



Asia-Pacific Governance Watch

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Asia-Pacific

Global Co-operation and Strong Policy Action Needed for a Sustainable Recovery – OECD

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed major weaknesses in our economies that can only be fixed through greater global co-operation and strong, targeted policy action, according to a new OECD report presented to the Leaders of the G20 countries at

their virtual Summit this weekend. New Horizons, a report requested by the G20 to support its Action Plan in response to the crisis, says governments need to plan now for the recovery while continuing to live with the virus. Emergency economic measures to tackle the crisis will need to be adapted, support to people and businesses become more targeted, and new policies put in place to make the objective of a stronger, sustainable and inclusive global economy, a reality. Speaking at the Summit OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría said that ambitious reforms were needed to ensure a vigorous recovery. He added: “We need to make sure health and social protection benefit all, that public and private investment is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, and we need to build resilience into the heart of our economic and social systems.”

The OECD identifies the need for stronger co-operation between governments in a number of fields:

- in health, from research to distributing COVID-19 vaccines,
- in trade, to ensure robust global production chains,
- in the taxation of multinationals as the economy becomes increasingly digitalised,
- in environmental sustainability, and,
- in preventing sudden outflows of capital and sovereign debt crises in emerging markets and developing countries.

The report says exceptional fiscal spending and monetary support should be maintained as long as needed to buffer the shock of the pandemic, and outlines how governments should work on three main fronts – to reallocate resources; support people; and build a sustainable and resilient economic system for the future. The crisis is accelerating changes to the economy, which are often disruptive. Governments will need to assist workers and businesses to transition from shrinking to expanding sectors; by removing barriers to mobility, by increasing competition, and by making it easier for firms to access finance and advanced technologies or to restructure. Improving training and building skills, particularly among the low-skilled, youths and women who are often vulnerable in the labour market, will be key. Job retention schemes will need to evolve to ensure that people, rather than their jobs, are protected, that their opportunities are widened and their income safeguarded.

Increasing public and private investment particularly in healthcare, digitalisation, lowering carbon emissions, education and skills are essential to reinforce sustainability and resilience. The New Horizons report is part of the broad range of analysis and recommendations from the OECD and other international organisations to support the work of the G20. Mr. Gurría welcomed the achievements of the G20 under the Saudi presidency. In particular, he pointed to the G20 reaffirming its targets to reduce the percentage of young people who are most at risk of being left behind in the labour market by 15% by 2025, and to reduce the gender gap in the labour force by 25 % over the next five years. The OECD and ILO will continue monitoring progress in these areas, as well as on the impact of the pandemic on employment

and trends in migration.

Mr Gurría said the OECD is continuing to work with the G20 towards achieving a political agreement on how to tax the digital economy by mid-2021. In the Secretary-General's Tax Report to G20 finance ministers, the OECD warns that without an agreement there would be a proliferation of unilateral measures and an increase in damaging tax and trade disputes that could cut global GDP at a time when we are reeling from the pandemic. He added that a sustainable economic recovery from the crisis would be undermined by environmentally harmful spending – such as fossil fuel subsidies – which still outweighs more ecologically friendly investments in the recovery packages announced by governments. Mr Gurría also welcomed G20 progress on fighting corruption and criminalising foreign bribery, including the request by Saudi Arabia to join the OECD Working Group on Bribery, with a view to adhering to the OECD Anti-bribery Convention, the international standard in this area.

Further information on the full range of OECD work on G20 priorities.

OECD work on policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For additional information, journalists can also contact the OECD Media Office (tel. +33 1 4524 9700). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 11/22/2020

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Governments Should Strike a Balance Between Encouraging Philanthropy Through Tax Support and Ensuring Effective Public Policy

Governments should continue providing support to the philanthropic sector while taking steps to safeguard tax systems and ensure that the activities of philanthropic organisations continue to align with the public interest, according to a new report from the OECD. Taxation and Philanthropy reviews the tax treatment of philanthropic entities and charitable donations in 40 countries worldwide. The report points out the significant impact of philanthropy – the non-profit sector represents as much as 5% of GDP in many countries – as well as the wide range of potential tax policy options countries can consider to improve the effectiveness of tax concessions for philanthropy. Produced in collaboration with the University of Geneva's Centre for Philanthropy, Taxation and Philanthropy is the most exhaustive review of the tax treatment of the philanthropic sector undertaken to date. It details the various types of favourable tax treatment countries provide to encourage philanthropy, both to donors as well as the philanthropic entities themselves, and assesses how tax incentives are and can be used to increase philanthropic activity in areas prioritised by government to raise overall social welfare.

The report, which will be presented during a virtual conference hosted by the University of Geneva, highlights broad support amongst countries for the provision of tax support for philanthropy, while drawing attention to emerging concerns in some countries that current practices could give a small number of wealthy donors disproportionate influence over how public resources are allocated. This concern is highlighted by the rise in the number of very large private philanthropic foundations established by ultra-high-net-worth individuals, who are able to channel substantial resources into the priorities of their choice, while significantly minimising their tax liabilities. While risks of abuse should be addressed, this concern should not overshadow the overwhelmingly positive spillovers of philanthropy in general, according to the report. "Philanthropy plays an important role in most countries, providing private support to a range of activities for the public good, and this is especially evident in the current context of the COVID-19 crisis," said Pascal Saint-Amans, Director of the OECD Centre for Tax Policy and Administration. "Looking ahead, governments need to strike the right balance between safeguarding tax systems while continuing to provide support to the sector."

The report underlines important considerations for policy makers as they seek to strike this appropriate balance. The report discusses a range of tax policy options, suggesting that policy makers:

- Reassess the activities eligible for tax support, and ensure that favourable treatment is limited to those areas consistent with underlying policy goals.
- Consider providing tax credits rather than deductions, and fiscal caps, to ensure that tax support does not disproportionately benefit higher income taxpayers.
- Reassess the extent of tax exemptions for commercial income of philanthropic entities, to minimise the risk of putting for-profit businesses at a competitive disadvantage.
- Reduce the complexity of tax laws that disproportionately affect low-income donors and smaller philanthropic entities.
- Improve oversight and boost transparency, to safeguard public trust in the sector and ensure that tax concessions used to boost philanthropy are not abused through tax avoidance and evasion schemes.
- Reassess restrictions currently imposed on cross-border philanthropic activity.

Further information on Taxation and Philanthropy is available at: www.oecd.org/tax/tax-policy/taxation-and-philanthropy-df434a77-en.htm Media enquiries 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/> 11/26/2020

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Senior Officials Determine Policy Direction in the COVID-19 Age

Officials from the 21 APEC economies began their final round of policy deliberations for 2020 this Friday. The concluding senior officials' meeting, organized by Malaysia, was convened in a virtual space to ensure that APEC work in advancing regional economic integration, as well as fostering sustainability, inclusive growth and resilience, continues even as the COVID-19 pandemic restricts cross-border travel. These proceedings kick off the most crucial week of APEC 2020 which will culminate in the first online meeting of APEC Leaders which will be held next Friday and will be chaired by Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin. The outcomes are expected to direct policy direction towards the end of a year of what the Chair of APEC Senior Officials, Hairil Yahri Yaacob, called "significant challenges." "Just as things started to pick up, we were hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, which almost immediately halted all our meetings, disrupted our plans," Hairil said. "These developments prompted us to spring into action and swiftly respond to the crisis at hand. We strategized, moved ahead with renewed vigor."

Under the theme Optimising Human Potential towards a Resilient Future of Shared Prosperity. Pivot. Prioritise. Progress, the APEC forum's work necessarily zeroed in on the economic and social ailments caused by COVID-19. Considering that they collectively account for 40 percent of the population, half of global trade and 60 per cent of world GDP, the policies adopted collectively by APEC economies will advance the global fight against the pandemic. The chair recognized the untiring efforts and high-level dedication of senior officials in advancing work in 2020. "I'm proud to announce that we have successfully organized six sectoral ministerial meetings, namely trade, health, finance, women, SMEs and food security, which led to the issuance of seven ministerial statements," he said. "This is truly a remarkable feat, especially given the fact that almost three months of our hosting year was lost due to the pandemic."

The list of outcomes of senior officials' work over the past months include a declaration facilitating the movement of essential goods, such as medicine and medical equipment and a proposal to review measures facilitating the movement of people amid travel restrictions among others. Hairil emphasized that one of the most prominent outcomes of the year will be APEC's post-vision for the future. As this year marks the time for APEC to assess its progress in pursuit of the Bogor Goals of free and open trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific region, senior officials have been exploring the development of new vision to present to ministers and leaders over the coming days.

"This year is truly a turning point for APEC as well as the rest of the world," said Dr Rebecca Fatima Sta Maria, Executive Director of the APEC Secretariat, which supports the policymaking process for APEC's membership. "We have faced

economic uncertainty and other challenges that threaten the prosperity and well-being in the region before, but nothing like the threat of the pandemic." "It currently dominates our life, economic activity and policy decisions," she said. "It is important to make sure we learn from this and emerge better and more resilient." The work of senior officials will be elevated to the Virtual APEC Ministers' Meeting on Monday, 16 November. On Thursday, 19 November, leaders, policy makers and the region's movers and shakers of business will engage each other in the APEC CEO Dialogues, Malaysia, after which leaders will meet on Friday, 20 November, to set the tone for the region's collective response to the COVID-19 era.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 11/13/2020

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East Asia

CHINA: To Introduce More Green Development Measures

China will introduce a series of measures to facilitate the overall green transformation of economic and social development, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. The document, 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, was adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29. China will reduce its carbon intensity, or the amount of carbon emissions per unit of GDP, and make an action plan to achieve the goal of having CO2 emissions peak before 2030. With pollution prevention high on the agenda, China vows persistent efforts to basically eliminate days with severe pollution and "black and odorous" water bodies in cities.

In this regard, the country will implement a license system on pollution discharge and promote the trading of pollution discharge rights, energy and water utilization rights, and carbon emission quotas. China will actively take part in and lead international cooperation in tackling climate change and other ecological and environmental protection initiatives. The country will establish a nature reserve system with national parks at its heart, while implementing major projects on biodiversity protection. Efforts will be made to strengthen ecological protection of major rivers, lakes and wetlands, and well implement the 10-year Yangtze River fishing ban. China will monitor the impact of global warming in vulnerable areas and carry out performance evaluation on ecological protection. The efficiency of resource utilization will be raised in an all-round way.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/03/2020

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CPC Proposals Outline China's Development Principles over Next Five Years

China must follow a set of guiding principles during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) period in a bid to achieve social and economic development targets, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. The proposals stress upholding the overall leadership of the CPC, sticking to a people-centered approach, adopting a new vision for development, deepening reforms and opening up, and sticking to systematic concept. The Party leadership's proposals for formulating the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035 were adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/03/2020

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China Unveils Guidelines on Innovative Foreign Trade Development

The State Council, China's cabinet, on Monday unveiled guidelines on the innovative development of the country's foreign trade. It specified measures covering nine areas to promote trade development, including searching for new ways to explore the international market, optimizing the domestic layout of foreign trade, and enhancing the competitiveness of foreign trade firms. The country will actively negotiate and sign more high-standard free trade agreements and regional trade agreements while leveraging new technologies and channels to explore the international market, according to the guidelines. Efforts go into enhancing trade quality in the country's eastern region, increase the proportion of trade in the central and western areas, and expand the opening-up of the northeastern region while innovating mechanisms to foster cooperation among different regions, the guidelines said. The guidelines also required authorities to offer a targeted guide to different types of enterprises to foster the competitiveness of both large foreign trade firms and small and medium-sized enterprises. It also specified measures to improve the structure of exports and imports, cultivate innovative trade modes, and foster platforms to promote foreign trade. China has managed to keep foreign trade stable this year despite disruptions by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first ten months, the country's foreign trade of goods went up by 1.1 percent year on year, accelerating from an increase of 0.7 percent in the first three quarters, customs data showed.

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China Issues Plan to Streamline Administration, Improve Business Environment

China's cabinet on Tuesday unveiled a plan to deepen reforms in order to streamline administration and further improve the business climate. The plan, issued by the General Office of the State Council, lists 25 key tasks for the next phase of reforms. Stressing timely and precise implementation of macroeconomic policies, the plan calls for efforts to facilitate financing for enterprises, especially small, micro and medium-sized enterprises, and to stabilize and increase employment. The plan calls for further cutting red tape and simplifying and optimizing access management measures for automobile production. Work must be done to secure the bottom line of safety and quality through strict supervision and control over vaccines, pharmaceuticals, special equipment and hazardous chemicals, says the plan. According to the plan, China will accelerate the introduction of systems involving punitive damages and heavy fines in areas directly related to people's health and safety. The country will also support exploration and innovation at the local level, says the plan, adding that a number of pilot cities for business climate innovation will be set up, taking the lead in deepening reforms to strengthen regulation and services.

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China Adopts Law to Strengthen Support for Veterans

China's top legislature on Wednesday adopted a new law to strengthen protection over the legitimate rights of veterans. Lawmakers approved the law on support for veterans at the 23rd session of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress (NPC), which concluded Wednesday. The law stipulates that it is the common responsibility of the whole society to respect and care for demobilized military personnel, and the veterans can enjoy the benefits of preferential financing policies such as discount interest on loans if they start small or micro businesses. The law required establishing a national mechanism to ensure special preferential treatment to veterans who participated in wars. The law also has provisions on the different settlement measures for demobilized military officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers. The law will take effect on Jan. 1, 2021.

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Chinese Premier Stresses Implementation of Policies in Boosting Economy

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on Wednesday stressed the implementation of policies to ensure the important role of policies in promoting economic stability and recovery. Li made the remarks while presiding over an executive meeting of the State Council. The State Council has sent inspection teams to 14 provincial-level regions and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, in a bid to supervise implementation of policies, sum up local experiences, collect grass-roots suggestions and facilitate solutions to existing problems, according to the meeting. The inspection shows that, since the beginning of the year, local governments have conscientiously implemented the decisions and arrangements of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, channeling 2 trillion yuan (302.57 billion U.S. dollars) of new fiscal funds to the primary level in cities and counties to help businesses and individuals directly, according to the meeting. In particular, the 2.5 trillion yuan in tax and fee cuts, together with other policies, have been effective in supporting market entities and boosting market confidence, while playing a key role in stabilizing economic fundamentals, according to the meeting.

Noting that previous policy measures aimed at relieving difficulties and improving the business environment for market entities have helped recover economic growth so far this year, the meeting made two decisions to further energize market entities and unleash the potential of domestic demand. According to the meeting, China will deepen reform at the Shanghai Pilot Free Trade Zone and pilot an administrative reform on market entry in the municipality's Pudong New Area. The number of licenses needed to establish a business in the area will be reduced to one for 31 sectors that involve many micro and small firms, including convenience stores, gyms and catering companies, said the meeting. Another decision was to reduce the number of qualification categories and grades for construction-related companies from 593 to 245, while the number of surveying and mapping qualification categories and levels will be reduced from 138 to 20. The meeting called for strengthened oversight during construction projects and after their closures to ensure their quality.

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China Regulates Online Marketing Through Livestreaming

China's top Internet watchdog on Friday released a draft regulation to prohibit illegal activities in marketing goods or services to the public through online livestreaming. Livestreaming operators and salespersons on the Internet must not publish fake information to defraud or mislead users, according to the document released by the Cyberspace Administration of China. The practices of making up or falsifying relevant data, such as the number of views, likes and trade volumes, are prohibited. It calls on online livestreaming platforms for marketing to conduct credit evaluations of livestreamers and blacklist those guilty of serious violations of laws and

regulations. The draft also includes provisions for the protection of minors, personal information and data security.

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China Issues Guideline to Stabilize Grain Production

The General Office of the State Council has released a guideline on preventing non-grain use of arable land and stabilizing grain production to ensure food security. Underscoring food security as the top priority in China's agricultural work, the guideline stressed that grain production must be a priority in using farmland resources. It urged related departments to optimize production structures, implement the strictest farmland protection policies, and use arable land scientifically. The country should unveil special protection measures and regulations for using arable land, the guideline said, calling for strict restrictions on converting arable land into other types of agricultural land, such as forests and gardens. Efforts should also go into preventing the disorderly production of inedible produces that are excessive in the market, it said.

The guideline stressed fulfilling the targets of protecting permanent basic farmland, calling for efforts to regulate production and business activities, and prohibit the destructive use of the land. Also, the country should implement incentive policies and improve the economic compensation mechanism in major grain-producing regions while rolling out measures to encourage local governments and farmers in grain production, according to the guideline. To enhance the production efficiency in the functional areas of grain production, more policy support, as well as agriculture-oriented funds, will be provided, it added. Apart from improving the mechanical technologies in grain production, the guideline also said that authorities would monitor and assess arable land nationwide with satellite remote sensing technologies and report cases of non-grain farmland use.

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China Adopts New Steps to Bolster Consumption, Facilitate Internet Plus Tourism

China will introduce new measures in boosting consumption in commodities and key sectors, and tapping rural consumption potential, according to the State Council, or the cabinet. Greater support will be provided for the growth of Internet Plus Tourism,

to better cater people's demand in consumption upgrading, the State Council's executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on Wednesday. Figures from the Ministry of Commerce show that in 2019, retail sales in automobiles, home appliances, furniture, construction materials and catering sectors accounted for some 25 percent of the total retail sales in China, and retail sales in rural areas accounted for 14.7 percent of the total. In October, total retail sales saw a 4.3 percent year-on-year increase, registering positive growth for three consecutive months. "At present, the prominent restraint on economic development lies in consumption as the main growth engine was seriously affected by COVID-19 earlier this year.

It has been picking up in the past few months, yet notable difficulties remain in restoring normal growth. We need to explore new highlights in consumption to spur domestic demand," Li said. It was agreed at the Wednesday meeting that the strategy of bolstering domestic demands will be firmly implemented. Auto consumption will be stabilized and expanded. Local authorities are encouraged to finetune restrictive measures regarding car purchasing, and raise the ceiling of license plate quota. Promotion campaigns will be carried out for vehicle purchasing in rural areas and trading in used cars for new ones. In rural areas where conditions permit, residents will be encouraged to buy trucks with capacity no bigger than 3.5 tonnes and passenger cars with engines no bigger than 1.6 liters. Car buyers will be subsidized for phasing out the gasoline powered vehicles of national emission standard III or below. The construction of parking lots and charging piles will be stepped up.

Regions where conditions allow are encouraged to give out subsidies for trading in old facilities and purchasing green smart home appliances and environment-friendly furniture. Catering service providers are encouraged to diversify and upgrade their menus, innovate online and offline business models, and improve service standards. Market-oriented promotion of high-quality specialty diets will be supported. Expanding county and township consumption shall serve as a fulcrum to spur rural consumption. Construction of business and trade facilities in counties and townships and logistics outlets in villages will be stepped up. Sub-national localities will be supported in building comprehensive public service and consumer service centers that meet rural demands and needs in farmers' daily lives.

Violations such as making and selling of fake or substandard goods will be cracked down on pursuant to law to ensure that rural market will be better regulated. "Counties and townships shall also be included when boosting rural consumption, as they boast enormous potential. High-end consumption in big cities should not be our sole focus," Li said. "County consumption capacity is modest, yet it will grow and upgrade. Efforts should be taken to adapt to different consumer needs and improve people's lives." Those at the meeting also agreed on a host of measures to support Internet Plus Tourism. Development of smart facilities in tourist attractions will be taken forward and services such as electronic maps and audio guides will be

promoted. Construction of digital exhibition venues in major tourism sites will be encouraged.

Tourist sites will be encouraged to increase online marketing and facilitate new business forms such as cloud tour. Regulatory measures will be rolled out for Internet Plus Homestay. Traditional offline services will remain in place for senior citizens and other special groups. Accommodating yet prudent regulatory approaches will be improved, and tourism safety monitoring and online complaint handling will be scaled up. "The model of Internet Plus Tourism will play a positive role in catalyzing consumption. Practices proven effective shall be summarized and promoted," Li said. "Accommodating yet prudent regulation needs to be enhanced and cheating and swindling must be deterred."

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State Council Approves "One Integrated License" Pilot in Shanghai's Pudong

The State Council has given the nod to a pilot "one integrated license" in Shanghai's Pudong New Area. The "one integrated license," combining the previously-needed multiple licenses, can significantly reduce the cost of industry access and foster a world-class business environment, the State Council said. The pilot, to last till the end of 2022, aims to accumulate experience for similar practices to be implemented across China, it said. Altogether, 31 sectors in Pudong New Area including e-commerce, convenience stores, supermarkets, restaurants and hotels will spearhead the integrated license reform. A total of 25 administrative licensing items under the responsibility of State Council departments will be processed by the authorities in Pudong New Area.

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Chinese Premier Stresses Policy Continuity to Spur Vitality, Promote Economic Recovery

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has underscored policy continuity, effectiveness and sustainability to spur greater vitality among market entities, promote stable economic recovery and sustained growth, as well as constantly improve people's livelihoods. Li made the remarks via video link as he presided over a symposium on the economic situation that was attended by local government officials on Friday. Vice Premier Han Zheng attended the symposium. Leading government officials from the provinces of

Heilongjiang, Shandong, Hunan, Guangdong and Yunnan reported on local economic situations and made suggestions for policy making. China has made major strategic achievements in COVID-19 prevention and control and its economy has recorded positive growth relatively quickly, thanks to the concerted efforts from both higher and lower levels, and state policies that are timely and effective, Li said. He called for efforts to implement the spirit of the fifth plenary session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, apply new development philosophies, promote high-quality development and forge new development paradigm to ensure stable economic development and improve people's livelihoods.

Li urged efforts to maintain the continuity, effectiveness and sustainability of policies, keep the policy focus on market entities and people's livelihoods, as well as stabilizing employment and increasing domestic demand. The policy prioritizing employment should be strengthened and efforts should be made to create more job opportunities, he said. Li also called on governments to optimize policies in a timely manner, based on the needs of market entities and changing circumstances, while stabilizing market expectations, and taking targeted measures to help market entities overcome difficulties and improve people's livelihoods. Local governments are encouraged to introduce measures to inject more vitality and impetus into the market, creating a better environment that invigorates existing market entities and fosters new ones, Li said. The premier also called for efforts to promote high-level opening-up, and continue efforts to maintain the stability of foreign trade and investment, as well as the industrial and supply chains. The country should also leverage the recently signed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, make good use of relevant rules and facilitation measures, and actively explore new areas of international cooperation, he said.

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China to Take Steps to Improve Bad Faith Deterrent Mechanism

China will adopt policy steps to optimize the mechanism for deterring acts of bad faith and refine the social credit system to underpin the development of the socialist market economy, the State Council's executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on Wednesday. "In recent years, China's social credit system has continued to develop. A market economy relies on credit, and a credit-based economy must follow the rule of law. Work in this regard shall be effectively carried out pursuant to laws and regulations," Li said. Those at the Wednesday meeting decided on measures to refine the bad-faith deterrent mechanism to promote the orderly and healthy development of the social credit system. The principles include adhering to laws and regulations, protecting rights and interests, taking a prudent and appropriate approach and implementing list-based management.

The scope and procedures of credit information shall be formulated in a science-based way. Including certain behaviors in public credit information will require strictly following laws and regulations and a catalog management approach. Such information will be made accessible to the public. Administrative departments must determine acts of bad faith on the basis of legally binding documents. The scope and procedures for sharing credit information shall be standardized. The principle of legality and necessity shall be observed when deciding whether and to what extent credit information is shared and disclosed. Such decisions shall be made clear when compiling the credit information catalog. The meeting underlined the need to strengthen information security and privacy protection. Access to and procedures for credit information inquiries shall be strictly enforced. Leaking, tampering, damaging or stealing credit information or utilizing credit information for personal gains will be seriously investigated and dealt with.

Illegal collection and transaction of credit information will be strictly cracked down on. "In the development of the social credit system, it is important to pay attention to protecting personal privacy and trade secrets. Credit reference shall be conducted in accordance with law, with science-based scope and definition and appropriate penalties. Information must be used in a safe and secure manner," Li said. Identification of list of entities with serious acts of bad faith will be better regulated. The list shall be limited to those who put public health and safety in grave jeopardy, seriously sabotage the fair market competition order or disrupt normal social order. The list shall not be willfully expanded without authorization. Punishment against bad-faith acts shall be enforced in accordance with laws and regulations, to make sure that penalties are meted out commensurate with dishonest behaviors. Disciplinary measures taken against entities with serious dishonest behaviors that reduce their rights or increase their duties shall be based on facts of bad faith and on laws and regulations.

Punishments should be appropriate and not be added or increased at will. Financial institutions, credit service agencies, industry associations, chambers of commerce and news media should not be forced to punish entities with serious acts of bad faith. A credit repair mechanism, which is conducive to self-correction, will be established. Entities will be allowed to fix negative credit records, unless otherwise stipulated by laws and regulations, should they correct dishonest behaviors and eliminate adverse impact. Relevant departments shall remove entities, who meet credit repair eligibility, from the list in a timely manner. All localities and relevant departments shall promptly overhaul measures that have been rolled out for the determination, recording, disclosure and punishment of bad-faith acts, and those that do not meet the requirements shall be regulated in a timely manner.

The meeting also decided on measures to advance high-quality development of the credit reference sector. Cross-sectoral and cross-regional connectivity of credit information involving finance, government affairs, and public services will be

promoted as provided by law. Disclosure and orderly utilization of data in government departments will be promoted in faster pace. Market access of individual credit reference agencies will be promoted in an active yet prudent manner, and openness of the credit reference sector will be scaled up. Matching regulations and supporting institutions for the credit reference sector shall be improved and accountability mechanism strengthened. Fraudulent credit rating shall be strictly punished according to law.

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Prudent Monetary Policy to Be More Flexible, Targeted

China's central bank on Thursday pledged to make its prudent monetary policy more targeted and flexible to adapt better to the needs of high-quality development and put more focus on the efficiency of financial services to support the real economy. More efforts will go into improving the money supply regulation mechanism to maintain reasonable and sufficient liquidity, the People's Bank of China (PBOC) said in its third-quarter monetary policy report, ruling out the possibility of a "flood-like" stimulus. The PBOC stressed efforts to enable structural policy tools, including re-lending and rediscount programs, to play a more effective role in stabilizing businesses and jobs. China's financial institutions are projected to save enterprises 1.5 trillion yuan (about 228 billion U.S. dollars) this year through measures to boost the real economy. In the first ten months, financial institutions saved enterprises around 1.25 trillion yuan, according to the report.

The central bank also pledged efforts to innovate structural policy tools and deepen interest rate and exchange rate reforms. It reiterated that the property sector will not be used as a means to short-term stimulus and vowed to maintain the continuity, consistency, and stability of property financial policies. While the fundamentals for China's stable and sound high-quality development remain unchanged in the medium and long term, complexities in the international environment have brought increasing instabilities and uncertainties, the report noted. China has logged its best quarterly economic performance of the year in the third quarter, with a year-on-year expansion of 0.7 percent in the first nine months, as the first major economy to return to growth following the economic fallout of COVID-19.

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China to Expand Outbound Investment Schemes

China will expand the scale of two pilot schemes that allow domestic investors to access foreign assets, the country's foreign exchange regulator said Sunday. The scale of the outbound investment schemes -- Qualified Domestic Limited Partner (QDLP) and Qualified Domestic Investment Enterprise (QDIE) -- in Shanghai, Beijing and Shenzhen will be expanded in the near future, according to the State Administration of Foreign Exchange. The move aims to further meet domestic investors' demand for global asset allocation, it said. The country also plans to launch the pilot QDLP program in the southern island province of Hainan and southwest China's Chongqing Municipality to better support the construction of Hainan free trade port and the Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle, according to administration.

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China Rolls Out Plan of Promoting "Internet Plus Tourism"

Chinese authorities on Monday issued a guideline on facilitating "Internet plus tourism," showing the way for tourist destinations to become intelligent. The guideline, jointly released by 10 government departments including the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the National Development and Reform Commission, noted that by 2025, tourist attractions rated 4A or above are to be upgraded and become more intelligent in providing services. The guideline calls on tourist attractions and resorts to expand 5G network coverage and speed up the application of unmanned, non-contact facilities. It also encourages tourist destinations to make use of advanced technologies such as big data and cloud computing to provide detailed traffic, weather and other tourist information in a timely manner. According to the guideline, China aims to revive tourism to pre-COVID-19 levels by 2022.

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CPC Leadership Reviews Regulations on Military Political Work, United Front, Party Members' Rights

The Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee met on Monday to review regulations on the political work in the armed forces, the Party's united front work and safeguarding Party members' rights. Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, presided over the meeting. The political work is the lifeline of the people's armed forces, which can only be strengthened, not weakened, according to a statement issued after the meeting. The statement highlighted the role of amending regulations on political work in the armed forces, noting that it could strengthen the Party's leadership over the military political work

and promote the full implementation of the strategy of enhancing the military's political loyalty in the new era. Such measures would help ensure the armed forces are always under the absolute Party leadership and always capable of effectively fulfilling designated missions in the new era, thus contributing to the cause of delivering the Party's goal of building a strong military in the new era and building a world-class military in all respects, the statement said.

The military should abide by the fundamental principle of absolute Party leadership over the armed forces, said the statement, adding that the practice of the Chairman of the Central Military Commission assuming full responsibility for military affairs should be entirely enforced. It called for efforts to educate members of the armed forces through Xi's thinking on strengthening the military to make sure the military stays absolutely loyal, pure and reliable. The CPC Central Committee has always attached great importance to the united front and related work, the statement said. Amending the Party's regulations on the united front work is a major task for the CPC Central Committee to exercise full, strict and rule-based governance over the Party, and an important measure to consolidate and deepen the principles of Party and state institution reform concerning the united front, it added. The statement emphasized that it is necessary to strengthen the Party's centralized and unified leadership over the united front work, and carry out the united front work more scientifically with higher standards and improved institutions.

It called on Party committees at all levels to study and fully implement the regulations to advance the cause of the patriotic united front continuously. To bring to date and revise the regulations on safeguarding Party members' rights is conducive to fully reflecting the strengths of the Party leadership system and letting all Party members rally closely around the CPC Central Committee, so as to work together to realize the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation, the statement noted. It added that Party members who exercise their rights must fulfill their obligations, assume responsibilities and obey the disciplines. Party organizations at every level should strengthen the organization and leadership for the enforcement of the regulations in order to ensure all measures are earnestly implemented and encourage their members to play an exemplary role in the new journey, the statement said. Efforts should also be made to guide Party members on carrying out democratic oversight to create an honest and upright political environment, taking a resolute stand against all instances of malpractice and corruption and all acts that may shake the Party's foundation or hinder the Party's cause, it added.

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JAPAN: Govt. Reviews 'Go to' Campaigns

Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide has announced that he's partially halting government programs brought in to boost travel and dining out. Suga was speaking at a coronavirus taskforce meeting on Saturday. Economic Revitalization Minister Nishimura Yasutoshi and Japanese Tourism Minister Akaba Kazuyoshi were also in attendance. Suga said the country's coronavirus cases have reached record levels and that utmost caution is still required. He said he will work with local governors to introduce stronger measures in areas seeing a rapid rise in infections. On Friday, an expert panel on the coronavirus advised the government to review the "Go To" programs. For "Go To Travel," Suga said he will call for a suspension of new reservations to regions seeing a resurgence of coronavirus cases. For "Go To Eat," he said he will urge local governments to suspend issuing meal coupons.

Suga said the central government will assist local governments financially to subsidize eateries that agree to limit their business hours and other measures. He said that the government will allocate a budget of about 481 million dollars for this purpose. The prime minister added that should the virus be confirmed in medical or nursing care facilities, the government will pay for all residents and workers to be tested to prevent serious cases from occurring. Suga instructed relevant ministers to work closely with local governments and do their utmost on measures to protect people. He went on to say that cooperation from citizens is vital so that even stronger measures that could limit social and economic activities do not have to be implemented. He called on people to take thorough measures, including wearing facemasks, even while dining out, washing one's hands, and avoiding the "Three Cs" -- closed spaces, crowded places and close-contact settings.

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Revised Legislation Must Balance Protection, Use of Personal Data

Amid the promotion of digitization in society, it is important to make effective use of a huge amount of data while protecting personal information. It is hoped that a well-balanced system will be created for these purposes. The government intends to submit a set of bills to revise laws for protecting personal information to the next year's ordinary Diet session. The move is aimed at establishing a foundation for the proper use of data to promote the digital reform that the Cabinet of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has proposed. With the advance in the practical use of artificial intelligence and other technologies, enormous amounts of information have come to create economic value. At the same time, there is a growing need to protect personal information, making it an urgent task to establish legislation in line with the new era.

The bills for the revision are to consolidate the three current laws for protecting personal information into one and unify the definitions of personal information among

the public and private sectors. The three laws cover private companies, the central government and independent administrative institutions. The proposed amendment aims to apply the same provisions of the central government to local governments and establish common rules nationwide. The central and prefectural governments, as well as 1,718 municipalities and other entities across the country, have set separate laws and regulations to protect personal information. Due to differences in governing authority and data-sharing procedures, it is difficult to share information with other organizations. Therefore, it has been called the “2,000-item problem,” a name derived from the total number of such laws and regulations.

It would be the first drastic revision of the laws since they were enacted in 2003 and organizing this complicated legal system would be of great benefit. The central government needs to carefully design the system while listening to opinions from related organizations. Expectations for the use of data in the medical and academic fields are particularly growing. Under current circumstances, the procedures for providing information vary depending on who established hospitals, such as the private sector or local governments, making it difficult to promote the smooth use of data. If multiple medical institutions cooperate to facilitate the analysis of huge amounts of data, it could help them prevent and treat diseases. The use of data may expand for wider purposes, such as solving educational, poverty and other social problems, and finding new business potential. Another aim of the bills is to unify the handling of personal information nationwide in times of emergencies.

There are a number of cases in which local governments have differed in how they handle releasing the names of people killed or missing in disasters, such as torrential rains and earthquakes. Also in the case of the novel coronavirus, an excessively cautious stance about releasing information has been considered problematic, mainly because it took too much time to share information on patients among parties concerned. If information is provided properly by disaster-hit municipalities, it will become easier to confirm the safety of victims and provide support for them across multiple organizations. The central government should set specific guidelines on how to implement the system so that information will be released in principle. The central government reportedly plans to allow local governments to establish their own protective measures for personal information, taking into account the fact that local governments have taken the initiative in implementing such measures. It must make the system easy to understand for the public, while giving consideration to the autonomy of local governments as well.

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LDP Calls for Major Green Investment in Draft Plan

Japan's ruling party will call on the government to promote environmental investment with a major decade-long spending program for the country, whose Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has made a green society a key policy priority. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) said in the draft proposal, which was seen by Reuters, that the government should create a fund with a size "comparable to global standards" that supports companies investing in green technology, without suggesting a specific figure. Suga has said that Japan will aim for net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and the LDP's recommendations will serve as a basis for the government's deliberations on a fresh stimulus package, which Suga has ordered his cabinet to develop. The proposal, which suggests incentives to promote green investment will be among key pillars of the package along with spending to cushion the immediate blow from COVID-19, will be presented to the government on Monday, an LDP source said. "By deploying all policy means available, the public and private sectors must work together to achieve zero carbon emission in 2050," said the draft, which was still subject to change after further deliberations when it was seen by Reuters, before being finalised by the party.

As well as calling for deregulation and tax breaks, the proposal also urges the government to expand or create new state-backed loan and loan guarantee schemes to support firms hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. "It seems (the new package) will clearly be different from just providing support to cope with the pandemic," said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute. "There will be an increasing number of measures with an eye on a post-COVID society," he said. The draft also called on the government to provide "strong support" for airlines hit by the pandemic, with measures such as slashing airport fees and fuel tax. And it urged the extension of a subsidy for travel that has provoked concerns over a resurgence of coronavirus infections. With rising infections clouding the outlook, Japan said on Friday it would extend until February next year a subsidy scheme that compensates companies for retaining jobs while temporarily closing business due to the pandemic. Ruling party executives have called for an extra budget worth around 20-30 trillion yen, which will fund part of the stimulus package.

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South-East Asia

THAILAND: Rolling Out Drought-Risk-Management Plan

Thailand's Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives on Friday unveiled its 2000-2021 drought-risk-management (DRM) plan, designed to "prevent a repeat of the severe water shortages that hit farmers earlier this year." Severe water shortage leads to difficulties in plantation agriculture, said the ministry's deputy permanent secretary

Samran Saraban, adding that the ministry had drawn up a blueprint or "Smart DRM" to control the usage of water and redirect water channels to irrigation zones. Smart DRM will help guide government agencies to solve farmers' drought-related issues, Samran added. The Smart DRM guidelines will be presented to an agriculture-planning subcommittee considering plans for agricultural land nationwide. In February, Thailand's Office of the National Water Resources (ONWR) reported that the country had been tackling the worst drought in 40 years. Thailand's commercial Bank of Ayudhya's Krungsri Research in February said the drought in early 2020 may cost the country 46 billion baht (1.47 billion U.S. dollars), or 0.27 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

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Thai Gov't, Opposition Bills on Constitutional Amendment Endorsed by Lawmakers

Thai legislators on Wednesday approved legislations on the constitutional amendment, separately lodged by the government and opposition, but rejected the one submitted by a civil rights group. A total of 647 lawmakers in both the House and Senate voted for the government bill and a total of 576 lawmakers in both the House and Senate approved the opposition bill. Both call for the setting up of a Constitution Drafting Committee. Meanwhile, most MPs and senators abstained from voting on the group iLaw version, thus rendering it rejected during Wednesday's joint parliamentary meeting. The iLaw bill was earlier endorsed with verified signatures by almost 100,000 people. Four other bills separately lodged by the opposition bloc were also turned down by most lawmakers, who abstained from voting in both the House and Senate. Two of the aborted bills were designed to deprive the senators, all of whom were handpicked by Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, of the constitutional right to vote for the head of a post-election government alongside the elected MPs.

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Thailand Extends Emergency Rule Against COVID-19 Pandemic Until Mid-January 2021

Thailand has extended the emergency rule against the COVID-19 pandemic from early December until mid-January next year. The cabinet of ministers on Monday approved a proposal from the government-run Center for the COVID-19 Situation Administration for the extension of the emergency decree to be enforced nationwide for a one-month-and-a-half period, beginning from Dec. 1 until Jan. 15, 2021, according to officials attached to Government House. It will be the eighth time

Thailand's emergency rule has been extended on monthly basis to contain the pandemic throughout the country. Anti-pandemic and health safety measures will be strictly taken in January during which three world badminton tournaments are scheduled to be held in Bangkok, the officials said.

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VIETNAM: Master Plan to Help Ensure Harmonised Energy Development

Providing a sufficient source of energy to facilitate Việt Nam's industrialisation and modernisation while also ensuring national energy security remained a challenge as Việt Nam and the region are importing more and more energy. Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Đặng Hoàng An delivered the statement at a conference held in Hà Nội on Wednesday. In this context, Việt Nam's energy master plan for 2021-30 with a vision to 2050 is expected to build scenarios that will not increase energy costs, prevent energy from becoming a burden of the economy, ensure the nation's harmonised energy development and contribute to promoting the country's economic development, An said. From 1997 to 2019, Việt Nam's economy maintained a growth rate of nearly 7 per cent. Its energy demand in the recent 10-year period increased 6.5 per cent for primary energy while demand for electricity rose 10.5 per cent in the period, he noted. At the conference, delegates presented the overall energy development plan and sub-sectors planning of oil, gas, coal and electricity. Nguyễn Thế Thắng, Head of the Electrical System Development Department under the Institute of Energy, said that according to the master plan's base scenario, commercial electricity will reach 490.8 billion kWh by 2030 and 976 billion kWh by 2050, maintaining an increase of 8.3 per cent in 2021-30, then decreasing to 3.4 per cent in 2031-50.

In another scenario, commercial electricity will reach 523 billion kWh in 2030 and 1.110 billion kWh in 2050. Nguyễn Tài Anh, Deputy General Director of Vietnam Electricity said the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the consulting unit to build the energy master plan, should consider adding the import and transportation of LNG gas into the plan while evaluating the model of gas import because gas is not similar to other energy sources. According to the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MoIT), the master plan will help provide a comprehensive assessment of national energy supply and demand and connect energy development with the socio-economic-environmental development goals set by Việt Nam and its commitments to the international community. The MoIT set a target that this plan will ensure the harmonious development of energy sub-sectors while also creating favourable conditions for State management activities in the energy sector. According to MoIT, this is the first time that Việt Nam has built a master plan on energy. Therefore, the planning will face many challenges in synchronising and

ensuring compatibility with other plans. Notably, drawing mechanisms for the plan requires the participation of many stakeholders.

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New Decree to Prevent Transfer Pricing, Limit Thin Capitalisation

The Government's recently-issued Decree 132/2020/NĐ-CP would help prevent transfer pricing and limit thin capitalisation to develop a healthy investment market, Deputy Director of the General Department of Taxation Đặng Ngọc Minh said. Minh spoke at a press conference on Monday to introduce new points of the decree dated November 5 about tax management for enterprises with related-party transactions, saying the interest expense deduction limit was raised from 20 per cent to 30 per cent – the highest ratio recommended by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Increasing the cap to 30 per cent would help enterprises have more capital for investment in the context that most firms in Việt Nam were thinly-capitalised with the level of debt much greater than equity capital, he said. Minh said that the Decree 132 did not differentiate foreign-invested companies and domestic companies in fighting transfer pricing to ensure fairness and transparency. "This regulation does not mean to cause more difficulties for enterprises because any companies, foreign-invested or domestic, could use the transfer pricing method." The Ministry of Finance's statistics showed that there were about 16,500 enterprises with related-party relations, 8,000 of which had related-party transactions and 70 per cent were foreign-invested.

According to Nguyễn Thu Hương from international non-governmental organisation Oxfam in Việt Nam, it was necessary to terminate corporate income tax (CIT) incentives and reductions to minimise transfer pricing. The preferential value was estimated at about seven per cent of the total CIT revenue annually, a considerable sum, Hương said. However, she pointed that there was an unfairness because the preferential tax mostly applied to FDI companies. Preferential CIT policies to encourage investment led to a race to the bottom among localities in the country and among countries in the region, which was not only causing losses to budget revenue but also creating loopholes for transfer pricing, Hương said. Deputy Director of the finance ministry's Department of State Budget Nguyễn Minh Tân said that transfer pricing often occurred when there were tax incentives. However, tax incentives were an important factor to attract foreign investment in the context of a global production shift triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, Tân said. Việt Nam was regarded as an attractive destination for investment but not the only choice, Tân said, adding that it was necessary at the same time to offer tax incentives to attract investment and to fight transfer pricing. Decree 132 implemented regulations which were appropriate to international practices and the condition of Việt Nam to enhance the prevention against transfer pricing, Tân stressed. The tax watchdog inspected 263 enterprises

with related-party transactions in the first 10 months of this year, collecting more than VNĐ525 billion (US\$22.6 million) in fines and arrears, reducing losses by more than VNĐ9 trillion and increasing taxable income by VNĐ4.19 trillion. Last year, 597 enterprises with related party transactions were inspected to collect VNĐ1.1 trillion in fines, reducing losses by VNĐ5.8 trillion and increasing taxable income by VNĐ5.9 trillion.

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New Regulation Facilitates Firms in Customs Clearance

Applying risk management in customs operations will not only enable trade security and facilitation but will also allow the General Department of Customs to focus its resources on high-risk trade, heard a workshop held in Hà Nội yesterday. The workshop organised by General Department of Customs (GDC) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) aimed to discuss the content of Circular 81, Decision 2218, and a new Voluntary Compliance Program for Traders with representatives of the private sector and customs officials from local customs departments in northern provinces in Việt Nam. If successfully implemented, the programme will guide and give businesses the tools to self-assess and improve their compliance with customs regulations, cutting the time and cost to trade. Hoàng Việt Cường, the GDC's deputy general director said: "The General Department of Customs has gradually developed and completed the compliance assessment mechanism for four groups of customs declarants and warehouse, yard and port enterprises. We will publish criteria for assessment and classification on compliance and content on the application of risk management in customs operations."

With technical assistance from the USAID Trade Facilitation Program, in November 2019, the Ministry of Finance issued its first legal document on risk management in Customs operations (Circular No 81/2019/TT-BTC dated November 15, 2019), together with Decision 2218/QĐ-TCHQ on implementing and applying risk management in customs operations (Decision 2218), which provides guidance on the adoption of risk management in customs operations for both customs authorities and the private sector. Bradley Bessire, Deputy Mission Director of USAID Việt Nam said: "Over the past twenty years, USAID has supported Việt Nam in its efforts to institutionalise more open and predictable trade. Building on the normalisation of trade relations in 1995, USAID assistance to date is focused on the implementation of reforms to support Việt Nam's increased market orientation." He added that with more than US\$95 million in USAID trade facilitation technical assistance over the last two decades, Việt Nam has made substantive reforms to its legal framework governing many businesses in the trade sector. These reforms were particularly effective in raising the economic governance capacity of government officials to respond to the needs of the private sector, and to improving the business enabling

environment in Việt Nam so entrepreneurs and the economy can thrive. "Over the course of our co-operation on trade facilitation, we jointly recognised continuing constraints at both the central and the provincial levels. "To support Việt Nam, the five-year \$21.7 million USAID Trade Facilitation Programme was launched to address gaps in specialised inspection in order to help Việt Nam accelerate implementation of the World Trade Organisation's Trade Facilitation Agreements to simplify, modernise, and harmonise customs processes," he said.

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Law on Electronic Transactions to Be Amended

The Ministry of Information and Communications is proposing to amend and supplement some articles in the Law on Electronic Transactions No. 51/2005/QH11 in order to solve shortcomings. The Ministry of Information and Communications said that the law was passed by the National Assembly in 2005, and it had played an important role in creating a legal basis to promote e-transactions, promoting the application of information technology and contributing to socio-economic development for nearly 15 years. However, there are some shortcomings which needed to be amended and supplemented after 15 years of implementation. Statistics in the e-Commerce White Book 2019 showed that the size of the e-commerce market reached about US\$7.8 billion in 2018, including online retail, travel, marketing, entertainment and purchase of other digital products and services. If the growth rate continues at 30 per cent, the market size will reach \$13 billion by the end of this year.

However, many experts believed that the implementation of contracts, digital signatures, electronic authentication and payments still had many shortcomings which limited the development of electronic transactions even though the Government had a policy to promote the digital economy. According to the Ministry of Information and Communications the goal is to build in the direction of expanding the scope to suit the development of Industry 4.0 and the digital economy. At the same time, the amendment also aims to suit international treaties related to free trade agreements in which Việt Nam is a member to facilitate the promotion of development as well as the protection of legal rights and interests for those participating in e-transactions. The amendment and supplementation draft will include regulations on prohibited acts related to electronic identification and authentication, electronic transactions among state agencies, electronic transactions between state agencies and organisations and individuals. The Ministry of Information and Communications will be the agency responsible to the Government for presiding and co-ordinating with relevant ministries and agencies in performing the state management of electronic transactions. The draft will supplement the regulations on converting paper documents into electronic documents and additional

regulations on electronic identification, authentication, trusted services and service providers.

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Agreement on Child Protection Signed

A co-operation agreement on child protection was signed on Tuesday by the Department of Child Affairs under the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and Vietnam Post. The main objective of the deal is to strengthen co-ordination, direction and implementation of measures to protect children and prevent and combat child abuse, ensuring the realisation of children's rights and building a safe and healthy living environment for children's development. Under the agreement, the two sides will co-ordinate to carry out education programmes on child protection policies and laws. They will spread knowledge and skills on child protection, child abuse prevention and control for post office staff, especially at the commune level. The two sides will provide information on children's rights through the network of post offices, postal staff and commune post offices nationwide. They will also build a network of volunteers to protect children nationwide. The national hotline for children protection 111 will be announced nationwide. The two units will work together to build a national database on children, support and maximise the strengths of each party to perform their tasks and bring benefits to society.

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South Asia

INDIA: 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 launches new EV 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-fitting 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.

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/> 11/03/2020

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DMRC Releases New Guidelines Prior to Resumption of Functions

Following the Centre's announcements on the resumption of metro services from September 7, metro corporation across the country have come up with their set of guidelines for smooth and safe functioning. Similarly, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC), on September 3, released a set of new guidelines. As per the new guidelines, the metro stations in containment zones will remain closed after September 7. Further, metro trains will not stop at stations where passengers are found not maintaining social distancing. Also, wearing a face mask will be mandatory during travel on Metro trains and masks will be provided to passengers on payment basis at stations. According to Mangu Singh, DMRC Chief said that in the first stage, Delhi metro services will operate in two shifts from 7 am to 11 am and then from 4 pm to 8 pm. However, in the second stage, trains will be available from 7 am to 1 pm and from 4 pm to 10 pm, he added. Further, he said that the normal operations of Delhi metro will resume after September 12. As per Singh, in the first phase which begins on September 7, Yellow Line from Samaypur Badli to Huda City Centre will resume operations. Whereas, from September 9, Blue Line or Line-3/4 (Blue Line) connecting Dwarka Sec-21 in Delhi and Noida Electronic City/Vaishali; and Pink Line or Line 7 connecting Majlis Park and Shiv Vihar will resume operations. The following day, on September 10, Red Line or Line 1 from Rithala to Shaheed Sthal New Bus

Adda; Green Line or Line 5 from Kirti Nagar/Inderlok to Brig. Hoshiar Singh (Bahadurgarh); and Violet Line or Line 6 from Kashmere Gate to Raja Nahar Singh (Ballabhgarh) will also resume services with the same timings. In stage-2, kicking in from September 11, Magenta Line or Line 8 from Janakpuri West to Botanical Garden; and Grey Line or Line 9 from Dwarka to Najafgarh will also be made operational. The trains in stage two will operate in batches of six-hour each from 7 am to 1 pm and 4 pm to 10 pm, the DMRC said. And, from September 12, stage three will kick in and in addition to lines made operational, Airport Express Line from New Delhi to Dwarka Sec-21 will also resume service.

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CM Kejriwal Launches Delhi EV Policy, Claims It to Be Most Progressive

The Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal launched the electric vehicle policy for Delhi on August 7 viz today. The CM claims it to be the most progressive and one of the good policies across the globe. The new policy is due to the aim of the Delhi government to kickstart the economy and to reduce the pollution levels in the capital. According to the government leaders, various EV policies from across the globe has been studied and considered before framing the EV policy for Delhi. Moreover, the government has consulted with domain experts to bring in subsidies and waive road tax and registration fee of the vehicles. The CM, in a press conference today, said, "We have issued a notification for the electric vehicle policy today... This electric vehicle policy is the country's most progressive policy and most probably is one of the good policies in the entire world." The CM clearly states in the conference that the newly rolled out policy has two motives – firstly to boost the economy and secondly to contribute to the sustainable development goals by reducing pollution levels in the city. Moreover, the policy would help generate jobs in large numbers – driving, selling, financing, charging points, etc, Kejriwal added.

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Central-West Asia

ARMENIA: Occupation Policy Causes Big Damage to Azerbaijani Insurance Market

The analytical research group of the Azerbaijan Insurers Association has explored the insurance potential of the previously occupied Azerbaijani territories, Trend reports with reference to the Azerbaijan Insurers Association's statement. "The Azerbaijani territories, which were under Armenian occupation for about 30 years,

have great potential both in every economic sphere and in the insurance sector,” the statement said. “During this period, the occupation of 20 percent of Azerbaijani territories caused big damage to the insurance sector.” Thus, during entire 1993, as well as due to residential and non-residential buildings completely destroyed by Armenian vandals, the Azerbaijani insurance market could have ensured fees up to 4.9 million manat (\$2.9 million) on compulsory real estate insurance and during 30 year-occupation -149.5 million manat (\$87.9 million). “These are only tangible assets on compulsory real estate insurance,” the statement said. “If we take into account cargo insurance, insurance of personal property of citizens, as well as insurance of power lines, gas, water communications, agricultural insurance, car insurance, insurance of irrigation systems, then the damage caused as a result of 30-year Armenian occupation to the Azerbaijani insurance market is about one billion manat (\$588 million).” “As a result of intensive work of the association and each participant of the insurance market, the fastest recovery of these losses will be achieved for the development of the Azerbaijani economy,” the statement said.

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AZERBAIJAN: Cabinet of Ministers Adopts New Rules of Agricultural Insurance

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

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Azerbaijan Discloses Detailed Plan for Development of Agriculture in Liberated Lands

The preparation of an action plan for the development of agriculture in the Azerbaijani territories liberated from Armenian occupation has begun, Director of the Agrarian Research Center under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Agriculture Firdovsi Fikratzade told Trend. "The plan provides for bringing these lands to a suitable condition, their restoration, and then the establishment of amelioration systems there. At the same time, these lands will be grouped as intended and a system of electronic registration of these lands will be created," he noted. "At the moment, there is no complete information about how many hectares of land is suitable for agriculture, planting, or pasture. Upon completion of this work, a declaration system will be created. This is the first stage," Fikratzade said. He stressed that further a mechanism will be determined for the transfer of these lands for use by people who will live there. "During the occupation period, the cattle-breeding infrastructure in these lands was completely destroyed. The plan also provides for the creation of appropriate infrastructure, as well as the restoration of beekeeping and other areas of agricultural activity. The procurement and supply system will also be restored, support will be provided to entrepreneurs involved in this area, the creation of points for drying tobacco and cocoons is envisaged," stressed the expert. "One of the main issues is the creation of recommendations and information centers that will help citizens who have returned to these territories to adapt and start agricultural activities. It is clear that most of the people who were once expelled from here were not engaged in agriculture, and children born after the occupation have no idea about this area. Therefore, local consultation centers will be established. The Ministry of Agriculture will conduct pieces of training in these centers," Fikretzade added.

