertising shift is the reward video ad. Reward videos have been adapted and designed to be related to the economy in the app. Specifically users will be rewarded with premium content such as coins or credits after they watch a short video clip.

According to the Appota report, the effective cost per mile (eCPM) worldwide fell sharply in March due to the impact of the pandemic. Although Việt Nam shared this trend, the eCPM of the Android reward video format has been quickly recovered since April while eCPM on iOS fell from \$2.7 to \$2.27 in May, its lowest level in the first half of 2020. The factors driving the rapid recovery of eCPM on Android was because users play games on the Android platform more than iOS. Reward video is also especially suitable for gamers due to the ability to redeem in-game rewards. This type of ad can bring a lot of benefits to developers in terms of user engagement, ensuring an increase in click-through rate (CTR) and more eCPM. The report also revealed that the number of visits to news sites increased dramatically in the first quarter of 2020 because Vietnamese people are regularly updated with news related to COVID-19 at the time of the pandemic. Specifically, in the first quarter of 2020 compared to the fourth quarter of 2019, general news sites increase from 28 to 44 per cent of visits, and financial enterprise news sites increase 39 per cent of visits. Thanks to the sudden increase in visits, news sites have become frequently visited addresses and an effective advertising channel. Businesses are quick to recognise customer trends. According to the Influencer Marketing Hub report, businesses around the world have increased their advertising budgets 52 per cent in news and

newspapers.

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[TOP↑](#)

Private Sector, Non-State Enterprises to Be Placed at Heart of 10-Year Development Strategy

Enterprises, organisations and individuals have been called on to contribute to Việt Nam's draft socio-economic development strategy for the next 10 years. The Development Strategy Institute under the Ministry of Investment and Planning on Wednesday held a consultation workshop on the strategy. Speaking at the workshop, vice chairman of the institute Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh said the development strategy was expected to draw attention, identify and mobilise resources to facilitate business, increase the strength of the private sector and address problems. He said he hoped the business circle, occupational associations, universities and Việt Nam's development partners would work together to develop key strategic points for the development of non-State enterprises and the private sector in 2021-2030. Caitlin Wiesen, UNDP Resident Representative in Việt Nam, told the workshop that it was very important to harmonise economic growth with sustainable development and environmental protection. Economic achievements must go in line with ensuring social welfare and benefits for people, she said. She said that policymakers should focus on studying, analysing and finding solutions for challenges during the country's development. Enterprises should be placed at the centre of policies to create favourable conditions for them, she said, adding that support for start-ups should focus on innovation. Economic expert Nguyễn Đình Cung said sustainable development must rely on scientific and technological innovations and digital transformation. "It's a must to change ways of thinking and actions," he said, adding that now was time to catch the opportunities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and international integration to increase productivity, labour quality and national competitiveness," he said.

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[TOP↑](#)

South Asia

INDIA: Ramesh Pokhriyal Inaugurates 'Gyan Circle Ventures' to Aid Entrepreneurs in Technology Business

Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank', Union Minister for Education virtually inaugurated the Gyan Circle Ventures on October 8. Gyan Circle Ventures is a Technology Business Incubator (TBI) of Indian Institute of Information Technology, Sri City (Chittoor) in Andhra Pradesh funded by the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY). Amit Khare,

Secretary, Higher Education; Ajay Prakash Sawhney, Secretary, MeitY; Satish Chandra, Special Chief Secretary HE, Government of Andhra Pradesh; Bala MS, Chairman, Board of Governors, IIIT Sri City Chittoor; Srinivasa C Raju, Chairman, Sri City; Prof. G Kannabiran, Director, IIIT Sri City Chittoor and senior officials of the Ministry were also present during the inaugural ceremony. While addressing the occasion, the minister said that innovation is the engine that powers this progress of the nation. “We need to foster innovation and entrepreneurship to ensure that we are self-sustainable and remain as a leader, at the cutting edge of science and technology,” he added. Further, he said that facilities like ‘Gyan Circle ventures’ have the potential to imbibe entrepreneurship in young minds and aid them to be successful innovators. In 2020, IIIT Sri City is launching the TBI, Gyan Circle Ventures. Gyan Circle Ventures would function as a Technology Incubation and Development of Entrepreneurs (TIDE 2.0) incubation centre as approved by MeitY, told the minister. The incubator would leverage IIIT’s entrepreneurial spirit via utilizing its intellectual capital and engage in using emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Block-chain, Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS), Cyber Security, Internet of Things (IoT), Robotics, etc.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 10/07/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

