



Asia-Pacific Governance Watch

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1、 Government Policy and Legislation

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UNDP and UN-Habitat Sign New Framework for Urban Action

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) signed a new enhanced collaborative framework today, to ensure that support to countries and cities is aligned with their needs to better respond to future crises and recover from COVID-19. The new joint framework reiterates that urbanization is a transformative force that, if properly harnessed, can help countries and cities overcome major development challenges and make progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Under the new partnership framework, the five key areas of focus will be to: support countries to develop National Urban Policies (NUPs); help national and local governments develop effective and innovative financing frameworks to deliver local development agendas and ensure cities' vital role in national economies; strengthen countries' and cities' capacity to fulfil climate action commitments; help adopt integrated approaches to strengthen urban resilience and pursue innovative digital technologies for people centered smart cities.

The Executive Director of UN-Habitat Maimunah Mohd Sharif stated: "The areas of focus within this collaboration respond to the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda adopted in 2016, and the current need to support countries and cities with their COVID-19 response and recovery. It will allow us to leverage our respective capacities as a contribution to the Decade of Action launched by the Secretary-General." UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner stated, "Cities have been on the frontline of the COVID-19 response. A green and inclusive recovery will not be viable without the direct engagement of cities. UN-Habitat and UNDP have enjoyed a longstanding partnership and now we have an opportunity to capitalize on each other's strengths to move forward together in areas ranging from local economic development, to decentralized service delivery and supporting low-carbon resilient development." Currently UN-Habitat is implementing 20 projects funded through UNDP, valued at USD \$80 million. The majority of these joint-projects are in the Arab States region (Iraq, Lebanon and Syria) and Africa (Somalia, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Mozambique). Two-thirds of these projects focus on reconstruction, resilience and/or urban planning. The others deal with access to land, local governance and development in line with the UN reform, the collaboration will be translated into yearly targets, led by the regional and country offices, aiming for concrete impact where it matters most.

From <https://www.undp.org/> 12/05/2020

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Sustainability and Resilience in Smart City Planning: A Review

Urban planning is recognized as an interaction between the state and society, which aims to articulate public policies in the territory, facilitating their administration in favor of greater development and well-being of society. However, this interaction becomes complex because consumption demands increase, and the carrying capacity of the urban ecosystem to supply them is exceeded, hindering its sustainable functionality. With this overview, it becomes relevant to study urban planning from a sustainable environmental planning perspective, based on four topics: urban planning, sustainability, resilience, and smart cities, which are developed throughout the document by means of a chronological study. A bibliometric study was used through a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) adjustment to 87 articles, supported by VOSviewer®, which allowed for the construction and visualization of the co-occurrence networks of key words extracted from the selected articles. Likewise, 16 documents more were used for the co-occurrence analysis. The main result is to consider cities with a complex systems approach that works like a gear; the relationship between inter-urban and intra-urban processes is the key factor that allows for an understanding of their synchronization; therefore, deepening of each of these topics is crucial to the ideal of a territorial administration involving time scales and adaptive cycles, allowing for the provision of new tools for concepts such as carrying capacity and the measurement of the ecological footprint

From <https://www.mdpi.com/> 12/28/2020

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CAREC Endorses Long-Term Strategy to Promote Safe, Sustainable, and Inclusive Tourism

Ministers and senior officials from the 11 member countries of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program have endorsed a new long-term strategy to promote safe, sustainable, and inclusive tourism development in the region, and enhance its attractiveness as a competitive tourism destination globally. The CAREC Tourism Strategy 2030, presented at the 19th CAREC Ministerial Conference held virtually today, was endorsed by ministers and senior officials representing Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, the People's Republic of China (PRC), Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan also attended the meeting. "The CAREC region is home to a wide range of historical and cultural heritage sites; unique gastronomy and local traditions; a rich, unexplored network of cities; and arresting natural endowments that traverse national boundaries," said Asian Development Bank (ADB) Vice-President Shixin Chen, co-chair of the conference. "Through the gradual implementation of regional

initiatives, the CAREC Tourism Strategy 2030 will help the region bounce back from COVID-19 and establish itself as a sustainable, safe, and easily accessible tourism destination over the long term.”

In 2019, CAREC countries generated more than 420 million domestic tourists but only received 41 million foreign tourists. With the COVID-19 pandemic severely affecting global tourism in 2020, the CAREC Tourism Strategy 2030 accounts for the shift in travelers’ preference towards closer, safer, and uncrowded destinations while outlining a long-term plan to develop the region as an easily accessible tourism destination that provides visitors with a variety of unique experiences. The strategy provides a roadmap towards the enhancement of the region’s connectivity through the harmonization of visa requirements and quality standards, simplification of border crossing procedures, and improvement of tourism infrastructure and facilities. It also focuses on tourism skills development while maximizing the use of digital technologies. It aims to build a common brand, “Visit Silk Road”, through the creation of a CAREC tourism web portal and joint promotional activities for tour operators and other business providers. It seeks to develop unique tourism products and experiences catering to various segments including business, culture, nature and adventure, sun and beach holidays, health and wellness, and domestic weekenders.

“By fostering sustainable tourism growth in rural and urban areas, the new strategy will also help to reduce regional imbalances and empower local communities,” said ADB Director General for Central and West Asia Werner Liepach. “It will promote gender equality by promoting jobs and income opportunities for private sector SMEs and entrepreneurs including women and young people.” The CAREC Program is a partnership of 11 countries to promote economic growth and sustainable development through regional cooperation. It is supported by development partners including ADB, which serves as the Secretariat for the CAREC Program. Since 2001, the CAREC Program has financed 208 regional infrastructure and trade projects worth \$39.2 billion. Of this, \$14.7 billion has been financed by ADB, \$15.8 billion by other development partners, and \$8.7 billion by CAREC member country governments.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 12/07/2020

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New CAREC Gender Strategy to Promote Women’s Empowerment

Ministers and senior officials from the 11 member countries of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program have endorsed a new strategy to promote women’s empowerment by ensuring regional projects address women’s needs and provide equal access to benefits and opportunities. The CAREC Gender Strategy 2030, presented at the 19th CAREC Ministerial Conference held virtually

today, was endorsed by ministers and senior officials representing Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, the People's Republic of China, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan also attended the meeting. "There is a critical need for additional efforts to include women's voices at all stages of planning and implementation in regional projects," said Asian Development Bank (ADB) Vice-President Shixin Chen, co-chair of the conference. "Gender equality is essential for sustainable development and the gender strategy promotes the empowerment of women by ensuring access to capacity building, economic opportunities, and involvement in decision making."

CAREC countries face several common challenges to improving the lives of women. There is a systemic gender gap in labor force participation, with disparities in employment rates, pay scales, and quality of employment. There are also challenges in implementing national policies on flexible working arrangements, parental leave, and equal pay. In many countries, female entrepreneurship is undermined by a lack of finance for start-ups and expansion because of women's limited ownership of assets to leverage credit, while the proportion of women in senior management positions remains low. Women are also often among the most affected by external shocks such as drought or flooding linked to climate change; food and oil price fluctuations; and global pandemics because of their disproportionate exposure to risk and primary care responsibilities. CAREC's gender strategy outlines how the program's operations will supplement national strategies to empower women. This includes promoting economic opportunities for women in paid formal employment, in agriculture and informal sectors, and in entrepreneurship, among others.

The strategy articulates how CAREC interventions will account for the specific needs and concerns of women and girls through projects' consultative processes. It also aims to ensure women have equal access to quality education, health care services, and information and communication technology. "ADB identifies gender equality as both a critical end goal and a key driver of sustainable socioeconomic development," said ADB Director General for Central and West Asia Werner Liepach. "The gender strategy endorsed today is a step towards closing the gender equality gap that creates disadvantage, limits opportunities, and undermines well-being for women and other vulnerable groups in all CAREC countries, and will help to ensure that CAREC interventions leave no one behind." All CAREC countries have committed to the Sustainable Development Goals and to key international gender equality agreements, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The CAREC gender strategy commits to support policy reforms that will address existing gender disparities. The CAREC Program is a partnership of 11 countries to promote economic growth and sustainable development through regional cooperation. It is supported by development partners including ADB, which serves as the secretariat for the CAREC Program. Since 2001, the CAREC Program has financed 208 regional infrastructure and trade projects

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APEC Symposium to Focus on Reigniting Growth and Planning for Recovery

This week, New Zealand, incoming host of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, will focus member economies on a collaborative approach to reigniting growth and setting a plan for recovery from the economic impacts of COVID-19. New Zealand's APEC host year begins on Wednesday, 9 December, with representatives of the 21 member economies attending a symposium and the APEC Informal Senior Officials' Meeting hosted virtually from Wellington. "Bringing APEC officials together provides an important opportunity to set expectations and prioritize the work that will take place throughout the following APEC year," said Dr Rebecca Sta Maria, Executive Director of the APEC Secretariat. "New Zealand will host APEC in the wake of the unprecedented health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19," she added. "This means that much of the focus for the upcoming meeting will be on COVID-19 and supporting the region's economic response and recovery."

APEC's Economic Leaders agreed to the 2020 Kuala Lumpur Declaration last month and stand united in their determination to enable the Asia-Pacific region to successfully recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impacts. APEC Leaders also agreed to the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040, a shared vision of the forum for the next 20 years. "In the year ahead, APEC will not only be charting the course through the current economic crisis, but will also be agreeing a detailed plan of action to implement the new vision," Dr Sta Maria explained. "This will also be an important task for the year and a core focus for New Zealand as host." "There is no doubt that the immediate economic response to COVID-19 will dominate discussions in 2021, but as we work to rebuild, we also need to consider the policies that will sustain a resilient recovery," said New Zealand's Minister for Trade and Export Growth, Damien O'Connor. Running from 9 -11 December, the APEC Informal Senior Officials' Meeting will include a symposium that will bring together global thinkers on issues important to APEC, an informal plenary meeting and an informal retreat. Symposium experts will discuss macro-economic and fiscal responses to COVID-19 highlighting the importance of structural reform, digital economy, inclusive and sustainable growth and trade.

The stream will feature keynote addresses from:

- Vangelis Vitalis, New Zealand's Chair of APEC's Senior Officials' Meeting
- Mari Pangestu, World Bank Managing Director of Development Policy and

Partnerships

- Richard Baldwin, Professor of International Economics, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
- Ma Jun, Chairman, Green Finance Committee of China Society for Finance and Banking
- Denis Hew, Director, Director of the APEC Policy Support Unit.

Keynote presentations from the symposium will be streamed on the APEC 2021 website from 04:30PM New Zealand (GMT+12). The symposium precedes the APEC Informal Senior Officials' meeting and retreat on 10-11 December. At this meeting, senior officials from across the region will elaborate on the policy agenda for 2021. No registration is required for media representatives who wish to cover the meeting. To access the meeting's media pack, including photos, videos, background information and introduction to the APEC 2021 New Zealand, please visit this link. For more information on APEC 2021 New Zealand, visit www.apec2021nz.org.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 12/08/2020

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CHINA: To Ensure Sustainability of Macro Policies

China will ensure the continuity, stability, and sustainability of its macro policies and try to keep the economy running within a reasonable range, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said on Tuesday. That came as Li met Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), via video link in Beijing. Hailing the IMF's significant contribution to promoting free trade and facilitating global economic development, Li expressed the hope that the organization can continue to help forge multilateral consensus and vowed China's due contribution in the process as the biggest developing country. On a briefing about China's current economic situation, Li said: "We are confident that China's economy will register positive growth this year, which is not an easy task to accomplish for a country with a 1.4 billion population."

He pointed out that while the global economy is heading towards recovery, the world still faces uncertainties. "We will continue to promote economic and social development while keeping the COVID-19 pandemic under control, ensure the continuity, stability, and sustainability of macro policies, and try to keep the economy operating within a reasonable range," said Li. For her part, Georgieva said the IMF appreciated China's important role in trade, global economic recovery, poverty reduction, promoting low carbon growth, and other areas. She also expressed the IMF's readiness to enhance cooperation with China in upholding multilateralism and reviving global trade to strengthen the momentum of economic recovery globally.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/08/2020

China Adjusts Regulations to Implement Foreign Investment Law

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has signed a State Council decree announcing the decision on adjusting several administrative rules and regulations in order to step up the implementation of the Foreign Investment Law. According to the decree, 22 administrative regulations have been amended and one abolished. Certain clauses of these regulations were considered incompatible with the Foreign Investment Law, which took effect on Jan. 1. For example, a set of regulations on the management of establishing partnership enterprises by foreign enterprises or individuals in China were abolished, as the Foreign Investment Law, the Partnership Enterprise Law and other relevant laws and regulations are now applicable in this matter. The adjustment of regulations will take effect after the signing of the decree.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/11/2020

China Releases Rules on Foreign Investment Security Review

Chinese authorities on Saturday released rules on foreign investment security review to safeguard national security while spurring foreign investment. The rules, jointly released by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and the Ministry of Commerce (MOC), specified provisions concerning the security review mechanism on foreign investment, including the types of investments subject to review, review scopes, and procedures, among others. Approved by the State Council, the 23-clause rules aim to effectively forestall and resolve national security risks while actively promoting and protecting foreign investment to support the country's higher-level opening-up and facilitate the new development paradigm, said a statement released by the two government departments. Conducting security reviews on foreign investments that affect or may affect national security is a regular international practice. China adopted a related review mechanism in 2011, and the country's management system on foreign investment has undergone significant reforms over the past decade.

The office of the working mechanism of the security review will be set up under the NDRC, which will lead the task along with the MOC, according to the statement. The rules will take effect 30 days after the release. An office official stressed that releasing the security review rules is not a protectionist move or refusal to further open up. Instead, it accords with China's commitment to opening-up on all fronts and aims at strengthening the security mechanism for opening-up. While encouraging and protecting foreign investment, the rules should prevent and dissolve national security risks and safeguard opening-up at a higher level, the official said. He added

that opening-up without security protection is unsustainable in the long run. Meanwhile, the official said that the office would cooperate with related authorities to promote and protect foreign investment under the Foreign Investment Law. While implementing the security review rules, it will step up efforts to advance institutional opening-up.

The country will improve the "pre-establishment national treatment plus negative list" management system for foreign investment and be fair to both domestic and overseas companies in tax and fee cuts, licensing, and standard-setting, the official said. Also, efforts will continue to encourage foreign investment in advanced manufacturing, modern services, and environmental protection sectors and create a market-oriented, law-based, and internationalized business environment with high standards. Looking ahead, the official added that China would unswervingly follow the path of expanding opening-up, enhancing the business environment, and welcoming foreign investment.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/19/2020

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China Adopts New Energy Security Strategy: White Paper

China has adopted a new energy security strategy, vowing to promote reforms in energy supply and consumption, market building and innovation while strengthening international cooperation, according to a white paper released Monday. The strategy, featuring reform mainly in four aspects and comprehensive international cooperation, endeavors to adapt to domestic and international changes and meet new requirements, said the white paper titled "Energy in China's New Era." REFORM TO IMPROVE ENERGY CONSUMPTION STRUCTURE One of the reforms under way is to improve the country's energy consumption structure by containing unnecessary consumption. To that end, China has tightened the control of total energy consumption and energy use intensity, enforced energy conservation in all areas of social and economic development, and taken moves to adjust its industrial structure, promote energy conservation in the process of urbanization and develop a green and low-carbon transport system.

REFORM TO DIVERSIFY ENERGY SUPPLY To optimize and diversify its energy supply structure, China has been vigorously promoting the clean and efficient utilization of fossil energy, prioritizing the development of renewable energy, developing nuclear power in a safe and orderly manner, and raising the proportion of non-fossil energy in the energy supply structure. Exploration and exploitation for oil and gas resources have also been enhanced. REFORM TO UPGRADE ENERGY TECHNOLOGIES China is implementing an innovation-driven development strategy, building a system that nurtures innovation in green energy technologies, and upgrading energy technologies and equipment in an all-round way. Basic research

on energy, innovation in generic and disruptive technologies, and original and integrated innovation have been strengthened. China has also started to integrate digital, big-data and AI technologies with technologies for clean and efficient energy exploration and exploitation, with a focus on smart energy technologies, to foster new growth drivers for industrial upgrading.

REFORM TO PROMOTE FASTER GROWTH OF ENERGY SECTOR China has been making efforts to form a unified and open market with orderly competition, advance energy pricing reform to create a mechanism in which the market determines the price. It also strives to streamline government administration through reform, strengthen planning and policy guidance for the energy sector, and improve the regulatory system of the energy industry. **GLOBAL COOPERATION FOR ENERGY SECURITY IN OPEN ENVIRONMENT** China has been advancing comprehensive cooperation with other countries to realize energy security in an open environment. Under the principle of equality and mutual benefit, China is opening its door wider to the world. The country promotes green and sustainable energy development under the Belt and Road Initiative, and endeavors to improve energy infrastructure connectivity. An active participant in global energy governance, China has been increasing energy cooperation and exchanges with other countries, and facilitating international trade and investment in the energy sector.

The country has also joined the international community in building a new model of energy cooperation, maintaining energy market stability, and safeguarding common energy security. **GUIDING PHILOSOPHIES FOR POLICY MAKING** The white paper also stated the guiding philosophies for China's energy policies in the new era, namely, putting people first, promoting the use of clean and low-carbon energy, ensuring the core status of innovation, pursuing development through reform and building a global community of shared future. "Confronted by the severe impact of climate change, China advocates a global community of shared future, greater international cooperation on energy governance, and a new round of energy reform directed towards clean and low-carbon development," said the document.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/21/2020

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China Gives Priority to Non-fossil Energy Development: White Paper

China gives priority to non-fossil energy, and strives to substitute low-carbon for high-carbon energy and renewable for fossil energy, according to a white paper released Monday. The country has been facilitating the use of solar energy, developing wind power, hydropower as well as safe and structured nuclear power while advancing biomass, geothermal and ocean energy development in accordance with local conditions, said the white paper titled "Energy in China's New Era"

released by the State Council Information Office. The country has been increasing the overall utilization rate of renewable energy, with the national average consumption rate of wind power reaching 96 percent, that of solar photovoltaic power hitting 98 percent, and that of water energy in major river basins reaching 96 percent in 2019, the document said. "The development and utilization of non-fossil energy is a major element of transitioning to a low-carbon and eco-friendly energy system," it said.

While prioritizing non-fossil energy, the country has also been promoting the clean and efficient development and utilization of fossil energy. Coal remains the basic energy source, the white paper said, adding that the country's annual production of raw coal has ranged between 3.41 billion tonnes and 3.97 billion tonnes since 2012. The country has been facilitating the safe, smart and green utilization of coal. From 2016 to 2019, China cut more than 900 million tonnes of outdated coal production capacity per year on average. "Green development of the energy sector has played an important role in reducing carbon emissions," the white paper said. By 2019, carbon emission intensity in China had decreased by 48.1 percent compared with 2005, which exceeded the target of reducing carbon emission intensity by 40 to 45 percent between 2005 and 2020, reversing the trend of rapid carbon dioxide emission growth, it said.

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China Releases Guidelines for High-quality Development of Elder Care Services

The State Council, China's cabinet, has unveiled guidelines for establishing and improving a comprehensive supervision system for elder care services to boost the sector's high-quality development. The guidelines, issued by the General Office of the State Council, urged further reform on government services and accelerated moves to build a unified elder care market featuring efficiency and fair competition. Highlighting an improved business climate, the guidelines noted that incentives should be put in place to guide elder care facilities to run in accordance with business ethics and the law, and to keep improving their services. Government supervision should mainly focus on buildings, fire prevention, food safety and medical services in elder care facilities, as well as related workforces and funding usage, among other aspects, according to the guidelines. Elder care facilities found to be defrauding or abusing seniors will face severe punishment, per the guidelines.

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China to Revise Anti-monopoly Law, Formulate Law on Public Health Emergency Response

China's top legislature is in 2021 expected to consider laws on public health emergency response, family education, stamp duty and futures, among others, said a spokesperson on Monday. The lawmakers will also deliberate revisions to the anti-monopoly law, as well as laws concerning issues such as the prevention and control of infectious diseases, the progress of science and technology, and education, said Yue Zhongming, spokesperson for the Legislative Affairs Commission of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee. The legislative work plan for next year has been approved in principle by the Council of Chairpersons of the NPC Standing Committee, said Yue. In 2020, the NPC and its Standing Committee have thus far enacted eight laws, revised nine, and adopted 10 decisions on legal issues and other major concerns.

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China Considers Anti-Food-Waste Law to Ensure Food Security

Chinese lawmakers on Tuesday began deliberating a draft law on preventing food waste to ensure food security. The 32-article draft was submitted to the ongoing session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for its first reading. The law is of great significance to promoting a healthy, rational, and green lifestyle and better consumption behavior. It is also essential to accelerating the construction of a resource-conserving and environmentally-friendly society. It will also aid sustainable economic and social development, according to the reasoning submitted to the session.

"CLEAR YOUR PLATE" CAMPAIGN

The issue of food waste has been of widespread concern in the country in recent years. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the government has been paying more attention to the issue, with policies issued and campaigns launched to curb food waste. A nationwide "Clear Your Plate" campaign is gaining steam across the country, both online and offline. Anti-food-waste posters and slogans are on the walls of many restaurants, and schools and universities have also joined the efforts to fight food waste. Netizens share photos and videos of empty plates after finishing their food on social media platforms, where fighting food waste is among the hottest topics. In order to establish a long-term mechanism to prevent food waste, lawmakers are now elevating the constructive policies and measures the country has adopted over the past years into the draft law.

GOVERNMENT DUTIES

The draft law specifies the responsibilities of the government concerning the fight against food waste. Governments at all levels should exercise leadership over preventing food waste, improve work mechanisms, set targets, and intensify supervision and management, according to the draft. Local governments above the county level should update the public on the developments in their anti-food-waste work every year and propose measures to step up the work, the draft reads. It added that they should support sci-tech research and development that will help conserve food. China will enforce tax policies that will facilitate the fight against food waste, according to the draft. The draft also stipulates the responsibilities of several State Council departments, ranging from making an overall work plan to tightening management and supervision of the catering industry.

DUTIES OF VARIOUS SECTORS

The draft law also requires government agencies, state-owned enterprises, and public institutions to toughen the management of banquets using public funds. Catering service providers should adopt measures to minimize food waste, such as improving the management systems for food purchasing, storage, and processing. They should put up posters to remind consumers to refrain from ordering excessive food, says the draft, adding that they can charge consumers for obviously wasting food. It calls on catering service providers to use technologies. Big data, for instance, would analyze the needs of consumers. It would lead to improved management of food purchases, transportation, and storage.

Online food delivery platforms should also display noticeable reminders on their food-ordering pages, and travel agencies are responsible for guiding travelers in saving food. Individuals should serve or eat an appropriate amount of food at weddings, funerals, parties, and other events, as well as in daily life, according to the draft. Food and catering industry associations should formulate anti-waste standards and rules for their members, the draft reads. Schools should educate their students on practicing thrift and opposing waste, it says. News media outlets are required to promote public awareness of preventing food waste, the draft says, banning them from producing, broadcasting, or spreading programs or audio-video clips on binge eating.

SUPERVISION, PUNISHMENT

The draft specifies that governments at all levels and relevant departments should set up supervision and inspection mechanisms to combat food waste. It urges those who waste food to rectify their misdeeds. All units and individuals have the right to file complaints with administrative departments against food producers found to have wasted food, it adds. Catering service providers inducing or misleading consumers into ordering excessive food that leads to obvious waste will be warned by market regulators. Those who refuse to make rectifications will be fined, according to the draft. Radio stations, TV stations, and online audio-video service providers who

produce, release, or spread content advocating gluttony will also receive a fine if they refuse to make corrections or commit serious violations. Regulators can suspend or shut down their services, the draft says. A law on food security is also in the legislative work plan for the next year, and its drafting is underway.

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China Mulls New Law on Graft Busters

The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, on Tuesday started deliberating a draft law on graft busters as part of efforts to deepen reform of the country's anti-corruption system. The draft "supervisors" law, under first reading at the legislature, is expected to standardize the selection and appointment of anti-graft personnel, in addition to their functions, duties, management and oversight. China in 2018 enacted the Supervision Law and established supervision commissions at national, provincial, prefectural and county levels to integrate anti-corruption functions and personnel that had previously been scattered in related judicial and administrative organs, as well as in the disciplinary watchdogs of the Communist Party of China (CPC). The commissions have the power to investigate conduct involving the abuse of public office and hand out administrative sanctions.

They can hand over public sector employees to the prosecutors in the case of suspected job-related crimes. The draft has stipulated the CPC's leadership over the supervisor system. Specifying the requirements for supervisors to perform duties, the draft is expected to further define their jurisdiction and strengthen their self-discipline and external oversight, thus helping ensure that the supervisory power is properly exercised. In addition to general and supplementary provisions, the draft has seven chapters, including one on the appraisal policies and another that deals with how the supervisors shall be overseen and how they shall be punished if they abuse supervisory power.

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China to Extend Direct-benefit Monetary Policy Tools to Anchor Market Expectations

China will prolong the policies on inclusive loan repayment extension and the credit loan support program for smaller businesses, with a view to keep the main economic indicators within an appropriate range, maintain the continuity, stability and sustainability of the policies, spur vitality of market players and anchor market

expectations, the State Council executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on Monday. Competent departments devised two monetary policy tools this year, in an effort to funnel intensified, direct support for the real economy and help tide businesses over difficulties. That is, the loan extension which encourages local banks (namely, urban and rural commercial banks and rural credit cooperatives) to provisionally defer smaller businesses' inclusive loan repayments with incentives in place, and the inclusive credit loans which provide local banks with concessional funding support. The implementation of the aforementioned policy tools combined have achieved remarkable results, benefiting over 3.1 million smaller market entities, and playing a positive role in alleviating financial pressure on enterprises, ensuring market entities and securing employment.

"This year, China's economy is able to achieve positive growth. This is attributable to financial institutions' intensified support for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises," Li said. "The Central Economic Work Conference has underlined that necessary support for economic recovery shall be sustained, with well-calibrated and more effective policy operations." Attendees at the Monday meeting agreed that the economy is steadily returning to normal, and required continued efforts to help address the pressing concerns facing enterprises regarding their production and operation, and to ensure proper policy transition and adjustment. It was decided at the meeting that the provisional deferral policy for both principal repayment and interest payment on smaller businesses' inclusive loans will continue to be executed in the first quarter next year, and loan repayment further extended within a proper time frame. Inclusive loans granted to micro and small businesses will be extended as much as possible in line with market principles and upon consultations between enterprises and banks.

Incentives will be put in place for local banks that provide inclusive loans for micro and small enterprises with a deferred repayment period of no less than six months. The incentives will remain at 1 percent of the loan principal. Those at the meeting also decided that the inclusive credit loan support program will be extended from the end of this year as appropriate. Concessional financial support at 40 percent of the loan principal will continue to be given to eligible local banks for their issuance of inclusive credit loans to micro and small enterprises. "Implementation and appropriate extension of the above-mentioned direct-benefit monetary policy tools will help small and micro enterprises better respond to changes at home and abroad and realize stable recovery of production and operation," Li said.

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Chinese Lawmakers Call for Measures Against Unfair Online Competition

Chinese lawmakers have called for exploring new ways to supervise and manage online behaviors violating the Anti-Unfair Competition Law. A report on the topic was submitted by the law enforcement inspection team of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) Wednesday to the ongoing session of the NPC Standing Committee for deliberation. Online behaviors breaching the Anti-Unfair Competition Law keep cropping up, including price discrimination, click farms, paid post deletion, and false advertising via livestreaming, the report says. The report calls for measures to guide online platforms in tightening compliance and ethical reviews. It also suggests adopting new supervision and management methods to deal with behaviors of unfair competition, calling for the use of technologies like big data to enhance analysis of such violations.

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Chinese Premier Stresses Formulating Five-year Plan to Deepen Reform, Opening-up

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has stressed adopting a practical approach in formulating the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) for National Economic and Social Development that takes into account the current and long-term situation and will promote the deepening of reform and opening-up. Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks Wednesday at a meeting of the State Council's leading group on the five-year plan's draft formulation. Vice Premier Han Zheng, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, attended the meeting. Li urged efforts to formulate a plan that can stand the test of practice and history.

Noting that the draft plan should be formulated on the basis of thorough consideration of development in the next five years and mesh with the long-range objectives through the year 2035, Li said it should contain overall plans and arrangements for the next two years when China will move to restore normal economic growth to lay a solid foundation for future development. Li also stressed properly setting development targets for the plan period, which need to be encouraging and leave some leeway at the same time. The premier said the draft plan should put forward more measures to advance institutional opening-up, improve the environment for foreign trade and investment, and enhance international exchange and cooperation.

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China to Stabilize, Optimize Industrial and Supply Chains in 2021: MIIT

China will pool its strength to stabilize and optimize the industrial and supply chains next year, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT). More efforts will be made to monitor and evaluate the safety of key industrial and supply chains, strengthen the supply chains in the manufacturing industry and tackle weak links, said Xiao Yaqing, minister of the MIIT at a working conference held from Monday to Tuesday in Beijing. He called for achieving breakthroughs in core technologies, speeding up the digital transformation of the manufacturing sector and enhancing the flexibility and resilience of the industrial and supply chains. The country will make efforts to build more independent and controllable industrial and supply chains, as the security and stability of these chains is the foundation of forming a new development paradigm, according to the meeting.

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Yearender-Economic Watch: China Expected to Fine-tune Monetary Policy to Boost Recovery

China is expected to fine-tune its monetary policy next year to achieve the dual tasks of boosting economic recovery and forestalling financial risks, analysts said. China will keep its macroeconomic policies consistent, stable and sustainable in 2021, with a prudent monetary policy that is flexible, precise, reasonable and moderate, according to the tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference that took place in December. "We should strive to implement targeted and effective policies, make no sharp turns and pay attention to the ideal timing, extent, and impact of policies," the meeting said. China's macroeconomic policies are expected to be "normalized" next year after credit expansion this year to support the virus-hit economy, but the tightening bias is likely to come in a step-by-step manner, said Wang Qing, an analyst with Golden Credit Rating International.

"It's unlikely that we will see a sudden shift in policy direction. The meeting suggested that no 'policy cliff' would occur," Wang said. Instead of adopting a deluge of strong stimulus policies amid disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, China has implemented a prudent monetary policy in a flexible and appropriate manner to minimize the pandemic's impact and offered liquidity to those that suffered the most. Special temporary monetary policy tools have been used in response to COVID-19, said Guo Kai, an official with the People's Bank of China (PBOC), giving examples of reloans supporting the production of medical supplies and deferred repayment of inclusive loans. Targeted support was given to micro and small enterprises, which were hit hard by the pandemic. Outstanding inclusive loans to small and micro firms

soared 29.6 percent by the end of September, hitting a new high in the past seven months, data by the PBOC showed.

As traditional counter-cyclical adjustments, the central bank also cut benchmark lending rates to counter downward economic pressure. The loan prime rates were cut twice this year, in February and April, when businesses were in dire need of cash to reopen. The rates have remained unchanged since May. The rather restrained policy stimulus has left the country room to prevent a rapid decline in credit growth next year, which could lead to bond defaults and other financial risks, according to Lu Ting, chief China economist with Nomura. He expected the country's credit expansion rate to go down slightly next year if the pandemic starts waning globally. "The chance that a systemic financial crisis would occur in China is very low thanks to sound economic fundamentals and enough policy space for the government to counter risks," he said.

In a meeting held after the recent Central Economic Work Conference, the central bank vowed to keep the country's macro leverage at a stable level while walking a fine line between boosting economic recovery and preventing risks. It also pledged further support for private and small firms, while stepping up credit expansion in fields including technological innovation, green development and manufacturing. In the next year, the central bank will continue to maintain ample liquidity in the market via a variety of policy tools, but across-the-board cuts in interest rates or reserve requirement ratio are unlikely, said Tang Jianwei, an analyst with the Bank of Communications.

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JAPAN: Enacting Law to Make Coronavirus Vaccines Free to Residents

The Diet enacted a law Wednesday to cover the costs for residents to be vaccinated against the coronavirus, as hopes grow for the early arrival of vaccines following recent reports of progress amid a resurgence of infections. The House of Councillors unanimously passed a bill to revise the current vaccination law after Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga pledged to secure coronavirus vaccines for all the roughly 126 million residents of the country in the first half of next year. Japan has agreed with U.S. pharmaceutical giant Pfizer Inc, American firm Moderna Inc and Britain's AstraZeneca Plc to receive sufficient vaccines for 145 million people when they are successfully developed, earmarking a budget of 671.4 billion yen (\$6.4 billion) for that purpose. In the accelerating global race to develop vaccines to tackle the pandemic, Pfizer and its German development partner BioNTech SE have recently applied for approval in the European Union after doing so in the United States and Britain. The revised law does not clarify whether the scheme will include foreign

residents of Japan, but health ministry officials have said they expect them to be covered.

The government needs to collect information on the efficacy and safety of vaccines under development as some of them employ artificial genes and other technologies that have yet to be used outside of a laboratory setting. The passage of the bill by the upper house of the Diet comes as Tokyo and many other parts of Japan are seeing a spike in infections, with the nation reporting a record 41 deaths on Tuesday. Tokyo on Wednesday confirmed 500 new cases of infection, the highest number since Saturday, when it logged 561. Although the revised law strongly recommends that people get inoculated, the government will allow individuals to refuse if the efficacy and safety of vaccines has not been proved sufficiently at the time of approval. In the event that vaccination causes serious side effects, the revised law states the government will cover medical expenses and disability pensions as part of relief measures and shoulder damages on behalf of the vaccine suppliers. Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato, the top government spokesman, told a news conference, "We will make efforts to establish a system to smoothly administer vaccines by closely collaborating with local governments and medical workers."

Municipalities will be in charge of the administrative work related to vaccinations, which will be funded by the state. The Diet also passed a separate bill enabling the government to continue beyond February the quarantining of people who test positive for the novel coronavirus upon their arrival in Japan, extending the measure that was due to expire after a year. In February, Japan decided to hospitalize people who test positive for the virus at airports and ports, and to require those suspected of infection to stay in designated facilities for a certain period. On Wednesday, the government also began re-evaluating the operation of its Go To Eat subsidy program to encourage dining out and is considering halting issuance of coupons under the initiative. Of Japan's 47 prefectures, 10 including Tokyo, Hokkaido and Osaka have already paused issuance of the coupons, which are offered with 25 percent premiums, due to a rise in coronavirus cases in their regions. Japan will strengthen financial support for dining establishments affected by a drop in demand due to the halting of coupon issuance. The plans will be included in the third supplementary budget for fiscal 2020.

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Suga Positions Carbon Goal, Digitization as Pillars for Economic Revitalization

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga pledged to work on measures to combat global warming and digitization as the central pillars of economic revitalization efforts at a press conference on Friday ahead of the end of the extraordinary Diet session. With

the coronavirus pandemic not yet under control, Suga apparently aims to revitalize the economy with signature policies, ahead of a dissolution of the House of Representatives for a general election. "What our nation needs are sources of growth for the post-coronavirus era. Green [initiatives] and digital policies are key," Suga said at the press conference. He expressed a commitment to realizing the development of large-scale hydrogen production equipment, low-cost storage batteries and 6G, the successor to the high-speed, large-capacity 5G telecommunications standard. Concerning a digital agency to be established as the headquarters for digitization, Suga expressed his intention to appoint about 100 experts from the private sector, saying that he would create a model for personnel who can advance their careers while moving back and forth between the public and private sectors.