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UZBEKISTAN: Parliament Discusses State Program of Foreign Policy

Execution of tasks and assignments identified in the priority areas of the State Program in the field of foreign policy was discussed at a meeting of the Senate Committee of the Oliy Majlis (Supreme Assembly) of Uzbekistan, Trend reports referring to the press service of the Assembly. A meeting of the Senate Committee of Uzbekistan's Supreme Assembly on international relations, foreign economic relations, foreign investment, and tourism was held on November 16, 2020. The report of the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan on the progress of the implementation within nine months of 2020 of the State Program for the implementation of the Action Strategy in the "Year of Science, Education and the Digital Economy" was considered at the meeting. It was noted that the corresponding tasks in this direction are indicated in seven points of the State Program to be carried out during the year. In addition, the issue of sending a parliamentary request to the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan on measures taken to increase the competitiveness of the country's special economic zones (SEZ) was preliminarily

discussed. Currently, there are 21 special economic zones in 13 regions of the country. Also, about 370 projects were implemented for a total amount of \$2 billion, and about 30,000 new jobs were created in these territories. At the same time, attention was focused on factors that harm the effectiveness of special economic zones, as well as on a number of shortcomings that are allowed in this area. These include inconsistencies in the legislation of this area, violation of the terms of consideration of investment projects, and problems associated with the engineering infrastructure and unreasonable obstacles. At the end of the discussion, appropriate recommendations were given on the full implementation of the tasks specified in the parliamentary request, as well as taking into account the directions in which it is necessary to carry out work.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: NSW Premier Announces \$250m Jobs Program

The NSW government plans to entice domestic and international business to the state with payroll tax relief as part of a new \$250 million jobs program. NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian says jobs growth is her number one priority in the next 12 months. "We absolutely have to get jobs growth right," Ms Berejiklian told the Committee for Economic Development of Australia during her 'State of the State' address on Thursday. "I don't want hundreds of thousands of families worried about whether or not they have a job beyond March next year. "It has be our priority - job security, job creation, jobs growth is at the heart of our consideration at this point in time." Ms Berejiklian said the Jobs Plus program, part of the 2020-21 state budget to be delivered on November 17, would create or support up to 25,000 new jobs to June 2022.

"The ... program will allow companies to rescale and hire people, which will also allow companies to have up to four years of payroll tax relief if they employ more than 30 people to June, 2022," she told reporters later. The program was an "unashamed grab for head offices" and would back companies that wanted to relocate or expand their jobs footprint in the state. "Jobs Plus will entice top-performing companies from interstate and across the globe to NSW, and cements this state as the best place to do business in Australia," she said. Under the program, the NSW government will support businesses that create at least 30 new net jobs. Support will include payroll tax relief, up to a four-year period, for every new job created where a business has created at least 30 new net jobs. It will also include fast-tracked planning approval pathways and advice, plus guidance on appropriate site selection to increase speed to market, Ms Berejiklian said.

NSW Treasurer Dominic Perrottet said the program would reduce costs for businesses looking to scale and grow in the state. "This is a clear signal to the private sector that NSW is the best place to invest and grow your business," Mr Perrottet said. "We are backing private and non-government sectors seeking to invest in job-creating projects, proposals and partnerships by supporting them throughout the critical stages of business development." The state's peak business organisation welcomed the payroll tax relief as a "huge boost" for job creation. "We need to identify ways to supercharge parts of the economy able to absorb spare economic capacity," Business NSW chief Nola Watson said in a statement. "Payroll tax is a barrier to job creation and the Jobs Plus program will remove one of the biggest barriers for employers looking to expand or relocate to NSW."

However, Labor's finance spokesman Walt Secord said the program would give large international businesses a "payroll tax holiday" while "completely overlooking" small local businesses. He called on the government to restructure its business programs, saying the take-up rate had been "woefully inadequate". "There is no point in announcing programs if you don't spend the cash or provide funds to small businesses." The Jobs Plus program will run from December 15 to June 30, 2022.

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Minister Chides 'Feel Good' Climate Target

Energy Minister Angus Taylor is staring down mounting international pressure to commit to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. With the election of Joe Biden as president in the United States, Australia's five biggest export markets are aiming to be carbon neutral by mid-century or 2060 at the latest. Every state and territory and many business and industry groups have also set net zero targets, making the Morrison government an obvious outlier in Australia and on the global stage. Mr Taylor criticised other countries for setting climate targets without detailing plans to achieve them. He argued "unfunded policies with feel good targets" were no way to bring down emissions, echoing earlier statements from former ACTU president and Labor MP Jennie George. "The Paris Agreement requires net zero and we want it to happen as soon as possible, but the pathway is what counts," Mr Taylor told ABC radio on Thursday.

"We don't commit to targets without a pathway to get there." Asked if other nations were wrong to commit to firm climate change targets, Mr Taylor said every country was in a different situation. "We are a country that exports energy-intensive goods to the world, we've brought down global emissions by doing that," he said. "When we sell gas to another country that uses that gas as a substitute for higher emitting alternatives, we are bringing down global emissions, so we have a crucial role to play globally in this." Mr Taylor also said committing to net zero by 2050 would require

Australia to make much deeper emissions reductions by 2030, which he claimed would cost jobs. The Labor Party is also feeling the heat over climate change. Rogue right-winger Joel Fitzgibbon has resigned from the Labor front bench over energy policy and called for the party's climate change spokesman to be dumped.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 11/12/2020

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Laws Flagged to Declare National Disasters

Laws will be introduced to federal parliament by the end of the year to enable the declaration of a national emergency. The laws were part of the Morrison government's response released on Friday to the royal commission into natural disasters. A declaration will fast-track national responses to bushfires, cyclones and floods, triggering the use of defence personnel, federal emergency services and health officials. "We will not be taking over the operational management of disasters - that is the remit of the states," Emergency Management Minister David Littleproud told reporters in Canberra. "But where there is needed to be a surge of resources, then the Australian government will come in." A national agency will also be set up from July to take the lead on natural disaster resilience, relief and recovery. "That will bring together the current flood and drought agencies and bushfire agencies into one," the minister said.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said there were good operating arrangements between the states, territories and Commonwealth when it comes to dealing on the ground with natural disasters. But he said there were a number of "broken points" particularly around governance. The federal government will also work with the states and territories on a new national forum for them to collaborate on strategic decision-making. A new virtual climate and disaster risk information and services centre known as "Resilience Services" will also be set up mid-2021. The centre will connect information held by the Bureau of Meteorology, CSIRO, Geoscience Australia and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It will support the work of Emergency Management Australia and the new national resilience, relief and recovery agency.

The government merely "noted" a recommendation about developing an Australian-based national aerial firefighting capability, saying it would continue to put \$26 million into existing arrangements. "The federal government does not and has never determined the type of aircraft that comes into the country," Mr Littleproud said. The minister also met with the Insurance Council on Friday to discuss the role of the sector in disaster recovery. "To be candid, I haven't had significant complaints about the insurance industry in respect of bushfires," he said. Eden-Monaro MP Kristy McBain earlier in the week told parliament many businesses and home owners in fire-hit southern NSW were facing unaffordable insurance premiums or were unable

to access cover at all.

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States Consider Plans for Foreign Students

Repatriating Australians stranded offshore by COVID-19 remains the Morrison government's number one priority, but the education sector has been told to work with state and territory governments in regard to international students. Federal Education Minister Dan Tehan said jurisdictions have been asked to draw up plans how they can accommodate returning international students within their quarantine caps. "Our priority is returning Australians and that will continue to be the case especially in the lead up to Christmas," Mr Tehan told Sky News' Sunday Agenda. "But we have asked state and territory governments to submit plans to us as to how they can bring in international students back." Australia's \$40 billion foreign student education industry has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, with an estimated 10,000 to 12,000 jobs having been lost. Mr Tehan said the government is doing all it can to minimise job losses. "If you look and take an assessment with comparable industries it is actually below the job losses we have seen in other industries more broadly across the nation," he said.

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Raft of Changes Urged for Disability Plans

More than 40 changes to the national disability scheme are needed to make plans better for Australians who need support, the government has been told. There are no dissenting views within parliament's report into the National Disability Insurance Agency's approach to support plans, with committee chair Kevin Andrews flagging 42 recommendations to improve transparency, consistency and accountability. That comes on top of the 14 recommendations made in the committee's interim report. Plans are central to NDIS participants as they outline the type of supports they have access to. Mr Andrews - a veteran Morrison government MP - said errors in plans were often a result of high workloads for staff, but sometimes incorrect information such as the wrong disability were included in plans. The committee was told of times when staff used the internet to find information about a participant because the agency didn't have it.

The agency sometimes made incorrect decisions on the type of supports people needed. "Such decisions, the committee learnt, can have significant consequences for participants and may be a matter of life and death," Mr Andrews told parliament on Tuesday. One participant told the committee the NDIS had absolute control over

their plan, and therefore their life. "This can never not be terrifying for anyone who is severely disabled," the participant said. "If anything goes wrong, goes really wrong, my worst nightmare is that I lose my remaining independence and in the worst case would have to move into a hospital or an aged care facility." Mr Andrews noted there had been some changes to the scheme since the committee stopped taking submissions in September. "This does not mean that all of these issues are resolved, merely that the NDIA and the government have recognised the need to address them," he said. The recommendations include more funding to help people navigate the system, an inquiry into the workload of community organisations and that participants get early access to fully costed, detailed draft plans before approval.

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Asia-Pacific

East Asia

CHINA: Xi Stresses Advancing Deep Integration of Reform, Development

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday stressed efforts to fully implement the spirit of the fifth plenary session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and promote the deep integration and efficient interaction of reform and development. Xi, also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks while presiding over the 16th meeting of the central committee for deepening overall reform. China's development will enter a new stage during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) period, and the country's reforms are at a new juncture, said Xi, also head of the central committee for deepening overall reform. Efforts should be made to address prominent issues and reforms should be more strategic, forward-looking and targeted, Xi said, adding that the reforms should be better steered to meet the demands of development, the grassroots and the people.

Li Keqiang, Wang Huning, and Han Zheng, all members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and deputy heads of the central committee for deepening overall reform, attended the meeting. The meeting reviewed and approved a series of guidelines on optimizing the state-owned economy, building a high-standard market system, enhancing the management of state assets, promoting elderly care and child nursery services, implementing a

forest chief system, strengthening social responsibilities of cultural enterprises, improving the delisting mechanism of listed firms and punishing illegal securities activities. The meeting stressed efforts to optimize the layout and structure of the state-owned economy and intensify its competitiveness, innovation capacity, influence, and capability of resisting risks.

China should also work to build a high-standard market system, take expanding domestic demand as a strategic underpinning, and strive to provide a powerful institutional guarantee for forging a new development pattern. The meeting decided that China will implement a forest chief system, clarifying all levels of forest chiefs' responsibilities in protecting forests and grasslands. Also, the country should consolidate the delisting mechanism for listed companies and crack down on illegal securities activities as crucial measures for comprehensively deepening reform of the capital market, according to the meeting. The meeting called for more efforts to optimize delisting standards, streamline delisting procedures, increase delisting channels and enforce stricter delisting regulation. It also vowed to strengthen cross-border cooperation in regulation and law enforcement to ensure a stable market order.

In terms of education, the meeting emphasized the continuation of deepening comprehensive education reform and the establishment of a balanced basic public education service system to narrow the urban-rural divide. In addition, the meeting reaffirmed the arrangements made at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee, stressing creating a new development pattern, improving the market-oriented allocation of production factors and the fair competition system, boosting the integrated development of the innovation chain and the industrial chain, as well as vitalizing market entities. Progress should also be achieved in safeguarding stable employment, optimizing income allocation, facilitating the overall green transformation of economic and social development, and forming the new institutions of a higher-level open economy, according to the meeting.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/02/2020

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China Faces Profound, Complex Changes in Development Environment

China is facing profound and complex changes in its development environment, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. The country 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, said the document. China has entered a stage of high-quality development with its long-term momentum for economic growth amid many advantages and conditions for

continued development. The whole Party should coordinate the overall strategic plan for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and major global changes unseen in a century, said the proposals, stressing maintaining strategic focus based on the basic national conditions that China remains in the primary stage of socialism. The CPC Central Committee also called for efforts to foster opportunities amid challenges in a pre-emptive way and make new advances amid changes. 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 were adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/03/2020

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China Secures Decisive Achievements in Building Moderately Prosperous Society

China has attained decisive achievements in securing a victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. The proposals highlighted progress made in the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-2020), including stable economic performance, remarkable achievements in the fight against poverty, improving ecological environment as well as expanding opening-up. Noting that China is about to accomplish the goals and tasks of the 13th Five-Year Plan and "a victory is in sight" for building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, the CPC Central Committee called for concerted efforts to lay a solid foundation for embarking on a journey to fully build a modern socialist China. 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 were adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29.

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China to Advance Peaceful Development of Cross-Strait Relations

China will continue to advance the peaceful development of relations across the Taiwan Strait and national reunification, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China Central Committee's proposals for formulating a new five-year development plan and long-range objectives. The document, which was made public Tuesday, stressed upholding the one-China principle and the 1992 Consensus while

promoting the peaceful and integrated development of cross-Strait relations. Efforts should be made to strengthen cross-Strait industrial cooperation and foster a common market for the two sides, it said. Policies will be fine-tuned to better safeguard the well-being of Taiwan compatriots and ensure they enjoy the same treatment on the mainland, according to the document.

Taiwan businesspersons and enterprises will be encouraged to participate in the Belt and Road cooperation and national strategies for regional coordinated development, said the document. Eligible Taiwan-funded enterprises will be supported to be listed on the mainland, it said. Fujian Province will be supported to explore new ways of cross-Strait integration and development, the document noted. The document also highlighted the importance of enhancing communication at the grassroots level and among young people across the Strait. The mainland will stay on high alert and resolutely curb any "Taiwan independence" secessionist activities, it added.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/03/2020

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China to Advance Socialist Political System

China will further push forward development of the socialist political system, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China Central Committee's proposals for formulating a new five-year development plan and long-range objectives. The document, made public Tuesday, called for promoting the organic unity of Party leadership, the running of the country by the people, and law-based governance. It urged efforts to advance the self-improvement and development of a political system featuring socialism with Chinese characteristics. The document stressed upholding and improving political mechanisms including the systems of people's congresses, Party-led multiparty cooperation and political consultation, regional ethnic autonomy, and community-level self-governance. While stressing improving the Chinese socialist system of laws with the Constitution at its heart, the document also called for improving the exercise and oversight of supervisory power, adjudicatory power, and procuratorial power to promote judicial impartiality. The document also underscored the overall development of human rights.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/03/2020

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China to Deepen Sci-tech Institutional Reform, International Cooperation

China will further advance the reform of sci-tech governance system, and optimize the national sci-tech planning system and operation mechanism, according to the full

text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. The proposals suggested to promote the integrated deployment and allocation of projects, bases, talent and funds in major sci-tech fields. The proposals asked for the improvement in organization and management of sci-tech projects as well as in evaluation mechanism. It noted that more efforts shall be made to strengthen the protection of intellectual property rights and significantly improve the efficiency of the transfer of sci-tech achievements. The country will increase investment in research and development, and intensify support for basic research, it said. The proposals also stress the work of science popularization and building an improved sci-tech ethic system. China will promote international sci-tech cooperation and establish a global scientific research fund, the proposals said. 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 were adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29.

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China Moves to Improve Social Credit System

China will adopt policy steps to optimize the mechanism against dishonest practices and refine the social credit system to underpin the development of the socialist market economy, according to a State Council's executive meeting. The meeting, chaired by Premier Li Keqiang on Wednesday, decided on measures to refine the bad-faith deterrent mechanism to promote the orderly and healthy development of the social credit system. The principles include adhering to laws and regulations, protecting rights and interests, taking a prudent and appropriate approach and implementing list-based management. The scope and procedures of credit information shall be formulated in a science-based way, while those for sharing credit information shall be standardized, the meeting said. Identification of list of entities with serious acts of bad faith will be better regulated. Punishment against dishonesty shall be enforced in accordance with laws and regulations. A credit repair mechanism, which is conducive to self-correction, will be established. The meeting underlined the need to strengthen information security and privacy protection. The meeting also passed a draft amendment to the Law on Workplace Safety, and decided to submit it to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for review.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/26/2020

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JAPAN: New Digital Agency to Launch in Sept.

The government will launch its envisaged digital agency in September 2021, and will bring on 500 employees, 100 to 150 of whom will come from the private sector, The Yomiuri Shimbun has learned. The digital agency will be in charge of digitizing administrative services and will work directly under the prime minister. In addition to the minister in charge of the agency, the government is considering creating a new position of vice minister of digital affairs, according to sources. The government will include an outline of the organization in its basic policy on digital technology, which will be compiled by the end of the year. The digital agency will handle the budgets related to the procurement and maintenance of information systems for the entire government to unify the efforts of each ministry and agency. The government plans to have the digital agency be a permanent organization, but it will also include a provision in the basic policy to have its organizational structure be reviewed after a certain period of time. The reason for this is because it is necessary to reexamine the organization as technology progresses. The hiring of 500 employees will make the new agency larger than the Consumer Affairs Agency and the Reconstruction Agency, which is in charge of reconstruction for the areas that were affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 11/14/2020

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Japan's Cultural Facilities to Receive Government Subsidies to Set Up Streaming Services

The Cultural Affairs Agency is planning from next fiscal year to assist cultural facilities stream events in a bid to shore up finances in an industry that has been battered by the novel coronavirus pandemic, government officials said. The agency plans to subsidize half of the capital investment costs when cultural facilities install streaming service equipment and has included an ¥8.1 billion request for the project in its fiscal 2021 budget. Approximately 1,000 theaters and museums nationwide could benefit from the support. Separately, the government agency has also allocated ¥1.5 billion in the request to subsidize half of the costs to be shouldered by streaming service companies.

The pandemic has forced theaters and museums to cancel or postpone many performances and exhibitions, resulting in operators losing their main revenue sources: ticket and admission fees. The goal is for theaters and museums to provide streaming services when restarting shows and exhibitions, making them viewable to audiences at home and thus opening another revenue channel. The agency also hopes operators will attract overseas viewers by streaming in multiple languages, furthering the multiplier effect. The government will also strengthen antivirus measures taken at cultural facilities and has included ¥1.7 billion in the budgetary

request to subsidize half the cost for operators to purchase air purifiers and thermal cameras as well as to repair or upgrade air conditioners.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 11/16/2020

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Digital Agency to Work on Seven Major Tasks; Plans to Promote Shared Cloud Among Local Govts

The governments' envisaged digital agency is expected to work on seven major tasks including the standardization of local government digital infrastructure by introducing cloud computing systems, The Yomiuri Shimbun has learned. The agency, which is to be established in September next year, is expected to serve as a control tower for the administration and the private sector, amid efforts to establish a digital society aimed at improving convenience and saving money for citizens and businesses. According to a draft compiled by the government, the agency will tackle seven major tasks, including having local governments introduce cloud-based systems for the collaborative management of data sharing on the internet. The agency will cooperate with the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry to migrate administrative systems, currently operated separately by each local government, to a nationwide cloud system in a bid to reduce costs and save labor.

The agency will also promote the unification of the government's information system. The total related budget for this fiscal year, across various parts of the government, totaled about ¥800 billion. But the government is planning to allocate the new agency a single lump sum to deal with the issue instead, aiming to reduce it by 30% by fiscal 2025. The government also wants to boost digitization in the private sector to improve productivity and accelerate growth. The agency is expected to formulate a policy for the development of necessary systems in fields closely related to people's lives, such as health care and education, according to sources. Operations related to My Number cards are expected to be transferred from related ministries and agencies including the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry to promote the use of the cards. The goal is for almost all citizens to possess a My Number card by the end of fiscal 2022. The current possession rate is about 20%.

The agency is expected to strengthen its involvement in the Japan Agency for Local Authority Information Systems, which now operates the My Number card management system. To prevent information leaks due to cyber-attacks and other factors, the agency will have a dedicated cyber-security team. The team will work with the National Center of Incident readiness and Strategy for Cybersecurity (NISC) to strengthen measures. In terms of human resource development, the agency is to create an environment in which people can move back and forth between the public and private sectors. The digital agency will have about 500 employees, exceeding

the number of the consumer affairs and reconstruction agencies, of which 100 to 150 will come from the private sector. The draft outline is expected to be included in the government's basic policy for the digital agency, which will be finalized by the end of this year.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 11/26/2020

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Gov't Determines Framework of New Digital Agency

The Japanese government decided at a task force meeting Thursday on the framework and roles of a new agency to be established in September next year to promote the digitalization of national and local administrative work. A top priority under Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, the new agency in charge of digitalization in both the official and private sectors will be tasked with promoting the My Number personal identification system, currently under the jurisdiction of the Cabinet Office and Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. By centralizing work related to computer system management at ministries and agencies, the government aims to cut operating costs by 30 percent by fiscal 2025, excluding system development costs. The government will finalize the blueprint of the agency by the end of the year. There will be a minister overseeing the agency whose top administrative post will be filled by a person to be tapped from the private sector. The government plans to have around 500 people at the agency, of which over 100 are expected to be civilian IT engineers. "There are still many hurdles to overcome in establishing a digital agency," Takuya Hirai, a minister in charge of digitalization work, said during the task force meeting, stressing the need to accelerate preparatory work for the new agency.

From <https://japantoday.com> 11/27/2020

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S. KOREA: Moon Urges Civil Servants to Follow His Reform Drive Despite Troubles

President Moon Jae-in issued an unusual message Monday in public for South Korea's civil servants, saying they need to break away from what is obsolete and put the interests of the whole community above those of their own organizations or groups. The president reaffirmed his administration's "firm determination" to reform "power institutions" as one of his key policy agenda items, which also include the Korean-version New Deal, a carbon neutrality campaign and regulatory reform. In general, power institutions here refer to the state prosecution service, police, the National Intelligence Service and the National Tax Service. As the government is striving to turn the COVID-19 pandemic into an opportunity, it is time for public officials to "pull together their minds" in coping with the crisis, Moon said in front of

pool reporters at the outset of his weekly meeting with senior Cheong Wa Dae aides.

"All public officials should return to the basics and fulfill their duty of serving the people and making the country better," he emphasized. He added that they should pioneer an era of upheaval with the attitude of caring more about the interests of the community, not organizations or groups, to which they belong. Moon's remarks came as Justice Minister Choo Mi-ae and Prosecutor General Yoon Seok-youl are at loggerheads. Choo has even suspended Yoon from duty, citing allegations of several misdeeds. The Seoul Administrative Court had a hearing for about an hour Monday to review Yoon's petition against the measure. Choo has been spearheading the prosecution reform drive and accused Yoon of using his power and authority to hamper it. The top prosecutor, however, said he is just carrying out his duty faithfully even with regard to some high-profile corruption scandals involving confidants to the president.

At a weekly meeting with the president on Monday, Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun told Moon that the issue of disciplinary action against Yoon has become a "big burden" for the administration, according to multiple sources in the ruling party. "Even disregarding the steps for disciplinary action, given that Prosecutor General Yoon has put himself in a situation where he can't carry out his duties, stepping down is unavoidable," Chung was quoted as saying. Moon responded that he has also been thinking hard about the issue, the sources said. Moon has publicly kept mum on the conflict between Choo and Yoon, which has made headlines in local newspapers for a number of days. He apparently alluded to the sensitive issue, talking about the importance of reform during the Cheong Wa Dae session.

"Even if (we) go through difficulties and troubles, a new future will be opened when (we) boldly break away from obsolete things via reform and innovation and have the will for change," Moon said. President Moon Jae-in holds a weekly meeting with his senior secretaries at Cheong Wa Dae in Seoul on Nov. 30, 2020. Meanwhile, Moon vowed a "pan-governmental emergency response system" to ensure that the annual state college entrance exam will be held nationwide safely amid the rapid spread of the coronavirus. "This week, entering December, is a very important period in many aspects," he said. "Above all, (we) should certainly turn around the upward trend of new infections. It's more important than any other thing to hold the CSAT safely, which is three days away." CSAT is the abbreviation for College Scholastic Ability Test. Close to half a million students and others have applied to take the CSAT slated for Thursday, according to education authorities.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 11/30/2020

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INDONESIA: Uses Crisis Momentum to Make Structural Reforms

Indonesian President Joko Widodo said his country has taken advantage of the momentum of the crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic to make structural reforms in an extraordinary manner. "In an extraordinary manner, we improve the existing regulations and bureaucracies in order to move fast in the time of difficulties so as to be ready to open the doors as wide as possible for business people and investors in new ways," he said in his speech at the virtual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) CEO Dialogues 2020 on Thursday. According to the head of state, several weeks ago Indonesia passed the omnibus law on job creation as an effort to simplify regulations from 79 laws to one law, aiming to create a quality business and investment climate for business people including small and medium entrepreneurs and foreign investors. "Overlapping regulations and complicated procedures were trimmed, convoluted bureaucratic licensing chains were cut, and illegal levies that had hindered business and investment were also eradicated while maintaining our commitment to protecting the environment," he said.

The president elaborated that the business and investment licensing process has become simpler and more accelerated, while the requirements for investment have become simpler, and business licensing for micro and small businesses is no longer needed. Illegal fees and corruption are cut by integrating the entire licensing process into the electronic licensing system through the online single submission (OSS) system, he said, adding that business and investment activities have been made easier. "The formation of a limited liability company is made simpler and there is no longer a minimum capital limitation. Patent and brand processing is also accelerated. Acquisition of land and land for public use and investment is much easier," he said. He pointed out that investing in special economic zones, free trade areas and free ports will be made easier and more attractive with various facilities and incentives. "Business licensing services in these areas will be carried out in a matter of hours with fiscal facilities integrated in the OSS system," Widodo added.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 11/19/2020

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CAMBODIA: Princess Norodom Arunrasmy Appointed as Advisor to Gov't

Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni has signed a royal decree to appoint Princess Norodom Arunrasmy as an advisor to the government with the rank equivalent to deputy prime minister. In the royal decree dated Wednesday and released to media Saturday, the monarch said the appointment was made at the request of Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen. "Samdech Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, must take responsibility to implement this royal decree from the day of signature," the king wrote. Princess Arunrasmy currently is also a

privy councilor for the Supreme Privy Council to King Sihamoni.

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MYANMAR: Ruling Party Wins in General Elections

Myanmar's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) party has won more than enough seats to form a new government in the general elections held across the country on Nov. 8, according to a result announcement by the Union Election Commission (UEC) on Friday. As of Friday morning, the NLD party has won 346 seats in the parliament, passing the target parliamentary seats to win, the UEC's figures showed.

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MALAYSIA: PM Thanks MPs for Maturity in Passing 2021 Budget

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin paid tribute to members of parliament for their support which led to the 2021 Budget being passed at the policy stage in Parliament today. He said the move demonstrated the maturity of the MPs in making key decisions by placing the welfare, safety and prosperity of the people as a priority. "I am grateful that the 2021 Budget was passed by the Dewan Rakyat today. I would like to convey my thanks to all parliamentarians, especially MPs from Perikatan Nasional (PN), Barisan Nasional (BN), Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) and Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) who supported the Budget's approval at policy stage," he said, adding that the 2021 Budget was the country's biggest to date and crucial for the country. "This proves that the PN government listens to the people's grievances and is very responsive to the views of various parties in helping the public recover as well as regenerate the country's economy, which was badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

From <https://www.nst.com.my/> 11/26/2020

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VIETNAM: Appointment Decisions Handed over to New Health, Science and Technology Ministers & Central Bank Governor

Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc on Monday presented the State President's decisions to appoint Nguyễn Thanh Long as Minister of the Ministry of Health, Nguyễn Thị Hồng as the Governor of State Bank of Việt Nam, and Huỳnh Thanh Đạt as Minister of Science and Technology. PM Phúc spoke highly of efforts made by the health sector in preventing and controlling the COVID-19 pandemic, and asked for

greater endeavours from the sector to protect and take care of the people's health. The sector was tasked with effectively controlling the coronavirus disease, preventing it from breaking out again, as well as other infectious diseases such as diphtheria, dengue fever, seasonal flu and cholera. Attention should be also paid to completing policies and financial mechanisms to improve the quality and efficiency of medical services, and reduce hospital overloads, he said. It is also necessary to manage costs for medical services, pharmaceuticals, food, medical supplies and equipment; and ensure publicity and transparency in management of drug licensing, bidding and procurement; and improve the quality of food safety, especially at kitchens in schools and industrial parks, the Government leader added. PM Phúc asked the sector to do more to expand the coverage of universal health insurance and health insurance payments, and take care of policy beneficiaries such as the poor, people in difficult circumstances, and those with meritorious services to the country, towards ensuring that all people can get initial health care services.

Long, the deputy health minister who has been promoted to be acting health minister since July, promised that the ministry will focus on successfully implementing the tasks assigned by the Party and people. He also demonstrated the determination to promote digital transformation in the sector with programmes such as remote medical examination and treatment, medical publicity, control of communal-level medical stations, and personal medical record management. The sector will also speed up administrative reform to make it easier for people to access health care services, he said. At the event to officially give the title to Hồng as Việt Nam's first female governor of central bank, PM Phúc highly valued the central bank's proactive, drastic and timely actions to assist people and businesses hit by the COVID-19 pandemic such as debt repayment deadline extension, interest reduction, and fee exemption. He asked the new governor to build on her predecessors' achievements and lead the banking sector to fulfill its duties. The SBV needs to push ahead with efforts to ensure the control of inflation, macro-economic stability, and stable value of the domestic currency. It also has to increase inspection to guarantee the banking system's safety, curb the increase of non-performing loans (NPLs), address the existing NPLs, and apply modern technology to develop banking products and services.

Hồng thanked leaders of the Party, State, National Assembly, and Government for entrusting the position to her, pledging to help the central bank fulfill its tasks. Earlier, the parliament had approved Hồng as the 15th Governor of the central bank. While presenting the decision to Đạt on Sunday, PM Phúc asked the science and technology sector to focus on promoting practical connection between enterprises, research institutes and universities towards narrowing the gap between production and business. He also urged the sector to propose breakthroughs in management mechanisms in the field, while stressing the need to make science and technology a direct production and business force to improve productivity and quality. Minister Đạt, replacing his predecessor Chu Ngọc Anh who was reassigned to the post of

Chairman of Hà Nội City People's Committee earlier this year, as stated that he will do his utmost to further promote achievements and results made by the ministry in recent years. He also pledged to perform the tasks assigned by the Prime Minister, focusing on enhancing cooperation among domestic and foreign scientists in exploiting and developing national science and technology potential.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 11/17/2020

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HCM City to Abolish People's Councils at District and Ward Levels Next Year

With 87.14 per cent of votes, National Assembly deputies on Monday morning passed a resolution on urban administration in HCM City to eliminate People's Councils at district and ward levels in the city. The document stipulates administration organisation at the municipal level, comprising the People's Committee and the People's Council. However, there are only People's Committees at the district and ward levels. The organisation of other administrative units in the city is subject to the Law on Local Government Organisation. The newly-passed resolution will take effect next year and the implementation of new urban administrative models in HCM City will begin from July next year. From July next year, chairmen and vice-chairmen of ward People's Committees who are elected/employed before the month will start to work as State employees at the wards. The employment, management and policies for commune officials remain as regulated in the Law on State employees and relevant regulations. At the National Assembly's meeting on Monday, head of the NA Committee for Legal Affairs Hoàng Thanh Tùng said the municipal People's Council was empowered to give a vote of confidence to the chairman/chairwoman of the district People's Committee to strengthen supervisory and power control of city's government to district-level government.

So, chairmen/chairwomen of district People's Committees could be appointed, dismissed or moved to other positions. Under the resolution, ward People's Committees will be no longer responsible for making the ward's socio-economic plan or collecting funds for State budget. The ward People's Committees will solely develop public spending estimates. The urban administration model is also expected to help shorten the time to develop plans for socio-economic development. Earlier, Nguyễn Thành Phong, chairman of the HCM City People's Committee, said the administration project was first proposed in 2007 and amended in 2013. Legal problems delayed its implementation last year. From 2009 to 2016, the city was abolishing People's Councils at district and ward levels with the expectation to reduce overlapping functions and tasks of State governance and cut expenditures. Despite positive results including improved governance, the elimination of the councils was stopped in 2016, Phong said. "In a rapidly developing urban area like

HCM City, People's Councils in districts and wards create an intermediate level that slows down the working process. And the authority assigned to councils is already limited," Phong said, adding that the removal of these People's Councils helped to streamline administrative procedures.

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Vietnam's Top Legislature Concludes Session

The 14th National Assembly (NA) of Vietnam, the country's top legislature, wrapped up its 10th session here on Tuesday. The NA adopted 7 laws and 13 resolutions and reviewed four other draft laws at the session, Vice Chairman of the NA Office Vu Minh Tuan said at a press conference held in Vietnamese capital Hanoi. The NA also discussed and gave comments on the draft documents to be submitted to the 13th national congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) scheduled for next year. The top legislature decided that May 23, 2021 will be the national election day for the election of NA deputies to the 15th NA, as well as for the election of deputies to the People's Councils at all levels for the term 2021-2026, Tuan said. Regarding personnel issues, the NA appointed the minister of health, the minister of science and technology, governor of the State Bank of Vietnam and judges of the Supreme People's Court, Tuan added. The upcoming year of 2021 will have significant meaning as the 13th national congress of the CPV will be held, and it will be the first year for the implementation of the country's 10-year socio-economic development strategy for the 2021-2030 period, NA Chairwoman Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan said in her closing speech. Noting that Vietnam will also encounter several major difficulties and challenges, the NA requested the government, relevant authorities, the business community and the people to exert utmost efforts to fulfill the epidemic control and economic recovery tasks while attaining the targets and completing set plans, in order to create a foundation for a new phase of development, Ngan said. The NA session was held online from Oct. 20 to 27 before deputies gathered in Hanoi for plenary meetings from Nov. 2 to 17.

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South Asia

INDIA: 16 Elite Services Officers Transferred to Central Administration including 6 IAS Officers

Amidst a reshuffle of officers of elite services, 16 officers have been transferred including 6 IAS officers and have been appointed different roles. The Department of Personnel and Training issued a notification regarding the transfers following a nod

from the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. P Amudha (1994-Batch IAS) who is at present serving as a professor at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration has been transferred and posted to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) as Joint Secretary. Varsha Joshi (1995-Batch IAS) has been appointed in the Central administration as Joint Secretary in the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying. Joshi is, at present, serving in the Government of Delhi. Keshav Chandra (1995-Batch IAS) has been posted as the Director, Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO), in the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. Sajjan Yadav (1995-Batch IAS) has been moved from the Department of Women and Child and made the Joint Secretary, Department of Expenditure in the Ministry of Finance. Sudhir Kumar (1999-Batch IAS) has been transferred and appointed as Additional Secretary in the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC). Nitishwar Kumar (1996-Batch IAS) has been made the member secretary, National Council for Teachers' Education (NCTE). Kumar is currently serving in the Ministry of Water Resources. Further, officers who have been transferred are from other elite services including revenue service, economic service and railway services.

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

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

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/> 11/25/2020

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Odisha's Bureaucratic Reshuffle: 5 IAS Officers Transferred

On July 27, the Government of Odisha gave a go-ahead for a minor administrative rejig in the senior IAS cadre. Raj Kumar Sharma, Additional Chief Secretary, Steel and Mines has been transferred and posted as the Agriculture Production Commissioner (APC). Anu Garg, Principal Secretary, Labour & ESI is to assume the charge as Principal Secretary, Water Resources with additional charge as Principal Secretary, WCD and Mission Shakti. Surendra Kumar has been appointed as the Principal Secretary, Steel and Mines. Kumar also has an additional charge as Chairman of the Cuttack Development Authority (CDA). Chitra Arumugam, who is the current Principal Secretary, School and Mass Education, has been given the charge of Principal Secretary, Labour and ESI. Satyabrata Sahu has been given the additional charge of Principal Secretary, School and Mass Education.

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Sindhu Rupesh to Assume Charge as Director, EDCS, DP&AR (E-Governance), Karnataka

Amidst the growing number of COVID-19 cases in Dakshin Kannada, the Government of Karnataka passed orders for the reshuffling of several IAS officers. Sindhu Rupesh (2011-Batch IAS officer) the Deputy Commissioner of Dakshina Kannada district has been replaced in less than a year and has been transferred to the post of Director, Electronic Delivery of Citizen Services (EDCS), DP&AR (E-Governance). The Dakshina Kannada district is grappling with 2,672 active Corona cases after it reported 119 new cases on July 27.

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Uttar Pradesh's Major Administrative Reshuffle: 17 IAS & 15 PCS officers Transferred

Following a nod from the Yogi Adityanath-led Government of Uttar Pradesh for a major administrative reshuffle, 17 IAS and 15 PCS officers were transferred on July 29. The reshuffle saw the deployment of new Chief Development Officers (CDOs) in 10 districts. Moreover, five IAS officers are awaiting their postings. Here is the complete list of the transfers:

17 IAS transfers:

Dr Mahendra Kumar, CDO Chitrakoot has been transferred and posted as Special Secretary APC Branch. Ghazal Bhardwaj, Joint Magistrate Lalitpur has been given the charge of CDO Rampur. Ashwini Kumar Pandey, presently serving as the Joint

Magistrate Chitrakoot has been posted as CDO Ballia. Amit Aasari, the current Joint Magistrate of Farrukhabad has been given the position of CDO Chitrakoot. Atul Vats, Joint Magistrate Mau has been transferred and posted as CDO Sultanpur. Ankur Lather, Joint Magistrate Mau has been transferred and posted as CDO Amethi. Annapurna Garg, who is the current Joint Magistrate Ballia has now been given the charge of CDO Ambedkarnagar. Amit Pal, serving as CDO Pratapgarh is to assume the charge of Special Secretary Secondary Education. Vipin Jain, Joint Magistrate Ballia has been made CDO Pratapgarh. Kavita Meena, Joint Magistrate Bhadohi has been now been made CDO Bahraich. Indrajit Singh, Joint Magistrate Etawah has been appointed as CDO Gorakhpur. Arvind Kumar Chauhan, CDO Bahraich has been appointed as Special Secretary Social Welfare.

The five officers awaiting their postings are as follows:

Muthu Kumar Swami B who has been given the charge of Special Secretary, Department of Industrial Development. G Srinivasulu has been given the Finance Department to head as Special Secretary. Manoj Kumar to be posted as Director Agriculture Marketing & Agriculture Foreign Trade. Shyam Sundar Sharma has been given the charge of Secretary Backward Classes Commission. Ghanshyam Meena to be posted as CDO Kushinagar.

15 PCS transfers: Manju Lata, Additional Commissioner Affiliated Agra has been posted as Special Secretary APC Branch. Poonam Nigam, Additional District Magistrate (ADM) Judicial Mahoba has been appointed as Additional Commissioner Jhansi Division. Vishram, Officer on Special Duty (OSD) Revenue Council has been made ADM Judicial Kaushambi. Neeta Yadav, OSD Revenue Council has been given the charge of CRO Settlement. Anil Kumar Singh, Joint Secretary Avipa has been appointed as Registrar, Atal Bihari Vajpayee Medical University. Narendra Singh-II, Member Waqf Tribunal has been posted as Joint Secretary Home Guard Department. Alka Verma, Joint Secretary Technical Education has been appointed as Additional Commissioner, Lucknow Division. Hariom Sharma, Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Pilibhit has been posted as Additional Commissioner Gorakhpur Division. Narendra Kumar Singh, SDM Mathura has been made City Magistrate Ballia. Anand Kumar, CDO Kushinagar has been appointed as Special Secretary Education. Anup Srivastava, CDO Ambedkarnagar has been posted as Special Secretary Disability Empowerment Department. Prabhunath, CDO Amethi has been given the charge of Special Secretary Public Works Department (PWD). Badri Nath Singh, CDO Ballia has been appointed as Special Secretary to the Governor. Shivendra Kumar Singh, CDO Rampur has been posted as Additional Registrar Bank Cooperatives. Ramesh Prasad Mishra, CDO Sultanpur has been appointed as Additional Commissioner Jhansi Division.

From <http://egov.eletsonline.com> 11/30/2020

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Parliament Voices Appeal to Government Due to France

The Azerbaijani parliament voiced an appeal to the government in connection with France, Trend reports on Nov. 26. The Azerbaijani parliament calls on the government to appeal to the OSCE leadership regarding the withdrawal of the mandate of France, the co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, which has questioned its neutrality. An appeal was made to reconsider the existing political relations between Azerbaijan and France. At the same time, the parliament called on the government to thoroughly analyze the economic ties with France by taking the appropriate measures. On November 18, at the Presidium of the French Senate, a group of senators influenced by the Armenian diaspora presented a draft resolution No. 145 "On the need to recognize the "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic", which was discussed and adopted on November 25.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 11/26/2020

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TURKMENISTAN: Preparing Project for Intellectual Property System Dev't

Turkmenistan jointly with The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) prepared a draft program for the development of the intellectual property system of Turkmenistan for 2021-2025, Trend reports with reference to the State News Agency of Turkmenistan. According to the information, the project provides for taking comprehensive steps to solve the tasks set in the mentioned issue. The project was prepared in the framework of strengthening cooperation between Turkmenistan and specialized structures in the field of technology and innovation, and in particular, with WIPO. An important aspect of partnership with international organizations is the introduction of modern technologies and innovations in all sectors of the economy of Turkmenistan. Earlier, WIPO said its ready to assist Turkmenistan in improving distance education. WIPO is a part of the UN that deals with the use of intellectual property. Turkmenistan joined WIPO in 1995. WIPO is the oldest international organization in the field of intellectual property protection, which was formed on July 14, 1964. Since 1998, the WIPO worldwide academy is engaged in training of human resources in the field of intellectual property protection. It has a distant learning center that allows receiving education via the Internet.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 11/27/2020

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: PM and Biden Discuss Climate and Democracy

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has spoken to Joe Biden for the first time since the Democrat won the United States presidential election. Mr Morrison became the latest in a cavalcade of world leaders to congratulate the president-elect from Canberra on Thursday. He used the phone call to reiterate his invitation for Mr Biden and his wife to visit Australia next year for the 70th anniversary of the ANZUS security treaty. Mr Morrison said the pair discussed environmental challenges, including technologies to reduce carbon emissions, but net zero targets for 2050 were not raised. An official readout from Mr Biden's office said he looked forward to working with the prime minister on confronting climate change and strengthening democracy. Mr Morrison said he was not concerned about the transition of power in Washington.

He said Donald Trump's refusal to concede was not a matter for him as the Australian head of government. "That is a matter for the president," Mr Morrison told reporters. The prime minister said he and Mr Biden spoke about multilateral engagement around the world and the "indispensable and important" role of the United States. "He and I will be the next pairing of stewards of this important relationship of this alliance," Mr Morrison said. "We understand the responsibility of that extends well beyond our terms and our specific domestic responsibilities." Mr Morrison also confirmed British leader Boris Johnson had invited him to take part in the G7 summit next year. The president-elect is due to be inaugurated on January 20, but Mr Trump is still refusing to concede defeat, peddling baseless claims of voter fraud. Mr Biden spoke to the leaders of Canada, Britain, Germany, France and Ireland earlier this week. He also spoke to the Japanese and South Korean leaders on Thursday.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 11/12/2020

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Australia's Space Agency Appoints New Boss

Australia's space agency has appointed a star boss with Virgin Galactic's chief operating officer set to make a giant leap and rocket home for the role. Enrico Palermo will take over from inaugural head Megan Clark, who led the agency from blast off in 2018. Mr Palermo will return to his native Australia after two decades of working in the space industry in the United States and United Kingdom. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the new head comes to the role with extensive international experience in the space industry "Mr Palermo's leadership will rocket Australia toward our goal of becoming a major player in the international space industry, while providing benefits across our economy," he said on Friday. "By 2030, we want to triple the size of our space sector - adding \$12 billion to our economy and creating up to 20,000 new, high-skilled jobs."

Dr Clark will finish at the end of the year to become the chair of the agency's advisory board. Mr Palermo, who is a Perth native, works at Virgin Galactic's aerospace-system manufacturing organisation and is president of the Richard Branson-founded Spaceship Company. "In its first two years, the Australian Space Agency has made significant progress and achieved many firsts," he said. "I look forward to working with the agency team to continue the mission of growing and transforming Australia's space industry." He will move from California to Adelaide where the agency is based.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 11/13/2020

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PM Challenges States to Open Up, Stay Open

Scott Morrison has challenged states and territories to keep borders and businesses open if coronavirus outbreaks flare up. The prime minister said he was thrilled Queensland was preparing to welcome back visitors from Victoria and NSW on December 1. He urged the state government, and others around the country, to have faith in their health systems. "With Christmas coming up, that's especially important," Mr Morrison told 2GB radio. "It's important now that we open safely in Queensland and we remain safely open. I think business needs that assurance." Tasmania will open its borders to Victoria on Friday for the first time in more than eight months. All states except Western Australia are committed to reopening their borders by Christmas. WA Premier Mark McGowan remains defiant and unapologetic for his hard border stance shutting the state off from large parts of the country.

South Australia is introducing stricter protocols for hotel quarantine after a coronavirus cluster triggered a short-lived statewide shutdown. Further restrictions are set to ease in SA from December 1 amid hopes states will look at relaxing hard borders after there were no new cases on Wednesday. "We had that hiccup in South Australia last week, a bit of a false alarm, and it's important for businesses that there is that certainty," the prime minister said. Victoria is free of active cases after 26 days without recording a new infection. NSW will allow 50 people to gather outdoors including backyards from Tuesday, while 30 people can gather indoors. The state also eased hospitality limits after going 18 days without a locally acquired case of the disease. Mr Morrison is confident Australians will start receiving a coronavirus vaccine early next year after more encouraging late-stage trials.

The AstraZeneca-University of Oxford candidate has reported up to 90 per cent effectiveness, fuelling hopes an end to the pandemic could be possible. Australia has a contract for 33.8 million doses of that vaccine, which will be manufactured in Melbourne. Mr Morrison said it was clear the world was on track to start immunising people for coronavirus in 2021. Pfizer and Moderna's candidates reported a 95 per cent effectiveness rate, with Australia contracted for 10 million doses of the former.

Mr Morrison said the University of Queensland vaccine was also showing strong signs, describing the performance of vaccines as being beyond the government's best hopes. Health workers and elderly people would be the first to receive the free vaccine, with the wider population set for the jab before the end of 2021.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 11/25/2020

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3、 Management, Capacity Building and Innovation

Asia-Pacific

Powering Up Smart Cities Around the World

Jim Craig, Pieter De Jong and Val De Oliveira from the FIWARE Community explain how FIWARE is driving the development of smart digital solutions in a faster, easier, interoperable and affordable way, following an open source approach that avoids vendor lock-in. When we talk about Smart Cities, topics such as ICT, big data and Internet of Things often spring to mind, and rightfully so. However, the scope of Smart Cities reaches far beyond software, hardware and data. Smart Cities represent distinctive ecosystems of collaborative frameworks: private and public businesses, not-for-profit organisations, social enterprises, citizens, etc. These ecosystems facilitate the transformation of cities into enablers of economic growth, innovation and well-being. Under this concept, cities become more efficient, resilient to environmental challenges, cost effective and sustainable, providing citizens with a better place to work, live and socialise.

In this context, we invite you on a journey of digital transformation, with practical examples focused on sustainability, data economy, and the efficient management of public services – from the citizen's standpoint. We will show you how FIWARE Foundation¹ members are guiding cities and helping them to embrace the Smart City concept. Cities such as Amersfoort, Antwerp, Málaga, Santander (to mention but a few) – part of the Open & Agile Smart Cities (OASC) network – of which the vast majority of its 150+ cities have already adopted FIWARE technologies, are great examples of how cities can boost growth and deliver more efficient services with the help of the growing FIWARE's Community, ultimately creating more livable environments where both citizens and businesses can thrive.

Delivering Smart Cities to enhance life

Technical innovation projects, using enterprise open source software, can be used to improve the infrastructure of cities and enhance the lives of citizens.

Current outlook and future challenges

Reports from the United Nations forecast that the world's population will grow to 9.8 billion by 2050 and 68% of people will live in cities. This growth will stress city infrastructures. Cities around the globe are already struggling with a range of challenges, including air and water quality, pollution, congestion, overcrowding, poverty, waste, health and social care, energy, transport and travel. The deepening climate crisis, in which we are already experiencing an increase in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, intensifies matters.

The opportunity for Smart Cities

Concentrating citizens into large "smart" metropolitan areas provides economies of scale and helps us avoid exceeding the carrying capacity of the planet. To become truly smart requires a fundamental change in how existing cities are operated, and new ones are developed and run. Silos need removing and interoperability needs common information standards. Cities need to facilitate third parties to develop solutions, which in turn can be used by city administrators to deliver enhanced and new services to citizens.

In Smart Cities, efficiencies can be achieved through circular economy processes. Examples of this include generating renewable energy locally, harvesting and reusing water, and growing food in urban plots. Public transport can be affordable or even free in Smart Cities, reliable, uncongested and non-polluting. Health and social care can be supported by remote monitoring and video systems. Ultimately, Smart Cities are about enhancing the delivery of services to citizens, services that support life events, literally from cradle to grave.

How do we get there?

"Rome wasn't built in a day" and this holds true for Smart Cities. However, there are already many examples of technology being used to deliver elements of Smart Cities. Public administrators of cities and wider metropolitan areas need to develop a big picture plan. They can then deliver against this in small, incremental pieces, like building Smart World models (made entirely of Lego bricks), in collaboration with trusted partners.

Some critical factors to deliver this approach are:

1. A modular architecture using open standards. This allows you to start small, grow and adapt quickly.
2. A rock solid foundation. The architecture is only as good as the foundation it is running on. This has to be secure, scalable, intelligent, distributed, extensible, resilient, responsive, and supportive of innovation.
3. An enabling support ecosystem. The foundation needs to be backed by enterprise-grade support 24/7 and every day of the year. It must deliver this with infrastructure that is invisible.

The city of Montevideo, a strategic user of the FIWARE platform and a member of FIWARE Foundation, is a good example of this. They achieved their success by

adopting the Red Hat OpenShift Container platform.

Smart Cities are not only about technology

A successful Smart City is a city that addresses challenges in a collaborative, open and replicable manner. If you want a successful Smart City approach that addresses climate resilience, air and water pollution, public health and the “liveability” of cities, you must focus on the challenges of the city. Be open, build a community and collaborate. At the heart of a city is its community, a broad group of actors who can all provide valuable inputs in working towards a Smart City. Bringing together citizens, industry, science and policy is a potent mixture for innovation. The key is collaboration between all these actors, using all available knowledge, while not reinventing the wheel. A prerequisite for successful collaboration is openness: open data, open technology, open source, and open standards. The technology is a facilitator, an enabler, a means to an end. This is the approach of the Future City Foundation, the FIWARE iHub in the Netherlands, and the first Smart City network in the Netherlands that focuses on the demand of the city and brings all the actors together. The Future City Foundation uses the open standards provided by FIWARE Foundation to enable rapid data and information transfers between all involved parties.

Success with a collaborative approach

Successful projects already applying this approach include SCOREwater, a EU Horizon2020 research and innovation project, working towards a smart water society.

- In an effort to create a climate-resilient city, Amersfoort (Netherlands) teamed up with the citizen science network “MeetJeStad”, integrating data gathered by citizens into the project.
- In the city of Gothenburg (Sweden), sensors give insights into the quality of run-off water from construction sites. The same data contributes to educational programs for children about water pollution.
- In Barcelona (Spain), sewage is being analysed as part of a broader, city-wide and citizen-centric approach. It’s even possible to trace the presence of COVID-19 in wastewater. All this new data allows faster and better-informed decisions.

Another successful project is Sniffer Bike, a collaborative effort of over 20 parties installing sensors on bicycles. This has created a network of sensors giving insight into air quality, road quality and cycle routes. Importantly, there is an opportunity for citizens to have an active role in the initiative. Then there is the City Deal ‘Smart City, This is How You Do It’, a collaborative effort of more than 50 parties developing and testing tools for the Smart City of tomorrow, based on challenges citizens and cities are dealing with. There is much more. Embrace the collaborative approach, and learn more about the Future City Foundation.

From <https://www.forbes.com/> 11/04/2020

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Pt.Seminar 2020: Digital Citymakers

Digital transformation permeates every aspect of everyday life. But is the role of citizens limited to the generation of data in a system of global surveillance and targeted marketing? Are digital assets at a similar risk of being sold off for profit as physical urban commons? Facing these questions, activists join together in global networks and local spaces to advocate for equitable digital cities. City makers have always been working to (co)produce and shape urban space: reactivating underused spaces, setting impulses for community life and creative expression, raising awareness through public interventions. Although digital transformation adds new threats and layers of complexity, it also provides city makers with new tools. Local communities are empowered to collect data and adopt digital tools to solve real-world problems. At the same time, their initiatives are linked in global networks of open-source platforms, allowing local solutions to be replicated and adapted to other contexts. This Pt.Seminar presents four approaches of “digital city makers” to make an impact on their environment. In an open dialogue between city makers, urban planners and researchers we will uncover the forces that work towards and against the democratization of digital transformation in cities.

Program:

17:00 Introduction and Welcome by Agnes Förster and Martin Bangratz

Digital Citymakers: Co-producing the Digital City

17:15 Ivan Iovine

Fraunhofer Institute for Computer Graphics Research IGD

Smarticipate – Opening Up the Smart City

Manon Brulard

Open Knowledge Belgium | HackYourFuture Belgium

Using Technology to Drive Equality

18:00 Panel Discussion: Co-producing the Digital City

Panelists from academia, civil society initiatives, foundations, and local governments discuss: What do Digital Citymakers contribute to their cities?

18:30 Parallel Themed Workshops: Perspectives on Digital Citymaking

Join the experts and other participants in interactive sessions to discover more about the origins, objectives, challenges, and contributions of Digital Citymakers

From <https://www.pt.rwth-aachen.de/> 11/04/2020

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Asia-Pacific Countries Have Managed COVID-19 Crisis Relatively Well but Major Challenges Remain in Low-Middle-Income Countries

Australia, Japan, Korea, and New Zealand did better than most countries in flattening

the curve of the COVID-19 epidemic and containing the first wave of the virus, according to the OECD's first analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on health systems of countries across the Asia-Pacific as well as governments' responses to control the virus. These countries developed effective testing, tracing and isolation systems, as well as trust and compliance with social distancing and other key guidelines. Other countries including Viet Nam and Thailand demonstrate the value of a proactive response to successfully contain the virus and limit deaths. Health at a Glance Asia/Pacific 2020 says that deaths in the Asia-Pacific region attributed to COVID-19 have increased over time and reached over 140,300 – around 12% of the deaths reported in the world – at the beginning of October 2020. In particular, the virus spread rapidly in India, Indonesia, and the Philippines causing a significant impact on human life.

Until vaccines are widely available, countries should address risk factors, create adaptable surge capacity, strengthen the health workforce, and exploit opportunities offered by digital health technologies. Many low- and middle-income Asian economies needed to spend more on health even prior to the crisis. It is critical to ensure that economic pressures - either during or after the pandemic has ended - do not divert already limited resources away from essential health services. As these countries have limited capacity and depend heavily on household out-of-pocket spending, the significant cost of the COVID-19 response may not be fully within their financial capacity. The report also says that prevention and treatment services for cancer, cardiovascular disease and diabetes as well as for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria have been severely disrupted since the pandemic began. The indirect effects of COVID-19 on pregnant women, newborns, young children and adolescents are also huge.