96% of Businesses Making Employee-centric Future Workplace Strategy

NTT Ltd., the global technology services company, today releases its 2020 Intelligent Workplace Report ‘Shaping Employee Experiences for a World Transformed’, which highlights that the pandemic has put employee wellbeing at the forefront of the business agenda. Almost four-fifths (90.0%) of organizations agree that home-working during the pandemic has been challenging for employees. Connectivity and workspace issues such as bandwidth, a feeling of isolation and a lack of dedicated workspace have all contributed to their concerns. Organizations have to look at every aspect of workplace strategy to optimize employee experience, these include; culture, technology and location. The report which surveyed 1,350 participants across 19 markets found that 96.0% of the respondents believe employee needs will be at the heart of the future workplace design. Our findings show that 89.0% of organizations agree employees would prefer to have the choice and flexibility to work in an office when it is safe to do so, and 92.0% agreed that face-to-face meeting time is essential to build a sense of teamwork and/or when meeting clients. As the world continues to adapt to the challenges of COVID-19, organizations must develop a more robust strategy to permanently provide for their distributed workforce. While 92.0% of organizations recognize the value of employee experience as a crucial strategic differentiator, just 49.0% are very satisfied with their current capability. For now, a third of all businesses (39.0%) have changed their IT policy to help employees work within a new operating model and half (59.0%) have

deployed new communication and productivity tools. In many cases, employees have been left to use their personal devices and applications which has rapidly increased the risk of security vulnerabilities. In fact, only 64.0% have increased their IT security capabilities to keep their organization and employees secure.

John Lombard, CEO – Asia Pacific at NTT Ltd. comments, “The connected employee – their wellness and employee experience – must be at the heart of the future workplace strategy. Helping people stay connected and keeping their data secure is key to looking after the workforce and maintaining productivity and effectiveness. Yet this must be underpinned by a long-term strategy for digital transformation, with the roll out of new technologies, policies and of course training so employees feel comfortable with new platforms.” According to the report findings, almost half (59.0%) of businesses are already reviewing the general office design and how best to align with employees’ new needs. Respondents are somewhat polarised on what to do with office space in general, with over a third (34.4%) of global C-suite execs saying they are looking to reduce office space, yet almost a quarter (24.0%) plan to increase it. That said, most agree that the physical space will have a more defined, flexible use to provide for a more collaborative environment enabling: Connecting the distributed workforce: 64.0% will install video conferencing/video collaboration spaces to bring remote and office employees together
Facilitate creativity and collaboration: 50.0% will implement creative/thinking spaces
Drive activity-based work initiatives: over a quarter (27.0%) will reduce individual office desk space with 39.0% increasing meeting spaces
Intelligent solutions will empower the employee

We now have access to a vast range of digital platforms and applications, but the rapid adoption of these new technologies has not always been supported with adequate training. To motivate employees to use new technology, it is important to clearly articulate the benefit to them as individuals, especially if they are working remotely. Just 46.0% of businesses, across the globe, have access to workplace analytics to help them understand and assess new pain points introduced by remote working. By reviewing which applications and features people are using through workplace analytics, businesses can learn how to prioritise, tailor and measure the impact of training to positively impact on adoption, usage and productivity – all of which contributes to the employee experience. Having adapted to the pandemic in recent months, over half (55.3%) of the global C-suite strongly agree that now is the time to create the workplace of the future. Pranay Anand, Senior Director of Intelligent Workplace, Asia Pacific at NTT Ltd. agrees with the need for businesses to act now, stating: “How businesses combat the challenges posed by COVID-19 and re-shape their workplace strategy, will lay the foundation for an entire generation’s future of working. Businesses must react with agility and purpose. We’re seeing companies driving change in real-time compared to months if not years previously. Those who were already ahead of the game in employee experience – making brave, data-driven, human-led decisions are now in a much stronger position in creating a

supportive culture. Empowering people and helping them find greater fulfilment in their work is delivering value to these organizations.”