Since the start of the Suga Cabinet in September, the prime minister has attached importance to promoting the resumption of economic activities while taking measures against the coronavirus. However, experts of a government subcommittee on coronavirus measures have been increasingly cautious about the Go To Travel tourism promotion campaign amid a spike of infections in winter. Nevertheless, Suga has told his aides that the campaign should be promoted resolutely. He plans to propose an extension to the government's additional economic measures to deal with the coronavirus to the end of June next year. He mentioned the significance of the campaign during the press conference, saying: "There are about nine million people involved in the tourist industry in Japan. The government has made decisions based on what will be most useful for regional economies."

The prime minister is also focusing on environmental measures and the digitization of public administration as part of long-term steps to strengthen the economy. He probably believes that it would be easy for the administration to achieve results in fields concerning the environment and digitization, "unexplored areas" that were not prioritized by the administration of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Suga's leadership within the administration is expected to be tested by an increase in out-of-pocket medical expenses for people aged 75 years and older, one of the major issues in the reform of "social security for all generations" that will review the structure of burdens and benefits for elderly people and working generations. Suga said to his aides that unless this issue is resolved, the reform cannot be said to be a reform for all generations in the true sense. At the press conference, Suga said, "It's important to decrease the burdens of younger generations as much as possible."

However, Liberal Democratic Party coalition partner Komeito is cautious about expanding the target of those whose out-of-pocket expenses would increase, because of concerns about the impact it would have on the general election, which will take place in autumn next year at the latest. A meeting to discuss a draft for the reform was abruptly canceled just before it was to start on Friday as the coalition parties could not reach a consensus on the issue. "The future handling of the

government will depend on whether Komeito gets its way or the prime minister stands firm,” an LDP member with ministerial experience said. The decision to dissolve the lower house for a general election will be a focal point for the future management of the government. Asked about the timing of the dissolution at the press conference, Suga indicated that economic revitalization and measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus are the main priorities. “I’d like to devote all my efforts to these issues for the time being,” he said.

“I will think it over carefully,” he added, with an eye seemingly on the expiration of the term of lower house lawmakers in October next year. Suga has been cautious about dissolving the lower house early next year, but reportedly is considering the idea as one of his options. Many within the LDP have called for an early dissolution while the Cabinet’s approval rating remains strong. But, in addition to the sudden increase in coronavirus cases, scandals on money and politics involving former Prime Minister Abe and former agriculture minister Takamori Yoshikawa have come to light, dampening the momentum. The government plans to convene the ordinary Diet session on Jan. 18 and submit proposals for a third supplementary budget for fiscal 2020 and a fiscal 2021 budget. The prime minister intends to focus on realizing the early passage of budget plans and implementing a series of measures.

For that reason, the lower house is more likely to be dissolved in spring or later after the passage of the fiscal 2021 budget, or after the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics scheduled for next summer. Key policies of the Suga Cabinet have begun to produce results. Regarding the lowering of mobile phone fees, NTT Docomo Inc. unveiled Thursday the lowest-price large-capacity mobile plan in the industry. Meanwhile, preparations are underway for a digital agency, which is expected to be launched in September next year. A mid-ranking LDP lawmaker said that if dissolution is delayed, there could be a dissolution immediately before the expiration of the term of lawmakers, which tends to work against ruling parties. However, achieving tangible results ahead of a general election appears to be Suga’s basic strategy. He is expected to determine the timing of the dissolution, taking into consideration the infection situation and other factors.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 12/05/2020

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Japan Unveils Green Growth Plan for 2050 Carbon Neutral Goal

Japan on Friday unveiled plans to boost renewable energy, phase out gasoline-powered cars and reduce battery costs as part of a bid to reach an ambitious 2050 carbon-neutral goal. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga announced the new 2050 goal in November, significantly moving up Japan's timeline for carbon-neutrality. On Friday, his government laid out for the first time what meeting that target will involve, including setting a provisional goal of generating more than

half of the country's electricity from renewable sources by 2050. "The government's actions on the environment reflect our belief that a significant change of mindset is required and that these are not constraints for growth, rather they are drivers of growth," top government spokesman Katsunobu Kato told a regular briefing. Japan, which is a signatory to the Paris climate deal, has been seen as reluctant to reduce its reliance on fossil fuel, despite its self-professed pride as a nation of energy-saving technologies.

The country was the sixth-biggest contributor to global greenhouse emissions in 2017, according to the International Energy Agency. The world's third largest economy still relies heavily on coal and liquefied natural gas, with most of its nuclear reactors offline since the 2011 Fukushima disaster. Japan expects demand for electricity to surge 30-50 percent by 2050, but the nation's conservative ruling party has so far stayed lukewarm about renewable energy, though Suga has shifted the tone in recent weeks. Under the plans to boost renewables, officials are placing a new focus on offshore wind generation, with the goal of producing up to 45 gigawatts within the coming decades. Japan also wants to use nuclear and thermal power plants with carbon capture technology to cover 30-40 percent of the nation's electricity demand. Ammonia and hydrogen technologies are expected to fulfill about 10 percent of the nation's power needs.

By the mid-2030s, the government also wants to end the sale of new passenger vehicles that are solely powered by gasoline. Japan plans to replace them with hybrids, electric cars and cars fitted with fuel-cell engines, while bringing down the cost of batteries for those vehicles. But while officials say the new plan is ambitious, some critics believe it falls short. Mika Ohbayashi, director of the Renewable Energy Institute, said the figures were "a poor starting point for discussions and (showed) a lack of ambition." Japan should aim for renewable energy to cover 50-60 percent of national electricity needs by 2030, rather than wait until 2050, the think tank said. The institution also voiced its skepticism about whether carbon capture technology will become widely available in the coming decades -- an assumption made by Japan as well as other nations in their carbon-neutral plans.

From <https://japantoday.com> 12/26/2020

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Law Against Discrimination of Disabled to Be Applied More Broadly in Japan

The government plans to amend an anti-discrimination law to require that private companies and stores give "reasonable consideration" to people with disabilities. The amendment to the Law on Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities will make it mandatory for the private sector to remove obstacles such people face in social activities without being an excessive burden on private

enterprise. The government is preparing to submit the amendment to the Diet session scheduled to convene in January. With an eye on the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics next year, the goal is to create an inclusive society with mutual respect for people of all abilities. The law was based on the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and came into effect in April 2016. It prohibits the central government, municipalities and private businesses from discriminating on the basis of physical or mental ability. The law requires the central government and municipalities to give reasonable consideration to the disabled, while the private sector is called upon only to make an effort to undertake voluntary initiatives.

The U.N. convention views not giving proper consideration to differently abled people as a type of discrimination. By mandating that private companies give reasonable consideration, the revised law would equalize regulations for the public and private sectors. There are no penalties for violations of consideration. The government may provide advice, guidance or recommendations if improvements are not realized. Reasonable consideration refers to the act of removing barriers people with disabilities face regarding movement and communication, but only to the extent that costs and other burdens are not excessive. Such measures could include installing ramps on stairways for wheelchair users, and using sign language interpretation, illustrations, photos, tablets and other tools for the hearing impaired. In a 2017 poll conducted by the Cabinet Office, 21.9% of the general public said they knew of the law, while 77.2% said they did not. The government hopes to raise awareness of discrimination against people with disabilities and strengthen efforts to achieve a more inclusive society by amending the law.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 12/28/2020

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South-East Asia

MYANMAR: To Lift Stay-at-Home Order in Some Townships

Myanmar's Ministry of Health and Sports on Saturday announced the lifting of stay-at-home order in some townships of regions and states as fewer daily infection cases are seen there. According to the order issued by the ministry, the stay-at-home order will be lifted in all townships excluding three townships in Yangon region on Sunday. Also, the lifting of stay-at-home order will be applied to some townships in Mandalay, Bago, Ayeyarwady regions, and Mon and Kachin states, respectively. Meanwhile, a stay-at-home order will be imposed by the ministry in four townships, Aungmyaythazan, Chanmyathazai, Pyigyidagun and Patheingyi townships of Mandalay regions starting Sunday as part of containment measures against COVID-19. According to the ministry's figures, on Saturday, 734 new infections were reported with 27 more deaths in the country. As of Saturday, 121,280 cases and 2,579 deaths were recorded while 102,163 recovered patients have been discharged

from hospitals.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 12/26/2020

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VIETNAM: HÀ NỘI People's Council Approves Five-Year SME Support Project

The 15th tenure Hà Nội People's Council adopted a resolution on a small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) support project in the capital city from 2021 – 2025 during its 18th sitting on Wednesday. The project will provide support to SMEs and help those converted from business households play a part in sectoral links and supply chains. It aims to accelerate public administrative reforms and delivery of Level 3 and Level 4 public administrative services, to improve the city's Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI), and to achieve an average annual growth of 10 per cent and record about 30,000 newly-established enterprises annually. The project also sets for the local SMEs to create 1.5 million new jobs and to make up more than 25 per cent of Hà Nội's total exports, more than 40 per cent of the city's gross regional domestic product (GRDP) and 30 per cent of the local budget. It is expected to benefit at least 500 SMEs in manufacturing and processing in the areas of information technology, electronics, mechanics, high-tech, food and agricultural preservation and processing. To do the work, the city will need more than VNĐ957 billion (US\$41.3 million), including about VNĐ832 billion to be funded by the city's budget.

According to a report from the Hà Nội People's Committee, the capital city is estimated to rake in about \$4 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) and VNĐ145 trillion in domestic investment this year. It has more than 26,000 new businesses this year, accounting for 20 per cent of the country's total and raising the number of local firms to around 303,000. On the same day, the meeting elected Nguyễn Ngọc Tuấn as the chairman of the Hà Nội People's Council for the 2021-26 term and five vice chairs of the Hà Nội People's Committee. The Hà Nội People's Council wrapped up its three-day 18th meeting on Wednesday during which it adopted 20 reports and 16 resolutions, laying a basis for the city to mobilise resources for socio-economic development in 2021 and beyond. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the city has maintained its economic growth, with GRDP expanding around 3.98 per cent this year, 1.5 times higher than the national average. Hanoi's budget collection totalled VNĐ280 trillion, exceeding the estimate by 2 per cent, and up 3.5 per cent year-on-year. The city seeks to raise its GRDP by 7.5 per cent next year, social investment is projected to increase by 12 per cent, and inflation is expected to be kept below 4 per cent.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 12/10/2020

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Ministry Proposes Special Policies for Large SOEs to Make Them Spearheads

The Ministry of Planning and Investment has proposed special policies for large State-owned enterprises (SOEs) to make them spearheads in key industries of the economy. The policies were mentioned in a first ever draft project about developing large SOEs which aimed to promote the roles of selected SOEs in driving economic growth. Three industries would be piloted first, including telecommunications, energy and defence. Accordingly, three SOEs proposed to be selected for the pilot implementation were Mobifone, EVN and Viettel. The ministry said telecommunications, energy and defence were important industries to the development and security of a country, which would supply indispensable inputs for production and business, provide infrastructure for digital transformation and Industry 4.0 as well as ensuring national defence. Mobifone was proposed for the telecommunications industry because it had a good financial situation and business results among three telecommunications companies, according to the ministry.

In addition, Mobifone had good technology and corporate governance system which were inherited from the previous cooperation with Sweden's Kinnevik/Comvik Group. Mobifone was also focusing heavily on digital transformation and developing an ecosystem for digital transformation for private companies. In the energy industry, Việt Nam Electricity (EVN) was proposed because EVN accounted for nearly 50 per cent of the country's total electricity output together with experiences in investing in power sectors, especially clean energy. Viettel was proposed for the defence industry because it was taking the lead in research and development, manufacturing, technology transfer, import and export of military technical equipment and dual-use items. At the same time, Viettel with the focus on high-tech defence, electronics and telecommunications and network securities industries set the target to become one among the top 80 enterprise with the highest revenue from defence activities in the world by 2025. Selected SOEs would play roles in paving the way and leading other enterprises in the formation and expansion of supply and value chains regionally and globally, the ministry said. The ministry also proposed solutions for Mobifone, EVN and Viettel to make them spearheads.

Accordingly, the privatisation of Mobifone would be sped up so the State would hold a stake of 51 per cent of its charter capital after privatisation. The privatisation of Mobifone was proposed to be carried out before VNPT's. In addition, no foreign strategic investor would be selected for Mobifone's privatisation. EVN would be encouraged to play the key role in investing in renewable energy projects. For Viettel, a defence industry development fund would be founded, sourced from the group's after-tax profit, together with a venture capital fund to promote the commercialisation of new products. Under the draft project, the ministry proposed five criteria to identify spearhead SOEs, including charter capital from VNĐ1.8 trillion or higher, dominant

market share (from 30 per cent), good governance system, operating in key sectors such as infrastructure, industry, energy, telecommunications and finance and banking and State-wholly owned or State holding the controlling stakes. Accordingly, a total of 17 economic groups and corporations were proposed to be selected following these criteria. The ministry said that the operation efficiency of these 17 SOEs was not commensurate with the resources on hand. Statistics showed that these 17 SOEs had assets worth VNĐ2.56 quadrillion in 2019.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 12/15/2020

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HCM City Announces Guidelines for Issuing Apartment Ownership Certificates

HCM City authorities have issued guidelines to speed up the issuance of land use and home ownership certificates to buyers to prevent disputes with housing developers. They divide apartment projects in the city into two categories for collecting land use fees for issuance of ownership certificates. For apartments with a compound, the entire project area is identified as 'residential land' and subject to fees for issuance of certificates for land use rights, house ownership and other land-related assets. For those without compounds that come with public areas such as parks, schools, hospitals, and main roads connecting to public roads outside the apartment building, only the area of land used for apartment construction is considered 'residential land.' For the public areas, the city will organise bids to select investors. The construction of technical works such as electricity and water supply, drainage, lighting, telecommunications systems must be done by the developer and handed over to the city. No land-use fees will be collected. The Department of Natural Resources and Environment has been assigned to work with the departments of planning and architecture, construction, and other agencies to classify land areas in each project (both already completed and upcoming) subject to fees for issuance of ownership certificates. The Department of Construction will be responsible for monitoring compliance with construction norms and penalising violators.

A number of apartments have been built in violation of approved plans and designs in HCM and Hà Nội, delaying the issuance of land use and home ownership certificates, according to city authorities. Many developers have even mortgaged their buildings to get loans for other projects, meaning buyers have been unable to get ownership certificates, according to the Department of Construction. Võ Văn Hoan, vice chairman of the People's Committee, said the city would continue to review apartment projects in the city and work out solutions for delays in the issuance of ownership certificates. He urged agencies to carefully review investors' financial capacity before licensing their projects. Investors found to have committed violations must be severely sanctioned, he added. The lack of certificates means apartment

buyers cannot mortgage their property or use it as collateral for bank loans or complete inheritance procedures. This often causes them to sell their apartments at below their real value. Experts said legal provisions related to investment, construction and land use are riddled with inconsistencies. HCM City and Hà Nội have seen a rising number of disputes between buyers and apartment developers in recent years, especially with relation to construction progress, services fees, maintenance fees, construction quality, the use of common areas, ownership certificates, and appointment of building managers. The Government has ordered the cities to resolve the disputes.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 12/17/2020

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HCM City Drafts 10-Year Climate Change Response Plan

HCM City has drafted a long-term plan to combat the detrimental effects of climate change. The HCM City Department of Natural Resources and Environment recently held a seminar on climate change response policies 2017-2020 and the new draft plan for the 2021-2030 period. Experts praised authorities' efforts on reducing the amount of CO₂ by one tonne between 2017 and 2019. According to a representative of the city's Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Nguyễn Thị Phương Thảo, previous plans were relatively "ambitious". They cost a significant amount of capital resources but did not generate successful results. While it is essential to make a plan based on the government's vision, HCM City needs to evaluate the quality of its human and infrastructure resources and get an update on global climate change activities before drafting a specific plan, she said. The deputy head of Scientific Management under the city's Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Huỳnh Lưu Trung Phùng, said he was concerned that since the 10-year plan's mission is relatively broad, it would be challenging to determine detailed goals and products that meet society's actual needs. This occurred in a case in which authorities were once asked to research the impact of climate change on the agricultural sector. As the mission given was too broad to be carried out, they had a difficult time, Phùng said, stressing the importance of setting realistic goals.

Collaboration

Speaking at the event, a representative of the HCM City's Department of Construction said the department would strive to complete the seven missions given by the city People's Committee in accordance with the Paris Agreement on climate change. The department will collaborate with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank to offer solutions on management of flooding in HCM City. According to the deputy director of the HCM City Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Nguyễn Thị Thanh Mỹ, collaboration among authorities are important to tackle the impact of climate change. Though authorities have become more aware of the matter over the past few years, they have not considered a

response to climate change as an essential task, she said. HCM City is currently working on a specific climate change response plan to be carried out between 2021 and 2030, with a vision to 2050. The HCM City Department of Natural Resources and Environment was appointed to take the leading role in this task, Mỹ said, suggesting that authorities need to be more active. Setting specific goals every three to five years, together with evaluation criteria, is required as well.

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South Asia

INDIA: Tamil Nadu Announces New Electronics & Hardware Manufacturing Policy

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

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/> 12/09//2020

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Co-op Between BP and International Bank of Azerbaijan - Part of ICT Sector Development Strategy

The Azerbaijani society will greatly succeed in the field of education thanks to the joint cooperation between BP and the International Bank of Azerbaijan (IBA) within the IBA Tech Academy project, Chairman of the IBA Board Abbas Ibrahimov said during the IBA Tech Academy online event, [Trend](#) reports on Dec. 17. "This project has been designed to support the training of a new generation of specialists in digital technologies in the country and is part of the commitment of BP and its partners to develop innovations in Azerbaijan," Advisor to the Chairman of the IBA Board Zaur Alakbarov said. Within this project, BP and its partners financed the training of two hundred students of Azerbaijan. "We think that an increase in the potential of the workforce in the field of digital technologies is a direct contribution to the socio-economic development of the country and also increases the efficiency of public services," BP Communications and Advocacy Vice President for the Middle East and Caspian Region Bakhtiyar Aslanbayli said. "As far as the world is changing rapidly, there is a growing demand for technology professionals capable of working with new technologies."

"We welcome the initiative of the International Bank of Azerbaijan, which contributes to the smooth transition of the country to the future technologies," Aslanbayli said. "We support the training of a new generation of technologically competent, knowledgeable, and qualified specialists." "Most graduates with the support of BP and its partners are provided with jobs," Alakbarov said at the event. "About 70 percent of graduate students were provided with jobs in about 40 companies in our country within the last three projects." Alakbarov added that this project is part of the strategy for the development of the ICT sector in Azerbaijan. "The development of innovations is an integral part of all business structures, therefore we are trying to promote state programs in the development of such sectors and provide an opportunity for the future generation to become specialists in these spheres," Alakbarov said. The project worth 400,000 manat (\$235,294) will be implemented within 12 months. BP and its partners have supported many big social investment projects over the past 27 years. These projects include educational programs, the creation of skills and abilities in local communities, the improvement of community access to social infrastructure, providing of access to finance, supporting of local enterprises through training, supporting of cultural heritage and sports development, as well as technical assistance to the governmental structures.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/17/2020

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KAZAKHSTAN: Introducing Bill on Economic Recovery

The head of Kazakhstan's Ministry of National Economy Ruslan Dalenov presented amendments to the bill on the recovery of economic growth at the plenary session of the Senate (Higher Chamber of the Parliament), [Trend](#) reports referring to the

ministry. "The draft law is aimed at the implementation of the instructions of the Head of State, voiced in the framework of his Appeal 'Kazakhstan in a new reality: time for action' for the country's people, the State Commission for the State of Emergency, as well as the implementation of measures provided for in the Comprehensive Plan of Economic Growth Recovery," explained Dalenov on Dec.21 during the discussion of the draft law 'On amendments and additions to some legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the recovery of economic growth.' According to the ministry, the proposed amendments provide for the introduction of amendments and additions to 85 legislative acts, including 14 codes and 71 laws in 9 directions, including attraction of investments, development of entrepreneurship and the real sector, a sustainable financial market, digitalization, project management, monetary, social and trade policy. "In general, the adoption of the draft Law will stimulate the development of economic sectors, including those affected by the restrictive measures in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, and will also provide a basis for sustainable economic growth," the minister said.

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TURKMENISTAN: Signs Document Approving Development Program

Turkmenistan has approved a development program in a number of areas, [Trend](#) reports with reference to Turkmenistan's State News Agency. A corresponding decree, approving development programs, was signed by the President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. The following programs were approved: The program for the development of the intellectual property system of Turkmenistan for 2021-2025 and the action plan for its implementation; the program for the development of energy diplomacy of Turkmenistan for 2021-2025; the national action plan for gender equality in Turkmenistan for 2021-2025; the national action plan for 2021-2024 for the implementation of the strategy of Turkmenistan to prevent violent extremism and counter-terrorism for 2020-2024; the national strategy for the development of renewable energy in Turkmenistan until 2030. In accordance with the decree, ministries and industry departments are required to ensure the implementation of the measures provided for in the above documents. The resolution approving development programs was signed in order to increase cooperation between Turkmenistan and international organizations. Earlier, Turkmenistan approved a program for the development of foreign economic activity for 2020-2025.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/07/2020

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AUSTRALIA: To Drop Kyoto Credits Plan

Environmentalists are calling for a reset of the federal government's climate policy in response to a report it will no longer use Kyoto carryover credits to meet emissions reductions targets. Prime Minister Scott Morrison plans to tell world leaders next week Australia will not use the controversial accounting method to satisfy its 2030 target under the Paris Agreement, Nine newspapers say. Greenpeace responded to the news on Saturday by calling for a fresh climate policy. Spokeswoman Nelli Stevenson said the government had been stalling on climate action and "dodgy accounting" had led to Australia being shamed on the world stage. The government had been criticised for the carryover plan, which involved using "surplus" units from the past 12 years and putting them towards the next decade of Paris targets.

"Australia needs a strong, federal climate policy, not a federal government kicking back on the heavy lifting being done by states, territories and businesses who are getting on with the job of moving to safe and reliable 100 per cent renewable energy," Ms Stevenson said in a statement. It was critical that Australia develop a meaningful policy to protect against worsening bushfires, heatwaves and droughts, she said. "It's time to walk the talk and ramp up ambition beyond Australia's weak Paris targets." Opposition leader Anthony Albanese called the development "rather pathetic" and said the government did not have a good enough short term or long term plan to tackle climate change. Mr Albanese suggested the decision to refrain from using the carryover credits should not be viewed as "a positive". "It is a fact that the rest of the world rejected that as an accounting trick. That's not a plus for the government," Mr Albanese said in Brisbane on Saturday morning.

"What we need is a plan to reduce emissions, not a plan for accounting tricks." Attorney-General Christian Porter said it had always been the government's position that "essentially we are trying everything we can and using every technology available to meet our Paris targets without having to rely on the fact that we overperform with respect to our Kyoto targets". He said the Paris targets were a "floor, not a ceiling" and the government's ambition was to do as well as possible. The change is set to be announced at a summit convened by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on December 12.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/05/2020

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New Law Would Allow Merged Unions to Split

The government will introduce a law to make it easier for parts of an amalgamated union to disaffiliate, in a move targeting the troubled CFMEU. Speaking to reporters in Brisbane on Saturday, Attorney-General and Industrial Relations Minister Christian Porter said the announcement was meant to help "good, hard-working members of

unions (who) get stuck inside a union that may not be working in their best interest". "We have seen some terrible behaviour from parts of the CFMEU yet there are other parts of the CFMEU who work hard on behalf of their members and would appear they want to leave that union and they should be given that opportunity," he said. Industrial relations law currently prevents one part of a registered organisation leaving five years after merging. The government's bill, to be introduced next week, would allow the Fair Work Commission to approve a vote for a de-merger after that period, if it considers it is appropriate based on specified considerations.

Mr Porter said this would allow dissatisfied divisions of the CFMEU to apply for a ballot for their members to decide whether to break away and then take their members with them to form their own, standalone union. The Fair Work Commission would have to consider whether the merged organisation has a record of not meeting workplace laws or of not meeting standards for registered organisations. It would also have to look at the ability of the new organisation to protect its members' economic and social interests. Victorian CFMEU secretary John Sekta was expelled from the Labor party in 2019 over alleged comments about family violence campaigner Rosie Batty. Last year, he was also found guilty of using a carriage service to harrass his wife. The government also plans to introduce a new omnibus industrial relations law next week. Mr Porter said on Saturday the bill would address issues like allowing an employer to offer an employee extra hours at ordinary wage rates. Currently, the employer must offer a higher wage or not offer the extra hours.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/05/2020

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Labor Deputy Whacks Foreign Relations Laws

Labor has taken aim at "half-baked" foreign relations laws on the verge of passing federal parliament. Deputy Opposition Leader Richard Marles said the party agreed with giving the Commonwealth veto powers on deals struck between states or universities and foreign powers. "But this specific piece of legislation is half-baked," Mr Marles told reporters in Canberra on Monday. "It was rushed out the door in order to try and change the conversation on a day the government was under scrutiny in respect of aged care. "It's simply not ready, the consultation hasn't been done with a whole lot of entities concerned, particularly the university sector." Mr Marles said Labor wanted to sit down with the government to discuss the legislation, which is destined to become law within days. "We would really like for Marise Payne and the government to actually come out of the bunker and have a conversation with us about how we can do this in a better way," he said.

Once the powers are passed, states and territories will be given three months to provide details of existing agreements with foreign governments. The federal government is then expected to tear up a deal the Victorian government has done

with China. Defence Minister Linda Reynolds ducked questions about the controversial Belt and Road agreement. "That is not an issue for me as defence minister," she told reporters at Parliament House. "That is something for the foreign minister and also the prime minister to answer." Trade and Tourism Minister Simon Birmingham said the Commonwealth would go through a careful and considered process in assessing more than 130 agreements. "It wouldn't exactly be methodically going through things in good faith if I was to say that there was an automatic predisposition to tear it up," he told the ABC when asked about the China deal.

"We will go through the proper processes, not just for this agreement, but the majority of agreements that exist between the states and territories and foreign governments." Senator Birmingham said the vast majority of deals in questions were with governments other than China. "We'll look at them all at face value and assess them against our foreign policy fairly, squarely and without any predetermined outcomes," he said. Senator Birmingham expects the legislation to clear parliament this week.

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Labor Plan for 10 Days Paid Violence Leave

Workers affected by family violence would get 10 days of paid leave a year under a plan developed by the federal opposition. Labor's social services spokeswoman Linda Burney has on Monday introduced a bill to get the ball rolling on the changes. "No one should have to choose between their livelihoods and their safety," she told parliament. Ms Burney says the time off will help women planning to leave abusive partners, an event she described as anxiety-inducing and needing to occur swiftly. It takes careful planning, significant effort and cost. "It just astounds me more attention is not paid to this national crisis - a crisis that saw four women last week alone die at the hands of their ex-partner or partner," Ms Burney said. "Preventing family violence is everyone's business and responsibility." She is urging the Morrison government to support the plan.

The paid leave would also give people time to attend legal proceedings, counselling, medical and financial appointments. The bill changes the Fair Work Act to replace the existing entitlement of five days unpaid leave. Part-time and full-time employees would get their regular rate of pay covering their usual hours. Casuals would get paid for the period they were rostered on, including any loadings. The leave would be pro-rata for casuals and part-time workers. The bill also acknowledges employee privacy is paramount, strengthening obligations on bosses to not disclose a worker has sought such leave. "Information concerning an employee's experience of family and domestic violence is sensitive and if mishandled can have adverse consequences for the employee," the draft law says. "Employers should consult with

such employees regarding the handling of this information." Since late 2018, workers have had access to five days of unpaid domestic violence leave per year. At the time, the coalition government argued it was sufficient as it was the minimum benchmark recommended by the Fair Work Commission.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/07/2020

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New Guide for Where Future Jobs Will Be

Perhaps unsurprisingly, jobs in health care and social assistance have proved the most resilient occupations during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a new report by the National Skills Commission has also found education and training, construction and mining are among occupations that have best been able stand up to the impact of the coronavirus impact. The commission has developed a resilient occupations framework that ranks 358 professions. "By developing this framework, we have improved our understanding of what has been a highly volatile labour market," National Skills Commissioner Adam Boyton said, releasing the report on Monday. "Jobs are starting to return even in some of the industries and occupations most impacted by the shutdowns, but recovery is uneven, and young people are most affected." Employment and Skills Minister Michaelia Cash said the report shows where the new jobs will be created.

"Given the disruption in the labour market caused by COVID-19, knowing that the job you are training for now will still be there in the future is critical for all Australians and our future prosperity," Senator Cash said. "The list of resilient jobs also provides for a mix of training requirements, which means Australians can train for them in the short and long term." She said it reinforces the Morrison government's work to make skills and vocational education and training (VET) more flexible and relevant to actual labour market demand. She said since coming to office, the government has focused on reforming the VET sector. "COVID-19 has expedited these reforms," Senator Cash said. "We have made the necessary changes to the VET sector to ensure the training that Australians are undertaking is relevant and fit for purpose." She said the government has invested almost \$7 billion in the VET sector in this year alone.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/07/2020

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New Laws to End Casual Confusion

New industrial relations laws to be introduced to parliament this week aim to end the confusion surrounding casual workers. Attorney-General and Industrial Relations Minister Christian Porter said there are many Australians still out of work, or doing fewer hours as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. "We cannot do nothing when we

have a situation where employers are delaying making hiring decisions because of ongoing confusion about the legal status of casual employment," Mr Porter said. He thanks employer groups and unions that have helped to shape these reforms. Labor industrial relations spokesman Tony Burke urged people to be wary of suggestions the proposed laws would be good for casuals. Mr Burke says casuals will lose workplace rights if employers are able to abuse their conditions without consequences.

"Labor still hasn't seen the legislation but when you look closely at the reports it seems this is another example where the spin of the government announcement is the opposite of the delivery," he said. The legislation to be introduced on Wednesday will cover three areas. It will introduce the statutory definition of casual employment in the Fair Work Act, which will include employment being offered without any firm advance commitment that the work will continue indefinitely and follow an agreed pattern of work. "Our definition of casual employment is likely broader than some business groups had wanted," Mr Porter said. "Unions are likely to say we should have made the definition broader still, suggesting to me that we have struck the right balance on this issue and delivered a fair and equitable outcome that will benefit both workers and employers."

The legislation will address the so-called "double-dipping" issue where currently employers may have to pay for sick leave and other leave as well as the 25 per cent casual loading meant to compensate for those benefits. The government will ensure employers do not have to pay worker entitlements twice by legislating to ensure that a court deducts any identifiable casual loading paid to compensate the employee for the absence of one or more entitlements. But Labor is concerned bosses could be the ones double-dipping. "If an employer tries to take the reliability of a permanent roster but only offers the insecurity of casual work, it's the employer who is double-dipping," Mr Burke said. "The government proposal would overturn the current cases which had protected workers where labour hire was causing casual workers to be paid less than the permanent workers doing the exact same job."

The new laws will also create a new minimum standard for casual conversion so that casuals who work regular shift patterns can move - if desired - to part-time or full-time employment after 12 months. "These are significant reforms which together will solve the problem of uncertainty, provide better avenues for job security, remove the burden of double-dipping claims and recognise employee choice," Mr Porter said.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/07/2020

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Call for Major Overhaul of Voting Laws

A major report into the 2019 federal election has called for a new style of voting and

flagged the need for more politicians to better represent Australians. The 228-page report by parliament's joint standing committee on electoral matters made 27 recommendations, including voters for the first time being required to show identification at polling booths. And when they vote for House of Representatives members they should be given the option not to cast preferences, rather than compulsorily number all the boxes to have their vote counted. The committee said the parliament should consider a constitutional referendum to break the nexus between the number of senators and the number of lower house members. A proposal to alter the constitution to break the nexus - that is, allow the lower house to expand without increasing the size of the Senate - was rejected in 1967.

"Parliament should commence a conversation about whether the parliament should be increased in size as the last increase was in 1984," the report said. "Part of the dialogue should consider whether the nexus between the Senate and the House of Representatives should be reformed. "In addition, consideration should be given to changing the term of the House of Representatives from three years to four years." The length of term change would also require the Senate to adopt eight-year terms instead of the current six for state senators. As well, by-elections for the lower house could be abolished with the party or group elected at the general election choosing the replacement. In a more controversial recommendation the committee said an MP who voluntarily resigns from the party under which they were elected at the general election "will be deemed to have vacated their seat".

Committee chair and LNP senator James McGrath said electoral reform was vital. "We sleep safely in our beds protected from the claws of the banality of evil because we decide who governs," he wrote. "These reforms are about empowering further the voter. Governments in democracies should always be wary of the voter. Long may it be so." The report also made recommendations in relation to donation reform, ending the pre-election broadcast media blackout, examining truth in political advertising rules, and putting in place a new offence of "electoral violence" to deal with candidates being stalked or intimidated.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/10/2020

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PM Kicks Tougher Enviro Laws Down the Road

Prime Minister Scott Morrison wants to push ahead with controversial changes to environmental laws without firstly beefing up protections. The government is yet to release former competition watchdog chair Graeme Samuel's review of Australia's environmental protection framework. It's a large reason why Mr Morrison's attempts to make changes from Professor Samuel's interim review faces stiff opposition. In the interim report Prof Samuel said Australia's natural environment was under increasing threat, with the current trajectory unsustainable. He described the current laws as not

fit for purpose. His key advice was for an independent environmental watchdog and for states to take on approvals to reduce red tape and costs. But Professor Samuel also wanted new national environmental standards to provide clear rules for the states as they take on decision-making from federal authorities.

The prime minister has pushed that step down the track, despite the government already knowing what recommendations are in the final report. Mr Morrison and his state and territory counterparts met in person for the first time in months on Friday, marking the final national cabinet meeting of the year. They agreed on pushing for the environmental protection changes. "This means you go through one process, you go through one decision maker," Mr Morrison said. The government's argument is the current process is too slow and costly but critics of the plan say it further risks Australia's environment. Victorian Premier Dan Andrews says the changes aren't about that. "It is about how you make the decision, not the decision itself," he said. Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk expects the streamlined process to be well received.

But that hasn't been the case so far, with a Senate inquiry into the proposed laws warned against the changes by scores of environment groups. Key cross bench senators Jacqui Lambie, Rex Patrick and Stirling Griff have said they won't support the changes. Mr Morrison wants the bill to pass next year but faces a battle with the three crossbenchers, Labor and the Greens opposing it. The government used its numbers in the lower house to push the bill through without it being properly debated, with some independent MPs not even able to introduce amendments or speak on the draft laws.

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

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The New Laws and Changes Coming into Force in 2021

As we prepare to put 2020 in our rear view mirror, Australians are no doubt keen to look ahead to 2021. But there will be some changes – good and bad – heading our way in the new year. Many of the notable changes relate to government policies brought in to help Aussies endure the coronavirus crisis. Some changes, like the Jobkeeper allowance will come into effect in the coming days, while others such as a planned tax on electric vehicles in certain states will happen mid year. Jobkeeper and JobSeeker changes For those relying on the federal government's JobKeeper payment, brought in as the pandemic decimated the economy back in March, the dollar amount is about to drop. From 4 January 2021, the JobKeeper Payment rate is either:

\$1000 per fortnight \$650 per fortnight – if you've worked less than 20 hours a week on average during February or June 2020. The JobKeeper payment is set to end on

the 28th of March, 2021. For those looking for a job, the bump in financial assistance in the form of the so-called Coronavirus Supplement is also about to drop. From January 1 this year, those on JobSeeker will be topped up at a rate of \$150 per fortnight, down from \$250 per fortnight. Reduced HomeBuilder grant rolls over The federal government announced an extension for its HomeBuilder grant for those who are seeking to build a new home or renovate an existing home. Due to expire at the end of 2020, the government announced an extension of the grant until 31 March 2021, albeit at a significantly reduced rate.