Other findings of Health at a Glance Asia/Pacific 2020 include:

- Life expectancy increased by 6 years since 2000 to reach 70 years in 2018, but maternal mortality is still twice the Sustainable Development Goal target in lower-middle and low-income countries in the region.
- At an average of 27.2 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2018, infant mortality in lower-middle and low-income Asia-Pacific countries is still seven times that of high income Asia-Pacific countries and OECD rate, and more than two times the SDG target of 12 deaths per 1,000 live births.
- Almost half of health spending comes from payments made by households out-of-pocket in lower-middle and low income countries. For each dollar spent on health, more than 60 cents were “out-of-pocket” in Cambodia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Myanmar in 2017

Health at a Glance Asia/Pacific 2020, a joint publication of the OECD with the World Health Organisation, presents key indicators on health status, determinants of health, health care resources and utilisation, health expenditure and financing, and quality of care for 27 Asia/Pacific countries and territories. This report offers a comprehensive

and user-friendly framework to help policy makers make further progress towards improving coverage, access and financial protection of population across the Asia/Pacific region. More information is available at <https://www.oecd.org/health/health-at-a-glance-asia-pacific-23054964.htm>. For further information, journalists are invited to contact Spencer Wilson in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 45 24 97 00). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 11/27/2020

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East Asia

CHINA: To Accelerate Development of Modern Industrial System

China aims to speed up the development of modern industrial system and push economic optimization and upgrade, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals that was made public on Tuesday. The document, 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, was adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29. China will continue to take the real economy as the focus of its economic development, unswervingly build up its strength in manufacturing, quality and cyberspace, and build a digital country, said the document. The country will work to advance its industrial foundation to a higher level, promote the modernization of its industrial chain, and improve the quality, efficiency and core competitiveness of its economy, according to the document.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/03/2020

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China to Advance Coordinated Regional Development

China will advance coordinated regional development and a new type of urbanization, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. Efforts will be made to create a new situation in developing the country's western regions, achieve new breakthroughs in revitalizing the northeastern regions, accelerate the rise of central regions, and encourage eastern regions to accelerate the process of modernization. A new type of urbanization that puts people at the core will be advanced. China will promote urban ecological restoration and functional improvement projects, coordinate urban planning, construction and management, rationally set the size,

population density and spatial structure of cities, and promote the coordinated development of cities and small towns. 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 were adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/03/2020

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China to Advance Infrastructure Construction

China will advance the infrastructure construction in a coordinated way, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China Central Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. The country will build a systematic, highly efficient and practical, intelligent and green, and safe and reliable modern infrastructure system, according to the document. China will speed up new infrastructure construction in fields like 5G, industrial internet, and big data center, improve comprehensive transportation channels, hubs, and logistics systems, and build more rail transit lines in city clusters and metropolitan areas, it said. China will advance energy revolution by strengthening domestic oil and gas exploration and development, speeding up the construction of oil and gas storage facilities, and trunk oil and gas pipelines, building a smart energy system, and boosting the consumption and storage of new energy, it added. The country will also beef up water conservancy infrastructure construction to optimize water resources allocation and improve flood and drought defense capability.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/03/2020

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China to Build High-level Socialist Market Economy

China will comprehensively deepen reform to build a high-level socialist market economy, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. China will uphold and improve the basic socialist economic system, give full play to the decisive role of the market in resource allocation, let the government better play its role, and promote the better integration of an efficient market and a capable government, said the document. The proposals emphasize the need to stimulate the vitality of various market entities, optimize macro-economic governance, establish a modern fiscal, taxation and financial system, foster a high-standard market system and speed up the transformation of government functions. China will unswervingly consolidate and develop the public sector of the economy and encourage, support and guide the

development of the non-public sector, the document said. In terms of macro-economic governance, the country will improve a macro-economic governance system featuring optimized objectives, appropriate labor distribution and efficient coordination, with national development planning playing a strategic guiding role, fiscal and monetary policies being the major means as well as a close coordination of policies in employment, industries, investment, consumption, environmental protection, and regional development, it added.

To establish a modern fiscal, taxation and financial system, China will beef up overall planning of fiscal resources and mid-term fiscal planning management. It will also build a modern central bank system, improve the money supply regulation mechanism, prudently promote the research and development of digital currency, and improve the market-oriented interest rate formation and transmission mechanism. To foster a high-standard market system, China will improve the basic institutions of the market system and create a highly efficient, regulated, and unified domestic market with a level-playing field. To speed up the transformation of government functions, China will build a law-based government administration with well-defined functions and duties, and improve a market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/03/2020

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China to Build Open Economy at Higher Level

China will enhance the level of opening-up, promote trade and investment liberalization and facilitation, and strengthen the comprehensive competitiveness of foreign trade, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. The country will improve the "pre-establishment national treatment plus negative list" management system for foreign investment, expand the opening-up of the service sector and protect foreign companies' legitimate rights and interests, the document said. Pilot free trade zones will be granted greater decision-making power in reform while the construction of Hainan free trade port will be advanced steadily. The document, 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, was adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/03/2020

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China to Enhance Cultural Soft Power

China will strengthen efforts to develop cultural undertakings and industries, and enhance the country's cultural soft power, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. China should further enhance social etiquette and civility, improve public cultural services, and improve the system of modern cultural industries, according to the document. 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 were adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/03/2020

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China to Facilitate Modernization of Industrial, Supply Chains

China will advance the optimization and upgrading of its entire industrial chain by making sector-specific strategic plans for supply chains in a targeted approach, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. Building on its industrial advantages, China will foster emerging industrial chains, push the high-end, smart and green development of traditional industries, and boost service-oriented manufacturing, said the document. To strengthen weak links in the industrial and supply chains, more efforts will be made to achieve breakthroughs in developing important products as well as key and core technologies, while diversification of industrial and supply chains will be further enhanced. The country will enhance international industrial cooperation and build industrial and supply chains that are more innovative, secure, reliable and higher value-added. The document, 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, was adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/03/2020

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China to Jointly Boost High-quality B&R Construction

China will promote high-quality development in the joint construction of the Belt and Road (B&R), according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. More efforts will be made to build a mutually beneficial cooperation system on industrial and

supply chains, enhance international cooperation on capacity and expand bilateral trade and investment. The country will develop a market-oriented system in which enterprises are the main players, follow international practices and the principle of debt sustainability and optimize diversified investment and financing system. Meanwhile, cooperations on public health, digital economy, green development, technology and education will be deepened. 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 were adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29.

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China to Promote Innovation Capacity of Enterprises

China will promote the innovation capacity of its enterprises and strengthen the dominant role of enterprises in innovation, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals, which were made public on Tuesday. The document, 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, was adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29. The proposals underline the importance of collaborative innovation between industry, universities and research institutes. They also encourage enterprises to take the lead in establishing innovation consortia, while participating in major national science and technology projects. The proposals call for giving full play to the important role of entrepreneurs in technological innovation, while encouraging enterprises to increase investment in research and development, pledging tax incentives for investments in basic research. Large enterprises should play a leading role, according to the proposals, while the growth of micro, small and medium-sized high-tech firms should be supported as important originators of innovation. The construction of common technology platforms should be strengthened, and the integration and innovation of large, small and medium-sized enterprises in the whole industrial chain should be promoted, according to the proposals.

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China to Pursue Innovation-driven Development

China will pursue innovation-driven development and shape new development advantages, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central

Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. The country will uphold the central role of innovation in its modernization drive and take self-reliance in science and technology as strategic underpinning for national development. Focusing on world-leading technologies, economic development, the major demand of the country and people's lives and health, China should further implement the strategies of invigorating the country through science and education, developing a quality workforce as well as of driving development through innovation, according to the proposals. China will improve the national innovation system and speed up efforts to build the country into a scientific and technological powerhouse.

The country will intensify its national strategic strength in science and technology, make major breakthroughs in core technologies and improve the overall efficiency of the innovation chain. China will enhance enterprises' innovation capacity and strengthen the dominant role of enterprises in innovation. Through stimulating the vitality of talent for innovation, China aims to cultivate world-class sci-tech talent and innovation teams. The country will also make institutional improvement in sci-tech innovation and optimize its national sci-tech governance system. The Party leadership's proposals for formulating the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035 were adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29.

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China Underscores Development of Strategic Emerging Industries

China vows to boost the development of strategic emerging industries, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. China will speed up developing several strategic emerging industries, including new-generation information technology, biotechnology, new energy, new materials, high-end equipment, new energy vehicles, environmental protection, aerospace, and marine equipment, according to the document. The document, 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, was adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29. The proposals call for the deep integration of internet, big data and artificial intelligence with other industries, facilitating the cluster development of advanced manufacturing, building a series of strategic emerging industries as new growth drivers, and nurturing new technologies, new products, new business models and new business forms. China will also promote the healthy development of platform

economy and shared economy, encourage corporate mergers and acquisitions, and avoid low-level repetitive construction, the document said.

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Innovation Drives High-quality Growth of Beijing's Tech Hub

High-tech companies in Beijing's Zhongguancun, better known as China's Silicon Valley, are spearheading innovation as the country continues to advance high-quality development. Founded in 2014, Chinese cloud computing platform EasyStack is one of the leading innovators in Zhongguancun Science Park, a national demonstration area for independent innovation. Over the last six years, the company has seen steep growth from a small team of nine to a professional cloud product and service provider with around 400 employees. It was not easy to start from scratch, said Chen Xilun, founder and CEO of EasyStack. The company built up its reputation in the industry by contributing codes to core projects worldwide in its early days, and has more than once made it to the top 10 core code contribution lists, according to Chen. It is now providing cloud computing solutions to governments and key sectors including finance, telecommunication and energy both at home and abroad.

Chen thinks independent innovation is behind the company's success. "Cloud computing is the engine of digitalization," said Chen, adding that the company has been committed to independent research and development with a global perspective. "Only with core technology can we have core competence." China's central authorities have reiterated the core position innovation occupies in the country's march toward modernization in a recently released blueprint for development through 2035. Technological self-sufficiency should be a strategic pillar of the country's development, they say. "What our company does echoes with the country's call for innovation-driven development," said Chen, promising to step up independent research and development to become a world-class cloud computing company based on an open-source ecosystem. Sugon, a leading company in the field of server, storage, cloud computing and big data in China, holds the patent for an advanced immersion cooled server.

Because of the use of liquid cooling technology, the server is energy efficient compared with traditional ones, said Ren Jingyang, senior vice president of Sugon. "We've never hesitated in pursuing innovation," he added. Ren said there has been rising confidence among enterprises as the environment for business, innovation and investment in the country kept improving during the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) period. Looking forward to the next five years, Ren said the emphasis on innovation by the central authorities is uplifting. The company will remain determined in walking down the path of technological self-reliance, concentrating on key research and

development projects and increasing resource investment to contribute to high-quality economic growth, he added. Digital building platform provider Glodon is transforming the traditional construction industry by delivering products and services covering the entire life cycle of construction projects.

By adopting digital workflows, the platform helps improve the efficiency of project cost calculation as well as construction. "Take the use of steel bars for example. Digitalizing the process of cutting, processing and installation can result in more efficient use of raw materials and reduction of waste and pollution," said Chen Xiaofeng, assistant president of Glodon. Since its founding in Beijing in 1998, the company has placed a high value on technological innovation.

It has invested nearly 30 percent of its annual revenue in research and development over the past five years, Chen said. In the future, Chen added, the company is ready to contribute more to high-quality development of China's construction industry by making innovation the main driver of growth. In Zhongguancun Science Park, the beat of innovation never ceases. "In the next step, we are going to focus on the main tasks of transformation and industrialization of scientific and technological achievements, and accelerate our progress toward a leading science park and innovator in the world," said Zhai Lixin, director of the management committee of Zhongguancun.

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JAPAN: To Prioritize Older People in Administering Coronavirus Vaccines

Japan will prioritize administering coronavirus vaccines to older people over those with chronic diseases when they become available, as the former face a higher risk of contracting a severe form of the COVID-19 respiratory illness, the health ministry said Monday. The government plans to distribute coupons for free vaccinations in order of priority when a vaccine is ready, according to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. The policy was decided Monday at a ministry panel meeting involving experts. According to the ministry, older people are up to several dozen times more likely to develop serious complications from the novel coronavirus compared to healthy adults, while those suffering from heart or chronic lung illness, cerebrovascular disease or kidney failure face risks several times higher. The government aims to secure coronavirus vaccines for all people in the first half of 2021.

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Technological Innovation Key to Eliminating Greenhouse Gases

It is important to set goals, but effective and concrete measures are more important. It is hoped that economic growth will be brought about by specifying a road map. As Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga announced a policy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, the government intends to devise an action plan by the end of the year to achieve this goal. Moves to pursue net-zero emissions have grown around the world. Japan should not lag behind in taking measures. However, it is no easy task to attain such a goal. Japan's greenhouse gas emissions amounted to about 1.2 billion tons in fiscal 2018, down only 12% from fiscal 2013. The government projects the figure to be about 1 billion tons in fiscal 2030. Currently, thermal power generation using fossil fuels such as natural gas and coal accounts for about 40% of carbon dioxide emissions. To curb thermal power generation, the nation has no choice but to make the most of renewable energy and nuclear power.

The European Union, which declared a goal of cutting emissions to net zero ahead of Japan, expects renewable energy to account for 81% to 85% of its electricity generation in 2050, while nuclear power is projected to make up for 12% to 15%. The key to increasing renewable energy is to cut costs, which are higher in Japan than in Europe, and develop technologies for large-capacity storage batteries that can adjust for unstable output. As for nuclear power generation, it is the government's responsibility to regain the public's trust and deepen the understanding of local residents about restarting reactors. It is also desirable that discussions will be held on the construction of new reactors, and that there will be progress on the development of small reactors with higher safety. Furthermore, it will be essential to develop new breakthrough technologies and have them used widely. Hopes are being pinned on the use of hydrogen, which does not emit CO₂ when burned. Hydrogen can be liquefied for storage and used in fuel cell vehicles (FCVs) as well as for other purposes such as a substitute for coal in the process of steelmaking. It can be also used to generate electricity. Japan is said to have the upper hand globally in technology using hydrogen — Toyota Motor Corp., for example, launched the world's first mass-produced FCV model in 2014.

A challenge is to build infrastructure to supply hydrogen and reduce costs. Government support measures giving priority to this matter are needed. To achieve the net-zero emissions goal, it is also necessary to put into practice a carbon recycling system, in which CO₂ is collected for reuse. Japanese companies once led the world in environmental technology. In the 1970s, Honda Motor Co. cleared emissions regulations in the United States ahead of major U.S. automakers. In the wake of the oil crisis, automakers and consumer electronics companies improved their energy-saving performance to be among the best in the world. It is crucial to view measures against global warming as an opportunity for growth this time as well. If the government clarifies its plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, that would make it easier for companies to make investments. It is important for both the public

and private sectors to accelerate technological innovations that will support economic growth.

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S. KOREA: Fines Facebook W6.7b for Sharing Users' Info Without Consent

South Korea's information watchdog on Wednesday fined Facebook Inc. 6.7 billion won (\$6 million) for passing information of at least 3.3 million South Koreans to other companies in its first crackdown on the U.S. tech giant. The Personal Information Protection Commission (PIPC) said Facebook violated the country's personal information law by providing personal information of at least 3.3 million of the country's total 18 million local users from May 2012 to June 2018 to other companies without their consent. It marked the commission's first punishment against Facebook since it was launched in August this year. The commission said that when users logged into other company's services using their Facebook accounts, the personal information of their Facebook friends was also shared to such service providers without consent. The personal information that was shared with other companies included users' names, their addresses, dates of birth, work experience, hometowns and relationship statuses. The watchdog said the exact amount of the shared information is unclear as Facebook did not provide relevant documentation.

Considering the information could be provided to at most 10,000 other companies, the watchdog said a considerable amount of personal information could have been shared. The commission said it will refer Facebook Ireland Ltd. -- which was in charge of Facebook operations in South Korea from May 2012 to June 2018 -- to the prosecution for a criminal investigation. Facebook Ireland's director in charge of user privacy could face up to five years in prison or a maximum of 50 million won in fines if convicted of violating South Korea's relevant personal information law. It added that Facebook was uncooperative in its investigation as it submitted incomplete or false documents. Also on Wednesday, the commission levied Facebook with a separate penalty of 66 million won for the false documentation. Facebook expressed regret at the commission's move. "We cooperated with the investigation in its entirety," Facebook said in a statement. "We have yet to closely review PIPC's measure." In 2018, the Korea Communications Commission, South Korea's telecommunications regulator, started investigations into Facebook before handing it off to the commission.

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South-East Asia

MYANMAR: Gov't Urges Public to Stay at Home to Contain Spread of COVID-19

Myanmar's Ministry of Health and Sports on Thursday urged the public to stay at home and follow the directives of the ministry to curb the spread of COVID-19 outbreak. The ministry also called on the public to avoid mass gatherings and travelling if necessary. According to the ministry's release, the ministry has been accelerating efforts in containment measures against the spread of the disease while monitoring the aftermath of gatherings which occurred during the recent election period. Meanwhile, the ministry is carrying out the public awareness campaign against wearing masks and face shields across the country under the management of regional and state governments. Myanmar has reported 74,882 COVID-19 confirmed cases with 1,676 deaths in the country so far.

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MALAYSIA: Monitoring Stations Able to Monitor Various Types of Pollution, Says Tuan Ibrahim

KUALA LUMPUR: Thirty monitoring stations to be set up under a RM40 million 2021 Budget allocation are not limited to detecting water contamination but also capable of detecting various types of environmental pollution. Environment and Water Minister Datuk Seri Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man said the construction of these stations was expected to address all previous weaknesses. "Apart from monitoring stations, the ministry also intends to install monitoring systems in river basins to monitor water levels to provide early signals, especially concerning floods," he said when winding-up the debate on the Supply Bill 2021 in the Dewan Rakyat today. He said at the moment his ministry is still in discussions and has yet to decide on which company to appoint for the job. He said the allocation is part of a RM500 million allocation to preserve natural resources through the implementation of several initiatives announced in the 2021 Budget. On the flash flood problems in the capital, Tuan Ibrahim said the river widening measure could not be implemented as all the rivers had reached full capacity due to development factors, instead the best step was to build a flood reservoir which could be drained in a controlled manner. "Therefore, cooperation between local authorities (PBT) and the Department of Irrigation and Drainage (DID) is necessary to address the problem of flooding that often occurs in the capital, especially when it rains heavily," he said. In another development, Tuan Ibrahim said that the community is increasingly concerned about pollution, based on the increased number of reports received by the DOE hotline 1-800-88-2727. He said that last year a total of 3,308 complaints were received while for this year, as at early this month, there were 2,650 complaints recorded. "Complaints related to environmental crimes can be channelled to the 999. Once the 999 line and DOE hotline are integrated, it will enable case reports to be managed

more efficiently and immediate action can be taken," he said.

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THAILAND: PM Highlights Role of Technology in COVID-19 Recovery Efforts at ASEAN Business and Investment Summit

Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha on Friday highlighted the significant role of technology and innovation in reinforcing COVID-19 recovery efforts at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Business and Investment Summit 2020, which is part of the 37th ASEAN Summit. In a video message, Prayut also stressed the importance in promoting inclusive growth, as well as supporting ASEAN's core objectives towards narrowing the development gap and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs. Prayut also proposed the "Three New" concepts for Friday's summit. Firstly, promoting "New Economic Models" that seek to thrive in balance between economic growth, technological advancement, social equality and environmental sustainability, Prayut said in his video message. Secondly, exploring the "New Engine of Growth" by utilizing science, technology and innovation to maximize the strength of ASEAN economy, as well as enhancing the capacity of Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in ASEAN and the development of a financial facility to support them. Last but not least, building a "New Economic Ecosystem" through the development of digital infrastructure accessible for both small businesses and individuals, as well as promoting comprehensive digital trade connectivity to support a full digital integration towards becoming "Digital ASEAN," Prayut said. The ASEAN Business and Investment Summit is an annual event organized by the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN-BAC) at the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit, as a platform for dialogue between leaders from ASEAN, dialogue partners, and business sector on the ways forward for economic development in ASEAN. Vietnam chairs the ASEAN Summit 2020.

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Thailand Looks to Legalize Abortion on 12-Week-Old or Less Pregnancy

Thailand may legalize abortion next year with women who may have been pregnant for or less than 12 weeks, said deputy government spokeswoman Ratchada Thanadirek on Tuesday. The Thai cabinet of ministers on Tuesday approved legislation on the planned legalization of abortion with women, who may have been pregnant for or less than 12 weeks, Ratchada said. The legislation is yet to pass approval from parliament to become law, effective from the upcoming February, the deputy government spokeswoman said. However, those who may have been

pregnant for more than 12 weeks and have undergone abortion would be subject to a maximum of six months in prison or a maximum of 10,000 baht (about 331.56 U.S. dollars) in fine, she said.

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Thai Gov't Grants Sale, Possession of Drugs for Medical Use

Thailand's Ministry of Public Health Wednesday granted the sale and possession of ordinary narcotics, however for medical purposes only. A new Public Health Ministry regulation allows the sale and possession of category II narcotics under the Narcotic Act BE 2522 (1979), the ministry announced in its website. Category II comprises 102 ordinary narcotics including as morphine, cocaine, codeine, medicinal opium, and fresh opium. However, the permit to sell category II narcotics will be granted to applicants with purposes in medical treatment and disease prevention, as well as for medical study. The new regulation will be effective 240 days and will be reviewed again after.

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VIETNAM: Digital Literacy Training Available to 65,000 Microfinance Clients

Around 65,000 microfinance clients in Việt Nam have or will be taking part in digital literacy training courses that started in July and will finish in April next year as part of an initiative for underserved communities throughout Southeast Asia. The Go Digital ASEAN initiative focuses on closing the digital gap across ASEAN in support of the vision set out by the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Implemented by The Asia Foundation, with support from Google.org, Google's philanthropic arm, the initiative will train 200,000 people from rural regions and underserved communities – including entrepreneurs, underemployed youth and women. Working with local partners in Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Việt Nam, the US\$3.3 million grant will broaden participation in the digital economy to include groups that have the most to gain from 21st century skills, such as digital literacy and online safety awareness. The Việt Nam component of the initiative was officially launched on Friday at a forum themed “Increasing access to digital education to expand economic and employment opportunities for women.”

Over 100 representatives from the Việt Nam Women's Union, Government agencies, the private sector, civil society groups, micro-finance service providers and women-led micro-enterprises participated in the forum. In Việt Nam, Go Digital

ASEAN will focus on equipping women-led household businesses and micro-enterprises with critical technology skills to overcome the impacts of COVID-19 and leverage the digital economy for increased economic opportunities. The project will train up to 65,000 individuals and help contribute to the country's financial inclusion and socioeconomic development priorities. The Vietnamese Government is prioritising the nation's digital transformation to ensure inclusive development in the era of Industry 4.0. On June 3, the Prime Minister approved the National Digital Transformation Programme until 2025, with a vision toward 2030, with the aim of concurrently developing a digital Government, economy and society while also creating technology businesses capable of extending their reach to the world. In the process of digital transformation, large private enterprises are taking a leading role and leaving home-based micro-businesses behind.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit Vietnamese micro-enterprises hard, and women-led businesses were disproportionately affected. Many of the women who run household businesses faced barriers, such as inadequate skills and fluency in accessing online marketing tools, and were unable to move their business operations online to weather the crisis. Nguyễn Thị Thu Hiền, a member of the presidium of the Việt Nam Women's Union and general director of Tỉnh Thương One-Member Limited Liability Microfinance Institution (TYM), said that providing digital literacy training for microfinance clients, micro and small enterprises was crucial. Through the co-operation with The Asia Foundation, TYM has an opportunity to directly improve digital knowledge and skills for its clients and their family members, contributing to fostering business and employment opportunities. It is also expected that female clients who are direct beneficiaries of this initiative will help equip other women and households with digital knowledge, thereby supporting more women to find business opportunities and generate employment.

Filip Graovac, the Asia Foundation's deputy country representative in Việt Nam, said the Asia Foundation believed that digital platforms could help build resilience to human and natural disasters by supporting entrepreneurs living in hard-hit or remote areas to access money, supplies and markets outside of their immediate communities. "Projects like Go Digital ASEAN expand digital literacy and grow the potential of microbusinesses, women and underserved populations so that they will not just survive, but thrive," he said. Trâm Nguyễn, country director for Google Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, said that at Google, they knew technology played a significant role in helping many small businesses, especially during this time of crisis. "For years, we've seen countless businesses around the world benefiting from the use of digital tools. Not only do they gain new skills, they now have the ability to reach new customers beyond their shores which ultimately helps to keep their businesses going," she said. "I believe it's important for us to continue our work in this space and we are proud to support the Go Digital ASEAN initiative to help more Vietnamese businesses adjust and succeed as our economies reopen," she said.

Nguyễn Thị Thanh Phương, 32, from the northern province of Thái Nguyên, said that TYM's loans had helped her start a sawdust blocks production model. In 2012 her workshop was only 100 sq.m, but now it had expanded to 1,000 sq.m, she said, adding that her business also provided regular jobs for 7-10 local workers. Over the last few months, Phương had been offered training about the internet, smartphones and online sales, she said, adding that new skills and understanding helped her locate information about materials, connect with business partners and consumers, and advertise her products. Phương said that thanks to the digital training classes, she had mastered online payments, including money transfers and bill payments. "It's so convenient for me," she said, adding that she had also shown her friends and relatives what she had learnt.

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PM Phúc Urges Better Law-Building for Country's Development

Good legal institutions and rule of law will be "breakthrough measures" to bring the country forward, Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc has said. Whether a country succeeds depends on its laws and its institutions but so far, "we haven't paid due attention to institution building", the Vietnamese Government leader said as he addressed a conference on laws held on Tuesday in Hà Nội. "We usually are concerned about separate individual cases or projects, not institution building," PM Phúc said, calling for more attention on this issue. Since the beginning of this tenure, the Government has considered institution-building a "central task," evidenced by the fact that recently the monthly Government meeting has started with policy and institution discussions instead of socio-economic talks as before, according to PM Phúc. Minister, Chairman of the Government Office Mai Tiến Dũng said efforts have been expended to fix overlapping and conflicting legal documents related to investment and business, the environment, construction and land, collect feedback from the public and advice from international organisations via policy dialogues and address legal problems that might arise in the Industry 4.0 era – all to make institutions a truly "guiding and facilitating force," not a roadblock to development.

PM Phúc noted that 90 per cent of all law projects are written by the Government – ministries and State agencies – which makes the role of the Government even bigger and "if the problems arise, the responsibility first falls on the Government." In recognition of feedback the Government has received from the public, PM Phúc stressed that the "life" of certain law projects is "too short" – referring to the need to make amendments just a short time after promulgation. The issue of drafting agencies asking to withdraw or delay ordinances and law projects because they have not got enough time to prepare, or failure to issue timely and detailed instructions on the implementation of the laws, remain commonplace, PM Phúc said. "In every Government meeting, I always demand that ministers report publicly on

what law projects or bills that have not been done on schedule,” he said. Emphasising the important, exhaustive task that is to build a socialist state with rule of law, he said it is necessary to continue to improve the process of law-building, clearly define responsibilities and co-ordination between different agencies, focus more on law enforcement, and observe disciplines in law-building. He also highlighted the need to prevent policy corruption from vested interests and uphold integrity in this process. Vice-Chair of the National Assembly Uông Chu Lưu said at the meeting that law enforcement remains a “weak link,” adding that legal violations on the part of the public are rampant – especially with regards to traffic laws, environmental protection and food safety. Lưu said a society where people comply with the law would prosper and develop. The Ministry of Justice should do more studies and advise the Government to submit to the National Assembly the law project on the organisation of law enforcement, which is expected to help implement breakthrough solutions to enhance law enforcement and spread the spirit of adhering to the law in society, he said.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 11/25/2020

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South Asia

INDIA: Ranked Among Top 50 Nations in Global Innovation Index

In the Global Innovation Index 2020 rankings, India jumped four spots and secured ranked 48th rank by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). Amidst the havoc caused by COVID-19 pandemic, the rankings came in as good news for India and also a sign of the wave of growth and development sweeping through the country. In the previous rankings in 2019, India was positioned 52nd in the world and 81st in the rankings of the year 2015. The ascending trends show a remarkable achievement by India to be in a league of highly innovative developed nations all over the globe. The WIPO had also accepted India as one of the leading innovation achievers of 2019 in the central and southern Asian regions, as it has shown a consistent improvement in its innovation ranking for the last five years. The consistent improvement in the global innovation index rankings is owing to the immense knowledge capital, the vibrant startup ecosystem, and the amazing work done by the public & private research organizations. The scientific ministries like the Department of Science and Technology (DST), the Department of Biotechnology and the Department of Space have played a pivotal role in the enriching the national innovation Ecosystem. The NITI Aayog has been working tirelessly to ensure optimization of national efforts in this direction by bringing policy led innovation in different areas such as EVs, biotechnology, Nanotechnology, Space, alternative energy sources, etc. The India Innovation Index, which was released last year by the NITI Aayog, has been widely accepted as the major step in the direction of decentralization of innovation across all the states of India. A constant thrust in

monitoring and evaluating India's position in global rankings has been provided by the NITI Aayog, including the global innovation index. India must aim high and double its efforts in improving its ranking in the global innovation index. The call for 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat' by the Hon'ble Prime Minister could only be realized if India punches above its weight class and competes with global superpowers in developing scientific interventions. It is time that India brings a paradigm shift and aims to be in the top 25 countries in the next global innovation index rankings.

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How Cloud Computing Technology Affects the SEO Industry

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

Bots and other malicious programs pose a major threat to websites and online services all the world over. Bots can make it possible for a hacker to get around a website security and give an unauthorized individual the ability to control a website. Some bots make it possible for hackers to have a good view of a website, allowing them to steal information, disrupt functionalities, and engage in other things that will impact the search engine optimization status of the website. One of the best ways to address unwanted malware attacks from bots is a robust web hosting service. Cloud

hosting services offer strong security against bots. There's no such thing as 100 percent impenetrable security. However, cloud hosting offers some of the best security possible. One of the biggest benefits connected to cloud hosting is reliability. If your website is constantly down because you are using unreliable hosting, your ranking is going to plummet. However, cloud hosting has proven itself to be a reliable source of hosting. Many cloud hosting providers can promise an uptime of 99.9 percent. Since there is a lot of competition in cloud hosting, hosting providers offer phenomenal customer service. If there is anything wrong with the hosting and you call the provider, you will usually get a quick response. This is an important benefit of cloud hosting, especially when compared to other types of hosting. People use their smartphones for just about everything from listening to the music to using business tools such as accounting apps. More people use their smartphones to access the Internet than accessing the Internet from desktop devices. Successful search engine optimization strategies must be formulated to take mobile users in mind.

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

Tools, dashboards, and management consoles can also be offered, which improve the end-user's ability to manage their website remotely. Some of these tools can help website owners build unique strategies for search engine optimization. Cloud-based systems allow the owners of websites to monitor the activity of their users. This information can be analyzed. Changes can then be made in the search engine optimization strategy with the goal of reaching more customers. The popularity of cloud hosting comes from the benefits it offers. It provides a seamless Internet service that is secure and flexible. The number of malicious attacks decreases when

using cloud hosting services. The speed of websites increase when businesses opt for cloud services. Websites that have few risks and are optimized for speed attract customers. This plays a role in a high search engine optimization ranking. This leads to improved SERP ranking, which creates a positive chain reaction that will eventually benefit the business's bottom line.

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Telangana Gets Water Resource Management App to Manage Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project

In a significant move to the adoption of technology and enabling better governance, the State of Telangana has started using water resource management app for water management at the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP). For this, Telangana joined hands with VASSAR Labs to deploy and support water management for KLIP. Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project With the implementation of the app, the mega lift irrigation project is now digitally enabled and allows the State authorities to monitor the water levels, pump houses, canals, and reservoirs remotely with the help of a dashboard. To aid the decision making of the authorities, the dashboard displays all the components of the KLIP on a near real-time basis. KLIP is a mega multi-purpose irrigation project developed on the Godavari river in Kaleshwaram, in Jayashankar-Bhupalpally district of Telangana. It is considered the world's largest multi-stage lift irrigation project with its farthest upstream influence is at the confluence of the Pranhita and Godavari rivers. As per the agreement, VASSAR Labs that has designed the app for KLIP will also provide maintenance support for the system for the next five years.

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Delhi to Get Cloud-based Healthcare Management System

In a high-level review meeting for the healthcare system in Delhi on November 11, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal directed all the healthcare officials to ensure the implementation of Health Information Management System (HIMS) and e-health cards in all the hospitals run by the Delhi government. The CM asked for the complete implementation of the technology-based solution by August 2021. kejriwalAs reported by Times of India, CM Kejriwal said, "It is our duty to ensure that there is no inconvenience to the people of Delhi. This management system should be able to provide all healthcare facilities to the people." Every individual will be issued a and e-card which will then be integrated into the HIMS and they all will be able to claim benefits of government healthcare services, he added. Once the systems come in place, the national capital will become the only city in the country to have a

cloud-based health management system. The cloud-based system will integrate services like hospital administration, planning & budgeting, services for patients, healthcare delivery, backend processes, and more.

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Ministry of Information & Broadcasting to Regulate Content on OTT Platforms

The Government of India brings online streaming platforms, news and other entertainment content under the ambit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Following this, the Ministry will be allowed to regulate the content on over the top (OTT) platforms. Ministry of Information & Broadcasting In recent times, there have been concerns raised by a sect that the content OTT platforms is abusive and obscene at times and is allowed to be streamed unrestrained. Also, there has also been growing concerns for the fake news. However, as reported by a reputed news agency, some government sources said that the Ministry is not planning to censor and understands creative license considering the nature and format of the portals. "We have to also understand that Indians are sensitive and with schools closed, children spend time in front of television sets and use online enthusiastically. The earlier system of fixed time for adult content doesn't work anymore. So we have to tune in to the sensitivity of the times and viewers also," a source said. The change brought in for the regulation of the content on OTT platforms was through a Gazette notification dated November 9 by the Cabinet Secretariat. The change was made through the amendment of Allocation of Business Rules. The amendment resulted in bringing the 'film and audio-visual' content and 'news and current affairs' content under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for regulation.

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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.

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Trescon's Big BFSI Future Tech Show Explores India's Phygital Leap with Top BFSI & NBFC Leaders

On Thursday, the 8th Edition of Big BFSI Future Tech Show provided a comprehensive digital platform for hundreds of pre-qualified C-level Decision Makers and fintech enthusiasts to discuss India's next big step in exploiting future technologies. The conference was hosted on the recently launched virtual events platform, vmeets that featured powerful keynotes, exciting panel discussions, technology use-cases, product showcases and other insightful sessions from key players in the BFSI sector. The agenda of the conference covered the impact of AI, ML, IoT & Big Data Analytics in the BFSI & NBFC sector; concerns of data security and compliances involved in the process of moving to cloud platforms; cyber threat intelligence and risks for the BFSI Sector in India (BCP); to name a few. The event was an outstanding example of how digital innovation can open the doors to financial inclusion in a post-Covid world. The conference opened with a government keynote from Pawan Kumar, Director, Investment and Digital Economy for the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Government of India. Pawan who works with various departments of the government and regulators to facilitate innovation and investments in the FinTech Sector, gave an overview of India's BFSI landscape. He said "We have laid a robust digital foundation over a period of two years with the help of progressive regulators like RBI and different government departments. The agenda for this year is to achieve digital financial inclusion for everyone including women, SMEs and the youth of the country." Dr Anand Shrivastav, Member of RBI's Financial Inclusion Advisory Committee and speaker on the government panel discussion, outlined India's progress in terms of the overall regulation architecture for financial inclusion under The National Strategy for Financial Inclusion 2019-2024.

Other insightful sessions included a government keynote from Rajagopal Devara, Principal Secretary, Financial Reforms for Government of Maharashtra on reviving the economy and creating the new normal. A tech talk on Security and Compliance in a Hyper-Distributed Era from Rahul Arora, Country Manager - Strategic Sales for

SonicWall. A panel discussion on data analytics backed by AI and ML to transform the BFSI & NBFC sector that featured speakers from top companies such as Amit Saxena, Deputy CTO of SBI; Anish Agarwal, Director of Data & Analytics at NatWest Group; Ayaskant Mohapatra, CIO, BOB Financial Solutions Limited; Ashish Ojha, VP – IT for Aye Finance and Dr Mukesh Mehta, CTO at Batlivala & Karani Securities Ltd. Big BFSI Future Tech Show took place in an immersive online setting where attendees engaged with speakers in Q&A sessions and networked with solution providers in private consultation rooms and private networking rooms. The 8th edition of Big BFSI Future Tech Show was officially sponsored by Gold Sponsors - SonicWall and Eastvantage and Exhibitor - NeoSOFT Technologies.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Launching Agricultural Insurance Mechanism

A mechanism of agricultural insurance has been officially launched in Azerbaijan with state support, Trend reports citing the Azerbaijani Ministry of Agriculture. Azerbaijani Minister of Agriculture Inam Karimov met with a delegation from the Turkish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Turkish Agricultural Insurance Union (TARSIM) in the administrative building of the Agricultural Insurance Fund. During the meeting, the parties exchanged views on the introduction of agricultural insurance mechanism in Azerbaijan and the formation of an insurance mechanism based on the experience of Turkey. “Then an event was held on the signing of the first insurance contract with state support. The event was attended by Inam Karimov, representative of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Turkey Bekir Engurulu, Head of the TARSIM Serpil Gunal, officials of the Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA), the Agricultural Insurance Fund, farmers and entrepreneurs,” said the message. Speaking at the event, Karimov said that thanks to successive reforms carried out in the agricultural sector under the leadership of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, as well as state support for farmers and investors, the agricultural sector has become one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy. “The agricultural insurance system in Azerbaijan was formed with the support of the Turkish TARSIM (agricultural insurance system). One of the most successful agricultural insurance mechanisms in the world is the Turkish model. Through agricultural insurance, farmers will be able to insure farm animals, crops and crop products, as well as aquaculture against risks on preferential terms,” the message said. “Currently, the agricultural insurance mechanism is another manifestation of the state's support for the agricultural sector. We believe that this support will improve the well-being of farmers. Agricultural insurance mechanisms will increase investment in this industry,” said the message. Bekir Engurulu, a member of the TARSIM Board of Trustees, a representative of the Turkish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, noted that agricultural insurance will

facilitate access to finance for farmers through insurance of their risks and create conditions for more sustainable development of agriculture.

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KAZAKHSTAN: 15% of Population Could Get Free COVID-19 Vaccines

In Kazakhstan, the working group has been set up to define the demand for COVID-19 vaccines, Trend reports citing Kazinform. According to Yerxhat Isskaliyev, SK Pharmacy Board Chairman, the country will need an estimated 2.4 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines following the WHO recommendations. He also added that the number of doses will depend on the budgetary funds. Nurlybek Asylbekov, Deputy Chairman of the Committee on goods and services quality and safety control said that the initial figure was 2 million doses, noting that it is being considered to provide around 15% of the population with free COVID-19 vaccines. He added that funds are sought to increase the figure to comply with the WHO recommendations.

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TURKMENISTAN: Advocates Cooperation in Resolving Regional and Global Environmental Problems

During his speech at the 13th Central Asia-Korea Cooperation Forum in an online format, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan outlined the position of Turkmenistan on environmental issues. As is known, environmental safety is one of the key vectors of interaction within the framework of the Central Asia-Korea Cooperation Forum. Turkmenistan considers environmental protection as one of the most important directions of the state policy of Turkmenistan. This is manifested in the adopted national plans and programs, as well as in regional and international initiatives of the Government of Turkmenistan. In particular, the National Strategy on Climate Change and the National Forest Program which are consistent with the principles of the Paris Agreement, are highlighted. The interaction with the Korean side on the implementation of environmental projects, including cooperation in the field of forestry and air quality monitoring in Turkmenistan was announced. R. Meredov recalled that one of the most serious environmental problems in Central Asia is the drying up of the Aral Sea, which is gradually acquiring a global character and has an extremely negative effect on human health. Turkmenistan calls for the development of cooperation in this area.

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UZBEKISTAN: State Health Insurance Fund to Start Operation on December 1

Uzbekistan will commission state health insurance fund on December 1, according to a presidential decree. The main tasks of the fund are: - implementation and management of the state health insurance system; - introduction of a system of strategic procurement of medical services to provide all segments of the population with high-quality and necessary medical care within the guaranteed package; - organization of accumulation, management, targeted and effective spending of funds allocated from the state budget to finance the guaranteed package within the framework of the pilot project; - based on the results of the pilot project, the implementation of the necessary measures for the phased introduction of the state health insurance system in other regions of the Republic.

From <https://uzreport.news> 11/15/2020

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Uzbekistan Fails to Solve Hundreds of Crimes Since 2019

Uzbekistan failed to 720 serious and 207 particularly serious crimes during 2019 and 9 months of 2020. Among them, 35 murders, 18-causing serious bodily harm, 5-rape and 11-robbery. This was announced by a member of the Senate Committee on defense and security Farkhod Bokiev on Friday. He also reported that currently there are 8,311 persons convicted of serious crimes, 15,765 persons convicted of particularly serious crimes, and 1,777 persons convicted of crimes against sexual freedom in penitentiary institutions.

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IT Park Uzbekistan to Introduce Digital Technologies in Agricultural Sector

The owners of agricultural land will receive recommendations on the optimal use of land resources based on the results of a study using satellite technologies, told Trend, head of the creative department of IT Park Uzbekistan, Jamila Khalibayeva. To conduct a prompt and accurate assessment of agricultural land and crops, the IT Park Academy resident is currently implementing the online platform Monterra (Monterra Tech) using artificial intelligence (AI) technology. The goal of the project is to use AI technology for various needs, as well as objectively assess agricultural land in the region by taking satellite imagery. Monterra online platform uses satellite technology to create photographic land maps which helps to further analyze their yield potential. The main advantages of the Monterra project are the analysis of the

agricultural sector based on archival photographs, a comparison of the data obtained from the images, as well as the creation of topographic and cadastral maps. The project also includes an analysis of the relief of agricultural areas, the possibility of online observation of the growing season of cotton and grain crops, and the collection of information on the types and conditions of crops.

Due to the use of satellite technologies, it becomes possible to analyze arable land in other countries, which will allow the exports of such IT services. Currently, IT Park cooperates with international companies that are residents of IT Park, such as EPAM Systems, the world's largest manufacturer of custom software, consulting specialist, resident of the Belarusian High Technology Park, Alif Tech, a financial technology company whose mission is financial services based on good values and information technologies, DATE CENTER NETWORK SELECTEL, the founder of which is the Russian technology company Selectel, which provides cloud infrastructure and data center services and is the fifth largest cloud infrastructure provider in Russia in terms of IaaS (Infrastructure as a service) revenue. IT Park also cooperates with Asseco Central Asia, a consulting organization in Uzbekistan. The founder of this company is Asseco Group - the largest IT holding in Europe, specializing in the development and implementation of modern and technological solutions for key sectors of the economy. The holding is represented in more than 55 countries around the world and unites over 21 thousand employees. Asseco Group is currently the number one IT supplier in Central and Eastern Europe and is among the top six IT companies in Europe.

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Uzbekistan to Create Own Platform for Production of Vaccines

Uzbekistan will create its own platform for the production of vaccines, as provided in the decree of President Mirziyoyev "On comprehensive measures for the development of biotechnologies and improvement of the country's biological security system". The \$53mn plant will not only produce vaccines, but will also be a modern laboratory of the third level of safety. It will seek new types of vaccines and study virus strains. The lab will cost \$8mn.

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One Step Forward, Two Steps Back. Uzbek Media Receive Warning from Government Body

A number of Uzbek media received warnings from the regulator, the agency for information and mass communications (AIMC) under the Presidential Administration.

Kun.uz was first to receive a warning. On November 22 Kun.uz published an article with a selection of opinions from social networks called "Give people gas and light!" - an eternal and painful topic of social networks. " The regulator considered that the problems around gas and electricity are covered one-sidedly and emotionally. Editorial board of Kun.uz said it considers the letter as a pressure on the freedom of journalistic activity. The second was "Gazeta.uz". The agency received a warning for news related to Covid-19. AIMC claims that the published article was based on "unverified data" and the attitude expressed in this regard "led to the formation of a wrong opinion among the public". "Gazeta .uz" noting that the news was written on the basis of a message from the press service of the president and official statistics of the ministry of health, stressed that the warning in fact was an overreaction, similar to an attempt to force the publication to stop asking "unpleasant" questions to the government. In all two cases, the regulator warned editors of "serious legal consequences."

From <https://uzreport.news> 11/27/2020

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Call to Let More Australians Return Home

A single mother separated from her autistic son is one of thousands of Australians still stranded overseas, desperate to return home. Lynne travelled to Scotland to care for her sick mum, who has since died. She's urgently trying to get home as her 13-year-old son has been staying with friends in Australia. Lynne also has health issues that have gone unchecked in Scotland. Her story is one of a handful being shared by human rights organisation Amnesty International, which is ramping up its campaign to help the more than 35,000 stranded Australians return. Amnesty campaigner Joel Mackay says the distressing accounts show the impact of the weekly limit on people returning to Australia. "The prime minister promised to get the stranded Aussies home by Christmas," he said on Wednesday. "This is a promise that looks certain to be broken.

"The piecemeal approach to bringing people home needs to be supercharged. More quarantine spaces, home quarantine, more repatriation flights - this is what will bring Aussies home." Another stranded Australian is Carmelina, who is stuck in Italy with her son Oscar. The pair have spent about \$15,000 trying to get home, with multiple tickets cancelled because airlines have overbooked flights. Carmelina says she's receiving little assistance from the Australian embassy and has written to federal politicians asking for help. Amnesty is calling on the federal government to work with the states to let more people return home each week. The group says Australians should be allowed to quarantine at home if safe to do so. It's also urging more repatriation flights and for Melbourne to reopen to international arrivals.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 11/11/2020

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Inquiry to Examine Net Zero by 2050 Target

A parliamentary inquiry will for the first time examine why Australia should commit to a net zero emissions target by 2050. The House of Representatives' environment committee has agreed to examine two bills put forward by independent MP Zali Steggall. The private bills would lock in the target, which has been accepted by many other nations as well as business and environment groups. The Morrison government says it's in favour of the target being reached some time in the second half of the century, but insists the specific target should not be locked in without being able to prove how to get there. "I encourage all businesses, organisations and individuals to make a submission to the inquiry so that we can demonstrate to government and parliament the need for this legislation," Ms Steggall said. "The climate change bills give the Australian parliament an important and timely opportunity to end the climate wars and commit to meaningful legislation, as the UK did in 2008." Liberal chair of the committee Ted O'Brien said the inquiry would assess information "with dispassionate independence before drawing conclusions".

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No Plans to Make Vaccine Mandatory: Hunt

Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt is anticipating Australians will willingly adopt a coronavirus vaccine without having to make it compulsory. He said the immunisation of children is at record levels, while there has been a large take-up of the flu vaccine even during pandemic lockdowns. Addressing reporters in Canberra on Sunday, he said it was not the government's plan to make the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory at the moment. "I'm not going to suddenly rule things out," he said. "But what I expect on the basis of the way Australians have adopted the flu vaccine, the range of national immunisation program vaccines, is they will probably be vaccinated in record numbers on an entirely voluntary basis." Mr Hunt announced Australia will be part of a new international regulatory partnership for COVID-19 vaccines, which will share research and information.

The five-country Access Consortium is made up of Australia, the UK, Canada, Switzerland and Singapore. "The news on vaccines continue to be positive," Mr Hunt said. "We are cautious and that is why we have struck this international regulatory partnership." Deputy secretary of the Health Products Regulation Group John Skerritt said the ability to work with like-minded countries will give Australia greater assurances as the products are rolled out. Mr Hunt noted that the last two days of full

data has shown the two highest days worldwide in terms of new COVID-19 cases and deaths. In Australia by comparison, both days were zero national days, a record that has been seen in six of the past seven days. "We are not out of the woods, we have to continue our containment measures," he said. Meanwhile, Education Minister Dan Tehan said repatriating Australians stranded offshore by COVID-19 remains the Morrison government's number one priority.

More than 35,600 citizens and permanent residents now want to return home. "With what's happening with COVID-19 in other parts of the world, we are almost becoming a victim of our own success here in Australia," Mr Tehan told Sky News' Sunday Agenda program. "We have to make that a priority because there are vulnerable Australians who still want to return." But he says the education sector has been told to work with state and territory governments in regard to international students. He said jurisdictions have been asked to draw up plans how they can accommodate returning international students within their quarantine caps. Victoria recorded another zero day for new cases on Sunday. In NSW nine overseas travellers in hotel quarantine were diagnosed with the virus, while the state's week-long run without a locally transmitted case continues

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4、 Economic and Social Development and ICT

Asia-Pacific

Death of the Downtown: How Cities Can Rebuild Using 'Tactical Urbanism'

Whether or not cities "bounce back" from the COVID-19 pandemic will be determined by the choices they make to reimagine their downtown hubs, experts say. Cities are either on the brink of disaster, or they will recover just fine in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both are predictions that urban planners, developers and academics have tossed around when assessing a post-pandemic future, but the question remains: What will happen to cities as we know them today? While it is likely that most cities will "bounce back" from the crisis, many experts agree that when this modern rebirth occurs, cities will look different than they did pre-pandemic — particularly in their downtown regions.

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Kevin Gillen, senior research fellow with the Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation at

Drexel University, said "there's no reason to think that the current pandemic will kill cities." History suggests most cities can rebound from disaster, Gillen said, pointing to Rome, London and Athens as major cities that have faced and recovered from "devastating plagues, wars or natural disasters." Still, to avoid a catastrophic scenario, cities' futures are hinging on smart decisions, access to funding and an open mindedness to different models of planning and operations. "We have a saying: Cities don't die of natural causes, nor are they murdered," Gillen said. "They commit suicide."

The current state of the downtown

Today, most urban downtowns and business districts host an abundance of offices, retail spaces, restaurants and performance venues that are sitting vacant. "Things are at a standstill," said Alan Bernstein, owner of commercial real estate outfit Alan Bernstein Realty Services in Manhattan. "People aren't coming into the city as they used to and if they don't have to, they don't want to rent in the city. It's a house of cards on many levels." Bill Fulton, director of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University in Houston, agreed. "There's currently a movement away from cities," he said. "People are rethinking the amount of real estate they need if they're staying home for everything, which pushes them out to cheaper areas." This exodus brings with it a ripple effect: In New York City alone, restaurant and bar closures number into the thousands, taking jobs and tax revenue with them. In Philadelphia, where revenue comes from wage and business taxes, funding for public services is in a particularly precarious state. And in Washington, DC, just 5% of office workers had returned to the city as of this summer, according to the DowntownDC Economy Update. "The next few months will continue to be difficult for DC and other downtowns," said Gerry Widdicombe, director of economic development at DowntownDC. "Longer-term projections are very difficult to make at this time, particularly regarding the office market."

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Adjusting the use of commercial office space

A mid-October Gallup poll found one-third of Americans are still working from home amid COVID-19, with two-thirds of those remote workers hoping to continue remote work as economies recover. Therefore, the question of future occupancy rates in office space remains one of the toughest to answer.

Retrieved from Gallup on October 19, 2020

"Clearly, we know that people can work from home," said Widdicombe. "My guess would be we'll have lower demand for office space in the future, but how much lower? Nobody knows." Direct commercial real estate investment fell nearly 30% globally in the first six months of 2020, according to real estate services company JLL. City governments may need to repurpose their commercial office spaces if that demand continues to drop, but opportunities could arise if costs of square footage see a dip

as well. "I think there will be a market to convert office buildings into residential space," said Fulton. "Three to five years down the road, people will again want access to the amenities that cities afford." Bernstein said it's "not structurally difficult" to convert interior office spaces for alternative uses, but challenges may arise in "dealing with the bureaucracy to get approval." According to Gillen, the high cost of city real estate was forcing changes to building usage, and the pandemic only accelerated that trend. "We were seeing demand for multi-use space," he said. "Municipalities are rezoning so that residential spaces now include office space, gyms, and restaurants, which will be a silver lining to balance the loss in the commercial sector."

Restaurants and retail

Retail space will be hard to repurpose in a city's downtown, said International Downtown Association (IDA) President and CEO David Downey. He noted that retail space was overbuilt by up to 5% per capita in most cities pre-pandemic, as brick-and-mortar stores have struggled to stay afloat in the age of e-commerce. "The best way to reuse that space is to be more inclusive and to target new, smaller businesses," he said. There's also the question of how to utilize vacant restaurant space and prevent more loss in that sector. Many cities have permitted changes that allow eateries to spill out onto sidewalks and streets, but cities are determining if they can continue offering ways to safely dine outdoors as winter approaches. "This is the immediate challenge here," said Downey. "From a design perspective, there's work to be done to continue flexible use of outdoor space. If the pandemic continues into next summer, the same will hold true for providing cooler outdoor spaces in warmer climates." Yet the rapid pace at which many municipalities were able to adjust ordinances allowing for outdoor dining options paints an optimistic picture for the utilization of various spaces moving forward, Fulton said. "Small changes to codes is often all it takes to salvage a bad situation," he said. "There are multiple instances in the past where cities have successfully addressed needs by changing zoning, and getting creative, and that can work moving forward, too." Downey said that the pandemic has served as an advent of "tactical urbanism." "Cities have demonstrated they can go in with a light touch, instead of making a permanent change, and be effective," he said.

Greenspace

The pandemic has also resulted in greater adoption of outdoor interests as Americans seek activities that abide to social distancing guidelines. Parks and greenways are welcoming more guests, and summer point-of-sales data shows big jumps in purchases of bikes, kayaks and other outdoor accessories. "It's absolutely not too early to be thinking about expansion of park space," said Downey. "Cities understand that creating and expanding public play space is desirable." "Small changes to codes is often all it takes to salvage a bad situation."

Bill Fulton

Director, Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University, Houston

Plenty of underused or vacant space can be tapped for this park space development, Fulton said. He also noted that in many cities, space along waterways and greenways was expanding with biking and walking paths before the pandemic. "Houston, for instance, has been reclaiming greenway space for several years, and there are more than 100 miles of it now," Fulton said. "With the pandemic, I'm not quite sure what people would have done without it." The demand for more greenspace is there, but Siddhartha Sen, associate dean and professor at Morgan State University's School of Architecture and Planning, questions the widespread political will for such expansions. "Cities need federal and local government support on a large scale to make this happen," he said. "History suggests there is a lack of will to repurpose open spaces, even though it is good for cities."