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 10/16/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Visa Company Working to Promote Contactless Payments

The result of ‘Pay by Using Mobile Application with Visa’ national campaign, launch of which was announced by Visa company and the Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) in June 2020, over two months exceeded all expectations and confirmed the high demand for mobile payments among Azerbaijani users, Christina Dorosh, the company’s director for the Caucasus region, told Trend. According to Dorosh, the growth in turnovers on tokenized transactions reached 350,000 manat (\$205,800) per month, while the number of transactions has doubled and amounted to over 14,000 transactions per month. As she noted, one of the key sectors for the further development of contactless payments is transport. Thus, Visa, in partnership with the Central Bank of Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijan Railways and the International Bank of Azerbaijan, launched the first project of contactless fare payment on urban trains. "To date, testing of payment using contactless bank cards and payment rings has been already started," the director said. Dorosh also pointed out that upon completion of the technical testing, payment through these instruments will be available at several stations of the Absheron Ring Railway. "At the first stage of the project, only contactless cards and rings of the International Bank of Azerbaijan will be accepted, and afterwards, the system will be opened for contactless payment instruments of all banks and expanded to cover all stations of the Absheron Ring Railway," she also said. "The development of contactless payments is one of the key areas for Visa", the regional director of the company concluded.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 10/07/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Azerbaijan Holds Auction on Privatization of State-Owned Enterprises

The State Service on Property Issues under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy held a new auction, Trend reports citing the service. The state service said that the auction was organized on October 13, resulting in privatization of 9 state-owned enterprises. According to the service, 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 an auction price of the property, thereby obtaining the status of a customer. On the day of the auction, by picking 'Electronic auction' on the e-services portal (e-emdk.gov.az), potential participants can join the auction.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 10/14/2020

[TOP↑](#)

SMEDA Becomes a Member of Int'l Public-Private Partnership Association

The Center for Public-Private Partnership Development of the Agency for the Development of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEDA) has become a member of the World Association of Public-Private Partnership Units and Professionals (WAPPP), one of the organizations specializing in public-private partnership. It should be noted that WAPPP is an international non-governmental organization that brings together individuals and entities, operating or relating to the sphere of the partnership between the state and entrepreneurs, from different countries of the world. The main goal of the association is to conduct awareness raising activities to provide quality services in the field of the partnership between the state and entrepreneurs, and to create and maintain an institutional network among institutions working in this area. Moreover, WAPPP provides members of an association with access to a variety of training, consulting services, information exchange, provides opportunities for access to other resources, supports the possibility of using technical assistance, and using funding sources. The Small and Medium Business Development Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan was established in accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated December 28, 2017. As a legal entity under the Ministry of Economy, the agency is authorized to support the development of small and medium businesses (SMBs) in the country by providing SMBs with a number of services as well as ensuring coordination and regulation of services rendered by government entities to SMBs.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 10/23/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Azerbaijan Expands Public-Private Partnership in Agricultural Sector

Azerbaijan has made an important step in expanding public-private partnership in the agricultural sector. A Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation was signed

between the Agricultural Services Agency under the Ministry of Agriculture of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan State Agrarian University and the Public Association of Fertilizer Producers and Importers of Azerbaijan on Plant Protection. The document will ensure correct and timely use of production capacities to increase production in the country, organization of phytosanitary measures and coordination of services, as well as training of qualified personnel to ensure health and protection of plants, increase yield. Thus, parties of contract will cooperate in maintaining a healthy environment and phytosanitary stability in the country, improving the mechanism for effective control of pests, diseases and weeds using modern methods and technologies. Likewise, the document provides for cooperation in the field of phytosanitary specialists in monitoring of plant health by innovative methods, protection of phytosanitary environment and creation of ecologically clean integrated control systems, organization of joint training courses on modern technological processes in the field of plant protection. Additionally, parties will support scientific activities of young researches, organize working meetings, joint scientific-practical conferences and seminars on issues of mutual interest and exchange information.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 10/28/2020

[TOP↑](#)

UZBEKISTAN: Mirziyoyev Instructs to Develop Strategy for Development of Automotive Industry

Another video conference chaired by Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev held on October 21 focused on the productivity of industries for 9 months of this year. Even though the pandemic has seriously affected the pace of industrial production, production facilities continued their activity during the quarantine period. This has allowed protecting the industry from significant potential losses. The processing industry, which provides high added value in the economy, grew by almost 3% in 9 months. The production of electrical equipment increased by 25%, textiles – by 12%, metal ore mining – by 7%, construction materials production – by 6%. In addition, exports of automobiles increased by 1.5 times, electrical equipment – by 1.3 times, textiles – by 16%, copper wires – by 15%. The GDP growth made up 0.4%, budget revenues were fulfilled with a surplus of \$183.3mn. Meanwhile, some industries and regions experienced shortcomings, as a result of which the total volume of industrial production decreased by 2.7%. – There are problems in the management system of industrial enterprises. We need to reduce the cost of production. This is an important basis for creating a competitive environment, " said Mirziyoyev. He gave instructions to increase natural gas production and additional gas supplies to the domestic market by the end of the year. The task is to produce 740 thousand tons of oil and condensate, produce 203 thousand tons of liquefied gas and 125 thousand tons of polyethylene. The production of tractors and seeders has halved in the agricultural machinery industry. Mirziyoyev also urged to increase car production to 62,000 units in the fourth quarter, bring the export volume up to \$165mn, as well as launch the

export of components and spare parts on the foreign market. According to plans, some 80 large and 44 regional projects worth \$7bn are set to be implemented by the end of 2020.