For contracts signed between January 1 and the 31st of March 2021, eligible grant seekers can claim \$15,000 – down from the original \$25,000. Relaxed rules for partnership visas Partner visa hopefuls will no longer have to leave Australia to get their applications approved under temporary changes expected to help 4,000 people. The changes will kick in early in the new year and are to assist people attempting to navigate coronavirus-related travel restrictions and hotel quarantine. "I know this will be a relief to those Australians who were concerned that their loved one may have to leave the country with no certainty as to when they could return," Acting immigration minister Alan Tudge said last month. New tenancy laws in Victoria A raft of more than 130 tenancy reforms will be introduced by March 29 for those in Victoria. They were due to start on July 1, 2019, but were pushed back due to the pandemic.

The new laws, which followed a lengthy review, "aim to ensure that Victoria's rental sector meets the needs of tenants and landlords, now and into the future," the state government said. The array of reforms include better protection and support for victims of family violence living in rental accommodation, and make it easier for tenants to keep pets. You can read more about the introduction of the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act 2018 here. Healthcare reforms Reforms to private health insurance will see policies tweaked, increasing the maximum age of dependants to 31. The move is designed to make private healthcare more accessible for Australians and was announced in the latest federal budget. It means the maximum age for dependants under family private health insurance policies jumps from 24 to 31 years.

The change will come into effect from April 1. South Australia's plastic ban comes into effect South Australia's ban on single-use plastics, such as straws and cutlery, will come into force from March 2021. The measures, the first of their kind in Australia, were passed in parliament in September but were put on hold because of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have also been designed to allow more items to be progressively added to the banned list, with the government targeting polystyrene cups, bowls and plates to go by early 2022. Fines could be imposed on businesses that don't comply with the new rules but Environment Minister David Speirs said he didn't think they would be necessary. "I don't expect that to be the case because I think first and foremost, consumers are driving this and businesses by their very nature need to respond to consumers," the minister said.

Changes to immigration law The federal government will be making some significant changes to its visa system making it tougher for business migrants to take up jobs in Australia. The current Business Innovation and Investment Program (BIIP) includes three visas and nine streams for applicants but that will be simplified to four streams (Business Innovation, Entrepreneur, Investor, and Significant Investor) and there will be changes to eligibility requirements, making it more stringent. 'Tropical influence': Expert warns of wet, sticky and humid 2021 weather From leaking brains to strange diets – 2020's weirdest and wackiest medical cases It's peak snake season in Australia – so how should you react when you see one? The changes will come into effect from July and are designed to bolster the economy's bounce back from the pandemic, the government says.

Changes to your super coming + tax cuts Changes are afoot in the system that governs your retirement savings as the government tries to clean up the industry and make sure you don't end up with multiple accounts after moving around in different jobs. "Under our reforms, your super will follow you," Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said in his October federal budget speech. The new measures aim to tie a worker to their first super fund for life and will come into effect on July 1, 2021. At the same time, you can expect a tax cut at the end of the financial year after the government pushed through the legislation in 2020. New milk code becomes mandatory A new milk code introduced by the consumer and competition regulator on January 1, 2020, will become mandatory for those in the early parts of the dairy supply chain.

The industry code regulates the conduct of farmers and milk processors in their dealings with one another. From 1 January 2021, all milk supply agreements, regardless of when they were entered into, must be compliant with the code, the ACCC said this month. "The ACCC has been engaging with the dairy industry over the past year to help farmers and processors better understand their obligations and rights under this new mandatory code," ACCC Deputy Chair Mick Keogh said. The code, among other things, prohibits retrospective price "step downs" by processors, and bans exclusive supply arrangements deemed detrimental to dairy farmers. Prepare for a tax on electric vehicles South Australia recently announced it would be the first state in the country to impose a new tax on electric vehicles to make up for the fuel excise, which is said to raise money for the upkeep of roads.

Victoria soon followed suit while the country's peak motoring organisation, the Australian Automobile Association, is calling for the taxing of electric vehicle owners to be rolled out on a national basis. South Australia expects their yet-to-be-detailed charge to raise \$1 million a year starting in July. Victoria's will also come into effect in July. Assisted dying on the agenda for NSW An independent NSW MP says he will draft fresh legislation on access to voluntary euthanasia in the state, with debate to take place in early 2021. Sydney MP Alex Greenwich said in a statement on December 13 that voluntary assisted dying should be legalised in NSW for terminally ill patients, following the lead of Western Australia and Victoria. New Zealand also

recently passed euthanasia laws via a referendum, with laws to come into effect in 2021. Mr Greenwich encouraged his parliamentary colleagues to begin discussing the matter with their constituents ahead of debates in the new year.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/30/2020

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Liberals Ponder Emissions Trading Scheme

John Howard's coalition government was warming to an emissions trading scheme in the year 2000. Twenty-year-old cabinet papers - released by the National Archives of Australia - reveal a government on a trajectory towards an ETS, with the Australian Greenhouse Office commissioned to conduct a feasibility study. Then-environment minister Robert Hill backed a market-based approach, noting in a submission to cabinet that environmental issues had a high public profile. The policy was in line with the coalition's market-oriented economic philosophy, encouraged by its success in introducing the goods and services tax. Senator Hill told cabinet he was developing a new initiative designed to encourage businesses to adopt environmentally-sensitive processes in their operations. In the other corner sat industry and resources minister, Nick Minchin.

Cabinet papers show him in action championing, with then-treasurer Peter Costello, a liquefied natural gas plan. Senator Minchin argued that future greenhouse gas abatement action should not render Australian industries, including LNG, uncompetitive. But he acknowledged market-based mechanisms were the most efficient and least costly means of achieving Australia's greenhouse gas targets. In August 2003, Mr Costello took a proposed cap and trade ETS to cabinet, where it was rejected, reportedly following industry lobbying of Mr Howard. The prime minister may not then have been convinced of the merits of an ETS but that changed and in June 2007, he announced a scheme was government policy and would be in place by 2012. Archives consultant historian Christine Wallace said this was one of the great "what ifs" of recent Australian political history.

"What if Howard had won the 2007 election? What if Costello had succeeded Howard prior to the 2007 election and gone on to win it?" She asked. "Both had committed to an ETS. Both were practised in initiating, marketing and implementing a new tax, as they showed so capably with the GST. "Had either of these counterfactual scenarios actually come about, an ETS might already have been operating in Australia for years - an accepted, unremarked-upon aspect of public finance in Australia, just like the once-controversial GST." As it turned out, Labor won the 2007 election. Kevin Rudd declared climate change one of the great moral, economic and environmental challenges. But efforts to legislate an ETS got bogged down. It was left to new Labor PM Julia Gillard to introduce a carbon price, against which opposition leader Tony Abbott campaigned vigorously, terming it "the great big

tax on everything".

Mr Abbott set about dismantling Labor's climate policies upon winning government in 2013. Back in 2000, the coalition was at best green in part. Although Australia had signed the 1998 Kyoto Protocol on emissions, Mr Howard declined to ratify it on grounds that it would disadvantage Australia. Interestingly, Senator Hill sought to make approval for the Kogan Creek coal-fired power station conditional on "the difference in greenhouse gas emissions between it and an equivalent gas-fired power station be fully offset by investment in sinks." The environment department's submission noted that the combined emissions of Kogan and an alumina project would account for a quarter of all future emissions growth Australia was permitted under Kyoto.

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Asia-Pacific

COVID-19 Crisis Adds Pressure to Private and Public Pensions Systems

The COVID-19 crisis has compounded the challenges facing retirement savings and old-age pension arrangements and added new ones, according to a new OECD report. The OECD Pensions Outlook 2020 says that population ageing, low growth, low returns and low interest rates were already weighing heavily on funded and pay-as-you-go pension plans, defined benefit and defined contribution schemes, as well as private and public retirement provisions before the outbreak of the pandemic. The shocks from the global health and economic crisis will likely keep economic growth, interest rates and returns low long into the future, putting many people at risk of not being able to save enough for retirement. Governments have taken a range of swift measures to improve the sustainability and resilience of pension arrangements in response to COVID-19. These include extending job-retention schemes and unemployment benefits that allow workers to keep accruing retirement benefit entitlements, or providing flexibility around pension plans.

"Countries need to strike a balance between the short-term income support provided by measures like granting people access to their retirement savings before they reach retirement age, and the potential negative effect of such measures on future retirement incomes," said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. "Allowing access to retirement savings should be a measure of last resort, and based on hardship

circumstances rather than being granted widely and unconditionally.” “The COVID-19 crisis has also underlined the importance of having long-term savings for emergencies,” he added. “Introducing long-term savings arrangements that combine a savings account earmarked for retirement and a savings account for emergencies could make retirement savings more resilient.”

The report recommends that policy makers:

- Ensure people continue saving for retirement and avoid selling assets and materialising losses when markets suffer sharp declines.
- Adopt a framework to assess retirement income adequacy and conduct assessments regularly, identifying groups at risk and responding to their specific adequacy shortfalls.
- Consider targeted measures to make sure that workers in non-standard forms of work – part-time and temporary employees, self-employed workers and informal workers – have the opportunity to save for retirement.
- Address the potential negative consequences of frequent switching of investment strategies on future retirement income and the stability of financial markets.
- Have in place a regulatory framework that ensures that risk sharing arrangements are sustainable and promote fairness among participants, allowing all to enjoy the benefits of risk sharing in terms of risk mitigation and higher expected retirement income.
- Ensure communication about investment strategies, their associated risks, rewards and costs, is consistent and standardised, adapted to the target audience, and avoids jargon and complex metrics.

Journalists are invited to contact Spencer Wilson of the OECD's Media Office (tel: +33 1 45 24 81 18). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 12/07/2020

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Citizen Participation in the Smart City: Findings from an International Comparative Study

This article focuses on understanding the dynamics of citizen participation in smart city initiatives. The literature identifies citizens as key actors, however, our understanding of their roles and influence is underdeveloped. Using modes of urban governance to provide contextual depth, alongside the literature on citizen participation in smart cities, this article conducts an in-depth examination of the roles of citizens. The results of an empirical study of citizen engagement in smart city governance in Brazil, the UK and the Netherlands demonstrate that the roles and functions undertaken by citizens are not static, they participate in a dynamic mode

that evolves and changes over time. Also, identifies three emerging patterns of contextually specific citizen interaction: contestation, acceptance and collaboration. This highlights how smart city initiatives have differentiated outcomes and how the mode of governance in a societal and institutional context plays an important role in shaping patterns of citizen participation.

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ADB Appoints Bruce Gosper as New Vice-President

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has appointed Bruce Gosper as Vice-President for Administration and Corporate Management for a period of three years. He will succeed Deborah Stokes whose term ends on 17 January 2021. Mr. Gosper's expected first date of reporting is on 1 February 2021. Mr. Gosper is currently the Australian High Commissioner to Singapore, and also, a member of the Asia Society Australia Advisory Council. With 40 years of experience working with multilateral and regional institutions and running large public sector organizations, he has profound knowledge and experience in digitalization, multilateral trade negotiations, regional cooperation, investment and trade promotions, international relations, diplomacy, and corporate administration.

Mr. Gosper oversaw corporate reform initiatives as former Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Trade and Investment Commission and Deputy Secretary of the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade that lifted gender diversity and equality, and put in place new policy directions toward greater client focus. As Ambassador to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva, he led Australia's multilateral trade initiatives and chaired the WTO General Council and WTO Dispute Settlement Body. He held senior roles in the Australian Embassies in Washington and Tokyo, as well as served on the Board of the former Australian Export Finance. He has contributed in initiating policy and administrative reforms, supporting infrastructure developments, multilateral negotiations, and promoting trade and investment relationships. Mr. Gosper completed his Bachelor of Arts Degree with Honors at Macquarie University. He acquired a graduate certificate in Public Policy from University of New England.

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East Asia

CHINA: To Refine Financial Services, Promote Steady Development of Personal Insurance

China will adopt a host of policy steps to promote the scale and quality of the personal insurance sector and facilitate its steady development, to meet people's diverse needs, the State Council's executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on Wednesday. It was agreed at the Wednesday meeting that further improving financial services and promoting the development of personal insurance is conducive to better serving people's essential needs and facilitating economic and social development. China's personal insurance has seen sound and fast development in recent years with commercial personal insurance reaching a considerable coverage nationwide, yet problems such as insufficient supply and low level of protection still exist, said the meeting. "The personal insurance sector in China has made notable progress in recent years, with insurance coverage continuously expanding and public awareness of risks steadily increasing.

That said, the sophistication and coverage of China's personal insurance sector remain modest. This also indicates that China is a huge insurance market with enormous potential," Li said. Attendees at the meeting emphasized the need to deepen reform and opening-up of the insurance sector, with a focus on optimizing supply and providing high-quality personal-insurance products, to meet people's needs for health, old-age support and safety protection. The development of commercial insurance shall be stepped up. Commercial medical insurance products that suit the needs and paying capacity of the elderly shall be developed. Insurance companies will be encouraged to incorporate medical expenses, within reasonable range yet outside basic medical insurance catalog, into insurance coverage. "We must focus on key areas, especially the medical insurance or commercial health insurance.

More types of insurance targeting critical illnesses shall be supported and aligned with the basic medical insurance system as supplement to enhance critical illness insurance protection for urban and rural residents," the premier said. "Openness shall be extended in an orderly manner, and international cooperation strengthened, to promote the development of health insurance and provide better services. At the current stage, medical insurance remains a top priority to meet people's growing demand for greater health," he said. Commercial endowment insurance, which serves as the third pillar of China's pension system, will be put under unified standards and regulations, and its development will be stepped up. The protection function of commercial endowment insurance shall be intensified. Endowment insurance featuring convenient application, flexible payment and relatively stable earnings shall be supported, and pension annuity insurance products actively developed.

The insurance sector is encouraged to participate in a pilot insurance scheme for long-term care. "Commercial endowment insurance shall be vigorously developed. In the past few years, new industries and new business models have emerged as China deepens reform of government functions and encourages entrepreneurial and

innovation activities nationwide," Li said. "Suitable supplementary endowment insurance shall be developed to cater to the needs of people working in these businesses, as well as of those in flexible employment, to ensure a more reliable guarantee for the future. It will help sustain existing jobs and create new jobs. This is a major task, and breakthroughs shall be made," he said. The long-term investment capabilities of insurance funds are to be enhanced, while the supervision of assets and liabilities will be strengthened, and risk prevention and control stepped up.

Differentiated regulatory ratio shall be adopted for equity assets involving insurance fund investments, up to 45 percent of the company's total assets. Insurance funding will be encouraged to participate in major construction projects, such as infrastructure and new-type urbanization, to better facilitate its role in driving the real economy. Special rectification regarding related-party transactions will be carried out, to resolutely deter illegal acts of misuse, arbitrage or embezzlement of insurance company funds. "Risk prevention and control must be enhanced on an ongoing basis to prevent speculative use of insurance funds. Greater efforts shall be made to address the difficulty in settling insurance claims and draw more people to participate in insurance schemes," Li said.

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

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China to Deepen Reform of Government Functions, Raise Service Capacity for Businesses, Public

China will optimize government service hotlines, improve the efficiency and capacity of government services for businesses and individuals, and implement unified registration for pledge of movable property and rights to facilitate pledge financing for businesses, the State Council executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on Monday. Government service hotline is directly oriented to businesses and the public, and serves as an important channel to report problems, make suggestions, facilitate government decision-making and help solve public service issues. It has played a positive role in addressing pressing concerns for enterprises and people in recent years. Attendees at the Monday meeting decided that going forward, regarding the large numbers of government service hotlines and inconvenience in accessing services, service hotlines will be optimized in keeping with the requirements of deepening reform of government functions.

Local governments, especially governments at county and city levels, should fulfill due responsibilities for non-emergency hotlines related to enterprises and people, according to the meeting. Service hotlines set up by governments at local levels and those established by relevant departments of the State Council and operated at the local levels shall be merged, wherever possible, into one unified number, to the convenience of the people. This embodies services at a single window. Relevant

departments of the State Council shall guide localities in optimizing hotlines, the meeting decided. Optimized hotlines shall be convenient for people to access. Procedures and resource allocation should be refined, and technical support should be strengthened to better align hotline operations with related handling services. A sound mechanism to efficiently deal with complaints, as well as monitoring and accountability mechanisms, shall be established to see that problems and reasonable demands raised by businesses and people are properly handled in a timely manner, and to ensure that government service hotlines can be swiftly accessed, public concerns be more accurately referred to relevant departments and things get done efficiently, it said.

"We have been working hard to transform government functions and make it easier for businesses and the people to get things done," Li said. "Regarding hotline operation and case handling, multi-level targeted approaches shall be adopted, and due responsibilities specified, with high attention paid to localities at city and county levels. Guidance from relevant departments shall be stepped up," he said. It was decided at the meeting that unified registration for pledge of movable property and rights will be implemented nationwide starting Jan. 1, 2021, to further improve business environment and facilitate the financial sector to better serve the real economy, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in particular. In recent years, pilot programs of unified registration for pledge of movable property and rights have been carried out in certain provinces and cities, to facilitate enterprises' pledge financing.

Privately-owned firms and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises accounted for more than 95 percent of new pledge registration, and their amount of financing took up over 80 percent. Registration responsibility for pledge of production equipment, raw materials, semi-finished products, and product mortgages previously undertaken by the State Administration for Market Regulation, and registration responsibility for pledge of accounts receivables, deposits, financial leases, as well as factoring by the People's Bank of China, will all be assumed by the latter. Internet-based services will be provided 24/7. Those that have already completed registration for pledge of movable property and rights will not be required for re-registration. Relevant departments shall properly handle follow-up work such as data transfer of inventory information.

New registrations shall be applied by relevant parties through the unified registration and notification system, and they will be held accountable for the authenticity, completeness and legality of the application. Registration departments will not conduct substantive review of the registration contents. The unified registration system is conducive for financial institutions to get a full picture of movable property and rights information and enhance their readiness to provide pledge financing to enterprises. "Unified registration for pledge of movable property and rights requires the financial system to strengthen and improve management services for the

enterprises, and will play a positive role in easing the burden on small and medium-sized enterprises, and in facilitating pledge financing. The financial system must make great efforts to improve services," Li said.

The meeting also adopted draft revisions of the Regulation on Business Name Registration and Administration, to refine basic norms and put in place an application system for corporate names where applicants can choose a corporate name that meets the requirements and pledge to bear legal responsibilities for any name infringements. Both deregulation and oversight will be stepped up. Registration departments shall enhance compliance oversight, and refuse to register or correct the corporate names inconsistent with the requirements. Disputes over corporate names may be settled through lawsuits or mediated or decided by registration departments. "Corporate name registration shall facilitate fair competition and independent business operations within the confines of the law," Li said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/15/2020

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Contactless Tax Payment Services Popular in China

More and more Chinese taxpayers have chosen to pay their taxes online as the country advocates contactless tax payment as part of its efforts to improve the business environment and reduce the risk of virus transmission. In the first 11 months of the year, nearly 90 percent of tax-related services were handled online, China's tax authorities said on Tuesday. After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, China rolled out a list of 185 tax-related services that can be provided online such as tax declarations and payments, and tax reductions and exemption filings, said Han Guorong, an official with the State Taxation Administration. Han said the proportion of tax-related services handled online continues to increase, with 92 percent and 82 percent of declaration-related and invoice-related services dealt with online, respectively.

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China Sees Rise in New Business Forms in Transport: White Paper

China is seeing a rise in new models and forms of business in transport, bringing convenience to people and injecting fresh momentum to economic growth, a white paper released Tuesday says. The white paper, titled "Sustainable Development of Transport in China", listed the following facts and figures on how the Internet is having a profound impact on the way people travel: -- By the end of 2019, more than

400 cities across the country had online car-hailing services, with daily usage averaging 20 million trips. -- Bike-sharing has effectively bridged the last kilometer in urban travel, with daily usage averaging more than 45.7 million trips. -- The Internet is also changing freight logistics. The 95306 online platform for railway freight services was put in place. In 2019, the online rail freight service handling rate rose to 85 percent. -- In 2019, a total of 3.57 billion tickets were sold on 12306.cn, China's official website for booking train tickets. Electronic tickets can be bought at almost all railway stations. -- China is on the way to achieving full Wi-Fi coverage in high-speed trains and stations. It has also made innovations to roll out services such as online meal booking, wireless charging and intelligent interaction. -- By the end of 2019, over 98 percent of the bus terminals at the county level and above offer province-side online ticket booking services.

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JAPAN: Civil Service Exam to Include New Digital Sector Category

The government is considering setting up a new category in the national civil service examination, one that requires specialized knowledge in the digital sector such as information processing technology, according to sources. The move is aimed at accelerating the digitization of administrative procedures by securing specialized personnel for a digital agency, scheduled to be established in September next year, as well as for other ministries and agencies. The category is planned to be introduced in the examination in fiscal 2022, which screens national civil servants who will start working in April 2023. The government hopes to select a maximum of a few dozen recruits who are familiar with such matters as cybersecurity and building information systems. About 170 college and graduate school graduates are hired every year under the engineering category. Part of the number allocated for the engineering category is likely to be transferred to the new digital sector category, the sources said.

The government will soon include the new classification of categories in the national civil service exams in its process chart for the digitization of administrative procedures, which will be compiled soon. Currently, there are 11 categories in the national civil service exam for college graduate-level recruits. The new category will be the first addition since fiscal 2012, when the exam was reorganized to its present form. Government officials in charge of digital-related issues currently receive about ¥10,000 of extra pay per month in salary. The government is also considering to increase this amount. Focused efforts in hiring are planned because of a shortage of personnel who are well-versed in digital-related issues, as skilled workers are offered better pay and working conditions at tech firms and other entities. This discrepancy has contributed to the government's sluggish response in digitization efforts.

Competition to secure talented workers in the digital field is becoming fierce. Hitachi Ltd. established a new hiring system wherein new recruits will be directly assigned to digital-related research and development teams, for those who start working in fiscal 2021.

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

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SOUTH KOREA: Gov't Buildings to Have AI Face Recognition, QR Code Access Control System

A new access control system utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) face recognition and quick response (QR) code technologies will be introduced to government buildings to enhance their security and improve the convenience of visitors, as well as civil servants, the Ministry of the Interior and Safety said Monday. The new entry log system will be test-operated in parts of the government complex in the central administrative city of Sejong and later expanded to other government buildings in Seoul and other cities, according to the ministry. The AI-based face recognition system for public officials will be installed in Building 3 of the Sejong complex, it said. Currently, the officials have to verify both their face and identification cards, but under the new system, they only have to pass the AI face recognition to enter the building. The ministry said the change will also help prevent the spread of infectious diseases by minimizing human contact, while enabling the introduction of different services, such as automatic body temperature checks. The QR code system will first be used by those who tour the rooftop garden in the Sejong complex. Visitors will have better accessibility as they won't have to submit their ID cards to receive a visitors' pass and won't be required to be accompanied by authorities if they download the QR code on their mobile phones in advance, the ministry explained.

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S. Korea to Phase Out Public Key Certification System

South Korea said Wednesday it will phase out an official public key certification system this week in a move to introduce easier-to-use verification services. South Koreans have used public key certificates since 1999 for verification in digital services, such as online banking and tax returns. The system, however, has been criticized in recent years for being outdated and difficult to use as it requires installation of multiple security software. Getting rid of the system altogether was one of President Moon Jae-in's campaign promises back in 2017. Following the recent revision to the country's digital signature law, the Ministry of Science and ICT said the existing system will no longer be the country's sole official verification system starting Thursday, paving the way for companies to replace the system with their own

verification services. One of the alternatives includes Pass, a mobile verification application from the country's three major mobile carriers SK Telecom Co., KT Corp and LG Uplus Corp. Pass has racked up 20 million registrations since its launch in April last year, according to the companies. The ministry said as of end-November, there were 66.5 million registrations for electronic verification services from the private sector, compared with 46.8 million for the public system.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 12/09/2020

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Seoul City Gov't Expands Foreign Language Service on Its Website

The Seoul city government on Wednesday began to offer its website in 100 foreign languages using Google Inc.'s translation service. The website (<http://world.seoul.go.kr>) can now be seen in languages such as Nepali, Vietnamese and Cambodian, in addition to the existing six -- English, simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese, Japanese, French and Spanish -- according to the city government. Translation into four languages -- English, simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese and Japanese -- will continue to be done by experts. For the other 96 languages, the website will run the professionally translated English content through Google's automatic translation system. "Foreign nationals who speak languages other than English can now learn about Seoul's administrative policies, tourism and lifestyle in their own languages," Park Jin-young, a public communications official at the city government, said in a press release. The new initiative started at the request of Russian speakers during a town hall meeting with foreign residents last year, according to the city government.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 12/30/2020

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: President Reshuffles Cabinet amid Pandemic

Indonesian President Joko Widodo on Tuesday afternoon reshuffled his cabinet amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi, has chosen Tri Rismaharini, the current mayor of the second largest city Surabaya, as the social affairs minister and Sandiaga Uno, a former deputy governor of Jakarta, to serve as the tourism and creative economy minister. In the new cabinet lineup, Jokowi also appointed former banker Budi Gunadi Sadikin as the minister of health and Muslim figure Yaquut Cholil Qoumas the minister of religious affairs. Likewise, the cabinet changes include Muhammad Lutfi, who is the current Indonesian ambassador to the

United States, to lead the Trade Ministry, and Sakti Wahyu Trenggono, who is the current deputy minister of defense, to become the minister of maritime affairs and fisheries. The president said the newly appointed ministers will be sworn in on Wednesday.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 12/22/2020

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Indonesian President Inaugurates New Ministers, Deputy Ministers

Indonesian President Joko Widodo inaugurated six new ministers and five new deputy ministers in his cabinet lineup at the State Palace here Wednesday. The six ministers are Yaqut Cholil Qoumas as minister of religious affairs, Budi Gunadi Sadikin as minister of health, Tri Rismaharini as minister of social affairs, Muhammad Lutfi as minister of trade, Sakti Wahyu Trenggono as minister of maritime affairs and fisheries, Sandiaga Salahuddin Uno as minister of tourism and creative economy. The measure was taken based on a presidential decree dated Dec. 23, 2020, on the fulfilling and replacement of several state ministers in President Widodo's cabinet for the 2019-2024 term. On the occasion, the head of state also installed five deputy ministers in the cabinet. The inauguration was based on a presidential decree dated Dec. 23, 2020, on the dismissal and appointment of deputy ministers in Widodo's cabinet for the 2019-2024 period.

From http://www.xinhuanet.com 12/23/2020

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VIETNAM: Party Central Committee Reaches High Consensus on Personnel Work

The 12th-tenure Party Central Committee (PCC) has announced it reached high consensus on personnel work related to the 13th tenure Politburo and PCC Secretariat during the 14th Plenum, which concluded Friday morning after nearly five working days, two days ahead of schedule. During this session, the Party Central Committee discussed and reached very high consensus on the contents that the Politburo submitted for adjustment to and finalisation of the draft documents to be submitted to the 13th National Party Congress, according to Party General Secretary and State President Nguyễn Phú Trọng. Appreciating opinions on the drafts contributed by all-level Party congresses as well as by Vietnamese people both at home and abroad, the committee said the preparation of the draft documents for the 13th National Party Congress has met the set targets. The draft documents review not only the implementation of the 12th National Party Congress's resolution but also 35 years of carrying out đổi mới (Renewal), the 30-year implementation of the 1991 Platform, the 10-year implementation of the Platform that was amended in 2011, and

the realisation of the socio-economic development strategy for 2011-2020.

They also define socio-economic development orientations and tasks for 2021-2025 while identifying targets and orientations until 2030, when the Party marks its 100th founding anniversary, as well as the national development vision until 2045, when Viet Nam turns 100, according to the Party Central Committee. In his closing remarks, Party General Secretary and State President Nguyễn Phú Trọng said the preparation of the draft documents had been conducted in a methodological and thorough manner. He noted the drafts had been compiled in a democratic way that respects opinions of scientists, cadres, Party members, and people, describing them as the quintessence of the wisdom and creativity of the entire Party, people, and army. The drafts feature many reformed contents and important points, and the Party Central Committee believes the 13th National Party Congress will continue scrutinising thoroughly and reach high consensus on these documents, creating the basis for the dissemination and effective implementation of the coming congress's resolution to achieve targets for 2025 and 2030, he said.

Delegates agreed that during the past tenure, amid rapid and unpredictable developments in the country and the world, as well as natural disasters and epidemics, the Party Central Committee, Politburo, the PCC Secretariat, and key officials have united as one, closely followed the Party's policies and guidelines, and promptly made sound and suitable decisions to address many issues related to socio-economy, national defence-security, external relations, and the building of the Party and political system. The Party Central Committee, Politburo, and PCC Secretariat have directed the finetuning of guidelines and institutions, especially those of the socialist-oriented market economy, as well as the effective settlement of difficulties, obstacles, and weaknesses left from previous years in the economy, maintaining macro-economic stability, keeping inflation under control, and improving the people's living conditions. Facing new and complex developments in the global and regional situation, the Party Central Committee, Politburo, and Secretariat have made sound, appropriate and timely policies and decisions.

The country's stature and power have been strengthened while independence, sovereignty, sovereign rights and territorial integrity, the interests of the nation and people, along with peace and stability for national development have been sustained. Việt Nam has also made responsible contributions to global and regional peace, stability, and development, thus receiving appreciation and support from the international community. The Party and country's prestige and standing have been promoted in the international arena, winning Party members and people's trust. Party building and rectification work, along with political system building and the fight against corruption, wastefulness and negative phenomena, have received special attention with drastic action, resulting in substantial outcomes. Many complex issues left from many years ago have also been handled well during this tenure. The Party leader emphasised the outcomes of the 12th tenure hold extremely great importance

as they serve as a basis for the coming years and create confidence for the entire Party, army, and people to weather all difficulties and challenges and make use of opportunities.

The 14th Plenum of the Party Central Committee (PCC) reached high consensus on the personnel nomination for the Politburo and the PCC Secretariat for the 13th tenure, including both candidates for re-election and new nominees. The Politburo and sub-committee in charge of the personnel affairs were assigned to complete personnel plans to submit to the PCC for consideration and decision at the upcoming 15th session. The PCC agreed with the Politburo's proposals on the congress's working programme, contents, working rules, and election regulations, affirming the congress must uphold democracy and pool the brainpower of all delegates while ensuring the Party's discipline and the responsibility of setting good examples of 12th PCC members. The session also gave opinions on several documents, including a report on the implementation of the working rules of the PCC, Politburo and Secretariat in the 12th tenure, and a report on examination, inspection and implementation of Party discipline during the 12th tenure. In addition, the PCC agreed on the disciplinary measure of expelling from the Party for Nguyễn Đức Chung member of the 12th PCC, former Vice Secretary of the Hà Nội Party Committee during 2015-2020, former Secretary of the Party unit, and former Chairman of the municipal People's Committee for 2016-2020, for his serious mistakes and violations.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 12/18/2020

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South Asia

INDIA: Transforming to Be 'Aatmanirbhar'

India is en-route to become 'Aatmanirbhar' and the process of its transformation is underway. The Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Government of India has been actively driving the country towards a better future ahead. From coming up with schemes to increase the farmers' income by two folds to building an ecosystem adaptive enough to support businesses for holistic upliftment of the economy, there are many such initiatives that are transforming India. Bringing in the spotlight, the transformation of India, Elets Technomedia Pvt. Ltd. organised the 'India Transformation Summit'. The three-day summit was graced by the presence of Nitin Gadkari, Minister for Road Transport and Highways and Minister for Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) as the Chief Guest. It saw participation from senior policymakers, renowned industry leaders and academia brainstorming on India's transformation. The deliberations addressed growth and development in various sectors such as agriculture, MSMEs, water, food, disaster management, transport, urban development, and so on. The summit highlighted how India is spearheading to

transform into 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'. This issue of the EGov Magazine carries a detailed report of the India Transformation Summit. The report will detail out deliberations from the policymakers on government's work, actions, and policy reforms to transform India. Besides, the role of private players in strengthening governance and economy in the country. This issue further intends to bring in light how the effective measures and impactful strategies by the government have resulted in infrastructure development, enhanced mobility and connectivity, technology-powered processes and systems.

From <http://egov.eletsonline.com> 12/03/2020

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Chhattisgarh Govt Posts Alex VF Paul Menon V IAS as Labour Commissioner

The Government of Chhattisgarh, on November 30, transferred and posted Alex VF Paul Menon V (IAS 2006-Batch) as Labour Commissioner. Menon has been allotted the additional charges of Special Secretary, Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Department, and State Nodal Officer, Labour Department.

From <http://egov.eletsonline.com> 12/03/2020

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PayU India Appoints Prakash Padariya as CISO

Online payment solutions provider PayU on Monday said it has appointed Prakash Padariya as the companys Chief Information Security Officer, adding a key position to the India leadership team. In his new role, Padariya will lead and further strengthen PayU India security team, while ensuring alignment with PayU's Global Security strategic initiatives and standards. Padariya comes to PayU with more than 17 years of experience in core information, cybersecurity and technology. He was previously the CISO at GE India Technology Centre. He has also worked with leading Fortune 100 companies such as Royal Bank of Scotland, IBM, Target Corporation and Accenture in his career. "As a leading online payment player in the country, securing our customers' payment transaction data is a top priority for us and we constantly work to improve upon existing measures," Anirban Mukherjee, CEO, PayU India, said in a statement. Padariya professional expertise spans across banking & financial services and telecommunications & IT service industries. PayU's proprietary risk engine is built for global Internet businesses facing evolving fraud threats.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 12/05/2020

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SRI LANKA: Ministry of Technology Comes Under President's Purview

In accordance with the revision of subjects under Ministries on November 20th, Ministries of Defence and the Technology have been brought under the purview of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Simplification of State machinery and market process, expansion of digital governance through the use of information technology as a tool for knowledge exchange are priorities of the newly established Ministry. The establishment of international electronic payment schemes, high-speed data exchange systems, and associated mobile network across the country is within the purview of the new Ministry. President intends to build a culture of technology innovation that will enhance the living standards of the people. All economic sectors including agriculture, industry, and services will become technology dependent in the future. The Government seeks to integrate investment in education with economic sectors to create a society armed with new technology in the 21st Century. The 21st Century is considered as the knowledge-centric century. In order to make this a reality "Saubhagyaye Dekma" Policy Statement envisages to build a technology-based society.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 12/05/2020

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Ministry to Hold Online Event to Support Implementation of Start-Up Ideas

The third innovation week "Innoweek" will be held in Azerbaijan on December 14-19, 2020, [Trend](#) reports with reference to InnoWeek. The project will be implemented on the initiative of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies jointly with the UN Development Program, the Innovation Agency, and Azercell Telecom. The "Innoweek" innovation week is aimed at expanding the start-up movement and developing innovative thinking among Azerbaijani young people. During the coronavirus pandemic, various local and international events within the Innoweek project will be held online. The main goal is to accelerate the process of forming an innovation ecosystem, increase the interest of young people in innovations, and support the implementation of start-up ideas.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/08/2020

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Azerbaijan to Create 'Government-Cloud' National Data Center

Azerbaijan will create National Data Center 'Government Cloud' (G-cloud) on the basis of the Data Center operating under the Azintelecom LLC of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, [Trend](#) reports citing the ministry. The respective preparatory work is underway within the Transitional Plan on measures for the creation of the G-cloud and cloud services. The future center will ensure the stable operation of the 'Government Cloud', recovery of work from the archive, and protection of data during cyberattacks, emergency situations, and martial law. At present, the project infrastructure is being developed and, in accordance with the transitional plan, the migration of state structures to the G-cloud will begin. The G-cloud is a major project that includes reducing costs in public administration and increasing coordination between government structures by effectively integrating government information systems and reserves into a single platform. The project's implementation will ensure the operation of state information systems, the deployment of their infrastructure, and the formation of standards, as well as reduce the cost of creating and storing information systems in public administration and the formation of a centralized infrastructure for state institutions.