The role of tech

Efficient technology and increased public access to Wi-Fi will be crucial to push ahead on the development of more flexible space in cities. "This is a big issue that needs to be addressed," said Sen. "We still have wide disparities in this regard." "Tech plays an important role," agreed Fulton. "There's a lot more pressure to provide public Wi-Fi for work and play in a city." This even spills over to how city residents get around, Fulton said. "We know public transit is essential for many workers ... But it has taken an enormous hit because people don't want to use it during a pandemic. So tech can assist in creative transportation, like Uber pools." Widdicombe's hope is that, in addition to boosting access to Wi-Fi, governments will continue to offer micro-grants and other funding to provide relief and allow businesses to stay afloat. "Cities will have to become underwriters like banks," he said. "They have to take action to help with survival." The crystal ball for downtowns is certainly foggy at this stage, but Widdicombe predicts that even as they become more virtual, cities will continue to play an important role in society. "Cities have been around for thousands of years and serve as a crossroads where people get together to exchange ideas and goods," Widdicombe said. "The infrastructure will still influence where people go, even if that looks different." "History is clear on these things — the future's not preordained," Gillen echoed. "As long as the location value is there, cities will bounce back. The future is much more in our hands than we realize."

From <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/> 11/04/2020

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COVID-19 Is Shifting the Focus from Smart Cities to Resilient Cities

The COVID-19 crisis has focused the minds of local governments on the need to build resilience into their recovery strategies. While COVID-19 has knocked the world sideways, 2020 has also witnessed parallel and compounding crises, including social unrest through the Black Lives Matter protests; intense climate events with

heatwaves, hurricanes and wildfires, and the unfurling economic shocks following the pandemic. This perfect storm looks set to be a pivotal moment in changing attitudes to resilience, with a clear focus on learning lessons to strengthen communities against future shocks and stresses – whether economic, social or environmental. “Having this constant, high level of shocks and stresses together has really brought home to people that you’ve got to bring that multiple benefit approach into the present,” says Lauren Sorkin, Executive Director at the Resilient Cities Network (RCN), which is the organisation that evolved out of the 100 Resilient Cities (100RC) network.

A refocus on resilience

One lesson that cities had already learned in terms of building resilience is the need to appoint leadership which can break down silos within local government. Chief Resilience Officers (CROs) are at the forefront of this. Launched and funded as part of the 100RC programme, one of the key roles for city CROs has been to communicate and collaborate across different departments. This is essential to build a coherent strategy which can help cities face up to the challenges posed by climate change, health crises or an economic downturn. The ability to bring multiple strands together is where CROs excel because they “understand people in a different way and they understand the integration between the challenges that the city might face,” Sorkin says. The advent of COVID-19 has seen CROs receive greater support in terms of funding, staff resources and proximity to the mayor. A survey by the Resilient Cities Network, run with Dalberg Advisors, found that 87 percent of Chief Resilience Officers are involved in their city’s COVID-19 response or recovery effort.

“When city leaders need to make decisions, they want to make sure that they are purposefully building for a resilient future and so they’re calling on their CROs for their advice and analysis,” Sorkin says. Despite severe budget challenges globally, cities such as London and Tel Aviv, have set up dedicated resilience funds following COVID-19. Several cities have now pledged to recruit a CRO, including Austin, Texas, and a number of states in the US and regions elsewhere are developing legislation to create resilience officer roles or take on resilience responsibilities. The issue is going up the agenda in fast-growing cities in emerging markets too, as well as at the national policy level. India’s Ministry for Housing and Urban Affairs, for example, recently launched the Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework, which aims to provide a clear roadmap for cities towards combating climate change.

From why to how

This elevation of resilience is not only at the policy level as with COVID, there has been a marked shift towards a more practical approach to deploying resilience measures. As Arnoud Molenaar, Chief Resilience Officer, City of Rotterdam, explains: “We are entering a new phase. So far, we have been busy explaining what resilience is about and why it is important. Now, we are entering a phase that’s much more about the how.” Rotterdam is one of the more mature cities when it comes to

resilience. It created the Chief Resilience Officer role in 2014, broadening out the climate adaptation programme which had been in place since 2008. In 2016, Rotterdam launched its first documented resilience strategy. It also has, for the first time, assigned resilience formally as a responsibility of one of its vice-mayors and has appointed a cyber-resilience officer with a dedicated budget. Rotterdam is doubling down on its approach following COVID-19 and embedding resilience into all aspects of city planning.

“COVID is giving us new insights but also a new trigger to focus even harder than before on resilience,” says Molenaar. His team recently began the process of updating the resilience strategy in light of the pandemic and other learnings over the last four years, and this work will also feed into the city’s mid- and long-term COVID recovery planning. The 2016 strategy outlines seven qualities of resilience: reflectiveness, resourcefulness, robustness, redundancy, flexibility, inclusiveness and integrated. These are central to Rotterdam’s recovery plan and the first one in particular – being reflective — is now coming into play. “If we really want to learn from the situation, then we have to organise on a structural basis, harvest the lessons learned, and harvest the vulnerabilities that have become clear because of COVID,” says Molenaar. “When we have a good mapping of this, then we can also focus on these new vulnerabilities. We have to learn from this crisis and make ourselves stronger to be better prepared for the next one.”

This is echoed by cities around the world which have pledged to address systemic inequity and prioritise sustainability in their recovery planning. Of 53 respondents from 47 different cities within the Resilient Cities Network that responded to the Dalberg survey, 79 percent said that enhancing social equity is a top priority for recovery. Molenaar adds: “The challenge is raising awareness about not only coming out stronger from the COVID crisis but also that we are already in a crisis – we can apply the lessons from COVID to the economic crisis but also to the bigger wave, which is the climate crisis. It isn’t only coming; it’s already here.” As part of its COVID-19 economic recovery plan, Rotterdam recently announced seven city projects (the ‘Big 7’), which aim to boost the economy and liveability, with a focus on green infrastructure and climate adaptation as well as creating jobs and attracting businesses. Other key initiatives which are now being accelerated in Rotterdam include the use of a ‘filter’ tool, which is a set of principles to help the city make decisions, with citizens, about which ideas or actions to prioritise.

The leading principle is that initiatives have to contribute to a more resilient society and economy. The city is working with Erasmus University to develop criteria that can be used to judge whether proposals contribute to the resilience goal. Further efforts to embed resilience thinking throughout all levels of the municipality, rather than it being perceived as the role of the resilience team, include providing training on how to apply the city’s ‘Resilience Scan’ and apply it to specific projects. The scan provides a checklist to help people ensure they have taken into account possible

shocks and stresses and considered resilience qualities within their plans. So far, this training has been mainly delivered to spatial planners but will be rolled out more widely. Molenaar says: “If you think about flexibility in spatial planning related to climate change, you have to take into account a lot of uncertainty and it may be that within 30 or 40 years you have to adjust your plan – for higher-than-projected sea-level rise, for instance. It’s important not to make future adjustments impossible and that’s a kind of flexibility that’s not really common among spatial planners.”

Sorkin sees, too, that there is a growing push from cities for practical tools they can use in their recovery planning. In July, the Resilient Cities Network released its Toolkit for Resilient Recovery, developed collaboratively with city members. “We’ve seen huge resilience and recovery funds earmarked. The toolkit aims to help cities to prioritise according to multiple challenges,” Sorkin says. Within the network, cities are also collaborating to develop tools and frameworks in key areas including the circular economy, climate resilience, waste management and prevention of plastic pollution in the ocean.

Delivering the infrastructure to support resilience

Ramsey Green, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Infrastructure and Chief Resilience Officer, City of New Orleans, also notes the importance of a practical approach to resilience in light of COVID-19. It is just over 15 years since Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, killing more than 1,800 people and causing US\$125 billion in damage. More recently, pre-pandemic, the city has faced everything from a large-scale cyber-attack to the partial collapse of a large hotel under construction, an exploding turbine at a water plant and countless severe storms. Then came COVID. “I believe there is a direct relationship between infrastructure and resilience,” says Green. “When the resilience function of our government was started, it was very much a policy ideas shop. Vision is important in city government, especially in a place like New Orleans, but delivery is more important.”

Since New Orleans saw its first COVID diagnosis in mid-March, Green says the city has executed over US\$300 million in infrastructure contracts alone. The city’s bid process has gone completely online and 95 percent of the professional non-field workforce shifted to working at home. Green was appointed as Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Infrastructure in 2018, following the election of Mayor LaToya Cantrell, and subsequently assumed the position of Chief Resilience Officer. “A big reason I was hired is because the city was so behind in the delivery of infrastructure projects,” Green says. He explained that when he began the role, almost US\$1.8 billion in federal infrastructure funding which was provided for the City of New Orleans and the New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board following Hurricane Katrina was largely unspent, despite being approved in July 2016 and earmarked specifically for rebuilding streets, water lines and drainage.

Another US\$300 million in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) hazard mitigation funds and US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds for green infrastructure projects “sat languishing”. Co-ordination was also an issue, with the same roads often being dug up repeatedly for separate infrastructure projects due to a lack of holistic planning. “We have aggressively focused our work on building up our in-house ability to honestly and effectively manage the deployment of these funds and the construction of these projects, vastly improving the infrastructure within our city while making a substantial impact on our local economy,” Green explains. Projects underway and set to break ground by the first quarter of 2021 include the Gentilly area Blue & Green Corridors and Mirabeau Water Garden, which use natural systems to manage water and reduce flooding; St. Anthony Green Streets, where stormwater solutions are being retrofitted; and the St. Bernard Neighborhood Campus, which integrates green infrastructure and recreational improvements at a school and playground.

The Oak Park and St Roch FEMA hazard mitigation projects, which will store up to 30.7 million gallons of stormwater, have also been approved for construction funding. Green says this delivery culture has also helped New Orleans respond to COVID-19 and keep going amid the crisis. Both the state of Louisiana and the City of New Orleans categorised construction as an essential service since the start of the pandemic. “Construction is a big [way] that we’re mitigating ourselves against the impact of future significant, and even minor, storms – putting better drainage lines and green infrastructure in – so we’ve really accelerated those projects,” Green adds. To date, US\$2 million in bond funding has been allocated to the French Quarter pedestrianisation concepts for sidewalk repairs, for instance, and the construction of bicycle and pedestrian-focused infrastructure is also underway through the Moving New Orleans Bikes (MNOB) programme. Currently, the city is building 11 miles of cycling routes on the West Bank of the Mississippi River in the Algiers neighbourhood.

“We never stopped or slowed down,” says Green. “Despite the pandemic, it doesn’t mean that the city won’t flood; it doesn’t mean that the effects that our city faced prior to the pandemic go away so we have to continue to get the work done that we were doing before we got here.” Another instance of this has been the launch of New Orleans’ COVID-19 meal assistance programme, which was 75 percent funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), with the rest covered by the city through Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act money. The initiative engaged local restaurants to prepare and deliver food to residents in need. Over 12,000 residents now receive up to two meals per day and the programme is set to continue for the foreseeable future. Sorkin observes that food resilience programmes have been a key initiative during the pandemic. “Whereas before [CROs] were looking at strengthening rooftop gardening to provide healthy food and cooling, now they are also thinking about food supply in terms of shoring up their city’s nutritional content, and in terms of people not having to travel very far [for

food],” she says. The meal assistance programme is also an example of the wide-ranging role of the CRO, with Green noting that the pandemic has seen him considering everything from large construction projects to children’s playgrounds and the impact of the pandemic on mental health and food insecurity. “Every day I learn something that amends the way we do this work,” he adds.

Digital enablers

Digital initiatives are playing a key role in resilience, too, with cities seeing their digitalisation planning as a way of supporting and driving resilience. Like CROs, the Chief Information/Digital/Innovation Officer is a relatively new post in many cities and importantly it is also cross-departmental because breaking down data silos is the key to cities being able to improve decision-making – as has been shown during the pandemic. The convergence of resilience and digital strategies is crucial to cities not only combatting climate change but also to tackling social and economic shocks. Edinburgh unveiled its digital strategy for the next three years earlier this month with an emphasis on how it can help meet the target of eradicating poverty in the city by 2030. It is the first UK city to set such a target and this dovetails with the city’s aim to be carbon-neutral by the same year. Meanwhile, Orlando shifted from the term smart city to ‘future-ready city’ with its first documented strategy, which is now open for final citizen feedback and prioritises equitable resilience.

While COVID has shown that cities must adopt a holistic approach to digitalisation and resilience planning, it is equally important that they have the means to implement this. The argument to central government is that resilience not only protects cities from future shocks but actually provides an opportunity for them to assure a better economic future. According to the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, over the next few decades, commercial real estate developers are just as likely to base investment decisions on rising sea levels as on rising interest rates. “We are being asked by clients more and more about the dynamics of risk and resilience in cities, rather than national economies”, agrees Jeremy Kelly, Director of Global Research at JLL, a global real estate services company. The biggest mistake post-COVID would be for national and local governments to let budget shortfalls and short-term economic recovery mask the need to address long-standing crises such as climate change and equity. Chief Resilience and Digital Officers must work together to address multiple threats. “Everyone’s going to be borrowing for stimulus or investment, and that is money that cities would have borrowed for climate action or [to address] the future of work,” says Lauren Sorkin of the Resilient Cities Network. “We have one shot to get at those multiple issues, and to recover and achieve climate resilience.

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Economic Growth Records Historic Contraction, Better Outlook

in 2021

Economic growth in the APEC region declined by 3.7 percent in the first six months of 2020 and is expected to contract by 2.5 percent for the whole year, or equal to an output loss of USD 1.8 trillion. This will be the first time that the region's economy will contract in three decades, according to a report by the APEC Policy Support Unit. "APEC was formed more than 30 years ago and has seen economic recessions, financial crises, commodity price volatility, pandemics and terrorist attacks. Yet, in terms of economic losses, this has been a year like no other," explained Dr Denis Hew, Director of the APEC Policy Support Unit. Unemployment rates among APEC economies have surged due to the economic fallout from COVID-19, averaging 4.8 percent as of September 2020, with more than 74 million people looking for work, while consumption, trade and investments have reversed to contractions that are bigger than expected.

Household consumption shrunk by 7.1 percent during the first half of the year from an average growth rate of 3 percent in the first half of 2019. Investments also contracted by 11.2 percent, following modest growth of 1.1 percent during the same period last year. Growth in the volume of merchandise exports fell by 6.2 percent and imports recorded a sharp decline of 7.2 percent in the first half of 2020, down from tepid growth in the first half of 2019. "Trade performance in the APEC region was adversely affected by the combined impact of the temporary closure of borders, disruptions in global supply chains, and persistent trade and technology tensions," Dr Hew added. Positive contribution to growth comes from government spending with an increase of 2.8 percent in the first half of 2020, reflecting fiscal measures implemented by economies to provide support to various sectors, in particular to bolster the health system, and to provide targeted liquidity support to households and businesses, including small businesses. Dr Hew highlighted that there are already signs of recovery around the APEC region, especially coming from economies that were able to curb the spread of the virus early on and have reopened their economies, as well as improved manufacturing activities. These green shoots bring growth projections of 5.2 percent in 2021, reflecting an economic rebound for the region.

The recent APEC Regional Trends Analysis emphasized the need for APEC economies to continue deploying fiscal and monetary support measures so that health systems remain able to cope with continued, and for some economies, resurging or rising cases of infection. The report also recommends member economies to introduce, implement and enforce structural reforms to support recovery in the medium to long term. "Regional cooperation should take a central role in economic recovery," said Dr Rebecca Sta Maria, APEC Secretariat's Executive Director. "APEC's new post-2020 vision could serve as a guide for member economies to build a more resilient and inclusive region." Leaders and ministers from APEC's 21 member economies will convene virtually this week, led by

Malaysia as the host of APEC 2020, to address the challenges of the pandemic in the region and to pave the road to recovery and build back better.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 11/16/2020

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Pandemic Exposed Prevailing Inequalities, Environmental Challenges and Digital Economy Threats

COVID-19 has exploited persistent challenges of widening inequalities and environmental damage that have not been adequately addressed, as well as new sets of challenges caused by the acceleration of the digital economy, according to a new APEC Policy Support Unit's report. "The region has experienced rapid economic growth in the past thirty years, with 70 percent of the population rising to the well-off group while extreme poverty has almost been eliminated," said Emmanuel San Andres, an analyst with the APEC Policy Support Unit who co-authored the report. "However, this has come at the cost of environmental damage and climate change, which make our societies more vulnerable to diseases like COVID-19," San Andres added. "Meanwhile, the distribution of economic benefits over the past three decades has been far from equal, and now the virus has mercilessly exposed the prevailing social and economic inequalities." According to the recently issued APEC Regional Trends Analysis, more than 50 percent of the income gains over the past thirty years have gone to the richest quarter of the population, while the poorest quarter got only four percent. This has had important implications on the distribution of health, education and economic opportunities.

Inequality in access to digital tools and infrastructure has come to the fore as the pandemic necessitated a shift to conducting work, study and daily transactions online. The report highlights the impact of inequalities on efforts to bring COVID-19 under control. While authorities have advised people to stay at home and practice social distancing to slow down the spread of the virus, this is not an option for the poor, many of whom live in cramped spaces and earn daily wages in the informal sector. "Everyone is affected by the ongoing health and economic crisis, but not to the same magnitude," explained Rhea C. Hernando, the APEC Policy Support Unit's researcher and co-author of the report. "The poor, women, the youth, the low-skilled, the disabled, indigenous groups and other vulnerable sectors of society have to contend with a whole range of issues that are threatening their lives and livelihoods."

Another set of challenges come from the expansion of the digital economy. While digital tools have been beneficial for small businesses in weathering the adverse impact of the pandemic, especially during strict lockdown measures, it brings challenges such as cybersecurity, digital fraud and job precariousness. "Member economies should allocate the resources needed to build more reliable technological infrastructure and bridge the digital divide," said Dr Denis Hew, Director of the APEC

Policy Support Unit. "Ensuring access to reskilling and upskilling opportunities will enable more people to participate in the economy and re-ignite innovation that will bring higher productivity and greater economic output." The APEC region is expected to contract in 2020 by 2.5 percent, equivalent to an output loss of around USD 1.8 trillion. To build a more dynamic and resilient APEC region, the report recommends that member economies invest in green jobs and infrastructure, ensure equitable access to healthcare, infrastructure, technology, and education and skills development, as well as maximize the potential of the digital economy.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 11/16/2020

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International Trade Statistics: Trends in Third Quarter 2020

G20 international merchandise trade rebounded sharply in the third quarter of 2020 (**exports** up 21.6% and **imports** up 18.1%) after its precipitous fall in the second quarter of 2020 as lockdown measures were brought in across the globe. However, international trade remains around 5% below its pre-pandemic level in Q4 2019 and close to 10% below the most recent high seen in Q3 2018. Furthermore, provisional data for October, in those countries where data are available, suggest that renewed lockdown measures introduced in many economies may already be beginning to weigh down on international trade. Exports and imports rebounded sharply in North America: in **Canada**, by 31.1% and 32.3% respectively; in the **United States** by 23.6% and 18.5%; and in **Mexico** by 50.2% and 18.5%. Notwithstanding these positive developments, trade remained below pre-pandemic levels in this region.

Europe saw a similar rebound in the third quarter of 2020. In the **EU**, exports rose by 27.4% and imports by 22.4%, with exports in **France**, **Germany** and **Italy** up by 35.9%, 28.2% and 40.8% respectively, and imports by 30.7%, 17.8% and 29.8%. In the **United Kingdom** exports increased by 23.8% and imports by 31.0%. In **Russia**, for Q3 2020, despite a sharp rise of more than 40% in crude oil prices, trade increased more moderately, with exports up 10.6% and imports up 7.0%. In **Brazil** and **Japan**, imports declined (by 8.9% and 5.3% respectively) for the third consecutive quarter, and although exports saw moderate growth (by 1.6% and 11.6%), they remain 7% and 6% below pre-pandemic levels. Among G20 economies, only **China** has seen trade recover (exports up 9.6% and imports up 13.7% in Q3 2020) to above pre-pandemic levels with trade in PPE equipment, in particular, helping to push China's exports up to a record high in the third quarter of 2020.

G20 total international merchandise trade
Seasonally adjusted, in current prices and current US dollars billion

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 11/26/2020

COVID-19 Crisis Accentuating the Need to Bridge Digital Divides

Improved Internet connectivity and skills have helped many countries to cope with the health and economic crisis from COVID-19. Yet the pandemic has raised the bar for the digital transition and underscores the need to close the digital divides that risk leaving some people and firms worse off than others in a post-COVID world, according to a new OECD report. With some Internet providers reporting increases in traffic of 60% since the start of the pandemic, as people adapt to living and working online, the OECD's latest [Digital Economy Outlook](#) reveals the gaps between and within countries in access to fast and reliable Internet. For example, the share of fibre in fixed broadband subscriptions in OECD countries ranges from 82% in Korea and 79% in Japan to below 5% in Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Israel and the United Kingdom, with high-speed connections often sparse in rural areas. OECD countries count roughly twice the level of high-speed mobile Internet subscriptions per inhabitant and three times the level of fixed broadband subscriptions as non-OECD countries.

"Digital technologies have helped our economies and societies to avoid a complete standstill during the COVID-19 crisis, and have enabled us to learn more about the virus, accelerate the search for a vaccine and track the development of the pandemic," said OECD **Deputy Secretary-General Ulrik Vestergaard Knudsen**, launching the report at a virtual event. "But the crisis has also accentuated our dependence on digital technologies and exposed the reality of the digital divides between and within countries. We are at a turning point in the digital transformation, and the shape of our economies and societies post-COVID will depend on how well we can progress and narrow these divides." The digital transformation was accelerating prior to COVID-19 as an increasing number of governments place digital strategies at the heart of their policy agendas. Surging demand for bandwidth-intensive communication services from e-commerce, teleworking, online social activities and increased cross-border collaboration by governments and academics should spur further progress. Today's reliance on digital solutions has also added urgency to concerns around privacy and security by creating a fertile environment for cybercriminals.

Average mobile data usage per subscription in OECD countries already quadrupled in the four years to June 2019, and prices for high-usage mobile broadband fell by 59% over 2013-19, according to the report, which draws data from the OECD's regularly updated [Broadband Portal](#). As of June 2020, 5G commercial services were available in 22 OECD countries. OECD economies counted 113 high-speed mobile Internet subscriptions per 100 inhabitants as of June 2019, up from 32 per 100 a decade earlier, while non-OECD countries counted 60 such subscriptions per 100

people. Fixed broadband subscriptions number 32 per 100 inhabitants in OECD countries (more than three times the non-OECD level of 9 per 100) with fibre connections accounting for 27% of subscriptions. There are persistent gaps between rural and urban households in terms of availability of quality fixed broadband connections. Prior to the pandemic, in 2019, only a quarter of firms with over 10 employees across the OECD made e-commerce sales, while a third of firms had purchased cloud computing services and more than half had a social media presence. The share of people using e-government services stood at 58% in 2019, up from 43% in 2010.

The share of adults using the Internet ranges from over 95% in some OECD countries to less than 70% in others. Gaps in Internet access or usage due to age or income level mean uneven access to public information and services, especially critical during a pandemic. In a future where jobs, education, healthcare and even social interactions may depend on digital technologies, failing to ensure widespread digital access risks deepening inequalities and hindering countries' efforts to emerge stronger from the pandemic, the report says. Governments can strengthen broadband deployment by promoting private investment and competition, encouraging infrastructure sharing and setting minimum levels of coverage for rural areas in spectrum auctions, the report says. To meet the current surge in demand for network connectivity, the report recommends measures like temporarily releasing additional spectrum or approving commercial transactions that put unused spectrum into service, upgrading interconnection capacity between networks and finding ways to encourage broadband providers to deploy more fibre deeper into networks.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 11/27/2020

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Consumers in Asia-Pacific to Benefit Most from Industry 4.0

Shifting businesses and enterprises into an intelligent and connected virtual space is no longer an option but a necessity to survive, primarily due to the added pressure brought about by the pandemic, a study in the Asia-Pacific region by Deloitte said. Stephan Neumeier, online security company Kaspersky's managing director for the Asia Pacific, said: "The Asia Pacific's level of digitisation was still in its early stages until the pandemic forced everyone to reconsider their operational practices. Contrary to popular belief that Industry 4.0 is a high-level topic confined to board rooms, this revolution has the consumer at its core. "This, alongside breakthroughs like big data, internet of things and 5G, are here to create a customised future." Customised future, or products and services made based on a customer's preference, is a trend introduced by the mobile ultra-broadband of 4G, which brought to human's fingertips the power to call a cab when they needed one, to stream songs or contents they wanted and more. With more advanced technologies, a majority of

consumers (83 per cent) value personalised experience and are willing to give their data to make it possible. In fact, consumers are unknowingly giving more data than they have bargained for. While all this is proof of the power of technology when harnessed correctly, the flexible and highly-connected manufacturing process also opens a wider attack surface for cybercriminals.

The latest report from Kaspersky for industrial automation systems said Asia and Africa were the least secure globally during the first six months of 2020. Asian regions occupied four out of the top five positions in the regional rankings based on the percentage of Industrial Control Systems (ICS) computers which were almost infected. Southeast Asia topped followed by Africa and Central, East and South Asia. In ransomware too, Asia regions led by noticeable margins, with over half the countries in the top 15 being in APAC. "It is not surprising that ICS computers in the Asia Pacific were exposed to the highest number of cyber threats as the region is well on its way to building a customer-centric future," Neumeier said. "Smart systems and automated productions require in-depth, intelligent defences to foil malicious disruptions, with possible aftermaths that can cross from the virtual to the physical realm. "To avoid grave circumstances, a secure-by-design approach is necessary. Cyber immunity against attacks should be ingrained at the very fabric of the present and future industrial systems." An example of a secure and beneficial application of Industry 4.0 was done by Kaspersky and Siemens for Singapore Aquaculture Technologies' first smart floating fish farm. A first in Singapore and expected to produce 350 tonnes of fish annually, the S\$4 million (US\$2.97 million) aquaculture facility is set to cater to the needs of Singaporeans for quality fish while also addressing the challenges posed by climate change that have resulted in declining fish populations. Raimund Klein, Siemens Digital Industries' executive vice president for Southeast Asia, said "Consumers now are concerned about the origin of their food, the type of environment it is from, and the harvesting processes done before it arrived at their dinner table. With climate change and environmental challenges, food production should now be both ethical and sustainable. This is possible when we use available technologies right."

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APEC Ministers Focus on Regional Economic Recovery to Rebuild Better

Ministers from APEC's 21 member economies have convened to reiterate their commitment to pursue free and open trade and investment as well reinvigorating our efforts towards regional economic recovery and growth, explained Malaysia's Senior Minister and Minister of International Trade and Industry on Monday in Kuala Lumpur at the 31st APEC Ministerial Meeting. Together, ministers are working to advance regional trade and investment amid the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic which

has caused massive disruption to supply chains and is wreaking havoc on the global economic landscape. “This year, we have pivoted, prioritized and progressed work on a number of APEC initiatives, despite the challenging circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Dato’ Seri Mohamed Azmin Ali, Chair of this year’s APEC Ministerial Meeting. At the virtual meeting, Dato’ Seri Azmin Ali, stressed the need for member economies to “continue to resist the forces of protectionism, and strengthen support to a well-functioning, rules-based multilateral trading system, while remaining steadfast to advancing the development agenda of the World Trade Organization.”

The APEC region experienced its first ever economic growth contraction in thirty years, with gross domestic product declining by 3.7 percent in the first six months of 2020. This grim scenario followed a surge in unemployment rates among APEC economies, with more than 74 million people who are currently looking for work. Dato’ Seri Azmin Ali commended member economies’ unceasing efforts in slowly reopening economic activities, returning workers to employment and allowing people to move across borders through the introduction of travel bubbles, “all while managing the collective concerns regarding the health, safety and well-being of our people.” “The travel bubbles that are emerging within the region are a crucial development as these could possibly redefine the future of travel and tourism,” he added. “These bubbles are also central to revitalizing the essential movement of people within APEC.” In an effort to bolster a coordinated approach to collecting and sharing information on COVID-19, Malaysia as the chair of APEC 2020 launched the COVID-19 Latest and Immediate Virtual Exchange or COVID-19 LIVE site in partnership with the APEC Secretariat.

The site will serve as a tool for information sharing among APEC members to improve the region’s preparedness against pandemics and as a reference point for member economies’ COVID-19 experiences. Meeting under the theme of Optimising Human Potential towards a Resilient Future of Shared Prosperity: Pivot. Prioritise. Progress, Dato’ Seri Azmin Ali underscored the importance of improving the narrative of trade and investment, one of the key priorities for Malaysia as the host this year. “It is imperative to translate the benefits of trade and investment into a more inclusive economic growth that brings palpable benefits and greater well-being to all our people,” he explained. “In this regard, we have placed particular emphasis on shared prosperity, to enable more effective and meaningful economic participation by all segments of our societies.” Ministers have also completed their work in formulating APEC’s new post-2020 vision, which will chart the long-term strategic direction for the region for the next two decades. The recommendations from this meeting will be presented to APEC leaders at the upcoming virtual meeting on Friday, 20 November.

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Uniting to Build a Revitalised Asia-Pacific Economic Community

Asia-Pacific business leaders are urging APEC governments to work together to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic and to adopt a strong vision that demonstrates APEC members' collective commitment to international cooperation and serves as a framework for the sustained economic recovery and growth of the region. The APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) met virtually on Wednesday, in the lead up to the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting on Friday. "These are unprecedented times, demanding bold responses. The world faces the greatest health and economic crisis of a hundred years," said the Chair of ABAC, Dato Rohana Tan Sri Mahmood. "These challenges demand cooperation, coordination and collaboration. We are strongest when we act together." Dato Rohana added that this was a major theme for ABAC. "We are calling for a Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific. The values that have guided us this year – of integration, innovation and inclusion – are critical to recovery for us all." "We want a region that responds collectively to shared challenges. A region that values the connections between us – including free and open trade and investment, and a dynamic digital economy. Neighbours who help each other in times of need, respect each other's differences, and remain committed to greater inclusion and equity. A region that protects its natural environment, including taking urgent action on climate change," Dato Rohana added.

Dato Rohana noted that these ideas underpinned the recommendations that ABAC has conveyed in this year's report to APEC Economic Leaders. Dato Rohana explained that ABAC's report builds on the recommendations made in July to APEC Trade Ministers on tackling the immediate crisis. She added that crisis response remains a pressing concern in many economies, and requires an ongoing focus on ensuring access to essential medical supplies and services, including a vaccine; keeping supply chains functioning and avoiding fragmented policy approaches, including in the digital economy and the safe resumption of travel. These would serve to revive the business activities and market demand that would accelerate global economic recovery.

For the longer term, ABAC had focused on three main areas. "First, economic integration has been APEC's touchstone for quarter of a century, and will be fundamental to a return to growth. That means building the foundations for a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific, and championing the multilateral rules-based trading system, with the World Trade Organisation at its core. "We need to prioritise policies that are conducive to international trade, resist calls to undercut competitiveness with protectionist quick fixes, and ensure that the WTO remains relevant and fit-for-purpose" added Dato Rohana. The second major area was innovation. She added that the pandemic had dramatically demonstrated not only the importance of digital connectivity, but also the need to target disparities in internet access, digital skills and policies to foster an open, non-discriminatory and coherent digital economy.

Finally, Dato Rohana noted that COVID-19 had simultaneously made greater inclusion a more difficult goal to achieve, but also a more imperative one. “We cannot ignore the issue of rising inequality and the ever-greater discontent and loss of trust that it fosters. In rebuilding now, we must lift up the smallest of our businesses, women, our indigenous communities, youth, and other disadvantaged groups,” she said. “Our economic recovery must not leave these groups behind.” Dato Rohana added that these elements would all go to building greater resilience – especially as the region faced not only the risk of future health crises, but also accelerating climate change. “There is an urgent need to reverse the dramatic decline in the health of our planet and embrace the transition to a low-carbon economy. We owe this to our people – to the communities of future generations - and we cannot fail to take action,” concluded Dato Rohana.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 11/17/2020

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East Asia

CHINA: To Speed Up Digital Development

China will speed up its digital development, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. The proposals highlighted the development of the digital economy by promoting its deep integration with the real economy and building digital industrial clusters with international competitiveness. Also, China will improve its digitization level in public services and social governance by strengthening the construction of the digital society and digital government. According to the proposals, China will set basic systems and standards for property rights, transaction and circulation, cross-border transmission as well as security protection of data resources. The proposals emphasized the need to expand the orderly opening of basic public information data and build a national data sharing platform. China will ensure national data security, strengthen personal information protection and upgrade the digital skills of all Chinese people, the proposals said. Also, China will actively participate in the formulation of international rules and standards in the digital field. 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 were adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29.

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Foreign Investors to Gain Access to Palm Oil Futures Trade in

China

Overseas investors will soon have access to trade in palm oil futures contracts in China, according to the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC). The trading of onshore palm oil futures contracts will open to foreign investors on Dec. 22 this year on the Dalian Commodity Exchange (DCE), CSRC spokesperson Gao Li announced at a press briefing. The futures will become China's seventh internationalized commodity futures product available to overseas investors, marking another step in the country's financial opening-up and increasing its pricing power in the global commodity market. Palm oil futures contracts were listed on the DCE in 2007, and with over a decade's development, the exchange has developed into the world's largest trading platform for palm oil futures. According to the DCE, China relies heavily on palm oil imports and is currently the world's second-largest importer and the third-largest consumer of the commodity. In 2019, China consumed over 6.4 million tonnes of palm oil, data from the commodity exchange showed.

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Multinationals See Opportunities in China's Higher-level Opening-up

With the COVID-19 outbreak slowing down the global economic momentum, multinational enterprises see promising opportunities in China as the country continues to deepen its opening-up. Politicians, scholars and entrepreneurs from around the world on Saturday hailed China's push for widening its opening-up and called for deeper international cooperation during a forum at the fifth Understanding China Conference held in Guangzhou, south China's Guangdong Province. Despite a grim and complex economic situation both domestically and globally this year due to the novel coronavirus epidemic, China has not decelerated its efforts in promoting reform and development through opening-up. Rather, the country has made an advancement to cover a broader scope, more fields and embrace deeper level reforms.

China has continuously cut the number of sectors and businesses that are off-limits for investment in its negative list for market access in recent years, providing huge opportunities for foreign companies and stimulating the vitality of market entities. China's new "dual circulation strategy" will not only help to protect the Chinese economy from the volatility of external markets but will also help drive future economic development in a more balanced and sustainable way. These manifest a sign of reassurance for foreign investors of China's strong recovery potential and future sustainable growth, according to Merlin Swire, chairman of Swire Pacific Limited. "As committed investors, we welcome China's ongoing policy of higher-level opening-up. The new Foreign Investment Law, which came into effect early this year,

offers greater protection for investors and ensures a more level playing field and optimized business environment for foreign firms like Swire," Merlin Swire said.

In addition to the Swire Group, many other foreign enterprises have increased their capital and production in China. In the first three quarters of this year, China's paid-in foreign investment saw a year-on-year increase of 2.5 percent to 103.26 billion U. S. dollars, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed. As China is committed to opening its door wider to the rest of the world, multinational businesses are committed to deepening their development footprints in the country as well. From initial drug sales to the formation of a complete industrial chain, including R&D, production and marketing, Roche Pharma China's business has made great progress along with China's economic development and medical reform in the past 26 years. "China not only has a huge market potential but also a large number of medical and research institutions, as well as top scientists, making it a source of innovation and talents," said Hong Chow, CEO of Roche Pharma China.

Chow noted that in the future, stronger intellectual property protection and a market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment would accelerate the conversion of innovative achievements into products in China, benefiting the people and enabling sustainable development of enterprises. In the process of China's opening-up to a higher level, multinational enterprises will play a crucial role and gain greater opportunities, according to Yun Mingqing, Vice President of the China Institute for Innovation and Development Strategy. "We should further enhance the sense of cooperation and development, strengthen mutual understanding and trust, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, and carry out economic and technological cooperation at various levels, in wider areas and all directions," Yun said.

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Digital Economy Powering Global Economic Recovery: Report

With the COVID-19 epidemic hitting global economic and social development, the digital economy is viewed as a new engine for global economic recovery, according to a report released by the Chinese Academy of Cyberspace Studies on Monday. The outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic has accelerated the digital transformation of the global economy, with the digital economy likely to become a key force that reshapes the economic system and enhances governance capacity, said the World Internet Development Report 2020, which was released during the 2020 World Internet Conference -- Internet Development Forum, held in the water-town of Wuzhen, in east China's Zhejiang Province. According to the report, the COVID-19 epidemic has stimulated the demand for cloud-terminal coordination and intelligentization, while Internet-related industries face new development

opportunities. The digital economy accounted for between 4.5 and 15.5 percent of the world's GDP in 2019, according to the Digital Economy Report 2019 released by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. At the start of 2020, more than 4.5 billion people were using the Internet, with 3.8 billion social-media users and nearly 60 percent of the global population online, according to the Digital 2020 Global Overview Report, citing the World Internet Development Report 2020.

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China Vows to Expand Global Free Trade Area Network

China will step up efforts to expand the free trade area network across the world to enlarge its "circle of friends", according to China's Commerce Minister Zhong Shan. After signing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), China will see the China-Cambodia free trade agreement take effect at an early date and accelerate investment treaty negotiations with the European Union, Zhong said in a signed article published Tuesday in the People's Daily. Zhong also urged efforts to upgrade the existing trade pacts with ASEAN, Singapore, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and New Zealand, and facilitate China-Japan-ROK, China-Gulf Cooperation Council, China-Norway and China-Israel free trade agreement negotiations. With the RCEP reaching a higher level in fields including customs procedures and trade facilitation, intellectual property protection, e-commerce and trade remedies, China will actively engage in dialogue and communication with more major economies and regional trade mechanisms, he said.

The signing of the RCEP, together with the pledges on expanding the free trade area network worldwide, was in line with the Chinese leadership's goal of building a high-standard free trade area network with global reach, which was highlighted in the 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. "It is a milestone in China's pursuit of opening-up," Zhong said, adding that the trade pact is expected to forge a new round of high-level opening-up in China against the backdrop of a global economic recession triggered by COVID-19 and mounting external uncertainty. The RCEP, the world's largest free trade agreement, was signed in mid-November by 10 ASEAN member countries and China, Japan, the ROK, Australia and New Zealand. Covering a market of 2.27 billion people and a combined GDP of 26.2 trillion U.S. dollars, the RCEP signatories, which account for about one-third of the world's economy, will become a large integrated market.

The signing of the RCEP will help China to further optimize the layout of foreign trade and investment through a more comprehensive, deeper and more diversified opening-up, continuously integrate with international trade and investment rules at high standards and build an open economy at a higher level, said Bai Ming, a

researcher from a research institute affiliated with China's commerce ministry. So far, China has signed free trade agreements (FTAs) with 26 countries and regions. After signing the RCEP, the proportion of trade value with FTA partners in the country's overall foreign trade climbed from 27 percent to around 35 percent, official data showed. The RCEP witnessed many breakthroughs in the history of China's foreign trade. It is the first time for China to reach an agreement on a negative list of investments in economic negotiations, include data flow-related regulations in international agreements and fully incorporate items on intellectual property protection into FTAs, Zhong said.

Meanwhile, the import and export of goods worth more than 1.4 trillion U.S. dollars annually between China and other RCEP members will be subject to preferential tariffs following the RCEP implementation. China also promised to open more than 120 service sectors, including R&D and elderly care, 22 more than the number of sectors the country agreed to open upon accession to the World Trade Organization. The RCEP will also be an important platform for China's new development paradigm. The large regional market fueled by the implementation of the RCEP will provide development opportunities for enterprises of all countries, enhance the connectivity of China's domestic market and the global market and make the country better integrate into global industrial, supply and value chains, according to Zhong.

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China, Japan to Cooperate in Reviving Virus-Hit Economies

The foreign ministers of Japan and China agreed Tuesday to cooperate in fighting the coronavirus and reviving their pandemic-hit economies, while trying to avoid actions that provoke tensions over disputed islands in the East China Sea. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who arrived in Tokyo on Tuesday, and his Japanese counterpart, Toshimitsu Motegi, also agreed to resume business travel between the world's No. 2 and No. 3 economies through a "business track" program that will allow visitors to engage in limited activities during their 14-day quarantine periods. Japan recently launched such arrangements with Singapore, South Korea and Vietnam. The two countries are to restart business travel by the end of this month, even though Japan is currently grappling with a resurgence of coronavirus infections as the government struggles to balance disease prevention and economic health.

"I expect the agreement will contribute to energizing the economy between Japan and China and serve to promote mutual understanding," Motegi said. He said stable Japan-China relations are crucial not only for the two countries but also for the region. Chinese nationals topped the number of foreign visitors in Japan before the pandemic. Relations between the two countries have been strained over territorial disputes and wartime history. But ties have improved in recent years while China's

trade dispute with the U.S. has escalated. Japan, a key U.S. ally, sees China as a crucial trading partner and faces the challenge of balancing its relations with both nations. On Tuesday, Japan and China agreed to work together on climate change, energy conservation, healthcare and digital commerce as part of their economic cooperation. They agreed to support a rule-based multinational trade system, Wang said.

Motegi and Wang also discussed their dispute over Japanese-controlled East China Sea islands which Japan calls Senkaku and China calls Diaoyu, and agreed to try not to escalate tensions. The two sides will establish a hotline between their militaries by the end of December to "improve communication and safety," Wang said. "China hopes that with joint efforts from both sides, we can build the East China Sea into a sea of peace, friendship and cooperation. This serves the two people's fundamental and long-term interests," Wang said. Still, they insisted on their rival territorial claims. Motegi said he reiterated Japan's position and (asterisk)strongly urged China to take a forward-looking action." Wang defended China's coast guard patrols in the area. "We have a clear position in this regard. We will certainly continue to safeguard our sovereignty," he said.

Wang is to meet with Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga on Wednesday, the first meeting with a Japanese leader by a top Chinese official since the February visit of Chinese foreign policy chief Yang Jiechi. Wang's visit comes amid growing concerns about China's increasing influence in the region. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison held talks last week with Suga and they agreed to step up their military partnership to promote peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region as a counter to China's rise. Japan and Australia, along with the U.S. and India, are also trying to bring in Southeast Asian nations and others to join their cooperation. Beijing has criticized the moves. Japan and China say they are not currently considering rescheduling Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Japan, postponed from the spring due to the pandemic. Motegi and Wang did not mention Xi's visit during their joint news conference. After his visit to Japan, Wang will head for meetings in South Korea.

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China's Industrial Profits Accelerate amid Recovery

China's industrial profits grew at a faster pace in October as the economy continued its robust recovery, with steady improvement in the supply-demand relations and company operations. The profits of major industrial firms totaled 642.91 billion yuan (about 97.77 billion U.S. dollars) in October, increasing by 28.2 percent year on year, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed Friday. The pace of growth quickened by 18.1 percentage points from September. In the first 10 months of the year, the profits of major industrial firms expanded 0.7 percent year on year to 5.01

trillion yuan, reversing the 2.4-percent decline in the January-September period. Profits in 25 of the 41 surveyed industrial sectors rose from the same period last year, with 12 sectors posting a double-digit increase, according to Zhu Hong, a senior statistician with the NBS. Also, 36 sectors saw accelerated profit growth or narrowed profit decline compared with the first nine months, according to Zhu.

The equipment manufacturing sector, the largest contributor to the industrial profit growth, saw its profits rise 9.6 percent year on year, Zhu said, adding that the pace of growth accelerated 0.8 percentage points from the January-September period. Among the sectors, the electronics industry has maintained double-digit aggregated profit growth as of April, while the profits of the special equipment manufacturing industry saw a notable increase of 22.9 percent in the first 10 months. Thanks to various government policies to stabilize infrastructure investment and spur auto consumption, the auto manufacturing industry's profits increased 6.6 percent, a pace 3.6 percentage points faster than that in the January-September period, Zhu said. The country's auto sales rose 12.5 percent to 2.57 million last month. The rise marked the sixth consecutive month of double-digit year-on-year growth, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

Meanwhile, benefiting from China's rebounding domestic demand and export market, the consumer goods manufacturing sector posted a 4.8-percent year-on-year profit increase in the first 10 months, Zhu said. Industrial firms in the private sector reversed the January-September drop to see their profits grow 1.1 percent year on year in the first 10 months, said Zhu, attributing the growth partly to the country's strengthened financial support for the real economy. Looking ahead, Zhu said that the country should focus on expanding domestic demand while stepping up efforts to stimulate the vitality of market entities and unleash consumption potential. China's value-added industrial output, an important economic indicator, went up 6.9 percent year on year in October, while the retail sales of consumer goods climbed 4.3 percent, data from the NBS showed.

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JAPAN: Govt: 70,000 Jobs Lost Due to Coronavirus

Japan's labor ministry says more than 70,000 people in the country have lost or are about to lose their jobs because of the coronavirus outbreak. The ministry has been checking for cases of workers who have been laid off or have not had their contracts renewed because their employers are struggling with declining business performance. Officials found that 70,242 people faced or are about to face unemployment between the end of January and November 6. They believe the actual figure is likely higher, as they included only cases known to regional labor

bureaus and public job placement offices. Data as of October 30 show that the manufacturing sector was hit the hardest, with 12,979 jobs lost. Pubs and restaurants were next, with 10,445 workers let go. In the retail sector, 9,378 people were laid off, while 8,614 hotel workers lost their jobs. Ministry officials are urging businesses to keep employees on their payroll through the use of government subsidy programs. They are also providing support to help the unemployed find new jobs.

From <https://newsonjapan.com> 11/10/2020

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Give the Elderly the Help They Need to Participate in a Digitized Society

The purpose of digitization in society is to make the lives of all the people more convenient. A situation must be prevented in which people's ability or inability to use digital devices creates a new type of social disparity. Amid the coronavirus crisis, Japan's delay in digitization has been revealed in such ways as through the confusion that arose over online applications for the provision of cash benefits of ¥100,000 per person. The administration of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga regards the promotion of digitization as a key policy issue. As a precondition for achieving this goal, it is necessary for the public to widely use personal computers, smartphones, the internet and other means to realize the convenience of digital services. The most important thing is to give consideration to elderly people who are not familiar with these digital devices.

According to a survey by the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry, the percentage of internet users among those 65 or older was lower than among other age groups. Even if they used the internet, about half of the people in that age range did not use it frequently and could not make full use of it. While some people do not feel the need to use digital devices in their daily lives, there may be many people who do not have anyone around whom they can consult about how to use them. Some people may not be able to easily ask because their families live elsewhere. It is important to take measures not to leave these people behind. This autumn, the communications ministry launched a feasibility project at 11 locations across the country, in which staff members who support digital utilization teach mainly elderly people how to operate digital devices and use administrative and other services through digital devices.

In Matsuyama, the city government, the human resources center for the aged and other entities have teamed up to train 10 such staff members who intensively teach elderly people how to use smartphone apps that are closely linked to aspects of daily life, such as hobbies and health issues. The use of administrative digital services is expected to spread as a result of people directly realizing the convenience of digital

devices on a daily basis. The government needs to take into account the opinions of participants in the project and develop a teaching method suitable for each person's level of proficiency. It is desirable to have a system in which elderly people can receive advice easily by phone, at home or in other convenient places, if necessary.

In order to develop the project in a full-fledged manner, it is essential for the central and local governments to increase their fiscal support to and their involvement in the project. Aid for people who cannot afford to buy digital devices will also be a subject for discussions. Even if the number of elderly people who use digital devices increases, it would be putting the cart before the horse if the administrative services themselves are difficult to use. Concerning the screen displays when users go through online procedures for administrative services, or the method of searching for necessary information, it is vital to make repeated improvements from the viewpoint of user-friendliness. Every possible measure must be taken to ensure the stability of the system of digital devices and protect personal information.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 11/11/2020

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Japan GDP Grows at Highest Rate in 40 Years

Japanese government officials say the country's GDP had its biggest increase in 40 years in the latest quarter. The rebound follows a massive contraction due to the pandemic. GDP surged by an annualized 21.4 percent in the July-to-September period. That's the highest growth rate since comparable data became available in 1980. But it follows a historic plunge in the previous quarter amid fallout from the coronavirus. Personal consumption, which accounts for more than half of Japan's GDP, grew by 4.7 percent quarter-on-quarter. Government tourism subsidies boosted spending on travel and dining-out. Exports also surged 7 percent as shipments of vehicles and auto parts to the US and China increased. However corporate capital spending fell by 3.4 percent. Residential investment was also down, dropping 7.9 percent. Japan's economic minister noted that a resurgence of coronavirus infections would create risks for economic recovery. Japanese Economic Revitalization Minister Nishimura Yasutoshi said "While preventing infection, the government must also support employment and businesses, and make the economic recovery more solid. We have to work to get the economy back on track for growth led by private demand." Nishimura also said the government will act decisively to ensure recovery.

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Japan Expects Record Low Number of Newborns in 2020

Japan is expecting to see a record low number of newborns in 2020, government sources said. The figure is projected to fall to about 845,000 births, which is about 20,000 fewer newborns than the previous record, which occurred in 2019. The Covid-19 pandemic has been blamed for smaller numbers of marriages and pregnancies.

From <https://newsonjapan.com> 11/20/2020

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Do Not Give in to Heinous Threats Amid Surge in Cyber-Attacks

There has been a spate of cyber-attacks involving the theft of confidential corporate information and attempts to extort money. It is necessary to quickly prepare to respond to such heinous criminal acts. In early November, information was stolen from game software giant Capcom Co. by an unknown party and a ransom was demanded. It is believed the attack came from overseas. Up to 350,000 items of personal information of the company's customers, shareholders and others may have been hacked. Capcom said it refused to pay the ransom and has consulted the police. It is feared that the stolen personal information could be used for fraudulent and other illicit purposes. This is a serious situation. The cyber-attack involved "ransomware," malicious software through which an attacker hacks into a computer, steals data and encrypts the original data to make it unusable. A ransom is then demanded to decrypt the information. Such ransomware attacks spread globally in the past, affecting a large but unspecified number of targets. This time, however, the attackers targeted a specific company. It is called a "double extortion" because companies also risk having the stolen information exposed if the demands are not met.

According to experts, about 20 criminal groups are operating around the world, and ransoms are getting higher and higher. In Japan, the first victims were confirmed this summer. An overseas survey found that about 30% of targeted Japanese companies paid the ransom. More vigilance is urged. There is no guarantee that even if victims comply with the demands, attackers will keep their promise and decrypt data or not leak the information. If Japanese companies give in to the threats, they will be perceived as easy targets, which could lead to more attacks. In principle, it would be a good idea to take a firm stand. In recent years, a huge number of viruses have been created, and attacks have become more sophisticated. It is difficult to prevent being victimized completely. Cases involving attacks on employee computers with inadequate safeguards and the central computer systems of companies are on the rise. Amid the novel coronavirus pandemic, telecommuting is spreading, which increases the risk of vulnerabilities being exploited.

It is imperative that companies strengthen measures to prevent their systems from

being compromised by, for example, updating the latest version of software and introducing two-step authentication. Important data should be backed up. It is also important to consider in advance what to do if a hack occurs. There is a limit to how much a company can do on its own. In the United States, legislation has established an intelligence-sharing system between the public and private sectors for information on attack threats or damage. In November, the government and the Japan Business Federation (Keidanren) set up a new public-private organization to strengthen measures against cyber-attacks. It is important for information to be shared between the government ministries and agencies concerned and the business community to improve their response capabilities.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 11/28/2020

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In Civics Education, Foster Children's Awareness of Participating in Society

Awareness of the need to proactively participate and take an interest in society is nurtured through experiences and education from childhood. Schools, families and communities should work together as a whole to increase opportunities for children to be involved in society. An Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry panel of experts has compiled an interim report on the future direction of civics education for children to prepare them for the time they become eligible voters. In addition to practical research at model schools and the development of teaching materials, the report proposes measures to be taken at home and in local communities as well as the strengthening of information studies. The 2015 revision of the Public Offices Election Law introduced the lowered voting age of 18. High schools held classes with mock voting and as a result, voter turnout among 18-year-olds for the following year's House of Councillors election exceeded 50%. This number has since declined, however.

The voter turnout of young people in Japan is lower than in other countries. The age of adulthood will be lowered to 18 from 20 in fiscal 2022, and high schools will start teaching the new compulsory subject of public affairs to enhance civics education. While it is important to teach students about the mechanism of elections and how to vote in them, the essence of civics education is to foster the ability of each individual as a member of society to think and judge matters from various perspectives. Schools should recognize the importance of this aspect. It is important to guide students systematically from the elementary and junior high school levels. At home, parents and children should take part in community events and go to polling stations together so that they can become more aware of their relationship to society at a young age. The report also pointed out that it is important to develop the ability to read and understand information by using newspaper articles and other materials at home and at school. It can be said that the first step to participation in society is to

discuss various social issues and form one's own opinions.

Many young people use social media and they tend to empathize only with people they can agree with. It is essential to foster abilities to accurately judge the validity and reliability of matters through exposure to information and opinions using such materials as newspapers, public documents and statistical data. Each political party is making efforts to promote its policies to young people by explaining, for example, its campaign pledges in easy-to-understand ways and introducing them in animated form or as comics. Young people should first pick up these political parties' pamphlets and other materials, instead of deciding beforehand that they are "too difficult to understand." It is also effective for schools to have opportunities to allow students to think for themselves, instead of imposing their own regulations and other rules. Under such a system, students will feel that their voice can change the world, leading them to take responsibility for their choices. It is also important to nurture teachers engaged in civics education. Many teachers are hesitant to tackle civics education on the grounds that it is difficult to keep politically neutral. Teachers should improve their teaching skills and spend more time being involved in society with their students.

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S. KOREA: Economy Maintaining Recovery Momentum amid Pandemic

The South Korean economy is maintaining its recovery momentum amid the fallout of the new coronavirus outbreak, the country's chief economic policymaker said Tuesday. During a conference call with global credit appraiser Standard & Poor's (S&P) earlier in the day, Hong discussed the country's overall economic situation and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Every year, delegations from key global credit rating agencies visit South Korea for a meeting to evaluate the country's economic conditions and credit status. But this year, S&P held a conference call with the finance ministry and other institutions due to the virus outbreak. The South Korean economy grew 1.9 percent on-quarter in the third quarter on improving exports, after two consecutive quarters of contraction.