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[TOP↑](#)

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: ASX Ends 1pc Higher, All Sectors Up

Investors have made a spritely start to October and all ASX sectors finished higher following a good lead from Wall Street. The S&P/ASX200 benchmark index closed higher by 57 points, or 0.98 per cent, to 5872.9 points on Thursday. The index was up 1.5 per cent for much of the day, and hit a session high of 5916.5 before easing in the last hour. The All Ordinaries index finished up by 60.1 points, or 1.0 per cent, to 6069.4. The property sector fared best by 2.1 per cent, followed by materials at 1.53 per cent. Financials were up by 0.82 per cent. The positive lead came from optimism in the US that politicians would try again for financial stimulus to help business through the coronavirus recession. All three major US indexes finished higher after US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin expressed hope for a breakthrough.

ASR Wealth senior adviser Ben Le Brun noted the ASX200 finished in the trading range of the last few months, but believed there were benefits. "It really is a trader's market at the moment. You can't go too far wrong," he said. "You're buying at the bottom end of the range at about 5800 points, and 6000 has been the top end of the range." The US election on November 3 remains a big risk event as the less palatable choice for many investors, Democrat Joe Biden, leads the polls. However Mr Le Brun was hoping for news of a coronavirus vaccine before then. "If we get a shot in the arm in terms of a vaccine, no pun intended, that would set us up nicely for a Santa Claus rally," Mr Le Brun said. "We could get on to the V-shaped recovery everyone's talking about." Job vacancies rebounded sharply after the steep drop earlier in the year when COVID-19 restrictions were put in place.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics job vacancies survey - a pointer to employment growth - showed hiring intentions soared 59.4 per cent in the three months to August. Australian manufacturing got a boost after the Morrison government unveiled plans to pump almost \$1.5 billion into the sector. The plan, part of Tuesday's federal budget, targets mining, food and drink, medical products, recycling and clean energy, defence and space. On the market, miners enjoyed the optimism. BHP ended up by 1.94 per cent to \$36.29, Rio Tinto rose by 1.15 per cent to \$95.40 and Fortescue climbed by 2.33 per cent to \$16.68. Plumbing provider Reliance Worldwide was a top performer. Its shares surged by 10.47 per cent to \$4.22 after reporting September

sales in the Americas increased by 29 per cent. Sales were 24 per cent better in the Europe, Middle East and Asia region, and four per cent higher in Asia Pacific.

Moody's lowered its ratings for three parts of the AMP business from A3 to Baa2. These parts are AMP Group Holdings, AMP Finance Services and AMP Bank. Moody's improved the outlook for AMP Group to stable from "review for downgrade". Shares finished higher by 3.07 per cent to \$1.34. Among the major banks, ANZ gained 0.99 per cent to \$17.39, the Commonwealth rose by 0.68 per cent to \$64.04, NAB edged up by 0.45 per cent to \$17.83 and Westpac was higher by 0.48 per cent to \$16.92. Aussie biotech Mesoblast had shares suspended from trading ahead of US health authorities deciding whether to use the company's therapy for a rare disease which affects blood cancer patients. The decision is expected on Monday. Shares last traded lower by 2.12 per cent to \$5.08. Looking ahead, manufacturing data for Europe and the US will be published in the next day. On Friday in Australia, retail sales data for August is due. St George Bank economists expect a drop of 4.2 per cent. The Aussie dollar was buying 71.94 US cents at 1702 AEST, up from 71.10 US cents after the close of trade on Wednesday.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 10/01/2020

[TOP↑](#)

Small Businesses to Gain More Tax Breaks

It's not so much the scale of the support but the "attitude" being brought to backing small and medium-sized businesses in the federal budget that counts. That is the view of Assistant Treasurer Michael Sukkar, who has been helping pull together next Tuesday's budget. The government has unveiled a dozen changes to fringe benefits tax and the way businesses deal with the tax office. It has also been speculated the budget will include a measure enabling businesses to claim back tax paid before the coronavirus hit to offset losses incurred in the first recession in 30 years. Mr Sukkar refused to confirm changes to the "loss carry-back rules" but hinted it was important for businesses to have the liquidity and capital needed to invest and grow. However, he said businesses of all sizes would appreciate the government's approach to helping them through the crisis, even if it amounted to only a few thousand dollars for some.