Thus, an opportunity will be created to optimize the costs required by government agencies for information technology, the creation, and provision of digital services, and the organization of information systems in a high-quality, stable and secure infrastructure based on more modern standards. With the implementation of the 'Government Cloud' project, public institutions will be able to reduce the cost of IT infrastructure. Thus, cloud technologies allow for more efficient use of resources, providing management of IT infrastructure from a single platform based on the 'pool principle'. New data centers based on modern world standards for cloud services will be brought into compliance with the international certificate of the Uptime Institute TIER III organization, standards for the provision and management of IT services ISO-20000, and information security ISO 27001. Besides, the equipment used in the data centers will be controlled according to the 'N +' principle, which means the use of second backup equipment in order to ensure continuity of service in the event of any preventive maintenance on the equipment or a technical failure. Thus, correct and reliable management of information technology in 99.982 percent of cases will provide a level of resilience to safely perform this process. State institutions connected to the G-cloud will be able to manage IT resources allocated for them via a self-administration platform. The Ministry of Transport, Communications, and High Technologies have developed the architecture of the G-cloud, according to which the cloud's activities are planned to be carried out through active, backup, archive, and test Data Centers.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/22/2020

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President Aliyev's Brilliant Leadership, Wisdom Ensured Azerbaijan's Victory in Second Karabakh War

President Ilham Aliyev's brilliant leadership and wisdom ensured Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Karabakh War, US expert, CEO of Caspian Group Holdings Rob Sobhani told [Trend](#). Sobhani believes that Azerbaijan's victory is based on a number of mutually reinforcing factors. "First, the brilliant leadership of President Aliyev and the timing of launching the Second Karabakh War. President Aliyev, it appears, sensed a vacuum in the global arena; I call it a vacuum of leadership by the Minsk Group members (Russia, U.S. and France). The second factor is the wisdom President Aliyev has shown when it comes to conducting Azerbaijan's foreign policy. Unlike the inexperience of Prime Minister Pashinyan, the experience of President Aliyev allowed Azerbaijan to maintain good and friendly relations with two regional powers, namely Russia and Turkey. By making a rational case for why this Second Karabakh War is a Just War President Aliyev was able to win the support of these two important countries.

Third, I think that Azerbaijan's relations with Israel were also critical. The technological superiority of Israel's military-industrial complex was recognized early on by President Aliyev. A fourth important factor that led to a victory for Azerbaijan was innovative and creative technologies used in modern day drones. This introduction of modern technology was a very important factor that tilted the balance of military power in favor of Azerbaijan. This is a very important lesson for the future of Azerbaijan; namely to invest in innovative and creative technologies such as bio-tech, artificial intelligence, electric vehicle batteries, graphene based solar panels and e-commerce. And last but critically important we must never forget that the Second Karabakh War was won due to the courage of Azerbaijan's brave soldiers. Their memory must always be kept alive," the US expert explained. He went on to add that the reconstruction and development of Karabakh will obviously be a top priority. "Therefore, what is needed now a "Marshall Plan for Karabakh": inviting the U.S. European and Asian powers such as China, Japan and South Korea, to finance major infrastructure projects in Karabakh ranging from roads, bridges, power generation, water management to transportation links and tourism.

Specifically, what Azerbaijan can do now is to identify specific projects to present to banks for financing based on public-private partnerships. For example, it can present feasibility studies on solar panel and battery production facilities in Shusha which would be of enormous interest to the European Investment Bank. The liberation of Karabakh and its surrounding areas creates a historic opportunity for small and medium size businesses in these areas to transport their products to warehouses in Baku for sale to the global marketplace via e-commerce portals. Transportation links via high speed rail using technologies from Japan, China or France can connect Baku to Karabakh," Sobhani concluded.

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Azerbaijan to Establish Embassy in Afghanistan

Azerbaijan will establish an embassy in Afghanistan, Trend reports. The agenda of a meeting of the Parliament of Azerbaijan has been amended in this regard. The MPs discussed the bill 'On the establishment of the Azerbaijani embassy in Afghanistan (Kabul)'. The MPs noted Afghanistan's constant support for the fair position of Azerbaijan, the fact that there are strong ties between the two countries, and that the opening of the embassy would contribute to their further development. After discussions, the bill was put to a vote and adopted.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/30/2020

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GEORGIA: Innovation and Technology Agency Talks About Its Activity in Country

Georgia's Innovation and Technology Agency (GITA) supports the development of the Capital market at various levels in diverse sectors, the GITA told [Trend](#). According to the source, the Government of Georgia has prioritized developing knowledge-based and innovation-driven economic development by institutionalizing the support schemes and establishing Georgia's Innovation and Technology Agency (GITA) under the supervision of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia. "The main mandate of GITA is to create an ecosystem and coordinate its development process; stimulate innovation, modern technologies and R&D, facilitate commercialization and usage of R&D; support to innovative start-ups and their competitiveness growth, facilitate cooperation between the representatives of scientists and businesses," the agency said. According to it, GITA is providing access to finance for innovative projects, also supports R&D commercialization and technology transfer. In this regard, together with the awareness-raising and training programs, GITA provides access to finance by different types of grant programs. "In this direction, the Government is providing the pre-seed and seed stage financing for startups, covering the risks, and enhancing their skills for further investment opportunities. Since 2016 the support from the World Bank Group was secured for the Project - Georgia National Innovation Ecosystem (GENIE) in the amount of \$23.5 million," the GITA noted. As reported, the main objective of the project is to increase innovative activities of the micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), including startups, and individuals in Georgia and their participation in the digital economy. It includes a) access to finance – issue the grants for SMEs and innovative projects; b) scale up the infrastructure projects in the region; c) enhance skills and capacity by providing pieces of training and mentorship programs for startups by providing different types of incentives.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/18/2020

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KAZAKHSTAN: Agricultural Ministry Unveils Volume of Digitalized Services

Kazakhstan's Ministry of Agriculture held public discussions over the Report on its activities in the provision of public services for 2020, [Trend](#) reports referring to the ministry. The ministry began the active phase of transferring public services to an online format in 2019. Over the past year, it has transferred 82 percent of services to digital format. This year, when the entire work of the ministry was transferred to online mode due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the services' digitalization accelerated. For 9 months of 2020, 94 percent of public services assigned to the ministry are available in electronic form. Generally, out of 61 state services, 57 are provided online, the remaining - in paper format, 5 (on land resources) are provided by the 'Government for Citizens'. Of the total number of public services, 37 are provided by administrations of regions, including subsidizing services for the agro-industrial complex, plant growing, land resources, agricultural machinery, as well as some veterinary and phytosanitary services. The ministry itself provides 19 services.

For 9 months it provided 215,421 services, e.g. 24 percent in paper form, and 76 percent online. The share of services provided in paper form decreased by 34 percent compared to 2019. Besides, the ministry has shortened the terms of providing public services in 16 areas of subsidizing the agro-industrial complex from 15 calendar days to 5 working days, for subsidizing investment investments - from 30 calendar days to 14 working days, for guaranteeing and insuring loans - up to 21 working days. According to the accreditation of procurement organizations, the period for rendering public services has been reduced to 30 minutes. To reduce administrative barriers, the terms for plant quarantine and registration of pesticides were minimized. At the same time, within the framework of the amendments made to the Land Code of Kazakhstan, it's envisaged to reduce the terms for the provision of 5 state services in the field of land resources. Moreover, the timing of the provision of public services for the registration of agricultural equipment and the issuance of a license plate (from 15 calendar days to 1 working day) has been streamlined, and inspection of agricultural equipment by submitting photographs through the portal has been excluded.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/29/2020

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UZBEKISTAN: System for Assessing Professional Qualifications of Citizens to Be Introduced

A system for assessing the professional qualifications of citizens will be introduced in Uzbekistan starting from January 1, 2021, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev said during his message to the parliament, [Trend](#) reports citing kun.uz.

"We will focus our attention on youth employment and entrepreneurship support. To this end, next year the vocational education system will be reformed on the basis of new approaches in accordance with the requirements of the labor market and international standards," the head of state said. It was noted that from now on the availability of qualifications will become a key requirement for working specialties. In this regard, the government has been instructed to introduce a system for assessing the professional qualifications of citizens in demanded professions from January 1 next year. "As you know, at the recent Youth Forum we decided to allocate \$100 million for youth entrepreneurship and employment. In addition, 1 trillion soums (\$95.5 million) and \$50 million will be allocated to finance business projects of youth and train their professions," Mirziyoyev concluded. Furthermore, in his address to parliament, the president of Uzbekistan called 2021 the Year of Supporting Youth and Strengthening Public Health. According to the head of state, in this historical process, the most important factors, an integral part of the national idea are the development of education and upbringing, science and innovation, and the establishment of a healthy lifestyle. To this end, large-scale reforms will be carried out in the country, guided by the idea "New Uzbekistan starts from the threshold of the school, from the system of education and upbringing."

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/29/2020

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AUSTRALIA: Coalition Open to Industrial Reform Change

Industrial Relations Minister Christian Porter has left the door open to changing the coalition's workplace law reforms to secure passage through parliament. The Morrison government will on Wednesday introduce industrial relations legislation designed to cover five key reform areas. It will address the definition of casual employment, long-term greenfields agreements across the life of major projects, award simplification, compliance and changes to enterprise bargaining. Mr Porter said the government would not be obstinate about any part of the bill. "It's not going to be an all-or-nothing proposal," he told reporters in Canberra on Friday. The legislation will be scrutinised by a parliamentary committee before likely being voted on next year. Government-led industrial relations working groups of employers and unions discussed the key reform areas ahead of the laws being drafted.

Mr Porter wants consultations to continue once the bill is introduced to parliament. "I will be listening carefully not merely to all the business groups but also the union groups about their views on the final product," he said. "It's quite clear that not everyone is going to love everything in the final product and it has been something of a balancing exercise." He said everything in the bill was important because the reforms were based on job creation. In the working groups, unions proposed allowing

resource and construction projects worth more than \$5 billion to have one-year extensions provided there was dispute resolution on the sites. But mining and resource employers wanted greenfields agreements doubled to eight years. ACTU secretary Sally McManus has raised concerns the legislation could remove workers' rights and punish supermarket staff, young people and women. "We fear it will seek to weaken protections, when the experience of the pandemic has shown the importance of having these protections, when we have been reminded that our social contract must be treasured," she told the National Press Club earlier in the week.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/04/2020

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PM, Premiers Get to Work on Reform Agenda

Premiers, treasurers and local government leaders will come together in Canberra on Friday to discuss better cooperation between levels of government. The National Federation Reform Council was announced in mid-2020 to replace the Council of Australian Governments. It will meet once a year to focus on priority national issues. The meeting, to be opened by Prime Minister Scott Morrison, is expected to deal with job creation, commonwealth-state system reforms and mental health, as well as Indigenous issues, women's safety and veterans' wellbeing. A key point of discussion will be the response to the recent report of the bushfires royal commission.

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

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Labor Demands Action on Corruption

Labor has slammed the federal government for failing to establish a new national anti-corruption watchdog within two years of promising to do so. The government in December 2018 pledged to set up a Commonwealth Integrity Commission and in November this year released draft laws for its establishment, with public consultation still taking place. The government hopes to bring a bill before parliament in 2021. Covering members of parliament and their staff, as well as bureaucrats and federal police, the CIC would have the power to compel people to give sworn evidence at hearings and imprison those who do not comply. As well, people could be compelled to provide information and produce documents - even if the information would incriminate the person. Surveillance and searches under warrant of homes would also be allowed.

But Labor has opposed the privacy afforded to CIC hearings and the body's inability to launch its own investigations in most cases. Shadow Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus on Sunday lambasted the government's lack of urgency on establishing the CIC and its intransigence on the body's structure, saying it needed to be more powerful. "Time and time again (Prime Minister) Scott Morrison and

(Attorney-General) Christian Porter have shown they have no interest in tackling corruption and are too scared of what a powerful and independent integrity commission will do to their scandal-prone government," Mr Dreyfus said in a statement. "All we've seen is a draft bill for a weak, secretive and compromised commission that would cover up corruption, not expose it."

The government has committed \$147 million to the CIC, including shifting the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity under its remit. Senate powerbroker Jacqui Lambie has threatened to vote against all government legislation if it persists with the "toothless" commission, while the Greens labelled the CIC "a protection racket for corrupt politicians". Barrister and director of the Centre for Public Integrity, Geoffrey Watson, described the CIC as a "sham" and said it was designed to cover up corruption.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/13/2020

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Midnight Tax Grab Becomes Lasting Reform

On the stroke of midnight July 1, 2000 Australia gained a brand-new tax, the long-anticipated GST which added a 10 per cent tariff to the cost of almost everything. While many items became more expensive, some consumables remained the same price and others, where the goods and services tax replaced a higher rate of wholesale sales tax, actually became cheaper. Cabinet documents for 2000 - released by the National Archives of Australia - reveal the extensive effort conducted in the lead-up to July 1, 2000 to prepare the nation for this far-reaching economic reform. For example, what about those venues such as nightclubs, hotels and supermarkets which traded through the changeover? Cabinet decided they didn't need to shut their cash registers and reopen to set up for the new GST regime until normal closing time later on July 1.

That first morning, then-prime minister John Howard - who in May 1995 as opposition leader promised there would "never ever" be a GST on his watch - checked out the reception of the new tax with visits to Sydney shopping centres. He found reaction of shoppers and shopkeepers ranged from positive to indifferent, he recalled in his biography Lazarus Rising. "A sensible broadening of Australia's narrow tax base had been achieved after a generation-long public discussion of its merits and demerits," said archives historian, University of Canberra Associate Professor Dr Christine Wallace. In the lead-up to July 1, the government conducted an extensive education and information campaign to prepare the community and business sector for the new tax. It was a big job. In February, the government committed an extra \$20 million to sell the GST to the community.

Despite that considerable effort, its introduction still had to be followed by an

extensive bedding-down period. Cabinet documents disclose a number of decisions relating to adjusting GST processes, for which the main burden fell on businesses. In November, the Australian Taxation Office raised a number of issues, noting "the large and growing number of requests for assistance from the ATO for advisory visits and through calls to the helplines". This was about the time businesses had to submit their first Business Activity Statement, or BAS. Mr Howard later said the BAS was too complicated, yet Treasury resisted any change, as did Treasurer Peter Costello in the belief that any change signified retreat. Not until the following year was the form simplified. Australia had long considered a broad-based consumption tax to apply to goods and services (with a few exemptions) and which was paid by everyone.

That was advocated by the Asprey committee, commissioned by the McMahon government in 1971. At various times in the 1980s Paul Keating and John Howard favoured a GST. Opposition leader John Hewson campaigned on a GST at the 1993 election and lost. The impetus for the coalition government under John Howard was the 1997 High Court decision invalidating state indirect taxes and leaving the Commonwealth to make up the shortfall. The federal government could have got by with minimal change but in August 1997, Mr Howard invited Australia on a "great tax adventure". After narrowly winning the 1998 election, Mr Howard had a mandate to proceed with the GST. One government priority was to have the GST in place ahead of the Sydney Olympics to reap the benefit of visitor spending.

Professor Wallace said the government achieved a near-textbook demonstration of how to initiate and implement a controversial public policy. "It is a signal demonstration that a controversial, politically-risky policy, properly handled, can quite quickly become a routine, unremarked upon aspect of daily life," she said.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/31/2020

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3、 Management, Capacity Building and Innovation

Asia-Pacific

The Road to Smart City Infrastructure Starts with Research

Mathew Yarger Contributor

Mathew is Head of Mobility and Automotive at the IOTA Foundation, where he develops strategy and solutions around the use of data with distributed ledger technology-based innovations. These solutions focus on enabling flexible and privacy-centric data and value transfer within the public sector for use in smart cities, critical infrastructure, environmental and energy systems, and mobility-focused data industries. In the United States, critical city, state and federal infrastructure is falling

behind. While heavy investment, planning and development have gone into the U.S. infrastructure system, much of it is not keeping up with the pace of new technology, and some of it hasn't had a proper update in decades, instead just adding new systems onto old systems. This can be allotted to a combination of liability structures in the U.S., difficulty in enabling interconnection between infrastructure in different jurisdictions, worry over introducing large-scale security risks and an attempt to mitigate that risk.

There is interest in upgrading city systems to be more efficient, to be more in line with real-time demand and to move into the 21st century, but it's going to take work. It's also going to take new technology. Distributed ledger technology (DLT), when applied correctly, can do for a city's infrastructure what existing technologies cannot. Where existing technologies are heavy, requiring expensive servers and a larger energy draw, distributed ledger technology is light and can be implemented on individual nodes (code environments) and directly onto things like traffic light sensors. It also allows for more oversight from a privacy perspective. The ability to bring distributed ledger technology into lightweight frameworks allows for more security and upgrades to critical infrastructure.

Benefits of smart infrastructure

The biggest impact of smart infrastructure is that it enables local governments to focus on the reason they're there in the first place; to increase the quality of life of the local residents, bring stability and culture to local businesses, and create a welcoming and frictionless environment for tourists or visitors. Governments can create stability, streamline sources of revenue, and integrate a frictionless operational environment for people and organizations in their jurisdiction. Consider transportation infrastructure. A lot of revenue in cities and states comes from things like tolls and roadside parking, and of course taxes. States control the highways, interstates, and tolling infrastructure commonly through collaboration with service providers. Cities control the local roadside and passthrough streets and the revenue accrued through parking solutions. With the pandemic, these resources have dried up due to people staying at home, social distancing, using less public transit and working remotely.

This now offers an opportunity for an expanded example of the desire to understand the transportation flow. If cities had more real time insights into this, they'd be able to understand the demand and have a more fluidly flowing traffic condition. This can be done through new technologies such as what are seen deployed in Singapore like green link determinings systems, parking guidance systems, and expressway monitoring systems allowing for enhanced traffic awareness and guidance. There are also keen ways to incentivize traffic guidance while bringing stability to local small and medium businesses throughout cities such as using parking guidance systems to enable local businesses to offer discounts for parking nearby.

An open transportation grid (in the sense of data points gathered for streamlining and managing) can create smoother traffic patterns in cities with smaller road grids. Transportation centers could communicate with delivery services, understanding their routes and setting up parking reservation windows. Traffic flow could be managed so that delivery services are able to get in and out without causing back-ups on tight, busy roads. Another offering of smart infrastructure can be seen with cross border connections for transportation of goods and services. The ownership of infrastructure in the U.S. is highly fragmented; with cities owning local and neighborhood roadsides, and states owning highways and interstates. This also means that the infrastructure supporting this is highly distributed, because each entity has to have it's own systems in place to support their infrastructure, typically using different solutions, services and data structures.

From <https://www.newonnews.com/> 12/02/2020

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Measures Needed to Curb Particulate Matter Emitted by Wear of Car Parts and Road Surfaces

Wear and tear from brakes, tyres and road surfaces will soon overtake car exhaust fumes as the leading source of fine particles released into the air by road traffic, according to a new OECD report, and heavy electric vehicles with long-distance batteries could compound the problem even as they slash emissions from engine exhaust. The findings in Non-exhaust Particulate Emissions from Road Transport: An ignored Environmental Policy Challenge suggest that electric vehicles should not be exempted from tolls and congestion charges aimed at reducing road traffic emissions. Instead, road traffic regulations should consider both exhaust and “non-exhaust” emissions from all vehicles and should take into account factors like vehicle weight and tyre composition. Policy makers should also favour measures that reduce driving distances, limit urban vehicle access and encourage public transport, walking and cycling.

Exposure to airborne particulate matter (PM) is associated with acute respiratory infections, lung cancer, and chronic respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. Road traffic is behind a quarter of PM_{2.5}, the most damaging type, in urban areas yet only exhaust emissions of PM are regulated. No standards exist for measuring or regulating non-exhaust PM emissions. As particulate matter emitted from exhaust sources decreases with the uptake of electric vehicles, the majority of PM released into the air by road traffic could come from non-exhaust sources as early as 2035. The amount of non-exhaust particulate matter a vehicle emits is determined by many factors, including vehicle weight, driving styles, the material composition of brakes, tyres and roads, and the amount of dust on road surfaces. Lightweight electric vehicles with a driving range of about 100 miles (161 km) emit an estimated 11-13% less PM_{2.5} than conventional vehicles in the same segment. However, heavier

electric vehicles with battery packs enabling a range of 300 miles (483 km) emit an estimated 3-8% more PM2.5 than equivalent conventional vehicles. The report finds that the total amount of non-exhaust particulate matter emitted by passenger vehicles worldwide is likely to rise by 53.5% by 2030. These findings underline the need to establish standardised approaches to measuring non-exhaust particulate matter and to develop a better understanding of how factors like vehicle characteristics influence the amount of PM generated, the report says.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 12/07/2020

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Employers Must Remove Barriers to Work for All Generations

Governments and employers should work together to promote multi-generational workforces to adapt to ongoing changes in the world of work that have been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new OECD report. Promoting an Age-Inclusive Workforce says that, by 2050, more than four-in-ten people in the world's most advanced economies are likely to be aged older than 50. And there will be one person aged 65 and over for every two persons aged 20-64 in OECD economies compared to one for every three today. Yet current public employment and retirement policies, as well as many corporate practices, are often closely tied to the age of workers, rather than to their actual work capacity and individual needs. Despite older adults being healthier and better educated than ever before today, their talent often remains underutilised and overlooked.

“Promoting greater diversity of experience, generations and talent has the potential to bring enormous benefits to workers, companies and society as a whole,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. “Employers need to develop initiatives that nurture an age-diverse workplace and take a life-cycle perspective with supportive public policies and good social dialogue.” Living standards across the OECD would be improved substantially by increasing the participation of older workers in employment, according to the report. Extending working lives could boost GDP per capita by 19% in 2050 on average in OECD countries if employment rates of older workers everywhere caught up with the best-performing countries like Iceland and New Zealand. Age-discrimination remains a common problem across the world, restricting employment choices for older and sometimes even younger workers, representing a considerable cost to business.

Rather than focusing on age, labour market policy should be tailored to different individual circumstances and contexts. This implies eliminating age-bias recruitment practices and encouraging age-diverse cultures where all workers feel comfortable and appreciated regardless of age. Retaining talent is key. The report provides evidence that employers who respond positively to the changing needs of employees during their lifecycle and career stages improve their success in attracting, motivating

and retaining workers. These workers, in turn, are likely to make a greater contribution to their workplaces, and play a full part in making it efficient and productive. Along with more flexible working arrangements, implementing returnship programmes and providing opportunities for career and financial planning throughout employees' lifecycles can act as effective retention policies for both younger and older workers. Reverse mentorships also offer many advantages in the context of multigenerational workplaces and can help breakdown age-stereotypes.

Governments and companies should revise their approach to training and skills development. Currently, only 41% of adults across the OECD take part in job-related training. And employees who are younger, more highly qualified, and on full-time contracts are more likely to receive training than those who are older, lower skilled and working part-time. Encouraging people to maintain and develop their skills during their careers and lifetimes would generate significant productivity gains and help more older people extend their working lives. OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría will launch the report at an online event at 16.00 CET on 16 December. Register. For more information, journalists should contact Spencer Wilson in the OECD Media Office (tel. + 33 1 45 24 81 18). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 12/16/2020

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Evaluating the Impact Mechanism of Citizen Participation on Citizen Satisfaction in a Smart City

Citizen satisfaction is an important issue for global city managers in the construction of a smart city. To date, little research has been done on the effect of citizen participation on citizen satisfaction in a smart city. From the perspective of citizen involvement and based on the theory of involvement and American Customer Satisfaction Index model, this study explores the impact mechanism of citizen participation on citizen satisfaction in a smart city and constructs a theoretical model of citizen satisfaction. The data were collected in Qingdao, which is a smart city in China. The analysis shows that citizen involvement has a significant positive influence on citizen participation both cognitively and affectively. Furthermore, citizen participation produces a direct and significant positive impact on citizen satisfaction. Last, citizen participation can also have a significant positive influence on citizen satisfaction through perceived quality and perceived value. The main contribution of this study focuses on the construction of the impact mechanism model. Based on this model, researchers and city managers can understand the entire reaction process of the citizen ranging from subjective judgement to practical actions and then actual experiences in the construction of a smart city.

From <https://journals.sagepub.com/> 12/19/2020

Queue Management App Wins the 2020 APEC App Challenge

A mobile application that aims to make public queuing safer and more hygienic for both customers and businesses has won the 2020 APEC App Challenge. The winning app, String, designed by two Malaysians, Hoo Xing Yu and Louis Ong Bing Hao, was announced at the 31st APEC Ministerial Meeting by the chair of the meeting and Malaysia's Minister of International Trade and Industry, Dato' Seri Mohamed Azmin Ali. "This year, the word "challenge" has a whole new meaning to it," Dato' Seri Azmin Ali said. He further added that in response to the current uncertain times, "contestants were tasked to help small businesses acquire and apply new digital tools and services in the interest of post-COVID recovery." "One of the things that has been a challenge to our daily life during this pandemic is adapting and adhering to the safe distancing measures, be it in public transport, in a mall or in a café or restaurant," Louis explained. "The app that we developed aim to make safe distancing easier for customers and for the business itself."

"We have in mind that the app must be useful and we are grateful to have such opportunities to solve one of the issues small businesses are facing right now," added Xing Yu. The 2020 APEC App Challenge was held fully virtual for the first time, with 91 software developers and designers forming 15 teams from all across the 21 APEC member economies working together to bring forward ideas on how to support recovery for small businesses in the tourism sector. "It is very encouraging to see such innovation and ideas to support recovery of the tourism sector from our young talents in the region," said Dr Rebecca Sta Maria, Executive Director of the APEC Secretariat. "APEC policymakers could tap into these practical and functional innovations we see in the APEC App Challenge to build back the tourism sector."

Besides String winning the first prize of this year's challenge, a virtual interactive tourism platform, Choizy from Indonesia won the second prize and a platform aims to minimize business volatility using data and machine learning, OctoDash from the United States won the third prize of the 2020 APEC App Challenge. "The COVID-19 pandemic has only highlighted the key role played by digital technologies in our economy and society," said John Karr, the Asia Foundation's Senior Director of Technology Programs. "The APEC App Challenge shows how a great community of innovators and software developers in Asia-Pacific can positively contribute to the region's recovery effort."

"It is great to see software developers in APEC economies come together to support the tourism sector," said Andrew Ure, Head of Public Affairs, Google Asia-Pacific. "Online platforms give the region's entrepreneurs the chance to scale their efforts and help the tourism sector recover and grow." The 2020 APEC App Challenge is a

joint initiative of APEC Malaysia 2020 and the APEC Secretariat, with support from the Asia Foundation and Google, designed to showcase proof the policy initiatives in practice by encouraging top developers from across the region to design innovative applications that address a key APEC agenda item.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 12/02/2020

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ADB to Help Prevent and Control COVID-19 by Strengthening WASH+H Approach in Projects

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$2 million technical assistance (TA) grant to help select developing members prevent and control the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) by expanding and integrating water, sanitation, hygiene, and health (WASH+H) approaches into ADB's projects. The \$2 million grant comes from the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction financed by the Government of Japan. The TA will direct resources toward ADB projects in the social sector, particularly health, education, and social protection; as well as the water and urban sectors, focused on water supply, sanitation, wastewater, and solid waste management. Preliminary countries identified to participate in the TA are Bangladesh, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Uzbekistan. "As highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, safely managed WASH services, as well as hygienic behavior, are fundamental to protect human health from infectious disease outbreaks," said ADB Principal Water Resources Specialist Coral Fernandez Illescas. "This technical assistance will therefore support strengthened WASH+H awareness, evidence-based practices, investments, hygiene behavioral change for COVID-19 infection prevention and control, and impact mitigation in project preparation and implementation."

About 3 billion people globally and nearly three-quarters of people in least-developed countries lack basic home handwashing facilities with water and soap. Globally, almost half of all schools lack handwashing facilities, affecting 900 million school-age children, while 43% of health care facilities lack hand hygiene at points of patient care. Studies consistently show that increasing knowledge of handwashing, even in settings where access to reliable water supply exists, is not sufficient to motivate behavior change. The TA will make additional resources available to promote infection prevention and control through an effective and sustainable WASH+H program, with particular focus on the poor and marginalized. The program will support multi-sector and multi-stakeholder awareness raising, knowledge and capacity building, policy dialogue, and strategy development. This includes activities to raise awareness, strengthen capacity, and identify policy gaps and bottlenecks, and recommend measures to address them. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.

ADB, Far East Horizon to Support COVID-19 Health Care in Rural PRC

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Far East Horizon Limited (FEH) entered a \$75 million loan agreement to strengthen the capacity of rural public hospitals and support coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic control in the People's Republic of China. The loan will allow FEH's subsidiary International Far Eastern Leasing Co., Limited (IFEL) to provide finance to rural public hospitals for lease of modern medical equipment. At least 60% of the loan will be used to finance leases for COVID-19 treatment hospitals in rural areas. "Hospitals' bank financing activities are often constrained, because banks do not accept medical equipment as collateral. The pandemic has not only added stress to the health care system, but also reduced the availability of long-term financing from commercial sources," said ADB's Private Sector Financial Institutions Division Director Christine Engstrom. "This funding from ADB will help support long-term lease of health care equipment and promote the expansion of rural health care leasing operations."

FEH will also use the loan funds to train frontline staff and promote public awareness on gender-based violence (GBV) in hospitals it operates. An increase of GBV incidence since the COVID-19 breakout has been observed in some countries. "With the support of ADB, FEH has been able to support more rural public hospitals to upgrade medical equipment, which is undoubtedly a great support for PRC's medical industry during the COVID-19 global pandemic," said FEH Executive Director Wang Mingzhe. "In the future, we hope that ADB will join hands with FEH to support China's development in more fields." FEH, listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in 2011, is one of the leading leasing companies in the PRC. Financial leasing, through IFEL, is among the company's core businesses, with operations in health care, urban public utilities, culture, tourism, construction, among others. ADB has previously supported FEH to finance rural hospitals in 12 of the least developed PRC provinces. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.

East Asia

CHINA: To Embrace New Fintech Challenges with Innovation, Prudence

Faced with rapidly evolving financial technology (fintech), China will continue to maintain an innovative and prudent approach in embracing new challenges, a Chinese official said Tuesday. As the off-counter transaction rate of Chinese banks has exceeded 90 percent and financial services are highly dependent on the internet, cybersecurity needs to be highlighted, said Guo Shuqing, chairman of the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission (CBIRC). Guo made the remarks while delivering a speech at the Singapore Fintech Festival, which runs from Dec. 7 to 12. Fairer market competition will be pursued, as tech giants can use data monopoly advantages to hinder fair competition and obtain excess returns, Guo added. He called for strict monitoring of large companies to prevent them from obstructing the entry of new organizations, collecting data in unusual ways and refusing to share information that should be disclosed.

Guo noted that fintech has developed rapidly in China and the digital transformation of financial institutions accelerated with more products and tools, improving the efficiency of financial services. China has also learned lessons in handling challenges brought about by fintech, he said. The number of Chinese peer-to-peer (P2P) lenders had fallen to zero by mid-November from a peak of about 5,000 due to the country's ongoing efforts to crack down on risky forms of financing. Fintech is a term used to describe financial technology, an industry encompassing any kind of technology in financial services.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/08/2020

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Beijing's Tech Hub Aims High in Digital Economy

Beijing's Zhongguancun, better known as China's Silicon Valley, is eyeing new digital economy growth in its roadmap for the next five years. By 2025, the total income of the digital economy in Zhongguancun Science Park is expected to exceed 6 trillion yuan (about 917 billion U.S. dollars), with an average annual growth rate of no less than 15 percent, according to a digital economy roadmap released by the Zhongguancun park's management committee. From January to October this year, the revenue of the Zhongguancun digital economy grew by 16.3 percent year on year to reach 2.56 trillion yuan, with new developments in internet applications for medical services, education and offices. The hub aims for breakthroughs in core and applicable technology, fostering strong enterprises in the digital economy and supporting industrial innovation. It will further boost innovation in and the application of AI, big data, blockchain and the Internet of Things, and will advance the integration of the digital economy and the real economy.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/13/2020

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China to Build More Independent, Controllable Industrial, Supply Chains

China will make efforts to build more independent and controllable industrial and supply chains, according to a statement released after the annual Central Economic Work Conference that concluded Friday. The security and stability of industrial and supply chains is the foundation of forming a new development paradigm, the statement said. Efforts should be made to achieve breakthroughs in key and core technologies, break bottlenecks at the earliest time possible and obtain more exclusive technical advantages, it said. The country should work to consolidate industrial foundations by improving the manufacturing of basic parts, fundamental techniques and essential materials, according to the statement.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/18/2020

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China to Solve Housing Problems in Big Cities Through Rental Market

China will determinedly develop rental housing in 2021 under efforts to solve prominent housing problems in big cities, the country's housing regulator said on Monday. To address the concerns of new city dwellers and young people, especially those engaged in basic public services, China will promote the development of rental housing by increasing government-subsidized housing projects and ensuring the supply of public rental houses, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development said at a conference. Cities with a net population inflow should give priority to developing rental housing, the ministry said. The move came after China vowed to tackle prominent housing problems in large cities at a tone-setting economic meeting that concluded on Friday, listing the development of rental housing as one of its key economic tasks for 2021. The rental housing market will be further regulated and developed, with efforts made to cultivate professional and large-scale rental agencies and establish rental service platforms, according to the ministry. It also underlined efforts to implement a long-term mechanism in the housing market and promote the steady and sound development of the sector.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/21/2020

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China's Top Economic Planner Pledges Efforts to Ensure Stable Power Supply

China's electricity supply is largely stable, an official with the country's top economic planning body said Monday. Household electricity consumption in provinces including Hunan, Jiangxi and Zhejiang has not been affected, Zhao Chenxin, secretary general of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), told a press conference. Noting that cold weather and rapidly expanding industrial production created a surge in electricity demand, Zhao said that the NDRC and the National Energy Administration have been working with power companies to ensure stable supply. He said the country will take more measures to meet winter demand, including enhancing generation capacity and increasing coal supplies, among others.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/21/2020

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China Uses Blockchain Technology to Regulate Livestreaming E-commerce

The market regulation authorities in east China's Zhejiang Province have officially launched a blockchain-powered mobile app to improve regulations of the burgeoning livestreaming market. The app was released in the provincial capital of Hangzhou. According to the local market regulation administration, it would play a significant role in the supervision and law enforcement of mobile social media and livestreaming e-commerce platforms. Livestreaming e-commerce has rapidly developed into an important marketing method in the internet economy. However, problems such as sellers infringing on consumers' rights and interests to boost their popularity and profits are becoming increasingly prominent. As a mobile app based on Android, the app can help law enforcement officers obtain evidence on relevant mobile apps, programs, and livestreaming sessions through screen capturing and voice recording anytime and anywhere. The system will automatically generate an evidence document containing the blockchain information to ensure that the evidence is not manipulated and can be tracked.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/22/2020

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Capital Market Must Support Sci-tech Innovation: Securities Chief

China's securities chief said Monday that the country's capital market needs to better fulfill its role of supporting scientific and technological innovation in order to achieve high-quality development. Yi Huiman, chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, made the remarks while attending a symposium on the 30th anniversary of the establishment of China's capital market. Support will be given to the two Chinese stock exchanges -- the Shanghai Stock Exchange and the Shenzhen Stock Exchange -- to help make them centers of innovation capital and

world-class exchanges, he said. Market entities will also receive support in establishing and improving a "long-term incentive and restraint mechanism" to spur the maximum internal driving force for innovative development, he said. The securities chief said China's capital market also needs to increase the proportion of direct financing.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/28/2020

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JAPAN: Greenhouse Gas Emissions Fall in FY2019 for 6th Straight Year

Japan's greenhouse gas emissions fell in fiscal 2019 for the sixth straight year to reach their lowest level since comparable data became available in fiscal 1990, partly due to the impact of the U.S.-China trade dispute, the Environment Ministry said Tuesday. The equivalent of 1,213 million tons of carbon dioxide was emitted in the year through March 2020, down 2.7 percent from a year earlier to rewrite the previous low recorded in fiscal 2018, according to preliminary data. The ministry attributed the drop to declines in production in the steel and other industries affected by the U.S.-China trade war, and expansions of renewable energy. Under the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, Japan aims to slash greenhouse gas emissions by 26 percent in fiscal 2030 compared with fiscal 2013. With total emissions falling 14 percent in fiscal 2019 from fiscal 2013, the ministry believes the reduction target is attainable if the current pace of decline in greenhouse gas emissions continues. However, the ministry thinks Japan cannot achieve its longer-term goal of cutting emissions to zero on a net basis by 2050 "unless all sorts of measures are taken."