Hong said that the country's debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio has risen due to aggressive fiscal spending in response to the pandemic, but a rise in the debt ratio is a global trend. The country's debt is likely to reach a record 846.9 trillion won (\$765.4 billion) this year as the government sold deficit-covering bonds to finance four supplementary budgets, according to the finance ministry. The nation's debt-to-GDP ratio will reach an all-time high of 43.9 percent this year, up 6.2 percentage points from the end of last year. The top economic policymaker explained

the country's proposed fiscal rules to S&P as efforts to bolster fiscal soundness. South Korea recently unveiled the proposal that will limit its debt to 60 percent of GDP and its fiscal deficit to 3 percent from 2025. The new rule is subject to parliamentary approval.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 11/17/2020

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AI Education to Begin in High Schools Next Year

Artificial intelligence (AI) will be introduced as a new subject in local high schools next year before being expanded to the curriculums of kindergartens and elementary and middle schools by 2025, the education ministry said Friday, declaring a bid to strengthen AI education in preparation for a digital future. The government's AI education blueprint was announced after Minister of Education Yoo Eun-hae presided over a meeting of social affairs ministers for discussions on adjusting its education policies to better foster human resources in the era of AI. South Korea has chosen AI as an important education policy task in consideration of the recent digital technology advancement accelerated by the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. Under the policy plan, two career elective subjects -- introductory AI and mathematics of AI -- will be introduced to high schools nationwide in the second semester of next year, the ministry said.

The AI education will then be introduced to elementary and middle schools by 2025, with curriculums including programming, basic principles of AI, use of AI and AI ethics, it noted. The government will develop and distribute AI-related education materials to all elementary and secondary schools, beginning next year, so that students can receive AI education even before its formal introduction, it added. For kindergarten pupils as well, the government will develop various study materials intended to help children become more acquainted with AI through play. In order to strengthen teachers' AI-related competencies, the government will ensure that AI-related content is included in basic and information and computer teaching courses. In a relevant move, it will push to have graduate schools of education offer AI reeducation programs to about 5,000 incumbent teachers by 2025.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 11/20/2020

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S. Korea to Roll Out More Digital Services amid Pandemic

South Korea will start to unveil more digital services, from mobile identification to artificial intelligence (AI) doctors, as the pandemic limits face-to-face contact, the ICT ministry said Thursday. The Ministry of Science and ICT said it has named key

services to support for digital transition amid the pandemic, including rolling out mobile identification for public servants from this year and mobile driver's licenses from next year. The ministry said it will also pursue a test service for robot delivery for small merchants and develop digital kiosks that won't require contact to reduce the risk of infection next year. The ministry said it will support development of an AI physician to boost medical services for up to 20 diseases, such as diabetes and heart-related diseases, by 2024. It will also support development of an AI-based psychological treatment service for depression patients next year. The ministry added that it will spend 180 billion won (US\$150 million) next year to foster companies that specialize in data, cloud and blockchain technology. The latest announcement comes as a follow-up to the government's digital New Deal program announced in July that aims to spend 58.2 trillion won on digital projects and increase state investment in new technologies to create some 900,000 jobs by 2025.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 11/26/2020

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S. Korean Mobile Carriers Eye More Cloud Gaming Users as Demand Grows

South Korean telecom operators are targeting wider market penetration of cloud gaming services by expanding availability, industry officials said Thursday, amid strong demand from mobile gamers. The country's three major carriers -- SK Telecom Co., KT Corp. and LG Uplus Corp. -- have in recent months opened up their subscription services that stream console games on smartphones to other carrier users and networks. Last week, LG Uplus expanded its 5G cloud gaming service GeForce NOW's availability to gamers on the 4G LTE network, which has the bulk of the country's mobile users. Through the expansion, GeForce NOW -- launched last year with U.S. chipmaker Nvidia Corp. -- supports 58 additional devices, compared with the short list of mobile devices on the latest generation network, which launched in South Korea in April 2019.

Mobile users on 4G accounted for 77 percent of the country's total 70 million mobile subscriptions as of end-September, compared to 5G's 13 percent share. The telecom operator's latest expansion comes after it started offering the service, which supports major titles such as first-person shooter "Destiny," to other carrier users in August. LG Uplus said that move led to a fivefold increase in the number of average daily users from August to October, while the average daily gaming time per user more than doubled from 86 minutes to 210 minutes over the same period. "The increase in play time indicates growing demand," an LG Uplus spokesperson said. "We've expanded availability at the request of users, and while cloud gaming won't likely replace all gaming platforms, there's significant demand out there for people who want to play high-quality games on the go." Rival carrier KT has taken similar

measures to push its mobile cloud gaming service on more platforms by releasing a PC version late last month. The telecom operator's Gamebox, which offers over 100 games on the cloud, was launched in August this year, and was offered to other carrier users the following month.

"As of this month, Gamebox has racked up 100,000 users," a KT spokesperson said. "We plan to further expand the service's availability to internet protocol TVs by the end of this year." The carrier said it targets 1 million Gamebox subscribers by 2022. SK Telecom, the country's largest wireless provider, offered its cloud gaming service 5GX Cloud Game to other carrier users at launch in September. The service, released in partnership with Microsoft, allows gamers to stream the U.S. tech giant's Xbox games, such as its popular third-person shooter "Gears 5," on mobile devices. SK Telecom has also bundled the service with Microsoft's latest generation Xbox One S and One X as a monthly subscription for its users during the consoles' launch earlier this month. It plans to offer the bundled service to other carrier users next year. The three carriers' efforts to reach more gamers fall in line with growth projections for cloud gaming. Game data company Newzoo has forecast global cloud gaming revenue to reach US\$4.8 billion in 2023, compared to \$584.7 million this year.

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S. Korea's 5G Users Near 10 Mln in Oct.: Data

South Korea's number of 5G users reached nearly 10 million as of end-October, ministry data showed Monday. The number of 5G subscribers stood at 9.98 million as of the end of October, up 735,113 from the previous month, according to data from the Ministry of Science and ICT. The 5G subscribers accounted for 14.2 percent of the country's mobile subscriptions totaling 70.4 million. South Korea commercially rolled out 5G in April 2019 for the first time in the world. The latest figure comes as Apple Inc. launched its new iPhone 12 series smartphones on Oct. 30 in the local market. The iPhone 12 series consists of Apple's first smartphones to support the latest generation network and will likely boost the country's migration to 5G. Since their release in the local market, Apple is estimated to have sold around 600,000 iPhone 12 series models. The country's 4G subscriptions continued to decline, reaching 53.9 million last month, down 397,118 from the previous month.

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Unemployment Population Up by 2.67 Mln in August Due to COVID-19

The unemployed population in Indonesia was up by 2.67 million people due to COVID-19 to 9.77 million in August, or from 5.23 percent to 7.07 percent compared to the same month in 2020, Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati told a press conference Monday. She pointed out that the increasing unemployment rate would have the implication of reducing the rate of the people's welfare but the social assistance from the government has helped overcome the problem. "This is the challenge that we have to solve," said the minister. According to her, the decreasing rate of welfare was reflected by more people who moved their jobs from the formal sector to the informal one.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 11/23/2020

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MALAYSIA: Wage Subsidy Programme: 2.6mil Workers, 322k Employers to Benefit

KUALA LUMPUR: Over 2.6 million employees and 322,000 employers will benefit from the Wage Subsidy Programme (PSU) and PSU 2.0 following a government allocation of RM11.9 billion announced last month. Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz said the programme aims to assist employers affected by the Covid-19 pandemic to sustain businesses and reduce retrenchment. "As of Oct 23, RM11.9 billion in wage subsidies had been approved to benefit more than 322,000 employers and 2.6 million employees. "In total, almost RM18 billion has been allocated for programmes under PSU and PSU 2.0," he said in the Dewan Rakyat today in response to Datuk Ahmad Nazlan Idris's (BN-Jerantut) question on the ministry's post-recovery movement control order plans. Tengku Zafrul also pointed out that the government had come up with four economic stimulus and economic recovery packages. "The total value of the economic stimulus packages is RM305 billion. "Last Friday, I also tabled Budget 2021, with a RM322.5 billion expenditure, which is the largest in the country's history," he said. Tengku Zafrul added that the government had allocated RM11.9 billion in the form of one-off assistance, set to benefit more than 16.3 million recipients. "Under the stimulus packages, among the initiatives implemented to provide temporary relief of their daily burden are one-off cash assistance under the Bantuan Prihatin Nasional; and an additional RM100 one-off payment under Bantuan Sara Hidup."

From <https://www.nst.com.my/> 11/10/2020

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VIETNAM: To Allow Banks to Use Foreign E-Wallets for International Payments

The State Bank of Việt Nam is drafting a circular regarding cashless payments which might allow domestic commercial banks and domestic intermediary payment companies to co-operate with foreign intermediary payment companies to provide international payment services. Under current regulations, domestic banks are only allowed to cooperate with foreign banks and international card organisations for international payments. There are no regulations for international payments made via foreign e-wallets as well as about international payments that don't go through payment accounts. This loophole in the era of Industry 4.0 has seen a rapid boom of international payment methods. In recent years there has been huge demand for payments via foreign e-wallets such as Wechat Pay and Alipay from Chinese tourists in Việt Nam. Việt Nam attracts a large number of Chinese tourists every year. Some banks and intermediary payment companies have asked the central bank to allow them to co-operate with foreign intermediary payment companies to serve international demand while exploiting the large potential of this segment. Nguyễn Hưng, general director of TPBank, said domestic banks could not co-operate with foreign e-wallets like Wechat Pay and Alipay at the moment due to the lack of a legal framework. "We are getting ready to start but must wait for the green light from the central bank," Hưng was quoted by Đầu Tư (Investment) online newspaper as saying.

According to Phạm Tiến Dũng, director of the central bank's Payment Department, the Industry 4.0 revolution had created a number of new international payment models. Previously, international payments were mainly conducted via bank accounts and credit cards, but now e-wallets were emerging, he added. "It is clear that the definition of international payment must be changed. People should be able to make international payments through their banks and also via intermediary payment methods," he said. "In a changing world, the management method needs to change," Dũng stressed. Along with technological advances, cross-border payments are becoming much easier. Cross-border intermediary payment platforms are booming around the world, attracting not only fintech companies but also big corporations such as Amazon, Apple and Google. Experts predicted there would be a wave of co-operation between banks and domestic fintech companies with foreign e-wallets after the central bank gave the green light, which would also provide support for the tourism and e-commerce industries. E-wallets are developing rapidly in Việt Nam. AppotaPay received a licence from the State Bank of Việt Nam in October, making it the 39th intermediary payment company in Việt Nam. The COVID-19 pandemic was also pushing the development of cashless payments among the country's 97 million population, about 70 per cent of whom have access to the internet and 45 per cent use smartphones. Statistics from the central bank showed that as of the end of the first quarter, there were about 13 million activated e-wallet accounts in Việt Nam with a total outstanding balance of VNĐ1.36 trillion (US\$58.62 million). More than 225 million transactions were conducted, worth VNĐ77.7 trillion, via e-wallets in the first quarter.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 10/31/2020

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More Than 4,000 Cyberattacks in 10 Months

Việt Nam recorded more than 4,100 cyberattacks in the first 10 months of this year, a decrease of 7.8 per cent over the same period of last year. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) under the Authority of Information Security, Ministry of Information and Communication recorded and tackled 582 network attacks on information systems in Việt Nam last month, a year-on-year increase of 0.34 per cent. Trần Quang Hưng, NCSC director, said to ensure cybersecurity for information systems of agencies, organisations and internet users in Việt Nam, a campaign to review and remove malware nationwide has been deployed on a large scale since mid-September. During the campaign, 21 information technology units in Việt Nam were provided tools to inspect, process and remove malware to ensure the safety of all users on Vietnamese cyberspace, which is also a basis for promoting national digital transformation. As a result, after two peaks of checking and tackling malware on computer systems, the number of IP addresses of Việt Nam in the ghost computer networks (IP botnet) has fallen sharply, from more than 2 million to over 1.3 million by mid-October. Previously, to ensure information security in State agencies, Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc issued a request for ministries, branches and localities to ensure information security under a four-layer protection model in Directive 14 dated June 7 last year on enhancing cybersecurity. Statistics of the Authority of Information Security showed more than 70 per cent of ministries, branches and localities have completed a four-layer information security model as of early October. As the request of the PM, by the end of 2020, 100 per cent of ministries, branches and localities must complete the criteria for the four-layer information security model, serving as a basis for promoting digital transformation and building the e-government.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 11/08/2020

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Ministry Proposes Code of Conduct for Cyberspace

Minister of Information and Communications Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng said the Government is considering a proposal for a code of conduct for cyberspace in Việt Nam and will issue the code by the end of this year. He was answering questions from a National Assembly deputy regarding child protection in cyberspace at a Q&A session yesterday. The code would require internet users and service providers to comply with Vietnamese laws and respect the rights and interests of organisations and individuals, including the rights of children. Specifically, it would require social media users and internet service providers to guide children and adolescents on safe

and healthy use of social networks. In addition, the Ministry of Information and Communications was assigned by Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc to take the lead in developing a project to protect and support children to interact creatively and healthy online for 2010 - 2025. The project has provided basic solutions to solve problems such as creating a single focal point in cyberspace to receive feedback on child abuse content, applying technology, artificial intelligence, and analysing big data to detect and remove child abuse content.

Digital transformation for mountainous areas

Regarding digital transformation for people in mountainous areas, Hùng said in the digital transformation project, digital regulation for mountainous and remote areas is considered a priority. Regarding telecommunications infrastructure, the ministry has directed that all people in mountainous, remote and isolated areas must have 3G, 4G, and 5G to be able to access the internet. In terms of electronic payment infrastructure, this year, the Government and the State Bank of Việt Nam will trial the mobile money model so that people in remote areas without a bank card can make electronic payments. For people in remote and difficult areas with no smartphones, at present, a co-operation programme between Vietnamese manufacturers and carriers is available to support selling at a reasonable price, Hùng said. Regarding digital transformation for people in mountainous areas, the first priority is education, especially online education so children there can access the best education. The second priority is healthcare, Hùng said, adding that remote medical examination and treatment systems will be deployed for people in these areas soon.

Labour and vocational education

Earlier in the morning, the NA continued its question and answer programme about labour and vocational education. Deputy Đỗ Thị Lan from Quảng Ninh Province asked about planning the network of vocational institutions to meet the requirements of socio-economic development. Minister of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs Đào Ngọc Dung said the ministry would rearrange the system of vocational education centres and close ineffective ones. Dung said after three years, the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA) has completed all legal documents. Provinces and different ministries and sectors have reorganised and reduced from 1996 to 1909 vocational education schools, completing the target before 2021. Việt Nam's vocational education schools now rank 90th out of 158 countries and territories in the world for quality, up 10 places compared to last year, per the World Economic Forum. Emphasising the encouragement of establishing private foreign-invested educational institutions associated with human resources use for business sectors under the revised Labour Code 2019, Dung said with the direction of rearranging vocational education centres, each province would have only one or two multi-disciplinary and multi-system training colleges. The MoLISA will encourage investment in a high-quality education system, key occupations and publish the national qualification framework according to the ASEAN qualification framework. This plan also promotes international co-operation and recognises diplomas and

certificates of ASEAN countries and some highly developed vocational training countries, focusing on three countries, namely Australia, Japan and Germany. The goal is that by 2030, there will be 100 high-quality schools, 50 schools meeting ASEAN standards and Việt Nam's vocational education will reach an advanced level in ASEAN. "We apply a number of new training plans and methods to suit the digital transformation society through online training for students, promote creativity for young people and employees to study and work remotely," said Dung.

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Ensuring Cybersecurity a Key Task in Digital Transformation

Ensuring cybersecurity is considered a key factor for a successful and sustainable digital transformation, and at the same time, an inseparable part of digital transformation, said Nguyễn Đức Hiển, vice chairman of the Central Economic Commission, at a cybersecurity summit. The Vietnam Security Summit 2020 was held in Hà Nội on Tuesday, endorsed by the Central Economic Commission and the Ministry of Information and Communications. Featuring the theme 'Cybersecurity in the AI and Big data era', the summit shed light on the latest security trends and considerations for digital governments and modern-day enterprises, including national critical infrastructure defence, next-gen enterprise cyber protection and customers' data assurance. Digital transformation had led to an increase in the number of internet of things devices and generated a large amount of data, said Hiển. Data had become an important resource of the country and of each organisation and individual, along with that, the risks of information and data theft and destruction were increasing, Hiển added. Cyber attackers also exploited the strengths of artificial intelligence and big data in cyber-attack techniques and malware would become smarter with phishing technology based on artificial intelligence, he noted.

"Reality shows that we are facing increasingly dangerous and sophisticated cyber attacks. Each agency, organisation, business and user must always be ready to respond to threats in cyberspace," said Hiển. Sharing the same viewpoint, Colonel Nguyễn Đăng Lực, vice chairman of the Government Cipher Committee, said cyber-attacks and crime had increased recently to steal data, State confidential information and destroy information systems. More and more cybercriminals and reactionary organisations had been established and operated sophisticatedly, causing serious consequences, threatening social order and safety, political stability and national security, he said. From the perspective of the Ministry of Information and Communications, Nguyễn Khắc Lịch, deputy director of the Authority of Information Security under the Ministry of Information and Communication, said the current risk of information security was very big, which affected the entire economy. "Cyber attacks are getting more sophisticated, more fierce, more dangerous," said Lịch. Also at the summit, the representative of the Authority of Information Security

reviewed some outstanding results in the work of ensuring information security in Việt Nam. Specifically, Việt Nam's ranking of the Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) in accordance with the assessment of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) had positive changes last year. The country ranked 50 out of 193 countries, 11th in Asia-Pacific and fifth in ASEAN. Sharing about the orientation to implement cybersecurity, Lich said "If we want our country to become a powerful country in cybersecurity, in the group of 30 leading countries in GCI index by 2030, we need to focus on development in accordance with five main pillars including legal, technical, organising, capacity building, and co-operation". Along with that, Lich also raised other major orientations in ensuring information security in the coming time, which are ensuring information safety in digital transformation; protecting users on cyberspace, promoting the implementation of the four-class model in the organisations, and identifying human as the main orientation of ensuring information safety.

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SOEs Urged to Push Up Digital Transformation

State-owned enterprises (SOEs) must push up digital transformation to improve their competitiveness and operation efficiency, Chairman of the Committee for Management of State Capital at Enterprises (CMSC) Nguyễn Hoàng Anh said. He was speaking at a conference on Wednesday about building e-Government and digital transformation at enterprises that SOEs must be pioneers in digital transformation, adding that in the era of Industry 4.0, digital transformation was an inevitable trend that every country in the world was aiming for and Việt Nam was no exception. 2020 was the starting year for the national digital transformation following the Prime Minister's Decision No 749/QĐ-TTg about the national digital transformation programme to 2025 with a vision to 2030. Anh stressed that digital transformation was not only a task but also a solution for SOEs to improve their operation efficiency. "SOEs must be pioneers in digital transformation to increase their competitiveness and operation efficiency, and contribution to the prevention and fight against the COVID-19 pandemic," he said. Nineteen SOEs under CMSC's management were playing a significant role in the national digital transformation process, given that they were holding significant resources of the country's economy.

CMSC's Deputy Chairman Nguyễn Ngọc Cảnh urged SOEs to speed up the digital transformation process to play a leading role in developing a digital economy. Cảnh said technology enterprises under CMSC's management must be responsible for implementing digital transformation for the Government, local authorities and other enterprises. Determination and drastic measures must be taken to speed up the digital transformation, Cảnh said. "Who comes first will win," Cảnh stressed. Cảnh said SOEs needed to prepare in terms of digital infrastructure, developing

digital-based solutions and products as well as building talents and enhancing capacity. Besides, focus should also be placed on ensuring network security in digital transformation. Chairman of Việt Nam Posts and Telecommunications Group (VNPT) Phạm Đức Long said Việt Nam's digital economy saw significant development in recent years. However, the development remained uneven among different economic sectors and different regions, Long said. Long said VNPT would continue efforts to become the leading partner of the Government in developing e-Government as well as the leading company in Việt Nam to master Industry 4.0 to solve pressing issues of the country and provide comprehensive digital-based solutions. On the same day, CMSC officially launched a document linking axis developed by VNPT which would be connected with the national document linking axis, helping save time and costs in handling administrative documents.

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VN's Digital Economy to Reach \$14 Billion in 2020

Southeast Asia's digital economy remains resilient at \$100 billion in gross merchandise value (GMV) despite headwinds and is on track to cross \$300 billion in GMV by 2025, according to a report from Google, Temasek and Bain & Company. Indonesia and Việt Nam continued to grow at double-digit rates, and Singapore remains a regional enabler for growth, despite short term GMV decline due to the online travel sector. The report, which covered Indonesia, Malaysia, Việt Nam, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines, showed that Internet usage in the region continues to multiply, with 40 million new users this year alone. That pushed the total number of internet users in these Southeast Asian countries to 400 million or nearly 70 per cent of the population. The coronavirus brought about a permanent and massive digital adoption spurt, with more than one in three digital service consumers (36 per cent of total) new to the service. Of the number, 90 per cent intend to continue their newfound habits post-pandemic, it said. Many of the new users came from non-metropolitan areas in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

The report looked at seven internet economy sectors in Southeast Asia, including e-commerce, transport and food delivery, online travel, online media, financial services, health technology and education technology, with health and education technology added to the 2020 version. E-commerce is expected to grow by 63 per cent to \$62 billion in 2020 and is poised to hit \$172 billion in 2025. Digital financial services are also gaining momentum as more small-and-medium-sized businesses have become receptive to accepting online payments. Digital payments are set to grow from \$600 billion in 2019 to \$620 billion in 2020 and could reach \$1.2 trillion by 2025. The health technology and education technology sectors received a boost from the pandemic as many people turned to online health consultations while schools shifted to remote learning. Investments in those sectors are growing. Gross

merchandise value per internet economy sectors in Việt Nam. The country's digital economy is expected to reach US\$14 billion in 2020 and \$52 billion in 2025. — Source from Google, Temasek and Bain & Company report.

Online travel and transport sectors were hit the hardest as the pandemic ground international travel to a halt while many people began to work from home or became concerned about sharing transport. Still, the report predicted online travel to rebound to \$60 billion by 2025. In Việt Nam, with its various stages of lockdowns, users turned to the internet for solutions to their sudden challenges. A significant number tried new digital services: 41 per cent of all digital service consumers were new (higher than the SEA average), with 94 per cent of these new consumers intending to continue their behaviour post-pandemic. The report said e-commerce has driven significant growth in Việt Nam, at 46 per cent, alongside strong growth across most sectors, except for travel. Overall, Việt Nam's digital economy is expected to reach \$14 billion in 2020, a year-on-year increase of 16 per cent, and will likely reach \$52 billion in 2025, re-accelerating to nearly 29 per cent in compound annual growth rate. This year's seismic consumer and ecosystem shifts have advanced the internet sector in unimaginable ways, putting it in a stronger position than ever. "In our 2019 report, we identified six key barriers to growth - internet access, funding, consumer trust, payments, logistics and talent - and this year has seen significant progress on most (payments and consumer trust, especially). Talent, however, remains a key blocker that all parties will need to keep working on to ensure that the momentum gained this year is sustained." The report also pointed out that new frontiers' dealmaking activity across the region continued to grow unabated in the first half of 2020. Investors are remaining cautiously optimistic and are doing fewer deals at more attractive valuations, in hope for higher returns in the long run. Whereas the goal of years prior has been "blitzscaling", investors are now looking for sustainable, profitable growth.

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Retirement Age to Increase Starting 2021

Starting next year, the retirement age will be increased to 60 years and three months for men and 55 years and four months for women. This is part of Government Decree No. 135/2020/ND-CP, applicable from January 1, 2021, following the approval of the revised Labour Code by the National Assembly last year after lengthy debates. At present, the retirement age for regular labourers is 60 for men and 55 for women. People who do heavy, hazardous or dangerous work or employees working in a place with harsh living conditions can retire at 55 for men and 50 for women. High-skilled workers work until 65 for men and 60 for women. The increase in retirement ages is an important part of the revised Labour Code. According to the decree, after 2021, the retirement age will increase by three months per year for men

and four months for women. The male retirement age will be gradually increased from 60 to 62 by 2028, while the female retirement will increase from 55 to 60 by 2035. People working in dangerous environments or doing heavy lifting can retire sooner, while those who work in the private sector or in highly-skilled jobs can retire later, with the maximum extension five years.

For example, people with at least 15 years working in heavy, hazardous or dangerous jobs can retire up to five years earlier than the common retirement age. A similar incentive is applied for people working in remote disadvantaged areas or people who have lost at least 61 per cent of their working ability. Meanwhile, after retirement ages, people can continue working if they reach an agreement with their employers. Last year, Việt Nam's population was 96.2 million and may rise to 97.3 million this year, according to the General Statistics Office. The gradual retirement age extension is expected to prevent abrupt interruptions in the labour market and maintain political and social stability. It also aligns with Vietnamese workers' life expectancy. The average life expectancy of Vietnamese people has increased from 59 in 1960 to 73 in 2014 and more than 75 in 2018. The country currently has about 3.2 million pensioners.

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Better Communication Helps Improve Public Health Care

It was 3pm on Sunday afternoon when a group of youth union members in green uniforms in Hà Nội's Chương Mỹ District and women's union members gathered for a meeting where they could listen to the latest information on disease prevention and public healthcare. "It's helpful for us," said 23-year-old Lê Thị Bảo Ngọc. "Although the information about diseases is available on mass media, not many people clearly understand the symptoms as well as prevention measures," she said. "Knowing about the symptoms, the causes and how to prevent common non-communicable diseases helps enhance our awareness, especially for hypertension." By listening to the information, which was carefully edited by Nguyễn Đăng Minh, head of Tốt Động Commune health station, youth union members like Ngọc learnt about factors that can increase the risk of high blood pressure including health conditions, lifestyles and family history. "Some of the risk factors for high blood pressure cannot be controlled, such as our age or family history. But we can take steps to lower our risks by changing the factors we can control. These include unhealthy diet, obesity, physical inactivity, and use of tobacco or alcohol," Minh said.

Đặng Thị Phương Hằng, Secretary of Tốt Động Commune Youth Union, agreed. "After attending a similar meeting held last month, I got a lot of information on diseases such as hypertension and diabetes which are common nowadays." "People suffering from hypertension are at high risk of strokes and heart diseases," she said.

Hằng said she had shared that information with her family members. She also posted facts about the disease and preventive measures as well as posters relating to the disease on the commune's social network to raise people's awareness about public healthcare. "Using social media helps spread information quickly and it's easy for people to access," Hằng said, adding that each family has two or three members using social media. The initiative is part of the Citi Foundation's project for COVID-19-related community relief and economic recovery efforts globally. The project is carried out by Microfinance & Development Center (M&D) in 10 outlying districts of Hà Nội, namely Mỹ Đức, Ứng Hòa, Phú Xuyên, Thường Tín, Sóc Sơn, Mê Linh, Ba Vì, Thạch Thất, Chương Mỹ and Thanh Oai.

The project concentrated on offering useful and timely information to the trainees. They were trained on information principles and how to produce news articles in different formats or how to communicate with people in information dissemination meetings. According to Nguyễn Bích Vượng, director of the M&D, the commune's President of the Women's Union and the Secretary of the Youth Union were chosen for training as they represent two mass organisations which are prestigious and experienced in mobilising members to join social movements with great influence. "With the communication knowledge and skills from this training activity, these leaders will become the communicators and trainers of the local Women's Union and Youth Union. Thus, there will be a large number of people involving in communication, helping them perform better in the prevention work and healthcare," she said, adding that nearly 4,000 people have been trained since July this year. Minh, head of Tốt Động Commune health station, said members of Tốt Động Commune Steering Committee for COVID-19 prevention and control were finding themselves busier than ever during the peak of the pandemic in March and July this year. To enhance the joint efforts against the pandemic, the Committee has disseminated relevant information in all channels, including the commune's radio, printed bulletins, or handouts to each household.

Health workers gathered information from the portals of the Ministry of Health, announcements of the government, local authority, or the press. They made reports and broadcasted them through communal loudspeaker network. This is the station's usual task but the difference is that this is now done daily instead of weekly or quarterly. When asked about difficulties when it came to COVID-19 communication, Minh said arranging information dissemination meetings was a problem. It was not easy to gather a large number of locals during the day because people are busy. Thus, meetings would usually be held at weekends, he said. The commune has a population of 16,000 people. Most of them engaged in agriculture. To provide information to every household, the Youth Union members use a mobile channel. They drive motorbikes loaded with loudspeakers, travelling to every corner of the commune to broadcast the reports they have prepared.

"The communication on the COVID-19 pandemic is of utmost importance. Our

activities have raised the effectiveness of the overall communication: 100 per cent of people in our commune are aware of the pandemic, know how dangerous it is, and know what to do to prevent it," Minh said. Dissemination on disease prevention is also included in communal and village meetings, making the task more effective. "Most people wear masks in public. They wash their hands regularly and complete health declarations after returning from high-risk areas, he said. The feedback was also recognised by Ngọc, who works at the local kindergarten. Parents advised their children to wear masks and use hand sanitisers before entering the classroom, she said. "Particularly, parents follow the regulations of wearing masks and keeping a safe distance between people at the school enrollment held in late August."

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 11/28/2020

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South Asia

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

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

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

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

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Union Cabinet Nods for Inking MoC with Japan to Boost ICT

In another noteworthy step towards Digital India, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a nod for signing Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) between India and Japan on bilateral cooperation in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Union Cabinet nods for inking MoC with Japan to boost ICTAs Japan is an important partner with 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership' status, the MoC will not only contribute in strengthening bilateral cooperation and mutual understanding in the field of communications but will also serve as a strategic initiative for India. A per the MoC, the two countries will have cooperation in various fields like 5G network, telecom security, Submarine cable, standard certification of communication equipment, utilization of latest Wireless Technologies and ICTs, ICTs capacity building, Public Protection and Disaster Relief, Artificial Intelligence (AI) / Blockchain, Spectrum Chain, Spectrum Management, Cooperation on Multilateral platforms, etc. The pact will open doors to better opportunities for India to get into a global standardization process. And, as primarily the cooperation is in ICTs, it will help in strengthening ICTs infrastructure in India. Moreover, to bridge the connectivity gap between mainland India and remote areas, cooperation in the development of future submarine cable networks and technologies will answer the connectivity issues. Also, the MoC aims to promote human capacity building in the field of ICTs and further development of a startup ecosystem which will contribute to realizing the objectives of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

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Gujarat Stood 2nd, Kerala Tops with Most E-transactions During Lockdown

The State of Kerala sets a benchmark securing the first rank with the most number of e-transactions for the state and civic body services during the lockdown. Gujarat followed recording the second-most number of e-transactions. e-transactions Taking into account the figures, Gujarat recorded 67.3 crore hits on e-governance websites marking the second-most highest, while, Kerala topped the charts with 93.5 crore hits. The top five states following Kerala and Gujarat includes Andhra Pradesh

securing the third rank, West Bengal fourth and Telangana at the fifth position. The e-transactions made on the e-governance websites by all the states are recorded by the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY). In the case of Gujarat, the State has made an increase of 35 per cent in the past five years in terms of the number of hits on e-governance websites. In 2016, the State recorded 49.7 crore hits, whereas, in 2020, the hits touched 67.3 crore count. Most numbers of hits were recorded on the e-education services accounting to over 20 crore and the government examination boards' websites like for SSC witnessed over 11 crore hits. The hits on e-governance services like the Public Distribution System were quite low against the expectation of the State government. Also, the hits for online payment of electricity bills dropped significantly when compared from previous year's data. However, as reported by a national daily, the most number of transactions across the country were recorded in for services like e-courts, income tax, passport, road transport, etc.

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Gurugram, Millenium City to Smart City

Gurugram Smart City Gurugram, which is a prominent city of Haryana, is considered to be one of the most influential places in North India. It has become real estate hub and a centre for corporate houses that have been providing lucrative job offers over the past decade. A large population from tier-II and tier-III cities is moving towards Gurugram due to the employment opportunities and other available facilities. With the State Government developing the city as a Smart City, it has led to the rapid development of projects, writes Priyanka Sharma of Elets News Network (ENN). The current population of Gurugram is estimated to be close to 2.5 million and is expected to grow to 4.3 million by 2020. As the industrial and financial centre of Haryana, this city has witnessed the third largest increase in per capita incomes in India (after Chandigarh and Mumbai). Almost 45-48 per cent of Haryana's revenue accrues from Gurugram by way of excise duty, sales tax, stamp duty and registration. This is the hub of the prolific and massive real estate development that is happening in the State today. Although Chandigarh is the capital of Haryana and Punjab, Gurugram is considered to be the second capital of the State. Over the years, the Government has targeted Gurgaon as a city for attracting global investors and domestic capitalists over Chandigarh. Gurugram, earlier known as Gurgaon, may not have made it to the Smart Cities list of the Centre, but still is making itself smart in line with the vision of the Government of Haryana. Some of the projects where Gurugram has made a mark are: WASTE MANAGEMENT For effective waste management in Gurugram, foundation stones for 11 solid waste transfer stations were laid by the Chief Minister of Haryana Manohar Lal Khattar recently.

The stations will serve as temporary waste centres where the waste collected from households will be kept till it is transferred to Bandhwari for further processing.

Residents will be required to segregate waste at source into two separate bins, categorised as dry and wet waste. They can even check the arrival time of garbage vans through an app. The State has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Ecogreen Energy Private Ltd to develop Haryana's first integrated solid waste management project. "We have signed an agreement with the Ecogreen company, selected through a global tender. They now collect door-to-door garbage and convert it into compost and also waste-to-energy. They will install a power plant there. Less than 10 per cent inert is used for the landfill. This is all in compliance with the Supreme Court order," said Narhari Banger, Additional Commissioner, Municipal Corporation of Gurugram while speaking to ENN.

SMART SECURITY The Gurgaon Metropolitan Development Authority will install more CCTVs for enhanced security and better traffic management. The Rs 40 crore project will be implemented in the next two years. The city currently has around 60,000 CCTV cameras and they, too, will be part of the project. The CCTV feed will be monitored at the Police Commissioner's office and can be utilised by all the Gurugram departments. As a part of the project, 61 CCTV cameras have been installed in Old Gurgaon at 15 points between Sector 4/7 Chowk and Sadar Bazaar. Residents of Gurugram can utilise the control room through "Emergency Communication Box", in case of an emergency. There is also a provision to track criminals who try to harm the cameras.

"The Gurugram administration has opened a single window system for all clearances and approvals for a subsidy, net metering etc at the Renewable Centre in Leisure Valley, in Sector 29."

SMART TRANSPORT The Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) has forwarded its report to the SMART TRANSPORT Haryana Mass Rapid Transport Corporation (HMRTC), to expand the metro route from HUDA City Centre to Dwarka Sector 21. Gurugram Rapid Metro is also expanding. Work is in progress for the second phase of Gurugram's Rapid Metro from Sikandarpur metro junction to Gurgaon Sector 56. Fulfilling their promise of Smart transport in Gurugram, a special app is being designed for Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) expressway. There is an opportunity in short travel distances that makes this city walkable and cycle-friendly. This strength needs to be leveraged. The maximum daily trip length is less than 5 km, as per the Integrated Mobility Plan for Gurgaon. A bicycle sharing system will soon start in the Millenium city. China-based start-up Mobike will soon launch an app-based bicycle sharing service in the city. Under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Mobike and DLF Foundation, the project will start from Golf Course Road. The bicycles made by Mobike will have built-in GPS technology so that they can easily be tracked. The company will launch nearly 5,000 bicycles on Gurgaon roads.

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

"We have started door-to-door payment collection in collaboration with the ICICI

bank. Residents can pay the property tax and utility bill at the click of a button by sitting at the comfort of their homes,” Om Prakash Sharma, Chief Accounts Officer, Municipal Corporation of Gurugram. Detailed Project Reports of every area can be accessed through MCG website. No Objection Certificate for Fire and Emergency services can also be obtained online. It also provides a facility for online approvals of building plans. Any change or correction in Property Tax records can be done online. Marriages can be registered online too. MCG has started an online system to grant permissions, approvals and monitoring of outdoor advertisements. Trade licenses are issued online. Gurugram Police recently started Project Jagruk with the help of Home Credit India Finance Pvt. Ltd to create awareness amongst the police personnel on cybercrime and financial frauds. “The State has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Ecogreen Energy Private Ltd to develop Haryana’s first integrated solid waste management project.” SMART GRID FOR SMART GURUGRAM Gurugram is aiming at the 24×7 uninterrupted power supply to consumers. The city wants to make itself a diesel generator-free city, and for that, the Dakshin Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam (DHBVN) has launched a Smart Grid Project for the Millennium City. The project, at a cost of Rs 1,600-crore, will reduce AT&C (Aggregate Technical & Commercial) losses and overhead cost. The grid is integrated with the latest technology and it also ensures consumer participation. In phase 1, all the overhead 11 kV lines will be converted to underground except wherever it is not feasible.

There are also plans to lay optical fibre so that internet connectivity can be made possible. SMART ENERGY The energy roadmap for Gurugram needs to progressively increase the share of renewable energy resources and generation. Haryana is gearing up to contribute to India’s ambitious target of generating 175 gigawatts of solar power by 2022, and Gurugram is in a position to leverage the state level policies to scale up an application and make more off-grid solutions possible. The plummeting cost curve of solar power generation is an opportunity. As energy demand and consumption grows steadily in the city, increased share of solar power will not only de-carbonise energy but also reduce toxic pollution from power generation. Haryana gets a high-intensity solar radiation for 320 days in a year; the state’s overall solar potential is 4.5 GW. The Municipal Corporation of Gurugram is also undertaking LED streetlighting project worth Rs 50 crore. The Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) will replace more than 48,568 streetlights by LED this year, which in the tun, will save 11 million units per year for Gurugram. Under the New Solar Policy of 2016, Haryana has set itself a target of a solar renewable purchase obligation (solar RPO) which would be scaled up from the current 0.25 per cent to at least 8 per cent by 2021-22. The solar capacity target is 3,200 MW by 2021-22 — of this, 1,600 MW will be from rooftop solar. The policy encourages setting up solar plants on barren panchayat lands and on canals, enabling mechanisms for off-grid solar applications, creating a green energy fund and facilitating wheeling of solar through utilities. The scaling up of solar power generation will happen in diverse ways. Haryana’s solar initiatives are spearheaded by the Haryana Renewable

Energy Development Agency (Hareda). Currently, the State's solar power installed capacity is about 25 MW through rooftops and small solar power projects. Haryana is the second State after Tamil Nadu to have mandated the use of solar by buildings of and beyond 500 square yards.

Recently, a new solar policy has been unveiled. Net metering has been operationalised and the local administration has launched a 'single-window' for all clearances and approvals for solar PV and solar thermal. Research and development on solar power is being done at the Gurgaon National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE). In Gurugram, 17 MW of solar rooftops have been installed without subsidy, while 1 MW has been installed with subsidy. Gurugram district has been allocated a large target for providing subsidy to the tune of 11 MW till March 2017 for grid-connected rooftop systems. The subsidy will be 30 per cent of the project cost or Rs 20,000 per kW, whichever is less. Haryana has put in place all the elements to operationalise net metering. The net metering regulations from Haryana Electricity Regulatory Commission (HERC) were issued in November 2014 and were further fine-tuned in July 2015. "Haryana's solar initiatives are spearheaded by the Haryana Renewable Energy Development Agency (Hareda). Currently, the State's solar power installed capacity is about 25 MW through rooftops and small solar power projects." Net metering ensures that consumers can become power exporters by installing net meters at their premises and exporting surplus power to the grid – this enables them to get a discount on their power bill (after offsetting exported units) from the Dakshin Haryana Bidyut Vitaran Nigam Ltd (DHBVNL). The Gurugram administration has opened a single window system for all clearances and approvals for subsidy, net metering etc at the Renewable Centre in Leisure Valley, in Sector 29. The application for subsidy, net meters etc can be made online. As per the policy, the electricity generated from such systems will be cumulatively adjusted at 90 per cent of the electricity consumption during the financial year. In February 2016, Gurugram completed net metering of a 10-kWp rooftop grid-connected SPV power plant at Rajiv Gandhi Renewable Energy Park. In addition, in 2015-16, an incentive at 25 paise per unit was also provided on bills on the solar power thus generated. Several policy initiatives are in place – what is now needed is a time-bound implementation plan. The optimistic sign is that increasingly, solar photovoltaics are getting cheaper for large-scale deployment.

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Chennai Metrowater Accelerates Installation of Digital Water Meters

In order to ensure the judicious usage of water, the Chennai Metrowater has expedited the work to fit digital water meters with automated meter reading (AMR) in commercial properties in the city. As of now, around 5,300 commercial properties

using water more than 5,000 kilolitres including hotels, industries, and educational institutions have been provided with the AMR meters. The remaining properties of the total of 12,708 will be provided with the facility soon. According to Metrowater officials, the software for automated reading is in the development process. The software, once developed, will enable officers to read and monitor water meters and raise bills from their area and head offices. An official said that the smart meters are being procured from Hitron, a French company. In the second phase of the exercise more commercial establishments will be identified for the installation of smart meters and possibly the process will be expanded to cover domestic consumers as well. The project is taken under the Smart City Mission at a cost of Rs 9.5 crore. The initiative will help incorporating a behavioral change among the citizens to track their water consumption and pay as per the amount of water consumed. The Metrowater has begun billing as per volumetric consumption and soon engineers will not have to go door-to-door to raise bills or read meters. In addition, Metrowater has earmarked Rs 5 crore to install smartcard-based water dispensers in some of the filling posts that were not covered during the first phase of the Smart City project.

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Targeting a Chronic Pain Gateway Could Bring Relief

Something like a quarter of the world's population suffers from chronic pain at some point in their lives. As opposed to acute pain – for example, the feeling after hitting your finger with a hammer – chronic pain may not even have a clear cause, and it can linger for years or lifetimes. The burden of chronic pain includes damage to mental and physical health, lower productivity and drug addiction. A new study led by scientists at the Weizmann Institute of Science suggests an original approach to treating this affliction, by targeting a key gateway leading to the activation of genes in the peripheral nerve cells that play a role in many forms of chronic pain. The findings of this study were published in *Science*. Pain starts in the sensory neurons – those that pass information from the skin to the central nervous system. Damage to these neurons, chronic injury or disease can cause the neurons to “short circuit,” sending continuous pain messages. Prof. Mike Fainzilber of the Institute's Biomolecular Sciences Department investigates molecules that regulate the biomolecular messaging activities taking place within these nerve cells. These molecules – importins – are found in every cell, acting as conduits between the cell nucleus and its cytoplasm, shuttling molecules in and out of the nucleus and thus controlling access to the genes. This role takes on special significance in the peripheral nerve cells, with their long, thin bodies in which molecular messages can take hours to get from nerve endings to cell nuclei. Some of the importins Fainzilber and his team have identified, for example, relay messages about injury to the body of the nerve cell, initiating repair mechanisms. To ask whether importins are involved in chronic neuropathic pain, the researchers, led by Dr. Letizia Marvaldi in Fainzilber's group,

first set out to screen a number of importin-mutant mouse lines generated by the lab of Prof. Dr. Michael Bader at the Max-Delbruck Center in Berlin, who collaborated in this research. The research was supported by the European Research Council.

Behavioral screens on these different lines revealed a particular importin – importin alpha-3 – as the only importin implicated in controlling pain pathways. The team then sought to identify the gene expression pattern associated with long-lasting pain in peripheral nerve cells, and see how it tied into importin alpha-3 activity. Analyses of differences in the expression patterns between normal neurons and neurons lacking importin alpha-3 directed Dr. Marvaldi's attention to c-Fos, a protein that importin alpha-3 brings into the nucleus. c-Fos is a transcription factor – a molecule that raises or lowers the expression of numerous genes. Further experiments in mice showed that c-Fos accumulates in the nucleus in peripheral nerve cells of mice suffering from chronic pain. They then used specialized viruses as tools to reduce or disable importin alpha-3 or c-Fos in mouse peripheral nerve cells. These mice had much reduced responses to chronic pain situations than those of regular mice. Further research showed that importin alpha-3 is critical in late and chronic pain. c-Fos is also involved in earlier pain responses, but it seems to enter the nucleus by other means at those earlier stages. This suggests that blocking importin alpha-3 activity might be especially well-suited to preventing lasting, chronic pain. The research team then took their findings to the next level, asking how easily they can be translated to clinical application. They took advantage of a specialized database, the Connectivity Map (CMap) from the Broad Institute in Massachusetts, which reveals connections between drugs and gene expression patterns. This database enabled them to identify around 30 existing drugs that might target the importin alpha-3–c-Fos pathway. Almost two thirds of compounds they identified were not previously known to be associated with pain relief. The team chose two – one a cardiostimulant drug and the other an antibiotic – and tested them again in mice. Indeed, injection with these compounds provides relief of neuropathic pain symptoms in mice.

“The compounds we identified in this database search are a kind of fast track – proof that drugs already approved for other uses in patients can probably be repurposed to treat chronic pain,” says Marvaldi. “Clinical trials could be conducted in the near future, as these compounds have already been shown to be safe in humans.” “We are now in a position to conduct screens for new and better drug molecules that can precisely target this chain of events in the sensory neurons,” says Fainzilber. “Such targeted molecules might have fewer side effects and be less addictive than current treatments, and they could provide new options for reducing the burden of chronic pain.” Also participating in this research were Dr. Nicolas Panayotis, Dr. Stefanie Alber, Dr. Shachar Y. Dagan, Dr. Nataliya Okladnikov, Dr. Indrek Koppel, Agostina Di Pizio, Didi-Andreas Song, Yarden Tzur, Dr. Marco Terenzio, Dr. Ida Rishal and Dr. Dalia Gordon, all of the Weizmann Institute of Sciences Biomolecular Sciences Department; Dr. Franziska Rother of the Max-Delbruck Center, Berlin and the

University of Lübeck, Germany; and Prof. Dr. Enno Hartmann of the University of Lübeck. Prof. Michael Fainzilber's research is supported by the Moross Integrated Cancer Center; the David Barton Center for Research on the Chemistry of Life; the Nella and Leon Benozio Center for Neurological Diseases; the Laraine and Alan A. Fischer Laboratory for Biological Mass Spectrometry; the Dr. Miriam and Sheldon G. Adelson Medical Research Foundation; the Rising Tide Foundation; Lawrence Feis; the estate of Florence and Charles Cuevas; the estate of Lilly Fulop; the estate of Lola Asseof; and the European Research Council. Prof. Fainzilber is the incumbent of the Chaya Professorial Chair in Molecular Neuroscience.

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Fortinet Unveils Cloud-to-Cloud SD-WAN Solution to Simplify and Enhance Multi-Cloud Applications

Rajesh Maurya, Regional Vice President, India & SAARC at Fortinet said, "For enterprises deploying applications and workloads across multiple clouds, the need to seamlessly manage connectivity and maintain security across the diverse infrastructure is higher than ever. Fortinet Secure SD-WAN solutions provide connectivity and security across diverse cloud infrastructures while optimizing application user experience. Fortinet enables enterprises to realize the true potential of SD-WAN by enabling it to be implemented anywhere. From home, campus to the cloud, data centre to the cloud, and now cloud to cloud, Fortinet delivers the industry's most scalable, cost-effective and secure SD-WAN solution on the market." Fortinet, a global leader in broad, integrated and automated cybersecurity solutions, on July 15, announced Fortinet Secure SD-WAN for Multi-Cloud, a networking and security solution that solves common application performance, visibility, cost, and control challenges associated with multi-cloud deployments by enabling SD-WAN across multiple clouds and regions. Most enterprises today – 93 percent by recent estimates have a multi-cloud strategy in place and work with multiple cloud providers to meet a number of business needs, including disaster recovery, data backup, application resiliency, and global coverage. However, managing and securing an assortment of different private and public cloud workloads and environments remains a challenge, with many organizations choosing to connect their clouds via their on-premises data center WAN edge. The use of this type of traditional WAN infrastructure approach, though secure, inhibits multi-cloud capabilities and results in deployment complexity, inconsistent network performance, and expensive connectivity.

Fortinet Secure SD-WAN for Multi-Cloud is a new approach to establishing secure and high-performance connectivity between public cloud workloads running on multiple clouds without increasing cost and complexity. Available in all major cloud providers, Fortinet Secure SD-WAN for Multi-cloud enables a consistent network

architecture leveraging SD-WAN capabilities between clouds and empowers application developers and enterprise IT to build a high speed and seamless cloud-to-cloud network and security architecture. Fortinet Secure SD-WAN for Multi-Cloud uniquely offers a secure and effective infrastructure for maximizing the benefits of enterprise multi-cloud deployments by: Automating the deployment of a consistent overlay network across different cloud networks, reducing complexity and increasing agility to save teams time and resources. Offers end-to-end visibility, control, and centralized management that unifies functionality across multiple cloud environments through cloud native integrations. Securely transports application traffic between clouds without needing to backhaul through the data center, enabling better scaling of deployments and reducing latency. Intelligently selects connections based on application characteristics employing dynamic path selection, improving performance and optimizing cost by selecting the best internet or leased line link. Provides an application developer-friendly API to enable programmers the ability to consistently represent their network and security requirements.

Fortinet delivers Secure SD-WAN as an integrated feature of its industry-leading FortiGate Next-generation Firewall, powered by the industry's first SD-WAN ASIC to enable better application experience, higher performance, and better cost efficiency – with Security Compute Ratings up to 17 times better than competitor solutions. Fortinet Secure SD-WAN for Multi-Cloud, delivered via FortiGate-VM, a virtual appliance, is powered by Fortinet's patented vSPU technology and maintains a performance advantage in the cloud, including over 20Gbps of IPsec performance – 10 times the industry average – for fast encrypted connections over the internet and leased-line links to reduce operational costs. By leveraging the broad FortiGate-VM footprint across all major cloud platforms, as well as market-leading FortiGate appliances on-premises, enterprise organizations can benefit from cloud-agnostic consistent multi-cloud networks without compromising on security and performance. Fortinet Secure SD-WAN for Multi-Cloud, which securely connects applications and workloads across multiple clouds, complements Fortinet's existing Secure SD-WAN Cloud On-Ramp capabilities to securely connect users and offices to applications and cloud workloads. Fortinet delivers a Secure SD-WAN product portfolio designed for the entire end-to-end enterprise with physical appliances for large data centres, branch offices, remote sites, and home offices, as well as virtual appliances for multi-cloud deployments. Fortinet Secure SD-WAN's ability to scale from home office to branch to cloud all tied to a single operating system via the Fortinet Security Fabric ensures networking and security policies seamlessly work across multiple environments and cloud platforms, enabled by the latest threat intelligence from FortiGuard Labs.

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Haryana Collaborates with Israel for Agritech to Enhance

Horticulture

JP Dalal, Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Government of Haryana said, the State collaboration with Israel is working on new technology in the field of horticulture. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of a five-day fruit festival organized by the Horticulture Department of Haryana in Kurukshetra today, he said, by adopting this latest technology, the Centre of Excellence for Fruits and Vegetables have been set up in various districts in Haryana and the State is planning to set up three or four new Centres. On this occasion, the Minister planted a mango sapling and later inspected various varieties of fruits including mango, peach, plum, pear, guava, and pomegranate planted over 30 acres of land. During his address, he said, the department has been successfully organizing Mango Mela in Pinjore for many years but this time the Mela has been brought to the mango orchards and for the first time, the fruit festival is being organized in the Sub-Tropical Fruit Centre of Ladwa. This year the fruit festival is not focused on just one fruit, rather will focus on different fruits every day including mango, litchi, guava, pomegranate and pear, he added.

In the wake of COVID-19 only a few farmers have been invited the rest are being addressed through a webinar, the Minister said. Ever since Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Manohar Lal have assumed the charge in the country and State, policies are being formulated in the interest of the farmers. To double the income of farmers in the State more attention is being paid to horticulture, dairy, milk and fisheries. Loans are being provided to the educated youth for setting up processing units so as to provide employment. Further, the Minister said that loans are being provided at lower interest rates for businesses like horticulture, dairy, fisheries and the state aims to provide employment to 10,000 youth a year. He said that to save water, the state is laying emphasis on micro-irrigation and has fixed a budget of Rs 1000 crore for this purpose. In this manner every drop of water will be utilized for irrigation on the lines of irrigation methods being used in Israel.

A decision has been taken to deposit an amount of Rs 6000 per year per family in the accounts of the farmers having land up to 5 acres. This amount will also be used for crop insurance. Apart from this, Haryana is the first state in the country where 50 lakh animals were vaccinated whereas 1.5 crore animals were vaccinated in the entire country. In this region, the Foot and Mouth Disease in cattle has been eradicated completely. He said that Pashu Kisan Credit Cards will be issued to five to six lakh cattle owners in the state and a collateral-free loan of Rs 1.80 lakh will be provided to eligible persons on this card.

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Digital Lenders Are Busy Helping Indian MSMEs Stay Afloat

As the Covid-19 crisis forces micro, small and medium-size enterprises (MSMEs) in India to stay afloat in the absence of incoming revenue and kick-start their business again, digital lenders have come of age as they have the advantage of speed and adaptability to assess and disburse loans faster, according to a new report. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) estimates the total addressable credit demand by the country's MSMEs at \$490 billion and the overall supply from formal sources at \$192 billion. "This credit gap of up to \$331 billion suggests that traditional lenders are either reluctant or unable to serve this segment of borrowers. In contrast, alternative lenders like FlexiLoans, Indifi, SMEcorner and ZipLoan see lending to MSMEs as a business opportunity," said a latest Forrester report. These digital lenders offer a wide range of alternative lending options, such as working capital loans from Happy, lines of credit from Indifi, startup loans from Lendingkart, and merchant cash advances from FinBucket. "They use technology such as digital applications, automated underwriting, digital verification, and digital disbursement to improve risk assessment, accelerate loan processing, reduce costs, and enhance experiences," said Arnav Gupta, Analyst at Forrester Research. Digital business lenders use payment and accounting platforms to find borrowers. BharatPe lets payment solution customers know that they can apply for a loan and repay it via a percentage of sales made on the payment platform. Lenders lacking their own payment or accounting platform partner with firms that do. "FlexiLoans offers loans to small businesses based on their activity on Paytm's platform. Digital lenders such as Indifi and ZipLoan work with an ecosystem of companies and marketplaces to gather information on potential borrowers and assess risk before granting loans," Gupta elaborated.