"This is a very strong indication of the attitude the prime minister and the treasurer and government have brought to this year's budget, which is making it easier for small and medium-sized businesses," he told Sky News on Friday. "Every single business, regardless of the value, will be welcoming not having to pay fringe benefits tax. "These are important measures, but they most importantly give Australians a sense of just how serious we are about encouraging Australian businesses to employ and invest in their workforce." Treasurer Josh Frydenberg has pitched the budget as a two-step process, with a boost in spending now to fuel growth and get people back

into work, followed by a shift back to fiscal restraint once the jobless rate is under control. The budget deficit is expected to be around \$200 billion with debt heading towards \$1 trillion. Thousands of small businesses will get access to tax breaks and red tape cuts under a \$112 million plan.

The small business entity turnover threshold will be lifted from \$10 million to \$50 million for various tax concessions. Among the concessions will be not applying the 47 per cent fringe benefits tax (FBT) on work phones, laptops and small businesses that provide free car parking to their staff in non-commercial premises. The government will also remove the FBT on retraining provided by employers to redundant, or soon to be redundant, workers. The changes will complement other measures already in place, including lowering the company tax rate, increasing the instant asset write-off and providing a 50 per cent accelerated depreciation allowance. Work is also under way on reducing red tape across government. "Good regulation is critical to ensuring Australia has a well-functioning economy, society, environment, and democracy," said Ben Morton, the minister tasked with deregulation. "Bad regulation is a 'job-killer' with no redeeming features." Meanwhile, an extra \$50 million in rebates will be made available to drought-affected farmers this financial year to put in new bores, dams and pipes.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 10/01/2020

[TOP ↑](#)

Coal Plant Feasibility Study Handed \$770k

A Queensland company has so far received \$770,000 to conduct a feasibility study into building a new coal-fired power station, as the auditor-general investigates the grant. Shine Energy will get up to \$4 million from the federal government to look at building a new coal-fired power station in north Queensland, fulfilling an election promise. Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources senior official Rachel Parry revealed to a Senate estimates hearing on Tuesday the company had already received \$770,000. Labor senator Jenny McAllister was surprised, pointing out the opposition was trying to stop the feasibility study through a disallowance motion in the Senate with the support of the Greens. Department secretary David Fredericks wouldn't reveal what would happen to the money should the motion succeed. "We'll be able to deal with that eventuality if and when it occurs," he said.

Senator McAllister also raised issues with the grant process. Labor had referred the grant to the Australian National Audit Office after revelations Shine Energy was asked to apply for the money after the government had announced it was successful. Senior government minister Simon Birmingham said the grant process was not without precedent. "It's consistent with the grant guidelines," he said. "The department is co-operating with the ANAO, who I'm sure will find that to be the case." Mr Fredericks reminded senators the money was a grant for a feasibility study.

"Spoiler alert, it's not feasible - that will save you a bit of time and money," Greens senator Larissa Waters replied.

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[TOP↑](#)

SOLOMON ISLANDS: Fisheries, Tourism Applications Cleared

First round of assessment of all applications towards the Economic Stimulus Package under Fisheries and Tourism sector have completed the entire screening process this week. This means approvals have been made on the most genuine applications through the vigorous screening process. This is according to the ESP Oversight Committee of the National Government. Following the completion of the screening process, the recipients whose applications are approved will be contacted in the coming days. All successful applicants will be contacted to collect their letter of offer from the committee and sign an agreement with the ESP Oversight Committee. The purpose of the agreement is to ensure that all recipients are committed and are obligated to utilise the ESP support according to its intending purposes when they applied.

As stated in the agreement, all recipients of the ESP are obliged to report to the committee during the monitoring stage that their funds they receive are utilised accordingly to the stated purpose that they had applied for. The ESP Committee reiterates that all applications go through a vigorous and strict screening and selection process and a list of information relating to the applications will be published via a database following the launch a data software tomorrow. Meanwhile, approvals for projects such as piggery, poultry, timber milling and root crops are currently under screening process and is expected to complete by the end of this week or early next week. Process to release payments on cleared recipients is under way as well. The Government through the ESP Committee is fully committed to the implementation of the ESP on the interest of the wellbeing of the people, national stability and economic empowerment.

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[TOP↑](#)