There have been calls for steps such as raising the fiscal 2030 emissions-cut target in order to meet the longer-term goal, which is on a par with pledges by other economies including the European Union and Britain. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has pledged to establish a fund of 2 trillion yen (\$19.2 billion) for firms developing green technologies as part of efforts to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and spur economic growth. In fiscal 2019, electricity consumption by Japan's steel and machinery industries fell along with a decline in their exports to China, affected by trade disputes between the world's two largest economies. Meanwhile, the share of electricity generated in Japan using renewable sources rose to 18 percent on the back of an increase in solar power. Nuclear power generation accounted for just 6 percent as many nuclear plants remained offline under stricter safety regulations implemented after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster triggered by a massive earthquake and tsunami. The ministry said emissions in fiscal 2019 saw almost no impact from the coronavirus outbreak, but called for the need to monitor the situation.

From <https://japantoday.com> 12/09/2020

SOUTH KOREA: To Tighten Grip on Global Internet Giants amid Service Complaints

A law revision set to take effect next week will tighten rules for data-hungry internet giants, such as Netflix Inc., amid growing calls for stable services. Earlier this week, the Cabinet passed an amendment to the ordinance of the Telecommunication Business Act, stipulating that online content service providers are responsible for providing stable services to users. The new rules set to take effect Dec. 10 apply to large online service companies, which account for 1 percent or more of the country's total data traffic in the last three months of a year, essentially targeting popular global online service providers Netflix, Google LLC and Facebook Inc., as well as local players Naver Corp. and Kakao Corp. Should they fail to meet the new rules, they could face an administrative fine of up to 20 million won (US\$18,350). The revision comes as global streaming giants Netflix and Google, which operates YouTube, have recently come under scrutiny over their response to service complaints despite their growing popularity.

YouTube faced criticism here after its service went down for hours last month, while a ruling party lawmaker accused Netflix for not properly responding to service issues in May and June this year during a parliamentary audit in October. All the while, the two companies have boosted their presence in the country. South Koreans are estimated to have spent on average nearly 30 hours on YouTube in September, according to market tracker IGAWorks. Researcher WiseApp's data showed Netflix's paid subscribers topped 3.6 million in South Korea as of October. Under the new rule change, the companies will have to provide stable services to users regardless of the devices or ISPs used and take measures to prevent excessive online traffic by working with ISPs, according to the Ministry of Science and ICT. The relatively paltry fine, however, has left some critics wondering about the revision's effectiveness. "The revision itself has meaning rather than the amount of the fine," an ICT ministry official said. "There hadn't been a way to legally hold these companies accountable for not providing stable services.

"As online content providers have grown in influence, there's a need for them to handle greater responsibility," he added, explaining that the government is not expecting a string of new violations due to the revision. The extra attention to foreign content providers comes as some ISPs have requested them to share network costs as their growing popularity leads to a boom in online traffic. Netflix Services Korea Ltd., the Korean unit of the U.S. streaming giant, is currently embroiled in a legal battle with local major ISP SK Broadband Co., arguing that it has no obligation to pay network usage fees over data traffic. While the new revision doesn't mention network costs and wouldn't impact the current dispute, it could be cited in future legal battles

over network cost sharing, the ICT ministry official said. Internet industry officials still question the latest rules altogether, arguing that online content providers are already doing all they can for stable services. "It's questionable what the revision wants to achieve," an official at the Korea Internet Corporations Association said. "Why wouldn't these companies work toward stable services?"

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 12/05/2020

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S. Korea's Tech Trade at Record High Last Year: Data

South Korea's technology trade reached an all-time high of US\$31.6 billion last year, up 10.1 percent from 2018, government data showed Tuesday. Technology trade refers to the country's international technology transactions, such as the use of patents, licenses and technical services, as opposed to tech products, according to the Ministry of Science and ICT. The ICT ministry said outbound technology transfers amounted to \$13.8 billion last year, compared with imports of \$17.9 billion, leading to a trade deficit of \$4.1 billion that highlights South Korea's reliance on foreign technology. The ratio of tech exports to imports, however, rose last year to 0.77 for the ninth consecutive year from 0.33 in 2010. By country, South Korea had the largest technology trade with the United States at \$9.8 billion, accounting for 30.9 percent of last year's total. South Korea also had a technology trade deficit of \$4.6 billion with the U.S., with ICT ministry data showing that U.S. technology accounted for 40.2 percent of South Korea's total inbound technology transfers last year. In terms of technology trade surplus, South Korea had the largest surplus with Vietnam last year at \$2.4 billion. The ICT ministry said the trade surplus is likely derived from royalties from South Korean direct investment into the country.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 12/22/2020

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S. Korea to Launch Regional Cooperation Forum Against Health Crises

Health officials of South Korea, China, the United States and other regional partners were set to hold the inaugural meeting Tuesday of a regional cooperation forum aimed at jointly tackling public health crises like the coronavirus pandemic, the foreign ministry said. President Moon Jae-in first proposed the establishment of the "Northeast Asia Cooperation Initiative" during the U.N. General Assembly in September, mentioning North Korea, China, Japan and Mongolia as possible members of the forum. Officials said that China, Mongolia, Russia and the United States have since committed to participating in the initiative, while North Korea has not responded to the proposal and Japan has expressed reservations about taking

part in the forum. On Tuesday evening, the forum's inaugural meeting will be held via video links, bringing together working-level government officials and health experts from five countries, including China, Russia, Mongolia and the United States, the ministry said. Also attending the session will be officials from Japan's Embassy in Seoul. "With today's first meeting, our government hopes to gradually develop ways for practical cooperation among related countries, and seeks to increase the participating countries, including North Korea," ministry spokesperson Choi Young-sam said in a press briefing. The government plans to continue to expand the forum to include North Korea and other countries.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 12/29/2020

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Imposing Stricter Restrictions to Prevent Spike in COVID-19 Cases After Year-End Holidays

Indonesia has been imposing stricter restrictions from Dec. 18 to Jan. 8, 2021 to prevent a spike in COVID-19 cases after the Christmas and year-end holiday seasons, officials said. Coordinating Minister for Maritime and Investment Affairs Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan said the number of daily cases and deaths rose after long holidays at the end of October this year, especially in Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, East Java, South Sulawesi, North Sumatra, Bali and South Kalimantan. "Previously, the trend of the cases in these areas had decreased," Pandjaitan, concurrently a deputy chairman of the National Committee for the COVID-19 Mitigation and Economic Recovery, told a meeting with ministers and regional heads on Monday. Every year in Indonesia, there is an exodus of people who work in major cities returning to their villages or towns of origin for family gatherings or just traveling during the Christmas and year-end holidays. This time, to deal with the exodus during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has forbidden celebrations and gatherings of more than five people in public areas, and limited hours of service activities.

Jakarta's Deputy Governor Ahmad Riza Patria also emphasized that there would be no year-end celebrations in the capital city this year. The Jakarta administration has also limited operational hours for offices, malls, cafes, restaurants, places of interest and tourist attractions to 7:00 p.m. local time with a maximum capacity of 50 percent each. Meanwhile, Jakarta's Governor Anies Baswedan said, "We want them to remain at home." The central government also required people traveling to Jakarta and Yogyakarta province during that period to show negative antigen rapid test results. Bali, which required people only to show rapid test results, now obliges them to bring negative swab test results. In the meantime, South Tangerang city in Banten

province does not require rapid antigen or swab test results, but encouraged the community in the city to strengthen micro-scale social restrictions, Mayor Airin Rachmi Diany said. The South Tangerang administration has also prohibited any gathering and limited the operating hours of malls and restaurants to 7:00 p.m. as have been done in the provinces of Lampung, West Java, and North Sulawesi.

National COVID-19 Task Force's spokesperson Wiku Adisasmito said the rise in the COVID-19 cases did not only occur during the long weekend last October but also happened after the Eid al-Fitr holidays (Islam's post fasting festivities) in May and the Independence Day vacation in August this year. The spike in the cases could trigger next impacts such as fully occupied hospitals and increases in medical workers' burdens, Adisasmito said. Meanwhile, the occupancy rates of isolation rooms and intensive care units at hospitals in several areas have exceeded 70 percent due to the soaring number of daily COVID-19 cases. Adisasmito noted that the average active cases in December were recorded at 14.39 percent of the total COVID-19 cases, up from 13.78 percent last month. As of Saturday, Indonesia has recorded a total of 657,948 cases, the highest in Southeast Asia, with 536,260 recovered patients and 19,659 people dead. To achieve herd immunity and end the pandemic, President Joko Widodo said the government would provide the people with the COVID-19 vaccines for free. "So there is no more reason that the public would not get the vaccines," Widodo said on Thursday. The president also emphasized that he would be among the first to be vaccinated in Indonesia to convince the public that the vaccine is safe.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 12/20/2020

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CAMBODIA: Tightening Measures at Borders with Thailand to Prevent COVID-19 Spread

The Cambodian government on Sunday asked local authorities to strengthen safety measures along the border after neighboring Thailand reported more than 500 cases of COVID-19 in its Samut Sakhon province. Samut Sakhon is located about 300 km away from Cambodia's border. "The authorities along Cambodia's provincial border with Thailand must be on high alert and must check health for all incoming travelers thoroughly, screening their body's temperatures and requiring them to fill in health declaration forms," Cambodian Health Minister Mam Bunheng said in a statement. "All travelers entering Cambodia must undergo a 14-day mandatory quarantine, and their samples must be taken and sent to either the Pasteur Institute of Cambodia, the National Institute of Public Health, or the Siem Reap Provincial Hospital for testing on the same day they enter Cambodia," he added. Bunheng said if anyone has suspicious symptoms of the COVID-19, he or she can call the 115 free hotlines. Cambodia has reported no new cases of COVID-19 infections in the last five days. According to the Ministry of Health, the kingdom has recorded a total of 362

confirmed COVID-19 cases to date, with no deaths and 345 recoveries.

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VIETNAM: Apps, Technology Use Improve Traffic Management in HCM City

HCM City aims to improve traffic order and safety and reduce the number of traffic accidents, fatalities and injuries by 5 per cent by 2025, the chairman of the municipal People's Committee, Nguyễn Thành Phong, has said. Reviewing the last three years of the city-wide emulation movement to ensure traffic order and safety and its future tasks, the city's leader emphasised that many civil servants, public employees, organisation and individuals have contributed to the movement. He said that the city should promote IT application in traffic management and operation to help detect and handle traffic violations. The city plans to mobilise resources to invest in major transport projects, focusing on inter-regional road projects and improving the efficiency of inland waterways and railways, he noted. Trần Quang Lâm, director of the city's Department of Transport, said the movement has achieved positive results, contributing to reducing the number of traffic accidents, fatalities and injuries. Compared with figures in the previous year, the number of traffic accidents fell by 10.5 per cent, deaths by 4 per cent, and injured victims by nearly 29 per cent in 2018.

In 2019, the number of traffic accidents fell by 5.5 per cent, deaths by 10.3 per cent, and injured victims by 2.7 per cent. In the first nine months of the year, the number of traffic accidents dropped by 13.8 per cent and deaths by 14.1 per cent, while the number of injured victims decreased by 12.4 per cent, compared with the same period last year. Fifty-seven traffic works worth more than VNĐ11 trillion (US\$474.6 million) were completed and put into use. These new works will help reduce traffic jams in hotspots such as areas around Tân Sơn Nhất International Airport in Tân Bình District, Cát Lái Port in District 2, and the access road to HCM City - Long Thành - Dầu Giây Expressway between HCM City and Đồng Nai Province. Last year, the city opened the first phase of a smart traffic monitoring and operation centre, the first of its kind in the country applying modern technology to traffic management. The BusMap app, which has information on public bus routes and bus arrival times, has attracted more than 870,000 downloads. The city has also begun trial use of e-tickets on public buses, and installed automatic payment systems on 162 buses on 62 bus routes. In addition, parking fees on 23 streets are collected automatically through MyParking or ViettelPay apps on drivers' smart devices.

Roadblocks

Despite these measures, the increasing number of private vehicles is putting pressure on the city's transport infrastructure. Illegal parking areas and street-side vendors continue to encroach upon sidewalks and roads, and lack adequate

supervision and inspection. Phong asked State management offices to improve management activities to ensure traffic order and safety. Research on urban traffic management models suited to the city's current situation should be completed. And, solutions are needed to eliminate so-called black spots where traffic accidents and congestion occur regularly in the city, he said. More attention should also be paid to improving the quality of public transport services and control the number of personal vehicles in urban areas. The second phase of the smart traffic monitoring and operation centre is expected to be completed by 2025.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 12/04/2020

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New E-Government Platform Introduced

The Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) has introduced the Flex Digital platform, a solution to develop e-government in all fields by facilitating important activities such as online public services, online single window systems of ministries, sectors and localities, and digital data management and sharing. The platform, launched last Friday, is part of the 'Make in Việt Nam' platforms developed under the programme on National Digital Transformation to 2025 with a vision to 2030. Built on the foundation of open technology, the platform supports agencies and localities to speed up the completion of solutions and products meeting the development demands of e-government in Việt Nam, while helping cut costs. Addressing the launching ceremony, Minister of Information and Communications Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng said during the building of e-government, Việt Nam would develop and own digital technology based on open standards, with 'Make in Việt Nam' not only a technology strategy but also a plan of action. Components of the platform have been applied effectively in 11 sectors and ministries, five provinces and two international organisations. In the future, Flex Digital will be used to build more software serving digitalisation in ministries, sectors and localities across the country.

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PM Approves List of Priority Technologies for Research and Development

Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc has approved a list of priority technologies for research and development in a bid to facilitate participation in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. These belong to four areas, digital technologies, physics, biotechnology, and energy and environment. Digital technologies include artificial intelligence, internet of things, big data analytics, blockchain, cloud computing, quantum computing, virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality,

intelligence-remediation-adaptation cyber security, and precision agriculture. Physics includes robots, unmanned aerial vehicles, 3D printing, nanotechnology, technology for designing and manufacturing micro and small satellites, and photonic technology. Biotechnology includes synthetic biology, neurotechnology, stem cells, Enzyme technology, bioinformatics, biochip and biosensor, regenerative medicine and tissue engineering, next-generation sequencing. Priority technologies in energy and environment include fuel cells, hydrogen energy, photovoltaics, advanced energy storage, carbon capture and storage, geothermal energy, smart grids.

VN's first global science prize

Vietnamese conglomerate VinGroup on Sunday officially launched TheFuturePrize, the first global science and technology prize from Việt Nam, and one of the world's largest annual prizes in science and technology, on International Human Solidarity Day (December 20). The organisation directly in charge of the prize is VinFuture Foundation, founded by Phạm Nhật Vượng, the first Vietnamese billionaire – Founder and Chairman Vingroup Corporation, together with his wife, Phạm Thu Hương, according to the statement from the group. Nominations for the first edition of the Prize will be open from January to June 2021. The names of the selected VinFuture Prize Laureates will be announced in December 2021. The official prize award ceremony will be hosted in Việt Nam in January 2022. The vision of this endeavour is to “create meaningful change in the everyday lives of millions of people by promoting breakthrough scientific research and technological innovations”, the statement said. With that vision in mind, the VinFuture Foundation said it works to honour exceptional minds whose research and technological innovations will improve the quality of life and ensure sustainable living for future generations by addressing the everyday issues of people, aligned with one or more of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The VinFuture Prize comprises of a Grand Prize and three special prizes. The Grand Prize of US\$3 million will be one of the largest annual global science and technology prizes in value. The Grand Prize would be open to all, regardless of the candidate's nationality, age, gender, social status, or economic background. The prize will be awarded to proven breakthrough research and technological innovations that positively improve the quality of human life, and create a more equitable and sustainable world for future generations. In addition to the Grand Prize, three special prizes of \$500,000 each will also be awarded annually, with a focus on promoting diversity, equity, and new fields of study. These prizes will be earmarked for an exceptional researcher or innovator from a developing country institute, for an outstanding woman researcher or innovator, for a breakthrough research or innovations in an emerging field of science and technology that has significant future potential to create positive change for humanity. Nominations will be solicited from a large, diverse pool of distinguished nominators, including globally renowned scientists and innovators, academic institutions, technology corporations, and prestigious innovation incubators in all countries. An independent Prize Council,

consisting of distinguished, globally renowned experts from academia, research and industry, will adjudicate the Prize each year. Members of the Prize Council come from diverse sciences and professional disciplines, cultures, and viewpoints. The founders have personally committed an initial amount of \$100 million, which would be further enhanced in the future to fund the VinFuture Prize's resources and administration process, ensuring sustainability of the Foundation's long-term operations. VinFuture Foundation, an independent, non-profit foundation, will manage the VinFuture Prize. The Advisory Council, which comprises of internationally recognised Vietnamese innovators, researchers, and industry leaders, co-chaired by Professor Vũ Hà Văn, Yale University, and Professor Nguyễn Thục Quyên, University of California Santa Barbara, will support the Founder in providing strategic advice to the Foundation.

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Co-operative Audit on Water Management in Mekong River Basin Kicks Off

The State Audit of Việt Nam (SAV) on Tuesday held a kick-off meeting for a co-operative environmental audit on water management in the Mekong River basin for 2020-2021. The meeting was chaired by SAV Auditor General and Chairman of the Asian Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (ASOSAI) Hồ Đức Phớc. In his opening remarks, Phớc said the Hanoi Declaration on Environmental Audit for Sustainable Development was approved at the 14th ASOSAI Assembly in 2018. The document defines two major strategic goals for ASOSAI as bolstering environmental auditing and promoting issues relating to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in line with the UN's 2030 Agenda. As Chair of ASOSAI for the 2018-2021 term and the initiator of the Hanoi Declaration, the SAV has exerted every effort in the implementation of activities and initiatives to realise the document, including the organisation of a co-operative environmental audit on water management in the Mekong River basin for 2020-2021 in several Southeast Asian nations, the official added. In the face of the emergencies regarding water security in countries in the Mekong River's lower reaches, it is time for the SAV to join hands with Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) in Southeast Asia, he said. During the kick-off meeting, three SAIs from Việt Nam, Thailand, and Myanmar signed a statement of commitments and terms of reference for the co-operative audit, agreeing on an action plan for its organisation. Accordingly, they will focus on identifying the responsibilities of related countries in the implementation of the SGDs and assess their contributions to commitments on water resources management, use, and protection in the Mekong River basin.

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Support for Development in Ethnic Minority Areas Extended to 2025

The implementation of a project on strengthening international cooperation to support socio-economic development in ethnic minority-inhabited areas will be extended to 2025 under a decision signed recently by Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc. The project will be carried out from 2021-25, with the aim of promoting cooperation in attracting financial assistance, science and technology and experience from other countries, international organisations, overseas collectives and individuals to invest in socio-economic development in ethnic minority and mountainous areas, towards effectively performing the national target programme on socio-economic development in ethnic minority and mountainous areas in the 2021-30 period. By 2025, the project strives to maximise attraction of international resources, especially non-refundable aid, official development assistance (ODA) and preferential loans for the programmes. It encourages international investment in socio-economic development in ethnic minority and mountainous areas based on actual demand and potential and advantages of each locality and ethnic group, and on the principles of preserving and developing traditional cultural values and protecting the environment. The project also aims to mobilise technical support from international organisations and individuals to support capacity building for people in ethnic minority and mountainous areas, and civil servants and public employees working in ethnic affairs at all levels. The project is expected to help address the shortage of residential land, housing, productive land, and water in ethnic minority-inhabited areas. It will focus on developing agricultural and forestry production, and fully tapping the potential and strengths of regions for commodity production in value chains. Attention will be also paid to developing infrastructure serving production, promoting education and training to improve the quality of human resources from ethnic minority groups, preserving and upholding traditional cultural values in association with tourism development, taking care of people's health, preventing child malnutrition, promoting gender equality, and solving urgent issues for women and children.

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South Asia

INDIA: Need Faster Ways to Absorb Innovation in Govt SOPs

“This word ‘Innovation’ is misunderstood at times as many bureaucrats and other constituents feel that unless there is a huge change, it’s not an innovation. And, in such a complexity many times improvements do not take place,” Ranjan Dwivedi, Former Director General of Police, Uttar Pradesh, opened his address on this note.

He added, "We see many officers make good innovations, however, the process of governance is such that if you want to change a rule it is a long process. The problem of rule changing or rulemaking does really steps in while absorbing the innovations and changes." The governance has been designed in this way to ensure that even if someone makes changes to it no harm is caused, cited Dwivedi. Essentially all these improvements indicate changes in the rules of business. Some are reengineering workplaces and some are reengineering processes, however, everything follows a written procedure. Governments function as per certain standard operating procedures (SOPs). Therefore, what the government leaders, policymakers must look at is how to absorb innovations and corrective changes in the SOPs in the fastest manner possible to avoid unnecessary delays, Dwivedi deliberated. Further, he said, "With the inclusion of IT technologies, bringing changes in the procedures shall be eased... We should have the latest and the authentic version on the web and quoting the URL then becomes the latest version and not the official version." If such changes are introduced then it will become easier to absorb new innovations that the young officers are making, he added.

Shedding light on the way forward for the governance, he said, "The future of e-governance and the use of ICT for governance was always bright. However, the adoption of ICT has been very slow. One of the reasons is that the bureaucracy is extremely conservative... I would say that only 45 to 50 per cent have been achieved of that we could have achieved." On the impact of COVID pandemic on the governance, Dwivedi highlighted, "COVID has been a blessing in disguise. We see that there is a deadly pandemic with which we have to fight, however, in that silver cloud, there are so many silver linings." Citing an example of technologies augmenting governance, he said that earlier we had to submit live forms and that as no easy task. But, since the onset of COVID, one can now apply online, get formalities done within a few clicks and gets the service delivered at the doorstep. Contradicting his example above, he said, "But not all is so good. There are services where one can apply online but then has to visit the office for further formalities like for the vehicle registration certificate, one has to visit or take the vehicle to the authority. However, it should be in a way that if I apply only submit the required documents online then there should be no need for me to physically visit an office. So, we're halfway through." Concluding his address, Dwivedi pointed out, "Without bringing change and reengineering the business procedures, we cannot completely establish the e-governance or technology-based solutions. So, the government has to find out an easier way to change the rule book to absorb innovative solutions as soon as possible."

From <http://egov.eletsonline.com> 12/01/2020

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Gujarat Police Launches Online Portal to Fight Cybercrime

With the digital transformation taking place across the country, the incidences of cybercrime have seen a rise. To counter the situation, Gujarat police has launched an online portal to track cyber criminals by coordinating with law enforcement agencies across India. The initiative will focus on cybercrimes with any Gujarat link that covers both victims and perpetrators in the State. According to the state data, there has been a constant rise in cybercrimes like fake online job offers, OTP thefts, insurance frauds, social media bullying, cheating on e-commerce sites, spurious gift offers and sim card swaps in the past one year. The State Police is now taking up such crimes in an organised manner. To nab the cybercriminals, Gujarat cyber crime team will work actively in cooperation from their counterparts across the country to deal with cybercrimes. Moreover, police officers across the state working on any case related to cybercrime can access Gujarat Police's portal (Cyber Nodal) and lodge an investigation cooperation request for cybercrime fraud. According to the new mechanism, to report any cybercrime, the mobile tower locations on the portal has to be reported first and then an investigation cooperation request can be lodged on the portal by law enforcement agencies.

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PM Modi Launches India's First Driverless Metro in DelhiElets

In a significant leap make urban development future-ready and placing a new benchmark of growth and development, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated India's first-ever driverless metro train on Delhi Metro Rail Corporation's (DMRC) Magenta Line on December 28 via video conferencing. The PM also announced the expansion of National Common Mobility Card to the Airport Express Line of Delhi Metro. Union Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, Hardeep Singh Puri and Chief Minister of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal were also present on the occasion. Addressing the occasion, PM Modi termed the inaugural event as an attempt to make urban development future-ready. He said preparing the country for future needs is an important responsibility of governance. He lamented the fact that a few decades ago, when the demand of urbanisation was felt, there was not much attention given to the needs of the future, half-hearted work was done and confusion persisted. Unlike this, modern thinking says that urbanisation should not be seen as a challenge but used as an opportunity to build better infrastructure in the country, an opportunity through which we can enhance Ease of Living. This difference of thinking is seen now in every dimension of urbanization, added the PM. In 2014, only 5 cities had metro rail service and today, metro rail is available in 18 cities. By the year 2025, we are going to expand it to more than 25 cities. Today the metro covers over 700 km of distance which is thrice more than the 248 km of coverage in 2014. By the year 2025, we are trying to expand it to 1700 km said PM Modi.

The Prime Minister remarked that the government formulated the metro policy for the

first time and implemented it with an all-round strategy. Emphasis was on working according to local demand, promoting local standards, Make in India expansion and use of modern technology. He said it was noted that the expansion of the metro, modern modes of transport should be used according to the needs of the people of the city and the professional lifestyle there. This is the reason why work is being done on different types of metro rail in different cities. Listing out the different types of metro rail works being carried out, PM Modi said, on the Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) between Delhi and Meerut will reduce the distance of Delhi and Meerut to less than an hour. He said in cities where passenger numbers are less, work is being done on the MetroLite version. MetroLite version would be constructed at 40 per cent cost of normal metro. He further added that Metro Neo is being worked in cities where the ridership is less. It would be built at the cost of 25 per cent of the normal metro. Similarly, water metro would be an out of the box thinking. For cities where there are large water bodies, the water metro is now being worked on. This will provide last-mile connectivity to the people near the islands. The PM said the metro today is no longer just a medium of public transport but a great way to reduce pollution. Thousands of vehicles have been reduced from the road due to the metro network, which used to cause pollution and traffic jams. Further, he said that for the expansion of metro services, Make in India is important. Make in India reduces costs, saves foreign exchange, and gives more employment to people in the country itself. He stressed that standardisation of rolling stock has reduced the cost of every coach from Rs 12 crore to Rs 8 crore now. Today, four big companies are manufacturing metro coaches in the country and dozens of companies are engaged in the manufacturing of metro components. This is helping Make in India as well as the campaign for self-reliant India.

With the achievement of driverless metro rail, our country has joined the select countries of the world where such facilities are available. He said a braking system in which 50 per cent of the energy goes back into the grid when the brakes are applied are being used. Today 130 MW of solar power is being used in metro rail, which will be increased to 600 MW. Speaking on the Common Mobility Card, the PM said that providing the same standards and facilities for modernisation is very important. The Common Mobility Card at the national level is a major step in this direction. This one card will give integrated access to the commuters wherever they travel, whichever public transport they take. With this, he dwelled on the process of consolidating all the systems. Through such consolidation of systems, the strength of the country is being harnessed in a more coordinated and efficient way.

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SRI LANKA: Mobitel Empowers Police with Hi-tech Body Cameras

As part of supporting the nation's fight against COVID-19, Mobitel, Sri Lanka's National Mobile Service Provider introduced the latest Body Cameras to Sri Lanka Police at an event held at the Police Park Headquarters recently. The landmark event which took place under the patronage of the Senior Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Sri Lanka Police, Deshabandu Tennakoon had the presence of officials representing both the Police and Mobitel (PVT) Ltd. Further, Mobitel also made a financial contribution to support the ongoing efforts of the Police in curtailing the spread of COVID-19 along with food packs meant to be distributed among Police personnel who are managing checkpoints for hours to safeguard the people of Sri Lanka. Mobitel believes that Sri Lanka Police need to be appreciated for their outstanding efforts and for tirelessly working around the clock to keep people safe. The contribution showcases Mobitel's unwavering commitment in times of national crisis to partner with the Tri-Forces and the Health Sector while simultaneously helping Sri Lankans avail of its diverse digital healthcare and superior mobile experience during this challenging time. Mobitel is sharing the government's responsibility in facilitating the safety of citizens at this critical time through a variety of other digital measures. As the caring network provider, Mobitel introduced numerous packages ranging from special Pre-Paid plans to Bonus Data add-ons, Free Health Advisory services, Digital Payment solutions, Data extensions and many more to help its customers to carry out their day to day activities without any hassle. Furthermore, both local and international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and Sri Lanka Health Promotion Bureau are leveraging on Mobitel's superior reach to communicate vital messages about COVID to raise awareness across Sri Lanka. In a time of the crisis facing the nation, Mobitel remains a pillar of strength and refuge not only for its customers but for the rest of the country as well.

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Blockchain Power Land Registry

Real Estate is one of the largest markets/industries in the world. In 2018, Real Estate market transactions reached \$1.75 trillion. It is important to note that behind each of these transactions there was a land registry paper trail. The issue is that land registry systems, in most parts of the world, have also become such mundane administrative matter where it is still being performed manually. There are various challenges when it comes to land registry process. Historical records of lands and properties were recorded on paper documents. Although some first world countries have since welcomed digital records, many countries, such as Sri Lanka, still perform such activities on paper documents. There are cases where the paper title deeds were damaged or lost and registering the property again has become a cumbersome activity. It would then become extremely difficult to claim the ownership of the land. Therefore, it is safer to argue that manual paper-based land registry system is failing!

This is where the EFutures' Blockchain-Powered Land Registry prototype comes into the picture. While everyone agrees that land registries must go digital, the question is, why Blockchain? In a nutshell, Blockchain can provide highly secure records of ownership that cannot be manipulated. A Blockchain system is decentralized, therefore there is no one single point of entry for any cyber-attacks. Unlike traditional databases, Blockchain technology can record and maintain historical information at ease. The technology is also renowned for its abilities to provide secure environments for transactions between multiple parties. Some of the main features of the system is mentioned above in the photo. In the current application, there are three main user types. They are Admin Users who are authorized to manage properties, owners, buyers and transaction, property owners, who are allowed to update property details, manage documents and also to transfer properties and finally buyers, who have access to the property list and obtain available properties.

The system allows users to register themselves in the application while the authentication is carried out by a third-party service provider. Moreover, each user gets his/her Blockchain wallet in the application where the transactions are performed. The application not only contains existing properties and lands, but it also has the ability to create new properties and the function is restricted to authorized admin users. These properties are listed in a virtual map and colour-graded to identify properties that are available and properties that are already occupied. If a buyer desires to purchase certain property and the seller is willing to transfer the property, the transaction can be carried out seamlessly through a fast verification process and the property is obtained by the buyer in no time. All the transaction activities are recorded and the history is maintained in a decentralized Blockchain system. Therefore, ownership verification is accurate and super fast while the data cannot be altered or damaged. The application has plans to expand beyond the current set of users and authorities. The application will be open for financial institutions, tax authorities and conveyancers in the future. Financial institutions will gain access to the system and able to obtain relevant information. This will be helpful in an event of granting a housing loan or any financial aid for potential buyers of property. On the other hand, tax authorities will gain access to the system so they can monitor transactions in order to maintain proper taxable records. Finally, conveyancers will also gain access to the system in the future where they will be allowed to carry out various legal procedures.

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Spectrify AI to Launch Agri-tech Revolution in Sri Lanka

Spectrify AI, a part of VeracityAI Sri Lanka's fastest going AI company announced the launch of a new suite of solutions specifically designed to radically optimize

production, agri-inputs, and quality control across the entire value chain for tea, spices and herbs for the first time in Sri Lanka. Leveraging the very latest advancements in spectral scanning, artificial intelligence and machine learning, Spectrify AI delivers end-to-end consistency on quality standards directly into the hands of producers and value chain partners. This is accomplished by deploying extremely low-cost patented spectral scanners paired with AI to conduct real-time spectral analysis of everything from soil composition to the chemical make-up of tea, spices and herbs at every point from field to factory to the final buyer. “Despite a rich history and unmatched legacy of quality, Sri Lanka’s agri and plantation industries are yet to even approach their full potential. Ultimately this is due to a lack of good data. While most view this as a challenge, we see a massive opportunity in deploying new tech to dissolve traditional bottlenecks, drastically optimize on cost of production, and ultimately recapture our nation’s reputation for the very highest quality tea, spices and herbs in the world,” serial entrepreneur and Spectrify AI co-founder, Jeevan Gnanam said. Spectrify AI’s capabilities can also be merged with Veracity AI to analyse satellite imaging of land to track harvest development and study historical data to predict yields and risks. Additionally, Spectrify AI also offers integration with GoMicro, another groundbreaking AI detection tool that converts any smart device with a camera into a powerful handheld microscope for instant analysis and identification of plant pests and diseases.