Indifi is working with food delivery startups Zomato and Swiggy to assess a restaurant's credit risk by checking its borrowing history and customer feedback before issuing a loan. So far, digital business lenders have proliferated thanks to little competition from incumbents. To compete with them, a few Indian banks and NBFCs have started to raise their game — reducing the time to lend, improving risk assessment models, and building end-to-end digital lending processes. Digital lenders put more effort into fine-tuning credit risk assessments using data from alternative sources. They also avoid the cumbersome paper-based application and approval processes that traditional lenders use. Many MSMEs expect flexible loan repayment terms — which the Covid-19 crisis will make more important than ever. Loan repayment flexibility is something that traditional lenders have always failed to offer to businesses. In contrast, many digital lenders offer repayment flexibility as a product feature. "Lendingkart offers business loans that borrowers can repay in equal monthly or biweekly installments, allowing them to adjust their repayments to their sales and invoicing cycles," Gupta noted. Many digital lenders are also extending credit for a cause. "Capital Float offers educational institutions collateral-free loans to improve the quality of education by investing in educational infrastructure. Digital lenders such as FinBucket and Lendingkart offer preferential loans to women entrepreneurs," the report mentioned. FinBucket matches MSME

borrowers with lenders such as banks, offering loans under the national government's "Stand-Up India" scheme to help borrowers from different social strata and women entrepreneurs set up their own businesses. Many startups have sought to disrupt India's business lending landscape, dominated by banks and NBFCs.

Firms such as BharatPe, FlexiLoans, Happy, and Paytm are offering credit to small businesses that already use their services and often tie loans to sales flowing through their platform. FlexiLoans partnered with more than 100 merchant platforms to offer merchant POS-based loans; merchants repay these loans via automatic deductions from future sales. To help MSMEs cope with the pandemic, Indifi partnered with PayU to offer lines of credit to merchants, which can borrow up to \$66,000 in revolving credit; they can draw on it when needed, and interest is calculated on the outstanding amount on a given day, said the report. "Digital disruptors threaten to make incumbents irrelevant by delivering more compelling products, services and experiences than traditional firms and at a lower cost. To avoid being disrupted, relentlessly focus on understanding your customers' needs so you can give them more of what they want faster," the report said.

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Data Centre Trends to Watch Out for the Future

According to the World Economic Forum - data incorporates 500 million tweets, 294 billion emails, 4 petabytes of Facebook information, 65 billion messages sent on WhatsApp, and 5 billion internet searches. By 2025, there will be 463 exabytes (400,000,000,000,000,000,000 bytes) of data created daily! The Data Centres are pushing towards the edge of the horizon, with new solutions and concepts around the Data Centre domain. IT leaders are being forced to think of new solutions that could optimize their business even more. Businesses are utilizing smarter digital strategies more so ever. The upcoming decade will be full of innovations and drastic data centre operations. Keeping that in mind, here are a few Data Centre trends to watch out for: Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning have been driving a hardware arms race featuring more innovation than the chip sector has seen in years. AI is creating an "insatiable" demand for faster, more power-efficient computing hardware. Edge computing may be a technology paradigm that pushes core processing capacities to the actual area where it's required, frequently at the network's edges. This makes it conceivable to collect and analyze information "on location" instead of transmitting the knowledge back to the unified cloud for computation. Edge computing considers maximized operational efficiency, improved performance and safety, and limits downtime. Edge computing pushes computing power closer to devices. This, in turn, helps automate work and reduces the number of staff required for far-off locations. With such reduced bandwidth requirement and significantly lesser latency, Edge computing can handle massive amounts of data

and achieve quicker response time, as compared to cloud computing.

Cloud Enterprises will continue to shape the IT landscape for the times ahead. The ongoing IT migration from on-premises data centers to solo, cloud providers is a huge business and is still gaining momentum. The same holds for Cloud connectivity, whether software, platform or Infrastructure-as-a-Service; the cloud is an integral part of most corporations' IT strategy. With the introduction of 5G, few technologies will immediately get positively impacted upon. 5G offers two advantages. Firstly, lower network latency and secondly, higher speed of data transmission. The speed of data goes up to 20 gigabits per second, and it is 4X to 5X faster than 4G speeds. The high speed of data transmission leads to a lot of data available at the processing end and therefore becomes a big opportunity for AI-enabled applications. One of the most significant advantages of 5G is going to be on IOT devices. The big transformation for IOT devices will be that it would not just be a data collection unit but will transform itself into a decision-making unit. This will drastically reduce the cost of IoT devices. 5G will introduce a boom in the IOT devices market as it will combine the processing power with an ability to make autonomous decisions. This will create a significant impact on the world, which would have more processing power at the devices and create a hyper-connected world. 5G is expected to connect about 50 billion devices and making the hyper-connected world more intelligent with more data shared across. In the upcoming decade, we will see the implementation of Data Centre technologies more than ever. The world will continue to integrate the Internet of Things into daily life, which will result in the need for a more massive presence of Edge computing. 5G infrastructures will also be the standard for connectivity, which will allow us to create and share data at a scale never done before.

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Digital India Led to More Human-centric Approach to Development

With the Digital India initiative, India has witnessed a more human-centric approach to development, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi while addressing the Bengaluru Tech Summit on November 19. PM Modi inaugurated the Summit online through a video conference. Union Minister for Electronics & IT, Communications and Law & Justice, Ravi Shankar Prasad, along with Karnataka Chief Minister, BS Yeddiurappa was also present at the occasion. Prime Minister Narendra ModiThe PM said, using technology on such a large scale has brought about several changes for the citizens and the benefits are clearly visible. The government has not only created a market for digital and technological solutions but also made it a key part of all schemes. His governance model is 'technology first' and through technology, human dignity has been enhanced like crores of farmers receiving monetary support in one click and

successfully operating the world's largest healthcare scheme, Ayushman Bharat, the PM added. Further, he emphasised that technology ensured India's poor received proper & quick assistance even at the peak of the lockdown. The Prime Minister said the Government has used the power of data analytics to ensure better service delivery and efficiency. He remarked technology is the prime reason our schemes have transcended files and changed the lives of the people at such a speed and scale. He said due to technology we are able to provide electricity to all, cross toll booths faster, gives us the confidence to vaccinate a large population in a short period of time.

PM Modi praised the tech sector for showing its resilience during this pandemic. He highlighted that the amount of tech adoption that would not have happened in a decade, happened in just a few months. Work from anywhere has become the norm and is going to stay. A high amount of tech adoption will be seen in the fields of education, health, shopping, etc., he added. The Prime Minister said achievements of the industrial era are passed, and now we are in the middle of the information era. He said in the industrial era, change was linear but in the information era, change is disruptive. He stressed that unlike the industrial era, first-mover does not matter, the best-mover does matter in the information era. He said anyone can build a product any time that disrupts all existing equations of the market. The Prime Minister said India is uniquely positioned to leap ahead in the IT era. He said India has the best minds as well as the biggest market. He pointed out that our local tech solutions have the potential to go global. It is time for tech-solutions that are designed in India to be deployed for the world, he highlighted. On strengthening the tech ecosystem in the country, the PM added that the Government always tries to engage with stakeholders in the tech industry and chart out future-proof policy frameworks for India. The summit themed "Next is Now" was organised by the Government of Karnataka along with Karnataka Innovation and Technology Society (KITS), Karnataka government's Vision Group on Information Technology, Biotechnology & StartUp, Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) and MM Activ Sci-Tech Communications.

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PM Modi Inaugurates 7 Urban Infra Projects in Bihar

In another move towards transforming India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated & laid the foundation stones for seven projects worth Rs 541 crore to upscale the urban infrastructure in Bihar. Nitish Kumar, Chief Minister of Bihar was also present at the occasion. Of the projects rolled out by the PM today, four projects are related to water supply, two to sewerage treatment and one to riverfront development. PM Modi inaugurates 7 urban infra projects in Bihar Bihar Urban Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd. (BUIDCO) will be implementing the projects under the Urban Development and Housing Department of Bihar. Sewerage

treatment plants (STPs) built under Namami Gange at Beur and Karmalichak by Patna Municipal Corporation (PMC) was inaugurated by the PM. The PM also inaugurated water supply projects under Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) in Siwan Municipal Council and Chapra Municipal Corporation. Both these projects will help local residents get pure drinking water 24 hours a day. Also, he laid the foundation stone of the Munger water supply scheme under AMRUT. Jamalpur water supply Scheme, again under AMRUT, was inaugurated by the PM. Further, the PM through the videoconference also laid the foundation stone of Muzaffarpur Riverfront Development Scheme built under Namami Gange. Three ghats of Muzaffarpur, Poorvi Akhada Ghat, Seedhi Ghat and Chandwara Ghat will be developed under the project. Basic facilities like toilets, information kiosk, changing room, pathway, watchtower etc. will be made available at the riverfront. Proper security arrangements, signage and adequate lighting will be arranged for at these ghats. During the inauguration ceremony, PM Modi said that over 50 projects worth Rs 6000 crore have been approved in Bihar to keep river Ganga clean. Namami Gange project will change the lifestyle of the people, he added.

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Qlik Acquires Knarr Analytics to Expand Real-Time Collaboration Across Entire Data and Analytics Supply Chain

Qlik® today announced the acquisition of the assets and IP of Knarr Analytics, an innovative start-up that provides real-time collaboration, sophisticated data exploration and insight capture capabilities, to complement Qlik's cloud data and analytics platform. Acquiring Knarr Analytics advances Qlik's vision of Active Intelligence, where technology and processes trigger immediate action from real-time, up-to-date data to accelerate business value across the entire data and analytics supply chain. "Every process and decision can be informed and enhanced by real-time data to trigger action and augment decision making when it matters most – what we call Active Intelligence," said James Fisher, Chief Product Officer at Qlik. "Acquiring Knarr Analytics will help us further advance customers' Active Intelligence, enabling tighter collaboration between data stewards and business users that will increase data use and value throughout the organization." The need for real-time data-driven decision making, which requires merging and using new data sources on-demand, has exposed a gap in data and analytics supply chains. This gap requires a new way of thinking that centers on collaboration between all data and analytics personas, from data integrators and data stewards, to BI developers and analytics consumers. Knarr can help create a unique data and insight fabric by engaging more users throughout the analytical process, surfacing greater business context for both underlying data and resulting insights. This level of collaboration and sharing is essential to the creation of continuous intelligence at the core of Active

Intelligence that drives action and value from data.

Knarr IP will enhance the Qlik Sense® analytics cloud platform Insight Advisor experience, as well as the data exploration experience in the catalog. Qlik's customers will realize increased value and benefits through: A glossary in the catalog for added business context, helping data consumers understand what specific data will best help answer their questions. Real-time, multi-player collaboration to generate insights interactively with a team, helping organizations remove barriers between data and analytics users. Ability to capture and share these insights with notes and snapshots, while automatically capturing the exploration state and context, enriching understanding and driving action. Increased effectiveness through machine learning of Qlik's unique approach to Augmented Intelligence, helping drive more complex analysis and better outcomes for users of all levels. Terms of the deal are not being disclosed. Knarr Analytics co-founder and CTO Speros Kokenes, a Qlik Luminary, will be joining Qlik as a member of the Applied Research and Emerging Technology Team. As of today, Knarr Analytics products will no longer be for sale, and Qlik will support existing prospects and partners while bringing Knarr IP into Qlik's cloud platform throughout 2021.

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U-Rise: UP's Initiative to Aid Students with Academics & Jobs

In a significant move to empower the students in Uttar Pradesh to fetch good jobs easily, the Government of Uttar Pradesh launched 'U-Rise' portal on September 24. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath rolled out the online portal which hosts a database of around 20 lakh engineering and vocational courses students and aid them with study material and fetching employment. The portal holds data of the student from the time he/she gets enrolled on the portal until they get employed. Moreover, the portal hosts an e-library which can be accessed by students from anywhere. This enables the students to access quality study material even in the remotest districts of the state. U-Rise portal has been developed by Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Technical University and is a joint initiative by the technical education department, training and employment department and skill development mission. According to the CM, it was necessary to impart uniform education to all students in the state as that would bring about an equitable society. This is one of the major aims of launching U-Rise in the state.

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Zoho Books Aims to Capture Mid-Market with E-Invoicing and Other Advanced Features

Today, Zoho launched a new edition of its GST-compliant online accounting software Zoho Books for mid-market businesses. With Zoho Books Ultimate, companies that have a turnover of ₹ 1500 crore or more can generate e-invoices for every sales transaction and report them to the Invoice Registration Portal (IRP) starting from October. Businesses can also customize the underlying system to suit their needs, gain visibility into the performance of multiple branches, manage multiple GSTINs, simplify collaboration with suppliers, and get real-time business reports in a single place. With e-invoicing being introduced as a mandatory requirement, mid-market and large businesses will need a system that seamlessly integrates with the government portal, provide additional fields to capture QR code in addition to managing different aspects of their financial operations. Typically, to address these challenges, businesses have to invest heavily in implementing and customising their ERP systems. This is not only expensive and time-consuming but also complicated. With the capabilities launched today, Zoho Books offers a single, flexible, scalable accounting platform that is built to take care of compliance automatically. "When we launched our GST compliant accounting solution in 2017, we brought a new dimension to accounting software in India with a consumer-grade interface for finance functions and connected banking. With the new edition of Zoho Books, businesses in the mid-market space and beyond can bring innovative products and services to the market quickly. It addresses the latest e-invoicing requirements, allows businesses to manage their billing and finances remotely, streamlines collaboration with vendors, provides embedded analytics and customisation. These advanced capabilities push the envelope on what an accounting software can do while helping businesses future-proof their accounting and financial operations," said Prashant Ganti, Head of Product Management, Global Tax, Accounting, and Payroll solutions, Zoho Corp.

The highlights of this edition are: E-invoicing and new GST returns: Businesses can generate e-invoices and automatically report them to the IRP. They can also generate e-way bill and new GST returns (Sahaj and Sugam). Multiple GSTIN support: Businesses with multiple branches and multiple GSTINs can manage their accounting, generate GST returns and ensure GST compliance for each branch with a single account. Low-code customization platform: Businesses can customize Zoho Books according to their needs. This ensures that the system scales as the business grows. Supplier collaboration made easy: With the supplier portal, businesses can streamline collaboration by allowing suppliers to track purchase orders, invoices and payments from a single place. When both business owners and their suppliers use Zoho Books, they work from the same virtual network enabling automatic document exchange. This eliminates error-prone, manual data entry. Advanced business analytics: This edition comes with advanced business analytics that provides 75+ reports. Businesses can also create custom dashboards and interactive cross-functional reports with their sales, financial and operational data to gain quick insights for faster decision-making. In-built order management capabilities:

Businesses will have access to advanced inventory management features which enable them to integrate and process orders from Shopify, manage their sales transactions, orders, warehousing, fulfilment and product returns from Zoho Books. They can also sync sales from multiple channels, handle backorders and dropshipping. Streamlined employee payroll processing: Businesses can choose Zoho Payroll as an add-on to streamline their payroll processing, and automate the corresponding accounting entries in Zoho Books. Built in India, Zoho Books recently won the best app in the "Business" category in AtmaNirbhar Bharat App Innovation Challenge conducted by the government. All Zoho apps, including Zoho Books, are committed to protecting the data of its users, and therefore adhere to strict privacy and security standards. The data of Zoho's Indian users is stored in the company's data centres within the country.

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Flipkart Pledges 100% Transition to Electric Vehicles by 2030

E-commerce marketplace Flipkart on Tuesday said that it will transition its entire fleet to electric vehicles (EVs) within the decade by joining the non-profit Climate Groups global electric mobility initiative, EV100. The 'EV100; initiative brings together forward-looking companies committed to accelerating the transition to electric vehicles (EVs) and making electric transport the new normal by 2030. Flipkart said it will go for a phased integration of electric vehicles into its entire fleet -- directly owned or leased corporate fleets -- by 2030. This will be done through placing requirements in service contracts, installing charging infrastructure close to its 1,400 supply chain premises, conducting awareness programmes and incentivising delivery executives towards the use of electric vehicles. "With our scale & scope and intense focus on Sustainability agenda, we believe we can play a significant role in not just fast tracking the adoption of electric vehicles but also making clean mobility mainstream," Kalyan Krishnamurthy, CEO, Flipkart Group, said in a statement. Over the past year, Flipkart has worked towards creating a wide network of ecosystem partners across charging providers, regulators, policy makers, skill development agencies, aggregators and original equipment manufacturers to work on various areas. These include designing and the manufacturing of EVs optimised for e-commerce while supporting market demand for EVs to emerge as a mainstream mobility solution. "Flipkart will play a significant role in fostering innovation in technology and exchanging knowledge on e-mobility within our global network of committed businesses," said Divya Sharma, India Executive Director, Climate Group. "To help make swift emissions cuts and improve air quality for the long-term, we urge more Indian companies to follow suit, sending a powerful signal of support to policymakers wishing to see a faster roll-out of Evs." Flipkart said its initiative will support India's ambition of ensuring 30 per cent electric mobility by 2030.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 11/25/2020

Central-West Asia

KAZAKHSTAN: National Bank Talks COVID's Impact on IT Segment, Mobile Banking in Country

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the strengthening of the IT segment and the functionality of internet and mobile banking in the financial market of Kazakhstan, the National Bank of Kazakhstan told Trend. According to the bank, by the introduction of quarantine measures in Kazakhstan, the development of remote services has become a necessity, including in the banking sector. "For facilitating the market transition to remote customer service (when opening accounts, issuing payment cards, etc.), in April 2020, the National Bank in turn launched a pilot system for remote identification of bank customers. The basis of this system was the use of biometric tools for identifying citizens," the bank said. Also, to develop the national infrastructure of the financial market and create conditions for the development of the financial technology market, the Board of the National Bank of Kazakhstan adopted a resolution 'On approval of the concept for the development of financial technologies and innovations for 2020-2025', the bank noted. This resolution includes a description of global trends and prerequisites in the development of digital financial services, goals and key priorities in the field of financial technologies, strategic initiatives and approaches to their implementation, the bank said. According to the bank, the current positive dynamics of the development of non-cash payments remains on the Kazakhstani market. "Over the past four years, the volume of non-cash transactions increased 10 times and from January through July of this year amounted to 15.7 trillion tenge (\$37.1 billion). After the introduction of quarantine in the country in April, the volume of non-cash transactions decreased by 18 percent," the bank added. "However, already in May, this indicator grew by 33 percent. The total volume of transactions carried out from March through July 2020 amounted to 12.2 trillion tenge (\$28.8 billion), having soared over two times compared to the same period of 2019, the bank added.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 11/06/2020

Kazakhstan Considering Possibility of Creating Several New Digital Products

Kazakhstan is considering the possibility of creating a number of digital products within the Concept for the Development of Financial Technologies and Innovations from 2020 through 2025, the National Bank of Kazakhstan told Trend. "In general, the population is actively using the digital technologies," the bank added. "Digital"

literacy of the population is one of the factors ensuring the demand for the use of new technologies and contributing to the development of digitalization in the country." "The events aimed at increasing the level of awareness and competence of the population in the work with financial products, as well as in the digital sphere, are planned to be carried out within the abovementioned concept," the bank said. "The possibility of creating a number of digital products on financial literacy is being considered for the purpose of training, financial planning, consulting on financial literacy and protecting the rights of consumers of financial services," the bank said. At the same time, the Department for the Protection of the Rights of Financial Services operates at the Agency for Regulation and Development of Financial Market, which is the regulator of the financial sector. This department regularly carries out the work to improve the financial literacy of the population. "At the beginning of the year, about 20 million users were registered in the online services of banks, while after six months the number of online users reached more than 25 million," the bank said. "At the same time, about 12 million of these users are active." "Thus, every second non-cash transaction was carried out by the population online," the bank said. "At the same time, users conduct the non-cash transactions worth about 60 billion tenge (\$141.8 million) daily, which exceeds the same statistics indicators of 2019 by more than three times."

From <https://en.trend.az/> 11/07/2020

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Kazakhstan to Maximize Online Public Services by Year-End

At a meeting of the Government chaired by Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Askar Mamin, issues of improving the processes of providing public services were considered, Trend reports with reference to the press service of the government of Kazakhstan. Minister of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry of Kazakhstan Bagdat Musin reported on the provision of public services to the population in electronic form. "There are currently almost 700 services in the state register, of which 85.5 percent are online. Our goal is to bring this figure to 90 percent. Assessment of the quality of public services is in the competence of the Agency for Civil Service Affairs of Kazakhstan. According to the results of their public monitoring, it is clear that it is necessary to increase the level of satisfaction of the population with the quality of public services in the regions of our country," said Musin. "For this, a number of open questions stand before the Ministry of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry. For example, in order to receive government services, the population still continues to apply directly to a government agency or akimat. Now there are more than 200 such services.

For the analysis of the situation, the appeals from the population were examined together with the Prosecutor General's Office. It turned out that about 30 percent out of more than 2 million applications from citizens are actually requests for public

services,” said the minister. “Such statements are treated as ordinary treatment. This means that, in comparison with the Public Service Center (PSC), the deadlines are violated, because it is not registered in the monitoring system. And, of course, corruption factors aren’t excluded during personal contact. To solve this problem, it is proposed to consolidate the provision of public services with no alternative through the PSC or in electronic form,” Musin noted. “Today, eGOV provides about 600 services. Due to the large number of different services, it becomes difficult to make each service as simple as possible for the people. According to international practice, it was decided to bring online services to popular internet platforms. Registration of individual entrepreneurs on the applications of Kaspi.kz, Halyk Bank, Alfabank and Sberbank has already been launched and is working.

Also, other popular services are being implemented. At the same time, the problem is being solved according to the Pareto principle - 20 to 80, namely, on a systematic basis, the most popular public services are being optimized,” the minister added.

“For example, more than 3 million people turn to special PSCs every year. There are long queues. Despite the fact that car registration is available online, people come directly to the special center and spend several hours there. According to the new process, after a buyer transfers money to the buyer's account, the owner of the car changes immediately. Literally today, such a convenient service is in a pilot mode in the Kaspi.kz mobile application. The only services for the issuance of driver's licenses remain in the special centers,” said Musin. “We display the most requested documents in the EgovMobile application. In addition to identity cards, certificates of the registry office, driver's licenses and diplomas were added to the digital document service. The list of such documents will be constantly expanding. By the end of 2020, it is planned to exclude the issuance of up to 30 types of certificates,” Musin said. “A citizen will be able to share information directly from his/her phone. It is enough to show the QR code or send it through any available messenger.

Currently, more than 500 information systems and 1,500 integrations are in operation, which ensure the provision of e-services on eGOV. That is, the eGOV is only a front-end application as a single window,” said the minister. “It is necessary to increase the level of efficiency of information systems of state bodies up to 99.99%. It is very important. Within the framework of the concept of a "hearing state", the processes of rendering state services are discussed together with representatives of the public,” Musin noted. “For example, it was decided to cancel the need to apply to the military registration and enlistment office for military registration when changing the place of residence. Previously, if such a requirement was violated, a corresponding administrative fine was issued. When buying an apartment on a mortgage, registration of a mortgage is required. To do this, it is needed to take documents from the bank, provide them to the PSC. After 3 working days, pick up the documents from the PSC and return them to the bank again, only after which the mortgage is issued,” said the minister. “To solve such bureaucracy, together with

Forte, this complex process is automated using Blockchain technologies. Along with this, citizens are dissatisfied with the load on the Call Center 1414. For high-quality consulting, 2,000 PSC operators were involved in this work. And to reduce the waiting time for dialing, algorithms for answering frequently asked questions using artificial intelligence will be implemented,” added Musin.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 11/17/2020

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UZBEKISTAN: Number of ATMs and Information Kiosks Up 25.7%

The number of ATMs and information kiosks in Uzbekistan increased by 25.7% over the past 10 months - from 9.2 to 11.57 thousand, according to data from the Central Bank on November 1. About 26% of 3.03 thousand units belong to Kapital Bank. Agrobank and Halk Bank are in second and third place, with 1,8 and 1 thousand, respectively.

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State Statistics Committee discloses Tashkent's Contribution to Uzbekistan's GDP

Tashkent's contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) of Uzbekistan amounted to 15.6 percent from January through September 2020, the Uzbek State Statistics Committee said, Trend reports with reference to kursiv.uz website. The volume of the internal regional product of Tashkent in the reporting period exceeded 63.5 trillion soums, decreasing by 1.6 percent compared to the same period of last year. Since the beginning of the year, the growth rate of the construction industry in Tashkent reached 0.7 percent while the share of the sphere in GDP is 10.1 percent. There was a decrease in volumes in comparable prices in the industry and services sector, which amounted to 96 percent and 99.8 percent, respectively, compared to those from January through September 2019. The share of these sectors in GDP is 36.9 percent and 53 percent, respectively. GDP per capita in Tashkent exceeded 24.3 million soums and decreased by 4.7 percent.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 11/18/2020

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Uzbekistan Launches Production of Robots

Innovative Technopark Yashnobod in the capital of Uzbekistan has launched the production of robots and 3D printers, the press service of the Association Uzeltehsanoat said. The director of the technopark Farkhod Jumaev said that the

robot called Adbot has been produced only for export until today. Now one of the local banks has become the customer of the innovation. 3D printers are currently produced by the Green Code company. So far, the goods are supplied only to the domestic market. Yashnobod Technopark was inaugurated in August 2020 under the Ministry of innovative development of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The organization specializes in the development of high technologies and the production of competitive high-tech products.

From <https://uzreport.news> 11/23/2020

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Mirziyoyev Orders to Speed Up Digitalization of Energy Sector

Uzbekistan plans to implement 52 projects worth \$9bn to start deep processing of natural gas and produce value-added products, as well as create new jobs, the press service of the Uzbek president said on Wednesday. In particular, 15 projects are set to be implemented in the field of inorganic chemistry, 23 in organic chemistry, 12 in the production of polymers. One of the projects aims to establish an innovation center that will be engaged in research and development of new types of polymers, and the training of specialists. The projects would allow to launch production of \$4.1bn worth goods, replace import products worth \$1.1bn, ensure exports of value-added goods worth \$1.45bn, and create 6,500 new jobs. 2021 will see such promising projects as the organization of production of expanded polypropylene, wood-polymer composite sheets, hydrogen peroxide, reagents based on carboxymethylcellulose, sulphate acid, and soda from carbon dioxide. Work will begin on the second stage of the plant for the production of polyvinyl chloride, caustic soda and methanol, and the enterprise for the production of industrial oils for compressors. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev instructed to speed up work with foreign partners and investors for timely and high-quality implementation of projects. Uzbekistan produces around 60 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually, most of which are consumed domestically. Early this year, the Uzbek government said that it would stop natural gas exports by 2025 and start its deep processing domestically to expand the production of value-added products.

From <https://uzreport.news> 11/26/2020

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Uzbek Agriculture Expands to New Markets

Uzbekistan has received a phytosanitary permit to export agricultural products to a number of new countries, Uzdavkarantin inspection said November 26. From now on, the country can export radish to markets of the European Union, Japan and South Korea. Carrots can be exported to Japan and South Korea. Agricultural companies can now export onions to South Korea, the United States and Japan. Markets in

China, Japan, India, Myanmar and Ghana have opened up for Uzbek melons. Pistachios from Uzbekistan can be delivered to the markets of India, the Philippines, Japan, Bangladesh, Iran, Morocco, Pakistan and Jordan.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Population and Productivity Key to Economy

Treasury boss Steven Kennedy says it would be good to see Australia's migration levels return to normal levels, but he accepts the need to tread carefully as nations struggle to contain the coronavirus. Mr Kennedy used his first major speech since taking the role to argue this year's federal budget supported households and encouraged business investment, while also funding essential services such as health. But with international flights severely limited to stop coronavirus getting into the country, the budget numbers were also based on a significant cut in migration and falling population growth. Australia's net overseas migration is set to fall into negative territory for the first time since World War II. The budget papers predicted a loss of 72,000 people for the current financial year, with no return to positive levels until 2022/23. As well, the government will not increase the migration cap of 160,000 places per year.

"That leaves us smaller, slightly older and it means the level of GDP is lower," Dr Kennedy said. He said as Treasury worked on the next five-yearly intergenerational report - expected in 2021 - officials were thinking carefully about migration levels. "The government will approach that appropriately cautiously because the economic shock from second waves and from the virus spreading in an uncontained fashion are very significant," he said. "It would be good to see Australia's migration return to our previous levels but it has to be done with management of the virus." He said there was a lot of dynamism to be gained for the Australian economy through a vibrant migration program. The immediate priority in terms of international flights is getting Australians home, but then looking at students, business travellers and skilled migrants. Dr Kennedy said the government was giving active thought to safely scaling up migration.

"We have to take these things one step at a time because of the level of uncertainty that's in front of us. "But then, as the government has made clear, they will look at building the program more back to its usual levels." He said productivity would also be key to economic growth, but it was still unclear how the coronavirus shock would affect it. There has been some forced innovation, such as more businesses going online and working from home, but at the same time, there has been a lot of small business closures and reduced competition in some sectors. Dr Kennedy said the

smarter use of technology, regulatory reform, cutting the cost of doing business and insolvency reform would help. "The recovery will take time and there are new challenges for macro policy, but Australians can be confident that while bumpy, there is a clear path to recovery." Meanwhile, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported the trade balance in September increased \$3 billion to \$5.63 billion. It was the 33rd successive monthly trade surplus, with export values up four per cent and imports down six per cent.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 11/05/2020

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Minister Suggests Jobless 'Dip Their Toe'

The minister responsible for welfare payments is encouraging unemployed people to dip their toe in the jobs market as she prepares to cut JobSeeker by \$100 a fortnight. Social Services Minister Anne Ruston has again suggested inflated dole payments are discouraging people from seeking work, despite there being 12 applicants for every job vacancy. "We really want to encourage Australians to put their toe in the water and test their opportunity in the jobs market," Senator Ruston told the ABC on Wednesday. "But at the same time, we'll continue elevated levels of support from January through March recognising the jobs market is still shallow." Senator Ruston pointed to surveys from the National Skills Commission and small business lobby to back up her claim that employers are struggling to fill vacancies. But other studies have shown at least a dozen people are applying for each available job.

"We understand that this is not a blanket one size across the whole of the country," the minister said. "There are places around the country where we're seeing employers struggling to get workers, but we equally have places around the country where people who want jobs are struggling to get them." The maximum JobSeeker rate for single people with no children will fall to \$715 a fortnight from January 1. If the coronavirus supplement is abolished altogether at the end of March, the dole will return to the pre-pandemic rate of \$40 a day. Senator Ruston refused to say whether the jobless payment would return to that rate, which welfare organisations, business groups and economists have argued is far too low. "At the moment we're very focused on the here and now," she said. "Decisions about what happens after the end of March are a matter once we have a better understanding about what's happening around the country and the economic conditions and the labour market."

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Treasurer Aims to Save Jobs, Businesses

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg believes the federal government's new insolvency laws

will help keep businesses operating and Australians in jobs. The laws, first announced in September, aim to help small businesses to survive the impact of the coronavirus. "As the economy continues to recover it will be critical that distressed businesses have the necessary flexibility to either restructure or to wind down their operations in an orderly way," Mr Frydenberg said, introducing legislation to parliament on Thursday. The legislation will come in effect from January 1 once passed by the parliament and will assist in the debt restructuring process for small business while providing faster and lower cost liquidation. It came as new research found 42 per cent of employees believe their finances have been negatively impacted by the coronavirus pandemic through business and employment disruption.

Only one in 10 Australians, whose employment or business had not been impacted or benefited through COVID-19, reported a positive impact on their financial situation. More worrying, the AMP 2020 financial wellness report found 50 per cent of all Australians reported some level of stress about their finances. It found 1.8 million Australian workers have suffered either severe or moderate financial stress in 2020, a figure that is likely to worsen as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to take its toll. One in five female employees reported severe or moderate levels of financial stress, almost double the figure recorded for male workers. AMP calculated the cost to the economy is \$30.9 billion annually due to employee distraction and absenteeism, while modelling suggests the stress impact of the pandemic could drain a further \$4.4 billion.

"Australians continue to suffer the debilitating effects of financial stress, which is taking a huge personal toll on mental and physical wellbeing, particularly for younger women and single parents," AMP director of workplace super Ilaine Anderson said. "While COVID-19 is understandably creating significantly more anxiety for those directly impacted and blurring work and home life, the research shows that financial stress remains a systemic issue in Australian society." National Australia Bank chief economist Alan Oster warns the economic outlook will remain "bumpy". NAB is predicting the September quarter national accounts due in early December will show the economy expanding by three per cent after the steep seven per cent contraction in June quarter. However, future quarters are not so clear.

"We have still got the issue about what is going to happen as some of things like JobKeeper, etcetera, fade away and also as unemployment goes up," he said in a NAB podcast update on its economic forecasts. In parliament, Mr Frydenberg was asked by shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers to confirm jobs were lost in the fortnight after the JobKeeper wage subsidy was pared back in September. "I can confirm that the unemployment ticked up to 6.9 per cent," he replied. But he also pointed out that both Dr Chalmers and Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese had previously supported the tapering of such payments.

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Woolworths Commits to Green Energy by 2025

Supermarket giant Woolworths has committed to source 100 per cent of its electricity from renewable sources by 2025. Australia's largest retailer, which consumes around one per cent of the nation's electricity, announced the commitment in a statement on Thursday. It's the latest Australian company to join the global RE100 movement which brings together businesses around the world that are committed to 100 per cent renewable power. Woolworths Group CEO Brad Banducci said the company was proud to contribute to a greener future. "Moving to 100 per cent renewable electricity is the right thing to do, and something a growing number of our customers, team members and shareholders expect us to lead on. "We use around one per cent of Australia's national electricity, so we have a unique opportunity to use our scale for good and make a real impact," he said.

The company planned to invest tens of millions of dollars into renewable energy partnerships and prioritise new green energy projects to spur growth in the industry and new jobs in the sector, he said. "We believe this will not only be a positive for our business, but also contribute to a better tomorrow by making green energy accessible to more Australians." Woolworths will expand its network of solar panels at more than 150 locations and sign power purchase agreements with wind and solar energy providers. Greenpeace applauded the move saying it gave Woolworths the energy edge on rival Coles, which it urged to follow suit. Greenpeace REenergise Campaign Director Lindsay Soutar said Woolworths was the latest Australian brand giant, including ALDI, Bunnings, Officeworks and Telstra, to step up and set a strong renewable electricity target.

Woolworths has also committed to become net positive by 2050, meaning that it will be drawing down emissions from other sources. "What Woolies does matters. There are over 1000 Woolworths supermarkets and metro stores, and 3000 stores across the group including Big W and Dan Murphy's, which employ more than 215,000 people," she said. Woolworths going 100 per cent renewable put solar and wind power at the heart of Australian communities across the country, she said. "Businesses like Woolies know that wind and solar just make sense. They stand to make huge savings on electricity bills, she said. The 14 Australian members of RE100 include: Woolworths Group, Westpac, Suncorp, QBE, NAB, Mirvac, Macquarie, Interactive, Dexus, Commonwealth bank, BINGO Industries, Bank Australia, Atlassian and ANZ. More than 70 international companies with operations in Australia are also members of RE100.

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PM Announces Millions for Asian Recovery

Australia will invest hundreds of millions of dollars to boost post-COVID-19 economic recovery across Southeast Asia, Prime Minister Scott Morrison has announced. Mr Morrison committed \$232 million for environment, infrastructure, cyber, critical technologies and scholarships in a speech on Saturday at the virtual summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. He told the 10 member nations that the pandemic had forced change in the region but that Australia was committed to the "sovereign, independent states, resilient to coercion". "As your first dialogue partner we are also your partner in the great recovery that is now occurring," Mr Morrison said. "ASEAN's centrality is at the core of Australia's vision for the Indo-Pacific." Australia will also inject \$70 million for infrastructure development, plus \$65 million for maritime states to address regional challenges through training and technical advice, a separate statement from the prime minister said.

A further \$104 million will go towards the region's emerging security needs, including military education, infectious diseases, cyber resilience, maritime security and English language training, Mr Morrison said. Australia will open an liaison office in Myanmar's capital Nay Pyi Taw and expand its defence network to cover all ASEAN countries. The ASEAN members are: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia. Mr Morrison reiterated his commitment of \$500 million over three years to support access to COVID-19 vaccines across the region. He said the investment would include \$21 million to establish the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases, as well as an additional \$24 million to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. "In Australia we understand that your prosperity is our prosperity," he said in his speech.

The related East Asia Summit was also underway on Saturday and the prime minister said in a statement Australia would inject \$46 million to implement the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the ASEAN-Australia and New Zealand free trade agreement. The RCEP is a treaty creating the world's largest economic alliance and Mr Morrison is expected to be one of the signatories to it on Sunday. RCEP partner countries account for 58 per cent of Australia's trade and 66 per cent of exports. Australia, Japan, China, South Korea, the 10 members of ASEAN and New Zealand will be part of the deal, and a clause will allow India to join later. Benefits expected include better access into the region for exports of services such as telecommunications, professional and financial services, improved ways to tackle non-tariff barriers such as customs procedures, quarantine and technical standards and greater investment certainty for businesses.

As well, there are expected to be improved rules on e-commerce to make it easier for businesses to trade online and a common set of rules on intellectual property. At Thursday's opening ceremony, Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc said peace and security were under increasing threat in the region. Mr Morrison and other leaders are expected to discuss tensions in the South China Sea and the Korean

Peninsula as well as the spread of disinformation across the region.

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Australia in World's Biggest Trade Pact

Australia is entering into the biggest trade agreement ever, a 15-nation partnership that accounts for nearly a third of global output. Prime Minister Scott Morrison and his Trade Minister Simon Birmingham will sign the regional comprehensive economic partnership on Sunday, an agreement that covers around 30 per cent of the world's population. "This is a huge accomplishment," Senator Birmingham told reporters in Canberra. "This is an incredibly important agreement in terms of the timing ... we see huge pressures globally on the trading system and of course pressures Australia faces too." Aside from goods trading, the agreement also provides a common set of rules for digital trade and intellectual property, while providing better market access for Australia's services industries - such as financial services, health care and education.

Senator Birmingham is disappointed that India is not part of the final agreement, but says it still provides a huge platform for Australia to deliver more exports, creating more jobs. However, he welcomed the fact Australia and China have been partners in this agreement, which has been eight years in the making. "It is an important sign of our willingness to work in regional cooperation and regional economic partnership," Senator Birmingham said. "There are difficulties at present and I am deeply concerned by the fact that in a number of areas Chinese regulatory actions have disrupted trade flow." Australia, Japan, China, South Korea, New Zealand and the 10 members of ASEAN will be part of the deal. Business groups saw the trade agreement as critical for Australia's recovery from the COVID-19 recession.

"Australians need jobs and selling more of our world class products and services to the world is one of the best ways we can create them," Business Council of Australia chief executive Jennifer Westacott said. "Our success over the last 30 years has been built on trade and investment with Asia. This agreement will help lock in a new wave of growth and new jobs just when we need it most." Australian Industry Group chief executive Innes Willox said the agreement will put Australia and the Asia Pacific region at the forefront of modern trade rules. "While the FTA gives limited new market access to individual markets, the uniform rules for trading in the region will support regional supply chains and improve the international competitiveness of Australian companies," he said.

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Australian Recovery Sustainable: Moody's

Australia is unlikely to suffer a lasting drop in economic growth, despite being hit by its largest economic contraction on record due to the COVID-19 pandemic, global rating agency Moody's Investors Service says. Next week's national accounts are expected to show the economy grew in the September quarter after being whacked by a seven per cent contraction three months earlier, which marked the first recession in nearly 30 years. Moody's, which rates Australia triple-A with a stable outlook, does not expect a weakening in the nation's budget position over the longer-term either. "The broad diversification of Australian industry, and the flexibility and competitiveness of the economy will support a sustainable recovery over the next few years, with limited likelihood of severe financial stress destabilising the economy," Moody's senior credit officer Martin Petch says.

However, a major driver of Australia's potential growth rate will be the extent to which productivity growth picks up from the relatively weak levels experienced before the pandemic. Mr Petch says the government's substantial stimulus package highlights Australia's flexibility and capacity to use fiscal policy to support its credit profile in a difficult global economic environment. "Fiscal metrics will weaken but remain in line with rating peers," he says. He said Australia also had a strong track record of fiscal consolidation following periods of expansionary policy. While the debt burdens of states will climb in the fiscal year ending June 2021, Moody's does not foresee a material weakening in the sovereign credit profile as a result. "Rather, Moody's expects state governments will remain their resolve to implement additional budgetary discipline once the pandemic has passed," the rating agency said on Wednesday.

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Fear Persistent in Child Services: Inquiry

The fear of asking an agency for help that has the power to remove children from families is persistent in NSW, an inquiry has heard. The first royal commission hearing examining the experiences of Indigenous people with a disability and their contact with child protection services continued in Brisbane on Wednesday. NSW Department of Communities and Justice secretary Michael Coutts-Trotter told the hearing fears were held by both staff and families. He said parents were afraid of having children taken "for no good reason", while staff feared contributing to the serious injury or death of a child. Commissioners heard there has been a 42 per cent reduction of children in out of home care in NSW between 2015/15 and 2018/19. The number of Aboriginal children in out of home care has fallen by 35 per cent and there continues to be a significant over-representation.

Mr Coutts-Trotter told the hearing better integration with services such as housing contributed to the decline. He agreed the presence of child safety workers was not always perceived as benign when families received in-home support and said there needed to be an increase in the proportion of services provided by Aboriginal organisations. Commissioners heard there has not been an evaluation on the effect on parents of fear of the department. Earlier an Aboriginal mother with a disability, speaking under the pseudonym Kate, told the hearing she was afraid to contact the department when pregnant with her fourth child. Commissioners heard her first three children were removed and she was scared it would happen again if she made contact. With the help of NSW organisation the Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS), Kate notified the department in the early stages of her pregnancy.

A prenatal case worker supported her through her pregnancy and after the birth of her child, and no action was taken to remove the baby. Kate told the hearing the department needed to give First Nations parents with disabilities a chance to look after their child and "not just rip them away". IDRS parent advocate Julia Wren told the hearing it was easier for a parent to keep a child rather than go through reunification. She said it was best to contact the department early during a pregnancy to organise a prenatal worker and address any concerns before the baby was born. However, commissioners heard it could be arduous dealing with the department and organising a case worker. "I was hassling the prenatal worker nearly on a daily basis in the end," Ms Wren said. Twenty-five witnesses are scheduled to give evidence during the week-long hearing of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

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Union Concerns over Retail Wage Change

Thousands of young retail workers will earn the full adult rate of pay after the wages umpire scrapped junior rates for some levels of employment. The Fair Work Commission has decided junior employee rates will no longer apply to retail workers at level four and above. Retail union nation secretary Gerard Dwyer said previous arrangements discriminated against adult and junior workers. "Junior employees could be favoured over adults because of the lower rates," he said in a statement on Wednesday. "On the other hand, it discriminated against junior workers because they were doing the work of an adult and getting a lower rate of pay." But the retailers' union is worried the judgement will cost young people a shot at landing a job by forcing them to compete with more experienced, adult workers. The appearance of fairness masked the reality that junior applicants would be left to fight for the same positions as more seasoned employees, Australian Retailers Association chief executive Paul Zahra said.

"We are also concerned that the main effect of the decision will be to reduce the opportunities available for young Australians to find secure work, and make it more prohibitive for retailers to train young staff," he said. "Junior rates provide a proven benefit for young Australians seeking employment early in their lives, providing an incentive for retailers looking to give opportunities to applicants which lack the training and experience of their established peers." Mr Zahra said the decision demonstrated the commission was "out of touch" with the economic plight businesses in the sector are facing. "We are in the first recession for almost three decades and it's disappointing to see the Fair Work Commission continue to elevate the costs of employing staff," he said.

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Pressure on to Get More Australians Home

Renewed focus on the plight of stranded Australians trying to return home has prompted the Morrison government to defend its efforts. Health Minister Greg Hunt said work was under way to double the fortnightly quarantine capacity at the Northern Territory's Howard Springs facility to 1000 people. The government is pointing the finger at state limits on hotel quarantine capacity for preventing more Australians returning. "We've exceeded our targets of bringing Australians home, but as is the case, always there are more people looking to come home," Mr Hunt told reporters in Canberra on Friday. "The outside world is not a safe place. "As we head towards December and Christmas, there will be outbreaks inevitably in Australia whilst we're in contact with a world that has more than half a million cases a day."

Mr Hunt said Australia's vaccine timetable was unchanged after AstraZeneca said it would likely run additional trials to test the effectiveness of its medicine. Australian authorities had to help about 30 Australians find new flights home after their flight from San Francisco was cancelled on the tarmac, leaving them unsure when they would make it home. More than 36,000 people are registered to return to the country, with the foreign affairs department classifying 8070 as vulnerable. Labor is urging the federal government to stop pointing the finger at state-run hotel quarantine and do more to help isolate arrivals. "These are real issues affecting real Australians right now and we have a government that maintains complacency," Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese told reporters in Sydney. Further repatriation flights are planned to depart Europe before Christmas.

More than 426,000 people have returned since Australia's borders were closed in March, with 30,000 on government-facilitated flights. Victoria has on Friday officially eliminated the virus after four weeks without a new case. The state will on December 7 restart its hotel quarantine system, which was the source of the deadly outbreak that locked down Melbourne for months. But the state government is confident the

revamped program will be different to last time after intense scrutiny through a major inquiry. South Australia didn't record any new cases on Friday, keeping its cluster to 31 cases. The state's border with Victoria will reopen from next Tuesday, with a raft of restrictions including limits on funerals eased. Tasmania is retaining a travel ban on SA but has opened to Victorians. Telehealth will also be permanently subsidised through Medicare after initially starting as a pandemic measure.

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Summer Energy Supply Will Meet Demand Peak

Australia's east coast will have enough electricity to meet peak demand this summer, according to the market operator's latest forecast. The Australian Energy Market Operator(AEMO) plan for summer, released Friday, says new wind and solar installations have increased supply, while peak demand should not be as high as last summer. An extra 3400 megawatts of large-scale renewable power will be online compared to last summer, along with an extra 2000 MW of rooftop solar. AEMO chief operations officer Michael Gatt says heatwave and bushfire conditions should also be less intense, but they still pose a significant risk to the system. "There is also an increased risk of tropical cyclones and flooding," Mr Gatt said. The energy market is also facing uncertainties around COVID-19. While the virus has led to an overall drop in energy demand, it's also made it harder to forecast peak energy use, especially as people stop working from home and return to city offices.

The AEMO's summer forecast also hinges on current generator maintenance being completed before Christmas. Meanwhile, the Victorian government this week allocated \$543 million to fund six new renewable energy zones in its state budget. The money will go to upgrading transmission lines and other improvements to the network so that wind, solar, and pumped hydro can feed more energy into the grid. Earlier this month, Victoria announced it would build the biggest battery in the southern hemisphere near Geelong. The 300 MW Tesla battery is twice the size of SA's battery installation, and should be operational by the end of next year. Also on Friday, the global wind turbine company Vestas announced it would supply wind turbines for two Victorian wind farm projects, expected to power about 120,000 homes.

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NEW ZEALAND: To Steer APEC's Work Towards Recovery

In times of unprecedented health and economic crises, New Zealand, one of the twelve founding members of APEC, assumes the role of host in 2021, taking the

leadership from Malaysia, the host of APEC 2020. The host year will be held fully virtual, as announced in June this year, demonstrating New Zealand's leadership in digital diplomacy amidst the global pandemic. "As we plan for recovery from COVID-19, it is economic cooperation through APEC, the most dynamic region in the world's economy that will help us all rebuild," said New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, in a video introducing the New Zealand's APEC year presented at the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting last Friday.

Prime Minister Ardern, who will be the chair of the 2021 APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting acknowledged the extraordinary scale of the challenges the world faces today, and stressed the need for member economies to work together for the greater good. She explained that New Zealand will create an environment where connections can be made and APEC's important work can continue, including progress on sustainability, ensuring widespread adoption of digital tools to drive productivity and developing inclusive plans to create opportunities for all the people. "The way we respond as a region to today's challenges will be felt for generations to come," added Prime Minister Ardern. "APEC 2021 New Zealand will be the start of reigniting growth, continuing trade and setting a plan for long-lasting recovery across the entire region."

Speaking at a virtual briefing on Monday, Vangelis Vitalis, 2021 Chair of APEC Senior Officials and Deputy Secretary of Trade and Economic, New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade emphasized the importance of more cooperation in times of crisis, noting that trade is "an absolute vital part" to the journey of recovery. "We are hoping to take a closer look at the trade and economic policies that we need to drive recovery and to take us forward," he explained. "We would also like to propel more discussion on not only how we can build back better, but to build back greener and more inclusively, so that the recovery will be much more resilient and sustainable." Vitalis, who will be leading the technical discussions next year, also highlighted the importance of the digital and innovation aspect in driving recovery, improving productivity and efficiency and keeping the engagement and connectivity alive during periods of border closings and lockdowns.

"We look forward to a successful virtual APEC year as New Zealand continues the successful work laid by Malaysia this year, including to develop a work program for the implementation of the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040," said Executive Director of the APEC Secretariat, Dr Rebecca Sta Maria. "We stand ready to fully support New Zealand in its vision to pave the way for a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable APEC region." New Zealand will begin its host year with a symposium and the Informal Senior Officials Meeting in December 2020, followed by the first formal gatherings of senior officials early next year. For more information on APEC 2021 New Zealand, visit www.apec2021nz.org. To access media pack, please visit this link.

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5、 Public Finance

Asia-Pacific

COVID-19 Crisis Threatens Sustainable Development Goals Financing

According to the OECD's latest Global Outlook on Financing for Sustainable Development, developing countries are facing a shortfall of USD 1.7 trillion in the financing they would need this year to keep them on track for the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as governments and investors grapple with the health, economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. The report says developing countries are set to see a USD 700 billion drop in external private finance in 2020 and a gap of USD 1 trillion in public spending on coronavirus recovery measures compared to what is being spent in advanced economies, where governments have a greater capacity to borrow. The drop in private finance comes from a fall in portfolio investments, foreign direct investment and a decline in remittances sent home by migrant workers. "Financing for sustainable development is at risk of collapse when it is needed more than ever. COVID-19 is erasing years of development progress and causing major setbacks to all sources of finance for developing countries under stress, many of which entered the crisis with already severe structural impediments," said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría, presenting the report at a high-level meeting of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee. "With COVID-19 already reversing development advances and many challenges still ahead, it is urgent that we redesign global finance to incentivise sustainable investment and step up our efforts to help developing countries recover from the crisis in an inclusive, resilient and sustainable manner."

The projected USD 1.7 trillion shortfall for 2020 adds to an existing gap of USD 2.5 trillion in annual financing for developing countries towards achieving the 17 SDGs by 2030. Meanwhile, 90 out of 122 developing countries are now in economic recession as the virus hurts sectors like tourism, manufacturing and commodities. The pandemic also risks putting pressure on flows of development aid from advanced to developing economies. At USD 379 trillion, global financial assets are at their highest value since before the global financial crisis, yet 80% of these assets are held in advanced economies and a lack of universally accepted criteria means that little is known about their sustainable development and climate impact, the report says. Just 20% of financial assets are held in developing countries, where more than 80% of people on the planet live. According to the report, reallocating just

1.1% of the total assets held by banks, institutional investors or asset managers – USD 4.2 trillion – would be sufficient to fill the gap in SDG financing.

Fixing the inefficiencies in financial and taxation systems that enable money to drain away from developing countries through tax evasion and avoidance and high remittance transfer fees (which averaged 7% over 2017-19) would help to improve the geographic distribution of assets. The report also calls for better incentives to guide financing, increased transparency and accountability of finance flows, and a systemic solution to developing country debt to avert liquidity problems, ensure access to capital markets and preserve banking stability. Building on the Global Outlook's findings, the OECD is working with the United Nations to design a framework to improve alignment of global finance with the SDGs. For further information journalists are invited to contact Catherine Bremer in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 45 24 80 97). 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

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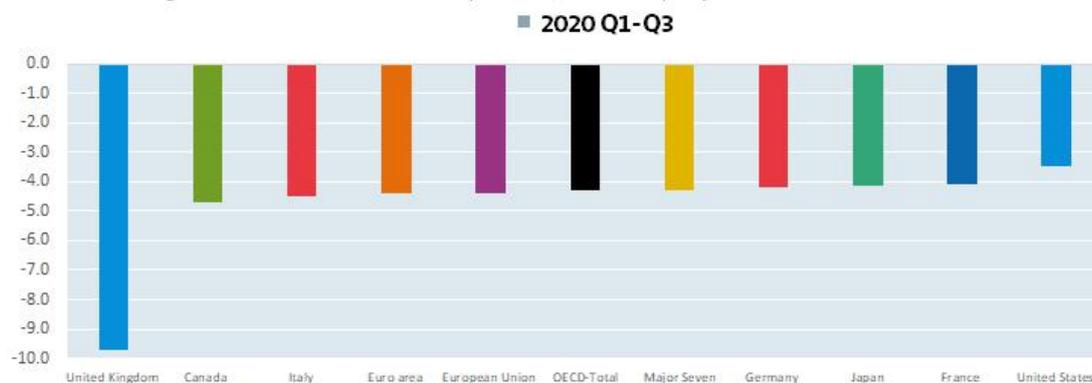
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OECD GDP Rebounded by 9.0% in the Third Quarter of 2020 but Remains Below Pre-Pandemic High

Following the unprecedented falls in real gross domestic product (GDP) in the first half of the year in the wake of COVID-19 containment measures, GDP in the **OECD area** rebounded by 9.0% in the third quarter of 2020 but it remains 4.3% below its pre-crisis high. Among the **Major Seven** economies, GDP in the third quarter rebounded most strongly in those economies that also saw the sharpest falls in the second quarter by: 18.2% in **France**, (following a contraction of 13.7%), 16.1% in **Italy** (following a contraction of 13.0%) and 15.5% in the **United Kingdom** (following a contraction of 19.8%). GDP also rebounded in all other major economies: in **Canada** (by 10%, following a contraction of 11.5% in the previous quarter), **Germany** (8.2%, minus 9.8%), **Japan** (5.0%, minus 8.2%) and the **United States** (7.4%, minus 9.0%). In the **euro area** and the **European Union**, GDP increased by 12.6% and 11.6% respectively, following contractions of 11.8% and 11.4% in the previous quarter. GDP remained significantly below the levels of a year earlier in the **OECD area** as whole (minus 4.1%) and in all **Major Seven** economies, with the **United States** (minus 2.9%) recording the smallest annual fall and the **United Kingdom** (minus 9.6%) the largest.

Gross domestic product

Cumulative growth rate over the last 3 quarters, seasonally adjusted data



Note: As a consequence of measures put in place by governments to reduce the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), many statistical agencies are facing unprecedented collection, compilation and methodological challenges to develop indicators across a number of domains. To address these challenges, the statistical community is developing guidance, both conceptual and practical, to help ensure the continued delivery of timely and reliable statistics. However, in some cases, there will inevitably be an impact on quality and, as such, the statistics included in this press release may be subject to larger, and more frequent, than normal revisions.

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East Asia

CHINA: To Advance RMB Internationalization Steadily and Prudently

China aims to promote the internationalization of its currency, the renminbi (RMB), in a steady and prudent manner, according to the full text of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's development proposals made public on Tuesday. The country will stick to the market-driven approach, allow companies to make their own choices, and create a new type of relations of mutually beneficial cooperation based on the free usage of RMB, the document said. The document, 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, was adopted at the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee which closed on Oct. 29.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/03/2020

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China Vows to Further Strengthen Financial Support for Real Economy

China will continue to encourage financial institutions to make interest concessions appropriate for the real economy with more targeted measures, a senior official said Friday. The country will intensify efforts to better implement preferential policies and make more targeted and effective measures to bolster the real economy, Liu Guoqiang, vice governor of the People's Bank of China, told a press conference. In the first 10 months of this year, the financial system has helped firms save a total of 1.25 trillion yuan (about 188.7 billion U.S. dollars) through cuts in interest rates and bank charges, and other monetary policy tools, he said. It is expected that the country will meet its annual target to help businesses save 1.5 trillion yuan, Liu added.

To stabilize economic fundamentals and help enterprises amid the COVID-19 epidemic, China has rolled out a raft of measures to reduce financing costs for these firms and step up interest rate reforms. "These policies are taking effect and market confidence is being restored," Liu said, pledging that the country will adhere to prudent monetary policies in a more flexible and appropriate way, and enhance financial support for the real economy. China saw an accelerated recovery in its production and business activities, with the manufacturing purchasing managers' index standing at 51.4 in October, slightly down from 51.5 in September but above the market expectation of 51.3, earlier official data showed.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/06/2020

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Financial Institutions Criticized for Raising Financing Cost of Small Businesses

Several Chinese banking, insurance and credit institutions have been criticized for charging excessive fees on loans to small and micro businesses, in violation of regulations aimed at lowering financing cost for the firms. Targeted inspections by the General Office of the State Council and China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission (CBIRC) found that some branches of Industrial and Commercial Bank of China and China Minsheng Bank had charged fees that should have been abolished for loan issuance to small and micro businesses. An inclusive financing company under Ping An Insurance (Group) Company of China Ltd. and Industrial Bank Co., Ltd. bundled insurance sales when extending loans to businesses to charge high service fees, according to a statement by the regulator. The CBIRC urged financial institutions to enhance support for businesses to help firms get over difficulties, and not to attach unreasonable conditions. The regulator vowed to act against practices that flout regulations.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 11/21/2020

JAPAN: To Spur Carbon-Cutting Investment with Tax Breaks

The Japanese government has begun weighing the introduction of tax incentives for investments in products and equipment that reduce carbon emissions, Nikkei has learned, as it works toward its goal of zero greenhouse gas output by midcentury. The central government, along with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, will also explore setting up a fund that would support research and development toward such green investing. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga unveiled the net-zero emissions goal last month and instructed relevant government agencies to explore policy options. The tax incentives and the fund are set to be included in the tax revision outline for the next fiscal year, as well as in the third supplementary budget for the current fiscal year. Japan used to be ahead of the curve in the 20th century when it came to energy efficiency and battery technology. But in this century, the nation has lagged behind setting environmental goals, and domestic corporations have lost competitive advantage.

Currently, the top three solar cell companies are based in China. Offshore wind farms are considered a growth industry, but the leading businesses for wind turbines are headquartered outside of Japan. Japanese companies are expected to reform themselves in tune with the global trend toward environmental responsiveness. Suga has positioned the environment as a pillar for Japan's growth. Under that banner, he plans to encourage technological innovations and investments in renewable energy and similar domains and support the development of next-generation industries. The main feature of the incentives are tax cuts for adding production equipment. If a company invests in equipment that manufactures wind turbines, for example, the business would be able to claim an exemption from the corporate tax at a certain percentage. The government will determine how much the tax exemption will be and the qualifying targets by the end of the year. Policymakers are looking at three possible sectors.

From <https://newsonjapan.com> 11/15/2020

Large-Scale Tests of Digital Currencies to Start in FY21 in Japan

A panel in which Japan's three megabanks are participating have been examining the effects of cryptocurrencies and the challenges of implementing them, with plans for large-scale experimentation in fiscal 2021. More than 30 companies and organizations, including NTT Group, East Japan Railway Co., Seven & i Holdings Co. and Kansai Electric Power Co., are considering joining the experiments. They will be divided into more than 10 groups such as retailers, electric power companies and

insurance firms, and will start tests aiming to put cryptocurrencies to practical use for each respective group in and after fiscal 2022. The retailers' group, for instance, plans to hold an experiment where transport companies and suppliers fees' are paid with digital currency. Payments between these companies are usually made at the end of the month, creating a time lag between deliveries and payments. The retailers plan to build a system in which digital currencies are used to issue payments immediately upon delivery of goods or products. Such systems can also reduce the hassle of cash management or making bank transfers.

The digital currencies used in the experiments will be designed by IT company DeCurret Inc., using blockchain technology, which makes data practically immutable and tamper-proof. Banks will be in charge of issuing and managing digital currencies. Several digital currencies will be used in the experiments, but under a unified basic framework enabling them to be exchanged with one another. The panel was launched in June to discuss challenges and solutions in the field of digital currencies. The experiments to be conducted in Japan are exceptionally large in terms of, for example, the number of participating companies. Overseas, the public and private sectors are accelerating moves to issue digital currencies. Facebook Inc. is preparing to launch the Libra digital currency and China began large-scale demonstration tests of its own digital currency, the digital renminbi, last month.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 11/22/2020

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Maintain Local Economic Support Through Regional Bank Realignment

The government and the Bank of Japan have come up with a series of new measures to help regional banks reorganize. Each regional bank must begin full-fledged discussions on how to strengthen its management foundation based on the measures. A special measures law in conjunction with the Antimonopoly Law has come into effect to make it easier for regional banks in the same region to integrate their operations. So far, it has been difficult to reorganize regional banks if their market share in the region would reach a high percentage after a merger, but the Antimonopoly Law would not be applied to such cases under certain conditions. In addition, the Financial Services Agency intends to establish a new system as early as next summer to provide subsidies to regional banks and other financial institutions that will integrate their operations. An initial cost of about ¥10 billion is said to be required to integrate computer systems in a reorganization. About one-third of the cost is planned to be subsidized under the new system. The central bank has decided to pay additional interest of 0.1% annually on current accounts of regional banks and other financial institutions held at the central bank after their integration of operations or cost reductions. This can be said to be a substantial provision of funds to them.

While major banks have been consolidated mainly into three megabanks, there are still 101 regional banks. It is important for the government and the central bank to support their reorganization. For the first-half period ending in September 2020, about 60% of 78 listed regional banks reported either a decline or a loss in their net income. In addition to the deteriorating business environment caused by the declining population and shrinking profit margins due to ultralow interest rates, the spread of the novel coronavirus has led to an increase in reserves for failure of their borrowers and other situations. If the impact of the coronavirus is prolonged, the burden on reserves could increase. There is a fear that such a situation could deal a further blow to local economies, mainly through banks' reluctance to extend loans. Realignment of regional banks such as by mergers would be an effective way to break the deadlock. The larger the scale of a business becomes, the more efficient its operations can be, making it easier to provide comprehensive financial services.

Local companies are asking regional banks not only for funds but also for help in finding customers and sales destinations, introducing management personnel and promoting digitization. There are also strong calls on regional banks for greater involvement in these companies' management through capital investment, and for cooperation in revitalizing their businesses and finding successors. Regional banks are required to respond to such needs and contribute to the vitalization of local communities. Promotion of the reorganization of regional banks is a key policy of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, but transparency is also essential. It is extremely unusual to provide subsidies that do not require repayment, or pay additional interest to financial institutions. It is important for the government to thoroughly explain its aims and effects to the public. It is necessary to avoid causing inconvenience to local users in the realignment of regional banks. If regional banks promote the elimination and consolidation of their branches, it is advisable for them to consider expanding cooperation with Japan Post Co., which has a network of post offices.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 11/27/2020

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S. KOREA: Eyes \$2tr in Trade by 2030

South Korea will seek to raise the value of its trade to \$2 trillion by 2030 by pushing for the digitalization of its trade infrastructure, the industry ministry said Friday. South Korea, Asia's fourth-largest economy, will also push to hike the number of small and medium-sized exporting companies to 200,000 by that year. The ministry unveiled the ambitious plan during an expanded trade strategy coordination meeting chaired by Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun. "A structural innovation is needed to make a new leap to the milestone," Industry Minister Sung Yun-mo said at the meeting. "South Korea should create new exporters and markets in line with trade digitalization and the spread of an untact economy due to the coronavirus pandemic." In order to

achieve the long-term trade volume target, the ministry said, it will push to establish a global online platform for electronic contract signings and settlements, among other things. The plan comes as South Korea's trade value has been hovering around \$1 trillion since breaking that mark in 2011, with the number of smaller exporting companies failing to pass the 100,000 level after surpassing 90,000 in 2016. In particular, South Korea's trade is unlikely to reach the \$1 trillion mark in 2020 due to the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic and a Sino-US trade row. South Korea's exports and imports stood at about \$174 billion in the November-December period last year. It would mark the first time in four years for South Korea's trade volume to hover below the \$1 trillion mark.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 11/13/2020

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BOK Chief Discusses COVID-19, Digitalization with Asia-Pacific Central Banks

Bank of Korea Gov. Lee Ju-yeol attended a videoconference with central bank representatives from 11 Asia-Pacific nations, the nation's central bank said Monday. Key topics included the effects of COVID-19 on the economy. The 25th Executives' Meeting of East Asia-Pacific Central Banks was a follow-up to a similar meeting held Aug. 19. The long-term effects of the pandemic on the economy, GDP outlooks and the digitalization of central banks were among the topics discussed, the BOK said in a statement. The Executives' Meeting of East Asia-Pacific Central Banks was established in 1991 to foster good economic and monetary ties among its members. Its members include the central banks of Australia, China, Japan, Singapore and Thailand. The central banks of key economies are facing the task of digitalization, and especially the development of their own digital currencies.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 11/16/2020

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S. Korea Decides to Spend 1.95 Bln Won to Transform DMZ Guard Post into Museum

The government decided Monday to spend 1.95 billion won (US\$1.76 million) to transform a guard post on the border with North Korea into a museum underscoring inter-Korean reconciliation efforts and honoring soldiers killed during the Korean War. The guard post at Arrowhead Ridge inside the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) has since been used as a place to display items unearthed from the former battlefield under a project to uncover remains of soldiers killed in the 1950-53 war. On Monday, a civilian-government committee on inter-Korean exchanges decided to remodel the outdated guard post into a museum to honor fallen soldiers and help people better

understand the need for peace and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula, the unification ministry said. Artifacts found on Arrowhead Ridge belonging to late service members will also be on display.

The museum was planned as part of efforts to follow an inter-Korean agreement on joint excavation and to push ahead with the vision of turning the DMZ into a peace zone, the ministry said. Under a bilateral military accord signed on Sept. 19, 2018, the two Koreas agreed to launch a joint excavation project on Arrowhead Ridge, one of the fiercest battlefields during the war. But the South has carried out the project alone since last year, as the North did not respond to calls for joint work. Unification Minister Lee In-young stressed the importance of fulfilling the agreement and urged the North "once again to come forward to the path for dialogue and cooperation" in improving inter-Korean relations. "The Korean Peninsula appears to have entered a great point of inflection in politics after the recent U.S. presidential elections," Lee said while presiding over the committee meeting.

"The government will push ahead to use this period of transition as an opportunity to make groundbreaking progress in inter-Korean relations," he added. The committee also decided to spend over 1.3 billion won (US\$1.19 million) for efforts to reconnect a railway section in the South for the Gyeongwon Line, a train route between Seoul and North Korea's eastern coastal city of Wonsan. The budget will be used for costs including maintenance and supervision fees, the ministry said. The restoration project for the South's section of the Gyeongwon Line was halted in May 2016 amid heightened tensions after Pyongyang's nuclear test and missile launch earlier that year. The DMZ, which is about 250 km long and 4 km wide, is one of the world's most heavily fortified borders, with the rival Koreas technically in a state of conflict, as the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a truce, not a peace treaty.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 11/16/2020

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BOK Keeps Key Rate at Record Low, Ups Economic Outlook

The South Korean central bank on Thursday held its policy rate unchanged at a record low of 0.5 percent, while slightly revising up this year's economic outlook, amid growing concerns over a winter wave of coronavirus infections. As expected, the monetary policy board of the Bank of Korea (BOK) voted to leave the base rate steady in this year's final rate-setting meeting. Driven by signs of a modest recovery in exports, the BOK revised up this year's economic growth outlook to 1.1 percent contraction, compared with a previous forecast of a 1.3 percent retreat. The BOK expected Asia's fourth-largest economy to grow 3 percent next year, faster than a previous forecast of 2.8 percent expansion for 2021. The BOK predicted that consumer prices may grow 0.5 percent this year, slightly up from its previous forecast

of 0.4 percent gain. BOK Gov. Lee Ju-yeol told reporters that the economy may have hit the bottom in the second quarter, but it is too early to say whether the central bank will consider tightening its monetary policy.

"It is not the time to discuss the normalization of monetary policies," Lee said, citing lingering uncertainties over the ongoing resurgence of COVID-19. The upbeat forecast was based on an assumption that the global spread of the virus would stabilize in the middle of next year or in the second half of next year, Lee said. The recent escalation of local virus cases is expected to have a short-term impact on local consumption, but its impact may be smaller than the first wave seen in late February, Lee said. The Korean currency's recent ascent against the U.S. dollar is "not desirable," Lee said, adding that the BOK will take foreign exchange stabilization measures, if necessary, against herd behaviors. In a statement, the BOK said the nation's economy showed signs of a modest recovery, but the pace of recovery is challenged by the recent resurgence of infections globally.

"The Korean economy has continued to recover at a modest pace. Although the recovery in private consumption has been slow and the correction in construction investment has continued, facilities investment has started to recover and the improvement in exports has continued," the BOK said. "Looking ahead, the board sees global economic growth and global financial markets as likely to be affected largely by the severity of the resurgence of COVID-19 and the status of vaccine development, as well as by national policy responses and their effects," it said. In late August, the BOK froze the key rate as economic uncertainty heightened amid a flare-up in new coronavirus cases. In July, the bank left the rate unchanged as well. To bolster the pandemic-hit economy, the BOK slashed the key rate to the all-time low of 0.5 percent in May after delivering an emergency rate cut of half a percentage point in March. Analysts said economic uncertainty has increased as daily new virus cases have recently stayed above 300, although the nation has largely brought the outbreak under control.

This file photo, taken June 4, 2020, shows stacks of import-export cargo containers at South Korea's largest seaport, located in Busan, 450 kilometers southeast of Seoul. On Thursday, South Korea reported 583 new coronavirus cases, the highest since early March, when the nation grappled with the first wave of virus infections. The central bank said private consumption is expected to recover at a slower-than-expected pace this year due to the virus fallout. South Korea's economy contracted 3.2 percent in the second quarter from three months earlier after shrinking 1.3 percent on-quarter in the January-March period. But the nation's economy returned to modest growth in the third quarter, marking the first quarterly expansion since the coronavirus pandemic began, as exports showed signs of improvement. In the July-September period, the economy grew 1.9 percent from the previous quarter. South Korea's low inflationary pressure and rising housing prices also appeared to prompt the BOK board to stand pat, analysts said.

South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Balance of Payment Posts 2.1 Bln USD Surplus in Q3

Indonesia's Balance of Payment (BOP) in the third quarter 2020 posted a surplus of 2.1 billion U.S. dollars, following a surplus of 9.2 billion dollars in the previous quarter, the central bank, Bank Indonesia, announced on Friday. "The continuing balance of payment surplus is supported by the current account surplus as well as the capital and financial account surplus. The surplus supports Indonesia's external resilience," Bank Indonesia's spokesman Onny Widjanarko said on Friday. Accordingly, the position of Indonesia's foreign exchange reserves at the end of September 2020 increased to 135.2 billion dollars, or equivalent to financing 9.1 months of imports and government foreign debt. The position is above the international adequacy standard. Widjanarko said the current account surplus in the third quarter of 2020 recorded a surplus of 1.0 billion dollars or 0.4 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), while in the previous quarter the current account registered a deficit of 2.9 billion dollars or 1.2 percent of the GDP. The current account surplus is supported by a surplus in the balance of goods, in line with the improving export performance, while import activities are restrained by the weak domestic demand, he said. Meanwhile, capital and financial transactions in the third quarter of 2020 also recorded a surplus of 1.0 billion U.S. dollars or 0.4 percent of the GDP, after a surplus of 10.6 billion U.S. dollars or 4.3 percent of the GDP in the previous quarter. The capital and financial account surplus occurred due to direct investment inflows amid the increasing uncertainty on the global financial market. The direct investment inflows are maintained in line with the improving domestic economy.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 11/20/2020

Indonesia's Central Bank Purchases State Securities Worth 24.2 Bln USD

Indonesia's central bank Bank Indonesia, has bought state securities issued by the government worth about 24.2 billion U.S. dollars through a direct market mechanism in support of the state budget for financing the national economic recovery program. "The measure was taken as an effort to support the acceleration of the national economic recovery program while maintaining the macroeconomic stability," Bank Indonesia Governor Perry Warjiyo said after attending the meeting of the central bank's board of governors here. Warjiyo said that the central bank had purchased

state securities on the primary market through a market mechanism worth some 5.1 billion U.S. dollars on April 16, 2020. Then, Bank Indonesia bought the state securities through a direct mechanism on July 7, 2020, amounting to some 19.07 billion U.S. dollars. The government has allocated budget ceiling of 49.09 billion U.S. dollars for the national economic recovery program which resulted in the 2020 state budget deficit widening to 6.34 percent. Of the amount, till November 9, 2020, the use of the state budget for the national economic recovery program reached 27.04 billion U.S. dollars or about 55.1 percent of the budgeted ceiling.

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CAMBODIA: Needs 91 Mln USD to Repair Rural Roads Damaged by Recent Flooding

Cambodia needs approximately 91 million U.S. dollars to repair about 3,154 km of rural roads that had been damaged by recent flash floods, a spokesman said on Tuesday. "The Ministry of Economy and Finance has provided 15 million U.S. dollars for the repairs," Rural Development Ministry secretary of state and spokesman Chan Darong said in a press conference, adding that they will seek from development partners for the remaining amount. Darong said the repairs have been underway since early November and about 111 km of the flood-damaged roads have been restored. According to the spokesman, the floods had also affected roughly 4,155 wells, mainly in Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Pursat, Pailin, Siem Reap, Preah Vihear, Svay Rieng and Kampong Cham provinces. Government spokesman Phay Siphon said in the press conference that seasonal rains, exacerbated by tropical storms, had caused floods in 19 of the kingdom's 25 cities and provinces last month. He added that the floods had killed 44 people and forced the evacuations of 47,584 others.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 11/24/2020

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CAMBODIA: \$70 Million ADB Loan to Strengthen Agricultural Value Chain, Food Safety

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$70 million loan to improve the capacity of agribusinesses in six provinces across Cambodia to process key agricultural products such as cassava, cashews, mangoes, vegetables, and native chickens. The Agricultural Value Chain Competitiveness and Safety Enhancement Project aims to benefit about 230 agricultural cooperatives and 50 agribusinesses in the provinces of Kampong Cham, Kampong Thom, Oddar Meanchey, Preah Vihear, Siem Reap, and Tboung Khmum. "Agriculture can contribute to Cambodia's economic growth and diversification if local small and medium-sized agribusinesses

can improve their ability to process high-value agricultural products and market them domestically and overseas,” said ADB Principal Natural Resources and Agriculture Economist Takeshi Ueda. “Private investment in agriculture, along with better access to credit and high-quality raw agricultural products, will help Cambodian agribusinesses unleash their growth potential, create jobs, and improve rural livelihoods.”

With 76% of Cambodia’s population living in rural areas, agriculture accounted for 20.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) and 31.2% of total employment in 2019. The industry grew an average of 1.7% annually from 2010 to 2019. Processed agro-based goods now account for just 4.0% of GDP, due to a lack of diverse, value-added products. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has disrupted agricultural supply chains and reduced incomes and market opportunities for farmers and agribusinesses. The project will facilitate access to credit for agriculture and agribusinesses, which attract only about 10% of total formal financing. The project will implement mutually reinforcing financial schemes, including credit lines and credit guarantees.

The project will support initiatives to strengthen food safety and quality across the value chains for cassava, cashews, mangoes, vegetables, and native chickens. It will help agricultural cooperatives adopt good agricultural practices and upgrade food-safety testing laboratories to gain international accreditation. The project will also support the research and development of crop seed varieties and poultry breeds by helping agricultural cooperatives access high-yield, drought-resilient, disease-resistant crop seeds and other planting materials. In addition, the project will help improve 110 kilometers of rural roads and help connect farms to markets in the project areas. The project will pilot a green financing mechanism, supported by a \$5 million loan from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Infrastructure Fund. ADB will also manage a \$25 million loan from Agence Française de Développement and a \$3 million grant from the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 11/27/2020

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ADB Approves 70 Mln USD Loan for Cambodia to Improve Agro-Food Industries' Competitiveness

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) said Friday that it has approved 70 million U.S. dollars in loans for Cambodia to improve the capacity of local agribusinesses. The loans for Cambodia will be used to support initiatives to strengthen food safety and quality across the value chains for cassava, cashews, mangoes, vegetables, and native chickens, it said in a statement. The Agricultural Value Chain Competitiveness and Safety Enhancement Project aims to benefit about 230 agricultural cooperatives and 50 agribusinesses in the Cambodian provinces of Kampong Cham, Kampong

Thom, Oddar Meanchey, Preah Vihear, Siem Reap, and Tboung Khmum. "Agriculture can contribute to Cambodia's economic growth and diversification if local small and medium-sized agribusinesses can improve their ability to process high-value agricultural products and market them domestically and overseas," said ADB principal natural Resources and agriculture economist Takeshi Ueda. "Private investment in agriculture, along with better access to credit and high-quality raw agricultural products, will help Cambodian agribusinesses unleash their growth potential, create jobs, and improve rural livelihoods," he added. With 76 percent of Cambodia's population living in rural areas, agriculture accounted for 20.7 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) and 31.2 percent of total employment in 2019, the statement said. The industry grew by an annual average of 1.7 percent from 2010 to 2019, it said, adding that processed agro-based goods now account for just 4 percent of GDP, due to the lack of diverse, value-added products. The ADB said the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted agricultural supply chains and reduced incomes and market opportunities for Cambodian farmers and agribusinesses. For Cambodia, the loan project will facilitate access to credit for agriculture and agribusinesses, help adopt good agricultural practices and upgrade food-safety testing laboratories to gain international accreditation, according to the bank.

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MALAYSIA: RM28 Billion Given to Malaysia Airlines So Far

KUALA LUMPUR: A total of RM28 billion has been injected into Malaysia Airlines Bhd by Khazanah Nasional so far, said Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz. Tengku Zafrul said there were plans to restructure the liabilities of Malaysia Aviation Group Bhd (MAGB), the parent group of the airline which is estimated to be RM16 billion. "As of Aug 31, MAGB's liquidity was RM366 million, in addition to the RM578 million allocated to it by Khazanah," he told the Dewan Rakyat in a written reply. He said that the airline's earnings had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with 75 per cent of its aircraft grounded due to travel restrictions.

From <https://www.nst.com.my> 11/26/2020

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RM300 One-Off Payment for All Frontliners

KUALA LUMPUR: The government has announced an additional RM300 one-off payment for all frontliners in the country, including the police and military officers. Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz said the decision was made to include other frontliners, in addition to Health Ministry officers. "The government recently announced a RM500 one-off payment for Health Ministry frontliners. "After listening to the suggestions made by some Members of Parliament, the government

has agreed to extend this assistance to all frontliners, where they will receive a one-off RM300 payment," he told the Dewan Rakyat in his winding-up speech on the Supply Bill (2021) today. Fahmi Fadzil (Pakatan Harapan-Lembah Pantai) interjected and asked Zafrul to clarify who he was referring to when he said "frontliners". "This is including the police, the army, Immigration, the People's Volunteer Corps (Rela), the National Disaster Management Agency (Nadma) – basically, all (agencies) certified by Nadma," Zafrul said. When tabling the 2021 Budget on Nov 6, Zafrul said the government would provide a RM500 one-off payment to benefit some 100,000 Health Ministry frontliners as a mark of appreciation for their services. According to Zafrul, the grant is in addition to their monthly RM600 Covid-19 Special Allowance given since March, and will continue until the pandemic threat is successfully overcome.

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PHILIPPINES: Remittances Up over 9 Pct in September, Hitting Nearly 3 Bln USD

Personal remittances from overseas Filipinos amounted to 2.888 billion U.S. dollars in September, higher by 9.1 percent than the 2.648 billion U.S. dollars recorded in the same period of last year, the Philippine central bank said on Monday. "This brought the total personal remittances for the first nine months of 2020 to 24.302 billion U.S. dollars," the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said in a statement. At this level, the BSP said the contraction in cumulative remittances for the first nine months narrowed to 1.4 percent from 2.6 percent in August. An estimated 12 million Filipinos are working abroad, according to the Philippine government's data. The Asian Development Bank has projected the remittances from overseas Filipino workers, equivalent to 9 percent of the country's gross domestic product, to slow down this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Philippine Senate Approves 2021 Budget to Kick-Start Pandemic-Hit Economy

The Philippine Senate Thursday approved on third and final reading the proposed 4.5 trillion pesos (roughly 93.5 billion U.S. dollars) 2021 national budget to kick-start the pandemic-hit economy. Twenty-two senators voted to approve the country's 2021 General Appropriations Bill with no abstentions or negative votes. The approval paves the way for the Senate and the House of Representatives to convene in a bicameral conference committee to reconcile their versions. "Hopefully, inside the

line items of this budget, our people see that indeed there is a path out of this pandemic and recession and that we are not without hope," Senate Committee on Finance chair Senator Sonny Angara said in plenary. Senate President Vicente Sotto earlier said that Congress hopes to submit the 2021 bill for the Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's signature before the legislative branch goes on a break by mid-December. The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) of the Philippines said the 2021 budget aims to sustain the government efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The government aims to boost the healthcare systems, ensure food security, increase investments in public and digital infrastructure, and help 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 his year's budget of 4.1 trillion pesos (roughly 85.2 billion dollars) national budget and equivalent to 21.8 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). Due to the pandemic, the Philippine economy shrank 11.5 percent in the third quarter of 2020, marking the first time in 35 years that the country's GDP contracted for three straight quarters. The Philippines is gradually easing the restrictions to allow more people to safely return to work while complying with the minimum health standards. The government expects the country's economy to bounce back in 2021.

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THAILAND: Central Bank Unveils New Measures to Curb Strengthening of Thai Baht

In a bold move designed to balance capital flows, the Bank of Thailand (BoT) on Friday announced new measures allowing Thais to freely deposit and transfer funds in foreign currency deposits (FCD) accounts and to directly invest more in foreign securities. The move came after the central bank warned the strengthening of the Thai baht may affect the fragile recovery of the Thai economy. The measures will enable exporters to effectively manage liquidity and foreign exchange risk, BOT assistant governor Vachira Arromdee said on Friday. The BOT has closely monitored and intervened in the market as necessary to limit excessive currency volatility, Vachira said. The BOT has relaxed regulations regarding investment in foreign securities. These include increasing investment limits and expanding eligible financial products, in order to expand investment options for residents and enhance portfolio diversification. The investment limit for retail investors has been increased from 200,000 U.S. dollars per year to five million U.S. dollars per year. Also, there is no investment limit in foreign securities through local financial institutions such as brokerage firms and asset management companies. There is also no investment limit in foreign assets for investors regulated under the Securities Exchange Commission

(SEC), Vachira said.

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ADB, Indorama Ventures Sign \$100 Million Blue Loan to Boost Recycling, Reduce Ocean Plastic Waste

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Indorama Ventures Public Company Limited (IVL) signed a \$100 million financing package to reduce the environmental impact of plastic and promote a circular economy by boosting the capacity of IVL's plastic recycling plants in India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand. The plants will recycle polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastics widely used in beverage bottles. The finance package comprises \$50 million from ADB and \$50 million from the ADB-administered Leading Asia's Private Infrastructure Fund (LEAP). A \$150 million loan will be provided by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and \$50 million from DEG – Deutsche Investitions- und Entwicklungsgesellschaft mbH. “The recycling of plastics like PET is a must for healthier oceans, and this initiative will help to achieve that objective by partnering with IVL, which is the global leader of PET production and recycling. We are also excited to work closely with IFC and DEG in this important journey,” said Vice-President for Private Sector Operations and Public–Private Partnerships Ashok Lavasa. “There is a rising global demand for recycled plastic packaging. ADB’s support will help IVL to meet this demand by collecting and treating plastic waste that would otherwise have been released into the oceans.”

“We are honored to agree to this Blue Loan with ADB,” said Chief Sustainability Officer Indorama Ventures Yashovardhan Lohia. “IVL is building the recycling infrastructure needed to divert waste from the marine environment. By using post-consumer PET bottles as a feedstock for new bottles, we give value to waste. This drives improvements in waste collection systems, meaning less waste and cleaner oceans.” Mismanagement of all plastic waste damages the marine ecosystem. It is estimated that Asia accounts for more than 80% of all plastics released into the ocean. Globally around half of PET is recycled. In a circular economy, products and materials are redesigned, recovered, and recycled to divert plastic waste from landfills and oceans. The plants to be built under the project are expected to be fully operational by 2022, and will ensure that nearly 5 billion additional bottles are diverted from waste annually. ADB’s loan is its first independently verified nonsovereign blue loan, following Blue Natural Capital Financing Facility’s Blue Bond Guidelines, with an assurance report from DNV GL. It is aligned with ADB’s Action Plan for Healthy Oceans and Sustainable Blue Economies, which calls for ADB to expand its investments and technical assistance to \$5 billion during 2019–2024.

IVL is a Thailand-listed, global business committed to develop technologies and processes that use post-consumer PET and polyester waste materials as feedstock for the future. As the largest producer of 100% recyclable PET in the world, IVL supports all aspects of the circular economy to reduce the amount of waste entering the environment. IVL is listed on the Dow Jones Sustainability Index and operates 125 manufacturing facilities in 33 countries, across 5 continents. LEAP is a cofinancing vehicle established by ADB and the Japan International Cooperation Agency to support private sector investments in energy and power generation, as well as water, urban infrastructure, transport, information and communications technology, and health.

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Thailand's Phuket Earns 9.87 Mln USD in Tourism-Related Revenue During Long Weekend

Thailand's Phuket has generated some 300 million baht (about 9.87 million U.S. dollars) in tourism-related revenue during the long weekend, said a senior government official Tuesday. Thailand's southern tourist island has received some 53,970 visitors, mostly Thais, during the four-day weekend from last Thursday until Sunday, according to the Tourism Authority of Thailand's Phuket Office Director Nanthasiri Ronnasiri. Each long-weekend visitor has spent an average of 5,500 baht (about 181 U.S. dollars) on the tourist island, Nanthasiri said. However, Phuket's hotel room occupancies, which registered an average of 35 percent during the long holiday, were considered quite low due to the pandemic situation, she said. Phuket and other tourist destinations throughout the country would have otherwise served high season during this time of year.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 11/24/2020

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VIETNAM: State Assets Sold for \$44.75 Million over 10 Months

A total of 42.3 million State shares sold from January-October fetched nearly VNĐ1.04 trillion (US\$44.75 million), according to the Hà Nội Stock Exchange (HNX). The northern market regulator organised 11 auctions to offload the shares. The successful bidding value was 22 per cent higher than the value offered for sale. In October alone, the HNX held one auction to help the State-owned power group Việt Nam Electricity (EVN) sell its stake in EV Finance Co (EVF). EVN offered 2.65 million shares for sale that sold out for VNĐ46 billion. The amount and value of shares sold in the 10-month period was a big disappointment as the State was trying to exit non-core companies. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, purchasing power from investors has declined this year making it hard for the State to complete its

divestment plans for 2020. In November, the State plans to sell its ownership in five State-owned enterprises including Việt Nam Vegetable Oils Industry Corporation (Vocarimex), Viettel Post Joint Stock Corporation, and Việt Nam Agriculture Tourism JSC (Agritour).

Vocarimex failure

The Hà Nội Stock Exchange on October 29 announced the auction of State shares in Vocarimex scheduled for November 4, but the plan was cancelled due to lack of interest. The State Capital Investment Corporation (SCIC) – the representative controlling the State ownership in SOEs – offered more than 44.2 million Vocarimex shares, or 36.3 per cent of the company's capital, for sale at a minimum bidding price of VNĐ22,690 (\$0.98) per share. After HNX's announcement, Vocarimex shares (UPCoM: VOC) had dropped as much as 7.82 per cent, ending Thursday at VNĐ17,000 apiece. SCIC put the shares up for sale in July 2019 for VNĐ22,300 apiece but that deal also failed. The biggest shareholder in Vocarimex is Kido Group, which owns 51 per cent of the capital. From January-September, Vocarimex earned VNĐ2.02 trillion in net revenue and VNĐ163 billion in post-tax profit, up 10 per cent and 13 per cent on-year, respectively.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 11/06/2020

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Ministry of Finance to Issue Green Bonds in 2021

The Ministry of Finance is working with ministries to issue green bonds next year, an official said. Nguyễn Hoàng Dương, deputy director of the Ministry of Finance's Department of Banking and Financial Institutions, made the statement at a seminar held in HCM City Monday. Green bonds are a type of debt issued by public or private institutions which use the funds for environmental purposes. "Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the slow progress of some public investment projects, the plan to issue green bonds has also been extended," Dương said. He said the Ministry of Finance has worked with donors and a number of businesses to boost the issuance of green bonds in the near future. The ministry has also sought international funds to support businesses in green bond issuance and consulting. Green bonds were an investment field with great potential for development, said Head of Investment, Public Equities & Fixed Income at VinaCapital Nguyễn Hoài Thu. Thu said green bonds were related to clean investment, including environment, society and corporate governance as well as clean energy. In Việt Nam, the Government's sustainable development orientation to 2030 also focuses on green growth as well as green financial products, including green bonds. According to experts, green bonds are also a type of debt, but the proceeds from green bond issuance must be used to implement green projects. This will be an important capital channel for investors interested in sustainable development factors, especially in the context of climate change, creating favourable conditions to attract large capital for

green growth and sustainable growth in the future.

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

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Việt Nam, ADB Sign Deal on Emergency Grant to Aid Disaster Response

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Nguyễn Xuân Cường and Country Director of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Andrew Jeffries on Tuesday signed an agreement on the bank's emergency grant of US\$2.5 million to help Việt Nam address the consequences of natural disasters in the central region. The grant is allocated from the Asia Pacific Disaster Response Fund, which was designed to support the ADB's developing members affected by major natural disasters. Minister Cường thanked ADB and Jeffries for assisting Việt Nam in responding to natural disasters, dealing with their aftermaths, and reconstruction efforts, especially in the central region, which was hit by several storms and historic floods since early October. However, he noted, the reconstruction of important infrastructure facilities and the settlement of natural disasters' consequences require stronger efforts by the Government, ministries, sectors, and the localities affected by storms and floods, as well as support from domestic and foreign organisations and individuals. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and ADB are working to consider proposing the Government approve an emergency loan for rebuilding infrastructure facilities, with priority given to important works, so as to swiftly recover socio-economic activities in disaster-hit central provinces, Cường said. For his part, Jeffries said after getting approval, the emergency loan from the ADB will be used as part of the Government's budget to help the affected localities. The ADB hopes that the Vietnamese Government will issue the approval soon so a loan agreement can be signed in March 2021, he added.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 11/26/2020

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South Asia

INDIA: AWS to Invest Rs 20,761 cr for Setting Up Multiple Data Centres in Hyderabad

Telangana Minister for IT and Industries KT Rama Rao, in a tweet today, announced that Amazon Web Services (AWS) will be investing Rs 20,761 crore for setting up multiple data centres across Hyderabad. This is the largest foreign direct investment in the State as of yet, added the Minister. AWS's tweet read, "Happy to announce the largest FDI in the history of Telangana! After a series of meetings, AWS has finalized investment of ₹20,761 Cr (\$ 2.77 Bn) to set up multiple data centers in

Telangana. The @AWS Cloud Hyd Region is expected to be launched by mid 2022 #HappeningHyderabad". As per an official statement from the State's IT department, "The AWS will set up an AWS Asia Pacific (Hyderabad) Region with three Availability Zones (AZs) in Hyderabad." The Availability Zones consists of multiple data centres at different locations in a single region that are designed to be operationally independent of one another with independent infrastructure and connections via a low-latency network, added the statement. The Minister said that the investment will pose a strong anchor for attracting other technological investments.

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/> 11/09/2020

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NEPAL: ADB Approves \$150 Million Loan to Upgrade Major Airports

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$150 million concessional loan to improve the capacity of Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) and Gautam Buddha Airport (GBA) in Nepal. Tourism is a major source of economic activity in Nepal. In 2019, tourism generated an estimated \$2.05 billion, which accounted for 6.7% of gross domestic product. TIA in Kathmandu is the country's only international airport and a major hub for domestic air transport. GBA in Lumbini will serve as an alternate international air transport facility for Nepal. Lumbini is the birthplace of the Buddha and is a pilgrimage and major tourist destination. "ADB's support will improve TIA's safety, capacity, and operational efficiency. In addition, the new GBA international terminal will play a key role in boosting regional tourism in and around Lumbini," said ADB Senior Transport Specialist for South Asia Kai Wei Yeo. "The project will help revive the country's tourism industry and address the long-term negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic." The loan will support the construction of a parallel taxiway extension and hangar aprons at TIA, and a new international terminal building at GBA to increase capacity. Another key component of the project is minimizing climate change impacts. This will be carried out by using clean energy materials, such as the solar panels and energy-efficient lighting to be installed at the new GBA terminal building.

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

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ADB Approves Loan to Upgrade Power Grids in Nepal

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$156 million concessional loan to modernize power transmission and distribution systems in Nepal. While majority of Nepal's population has access to grid-supplied electricity, there is a need to increase the capacity and reach of power distribution networks to meet current and future demands, improve reliability and quality of supply, and reduce losses. The Electricity

Grid Modernization Project will finance the automation of grid substations throughout the country, modernize distribution and transmission systems in various areas, complete the installation of smart meters in the Kathmandu Valley, and support sector reform and institutional strengthening of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA). “ADB has been actively involved in major policy and institutional reforms in the power sector, and this project is a continuation of our support to provide reliable and efficient electricity supply in the country,” said ADB Principal Energy Specialist Jiwan Acharya. “Moreover, this project will position Nepal to be better prepared in its post-pandemic economic rebuilding.”

The project will, among others, automate 34 existing grid substations, install 220-kilovolt (kV) and 132-kV automated grid substations, construct a total of 113 kilometers (km) of new transmission lines, upgrade 144 km of existing transmission lines with efficient conductors, and expand the installation of smart meters for 350,000 electricity consumers in the Kathmandu Valley. An electricity distribution system command and control center in Kathmandu will also be constructed. Awareness-raising activities on the safe and efficient use of electricity for electricity consumers, including women and disadvantaged groups, will be conducted. The project will strengthen the institutional capacity of NEA in implementing its comprehensive corporate development plan, train its staff in managing the automated grid substations, and improve financial sustainability and corporate financial reporting. 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/> 11/27/2020

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PAKISTAN: ADB \$300 Million Loan to Promote Macroeconomic Stability

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$300 million policy-based loan to help promote macroeconomic stability in Pakistan by facilitating improved trade competitiveness and export diversification. “While COVID-19 hit Pakistan at a critical point in its macroeconomic recovery, the government’s ongoing efforts to ensure stability have started showing encouraging results this fiscal year,” said ADB Principal Public Management Specialist Hiranya Mukhopadhyay. “ADB’s program will support these efforts and help Pakistan to improve its export competitiveness—now more important than ever given the impacts of the pandemic.” ADB’s program will help Pakistan recover its current account deficit in a sustained manner and continue to facilitate export diversification. It will introduce important tariff- and tax-related policy reforms to help improve Pakistan’s international competitiveness and further strengthen key institutions, including accreditation bodies, the Export–Import Bank of Pakistan, and the Pakistan Single Window.

The new financing falls under Subprogram 2 of the Trade and Competitiveness Program. Under the first phase, ADB helped the government usher in key reforms, including reducing or abolishing tariffs and ad hoc duties on a large number of raw materials and intermediate goods. Several steps were also taken to introduce e-commerce, strengthen key institutions involved in facilitating trade, and enhance the export certification process. Since fiscal year 2004, Pakistan has registered a rise-and-fall pattern of export growth reflecting underperformance in its export industry and long-term decline in export competitiveness. This is compounded by lost export growth momentum from COVID-19, which has reduced high-income countries' demand for manufacturing goods and disrupted the supply of raw materials. ADB is coordinating its efforts with other development partners and donors while the program complements International Monetary Fund-led reform initiatives by helping to improve competitiveness, which will help build robust foreign exchange reserves.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Ministry of Finance to Place State Medium-Term Bonds

The Baku Stock Exchange (BSE) will host an auction on placement of state medium-term bonds of the Ministry of Finance of Azerbaijan for a total of 15 million manats (\$8.83 million) on November 10, 2020, Trend reports with reference to the stock exchange. Bonds with face value of 100 manats (\$58) with circulation term of 1,092 days will be offered at the auction. The collection of orders during the auction will be held from 11:00 to 12:30 in accordance with the trading regulations of the BSE. The due date is November 7, 2023. It is allowed to accept non-competitive orders during the auction, provided that the bond issue does not exceed 20 percent. In addition, the issuer may not accept these orders if the volume of orders issued by the auction participants for the purchase of bonds is less than 20 percent of the volume of bonds issued by the issuer at the auction. If during the auction the demand for government bonds exceeds the supply and the price is satisfied by the issuer, the volume of bonds offered by the issuer may be increased up to 50 percent.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 11/05/2020

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Azerbaijani Fund Gives Update on Compensations Paid to Depositors of Closed Banks

The Azerbaijan Deposit Insurance Fund (ADIF) has paid compensations worth over 580.2 million manat (\$341.4 million) to depositors of the closed Ata Bank, Amrah Bank, AG Bank, and NBC Bank as of Nov.19, 2020, Trend reports with reference to ADIF. According to ADIF, 9,598 depositors of AtaBank received over 232.7 million manat (\$136.9 million), 5,684 depositors of Amrahbank – nearly 138 million manat (\$81.2 million), 4,450 depositors of AGBank – 90.2 million manat (\$53 million), 4,087 depositors of Amrah Bank – 119.3 million manat (\$70.2 million). Payments of compensation to the depositors of Ata Bank and Amrah Bank have been made from June 1, 2020, and are paid in the non-cash form via debit cards of Kapital Bank OJSC. Depositors of AG Bank and NBC Bank have been compensated since June 16, 2020, and are paid by bank transfer via debit cards of the International Bank of Azerbaijan (IBA) OJSC.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 11/20/2020

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Central Bank of Azerbaijan Reveals Last Deposit Auction's Results

The Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) has raised 200 million manat (\$117.6 million) at the deposit auction, Trend reports citing the CBA. According to the information, the deposit auction was held on November 30, 2020, the supply from banks exceeded demand by almost four times, reaching 772.5 million manat (\$454.4 million). The weighted average interest rate on deposit transactions concluded within the framework of 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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GEORGIA: Seeing Increase in Money Transfers

Georgia received \$192.7 million from abroad in September 2020, which is 28.7 percent more than the amount in September 2019, Trend reports via the National Bank of Georgia (NBG). The vast majority (94.7 percent) of all money transfers from abroad came from 19 countries, with the volume of transfers from these countries each exceeding \$1 million last month. Russia, Italy, and the United States were the largest remittance senders in Georgia in September 2020. Georgia received \$35.13 million from Russia, \$29.21 million from Italy, and \$22.65 million from the United States. After Russia, Italy, and the United States, other countries regularly sending money transfers to Georgia in September 2020 included: Greece - \$21.45 million, Israel – \$13.98 million, Turkey – \$10.61 million, Germany – \$7.54 million, Azerbaijan – \$7.43 million, Ukraine – \$13.21 million, Spain – \$4.82 million, Poland – \$2.60 million, France – \$2.98 million, UK - \$1.90 million, Cyprus - \$1.55 million.

million, Ireland - \$1.51 million, Kazakhstan - \$1.93 million, Canada - \$1.85 million, Kyrgyzstan - \$1.04 million. In September 2020, remittances leaving Georgia totaled \$25.1 million, which is a 22.4 percent increase year-on-year.

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KAZAKHSTAN: Applies Corrections to Capital Budget

Clarifications to the budget of the capital until 2023 has been applied, Head of the Economy and Budget Planning Department of the city of Nur-Sultan, Kaisar Mankaraev, said, Trend reports citing Kazinform. Mankaraev made the remark at an extraordinary session of the Maslikhat of the city of Nur-Sultan. "Clarification of the local budget is carried out to implement the goals and tasks determined by the head of state on September 1. The analysis of the actual collection of own income revealed the presence of reserves for increasing plans for own income by 22.2 billion tenge, bringing to 327,226 million tenge, including the plan for tax revenues is proposed to be increased by 18.5 billion tenge to 301,376 million tenge," said Mankaraev. He noted that optimization of the expenditures worth 2.8 billion tenge was also carried out. "Based on the income, the expenditure part of the city's budget has been formed. It provides for priority areas of financial resources for the social sphere, education, health care, taking into account the provision of quality and availability of these services for citizens," added Mankaraev.

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TAJIKISTAN: ADB Approves \$67 Million Grant to Enhance Road Network Sustainability in Southern Tajikistan

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$67.49 million grant to enhance the safety and reliability of the national road network in southern Tajikistan and promote the economic participation of women in the area. "Tajikistan relies heavily on road transport for international and domestic movement of goods and people," said ADB Transport Specialist for Central and West Asia Rika Idei. "But much of the national road network has deteriorated and is unsafe, hindering the livelihoods and daily economic activities of local people. The project will help to strengthen Tajikistan's road network by introducing important climate change adaptation, disaster risk management, and road safety features." The project will rehabilitate two existing national road sections in the Khatlon Region: from Dangara to Okmazor (28.7 km) and from Hulbuk to Kangurt (59.5 km), which currently support traffic volumes of 4,200 vehicles and 1,300 vehicles per day, respectively. Both sections link up with Asian Highway 66, a vital road connection between Asian and European

countries. The project will contribute to the goals of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program by improving connectivity and competitiveness of key national roads that connect to international corridors.

The project will help the Ministry of Transport operationalize a road asset management system by developing a data inventory of the country's arterial highways and train staff to collect and analyze condition data. The database will enable the government to prepare annual maintenance plans and ensure adequate budget for maintenance. Women in the project area will benefit from access to a knowledge distribution program on business development and household financial management skills through their mobile phones. The project will also help improve access for women to grants for starting new businesses.

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UZBEKISTAN: Debt Collection System to Be Simplified

The debt collection system will be simplified in Uzbekistan, Trend reports referring to Podrobno.uz website. Now it is ineffective due to the workload of state executors. This information became known following the meeting held as a video conference and dedicated to the measures to improve the system of the execution of judicial acts, which has been recently held by Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. "In many regions, the number of documents per contractor exceeds the established norms," the presidential press-service said. "For example, the execution of eight categories of documents, such as registration of property rights, reinstatement at work and collection of wages, payment of fines and utility bills, can be ensured without coercive measures." Currently, the Compulsory Enforcement Bureau has 1.6 million such executive documents in its proceedings, which is 35 percent of the total number of cases. Some 60 percent of executive documents relate to the collection of amounts up to 400,000 soums. In this regard, the responsible people were instructed to introduce a simplified procedure of the execution of judicial acts, to organize special departments in the structure of the Compulsory Enforcement Bureau that will deal with the collection of small amounts by using information technologies. The importance of retraining state officials on the basis of advanced techniques was stressed.

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Uzbektelecom Cuts Tariffs for Operators and Providers

Uzbektelecom has reduced Internet tariffs for operators and service providers. This was reported by the company's press service. The cost of the Internet channel for

operators and providers connected to the international packet switching center decreased by 20% — from 56 thousand soums to 45 thousand soums per 1 Mbit/s. For comparison, in 2018, it was 244 thousand soums, which means in three years tariffs fell by more than five times.

From <https://uzreport.news> 11/13/2020

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Big Banks Leave Variable Rates Unchanged

Australia's biggest banks appear to be chasing new home loan business by cutting their fixed rate products, rather than supporting existing customers with variable rate mortgages. Both Commonwealth Bank and Westpac, the nation's largest retail banks, have used the excuse of the Reserve Bank's 15 basis-point cut in the cash rate to a record low 0.1 per cent to cut their fixed rate home loans. But they both left their variable rates, which are more aligned to moves in the cash rate, unchanged. Rates on some small business loans were also cut. But according to financial comparison site Finder, five smaller banks have cut their variable rates. Athena Home Loans led the way on Tuesday, cutting its variable rate by 15 basis points to 2.19 per cent.

Other lenders to cut their rates were Reduce Home Loans (10-20 basis points), Homestar (15 basis points), Homeloans.com.au (15 basis points) and Freedom Lend (20 basis points). Farmers have urged banks to pass on rate reductions in full. "We will be watching the banks closely to ensure they do the right thing," National Farmers' Federation chief executive Tony Mahar said. "It would be a shame if they undid all their good work during the COVID crisis for short-term profit taking." Like CBA, Westpac has cut its four-year fixed rate home loan rate to 1.99 per cent. Westpac has also cut its one, two and three-year fixed rate home loans to 2.09 per cent, while rates on some small business loans have been reduced. "We are in an extraordinary period with the official cash rate at a historical low and unconventional monetary policy measures in place," Westpac's Richard Burton said.

"It is critical we carefully manage interest rate changes, while continuing to do our part in supporting customers and the economy." Earlier, CBA also cut its one-year fixed rate to 2.19 per cent and its two and three year fixed rate to 2.14 per cent, as well as some business loan rates. CBA retail banking executive Angus Sullivan said the RBA's move would lower the structure of interest rates and provide confidence that Australians can borrow over the long term at historically low rates. "We have reflected this in our interest rate settings, offering customers our lowest ever fixed rate," he said.

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Investment Challenge in Clean Energy Pivot

Australian investment for clean energy technologies could take a hit from the climate action shift in the US. The Investor Group on Climate Change - which represents investors with managed funds of more than \$US2 trillion (\$A2.7 trillion) - has sent its members a policy brief on the US election and announcements in Asia. US president-elect Joe Biden has a \$US2 trillion (\$A2.7 trillion) climate plan focused on clean energy investment and green jobs. His administration will also re-enter the Paris Agreement and commit to net zero emissions by 2050. "The sheer scale and size of the US economy means even small changes in direction can have global implications," the brief says. "Major investments by the US government and other major economies into existing and emerging clean technologies may create further challenges for investment in Australia, as capital flows to markets with supportive policy frameworks delivering better long term rates of return." The Morrison government is pinning its hopes on technology to reduce emissions, with the plan reliant on investment to reduce prices and make methods attractive. China has committed to net zero by 2060 while the Morrison government hasn't committed to a time goal for the emissions target. The policy brief says net zero by 2050 is now the global benchmark, with Australia at risk of becoming increasingly isolated.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 11/11/2020

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Australia Loans \$1.5 Billion to Indonesia

Australia is providing a \$1.5 billion loan to Indonesia in support of an international COVID-19 response program. The loan, repayable over 15 years, will be used to support Indonesia's budget financing for 2020. The agreement recognises the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries, while supporting the Asian Development Bank-led COVID-19 response and expenditure support program. In a joint statement, Australian Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and Indonesian Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati said COVID-19 was posing an unprecedented challenge to the Indo-Pacific and the world. "Both our nations have been affected by this extraordinary crisis as containment measures and uncertainty have depressed global economic activity and international trade," they said. "The provision of the Australian Government loan to Indonesia reflects the extraordinary times which we all must face together and is in recognition of Indonesia's record of sound fiscal management which has allowed the government to respond to COVID-19 health crisis." Indonesia's recovery and ongoing prosperity is also critical to the stability and security of the region, they said.

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Electric Vehicle Tax Would Be 'Madness'

Putting a usage charge on electric cars to make up losses in fuel tax would be "madness" and stunt the take up of the vehicles in NSW, the Electric Vehicle Council says. The NSW Treasurer on Friday announced a plan to make electric vehicle users pay "a fair and equitable share" for their use of the road. "You don't want to stifle new technology, but on the other hand it's hardly fair for tradies in utes to pay a tax that someone who can afford a \$100,000 hi-tech car does not," Dominic Perrottet told the Australian. He said the fuel excise tax is currently used to pay for road transport infrastructure, and the income stream would need to be replaced as electric vehicle use grows. But with electric vehicles currently only making up 0.6 per cent of car sales in Australia, EVC chief executive Behyad Jafari says now is not the time to introduce a tax.

"NSW is already languishing up the back of the pack in the global race toward electric vehicles. Mr Perrottet now wants to blow out our tyres," he said in a statement. "At this point in our history, when we should be doing everything possible to encourage people to switch to electric vehicles, this tax would be pure poison." Electric car users actually save the government money, and any future losses in fuel tax could be made up elsewhere, he says. "If tax is dwindling from one area, governments don't have to make it up from that same area." "That would be like whacking a new tax on nicotine gum because you're worried about a drop in the tobacco excise. It's madness." The usage charge on electric vehicles was recommended to Mr Perrottet by a federal financial review he commissioned last year. "Under the commonwealth government's fuel excise scheme, drivers of older or larger vehicles with higher fuel consumption pay more per kilometre to use the same stretch of road as drivers of newer, smaller, more fuel-efficient vehicles," the review found. "Further, electric vehicle drivers use the same road at very little cost." South Australia this week announced it would introduce a charge, which would \$1 million each year starting in July 2021. Mr Perrottet said he would continue speaking with his international counterparts to design a user charge that could be taken up nationally. The measure won't be included in next week's state budget, but Mr Perrottet will take it to cabinet within a year.

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Call for Governments to Wipe Rental Debts

Renters must be better supported to ensure they don't become homeless due to the coronavirus pandemic, an advocate group has urged. Better Renting's latest report looks at rental negotiation data, finding five to 15 per cent of tenants may be in rental debt and could be at risk of eviction when moratoriums lift. It equates to between

324,000 and 973,000 people who could be evicted. Better Renting wants governments to step in to buy the debts and tear them up. "Governments have a responsibility to ensure that people aren't losing their home because of the economic impact of COVID-19," the group's executive director Joel Dignam said. "Keeping renters secure in their homes over coming months is essential to help our community stay strong and recover from the impact of coronavirus on our society."