“The future of agriculture is technology, and it is already here today. The reductions in cost and growth in capabilities of spectral imaging analysis has the potential to be more impactful to global economies and societies than the Agricultural and Electronic revolutions combined. Using AI and spectral imaging, we are gaining the ability to standardize, systematize and optimize agricultural production on an unprecedented scale. Our goal with Spectrify AI is to showcase this potential, and in the process, make Sri Lanka a hub for agri-tech innovation,” Deep Technology Entrepreneur and Spectrify co-founder Mike Richardson said. A subsidiary of SAKS, Veracity AI specializes in data and machine learning technologies to drive AI applications. Ever since its establishment in 2018, Veracity AI has been transforming companies by providing personalized, intelligent business models and product development strategy and prototyping in the areas of Data Science, Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Presents First Locally Manufactured High-Tech Prostheses

An innovative step in the field of rehabilitation of disabled people was taken on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3, 2020, [Trend](#) reports citing the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population of Azerbaijan. According to the source, the first two samples of prostheses made in the workshop for the production of high-tech prostheses were presented at the center of prosthetic and orthopedic production and rehabilitation of the ministry. Lower limb prostheses were handed over to the veterans of the Karabakh war: Malik Orujov and Ayaz Mammadov, the ministry said. Javid Abdul-Gadirov, Chairman of the State Service for Medical and Social Expertise and Rehabilitation under the ministry, noted that as a continuation of the work on providing disabled people with rehabilitation means in Azerbaijan for 11 months of this year, 10,424 disabled people were provided with about 26,700 rehabilitation means, including about 900 wheelchairs. "In connection with the modernization of rehabilitation systems in Azerbaijan, the practice of

producing rehabilitation means and adaptation to advanced world standards is constantly being improved," he added. The ministry of labor said that a workshop for the production of high-tech prostheses was created in cooperation with OTTO BOKK (Germany), one of the world's leading manufacturers of prostheses. The workshop provides for the production of prostheses according to the standards of the Genium company, that is, a system for the production of prostheses with a high degree of activity and functionality. Prostheses made on the basis of this system allow for more precise regulation of movements based on electronic joints, providing stable, safe and confident movement, significantly increasing comfort.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/05/2020

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Azerbaijan Simplifies Procedure for Creating Agricultural Production Cooperatives

In order to simplify the procedure for creating production cooperatives in the field of agriculture, a model charter has been developed in Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Agriculture told Trend. The organization of the development of the agricultural sector, the efficient use of land, the creation of agricultural cooperatives as a form of joint farming to increase the income of farmers are of great importance. By providing significant support to small agricultural producers, cooperatives are increasing their access to a variety of services, resources, technology, credit, and supply centers," said the ministry's message. The 'Strategic Roadmap for the production and processing of agricultural products in of Azerbaijan', approved by the decree #1138 of the President of Azerbaijan dated December 6, 2016, identifies measures to create farmer partnerships and develop cooperation in agriculture.

In accordance with the Strategic Roadmap and the State Program for the Development of Agricultural Cooperation in Azerbaijan for 2017-2022' on the basis of a voluntary association of citizens as a pilot project with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, the 'Birlik' cooperative was created in the Sabirabad district, consisting of 850 hectares of shared land of 133 families, 'Akhyskhalat', consisting of 730 hectares of shared land of 231 families, and in the Gakh district - the 'Atababa Fyndygh' cooperative, consisting of 350 hectares of shared land of 96 families. "In 2019, in a vegetable and seed-growing, 'Bereket' cooperative was created in the Fuzuli village of the Samukh district. Meanwhile, in the village of Saryjalar of the Saatli district – 'Bollug' production cooperative, and in the village of Isnov Gyshtag of the Guba district – 'Gyzyl Alma' production and consumer cooperative. As of early 2020, the 'Sunbul' production cooperative was established in the Agsu district, the 'Jalilabad' production cooperative was established in the villages of Kazimabad and Garazenjir, in the Goktepe settlement of the Jalilabad district, and in the city of Jalilabad.

The creation of cooperatives is considered to be the best way to move agriculture from small-scale production to competitive production, increase productivity through the use of innovative technologies, and provide access to foreign markets. The ministry continues to take measures in this direction. In Jalilabad district, it is planned to create a cooperative for growing strawberries, in Lankaran district - rice and tea, Khachmaz district - cherry, in Barda and Aghjabadi districts - cotton, Goychay district - persimmons, Zagatala district - tea, Astara district - citrus fruits, in Hajigabul and Aghdash districts- cooperatives for the production of grain.

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UZBEKISTAN: To Attract Carbon Credits to Create Forest Plantations

The State Forestry Committee of Uzbekistan plans to attract carbon credits to finance the creation of forest plantations, National expert on drought in Uzbekistan Sobirjon Umarov told [Trend](#), commenting on the development of the forestry industry in Uzbekistan. A carbon credit is a permit that allows the company that holds it to emit a certain amount of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases. For the development of the forestry industry in Uzbekistan, it is planned to reconstruct and replenish walnut, almond and pistachio forests with high-yielding varieties and the creation of industrial plantations. In addition, State Forestry Committee plans to expand the provision of natural regeneration and creation of tugai forests, plantations of paulownia and other fast-growing tree species, as well as creation of protective forest plantations in the desert zone, including on the drained bottom of the Aral Sea with modern technologies. The Committee also intends to implement projects on the organization of ecological tourism, expanding the range of cultivated medicinal plants, and the processing of forest products and products of secondary forest use. In cooperation with the private sectors, the Committee is aimed to develop the production of beekeeping, poultry, livestock, and other food products. "In 2021-2024 the Committee plans to implement a full-scale "Sustainable management of forests and pastures in arid ecosystems of Uzbekistan" project for the amount of \$4.3 million," Umarov said. The expert also noted a national action plan to combat desertification and drought in 2023 in Uzbekistan.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Electronic Surveillance Set for Overhaul

Australia's electronic surveillance laws are set for an overhaul after the Morrison

government agreed to the recommendations of a landmark intelligence report. Former intelligence chief Dennis Richardson's 1300-page report found the existing framework was unnecessarily complex and outpaced by technology. Attorney-General Christian Porter expects the surveillance reforms to take up to 18 months to draft. "That in itself would be perhaps the biggest national security legislative project in recent history," he told reporters in Canberra on Friday. "It would require the repeal and rewriting of nearly 1000 pages of existing law on warrants, interception and telecommunications." The report found law enforcement and intelligence were being challenged by criminals going under the radar through new technologies.

It referenced the dark web, encryption, cryptocurrency, messaging apps, social media and multiple data storage platforms. Mr Porter said despite the scale and pace of technological change, the old regime had been durable over time. "The conclusion that Dennis Richardson reaches is that it is no longer fit for purpose in the digital world of internet smart phones and end-to-end encryption," he said. The attorney-general said the report found key principles underpinning Australia's intelligence and security legislation were sound. The government also agreed to implementing a new framework for ASIO's offshore activities in order to strengthen ministerial accountability. More oversight will be included in intelligence legislation and emergency warrants streamlined. But Richardson report recommended against putting a "double lock" system for additional approvals across the warrant system.

An independent panel will be established to provide assistance to the inspector-general of intelligence and security. The government has agreed to 186 of the 190 unclassified recommendations. Mr Richardson also produced a classified version of the report. Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton, who is responsible for domestic security agencies, said legislated powers must keep up with new technologies in order to keep people safe. "The threat of violent extremists is still with us. These people are still plotting and planning to kill Australians and we need to make sure that legislation we have in place is fit for purpose," he told reporters in Canberra.

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Labor Launches Childcare Fee Calculator

Anthony Albanese is launching a childcare calculator he says will help families find out how much cheaper their fees would be under a Labor government. Mr Albanese says one million families would be better off under his party's alternative plans for early education. Labor is promising to scrap the \$10,560 childcare subsidy cap, lift the maximum rate to 90 per cent, and increase the taper rate to families earning less than \$530,000. Mr Albanese says Labor's plan would make child care more

affordable for 97 per cent of families in the system and remove disincentives for second income earners, predominantly women, to work full time. He says it will also remove financial barriers to more than 100,000 families locked out of the childcare system. "Labor has put forward a plan for cheaper child care that is win, win, win - it is good for parents, good for children, and good for the economy," Mr Albanese said on Monday.

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Most Want Masks Worn on Public Transport

Seventy per cent of Australians think face masks should be mandatory on public transport and almost 90 per cent believe there's a moderate to high risk of COVID-19 transmission on transport networks. Tourism and Transport Forum research released on Monday found the number of commuters travelling on public transport - particularly during the national lockdown from March through to May - dropped to between 10 to 30 per cent of normal activity in capital cities. TTF CEO Margy Osmond said COVID-19 had a massive impact on travel patterns and the effects had continued beyond the national lockdown. "Safety concerns have been the major barrier to getting back to pre-COVID-19 patronage levels on the network along with significant numbers of employees still working from home," Ms Osmond said. Almost 90 per cent of Australian businesses required staff to work from home during the initial lockdown.

Australian Bureau of Statistics data in May showed 59 per cent of people felt uncomfortable travelling to work by public transport as restrictions started to ease. That trend continuing after the second wave and more extreme lockdown in Victoria and other small outbreaks in NSW and South Australia. Some 86 per cent said they believed there was a moderate to high risk of COVID-19 transmission on the transport network. A further 71 per cent of respondents supported a mandatory requirement to wear face masks on public transport. And almost 75 per cent of people working from home preferred to work that way. Mask wearing is compulsory on public transport in Victoria but the NSW government has resisted calls to mandate it although it strongly recommends travellers do so.

"These issues will continue to challenge policymakers along with the longer-term implications of the changing face of the workplace and new travel patterns become established," Ms Osmond said. The report was produced by TTF using data supplied by LEK Consulting and a national consumer survey of 2300 Australians conducted by MI Associates.

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Australia Tightens International Borders

Air crews and diplomats entering Australia will face tougher coronavirus rules while more seasonal workers could come to the country under a new federal-state deal. Scott Morrison on Friday chaired the final national cabinet meeting for the year in Canberra, with state and territory leaders meeting in person for the first time since the pandemic hit. Premiers and chief ministers agreed to more stringent checks for diplomats and airline staff arriving in Australia. "These are the vulnerabilities that I wouldn't say are on a great scale but they're important vulnerabilities," Mr Morrison told reporters. "As the year goes on and as our success continues, the states and territories become even more laser-like focused on the areas where potential vulnerabilities can emerge." The federal government will provide special seasonal worker visas that confine people to states in which they have agreed to be employed.

The prime minister praised the success of Queensland in allowing agricultural workers to quarantine on farms, signalling similar arrangements could be in place across other jurisdictions. But NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian was adamant hotel quarantine would continue rather than allowing other isolation options. Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews said his state's horticulture industry needed more labour to guarantee crops could be harvested and sold to shoppers at an affordable price. "We have to find a way forward here. We need 15,000 to 20,000 workers and no hotel quarantine system will be able to cope with that," he said. He said Victoria would learn from Queensland and was in discussion with federal health authorities about establishing safe travel bubbles with other countries. The prime minister said allowing Australians to return home remained the chief priority ahead of seasonal workers or international students.

"There are physical limitations on the hotel quarantine capacity but that is the safest and most effective way for people to come home and quarantine," he said. There are almost 39,000 Australians stranded overseas wanting to return home, with the number growing in recent months. Mr Morrison argues 46,000 people have made it back to Australia since he made a mid-September commitment to return the 26,200 people who were on the list by Christmas. National cabinet was briefed on a vaccination rollout after an Australian-developed candidate was scrapped following false positives for HIV. The prime minister said the country remained on track for immunisations to begin in the first three months of next year through deals for other vaccines. Friday marked the first seven-day period without any community transmission of coronavirus in Australia since February 29. WA Premier Michael McGowan attended national cabinet virtually because his government has rules against mixing with South Australians.

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4、 Economic and Social Development and ICT

Asia-Pacific

G20 Alliance Will Conduct ‘Smart City’ Research Around the World

Chattanooga is one of two U.S. cities invited to join the 2020 G20 Global Smart Cities Alliance, a group of 36 cities from 22 countries. Work organized through the Center for Urban Informatics and Progress (CUIP) at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga is the main reason the city was selected, according to the alliance. San Jose, California, is the other U.S. city invited to join. Created in June 2019, the alliance brings together cities that are pioneers exploring solutions on issues of energy, transportation, health care, education and others with the ultimate goals of, among others, improving quality of life, environmental sustainability and financial transparency in each city. Members of the alliance trade successful ideas that address these dilemmas, designing a “roadmap” of policies that everyone can use. Chattanooga’s Smart City initiative examines and tests everything from traffic flow and electricity delivery to air quality and safety issues. The research is centered at CUIP and its partners.

“At UTC, we are excited about being part of the Chattanooga team that was given the opportunity by the World Economic Forum to pioneer smart-city technologies,” said Reinhold Mann, the University’s deputy vice chancellor for research. The city began its Smart City work in 2010 with the creation of EPB’s fiber-optic internet system, making Chattanooga the first U.S. city to offer high-speed internet access to every resident. After CUIP was created in 2018, its research projects include improving traffic flow to lower the amount of automobile pollution in the city, reduce the number of vehicle accidents and make streets safer for pedestrians and cyclists. Working with grants from the U.S. Department of Energy and U.S. Department of Transportation, CUIP has partnered with Vanderbilt University and the Chattanooga Area Regional Transportation Authority (CARTA) to examine ways to bring public transportation to underserved neighborhoods and address other public transportation issues. CUIP also established a Smart Community Collaborative that focuses on initiatives in health, transportation and energy.

CUIP has won several national and international awards for its research. Chattanooga offers “much in the areas of collaboration, entrepreneurship and innovation,” Chattanooga’s Smart City Director Kevin Comstock told SmartCitiesDive.comDrive, but there is still a lot to be learned by partnering with others around the world. “The palette is infinite for smart city activities,” he said on the website. Market research firm Frost & Sullivan predicts that global smart cities

may spur \$2.46 trillion in business opportunities by 2025 as long as cities have the capabilities and policies to implement those ideas.

From <https://blog.utc.edu/> 12/05/2020

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Smart Cities and Their Implications on Privacy

Any city capable of using information and communication technologies to create efficiency, sustainability, and improve the quality of its citizens can be described as a smart city. However, smart cities are still a fairly young concept and the definition of what constitutes a smart city is still evolving. Current global population trends point to a gradual shift in the residence of the human population from rural to urban areas, which makes smart cities all the more important. At the moment, more than 50 percent of the global population lives in cities. The global urban population is projected to rise to nearly 70 percent over the next few decades. A growing urban population creates issues such as congestion, high energy consumption, waste disposal problems, food scarcity, and inequality. Smart city technology will be pivotal in managing these and other challenges as our cities swell. Here are some global smart city trends and their respective benefits.

Big Data

One of the biggest trends in smart city technology is leveraging big data to improve the quality of life in cities. Advancements in big data and technologies such as IoT (Internet of Things) has allowed city authorities access to vast amounts of information. IoT and big data facilitate data-driven decision-making in energy and resource management which, in turn, cuts costs and improves service delivery to city residents.

Smart Buildings

High energy consumption is one of the challenges caused by growing urban populations. Smart cities are making an effort to reduce their carbon footprint through smart buildings. Smart buildings use renewable energy resources, air-quality sensors, and energy-efficient buildings to reduce adverse effects on the environment. Some smart buildings can even generate their own electricity to save resources and help sustainability.

Smart Transportation

Cities around the world are increasingly implementing smart transportation networks to solve the problem of traffic congestion and provide efficient transportation services. More congestion in our cities leads to more pollution. Reducing traffic congestion saves time, reduces energy consumption, and results in cleaner air. A smart transportation system also comes with great economic benefits. Cutting-edge technological innovations make smart cities more efficient, more effective, and are

necessary given these projections.

Connectivity

Smart cities are digitally connected through city-wide Wi-Fi connections, wireless CCTV cameras, etc. These technologies create a positive impact on the life of residents across the board. Cities can strategically place public Wi-Fi hotspots throughout the city to provide reliable internet service to all city residents and increase digital equity. CCTV cameras make our cities safer by making it easier to catch criminals.

Privacy Concerns in Smart Cities

The major area of concern with smart city technology is the massive data collection and its implication on the privacy of city residents. Smart cities rely on massive data collection and analysis. The data collected by smart cities poses certain privacy risks to the resident. There's always the possibility of misuse. Many have expressed concerns about the potential of smart city technology in mass surveillance and a gradual transition to a surveillance state. So, what can be done to protect the citizens' right to privacy?

The Future of Smart Cities

The more connected a city is, the greater the risk to the residents' individual privacy. In addition to surveillance, there are other issues surrounding smart cities and their data collection practices. Personal data is a valuable resource in the information economy. The data harvested by city authorities as well as private companies enlisted to implement smart city projects could be stolen. Vast amounts of detailed information are particularly appealing for hackers. The fact that this information is centralized and connected to the internet makes it even more susceptible to attacks. Often, data collected by cities contains enough information for hackers to steal their identity or execute scams. Cities should ensure that data collected is adequately secured by ensuring proper controls from the outset. Private companies handling the data should also strive to make sure that data is anonymized where possible.

What Can You Do to Improve Privacy?

There are certain steps city residents can take to protect their data at an individual level. For instance, make sure you know the best cybersecurity hygiene practices, such as using a VPN when connected to public Wi-Fi networks in the city. A Virtual Private Network (VPN) is a service designed to help you establish a secure internet connection and maintain internet privacy. It encrypts your internet traffic and hides it from your ISP and the government. If you are concerned about privacy, simply download a VPN to ensure security when you connect to city Wi-Fi hotspots.

Final Thoughts

The global urban population is on the rise. Smart city development projects are harnessing the power of information and communication technology to manage the

difficulties of swelling cities. Smart city technology can improve the quality of life of city residents in a myriad of ways. However, there are legitimate concerns that the vast amounts of data collected by smart cities heighten the risk to individual privacy. Fortunately, certain precautions can be taken at both individual and city levels to guarantee privacy.

From <https://www.theburnin.com/> 12/05/2020

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CLIS Show a Mixed Picture Across the Major Economies

The OECD Composite leading indicators (CLIs) continue to recover from the COVID-19 crisis lows in most major economies, but the rate of change differs across countries. In the United States, Japan and Canada, the CLIs point to stable growth. In France, Italy, and more tentatively Germany, the CLIs show signs of moderating growth. In the United Kingdom, where there is heightened uncertainty around the prospect of a trade deal with the EU being concluded before the end of the year, the CLI contracted for the third straight month. Among major emerging economies, the CLI for the manufacturing sector of China is improving steadily. This is also now the assessment for Brazil. In India, the CLI continues to rise but at a moderating pace, while in Russia growth of the CLI has stabilised. Whilst the impact of renewed COVID-19 containment measures has been largely incorporated into the forward-looking indicators used to construct the CLI estimates, the more recent positive news concerning vaccine developments may not be. As such, this month's CLIs should continue to be interpreted with care.

OECD area: Stable growth



Visit the interactive OECD Data Portal to explore this data further. The above graph show country specific composite leading indicators (CLIs solid line, left axis and the

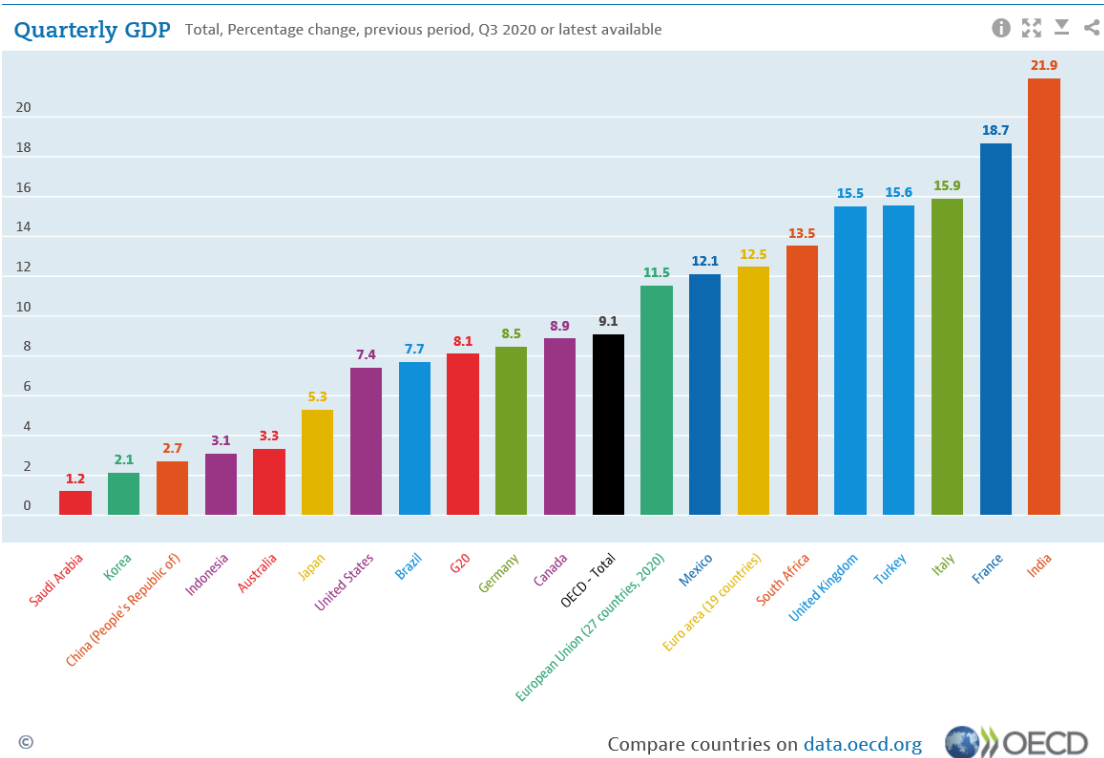
relative month-on-month growth rate, right axis). Turning points of CLIs tend to precede turning points in economic activity relative to trend by six to nine months. The horizontal line at 100 represents the trend of economic activity. Shaded triangles mark confirmed turning-points of the CLI. Blank triangles mark provisional turning-points that may be reversed

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 12/08/2020

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G20 GDP Showed a Strong Recovery in the Third Quarter of 2020, but Remained Below Pre-Pandemic High

Gross domestic product (GDP) in the G20 area rebounded by 8.1% in the third quarter of 2020 following the unprecedented falls in the first half of the year due to COVID-19 containment measures. However, GDP remained 2.4% below its pre-crisis high of the final quarter of 2019. Among the G20 economies, GDP in India rebounded strongest, by 21.9%, following a fall of 25.2% in the second quarter, the sharpest drop ever recorded. GDP also rebounded with double-digit numbers in the third quarter, after double-digit falls in the second quarter, in France (by 18.7%, following a contraction of (minus) 13.8%), Italy (by 15.9%, after minus 13.0%), Turkey (by 15.6%, after minus 10.8%), United Kingdom (by 15.5%, after minus 19.8%), South Africa (by 13.5%, after minus 16.6%) and Mexico (by 12.1%, after minus 17.0%). GDP also grew in the other major economies: 8.9% in Canada; 8.5% in Germany; 7.7% in Brazil; 7.4% in the United States; 5.3% in Japan; 3.3% in Australia; 3.1% in Indonesia; 2.7% in China; 2.1% in Korea; and 1.2% in Saudi Arabia. GDP in the G20 area as a whole remained significantly below the levels of the same quarter a year earlier (minus 2.0%), with only Turkey and China recording positive growth (of 5.4% and 4.9%, respectively), while the United Kingdom experienced the largest fall (minus 9.6%). A similar picture emerges when comparing economic activity in the third quarter with pre-pandemic levels, as approximated by the cumulative growth rate for the first three quarters of 2020.



From <https://www.oecd.org/> 12/14/2020

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ADB President Urges CAREC Countries to Boost Regional Cooperation and Embrace Digitalization to Strengthen COVID-19 Recovery

More rapid digitalization and leveraging the private sector can support the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, accelerate regional cooperation, drive innovation, and help countries adapt to new and evolving forms of globalization, participants at the 19th Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Ministerial Conference heard today. “As the world emerges from the pandemic, we must revive our regional cooperation efforts with a spirit of open regionalism to enable CAREC to seize the opportunities of renewed globalization,” said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa in his keynote address. “This means expanding connectivity, rejuvenating trade, and embracing innovation and technology in ways that put the people of the CAREC region at its center. There is huge potential for adopting technologies that improve the monitoring of cross-border health threats, enable the use of telemedicine and online education, and raise food safety standards—while the private sector can play a crucial role as a driver of innovation.”

The virtual event, under the theme "People-Centered Regional Cooperation in the Post-COVID Environment," was attended by President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan, ministers and senior officials from the 11 CAREC countries, and

representatives from development partners. The event was hosted by the Government of Afghanistan. Finance Minister of Afghanistan Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal chaired the meeting and ADB Vice-President Shixin Chen co-chaired. “Regional connectivity is one of the top priorities of our economic development agenda,” said Mr. Ghani in his special address. “The CAREC platform can help us fully integrate the infrastructure, systems, and programs, and share our common cultural values. The CAREC Program is a proactive facilitator of practical, results-based regional projects and policy initiatives critical to sustainable economic growth and shared prosperity in the region.”

As a high-level strategy and policy body, CAREC is a partnership for its 11 members to promote economic growth and sustainable development through cooperation. Since its inception in 2001, the program has financed 208 regional infrastructure and trade projects worth \$39.2 billion. Projects have, for example, helped increase road and railway efficiency, streamline border-crossings, and improve access to energy for millions of people in the region. Of the total, \$14.7 billion has been financed by ADB, \$15.8 billion by other development partners, and \$8.7 billion by CAREC member governments. CAREC ministers unanimously endorsed two new long-term strategies: a tourism strategy to develop safe and sustainable tourism destinations and provide jobs in CAREC countries; and a gender strategy to improve access to economic opportunities for women and empower them in decision-making processes.

In a joint statement, the ministers commended CAREC’s efforts to address the challenges posed by the pandemic and reaffirmed their commitment to regional cooperation and support for CAREC’s Strategy 2030. The ministers noted substantial progress in CAREC’s five priority areas, welcomed the forthcoming digital strategy to integrate information and communication technology into each priority area, and highlighted the continued financial and technical support of development partners. Investments in the CAREC region in 2020 have further strengthened regional connectivity, including a new project to expand energy trade between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan and provide 500,000 households and businesses with reliable access to electricity. The program also completed a study on regional health cooperation, identifying opportunities to mitigate the spread of diseases and improve health services for migrants and border communities. ADB is the secretariat of the CAREC Program. The 11 members of CAREC are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, the People’s Republic of China, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 12/07/2020

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COVID-19 and the Wellbeing of Older Persons in Asia

Asia's population is rapidly aging, a trend that predates the ongoing pandemic. As COVID-19 does disproportionate harm to the elderly—particularly those with pre-existing health problems—ensuring the wellbeing of older persons in the region is even more urgent. Asia's policy makers need to know how seniors in the region are faring in this pandemic, how they can be protected from the worst aspects of the disease, and what can be done to support them. Even as economies return to normal after the pandemic, the region will face the question of how best to promote healthy and active aging. A panel of experts describes how the pandemic is impacting the physical health, mental health, and economic security of older persons in Asia and the Pacific and discusses the needs of older persons and the extent to which these needs are addressed by country systems in the context of the pandemic. The role of government policy in promoting active and healthy aging in times of the COVID-19 and its aftermath is also examined.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 12/14/2020

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Health, Social Protection to Underpin Sustainable Recovery from COVID-19

Growth in the Pacific subregion for 2020 has been further downgraded as the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continues to squeeze the region's economies. The Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Pacific Economic Monitor launched today has downgraded the Pacific's growth for this year to a contraction of 6.1%, down from the 4.3% decline forecast in July. "It will be a balancing act to keep Pacific economies moving during the COVID-19 recovery period," said ADB Director General for the Pacific Leah Gutierrez. "Vaccine procurement and distribution, safe travel arrangements, and continuing to strengthen health and social protection systems will all be key to ensuring the region's recovery is sustainable." Although the ADB report says the Pacific subregion is expected to post a cautious recovery in 2021 with growth of 1.3%, that will depend on how quickly travel and trade restrictions can be lifted to allow for some revival in economic activity. As Fiji waits for tourism to resume, ADB projects the country's economy to contract by 19.8% in 2020 and may only achieve a minimal recovery of 1.0% in 2021, assuming tourists return in the second half of the year.

The pandemic has heavily impacted Papua New Guinea's economy, which is forecast to contract by 2.9% in 2020. Some recovery is projected in 2021, but growth is expected to remain low at 2.5%, reflecting the lingering impacts of the pandemic. The Monitor says a prudent expenditure strategy will be key for the recovery period. Articles in the Monitor look at how the tourism-dependent economies, such as the Cook Islands, are managing the economic impacts of COVID-19. Even if borders were to reopen in the Cook Islands at the beginning of next year, ADB anticipates GDP there will decline by 15.4% in 2021. The contraction is expected to impact

employment and household incomes, particularly for women who hold 60% of tourism-related jobs. In Niue, a potential travel bubble with New Zealand could help alleviate the fiscal strains of a prolonged pause in international travel. For Palau, measures including tax and state-owned enterprise reforms, and prioritizing capital spending, will help the economy better weather the COVID-19 storm. In Vanuatu, the government responded to the impacts of COVID-19 and Cyclone Harold with strong health and economic stimulus measures. However, fiscal pressures appear to be mounting for 2021.

In Samoa and Tonga, remittances may provide an opportunity to alleviate domestic economic pressures. Ultimately, expanding seasonal worker schemes would substantially alleviate economic pressures. For Solomon Islands, beyond the immediate fiscal response to the pandemic, targeted efforts will be needed to improve fiscal buffers, and ensure that revenue mobilization is efficient. The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Marshall Islands have been more affected by the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic than initially estimated. The ADB report says measures to safeguard public health, provide training and education, and protect the vulnerable will help those countries avoid the spread of the disease and lay the foundations for a strong and sustainable economic recovery. The Monitor says the priorities for Nauru are to ensure critical services are efficiently delivered and private sector activities are not adversely affected. For Kiribati and Tuvalu, geographical remoteness, isolation, and dispersion create additional hurdles for the government to respond. A stronger information base on vulnerable groups can help ensure social assistance measures are better targeted during crisis periods.

The Monitor's policy briefs examine key issues that have critical implications for the Pacific's broader economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. A case study looks at how data from the latest census in the FSM helped the country to mount a gender-inclusive response to COVID-19. A survey of COVID-19 response packages across the subregion highlights how the Pacific has prioritized social protection to mitigate the pandemic's most severe impacts on the vulnerable. Another policy brief presents an initial analysis of the potential cost-effectiveness of a COVID-19 vaccine in select Pacific economies. A contribution from the Lowy Institute examines trends in health spending and foreign aid in the Pacific, as well as the potential impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on health financing moving forward.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 12/15/2020

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Asia's Water Security - The Glass Is Still Half Full

Managing water resources effectively is becoming increasingly critical in Asia and the Pacific, with its fast-paced economic development, population growth, and changing climate. Accelerating urbanization means that about 2.5 billion people or

more than half of the region's population, will be living in urban areas by 2030. The region is home to about 563 million urban slum dwellers, challenging municipalities' abilities to provide basic services. At the same time, agriculture is expanding with irrigated smallholder farms receiving on average 80% of Asia's freshwater. The Asian Water Development Outlook (AWDO), a flagship periodical publication by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asia-Pacific Water Forum, describes in detail the water security status of Asia and the Pacific since 2007 and highlights critical water management issues facing the region. This 2020 fourth edition provides is strongly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Serious water constraints

As AWDO 2020 describes, despite the economic and development achievements in Asia and the Pacific (home to 60% of the world's population), about 300 million in the region still have no access to safely managed or basic water services such as drinking water, and 1.2 billion lack adequate sanitation. Poor access to water and sanitation disproportionately impacts vulnerable groups, who are particularly susceptible to external economic shocks and infectious diseases such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Of the 49 ADB members from Asia and the Pacific, 27 face serious water constraints on economic development, and 18 are yet to sufficiently protect their inhabitants against water-related disasters. Asia and the Pacific is the most disaster-affected region in the world, home to more than 40% of disasters and 84% of people affected. Major cities along the coastlines are becoming increasingly vulnerable to climate change risks and disasters—flood events, sea-level rise, and droughts—threatening lives, livelihoods, and public health and generating huge economic losses. “Over the last few decades, Asia and the Pacific has achieved impressive economic growth and gains social welfare with a tangible increase in water security,” says Tom Panella, Chief of ADB's Water Sector Group, tasked with producing this fourth edition of AWDO. “Integrated water resources management, good governance and human capital development remain vital to support inclusive economic growth and increase overall social well-being in Asia and the Pacific, especially in the wake of COVID-19.”

Tracking water security

Water security as defined in AWDO 2020 is the availability of an adequate quantity and quality of water to ensure safe, affordable, equitable and inclusive water supply and sanitation together with sustainable livelihoods and healthy ecosystems and manageable water-related risks. Operationalizing water security will help foster resilient rural–urban economies in Asia and the Pacific. The AWDO measures water security across five key dimensions (KDs)—rural household water security, economic water security, urban water security, environmental water security, and water-related disaster security. Water security is expressed in scores, calculated for each KD based on publicly available data on various indicators. The scores of all five KDs are added to form the multidimensional national water security score. Based on the aggregated scores, five key stages of national water security were identified

progressively from nascent up to engaged, capable, effective, and model.

Key findings of AWDO

National Water Security. The number of ADB members in the nascent and engaged stages cumulatively decreased from 30 to 22, while the number of ADB members in the capable and effective stages increased from 19 to 27. This reflects an overall upward trend for the region. **KD1: Rural Household Water Security.** All regions show steady progress in improving rural household water security. East Asia and Southeast Asia perform well, while Pacific and South Asia lag behind. Twenty-three ADB members are still in the nascent and engaged stages (compared with 28 in 2013). The number of ADB members in the effective and model stages has increased from 7 to 13. **KD2: Economic Water Security.** All other regions also show good progress except the Pacific, where eight ADB members are still in the nascent stage. With 32 ADB members still in the nascent and engaged stages, 2.1 billion people face serious limitations in their economic activities due to insufficient water management.

KD3: Urban Water Security. The level of urban water security has remained about the same during 2013–2020. Urban water security in East Asia has nearly reached the same level as the advanced economies. The Pacific region is lagging. Seven ADB members are still in the nascent stage, while 18 are in the engaged stage. **KD4: Environmental Water Security.** KD4 shows a mixed picture. On the one hand, the number of ADB members in the capable and effective stages has increased from 20 in 2013 to 31 in 2020. On the other hand, 18 ADB members are still in the nascent and engaged stages. Southeast Asia scores well and is nearly at the same level as the Advanced Economies, with the Pacific region scoring above average. South Asia is trailing other regions. **KD5: Water-Related Disaster Security.** All regions, show good progress in water-related disaster security, except for South Asia, which experienced some major droughts in the last 10 years, which influenced their score negatively. In 2020, 18 ADB members are still in the nascent and engaged stages, slightly down from 20 in 2013.

The financing needs to achieve water security are enormous. ADB estimates the investment needs for water and sanitation to be on average \$53 billion per year up to 2030, of which about one third will be needed from the private sector. Good governance is a critical enabling factor to advance water security in the region with sustainable impacts on the ground, leaving no one behind. “Achieving water security for all ADB Asia and the Pacific members requires robust public policies across all levels of government, a clear allocation of duties among responsible authorities, as well as regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms,” AWDO concludes. “At the same time, adequate financial means should be made available to implement the needed institutional and technical interventions, which require appropriate enabling environments to make the best use of available water resources, water-related assets, and financial sources.”

Water Security a Top Priority in COVID-19 Recovery, Says ADB Report

Economies of Asia and the Pacific must put water security at the top of their agenda to recover from the fallout from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and adapt to climate change, according to a new flagship report released today by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The Asian Water Development Outlook 2020 describes the status in the region of water security, which measures the availability of safe and affordable water supply, sanitation for all, improved livelihoods, and healthy ecosystems, with reduced water-related diseases and floods. “The need for water security is even more urgent due to the COVID-19 pandemic because access to water, sanitation, and hygiene offers the primary line of defense against the spread of COVID-19 and other diseases. Far too many people across Asia and the Pacific continue to suffer from limited access to these vital services,” said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa. “The new AWDO edition serves as a tangible and reliable knowledge resource for ADB’s developing members as they address the multifaceted challenges of water security.”