The report also flagged concerns for renters who have avoided rental debt only by opting for other debts such as credit cards, as well as those who are at risk of running out of savings and may soon owe money. Governments announced eviction moratoriums at the start of the health crisis to prevent Australians being kicked out of their homes as multiple industries were shut down. Western Australia, NSW, Victoria and South Australia have extended their moratoriums until March next year, while Tasmania's will end in December. Queensland's has expired, while the NT didn't introduce one.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 11/25/2020

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Andrews Says No Timeline on Debt Repayment

Premier Daniel Andrews is unable to say when Victoria will start paying off the principal components of its eye-watering debt. Tuesday's budget, intended to fast-track the state's recovery out of the coronavirus crisis, includes about \$80 billion in infrastructure spending and \$49 billion in new stimulus measures. As a result, debt is executed to soar to \$154.8 billion by 2023/2 - about 28.9 per cent of the size of Victoria's gross state product. The premier told a parliamentary committee on Friday it was the view of economists, both state and federal Treasury and the Reserve Bank that "unprecedented investment" was required to stimulate the economy and reduce unemployment. "All of us agree that now is the time to invest," he told the public accounts and estimates committee. "Unless we make these borrowings now, we simply will not have the growth in our economy and the surpluses generated by additional activity to service the debt that we already have."

Mr Andrews said he was unable to provide the committee with a "long-term repayment plan". "We will be best placed to not only service the cost of that capital but to repay principal once we have the economy growing, once we have healed the wounds in our economy and communities and repair the damage that has been done," he said. "The repayment of these borrowings and the repair from this pandemic will be a long-term project. That is the position of every first minister, including the prime minister." Mr Andrews ruled out increasing taxes in order to improve the budget's bottom line. He said a competitive tax system was key to growing the economy. "We're not in the business of stifling jobs growth. We're not in the business of making it less attractive to invest in Victoria than other states," Mr

Andrews said. The committee also heard from the new secretary of Department of Premier and Cabinet Jeremi Moule, who confirmed his predecessor did not receive a payout. Chris Eccles resigned in October after his evidence to the state's hotel quarantine inquiry conflicted with phone records. "Mr Eccles did not seek or receive any payment for his termination. He resigned of his own volition," Mr Moule said.

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Fed Budget Deficit \$4b Lower Than Expected

Australia's budget deficit has fallen almost \$4 billion short of where it was expected to be at this time, new figures show. Finance Department figures released on Friday showed a deficit of \$174.6 billion in the 12 months to October, or 8.8 per cent of gross domestic product. CommSec chief economist Craig James said it was hard to say whether the smaller than expected deficit was due to government assistance not getting to businesses and households or that the economy was performing better than expected. "It may be a mixture of the two," he said. He said "smoothed revenues" were down two per cent on a year ago, the biggest decline in more than 10 years. Expenses were up 26 per cent, the fastest growth since monthly records were published. Annual company tax collections fell 10.1 per cent over the year - the biggest fall in nine-and-a-half years - after recording double-digit annual results over 2017/18 and 2018/19. Social security and welfare spending was up 24.8 per cent, the fastest rate in almost 11 years.

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PAPUA NEW GUINEA: ADB Announces \$150 Million to Support Universal Health Care

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$150 million loan to help Papua New Guinea (PNG) provide affordable, accessible, high-quality health services for all PNG citizens. The loan will fund the third and final subprogram of the ADB-supported Health Services Sector Development Program. "Through ADB's program, national and health-specific reforms are expected to increase the availability of funds, and the effectiveness and efficiency of how resources are used," said Principal Public Management Specialist of ADB's Pacific Department Pamela Wyatt. "This is especially critical during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic which has heightened the government's financing needs and put pressure on the country's health sector." There are three reform areas under subprogram 3. The first is the enhancement of public financial management, to support improved health service delivery and, more broadly, the delivery of government services. The second reform area is strengthening subnational health systems, including provincial institutional

arrangements and operations, as well as the flow of funds to the provincial health sector and the capacity to monitor the use of these funds. The third reform area is boosting the delivery of health services, including the efficiency of the procurement and distribution of medical supplies. In support of the ongoing response to COVID-19 in Papua New Guinea, the program also focused on ensuring the government had put in place effective institutional and legislative frameworks for planning and implementing its COVID-19 response. ADB's assistance is expected to promote fiscal sustainability by supporting critical reforms across public financial management and health operations to improve efficiency and transparency. Implementation of these reforms will continue to be supported through the ongoing investment component of the Health Services Sector Development Program which continues through September 2025.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 11/26/2020

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ADB Approves \$250 Million Loan to Support PNG's Response to COVID-19

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$250 million loan to help finance the Government of Papua New Guinea's (PNG) response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. PNG declared a state of emergency on 21 March and the subsequent public health emergency, closure of its borders, lockdowns, and other response measures have put pressure on the country's health system and economy. Among ADB's Pacific developing members, only PNG is currently affected by community transmission of the pandemic. "COVID-19 has had a devastating health, social, and economic impact on PNG," said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa. "ADB is committed to supporting the government in responding to this pandemic. These funds will help in containing the health and economic impact of the pandemic by strengthening the country's health sector and providing much-needed budgetary support for revitalizing the economy."

ADB's program will help the government finance and implement its \$769 million pandemic response plan that includes an economic stimulus package. The program will help strengthen PNG's health system by building temporary isolation facilities for COVID-19 patients, training frontline health workers, rapidly procuring test kits and personal protective equipment, and improving the water supply for communities, schools, and clinics. The program will provide social assistance and food security to vulnerable groups, particularly those affected by income and job losses. Some 5,000 people in Port Moresby will receive food rations, delivered through local churches. The program will provide assistance to small businesses and rural producers, including subsidized lending, loans for women-owned businesses, price support for farmers, support to purchase seedlings for 10,000 smallholder farmers and poor rural households, and hygiene improvements in local markets to allow trading to continue.

The program will also focus on gender equality by ensuring women are not disproportionately affected by the pandemic. That includes measures to protect women's health, including ring-fencing of funding for maternal health care services. More support will also be provided for gender-based violence services to protect the most vulnerable women. The program is 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 members to respond to COVID-19, which was announced on 13 April. ADB also provided a \$1.5 million grant from its Asia Pacific Disaster Response Fund to PNG in July to help mitigate the impacts of the pandemic.

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Asia-Pacific

APEC Contest to Promote Women Entrepreneurship Amidst Pandemic

An APEC contest aimed to highlight the region's best women-owned and women-managed small and medium businesses and promote women's entrepreneurship will take place 12-13 November. The annual APEC Business Efficiency and Success Target Award, known as the APEC BEST Award, is an initiative of Russia with China, Japan, Malaysia and Mexico as co-sponsors of this year's contest. This is the fifth year since the contest was first introduced in 2016 when Peru hosted APEC. The theme of the contest this year, "Women Business Leadership in Post-Pandemic Recovery," aims to identify and promote success stories from small and medium business owners and managers for how they are dealing with the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. "The impact of this crisis is being felt disproportionately by women and girls across the APEC region," said Carolina Cuevas, Chair of the APEC Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy. "Women face higher levels of economic hardships and income loss and are facing an increase in hours dedicated to unpaid domestic work. We need to step up our efforts to support women in the economy, especially small businesses." This year's contest will feature 20 nominees from 11 APEC economies, which represent varying economic sectors from high-technology and social entrepreneurship to healthy food production.

"All of us live in extremely challenging times now with the lingering negative impact of

economic and health crisis brought by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Natalia Strigunova of Russia’s Ministry of Economic Development, which initiated the APEC BEST Award with OPORA, Russia’s non-governmental organization for small and medium businesses. “Women entrepreneurship should play a key role and be a strong driver for post-pandemic recovery.” A panel of judges, comprised of entrepreneurs, investors, mentors, government officials, academia and civil society representing nine APEC economies will determine the winner of the APEC BEST Award. Each participant needs to present and pitch their business model as well as answer questions from the panel of judges. Besides the grand prize of 2020 APEC BEST Award, the contest will also award six winners in different categories namely: 1) best growth potential, 2) international attractiveness, 3) best business sustainability in tackling pandemic, 4) fourth industrial revolution project, 5) best family business support and 6) best top manager. “The goal of the APEC BEST Award is not only to promote women leadership and best practices amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to provide support to female entrepreneurs, replicate best business models and expand their networks beyond their home economies to encourage more women to establish their own businesses,” added Irina Saltykova, who leads the APEC BEST Award project.

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East Asia

China Mobile, China State Construction Ink Strategic 5G Integration Agreement

China Mobile and China State Construction Engineering Corporation on Tuesday signed a strategic cooperation agreement to enhance the complementarity of resources, technologies and markets. The two giants seek to continue integrating 5G technology into the construction sector to push the innovative development of the two industries. Major project construction, new infrastructure construction, overseas services, telecommunication and informatization are among the areas marked for deeper cooperation in the agreement. China Mobile, one of the country’s leading telecom operators, has built more than 385,000 5G base stations. 5G connections in China are expected to reach 200 million by the end of 2020, more than 85 percent of the global total, according to a recent analysis by GSMA, an international association of mobile operators. In China, 5G is playing an important role, especially in stabilizing investment, promoting consumption and fostering new drivers of economic development.

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JAPAN: Firms Pitch High-Tech Face Shields to Curb Virus Infections

Japanese manufacturers are gearing up production of face shields and masks utilizing cutting-edge technologies in a bid to curb the spread of COVID-19 amid growing concerns over a resurgence of novel coronavirus infections. Sharp Corp has started producing face shields with little reflection and fogging on the surface, using its original technology to manufacture liquid crystal display panels for TV sets and smartphones. The electric appliance and panel maker said its unique technology for putting tiny protuberances on the surface of face shields, manufactured in its factory in Yonago, Tottori Prefecture, western Japan, largely cuts the reflection of light and prevents fogging from exhalation, ensuring clear visibility for a long time. The company also employs light titanium frames made in Sabae in Fukui Prefecture, central Japan -- a city famous for high-end spectacle frame production -- for its products in a bid to reduce users' fatigue and stress. Sharp will start selling products on its online shopping website on Nov 30, expecting them to help protect health care workers and those in the service industry from virus infections.

The price tag of the product is 8,980 yen while a low-cost version using polycarbonate for its frame is already on sale and priced at 1,980 yen. Meanwhile, a team of people from a national medical institution, an air conditioner maker and other companies in western Japan is developing reusable medical face masks with a plan to mass-produce them in Japan as early as January, as Japanese hospitals and clinics largely rely on imported products. Under the project led by the National Cerebral and Cardiovascular Center in Osaka, the team plans to manufacture highly protective N95 masks with an exchangeable filter to meet possible high demand once a resurgence of virus infections occurs in the winter. Air conditioner maker Daikin Industries Ltd provides its advanced technology for the exchangeable filters, while medical device maker Nipro Corp manages the overall production and sales activities. "A shortage of N95 masks continues in many medical institutions. We want to provide made-in-Japan medical face masks to hospitals across the country to ensure safe treatment for patients," said Kunihiro Nishimura at the National Cerebral and Cardiovascular Center.

From <https://japantoday.com> 11/16/2020

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Japanese Firms to Promote Common Infrastructure for Cashless Payments

More than 30 major companies in Japan will launch verification tests on a possible private digital currency from fiscal 2021 starting next April, a group aimed at promoting common infrastructure for interoperable cashless payment services said. The lack of interoperability between different cashless payment applications remains

a hurdle both for consumers and retailers, as customers cannot use the payment app on their smartphone if a shop does not have a terminal that accepts it. In June, Japan's three megabanks -- MUFG Bank, Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp and Mizuho Bank -- and railway operator East Japan Railway Co, the issuer of smart card Suica, jointly set up the group to explore possible interoperable infrastructure for cashless payments and digital currency.

Last week, the consortium released a report proposing a common digital currency with an interoperable structure to allow different cashless payment service providers to use it while maintaining their original payment services. "We would like to facilitate a wide range of settlement services," Hiromi Yamaoka, a former senior Bank of Japan official who serves as chairman of the consortium, said at an online press conference. The consortium said it will develop into the "Digital Currency Forum" next month, joined by new members such as retailer Aeon Co, Kyocera Corp and Kansai Electric Power Co. The BOJ, the Financial Services Agency, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, the Finance Ministry and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications remain as observers, the consortium said. The central bank said last month it will start a feasibility study on a digital currency of its own in fiscal 2021. The bank said that so far it has no plan to issue digital currency, but will be collaborating with other central banks and fintech firms in the study.

From <https://japantoday.com> 11/22/2020

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Consider Ways to Enhance Strengths of Small and Medium-Sized Businesses

Enhancing the business operations of small and medium-sized companies is a major challenge for the Japanese economy. The government needs to carefully consider measures while taking into consideration technology and protecting jobs. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has announced his intention to map out measures to improve the productivity of small and medium-sized enterprises, including support for realignment. He said the newly established Growth Strategy Council will discuss the issue and compile an interim report by the end of the year. There are about 3.6 million small and medium-sized enterprises in the country, accounting for 99.7% of the total number of companies and about 70% of all employees. The novel coronavirus pandemic has deepened their predicament, especially in the restaurant and tourism industries. In addition to providing cash benefits and measures for financing, it is reasonable to push for a drastic strengthening of business foundations. The use of mergers and acquisitions would be a potent option.

However, it is important not to be preoccupied with expanding scale and business efficiency; the role that each company plays in its industry and region should not be underestimated. Konishi Decorative Arts & Crafts Co. President David Atkinson, who

is regarded as one of the prime minister's "brains," has been selected as a member of the council. He has argued in books and other publications that there are too many small and medium-sized businesses and that they should be weeded out. At a council meeting, Atkinson said the focus should be on the companies that are growing, not protecting all companies. He also calls for increasing minimum wages. The idea is to get companies that are unable to raise wages to leave the market. Akio Mimura, the chairman of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which represents the interests of small and medium-sized businesses, rejected such opinions, saying at a press conference, "I cannot agree." In the manufacturing industry, it is often the case that electronic parts, materials and other items made by local small and medium-sized companies support the advanced products of major companies. Service industries such as dining and retail may have low productivity, but they often provide important employment opportunities in regional areas.

Blindly pursuing redundancies or realignments should be avoided. Detailed measures that pay attention to the circumstances in each industry and each region are desirable. There must be an improvement in the slow response to digitization among small and medium-sized companies and the widening productivity gap with large companies. Subsidies for information technology investment must be enhanced. There has been a sharp increase in cases of businesses being suspended or closed due to circumstances such as aging business owners or a lack of successors. The government is considering subsidies and tax incentives to facilitate mergers and acquisitions of small and medium-sized companies. It is essential to make the most of such measures to assure smooth business succession. There are many areas where structural changes in demand are occurring, such as the expansion of home delivery and online shopping due to the pandemic. It is also important to help small and medium-sized companies change their businesses.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 11/28/2020

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Pandemic Inspires Japan Companies to Create Virtual Library System

A virtual-reality library system has been developed for people to enjoy from home, inspired by the closing of libraries around the country due to the novel coronavirus. The system was developed in part by Tokyo-based TRC Library Service Inc. The aim is to put it into operation in two years. When users access the virtual library on their computers or smartphones through a dedicated website, they will be able to select books from virtual shelves as if they were visiting a real library. The system currently has 12 e-books whose copyrights have expired, including "Lemon" by Motojiro Kajii. The number of e-books available is expected to increase after licensing fees are paid to publishers. According to a survey by a group of researchers and librarians, more than 90% of municipal and other libraries were closed in early May under the state of

emergency. TCR Library Service developed the virtual library with Dai Nippon Printing Co. The two companies plan to expand their services so users can order paper books from a real library or buy them as e-books after choosing them in the virtual library.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 11/29/2020

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S. KOREA: Firms Likely to Benefit from RCEP Trade Deal

South Korea signing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership is expected to benefit Korean companies, especially in steel, automobiles and electronics, through the elimination of tariffs across Asian countries. The pact will also help better protect Korean firms' intellectual property rights in the region, experts said Monday. RCEP is made up of 10 Southeast Asian countries, South Korea, China, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. The region covers nearly a third of the global economy with a combined nominal gross domestic product of \$26.3 trillion and combined trade volume of \$5.4 trillion. The Korea Institute for International Economic Policy, a state-run think tank, said in a recent report, "When RCEP comes into effect, the Korean economy will have a growth effect of 0.41 to 0.62 percent by reducing tariffs on goods." Korea's exports to RCEP nations were \$269 billion last year, accounting for half of the nation's total exports.

With Korea joining the mega deal on Sunday, Korean companies, especially in automobile parts, steel and electronics, are expected to benefit through tariff elimination in the world's largest trading bloc. Under the pact, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand will remove tariffs on automobile parts such as seat belts, air bags and wheels. Indonesia, in particular, will eliminate tariffs that are imposed on auto parts by up to 40 percent. Hyundai Motor is building an automobile plant in Indonesia, and parts exports are expected to increase once tariffs are lifted. As for finished cars, tariffs will be removed on cargo trucks or small cars in some countries. In the steel industry, tariffs on steel products (now 5 percent), steel pipes (20 percent) and steel plates (10 percent) will be removed. In electronics, tariffs on refrigerators and washing machines (up to 30 percent) as well as air conditioners (up to 25 percent) in some countries will be removed. The mega deal will also improve the protection of Korean companies' intellectual property rights in the region. The Free Trade Agreement between Korea and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations went into effect in 2007.

However, this still has limitations in effectively protecting Korean corporate intellectual property rights as it only declaratively stipulated sharing information and experience in the field of intellectual property rights and raising awareness of the protection of the rights. Under the RCEP trade deal, however, a total of 83 provisions are specifically stipulated in areas such as trademarks, patents and designs, which

are expected to further strengthen the protection of intellectual property rights in the ASEAN region. Through the rights protections, companies riding the Korean wave are expected to be greatly restricted. Currently, sellers in the region often take advantage of selling products by misusing the country name of Korea even for products not made in Korea. The formation of the mega deal was welcomed by Korean business associations. On Sunday, the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry released a statement saying, "We welcome this conclusion, expecting that RCEP will expand a new free trade bloc and serve as the basis for revitalizing the Asia-Pacific regional economic markets. The Korea International Trade Association said it hopes to expand economic cooperation in East Asia in the future and secure a stable foundation for trade and investment.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 11/16/2020

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SK Telecom Pursues E-Commerce Biz with Amazon in S. Korea

SK Telecom Co., South Korea's largest mobile carrier, said Monday it is partnering with Amazon.com, Inc. to allow South Koreans to have easier access to products on the U.S. e-commerce giant's platform. The carrier said users of its e-commerce unit 11Street Co. can directly purchase the U.S. company's products on its platform. It did not provide a specific time frame for the service's launch. SK Telecom said it has also made an agreement with Amazon so that the U.S. tech giant has the right to acquire a stake in 11Street based on the South Korean e-commerce company's progress in the local market. The announcement comes as SK Telecom is currently planning an initial public offering (IPO) for 11Street. The carrier said in its third-quarter conference call that the e-commerce unit is among its list of subsidiaries, such as new mobility spinoff T map Mobility Co., that will pursue IPOs. The e-commerce unit's sales reached 135.7 billion won (US\$122.7 million) in the third quarter, up 8 percent from a year earlier, according to SK Telecom.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 11/16/2020

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Korean Firms Tighten Antivirus Measures Over Resurgence of COVID-19

South Korean firms are again beefing up their virus prevention measures after the country decided to enforce enhanced social distancing rules in the greater Seoul area over a resurgence of the novel coronavirus, industry insiders said Monday. Health authorities will start implementing the Level 2 distancing scheme, the third highest in the country's five-tier COVID-19 alert system, in the capital region, home to half of the nation's population, Tuesday as sporadic cluster infections continue to

pile up. To join the country's virus fight, companies here are expanding their remote working program, while asking their workers to limit meetings and staff dinners. LG Group, South Korea's fourth-largest conglomerate, initiated its enhanced antivirus protocol this week after one of its employees at its headquarters in Seoul tested positive for COVID-19 on Sunday.

The group said 70 percent of its workers at the headquarters building are ordered to work from home at least for this week. It has also banned gatherings and meetings involving 10 people or more, and advised workers to suspend unessential business trips. Hyundai Motor Group said at least 30 percent of its workers will work from home, and meetings will be limited to up to 15 people, while any group activity and gatherings outside its business sites will be banned. SK Group, the country's No. 3 conglomerate, has reinforced its building entry procedures for visitors for its facilities. The group previously reported virus-infected workers at its office building in central Seoul. Hanwha Group, a major defense and chemical conglomerate, also expanded its remote working program, while prohibiting staff dinners and unnecessary business trips this week.

Posco, the country's largest steelmaker, said 30 percent of its employees have started remote working from this week. It has advised employees to refrain from holding meetings involving 10 people or more. Samsung Electronics Co., the country's leading tech firm, has been already running a pilot remote working program for some of its set business units since last week and said it is considering implementing extra virus prevention measures following the elevation of the state-run social distancing scheme. The world's largest smartphone maker on Monday reported a virus-infected worker at its mobile research lab in Suwon, south of Seoul. It added that the floor where the virus-infected employee worked will be shuttered through Wednesday. South Korean companies previously enforced strengthened antivirus curbs in August and September due to massive virus outbreaks in the greater Seoul area.

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Moon Says COVID-19 Crisis Highlighting Significance of AI Sector

President Moon Jae-in on Wednesday reviewed South Korea's campaign for the past year to develop its artificial intelligence (AI) sector and reaffirmed the government's commitment to supporting relevant industries. "First, (the government) will accelerate AI technology innovation," he said during an event, joined by representatives from some local firms engaging in AI businesses, held at the KINTEX exhibition center in Goyang, Gyeonggi Province. They included Naver, Kakao, KT, SK Telecom and Samsung Electronics. He presented an ambitious vision for the

development of AI semiconductors as the "second DRAM" memory chips, a major cash cow of the nation's chipmakers. He added the government's goal is "not just (for South Korea) to become the No. 1 country in AI technology but to make all of the people happy with AI". It was part of the president's almost weekly on-site inspections of businesses associated with his administration's bold push for the Korean version of the New Deal.

Expanding digital infrastructure is a pillar of the so-called K-New Deal project along with a campaign to promote environment-friendly industries. Moon said AI has emerged as a core technology of the fourth industrial revolution, such as the Internet of Things, self-driving and health care, opening a new future. He noted that AI has shown "unprecedented capability" in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The nation has actively used digital technologies to monitor and trace the sources of virus transmissions. He recalled the government's campaign to foster the sector since announcing a national strategy for it in December last year and having discussions on a future vision. He requested that private companies spearhead "bold investment" and make win-win efforts to help enhance the nation's AI competitiveness. He pledged that the government won't spare efforts to support the AI sector by clearing legal and systemic obstacles. "We need to design the future, thinking about the importance of people-centered values, along with economic values," Moon said, adding that it is important to establish AI-related ethics standards.

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SK Telecom Launches S. Korea's First AI Chip for Data Centers

SK Telecom Co., South Korea's leading wireless carrier, said Wednesday it launched a new artificial intelligence (AI) semiconductor for data center operations as it seeks to capture growing global demand for the chips. The new SAPEON X220 is the first AI chip developed by the mobile carrier and also the country's first AI chip for data centers. SK Telecom said its new semiconductor will target the global AI chip market set to grow to 50 trillion won (US\$45 billion) by 2024, citing data from market researcher Gartner. AI chips refer to high performance and power efficient semiconductors that specialize in AI services. The carrier's new AI chip serves as an alternative to graphic processing units (GPU) currently used by many companies to run AI-based data centers that consume a lot of power. The SAPEON X220's power consumption is about 80 percent of a conventional GPU, leading to lower operation costs, and is at around half the price, according to SK Telecom. The company added that the new chip is 1.5 times faster in deep learning calculation speeds than a GPU.

The carrier's new chip will be manufactured by Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC), the world's largest foundry firm, according to an industry official. SK Telecom said it will supply the chip to the South Korean government for its new data

analysis service before the end of this year. The chips will also be used to run cloud servers operated by Cast.era, a digital media equipment maker and a joint venture between SK Telecom and the U.S.-based Sinclair Broadcast Group, next year. The carrier added that it aims to use the chips next year for its own AI services, such as its AI assistant NUGU, and that it is closely working with its affiliate and memory chip giant SK hynix Inc. in memory-related technology. The carrier's launch of an AI chip comes as the South Korean government said earlier this year it will support local companies' efforts to develop up to 50 AI chips by 2030. SK Telecom said it is developing a new AI chip through the government program and aims for production by 2022. "By connecting future AI chips with SK Telecom's AI, 5G and cloud technology, we aim to become a top global AI company," SK Telecom Chief Technology Officer Kim Yoon said in a statement.

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South-East Asia

VIETNAM: Number of Newly-Established Firms Surges in October

The development of new enterprises and operation of some existing enterprises rose in October, according to the General Statistics Office (GSO). In October, 12,200 new enterprises were established with registered capital of VNĐ165.6 trillion. These figures were up 18.4 per cent in terms of the number of new enterprises, but down 18.5 per cent in registered capital compared to September. The average registered capital reached VNĐ13.6 billion per new enterprise, down 31.2 per cent month-on-month but up 15.1 per cent year-on-year. The GSO also reported that in October, 5,044 enterprises resumed operations, up 10.4 per cent month-on-month but down 30.4 per cent year-on-year. In total, 3,293 enterprises suspended their operations, up 0.7 per cent over the previous month and 57.9 per cent over the same period last year. Meanwhile, 3,579 businesses were waiting for dissolution procedures, down 12.6 per cent month-on-month and 28.6 per cent year-on-year. During the first 10 months of 2020, Việt Nam had 111,200 newly-established enterprises with total register capital of about VNĐ1.6 trillion, a decrease of 2.9 per cent in terms of number but an increase of 11.1 per cent in capital over the same period last year. The average registered capital of a new enterprise in the first 10 months reached VNĐ14.3 billion, 14.4 per cent higher than the same period last year, according to the GSO. Existing enterprises also registered to raise their joint capital by VNĐ2.3 trillion in the first 10 months, meaning the domestic economy received VNĐ3.9 trillion, a year-on-year increase of 17 per cent. Besides that, 37,700 enterprises resumed operations, an increase of 8.2 per cent year-on-year. About 41,800 businesses were suspended, up by 58.7 per cent, while 30,300 businesses stopped operations to complete dissolution procedures, down 12.4 per cent.

Gov't Policy Gives Auto Industry Much-Needed Boost

More than half a billion dollars in tax returns have been awarded to firms since 2017 in a bid by the Government to boost the country's auto industry and supporting industry, according to deputy director of the General Department of Vietnam Customs Lưu Mạnh Tường. The tax incentives are in line with Government Decision 57/2020/NĐ-CP, a policy package aimed at bolstering the development of the auto industry in the next four years, he said. While the tax returns may have hurt the State's budget collection in the short run, the benefits of growing the auto and supporting industries would be more than enough to make up for it in the near future. The incentive was said to have secured more jobs, attracted more foreign investment and created a ripple effect in the development of the country's industrial sector. Nguyễn Trung Hiếu, a representative from the Vietnam Automobile Manufacturers' Association (VAMA), said the policy package gave the auto industry a much-needed boost to catch up with the competition in Southeast Asia. Hiếu said the auto industry remained a large contributor to the State's budget with billions of dollars in revenue and also employed hundreds of thousands of workers.

Lương Đức Toàn, deputy head of the department of industrial manufacturing under the Ministry of Industry and Trade, said the auto industry had seen major leaps forward in recent years. By the end of 2019, Việt Nam was home to more than 40 auto manufacturers with several world-leading brands including Ford, Mercedes and Toyota. Domestic production had been able to supply up to 70 per cent of local demand for nine-seater or smaller vehicles while made-in-Viet Nam products had found their way to markets in the region such as Thailand and the Philippines. However, there were still shortcomings in the auto industry, Toàn said, as the industry remained entirely dependent on a few global corporations. In addition, domestic firms possessed no technologies for the production of key auto parts such as engines, control systems and transmission gears. As a direct result of the absence of a large network of auto parts suppliers, Việt Nam's localisation rate was poor compared with other countries in the region.

Việt Nam Targets Private-Sector Development

Việt Nam needs to develop a strategy to promote the development of the private sector over the next decade to maintain growth, speakers said at a conference on socio-economic development from 2021 to 2030 held in HCM City last week. Dr Vũ

Thành Tự Anh, dean of the Fulbright University Vietnam's Fulbright School of Public Policy and Management, said with the current global uncertainty, it would be difficult to achieve the target of average GDP growth of 7 per cent over the next decade unless the country focuses on the development of the private sector. Anh is also a member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Group. "Private firms, mostly small- and medium-sized enterprises, are considered the spearhead of the economy, but their contributions remain modest due to a lack of supportive policies," he said. "It's important to offer them fairness in accessing economic resources." Dr. Trần Du Lịch, a member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Group, said the country would not be able to achieve the target unless it mobilises all resources for economic development over the next decade as the population is getting older. "The proportion of the working age population has begun to decline and this trend will continue in the next decade. There is no country with an aging population that can grow rapidly. I am concerned we will be old before we can get rich."

Dr. Nguyễn Bá Ân, a member of the Editorial Group of the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party, said it was important to continue to reform administrative procedures to help remove barriers for private enterprises. Dr Vũ Tuấn Anh, lecturer at the National Economics University, noted that private enterprises' contribution to GDP remains modest at less than 10 per cent. In comparison, the FDI sector contributes about 20 per cent to GDP. This is a problematic economic structure, making it difficult for private firms to develop. Experts recommended that, for a normal economy, the contribution of the private sector to GDP should be around 60-70 per cent. Anh, the dean at Fulbright University, said more than 96 per cent of private firms are micro and small size, so their resilience to external shocks remains weak, making it difficult to connect to the global value chain. Statistics from the Ministry of Planning and Investment last year showed only 15 per cent of private enterprises are suppliers to FDI enterprises in the country. More than 8 per cent are likely to export directly, and 7.4 per cent can export indirectly through a third country. He said the Government should reform the governance system of State-owned enterprises, and stop providing bailouts or financial support to any State-owned business or project that encounters prolonged heavy losses.

"For attraction of FDI, priority should be given to domestic private enterprises to connect to supply networks of leading multinational corporations in the country. The domestic private sector should play a major role in the economy," he said. The private sector altogether contributes around 40 per cent to the country's GDP, of which some 32 per cent is from household-based businesses and only eight per cent from private firms. State-owned enterprises contribute around 28 per cent, according to statistics from the Ministry of Planning and Investment. State-owned enterprises and business households are the two major contributors to GDP, but they both have problems in capacity. Household-based businesses are of small scale, while State-owned enterprises lack efficiency in operation, the ministry said. Việt Nam's private sector has more than 700,000 firms and 5.2 million business households. The

meeting was organised by the Institute of Development Strategy under the Ministry of Planning and Investment in coordination with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Việt Nam.

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

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Mobifone to Launch 5G Commercial Pilot in HCM City Next Month

MobiFone is making final preparations for the launch of the commercial pilot of the fifth-generation (5G) network next month. The Ministry of Information Technology and Communications allowed the carrier to launch the 5G commercial pilot in HCM City. MobiFone has been rushing to install equipment and preparing technical, human resources and locations for the launch of 5G on the broadband of 2,600MHz with a scale of 50 sites in HCM City. It negotiated and co-ordinated with leading 5G network terminal equipment providers to prepare the best conditions for customer experience. MobiFone's subscribers would join in the launch at central areas with a high number of visitors. It is expected that MobiFone would provide high speed internet services such as video in 4K, 8K, augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) games, artificial intelligence (AI) learning and Internet of Things (IoT) service. The 5G commercial pilot aimed to evaluate the ability of MobiFone's network before the official launch nationwide. MobiFone said they had been focusing on the 5G launch but also ensure quality of their 2G/3G/4G services.

The number of 5G subscriptions could hit 6.3 million or 6 per cent of total mobile subscriptions by 2025, according to a forecast from technology conglomerate Cisco. 5G is said to offer speeds 100 times faster than 4G and support new applications like remote medical procedures and autonomous driving. Earlier, Minister of Information and Communication Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng said Việt Nam aimed to roll out the 5G network more widely in 2021 through producing 5G devices with good quality and reasonable prices. Developing a 5G network would be one of the key directions on improving the capacity of digital infrastructure for national digital transformation. Denis Brunetti, president of Ericsson Việt Nam, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, said that 5G would change all industries such as manufacturing, agriculture, and healthcare drastically thanks to the presence of robots and 5G information transmission systems. He believed that Việt Nam had the essentials to develop science and information technology.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 11/28/2020

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South Asia

INDIA: NITI Aayog Selects Oracle to Strengthen IT Infra in 112

Backward Districts

In a bid to aid backward districts of the country, NITI Aayog, a government think tank, announced on August 13 that it has selected Oracle to modernise vital IT infrastructure in 112 most backward districts. The move is a part of its Aspirational Districts Programme. The 112 most backward districts on the list are home to around 1.4 billion people which is India's 28 percent population. According to Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog, the technological aids and data-driven decisions will help pave the way for growth and development in these districts. Putting to use a range of services from the Oracle cloud, the government think tank is planning for a rapid transformation by providing simplified data access, increased process automation and real-time data governance. Moreover, the programme analyses the performance of the districts using the data. The Oracle autonomous database which has been kept at the core of the project is the world's first and the only true autonomous database. As the database is autonomous for most of its functioning it requires a minimal support from the IT team. Shailender Kumar, Regional Managing Director, Oracle India said, "Oracle has committed nearly 30 years in India, serving its people, the government and enterprise firms. With a range of Oracle Cloud services, we look forward to supporting this programme's success and facilitate the creation of a new India."

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Govt & Industry to Jointly Develop EV Ecosystem & Make India an Auto Manufacturing Hub in 5 Yrs

Addressing a virtual conference '9th Edition of Auto Serve 2020' Electric Mobility Conference 2020-Seizing Opportunities in New Normal, on November 23, Nitin Gadkari, Minister of Road Transport and Highways & MSME, asked the auto industry to come together to work jointly towards achieving broader national agenda of reducing pollution. Nitin GadkariThe Minister said that the government aims at creating core global competencies in India by facilitating the seamless integration of the automotive industry with the world. Government is trying to create an ecosystem to accelerate the uptake of electric vehicles in the country. Further, he detailed on a number of steps that government has taken to promote EVs which include a reduction in GST to 5 per cent, allowing delinking of battery cost of 2-3 wheelers from vehicle cost as it accounts for nearly 30 per cent of the cost etc. Battery charging ecosystem is very important, as such he said Government is planning to set up at least one EV charging kiosk at around 69 thousand Petrol Pumps across the country to induce people to go for e-mobility. The Minister also said, "Government is also working towards making India a global automobile manufacturing hub in next five years.' This is my dream, he stressed. This will also contribute to fulfilling the Prime Minister's vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat. This, he said, is possible as our auto industry

has made significant strides in terms of the development of different designs and models, robust R&D, huge market, stable government frame-work and bright & young engineering minds. "India already is the largest manufacturer of two-wheelers in the world," he added.

The government has earmarked over Rs 51,000 crore for the automobile sector under Production Linked Incentive (PLI) considering the huge potential of the sector. This is the highest amongst the 10 champion sectors, told the Minister. There is a huge requirement of about 25 million skilled jobs in the automobile sector in near future. This very significant as this industry is going to create maximum jobs and growth, Gadkari added. He further asked the automobile industry to push for manufacturing flex engines which have the versatility to use petrol or ethanol/CNG as fuels. He stressed that the Indian auto industry needs to follow the example of Brazil and US Auto sectors in this regard. He exuded confidence that our industry would utilise the opportunity being thrown up by the alternative and less polluting fuels like CNG, hydrogen, electricity.

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/> 11/25/2020

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Samsung Captures India Premium Smartphone Market in H1 2020

Riding on the success of its Galaxy A71 and A51 devices, Samsung grabbed the top position in the premium smartphone market (Rs 25,000-Rs 50,000) in India for the first six months this year, a new report said on Friday. While the South Korean giant captured 37 per cent market share in H1 2020, Apple continued its impressive run in the premium segment, growing by 14 per cent (year-on-year) with 26 per cent market share in the country, according to the 'CMR India Mobile Handset Review Report'. OnePlus was a distant third with 15 per cent market share in the premium segment in H1 2020. "Owing to the pandemic, H1 2020 was a tough period for the overall smartphone industry in general, with multiple challenges. However, the premium smartphone segment was one of the least affected segments. In fact, the segment grew owing to strong consumer demand and good supply-side dynamics," said Anand Priya Singh, Analyst, Industry Intelligence Group (IIG), CMR. Overall, the smartphone shipments in the premium segment grew 18 per cent (YoY) in the country in H1 2020. This segment accounted for 5 per cent of the total smartphone shipments in the January-June period. Samsung's domination of the overall premium smartphone segment was made possible through good supply side dynamics, attractive discounts and smart channel strategies.

Samsung Galaxy A71 was the star in this segment, contributing to 19 per cent in this segment. For Apple, the iPhone 11 continued to garner good market response in the initial part of the year. "On the other hand, the all-new iPhone SE 2020 is on track to repeat the exceptional performance of iPhone 11. It captured 8 per cent market share

of the total premium smartphones shipped during Q2," the report mentioned. According to the report, India's premium smartphone segment is potentially slated to grow 20 per cent (YoY) in H2 2020, with many new device offerings anticipated from various players in the festive season. "Samsung and Apple will be in a dead heat in H2 2020, and potentially slated to garner 28-29 per cent market share each," the report said. Beyond the incumbents, the new premium segment aspirants, including the likes of Xiaomi and OPPO will seek to shake the turf. "In H1 2020, consumer demand in the premium smartphone segment continued to remain high, and, in fact, fuelled the market growth. This bodes well for H2 2020, and, especially, in the run-up to the all-important festive season," said Amit Sharma, Analyst, IIG, CMR. Beyond the incumbents, aspirational premium brands will seek to make inroads into the premium segment, he added.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 11/28/2020

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Continuing Providing Financial Support to Private Entrepreneurs

Local entrepreneurs in Azerbaijan, working in the country's districts and cities that are under a strict anti-coronavirus quarantine regime, will be provided with state financial support, Trend reports referring to the State Tax Service under the Ministry of Economy. According to the decree of the President of Azerbaijan dated March 19, 2020, on reducing the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) on the national economy and business entities, as well as the action plan approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in connection with the implementation of this decree, the payment of a certain part of employees' salaries working in areas affected by the pandemic and financial support to private (micro) entrepreneurs continues. A special quarantine regime has been reintroduced in connection with the aggravation of the epidemiological situation in a number of cities and regions of the country. Tightening of the quarantine regime in the administrative territories of Shaki, Lankaran, Gakh, Zagatala, Bilasuar, Jalilabad, Masalli, Ismayilli, Guba and Khachmaz regions led to repeated restrictions on the activities of business entities.

It was decided to continue providing financial support to business entities operating in the above cities and regions in order to reduce the losses of business entities in the current situation and improve their financial situation and preserve jobs. So, payments in these cities and regions will be made to preserve part of the wages of employees, and private (micro) entrepreneurs will be provided with one-time financial support. Financial support for business entities in 10 cities and regions where a toughened quarantine regime has been applied will cover up to 9,300 employees, 1,900 taxpayers for the payment of part of the wages, and over 13,000 private (micro)

entrepreneurs will be provided with one-time support. Taxpayers do not need to apply for financial support. Payments will be made to those taxpayers who previously received financial support in these areas. Financial support will be provided to taxpayers who have not significantly reduced the number of employees over the past four months. Social insurance contributions of taxpayers will also be taken into account in the course of making payments on the part of wages.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 11/07/2020

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Azerbaijan Launches New E-Platform to Improve Entrepreneurs' Skills, Knowledge

A single online platform for the Small and Medium Business Development Centers (SMEs) has been launched - www.kobim.az, Trend reports citing Azerbaijan's Small and Medium Business Development Agency. The site will inform SMEs about the support and services needed to improve their skills and knowledge. The site provides information about SME Development Centers in various cities and districts of the country, about trainings, consultations, and other services for entrepreneurs, as well as professional instructors-experts. The site also contains information about free trainings organized at the SME Development Centers in the cities of Baku, Sumgayit, Khachmaz, and Yevlakh. In the coming days, an opportunity for online trainings will be created on the site for SME facilities, video materials of trainings will be posted.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 11/12/2020

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Azerbaijan to Auction Off State-owned Enterprises

The State Service on Property Issues under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy will hold another auction on December 8, 2020, Trend reports referring to the ministry. In accordance with the data, 64 state property facilities, including 24 small public enterprises and facilities, 38 joint-stock companies, and two partially constructed facilities, will be put up for auction. "Everyone can take part in the auctions," the service said. "Those interested in the process can also observe the process of the auctions both in the area in which property services of the State Service on Property Issues are rendered and online." "Those wishing to participate in the auctions on the official website of the Service (www.emlak.gov.az) or www.privatization.az, 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 website (www.e-emdk.gov.az), it is possible to join the auction.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 11/13/2020

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Azerbaijan's High-Tech Park Records New Resident Companies

Three more companies operating in the field of high technologies of Azerbaijan have been registered as residents of the High Technologies Park (located in Pirallahi village) of the Innovation Agency under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, Trend reports citing the ministry. Registration certificates were presented to the iTicket project of ITICKET LLC, the Smart Bus project of NN GROUP LLC, and several projects of LOF STUDIOS LLC. The residents will be provided with production areas for activities in the high-tech park, the development of high technologies, research, and development of innovative products and high technologies. These companies will also be able to take advantage of the benefits provided for residents by Azerbaijan's Tax Code and the Law on Customs Tariffs. Thus, residents will be exempt from paying income tax/income tax, property and land tax, VAT, and customs duties when importing machinery, technological equipment, and structures for 10 years starting from the reporting year in the technoparks where they are registered.

The residents will implement the following projects: The 'iTicket' project of ITICKET LLC, which is a platform based on artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, developed in accordance with international standards. The goal of the project is to bring the Azerbaijani brand of artificial intelligence (AI) to the international market and increase its market share by selling tickets for concerts, theaters, sports events, entertainment, and many others. The 'Smart Bus' project of NN GROUP LLC, which will present a new generation bus powered by solar and wind energy. The buses are equipped with technologies that fully comply with environmental standards. The project's aim is to develop the 'green industry' in Azerbaijan, train local specialists in the sphere, promote the brand 'Made in Azerbaijan' in the world market in a new direction. LOF STUDIOS LLC (Land Of Fire Studios), which is the first multifunctional studio in Azerbaijan and countries from the neighboring regions, which is engaged in the development and promotion of publishing and selling high-tech digital products such as video games, mobile apps, and cinematography. There are 4 types of projects in the studio: 'Project BOB' - mass multiplayer, 'VICON Motion Capture Systems' - the systems recording patterns of movement digitally for the purpose of animating a digital character in a film or video game, 'EMEK'project - a mobile application for eliminating unemployment on the basis of 'uberization' (the principle of providing services according to the scheme consumer - electronic site aggregator - performer) and the medical bot project 'MEDYBOT'. The project is aimed at the online organization of all medical services. The main goal of the projects is to prevent unemployment, develop the mobile applications and video games industry, and support the development of talented youth in this area. The number of residents of Pirallahi High Technologies Park has reached seven.

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KYRGYZSTAN: Provides Online Courses for Entrepreneurs in Field of Tourism

An online course for local representatives of the tourism market from Naryn, Osh, Dzhalaal-Abad and Issyk-Kul Oblasts, supported by the Department of Tourism, is being launched under the UNDP Trade Facilitation Project, Trend reports citing Kabar. The training is aimed at acquiring skills to strengthen the value chains of adventure tourism, the press service of the Department reported. The commission on the selection of candidates for training includes the Department of Tourism, the Office of four oblasts' state administrations, the Osh Oblast Development Fund, Kyrgyz Economic University named after Ryskulbekov, UNDP project officer and a representative from Kyrgyz Tourism LLC. The commission selected 25 people out of 72 who expressed their wish to participate. The main objectives of the course are: 1. Professional development of local staff in tourism. Training and capacity building of local players in the tourism market 2. Integrated approach to training and provision of professional training modules on marketing, management, tourism, English, coaching and digital skills 3. Strong players in the local market to promote and increase local sales 4. Improving the quality of adventure tourism products.

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Kazakhstan, Russia to Cooperate in Digitalization Sector

The President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev met with the Russian delegation represented by the Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Aleksey Overchuk and CEO, Chairman of the Board of 'Sberbank' PJSC German Gref at the platform of International Financial Center 'Astana', Trend reports with reference to the press service of the president. The state's head was familiarized, through an interactive presentation, with the projects of digital solutions being implemented in Russia, developments in the field of deep complex digitalization, and the experience of using the Sber ecosystem. Following the presentation, Tokayev held a conversation with the leadership of the Government of Kazakhstan and the Russian delegation about the prospects for bilateral cooperation in such areas as the technological development of ecosystems and the digitalization of public services. In the presence of the head of state, Kazakh-Russian memorandums of cooperation in the field of digitalization were signed.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 11/20/2020

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Mixed Signals over Business Revenue Growth

Fewer than half of Australian small businesses expect revenue growth through to April next year, new research shows. ScotPac and East & Partners surveyed 1252 businesses across the country as part of its twice-yearly research into the small business sector. ScotPac chief executive Jon Sutton said of the small businesses surveyed, 47 per cent were expecting revenue growth through to April 2021, with a quarter forecasting revenue to decline. "In the midst of Australia's first recession in 30 years, a record-low number of SMEs have positive revenue growth aspirations," Mr Sutton said. However, there was massive variance, by state and industry, in revenue forecasts for early 2021. In Victoria, 4.6 per cent of businesses expected positive growth, while 69.1 per cent forecast negative growth and 26.3 per cent felt there would be no change.

It was a stark contrast with the hard-bordered Western Australia, where 80.7 per cent of businesses believed they would have positive growth, with 3.5 per cent citing negative growth and 15.8 per cent predicting no change. Similarly, SA-NT businesses were upbeat, with 76.3 per cent predicting positive growth, 11.3 per cent negative and 12.5 per cent indicating no change. NSW businesses were divided, with 57 per cent forecasting positive growth, 13.5 per cent negative growth and 29.5 per cent no change. There was also a significant split in views in Queensland, with 42.7 per cent of businesses indicating positive growth, 8.9 per cent negative growth and 48.4 per cent no change. "Revenue forecasts for the small business sector are less 'doom and gloom' than might be expected after such a challenging 2020, and highlight the resilience of the SME sector," Mr Sutton said.

In a sign that government support during the pandemic has been effective, since March the number of small and medium sized businesses forecasting a revenue decline has moved only one percentage point. "It will be interesting to see whether revenue forecasts were kept artificially high because federal government's stimulus measures were still in place, allowing many SMEs to 'keep the lights on' without having to commit to investing significantly in their businesses," Mr Sutton said. "Those small businesses who have confirmed a clear strategy and who have secured appropriate funding will put themselves in the strongest position to face what 2021 has in store." Across different industry types there were differences of views on revenue prospects. The retail SME sector is evenly split between those expecting revenue to grow, decline or remain steady.

Transport businesses were more confident, given the demand for online shopping over the pandemic. Manufacturing and wholesale industries faced a hit in sales volume at the start of the pandemic, with signs of recovery during June and July followed by another decline in August and September during Victoria's stage four lockdown, the research found. ScotPac is Australia and New Zealand's largest non-bank SME lender.

Nine Wants Online Giants to Pay Fair Price

Nine Entertainment chair Peter Costello has stepped up pressure for Facebook and Google to pay to use news reports and said its range of material would be unviable if it is not compensated. Mr Costello told the media company's annual general meeting on Thursday that the market power of the two tech giants was one of the great challenges of the industry. "They make very little Australian content and contribute very little to Australian employment," Mr Costello said. "Nonetheless, they are able to use the premium content we produce to attract audiences in the Australian market." A Google spokesman said the comments were incorrect. He said Google invested about \$1 billion in Australia last year, and had 1800 jobs in the country. Google and Facebook have taken much of the advertising revenue of media operators such as Nine and News Corp, and embed or link to the latter's stories on their platforms.

Mr Costello said the digital giants were not paying for the material at a rate that fairly shared the cost of production. If Nine was not fairly compensated, it would become uncommercial to produce all its programming, Mr Costello said. However, the Google spokesman said the company did not use news stories, rather it linked to them as it did with every other page on the web. He said Google search results each year sent billions of user queries to Australian news publishers. This web traffic was worth \$218 million in 2018, the spokesman said. Media operators are hopeful of a mandatory code being devised to ensure Facebook and Google to pay for using news stories. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission introduced the draft code in July for feedback. Mr Costello said the final detail would be important. Facebook has also been contacted for comment.

Meanwhile, Nine Entertainment, which operates in TV, print, online and radio, said the advertising market had improved significantly in recent months. The company expects 15 per cent revenue growth from metropolitan areas in its second quarter. This is a marked improvement on the 15 per cent decline in its first quarter. Nine said its share of the ad market had been helped during this period by major events including the NRL finals and State of Origin. This meant metropolitan ad revenue for the half-year would be little changed on the previous six months. Shares closed up 5.08 per cent to \$2.48 on Thursday.

Public Service Wages Tied to Private Pay

Pay increases for Commonwealth public servants will have closer ties to the private sector after the federal government scrapped the two per cent wage cap. Public service wage rises will no longer be allowed to outstrip workers in the private sector, but increases can exceed the old cap if growth exceeds two per cent. Performance bonuses for senior Commonwealth executives will be reviewed after scandals at the corporate regulator and Australia Post put extra pay and entitlements under the microscope. Assistant Public Service Minister Ben Morton said the old wages policy was not sustainable and didn't meet community standards. "This will ensure that wage increases for Commonwealth public sector employees will be in step with their fellow Australians," he said. The seasonally adjusted wage price index for the private sector will be the official guide.

Public servants had their wages frozen for six months from April in a coronavirus pandemic austerity measure. In 2019/20, government departments, businesses and statutory authorities paid out bonuses totalling \$12.8 million. Mr Morton said public servants would benefit from implementing the government's efforts to boost private sector wages through economic growth. "Commonwealth wages policy should not be used as an excuse or signal to restrain private sector wages growth. This policy will address that," he said. The bonus review will develop consistent principles and guidance about appropriate pay incentives. "Where agencies have access to bonus arrangements they should exercise restraint to the furthest extent possible in keeping with community expectations," Mr Morton said. Prime Minister and Cabinet secretary Phil Gaetjens, Department of Finance secretary Rosemary Huxtable and Australian Public Service Commissioner Peter Woolcott will conduct the review.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 11/13/2020

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Business Still Lacking 'Animal Spirits'

Former Reserve Bank governor Glenn Stevens once told parliamentarians that the Australian business community was lacking the "animal spirits" that were needed to drive economic growth. Six years on, little appears to have changed. Business investment fell further in the September quarter to stand almost 14 per cent lower than a year earlier. While firms have upgraded their spending intentions for this financial year, they are not as strong as economists had been hoping for, particularly in the light of last month's federal budget that contained a number of investment incentives. "The outlook for business investment is weak - although not as weak as three months earlier," Westpac senior economist Andrew Hanlan said. Private capital expenditure dropped three per cent in the September quarter to \$25.9 billion, double the decline economists had been expecting.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics data released on Thursday also showed investment plans have been upgraded to almost \$105 billion for the 2020/21 financial

year, 6.3 per cent higher than estimated three months ago. But when compared to a year ago at this stage, spending estimates are 10 per cent lower. RBC Capital Markets head of strategy Su-Lin Ong suspects policy makers will be somewhat disappointed with these results. "They suggest that the animal spirits have yet to stir much," Ms Ong said. "Given the tumultuous year that 2020 has been, coupled with still ongoing uncertainty, it may well take some time before policy measures designed to support investment garner more traction and it will also demand sustained business confidence." She said strong business investment is critical to lift growth.

In the September quarter, investment in buildings and structures fell 3.7 per cent to \$13.8 billion, while spending on equipment, plant and machinery declined 2.2 per cent to \$12.1 billion. The figures feed into next Wednesday's national accounts for the September quarter, and will also take into account this week's equally disappointing construction figures for the quarter. Even so, economists are still expecting a positive growth outcome, largely as a result of a bounce back in retail spending as COVID-19 restrictions were eased, as well as a recovering employment market. Forecasts are for an expansion of between two and four per cent for the quarter after the massive seven per cent contraction in the June quarter that marked the first recession in nearly 30 years. Economists will finalise their forecasts after quarterly reports for company profits and inventories, international trade and government spending early next week.

Meanwhile, Business Council of Australia chief executive Jennifer Westacott has told a conference to really move the nation forward there needs to be a 30-year infrastructure plan. She said as a first step the Commonwealth and states should agree on the extent of national public infrastructure projects needed and develop a strategic pipeline. "Infrastructure can transform a place," she told the Sunshine Coast Business Council forum. "They not only create thousands of jobs, but they change the nature of the economy, especially outside our major capital cities." She said whether it is a major road or rail project, a port or airport facility, improving infrastructure means more effectively getting goods and services around the country and on to lucrative export markets.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 11/26/2020

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Soap and Cotton Won't Remove Ticks Safely

For years there has been a social media post doing the rounds claiming to have the safe and easy way to remove ticks. The 2013 Facebook post, from a nurse, involved just soap and a cotton ball. But experts have told AAP FactCheck that despite being shared 27,000 times, the remedy doesn't hold up to inspection. The recommended way to remove ticks is by freezing, or using tweezers, forceps or a tick remover, they say. Ticks, with a "mouthful of hooks" attach themselves deeply to skin to feed on

blood which can, in the process, transmit bacteria and viruses through their saliva. The original remedy was to "apply a glob of liquid soap to a cotton ball, cover the tick with the soap-soaked cotton ball and swab it for a few seconds", before the tick would come out on its own, stuck to the cotton ball. The reality, however, is not so easy, and the soapy cotton ball remedy is not recommended for the 70 species of ticks in Australia and more than 800 around the world.

"It is not a safe way to remove ticks," says Professor Stephen Doggett, director of the Department of Medical Entomology, NSW Health Pathology, at Sydney's Westmead Hospital. Prof Doggett told AAP FactCheck the Australian paralysis tick, found on the east coast, should be killed in place by freezing with an ether-based spray or dabbed with a permethrin-based scabies cream. Fine tweezers and tick removers can also be used. The New Zealand Ministry of Health told AAP FactCheck that if using tweezers, ticks must be grabbed close to the skin and pulled out at the angle the tick is attached. "This helps to limit the risk of breaking the tick's mouthparts. A secondary infection can occur if the mouthparts get stuck in the skin. "The skin needs to be disinfected once the tick has been removed." Australian health officials advise against using "folklore remedies" such as matches or pins.

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