Despite achievements in Asia and the Pacific over the last few decades, 1.5 billion people living in rural areas and 600 million in urban areas still lack adequate water supply and sanitation. Of the 49 ADB regional members, 27 face serious water constraints on economic development, and 18 are yet to sufficiently protect their inhabitants against water-related disasters. The report uses updated methodologies and in-depth analysis of water financing and governance developed in partnership with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The report stresses that it is imperative that countries drastically increase their investment in water, sanitation, and other water-related infrastructure and services by convening all public, private, and innovative financing to achieve quality growth and the Sustainable Development Goals. Financing is also needed to enable and sustain a virtuous system of good governance, which requires efficient water-related organizations with sufficient capacity and financial resources to enable them to provide coherent policies, monitor and evaluate progress, and take action when needed, all in interaction with the stakeholders in a transparent way.

Key recommendations in the report include:

- Put water at the center of sustainable rural development by promoting water-effective irrigation agriculture, community-based water and sanitation services, and locally resilient disaster risk reduction such as the combination of community protection and farmland flood retention. This will enable a good economic circle of

locally affordable investment, income generation, proper management and operation, and an enhanced level of welfare for the people.

- Achieve urban water security by investing in water, sanitation, and disaster risk reduction infrastructure services not only in cities but also in slums and peripheral areas, while following a gender-based approach.
- Provide a healthy environment by drastically reducing pollution, stimulating a circular economy, increasing land protection, and embracing nature-based approaches.
- Increase the resilience of water systems to avoid water-related disasters and to be prepared for climate and other global changes. Turn recent lessons of disasters into better practices of tomorrow by rebuilding better.

To improve the region's water security, ADB has programmed more than \$6 billion in financial and technical assistance between 2020 and 2022 to support safe water supply, sanitation, and wastewater measures; and more than \$2 billion for flood risk management in the same time period—together with tailored knowledge services that promote innovation and forge partnerships.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 12/18/2020

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East Asia

CHINA: Jilin Reports Surge in Cross-border E-commerce

Northeast China's Jilin Province reported its foreign trade value in e-commerce quadrupled to 443 million yuan (about 67.5 million U.S. dollars) in the first ten months this year compared to the same period last year, according to Changchun Customs. The trade volume of the province in cross-border e-commerce totaled more than 1,360 tonnes, about 13 times the number between January and October last year, the customs said. Mainly contributed by the booming e-commerce sector, the province's export value reached more than 440 million yuan, up by 424.8 percent year on year. The major exports are daily necessities, clothing, and electronic products. Jilin's imports recorded a decline in value of 33.2 percent year on year but a surge exceeding 420 percent in volume during the period.

Located at the junction of China, Russia, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the border city of Hunchun, Jilin, has become a strong magnet for e-commerce and logistics enterprises at home and abroad. At present, the exports delivered by Hunchun's logistics companies can reach most parts of Russia in only 15 to 25 days, saving more than half of the time and economic cost. Cross-border e-commerce has become a new growth and profits motor in the province's foreign trade. The customs plans to further improve its regulatory mechanism, and facilitate

the sector's boom, according to Shi Jianping, deputy director of Changchun Customs.

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Shanghai Community Safeguards Elderly Living Alone with Smart Devices

For Zhang Meixia, an 87-year-old woman who lives alone in Shanghai, 0.01 cubic meters of water is enough for her to do the laundry or cook a meal. That amount of water can even save her life. The Jiangsu Road sub-district of Changning District in Shanghai, where Zhang lives, has recently begun installing free smart water meters for elderly residents living alone to monitor their water consumption in real time. Once the reading within 12 hours falls below 0.01 cubic meters, the system will automatically alert the community's managing platform and notify local cadres. Community volunteers will come to check the situation as soon as possible. "As an elderly person living alone, my biggest fear is calling for help but no one comes. I am all for installing smart water meters in my home," said Zhang. Over two decades of living alone, Zhang's only experience with smart devices has been using her phone to make calls and take pictures of the flowers she grows on her balcony.

She never expected that installing smart devices in her home could bring her such peace of mind. Just like Zhang, many elderly living alone in Shanghai are now being protected by smart devices such as smart water meters, smart door sensors, smoke detectors and infrared sensors. The managing platform run by the local government collects and analyzes data from these smart devices to ensure the well-being of the elderly, monitoring key indicators such as whether the front door has been opened or whether there have been signs of human activity within the past 24 hours. So far, the sub-district has installed more than 100 smart door sensors and nearly 10 smart water meters for elderly residents living alone in the community. Since the beginning of November when the data was uploaded to the local urban operation and management center, the devices have issued 23 warnings.

"As I've gotten older, I've become more forgetful. Once I forgot about a frying pan on the gas stove. If it weren't for the alarms set off by the smoke detector, I would have been in big trouble. Soon volunteers also came to my door to check up on me after receiving warnings. I didn't expect those devices would be so helpful," Zhang said. Li Chun, the community volunteer paired with Zhang, said all the elderly living alone in the community are paired with volunteers who visit them every week. However, these volunteers can only do so much. "These smart devices come in handy to take care of the elderly. As long as the water consumption exceeds 0.01 cubic meters, I know that Zhang is safe and sound at home, and I feel at ease," Li said. Shanghai is facing a severe aging problem.

The number of people aged 60 and over in Shanghai was 5.18 million by the end of 2019, accounting for 35.2 percent of the total registered population in the city, according to the municipal health commission. Among them, 317,400 elderly are living alone. As a microcosm of the aging population in Shanghai, 40 percent of residents in the area are senior citizens, said Dai Tao, an official with the Jiangsu Road sub-district. Authorities hope to actively explore smart applications to solve real problems and share the benefits of technological progress with the elderly, Dai said. "We plan to explore more ways of using smart water meters in the future. For example, instead of only monitoring the minimum reading, we will also detect irregular increases in water consumption and send out warnings to the volunteers," Dai said, adding that relevant data is also under strict protection to avoid any privacy leakage.

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Chinese E-commerce Platform Hema Fresh Launches Cross-border Shopping

E-commerce platform Hema Fresh, Alibaba's fresh-food chain, has announced a cross-border shopping project that helps Chinese consumers purchase imported goods quickly and easily. The new project was announced on Friday at a press conference about the construction of an international consumption center in Shanghai's Pudong New Area, to which the new project will be linked. Hema Fresh will deliver imported goods to customers' designated addresses through its bonded online shopping model of cross-border e-commerce. This not only creates a new business model for domestic consumers to purchase imported goods, but also provides a practical example for Pudong as an international consumption center, according to Hou Yi, CEO of Hema Fresh. According to Yang Chao, deputy head of Pudong New Area, the total retail sales of consumer goods in Pudong exceeded 300 billion yuan (45.8 billion U.S. dollars) in 2019. Hema Fresh opened its first store in Pudong's Jinqiao in 2016. In 2020, the company established its headquarters in Pudong.

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China's Yunnan Reports Surge in Cross-border E-commerce

Southwest China's Yunnan Province reported a more than tenfold increase in cross-border e-commerce trade volume in the first 11 months of this year, local customs authorities said Tuesday. The import and export value of cross-border

e-commerce in the province reached 640 million yuan (about 97.7 million U.S. dollars), 13.3 times higher than the number for the same period last year, according to the Kunming customs. The development of cross-border e-commerce in Yunnan has picked up pace since the provincial capital Kunming was designated a national-level comprehensive test zone for cross-border e-commerce. To meet the demand of the booming sector, customs authorities of the region have been working to streamline customs clearance further and improve logistic efficiency.

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Chinese Economy Cements Recovery, Better Growth Expected for 2020

China's key economic indicators for November unveiled Tuesday showed strengthening recovery, indicating a world-beating growth trend, as consumption and investment gradually return to normal levels. Retail and investment, two main growth drivers, have picked up the pace, with market entities and the employment sector showing strong vitality in November, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Retail sales of consumer goods went up 5 percent year on year in November, up from the 4.3-percent surge in October, sustaining the upward momentum since the major consumption gauge posted its first positive growth in August this year. Fixed-asset investment edged up 2.6 percent year on year in the first 11 months of the year, up 0.8 percentage points from the rise in the first 10 months. During the January-November period, investment by the private sector rose 0.2 percent, the first growth registered this year. The surveyed urban unemployment rate stood at 5.2 percent in November, registering a four-month declining streak. Shining light on the November data, NBS spokesperson Fu Linghui said the sustained recovery fully demonstrated the economy's strong resilience and potential in the face of unprecedented COVID-19 impact. Fu added that major gauges in November pointed to faster economic growth in Q4 from Q3, as both production and demand have continued to soar steadily.

"Looking ahead, China is expected to become the only major economy in the world to achieve positive growth in 2020," Fu told a press conference. "As the economy gradually returns to normal operation, a better economic growth for the whole 2020 is expected." Thanks to robust year-on-year growth of 4.9 percent in its gross domestic product in the third quarter, the country's economy expanded 0.7 percent in the first nine months, bucking a 1.6 percent contraction in the first half year and a 6.8 percent contraction in the first quarter when the virus took its toll. In the latest World Economic Outlook report released in October, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected China's economy to grow 1.9 percent in 2020, 0.9 percentage points higher than the IMF's June forecast, which would make China the only major economy to register positive growth this year. China did not set any numerical growth target this

year. In the second half of 2020, domestic investment and consumer demand have continued to recover, and this positive trend could extend in 2021.

"China's economy will run with many favorable factors next year, and it is more likely that the economy will gradually return to the potential growth level," Fu said, adding that the growth rate in 2021 may be relatively high due to the low base this year. Wen Bin, chief analyst with the China Minsheng Bank, attributed the economic recovery to accelerated production and rising demand in China. "There's still large room for improvement," Wen said, adding that boosting consumption demand is critical to the country's future economic recovery. China aims to keep the economy running within a reasonable range and adhere to the strategy of expanding domestic demand in the coming year, according to a statement released Friday after a meeting, which analyzed the economic work for 2021, of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee.

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China's Growth to Boost World Economic Recovery

As the year is drawing to a close, China's economic rebound from COVID-19 is gathering pace as mirrored by improvements in key growth figures, which, for many market watchers, are a boon for the world economy still scrambling to shake off the severest recession in nearly a century. In the latest World Economic Outlook, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected China's economy to grow by 1.9 percent in 2020, 0.9 percentage points above its June forecast, making China the only major economy that will see positive growth this year. "With the right mix of supportive macroeconomic policies focused on strengthening social safety nets and further key reforms, China will secure the recovery and ensure balanced and high-quality growth, which will benefit China and the world," said IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva.

REBOUND ON TRACK

A set of early indicators had shown that an across-the-board recovery of the world's second-largest economy was firmly on track. In November, the purchasing managers' index for the manufacturing sector, the main gauge of factory activities, reached 52.1 -- well above the boom-bust line of 50 and representing the highest level of the year. Accounting for more than half of China's GDP growth, the service sector has long been one of its main economic barometers. Last month, the sub-index for business activities in the service sector rose to 55.7, also the highest level of the year. In terms of foreign trade, the revival continued too, as both new export orders and import sub-indexes hit a year-high and stayed in the expansion territory for three consecutive months. Some China watchers are concerned that the country's recovery is unbalanced, with a faster rebound in the industrial sector and

declining consumer spending, despite the latter being emphasized by the leadership as a leading driver amid a broader shift toward consumption-oriented growth.

In yet another encouraging sign, the consumption sector rebounded too. In November, China's retail sales of consumer goods went up by 5 percent year on year to 3.95 trillion yuan (about 604.7 billion U.S. dollars), up from the 4.3-percent gain in October after positive growth in August. More vigorous consumption recovery became apparent during this year's Singles' Day shopping festival, which yet again shattered a string of records from total sales volumes of participating brands. Boosted on the rebound, global chief financial officers (CFOs) have upgraded China's economic outlook to "Modestly Improving" for Q4 from "Stable" in Q3, showed a survey by the CNBC Global CFO Council, which gathers around 150 CFOs of some of the world's largest companies. The CFOs responding to Q4's survey feel more optimistic about the Chinese economy, the survey said.

POSITIVE SPILLOVERS

At a time when the coronavirus-triggered recession looms large globally, China's pace of expanding opening-up has been accelerating, generating positive spillover effects on the world economic recovery. China signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement with other participating countries in mid-November. The world's largest trade pact will likely open up more sectors and promote business flow among signatories. It is conducive to boosting regional trade, and the spillover effects of China's growth will improve the economic recovery of participating countries, according to Steven Zhang, the chief economist at Morgan Stanley Huaxin Securities. Amid efforts to nurture fertile ground for foreign businesses to thrive, China has this year implemented the Foreign Investment Law, trimmed the negative list for foreign investment, and eased foreign access to the financial market.

Merlin Swire, chairman of Swire Pacific Limited, welcomed China's ongoing policy of a higher-level opening-up, saying that foreign investors have experienced strengthened investor protection, a more leveled playing field, and a better business environment. Focusing on future high-quality growth, China has put forward a new development pattern of "dual circulation," to forge better connectivity between internal and external markets. Huang Qifan, vice chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges, saw the new paradigm as China's remedy to a global economy still mired in the doldrums. China's massive demand is estimated to generate over 27 trillion U.S. dollars of imports of goods and services in the following 10 years. It will surely provide a lasting boost to global revival in the post-pandemic era, Huang added. "It is clear that no economic recovery from the current global economic slowdown is possible without China being a major part of the equation," noted Rohana Mahmood, chair of APEC Business Advisory Council.

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China Moves Fast to Become World Leader in Transport

China is forging ahead in developing a comprehensive and multidimensional traffic network that is intelligent, safe and green as it looks to become a world leader in the field, according to a white paper released Tuesday. The white paper, titled "Sustainable Development of Transport in China," was released by the State Council Information Office to provide a full picture of China's achievements in the field and share its strategy and activities in building a sustainable transport system. Following a strategy of coordinating the development of the transport industry with its economy and society, China has, over the past decades, transformed the once-backward sector into a modern network, which now leads the world in terms of the scale of the transport infrastructure. By the end of 2019, China had a total of 139,000 km of rail track, of which high-speed lines represented 35,000 km, and a total of more than 5 million km of highways, of which expressways represented 150,000 km, according to the white paper.

The country's navigable inland waterways came in at 127,000 km and certified civil airports stood at 238. The road network density in the urban built-up areas was 6.65 km per sq km and the road area ratio was 13.19 percent. Boasting self-developed core technologies and world-leading mega-projects, China is also making steady progress from a follower to a leader in transport technology. China leads the world in technology for railways at high altitudes and in extremely low temperatures and is a global player in high-speed and heavy-haul railways. It has solved the most challenging technical problems confronting highway construction in difficult geological conditions such as plateau permafrost, expansive soil, and desert, according to the white paper. China also leads in core technologies for building deep-water offshore ports, improving massive estuary and long waterways, and building large airports.

Pursuing a mutually beneficial strategy of opening up, China has been expanding cooperation with other countries in the field of transport, actively promoting global connectivity and engaging in global transport governance, the white paper noted. "At present, the world is facing challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recession. Transport can play an important role in binding countries together and promoting economic growth during this difficult time," the white paper said. Facing changes in the international and domestic arena, China is moving faster in developing a national comprehensive and multidimensional traffic network, and reinforcing its strength in transport to satisfy the needs of its people, ensure adequate support for transport, and become a world leader in this field, according to the white paper. Giving priority to transport in future plans, China will shift its focus from speed and scale to quality and efficiency, from independent initiatives to integrated multimodal development, and from traditional drivers to innovative forces.

"Our country will build a modern comprehensive transport system that is safe, convenient, efficient, green and economical, equipped with world-class facilities, technology, management and services," the white paper stated, underlining the goal of building up significant strength in transport by 2035. Upholding the vision of a global community of shared future, China has vowed to continue implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and strengthening international exchanges and transport cooperation. "China will work with all other countries to promote global connectivity and stronger people-to-people ties, and make a greater contribution to building a better world," the white paper added.

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Big Data Indicates Recovery in China's Nighttime Economy

Nighttime consumption in China has almost returned to last year's level, an index based on big data has shown. The nighttime consumption recovery index has reached 92.6 this year, indicating the whole year's nighttime consumption is almost the same as last year, according to big data released by the China UnionPay Merchant Services Co., Ltd. (China UMS) on Wednesday. The index is mainly based on the value of consumption between 6 p.m. on any given day and 6 a.m. the following day, and a reading of 100 indicates the nighttime economy is at the level of the same period the previous year. Respective readings of 102 and 104.5 in the third and fourth quarters show positive year-on-year growth for nighttime consumption throughout the second half of this year. China's nighttime consumption volume in the first quarter dropped by over 40 percent year on year due to the outbreak of COVID-19, according to China UMS data. The volume began to rebound in the second quarter after infections waned following national efforts to battle the epidemic. Night tourism, shopping and dining across the country witnessed the quickest recoveries, with respective consumption recovery index readings of 102.9, 99.4 and 97.7. The consumption value of night shopping accounted for 24.1 percent of whole-day consumption this year, up 5.8 percentage points, and night dining accounted for 44.2 percent, up 11.3 percentage points.

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China's Guizhou Province Accelerates 5G Development

Guizhou Province, China's first comprehensive big data pilot area, had set up 20,215 5G base stations as of Wednesday to accelerate 5G development, local authorities said. The province in southwest China is currently home to more than 9 million 5G

users, according to the Big Data Development Administration of Guizhou Province. The mountainous province is one of China's most impoverished areas, with electricity, coal, tobacco and liquor production as its major industries. As China started to upgrade its economy toward a greener vision with more advanced technologies, Guizhou accelerated its economic restructuring and emerged as the front-runner of the country's big data industry. Guizhou has stepped up the use of 5G technology in fields such as transport, healthcare and tourism, with the number of 5G application projects in the province reaching more than 170. The country greenlighted the commercial use of 5G in 2019. Promising faster speeds, wider broadband and lower latency, 5G network is regarded as the "infrastructure" for a variety of next-generation digital technologies including artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality and driverless vehicles. China had set up 718,000 5G base stations as of November this year, Liu Liehong, vice-minister of Industry and Information Technology, said Wednesday.

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China's Zhejiang Logs Surge in Cross-border E-commerce

Zhejiang Province, an e-commerce heartland and foreign trade hub in east China, reported a robust increase in cross-border e-commerce trade in the first 11 months of this year. The export value of retail sales through cross-border e-commerce in the province reached 91.16 billion yuan (about 13.95 billion U.S. dollars), up 28.9 percent year on year, according to the province's department of commerce. Meanwhile, the retail imports of cross-border e-commerce rose 33.4 percent to 33.9 billion yuan, driving up the province's import growth by 1.2 percentage points. Zhejiang established seven new comprehensive cross-border e-commerce pilot zones this year -- Wenzhou, Shaoxing, Huzhou, Jiaxing, Quzhou, Taizhou and Lishui -- encouraging the local government to introduce more supporting policies. The province will provide more convenience and better services for the development of cross-border e-commerce, said Sheng Qiuping, director of the department.

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China Boosts Opening-up of Futures Market to Attract Global Traders

China's drive to open its futures markets to the outside world has gathered pace with an ultimate goal to serve the real economy amid the country's efforts to seek high-quality development. China currently has seven kinds of commodity futures and

options open to direct participation by international investors, after overseas investors were allowed to participate in the futures trading of a type of palm oil on Dec. 22. This came right after China launched the listing and trading of bonded copper futures contracts on Nov. 19, which are open to global traders. The China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC), the country's top securities regulator, said Friday it will further expand the scope of specific futures varieties, enhance the participation of overseas traders and support overseas financial institutions in controlling or holding a stake in domestic futures firms.

The futures market can sharpen its competitive edge amid the internationalization while attracting more global investors, CSRC vice chairman Fang Xinghai said at a conference on Dec. 19. The opening-up of the sector can boost China's pricing power in key commodities markets, said Luo Xufeng, chairman of Nanhua Futures Co., Ltd. China has fast-tracked the opening-up of the futures market this year, with new rules making it easier for international investors to trade in China's markets. The country removed foreign ownership limits for foreign-invested securities companies, fund management firms and futures companies at the beginning of this year. The top securities regulator in June granted approval allowing J.P. Morgan Futures Co., Ltd. to become the country's first wholly foreign-owned futures trading firm. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the launch of China's futures market, which has developed quickly in recent years.

At the end of November, funds in China's futures market had exceeded 855.95 billion yuan (130.48 billion U.S. dollars), up 55.2 percent year on year, CSRC data showed. Meanwhile, the turnover in China's futures market reached 382.5 trillion yuan from January to November, up 45.5 percent year on year, according to the data. The commodity futures available to international investors have been operating smoothly, such as crude oil and iron ore futures. In Shanghai, the transshipment business of crude oil based on Shanghai crude oil futures price has expanded to the Republic of Korea, Singapore and other regions. The iron ore futures trading on the Dalian Commodity Exchange has attracted about 270 overseas investors from 21 countries and regions. Though China's futures market has made remarkable progress, it still needs to improve market mechanisms, products, rules and infrastructure, while boosting its pricing power on key commodities to better serve the high-quality development of the economy, Fang said.

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China's PMI Remains in Expansion Zone amid Steady Economic Recovery

The purchasing managers' index (PMI) for China's manufacturing sector came in at 51.9 in December, edging down 0.2 percentage points from November, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said Thursday. A reading above 50 indicates expansion, while a reading below reflects contraction. The December PMI remained in the expansion zone for the tenth consecutive month, indicating that the country's manufacturing sector continued its steady recovery, said NBS senior statistician Zhao Qinghe, adding that the reading stood at a high level within the year. The sub-index for production stood at 54.2 in December, down 0.5 percentage points from November, while that for new orders dropped 0.3 percentage points to 53.6. Despite the slight decline from the previous month, the two sub-indexes saw their gap continue to narrow, which indicated a more balanced relationship between production and demand, Zhao said.

Meanwhile, the new export order and import sub-indexes edged down from 51.5 and 50.9 in November to 51.3 and 50.4, respectively, staying within the expansion territory. The sub-index for exporters' outlooks for their production and business activities maintained an eight-month recovery to reach a one-year high, while the high-tech manufacturing sector, with its sub-index remaining above the manufacturing PMI throughout 2020, has played a vital role in pushing forward the recovery of the manufacturing sector, Zhao said. Thursday's data also showed that the PMI for China's non-manufacturing sector came in at 55.7 in December, down from 56.4 in November. The non-manufacturing PMI has remained above 50 for 10 consecutive months, NBS data showed. In December, the service sector saw a slower recovery, with the sub-index for business activities standing at 54.8.

The figure was down from 55.7 in November but still remained at a relatively elevated level for the year. Analyzing the December PMI readings, Wen Bin, chief analyst at China Minsheng Bank, said in a co-authored research note that the Chinese economy has rebounded steadily, but challenges still linger for future recovery. More support should be provided for the manufacturing industry and small firms, while policies need to be more targeted and effective, Wen added. China aims to keep the economy running within a reasonable range and adhere to the strategy of expanding domestic demand in the coming year, according to the tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference that took place in December.

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JAPAN: Regional Banks Take Lead in Digitization

A divide has emerged in the regional banking industry. Banks with solid management bases and high capital ratios have taken the reins on digitization, leaving the institutions that cannot afford to do so trying to find ways to cut costs by reducing branch numbers and personnel. The Bank of Yokohama, a Concordia Financial

Group Ltd. subsidiary, installed a tablet-based system in all of its branches this month that enables customers to complete procedures such as opening accounts and registering address changes paperlessly. “Customer waiting times have been drastically reduced,” a salesperson at the bank’s head office in Nishi Ward, Yokohama, said. Leading regional banking group Concordia has set a goal of reducing the workload at its branches and administrative centers by about 30% over five years from fiscal 2019 by promoting digitization. “We’ve made progress in streamlining [operations]. The challenge for next fiscal year is to expand digital services for customers,” a member of the bank’s digital strategy department said.

Major regional banks in western Japan are also aggressively making moves. Fukuoka Financial Group Inc., which owns the Bank of Fukuoka, Kumamoto Bank and Juhachi-Shinwa Bank in Nagasaki, became the first regional organization to obtain a license to operate a smartphone app-based bank in December. Minna no Bank, which is scheduled to start full-scale operations around May 2021, is aimed at younger customers. Smartphone users will be able to complete all banking procedures, such as opening bank accounts and applying for loans, on the Minna no Bank app. “The number of people who visit bank [branches] has fallen by about 40% in the past decade. We have to adapt more drastically than other industries to keep up with changes in customer demand,” said Fukuoka Financial Group Chairman and President Takashige Shibato. Regional banks that are struggling with new investments are taking a more defensive stance.

Nanto Bank in Nara is implementing structural reforms led by Vice President Satoshi Ishida. A former official of the Financial Services Agency, the 46-year-old Ishida is a young executive with expertise in corporate revitalization. The bank plans to reduce the number of branches by about 30% over 10 years. It also aims to reduce the number of employees over five years, to about 2,000 from about 2,500 — as of the end of September 2020. Some banks have opted to shorten opening hours. Fukushima Bank’s six branches have been providing counter services only in the morning since autumn. Branch employees who work on counters in the morning focus on customer visits and other responsibilities in the afternoon, in an effort to make effective use of limited human resources, according to the bank.

Yuki Fukumoto of NLI Research Institute said: “Smaller regional banks are lagging behind in cost reduction efforts compared to large regional banks. They need to improve the efficiency of their branches and link their systems.” Regional banks have a thinner pool of human resources compared to the nation’s megabanks. There is an urgent need for regional institutions to raise their level as they lack the investment capabilities to earn profits through trading stocks, government bonds and other securities. According to the Bank of Japan’s Financial System Report released in October, if regional banks book the same gains on the sale of securities as those posted in the last three years through fiscal 2019, unrealized gains will dry up in 4.3 years.

While unrealized gains of major banks have fallen about 20% compared with those in fiscal 2015, at regional banks the fall was about 60%, leaving them with little room to maneuver. Jimoto Holdings Inc.'s Kirayaka Bank in Yamagata held unrealized losses of ¥4.3 billion as of the end of September 2020. "Many regional banks do not have anyone who can teach investment management," said Naoto Oguri, president of Nagomi Capital Co., which trains investment managers for regional banks. Some regional banks have been looking outside to escape the situation. Jimoto Holdings and Shimane Bank have decided to form an equity tie-up with major internet securities firm SBI Holdings Inc. to benefit from its investment expertise. "By relying on SBI, we will be able to move in the direction of stable investment management in the future," Jimoto Holdings Chairman Takashi Suzuki said.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 12/30/2020

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SOUTH KOREA: Setting Up Free Wi-Fi Networks on Buses in Operation Across Nation

South Korea has established free Wi-Fi networks on around 35,000 city buses operating across the nation, allowing citizens aboard to access the internet free of charge and reduce their mobile phone bills, the ICT ministry said Monday. The Ministry of Science and ICT said it marks the first time in the world that free Wi-Fi services will be provided on all of the 35,006 city buses in operation. The ministry and 16 provincial governments began setting up free Wi-Fi networks on buses in 2018 and completed the project in October this year in an effort to reduce households' communication bills and help citizens better access the internet. "It is meaningful that the service will help reduce the burden of communications bills for people who might have difficulty in using high-priced subscription packages," ICT Minister Choi Ki-young said. The accumulated number of times the free Wi-Fi services were used on buses reached 420 million between May 2019 and October 2020, the ministry said. This translates into each person in the country's 51.6 million population using such services eight times. The ministry said the free bus Wi-Fi services will enable people to have economic benefits valued at around 22 million won (US\$20,000) over the next three years.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 12/14/2020

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Cheong Wa Dae Checks Cybersecurity amid Growing Non-Contact Activities

Cheong Wa Dae said Wednesday it has reviewed South Korea's cybersecurity

posture during a high-level interagency meeting, as non-contact activities have sharply increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Suh Hoon, director of national security at the presidential office, pointed out that the importance of cybersecurity has been highlighted more this year than at any other time. He cited the spread of contactless activities, such as online classes and working from home. Speaking at the annual "national cybersecurity policy coordination meeting," he called for the review of tasks on new security threats in the coronavirus era and a preemptive response. It was held at the national crisis management center at Cheong Wa Dae, joined by vice ministerial officials at 16 government offices.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 12/16/2020

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

South Korea has the fastest 5G download speed in the world, reaching over 350 megabits per second (Mbps), a report showed Monday. The country's 5G download speed stood at an average 351.2 Mbps, followed by Saudi Arabia at 272.8 Mbps and Taiwan at 247.7 Mbps, industry tracker Opensignal said in a report, citing data collected between Sept. 1 and Nov. 29 in 15 global markets with 5G networks. The result marks an improvement for South Korea from a previous report by Opensignal in October, which had found the country's 5G download speed as the world's second fastest after Saudi Arabia. South Korea was the first country to commercialize the latest generation network in April last year and has racked up just under 10 million 5G users as of end-October, accounting for 14 percent of the country's total 70 million mobile subscriptions. The time South Korean 5G users spent connected to the network, however, stood at 24.6 percent, behind Kuwait at 29 percent and Saudi Arabia at 27.8 percent, according to the Opensignal report. South Korea has yet to commercialize the standalone version of 5G, requiring support from past generation networks, such as 4G LTE. The country's three major mobile carriers promised earlier this year to spend up to 25.7 trillion won (US\$23.3 billion) until 2022 to update network infrastructure and establish nationwide 5G coverage.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 12/21/2020

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: To Provide COVID-19 Vaccines for 181.5 Mln Residents Next Year

Indonesia will provide COVID-19 vaccines for 181.5 million residents next year in order to achieve herd immunity and break the chain of coronavirus transmissions in

the Southeast Asian country, Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin said on Tuesday. In explaining the figure at a virtual press briefing, he said, "Apart from those who have comorbidities, have been infected with COVID-19, and pregnant women, there are still 181.5 million people." According to him, there are 269 million people living in Indonesia currently, with 188 million of them aged between 18 and 59. Considering the need for twice vaccinations and vaccine reserves, it means that Indonesia requires around 426 million doses. Currently, Sadikin said, the Indonesian government has agreements to procure 125 million doses of vaccine with Chinese biopharmaceutical company Sinovac Biotech, and 130 million doses with U.S. biotechnology company Novavax. Besides, the Indonesian government is in the process of cooperating to procure 100 million doses of vaccine with British-Swedish multinational pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca and another 100 million doses with U.S. multinational pharmaceutical corporation Pfizer. Meanwhile, Indonesia also has cooperation in procuring around 16 million to 100 million doses of free vaccine with the COVAX facility, a COVID-19 vaccine distribution program prepared mainly by the World Health Organization (WHO). The first period of vaccination will be from January to April 2021, for inoculating 1.3 million medical workers, 17.4 million public workers, and 21.5 million elderly people. "The vaccination for the elderly will be given if the safety certificate from the BPOM (Indonesian Food and Drug Monitoring Agency) has been issued," added Sadikin. The second period will run from April 2021 to March 2022.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 12/29/2020

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CAMBODIA: Moving Up in Human Development Index Ranking

Cambodia has moved up on the Human Development Index (HDI) to rank 144th globally in 2019, compared to the 146th ranking in 2018, showed a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report released on Wednesday. Cambodia remained in the "medium human development" category among 189 countries and regions, said the UNDP 2020 Human Development Report. The HDI is designed to reflect the average achievement in key dimensions of human development including income, education, and health metrics. The report said Cambodia's gross national income (GNI) per capita increased to 4,246 U.S. dollars in 2019 from 3,876 dollars in 2018 on the PPP (purchasing power parity) basis. "Cambodia could be an example of how human development can go hand in hand with environmental sustainability," Nick Beresford, UNDP's resident representative in Cambodia, said in a press release. "With new technologies, promoting investment in green economy, including expansion of environment-related infrastructure such as renewable energy, green transportation, climate-smart agriculture and community forest expansion, will offer an opportunity for Cambodia to achieve higher levels of human development with an inclusive and sustainable economic growth," he added. The 2020 Human Development Report was based on the data before the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP

said, adding that the COVID-19 impact in Cambodia is equivalent to losing five years of HDI progress.

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THAILAND: To Offer Smart Visas to Foreign Digital Freelancers Working in the Country

Thailand's Board of Investment (BOI) said on Tuesday it is in the midst of designing new smart visa rules to attract more overseas talent to work in Thailand. The BOI said that the smart visa offer had already been approved by the government's Center for Covid-19 Situation Administration (CCSA). Among the move's aims is to allow digital freelancers currently working in Thailand to exchange their tourist visas for smart visas, said Narit Therdsteeerasukdi, BOI deputy secretary general. To be eligible, applicants must have an employment contract with a foreign firm lasting at least six months and proof of qualifications and professional experience. After that, BOI partners will help in screening their professional backgrounds, Narit said. After receiving the smart visa, their expertise could be tapped by universities, the Digital Economy Promotion Agency, National Innovation Agency, National Science and Technology Development Agency, and others. Known as digital nomads, the foreign freelancers currently work in Bangkok, Phuket, Chiang Mai and even on Koh Phangan in Surat Thani province, where they have set up a co-working space, Narit explained. The new visa rules will also cover experienced foreign executives in several businesses, helping to boost development of an investment ecosystem, especially for start-ups. Their expertise could be applied to innovation camps, co-working spaces, advanced materials and packaging, and 3D printing, said in the BOI press release. The BOI also aims to lure academics to government universities to teach subjects beyond science and technology. These would include innovation, technology management and entrepreneurship. Smart visa holders are permitted to stay up to four years in Thailand without a work permit. The visas also allow travel in and out of the country, as well as fast-track privileges at airports.

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VIETNAM: Technology Empowers People with Disabilities

Twenty-two people with visual impairments are attending a digital business training and coaching course for four months in Hà Nội to help them adapt to the fourth industrial revolution and co-exist with COVID-19. The trainees are mostly selling products online or working to become sale co-ordinators of brands. Despite losing their eyesight, they believe they can take advantage of digital entrepreneurship opportunities and technology empowerment to have stable jobs during the

turbulence of the pandemic. Lương Thị Hải Yến, a visually-impaired trainee, said blind people like her, with voice assistance and support from others, can use computers to learn digital business knowledge and skills to approach customers and how to advertise products. Like many other blind people, Yến's main job used to be at a massage parlour in Hà Nội. More than 100 massage parlours and other service venues which provided jobs for visually-impaired people in the capital city were closed as non-essential services during the COVID-19 social distancing period earlier this year.

Being among millions of people with disabilities nationwide who lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with consultation from others, Yến decided to learn marketing skills and sell perfume online. She acts as a sale co-ordinator who advertises products, orders the perfume and has it delivered to customers and can earn a stable source of income during the pandemic. "For visually-impaired people, selling products online has some difficulties. For example, we cannot advertise products through images. Instead of doing that, we livestream, write descriptions to make advertisements or directly consult customers," she said. "The disabled have limited ability to move around. Thanks to technology, we are connected with the outside world so that we know how the world is developing and what chances, including job opportunities, are available for us," she told Việt Nam News. Trần Trung Hiếu, chairman of Vocational Training Centre of the Hà Nội Blind Association, said those with visual impairment and the disabled in general are among the hardest hit by the pandemic.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Rapid Assessment on Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19 which interviewed more than 900 people with disabilities in Việt Nam in May, 30 per cent lost their jobs during COVID-19. Nearly half had their work hours reduced, and almost 60 per cent had their pay cut. Up to 72 per cent of the interviewees had an income of less than VNĐ1 million (US\$44) in March when the first wave of the pandemic peaked in Việt Nam. "Not only facing challenges during the COVID-19, but people with disabilities also have difficulties in the fourth industrial revolution. They have little access to information technology," Hiếu said. With the support of the UNDP and Japanese government, the four-month course will provide digital skills training for people with different disabilities to adapt for digitalisation after COVID-19. Many of the trainees have already started to run their businesses or practise online marketing skills.

"We [the disabled] have been present on the internet and are ready to engage in the supply chain," Hiếu said. Đào Thu Hương, UNDP Vietnam's disability rights officer, said working online from home helps people with disabilities cut travel costs and minimise travel difficulties caused by traffic. While working at home, they can get personal assistance when needed, face less discrimination and be better protected from psychological pain. Nguyễn Hạnh Thư, a disabled English teacher in Hà Nội, believes that with tools like computers or tablets, people with disabilities can do their

jobs, earn incomes and reduce the pressure on their families. Thu suffers from spinal cord injuries and has been in a wheelchair for 30 years. Over the past 30 years, she has been running free English classes for poor students, those in disadvantaged circumstances and people with disabilities like her. Due to the impacts of COVID-19, she has made use of the internet to offer online classes to her students. "I always encourage my disabled children to learn English and information technology skills and then use digital technology to earn money. That's how technology works for the disabled," she said.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 12/03/2020

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HCM City Legislature to Wrap Up Year by Discussing Economic Recovery in 2021

The year-end HCM City People's Council session that opened yesterday is set to pass a resolution on budget revenues and expenditure and discuss the city's economic recovery plans for 2021. Nguyễn Thị Lệ, its chairwoman, praised the efforts made by the People's Committee to carry out the socio-economic, cultural and other tasks set out for 2020, and said it had plans in place for economic recovery next year. The Covid-19 situation remained unpredictable globally and in Việt Nam, affecting the city and country's efforts to achieve socio-economic targets, she said. Fortunately they had taken drastic measures to contain the virus, enabling recovery and socio-economic development, she said. The city's economic growth rate this year had been 1.39 per cent. The city should continue to remain on guard, she said. It should also work to speed up public investment and address other public problems, she said. "A number of industries and services have experienced a slowdown. Administrative reform remains tardy. The criteria for assessing the satisfaction of the public and businesses have not been consistent." Construction-related violations remained a critical issue in some places that are urbanising rapidly. Flooding, traffic congestion and accidents were other problems, while social order and safety remained problematic, she said, citing drug crimes as a particular concern.

New Thủ Đức City

Uông Chu Lưu, vice chairman of the National Assembly, said at the opening that the proposal to establish the new Thủ Đức City was expected to be approved by the National Assembly Standing Committee on December 9. The People's Council recently passed a resolution to merge the city's eastern districts of 2, 9 and Thủ Đức into one administrative unit to create an innovation hub tentatively called Thủ Đức City. It will spread over 211 square kilometres and house more than a million people. At the Q&A session today, delegates will question Nguyễn Thành Phong, chairman of the People's Committee, on socio-economic development and other related issues. The People's Council will consider proposals by the People's Committee such as the issuance of fees for the use of public infrastructure works and utilities at seaport

border gates, and rename 224 roads after Vietnamese heroic mothers, famous scientists and cultural and historical events. The People's Council will also consider proposals for a sustainable poverty alleviation programme in 2021-25, organisation of annual cultural festival events, the establishment of an Office of the National Assembly Delegation and HCM City People's Council, and others. Its Standing Committee will report on administrative reform and Resolution 54 of the National Assembly on specific mechanisms and policies for the city's development. The meeting is expected to elect two additional vice chairpersons for the People's Committee. After the meeting, People's Council delegates will visit the first metro line from Bến Thành to Suối Tiên.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 12/08/2020

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HÀ NỘI Maintains Economic Growth Amidst COVID-19: Top Official

Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hà Nội has maintained its economic growth, with gross regional domestic product (GRPD) expanding by about 3.98 per cent this year, 1.5 times higher than the national average, the city's mayor said on Tuesday. Speaking at a Q&A session of the 18th meeting of the 15th tenure Hà Nội People's Council, Chairman of the city People's Committee Chu Ngọc Anh said Hà Nội's budget collection totalled VNĐ280 trillion (US\$12.1 billion), exceeding the estimate by 2 per cent, and up 3.5 per cent year-on-year. Meanwhile, budget spending stands at about VNĐ87 trillion, equivalent to 84.7 per cent of the estimate set earlier this year. Notably, the city has attracted some \$4 billion in foreign investment and VNĐ145 trillion in domestic investment, Anh said, adding that the number of newly-established firms has exceeded 26,000. He also highlighted achievements in culture, education, administrative reform, the fight against corruption and wastefulness, national defence, external affairs and COVID-19 combat. According to the municipal mayor, the committee will promptly devise specific programmes and plans to realise socio-economic development targets and tasks set for 2021 and adopted by the People's Council at the session. The city's GRDP is set to grow 7.5 per cent next year, social investment is projected to increase by 12 per cent, and inflation is expected to be kept below 4 per cent. At the meeting, Anh cleared up questions regarding State management over sand and gravel exploitation in rivers, and the implementation of codes of conduct in offices and public places.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 12/09/2020

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Việt Nam Sets an Example in Poverty Reduction

Việt Nam is expected to lower its national average poverty rate from 58.1 per cent in 1993 to 2.75 per cent by the end of 2020, becoming a role model in the world in poverty reduction and hunger elimination, said Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc. He was speaking at a national online conference on Friday to review poverty reduction work in 2016-20. Việt Nam is among 30 countries applying multidimensional poverty reduction criteria which include income, access to basic social services like healthcare, education, housing, clean water, hygiene and information. In 2016-20, the country has mobilised VNĐ93 trillion (US\$4.1 billion) for the national target programme on sustainable poverty reduction. According to PM Phúc, during that period, the National Assembly and the Government spent 21 per cent of the State budget on social security, two times higher than the investment of the previous period and the highest figure among ASEAN countries. Việt Nam has also offered financial assistance sourced from the State budget for 13 million people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Poverty reduction is a social and humanitarian task of top importance. This is also an important socialist orientation of Việt Nam under the leadership of the Party,” he said. All communes have roads for cars connected with the commune’s centre while 99 per cent of commune centres and 60 per cent of villages have electricity. PM Phúc cited Hùng Lợi Commune, Yên Sơn District in the northern mountainous province of Tuyên Quang as an example of poverty reduction. Being 40km from Tuyên Quang City, the commune has 7,000 people and 70 per cent of the households are classified as poor. As of November 2019, about 280 people of the commune were working for Samsung and each of them sent VNĐ5 million to VNĐ6 million (\$217-260) to their families each month. Another example is from Trà Linh Commune, Nam Trà My District in central Quảng Nam Province. People who wanted to reach the commune used to have to walk nine hours. Since a road was built, it now takes drivers 30 minutes to travel from the province's centre to the commune.

Those examples show infrastructure and a favourable business and investment climate which helps create jobs for local people are the best solutions to sustainable poverty reduction, he said. However, the PM also pointed out a number of challenges Việt Nam has to face. He warned of unsustainable poverty reduction in many places, widening gaps between the rich and the poor as well as the risk of poverty relapse, especially in mountainous remote areas, ethnic minority areas and regions frequently hard-hit by natural disasters. In many areas, the poverty rate remains more than 5 per cent and stands high among the ethnic minority community. On average, one of five poor households is a disabled family. Impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic have slowed and disrupted sustainable development progress. Oxfam has estimated that half a billion people in the world or more than 8 per cent of the world’s population could be pushed into poverty due to COVID-19. “This is such a big challenge for global poverty reduction,” Phúc said. The Government leader highlighted that one of the most important solutions to reduce poverty was to invest in infrastructure, create trade connections, education and job opportunities. He ordered agencies to stick to

the inclusive poverty reduction programme and adopt an investment plan for the national target programme on poverty reduction. He noted that more attention must be paid to children, the elderly and ethnic minority communities to ensure no one is left behind. Ministries and sectors should prioritise State sources and call for private investment and support from international donors in poverty reduction work. The PM pointed out that to solve poverty, it is necessary to start from production, business to create employment. Service agriculture development should be given priority, especially programmes focused on low-income areas.

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HCM City to Develop Public Cultural Spaces

HCM City needs to assess the features of its cultural and architectural identity so that it can create viable urban public spaces, experts said at a recent seminar. The seminar, which discussed solutions for the development of public cultural spaces, attracted architectural and cultural experts as well as local leaders. It was organised by the municipal Party Committee's Propaganda Department, the Council for Theory, Literature and Arts Criticism and the Association of Architects. Public cultural spaces are common places for community activities that all residents have the right to freely access and use such as squares, parks, pedestrian streets, surface water, spaces along the riverbank, and sidewalks. They play an important role in strengthening social cohesion and improving the quality of life and physical and spiritual health of residents. "The public space shows the city's cultural identity and civilisation," general secretary of the city's Association of Historical Sciences, Nguyễn Thị Hậu, said. The city government should develop solutions on public space development to bring the most practical benefits to the community in a humane way, she said.

The city has been developed around rivers and canals, so its typical identity is a river-based culture. Building public cultural spaces should promote the preservation of traditional intangible cultural heritage practices. The design for public cultural spaces should combine tradition and modernity, experts said. Existing water bodies such as Sài Gòn River or Thị Nghè Canal have been an integral part of the city's development, making them ideal spaces to promote cultural public activities, architect Phạm Phú Cường said. Nguyễn Tấn Vạn, former chairman of the city's Association of Architects, said developing public spaces along rivers and canals would create a unique identity for the city. Sharing the same idea, architect Nguyễn Anh Tuấn of the city's Department of Planning and Architecture, said that the landscapes along rivers and canals have the potential to become the backbone of urban cultural activities. "The city should create public spaces associated with trade, entertainment and cultural activities on rivers and canals." More efforts and solutions are also needed to prevent pollution and improve the landscape along rivers and canals, he said. Dr. Lê Hồng Phước from the HCM City University of Social Sciences

and Humanities said the city should create a public space for *đờn ca tài tử* (Southern folk music) which has been recognised by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage. *Đờn ca tài tử* performances could be organised at existing public spaces in the city such as Book Street on Nguyễn Văn Bình Street in District 1. The city should also set up a street to serve as a place for performing traditional arts, such as Huyền Trân Công Chúa Street in District 1, he said.

Challenges

Urban planning calls for 7sq.m of public space per capita but the current public space in the city is just 1.06sq.m per person. Most existing public spaces are located in inner districts, while there are no or only a few public spaces in outlying districts. More trees and water surface, and lights for existing public parks are needed, experts said. The city should also learn from other countries' experiences in building public space and consult leading architects. Hậu said clearing illegal encroachment on pavements and roads in the city is needed. However, the city should research street planning to manage streetside vendors on pavements and roads, instead of clearing all of them because "street trading is a typical feature that attracts tourists". Phan Nguyễn Như Khuê, head of the municipal Party Committee's Propaganda Department, said the city was considering building public spaces for cultural activities on Nguyễn Thượng Hiền Street and an area around Hồ Con Rùa (Turtle Lake) in District 3. At Hồ Con Rùa, it plans to organise *đờn ca tài tử* performances every Saturday night, art performances and entertainment programmes for children every Sunday night, and musical fountain, water puppetry shows and exhibitions on other days. The city will also develop an annual lantern festival in District 8. Proposed solutions, ideas and suggestions at the seminar will be recorded to study in depth. These will help the city prepare a clear roadmap for building public spaces, he added.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 12/12/2020

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Teleconference Reviews 10 Years of Rural Development

A national teleconference took place on Saturday to review outcomes of the 10-year implementation of the Party Central Committee Secretariat's Conclusion 61 and the Prime Minister's Decision 673 on rural development. Conclusion 61, issued on December 3, 2009, focuses on a project on improving the role and responsibility of the Viet Nam Farmers' Union (VFU) in the development of agriculture, new-style rural area building and the building of Vietnamese farmer class. Decision 673 was issued on May 10, 2011, covering the VFU's implementation of and collaboration to run a number of rural socio-economic and cultural development programmes and projects for 2011 – 2020. Delivering a report at the event, VFU Chairman Thào Xuân Sùng said the two documents had been important resources for the VFU to organise

activities for agricultural growth, rural economic restructuring, human resources improvement, new-style rural area building, poverty reduction, and better living standards. The nation now has 27,000 farmers' households whose annual incomes exceed VNĐ1 billion (US\$43,207), with the rural poverty rate under 3 per cent this year.

Under Decision 673, the VFU has conducted a project on overhauling the fund for supporting farmers, which received more than VNĐ2.64 trillion from the Government and municipal and provincial authorities. The fund has so far assisted 568,737 households in building production and business models. Vocational training and consultation for farmers, as well as communication campaigns to encourage farmers to engage in new-style rural area building, were also key activities over the last decade, Sùng added. To date, Việt Nam has 5,177 communes, or 58.2 per cent of its total, granted new-style rural area status. Concluding the function, Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc said despite natural disasters and diseases, under the Party's leadership and the Government's management, the VFU had worked with ministries, sectors and local authorities to build rural infrastructure, boost economic development, protect the environment and ensure security and farmers' living standards. He said Việt Nam's agricultural exports topped \$41 billion this year, becoming one of the top nations in ASEAN in terms of farm produce. "Việt Nam is moving toward safe agriculture and Vietnamese farmers boast improved knowledge and skills. "There is a need to have a new generation of farmers who can access advanced science and technology and digital economics," he said. He urged the VFU to continue promoting the key role in agricultural development and new-style rural area building in contribution to building a modern and sustainable rural area and agricultural sector as well as to helping farmers engage in and benefit more from the nation's industrialisation and modernisation.

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Hospitals Benefit from Great Development in Social Work System

Minister of Health Nguyễn Trường Sơn told a conference to review the last 10 years of its development held in HCM City yesterday. All central-level hospitals, 90 per cent at the provincial level and 80 per cent at the district level now have social work departments, and the number of social workers at hospitals has increased, according to the deputy minister. In the past social workers at hospitals mostly used to be involved with charity, but now also provide psychological assistance to patients. During the COVID-19 outbreaks they did the tasks of screening people entering hospitals and teaching patients preventive measures well. They have called on companies to donate medical equipment. The social work department at Chợ Rẫy Hospital was held up as an outstanding model. Nguyễn Tri Thức, the hospital's director, said the department had been developed from a social work team set up in

2004. "It has worked with charity organisations and sponsors to subsidise hospital fees for poor patients, and has been providing 5,000 free meals to poor patients every day for the last 12 years." It also provides psychological assistance in many ways, he said, adding that this year, for instance, patients getting infusion therapy could listen to symphony music or read newspapers. Social workers at hospitals also provide legal assistance to patients and help them perform daily activities. But Sơn also pointed to deficiencies like lack of a legal framework for such activities. More training courses should be organised to improve the capacity of social workers at hospitals, he said. Assoc Prof Nguyễn Tuấn Hưng, deputy director of the Ministry of Health's personnel and organisation department, said social work had been developed throughout the country, contributing to the creation of an advanced social welfare system.

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HCM City Aims to Enroll 371,000 in Vocational Schools Next Year

Colleges, vocational training schools and professional and continuing education centres in HCM City aim to enrol 371,000 students in 2021. Speaking at a meeting held on December 18 to review vocational training this year, Đặng Minh Sự, head of department's professional education division, instructed them to step up communication about their strengths in training, enrolment methods, student policies, and investment in modern technical equipment for training, and strengthen co-operation with domestic and international vocational schools and enterprises. Professional education establishments in the city have been instructed to strengthen co-operation with small and medium-sized enterprises to provide short-term training courses to their workers. Lê Minh Tấn, its head, instructed vocational training establishments to use IT in online training since COVID-19 still poses a risk. In upcoming time, they should soon complete quality accreditation as scheduled. The city this year has 393 professional education and vocational training establishments with 13,068 lecturers, down 174 institutions from last year as a result of the pandemic.

Their average enrolment was 74.48 per cent of the target, though a number of schools such as Cao Thắng Technical College, College of Foreign Economic Relations, and others managed 100 per cent due to innovation in enrolment and high training quality. Dr Phạm Hữu Lộc, rector of Lý Tự Trọng College, said his college has career counselling programmes at a number of secondary and high schools. With the Directorate of Vocational Education and Training and the department organising many programmes to honour skilled workers and outstanding students and lecturers at professional education and vocational training schools, more and more parents are allowing their children to enrol for such courses, he said. Many

companies come to these schools to recruit large numbers of students, he added. In 2020 professional education and vocational training establishments trained 141,832 students, and nearly 81 per cent of them from got jobs after graduating. The department co-operated this year with other relevant agencies and enterprises to organise job fairs through which 83,000 people were hired.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 12/21/2020

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PM Calls for Better Care for Workers

Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc on Thursday asked the Việt Nam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL) to take better care of workers. Speaking at a working session with the VGCL's leaders in Hà Nội, the PM said: "Caring for and ensuring stable jobs, as well as improving living standards and working conditions for workers is an important and urgent task of the Party, the State, of the political system, of each worker and all of society, in which the trade union has a great role and responsibility." The close co-ordination between the Government and VGCL over the past five years has helped solve a lot of labour-related matters and the trade union has brought into full play its role in building policies relating to labourers, he said. A report from VGCL showed that after five years, the number of employed workers increased by 26 per cent. The regional minimum wage rose by 1.3 times and average income increased by 35 per cent, contributing to improving income and living standards for workers. The number of workers with stable jobs and high income has gradually increased over the years. Despite accounting for only 14 per cent of the population and 27 per cent of the social workforce, the working class contributes more than 65 per cent of the country's gross national product and more than 70 per cent of the State Budget, the PM said.

However, he said: "In the new context, especially under the impact of international integration and strong digital transformation, our country's workers are facing many challenges." The low skill of labourers is a very big problem and so is the ability to adapt to some industries." Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, many factories and companies had to reduce their operations or lay off staff. The incomes of some workers were not enough for them to survive, causing difficulty for their children's schooling. "These things concern all of us," Phúc said. He suggested agencies and local authorities work with trade unions and employers to build housing, schools and other facilities to ease hardships for labourers. The PM said the Government encouraged employers to apply modern technical standards, management systems and advanced technologies into production and business activities to improve working conditions and ensure safety for employees. He called on workers across the country to overcome difficulties and study to improve their qualifications, contributing to the growth of each business for their happiness and the prosperity of the country. Phúc also directed agencies, the VGCL and enterprises to

prepare the best for workers on the occasion of Tết (Lunar New Year), especially those in difficult circumstances so everyone can welcome the New Year in a warm and happy manner.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 12/25/2020

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Online Sales Boom as Tết Approaches

With people afraid to visit public places like supermarkets because of Covid-19, e-commerce floors have become a convenient and safe shopping place for Tết items. With Việt Nam boasting a large internet community and a young, digital-savvy population, the e-commerce market is buzzing with activity ahead of the festival, which falls on February 12. Many consumers say that the hectic year-end schedule keeps them busy and they cannot go shopping, but the dizzying growth in e-commerce and e-payment is lending a hand. Now, without leaving office or home, they can place orders online and wait for the goods to be delivered home. Many large e-supermarkets and social networking sites claim to have carefully prepared to ship a large volume of goods to serve a huge, growing demand, and launched a number of promotions. Big C supermarket has worked with suppliers to ensure there is enough food to meet the Tết demand, and said it would stock 20 per cent more pork and 25 per cent more poultry meat than last year. A spokesperson said the pandemic would prevent many people from travelling home, but the demand for Tet would remain huge. The supermarket offers online shopping and free delivery within a 10km radius within two hours, he said. Nguyễn Anh Đức, general director of Saigon Co.opmark -- said the supermarkets would increase delivery staff by 25 per cent and deliver anywhere in the country wherever one orders from.

Trần Ngọc Trân, who works in HCM City's District 5, said she had a lot of year-end work to finish and little time to shop even for the most traditional, must-have food items for Tết (Lunar New Year), which is by far the most important festival of the year. Online shopping is a solution for her: She has ordered some traditional central region dishes like pickled scallion, salted figs and papaya shrimp sauce and asked the supermarket to ship them to her home in Bình Định Province. A spokesperson for an e-commerce business said with much lower overheads than brick and mortar stores, online shopping centres are able to offer promotions and discounts. Some popular sites like sendo, lazada, chodientu, hotdeal, tiki, and zalora are offering discounts of up to 50 per cent on all types of products, especially fashion and beauty like shoes, handbags, watches, and sunglasses. Foodstuffs are most in demand for the festival, and are advertised widely on the internet with many discount programmes. Though the discounts are not as high as on other consumer goods, people can still buy confectionary, soft drinks, noodles, and other items at discounts of up to 39 per cent.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 12/26/2020

Vietnam's Industrial Production Up 3.36 Pct in 2020

Vietnam's national index of industrial production rose 3.36 percent year on year in 2020, according to the country's General Statistics Office on Tuesday. The processing and manufacturing sector, the main driver of the surge, went up 5.82 percent, contributing 1.25 percentage points to the overall growth. The electricity production and distribution sector grew 3.92 percent, contributing 0.19 percentage points, and water supply and waste management grew 5.51 percent, contributing 0.04 percentage points. Regarding key products, between January and December, phone components witnessed the largest year-on-year output expansion at 22 percent, followed by television sets (up 20.7 percent), and rolled steel (up 16.4 percent). Industrial products with significant output reductions included refined sugar (down 22.9 percent), beer (down 13.9 percent), liquefied petroleum gas (down 13 percent) and crude oil (down 12.6 percent). As of Dec. 1, the total number of employees in the industrial sector declined 2.3 percent on a yearly basis. Employment went down 2.4 percent in the processing and manufacturing and 1.8 percent in mining, said the office.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 12/29/2020

South Asia

INDIA: Going Online Is a Necessity No More an Option

“E-governance was there from the past 15 to 20 years but the COVID pandemic has flagged it as the most essential thing in governance,” Sarvesh Kaushal, Former Chief Secretary to the Government of Punjab, opened his address on this note. “Physical contact has to be minimised for combating the pandemic. There is no way that any government or any organisation can ignore the online handling of its systems or online delivery when everything has to be done contactless one has to go online. G2C and B2C services have no option but to digitise,” he highlighted. Pandemic is a tragedy but for the IT applications, it posed as the biggest opportunity, Kaushal added. When asked about the challenges that the Government faced initially in implementing the IT applications, he answered, “Initially we lacked the backbone infrastructure. We did not have efficient connectivity and in many areas, there was no connectivity at all. Also, there existed huge digital illiteracy earlier. In addition, the hardware was not pocket-friendly, unmanageable in terms of size and was not even available easily.”

Unfortunately, there was not an equitable spread of IT transformation and most of it was through central funding which started diminishing with time. The institutionalised and standardised growth of IT was missing and this caused regional imbalances, he added. Speaking on the growth of IT in the past few years, Kaushal said that there have been excellent models of growth but unfortunately most of them have been silos. “So we are basically reinventing the wheel simultaneously at different places, synergy and integration are lacking.” There should be a national policy and a state policy which should be consistent, considering the next 20 to 30 years’ vision, deliberated Kaushal. Pointing out a few solutions, Kaushal said, “There is a need to devise an open-source mechanism which allows integration of efforts so that officers (district/ city leaders or policymakers) do not end up reinventing the wheel every third year.” Emphasising on integration and knowledge sharing, he added, “When some solution is being implemented in Delhi or Kerala and when it is adopted in Patna, then Patna should not start from scratch but it should start from the level where Delhi is at present.”

The national response to the COVID pandemic has brought out the best response in any country including India. The basic governance gets toned up in such times. If all the wheels of governance doing their individual jobs in a complete synergy then technology can be applied to their efforts so that their service delivery becomes effortless and contactless, he pointed out. On the way forward, Kaushal said, “I visualise a quantum jump as the issues are clearly flagged now, especially after COVID, however, for this we need apt manpower and liberal funds from the Centre. The potential to grow is now being tapped with all the goals, challenges, probable outcomes, clearly flagged. Also, the new generation of officers are digitally literate and hence, I see the next five years will be a revolution in the application of IT in governance.”

From <http://egov.eletsonline.com> 12/01/2020

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Upscale Digital Infra to Realise Effective Online Education

Shuchi Sharma, Secretary, Higher and Technical Education, Rajasthan addressed the Summit on ‘Challenges & Opportunities in the Education Sector During COVID-19 Situation’. “No doubt COVID has put up a lot of challenges, however, the pandemic has given opportunities to come up with innovative solutions as well,” she said while opening her address at the summit. Speaking of various challenges surfaced in Rajasthan in the higher and technical education sector, she said, “There were a few existing challenges like overall admissions have reduced in engineering colleges as less number of students are opting for B.Tech courses and admissions in general, have also reduced. The COVID pandemic has weighed on the existing challenges. Now the situation has turned grave and we are facing issues like how to rate the students, how to conduct exams, etc.” There are guidelines from UGC but

the line of action is not clear, she added. Mode of examination has posed a major challenge ahead of the students and the authorities. Earlier, students were waiting for March for their examination but March opened doors for the unprecedented crisis. Next, a decision to conduct the examinations by Septemeber end was taken which added to the existing challenges. Hence, “we raised this with the Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD) to review the decision”, Shuchi said. “Offline exams were not possible as social distancing norms were likely to be violated if exams were conducted. Also, many students have returned to their hometowns and have to come back to appear for the exams which will open up a new set of challenges altogether,” she added.

Further, she pointed out, “In Rajasthan, the digital infra is not up to the mark for conducting online examinations. And, to an extent, the situation is the same in most parts of India and worse in rural areas.” Fluctuating network speeds, power cuts, inapt digital infrastructure, are some of the hurdles in the way for implementing online education and examinations in the state. “However, e-content is the solution to overcome such challenges but a need to develop capacity do exist... In Rajasthan, we have started using YouTube as a platform for uploading apt e-content to help students during the COVID-induced lockdowns,” Shuchi mentioned. Adding on she said, “I asked all the teachers/lecturers to record one lecture on every working day and upload it on YouTube. So, in many colleges, this practice was started... I had emphasised on converting all the written content into e-content so that students can keep up with their studies. The possible issues were that one to one online lecture as not feasible, also siblings sharing the smartphone or laptop was another such issue. Hence, uploading of the e-content was one of the possible solutions we figured out.” To inform students about the incoming lectures or the time when lectures were being uploaded, WhatsApp groups were formed through which the information was propagated. Resting her words, she said, “Shortly, as the digital learning setting in as the new normal for the education sector, there is a need to upscale the digital infrastructure. Also, capacity building programmes need to be conducted for upskilling the teachers n terms of delivering lectures effectively through digital media. And, e-content should be kept in focus as it is one of the easily available and accessible forms of content.”

From <http://egov.eletsonline.com> 12/01/2020

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Vi Business & Fortinet Collaborate to Launch Managed Security Services

Vi Business, the enterprise arm of Vodafone Idea Ltd. (VIL) announces the launch of Managed Security Service and has collaborated with Fortinet, a global leader in broad, integrated and automated cybersecurity solutions, as the technology cornerstone for the offering. Vodafone Idea’s Managed Security Service (MSS)

delivers Next-Generation Firewalls with advanced security features offering the first line of defence for any cyberattack, thus ensuring that enterprise network is protected. MSS will provide the power that today's networks require, built on Fortinet's innovative security processing units (SPUs) and FortiOS operating system. The MSS includes both network-based firewalling with intrusion protection detection features and secure remote user access to enable remote workers to connect to their corporate network safely and securely through a VPN. This security-driven networking approach powered by Fortinet enables organisations to scale their network infrastructures without compromising security, which provides effective protection for today's environments. By delivering the industry's highest performance, best of breed security, the service will enable the most demanding digital innovation as well as meet the vast capacity and performance demands of critical business operations, both now as well as a future-proof investment. In addition, the deployment is simplified as customers can leverage the security features of the Fortinet FortiGate next-generation firewalls and is offered on an "as-a-service" model. This is vital to enterprises since they can focus on their business while trusting Vi business to deliver and manage their network security.

Commenting on the launch, Anil Philip, EVP- Products, Solutions and Partnerships, Vodafone Idea said, "Vi Business is a trusted connectivity partner for the enterprise. Acknowledging this confidence, we are proud to extend support with infrastructure security services that are closely associated with connectivity requirements. Our partnership with Fortinet will enable us to provide secure connectivity to our enterprise customers to address their need for managed and safe security solutions." Rajesh Maurya, Regional Vice President, India & SAARC, Fortinet added "The sophistication of today's threat landscape, coupled with the speed at which user traffic is increasing, requires organizations adopt advanced protection. With our integrated security platform, MSSPs and telecom service providers, such as Vodafone Idea, benefit from high-performance technology and an easy to manage security solution that provides comprehensive protection for the extended enterprise." MSS is offered 'as a service' and provides OPEX based pricing, thereby eliminating the need for upfront investment by the customer. It provides the flexibility to choose products and services as per the needs. Enterprise customers also get access to an online experience portal showcasing an analytical and detailed view on the security posture and threat analytics in their network.

From <http://egov.eletsonline.com> 12/03/2020

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Internal Differences: A New Method for Seeing into Cells

Invading cells' private space – prying into their internal functions, decisions and communications – could be a powerful tool that may help researchers develop new immunotherapy treatment for cancer. As reported in Cell, a research group at the

Weizmann Institute of Science has developed a technology that enables them to see inside tens of thousands of individual cells at once in greater details than ever before. The group, headed by Prof. Ido Amit of the Institute's Immunology Department, applied this method to define the immune cells that infiltrate tumors, identifying a new subset of innate immune cells that "collaborate" with cancer. Blocking these inhibitory immune cells in mice greatly enhanced the anti-tumor immune response, killing the cancer. Amit and his group had previously made significant inroads into seeing into cells when they developed single cell RNA-sequencing – a means of sequencing all of the RNA in thousands of individual cells at once. The new technique, called INs-seq (intracellular staining and sequencing) – developed in Amit's lab in a project led by research students Yonatan Katzenelenbogen, Fadi Sheban, Adam Yalin and Dr. Assaf Weiner – enables scientists to measure, in addition to the RNA, numerous proteins, processes and biochemical pathways occurring inside each of the cells. To do this, they had to develop new methods of getting inside the cell membranes without harming its genetic content. This wealth of "inside information" can help them draw much finer distinctions between different cell subtypes and activities than is possible with existing methods, most of which are able to measure surface proteins only.

In fact, Amit compares those existing methods of cell characterization with buying watermelons: They all appear identical from the outside, even though they can taste completely different when you open them up. Distinguishing between subtypes of cells that seem identical from the outside, such as inhibitory- versus effector-immune cells, may be crucial when it comes to fighting off cancer. Although the principal groups of immune cells had been identified many decades ago, there are hundreds of subtypes with many different functions, which haven't been classified. "Specific immune subtypes, for example, may play a role in promoting cancer or enabling it to evade the immune system, provoke tissue destruction by overreacting to a virus or act mistakenly in autoimmune syndromes, attacking our own body. Until now, there was no sufficiently sensitive means of telling these apart from other subtypes that appear identical from the outside," says Sheban. In order to sort through these different immune functions inside tumors, the Weizmann scientists used their technology to address an issue that researchers had been trying to resolve for decades: Why does the immune system fail to recognize and kill cancer cells, and why does immunotherapy for most tumor types often fail? In searching for an answer, they asked whether cancers might hijack and manipulate particular immune cells to "defend" the cancer cells from the rest of the immune system. "The suspicion that some kind of immune cell might be actively 'collaborating' with cancer is not as strange as it seems," explains Yalin. "Immune responses are often meant to be short-lived, so the immune system has its own mechanisms for shutting them down. Cancers could take advantage of such mechanisms, enhancing the production of the 'shut-down' immune cells, which, in turn, could prevent such immune cells as T lymphocytes that would normally kill them from taking action."

Indeed, the team succeeded in identifying T-cell-blocking immune cells, which belonged to a general group known as myeloid cells – a broad group of innate immune cells that mostly originate in the bone marrow. Although this particular subset of suppressive myeloid cells was new, it was distinguished by a prominent signaling receptor that Prof. Amit and his group had seen before, called TREM2. This receptor is critical for the activity of the cells that block the actions of tumor-killing T cells; and normally cells bearing this receptor are crucial for preventing excess tissue damage after injury or calming an inflammatory immune response. But Amit had also come across a version of this receptor in other immune cells involved in Alzheimer's disease, metabolic syndrome and other immune-related pathologies. The group's next step is to develop an immunotherapy treatment using specific antibodies that target this receptor and could prevent these immune-suppressive cells from supporting the tumor. "Because this receptor is only expressed when there is some type of pathology," says Weiner, "targeting it will not damage healthy cells in the body." Preliminary evidence for the TREM2 therapeutics was demonstrated by the scientists in mouse models of cancer with genetically ablated TREM2 receptors. In those mice, tumor-killing T cells "came back to life" and attacked the cancer cells; and the tumors shrank significantly. If treatment based on this finding is, in the future, proven effective for human use, it might be administered on its own or in combination with other forms of immunotherapy.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 12/13/2020

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India & World Bank Inks Pact for Developing Green, Resilient & Safe Highways

With an aim to build green and safe national highway corridors in Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, the Government of India and the World Bank signed a \$500 million project on December 22. The move will also include enhancing the capacity of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) in mainstreaming safety and green technologies. The project will support MoRTH construct 783 km of highways in the identified states by integrating safe and green technology designs such as local and marginal materials, industrial byproducts, and other bioengineering solutions. The project will help reduce GHG emissions in the construction and maintenance of highways. The agreement was signed by Dr Mohapatra, Additional Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, on behalf of the Government of India and Sumila Gulyani, Acting Country Director, India, on behalf of the World Bank. Dr CS Mohapatra stated that the Government of India is committed to environmentally sustainable development in its infrastructure projects. This project will set new standards in the construction of safe motorable roads. The selected stretches in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh will also help improve connectivity and promote economic development.

The National Highways of India carry about 40 per cent of road traffic. The project will also support analytics to map the freight volume and movement pattern on the National Highway network, identify constraints, and provide innovative logistics solutions. Several sections of these highways have inadequate capacity, weak drainage structures and black spots prone to accidents. The project will, therefore, strengthen and widen existing structures; construct new pavements, drainage facilities and bypasses; improve junctions; and introduce road safety features. Also, infrastructure investments are climate-resilient. To this effect disaster risk assessment of about 5000 km of the National Highway network will also be undertaken under the project along with support to the ministry for mainstreaming climate resilience aspects in project design and implementation. The \$500 million loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), has a maturity of 18.5 years including a grace period of five years.

From <http://egov.eletsonline.com> 12/23/2020

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Importance of Press Release in Digital Marketing

Press release has been rapidly changing with time. Amazingly, its importance in digital marketing is increasing. Press releases are mainly used by firms to spread awareness about their brand or new product. If you are wondering whether press releases have an importance in digital marketing then you are thinking right! You must have heard about digital PR while learning some tips about digital marketing. Surprisingly, this is what press release is all about! Digital PR is highly essential for your business as it spreads awareness globally about your brand, products or services. We are sure that you are well aware how digital marketing strategies help you generate leads and efficiently increase conversions. But it is also vital of the business to focus on other marketing strategies that boost conversions and generate leads. Therefore, to achieve digital marketing goals, effective strategies of Public Relations should be implemented. The best part about press releases is that it even allows you to interact with your target audience by spreading awareness about new launches. So are you ready to know some incredible benefits of press release in digital marketing? Well, let's begin! As discussed earlier, press release offer incredible benefits for digital marketing strategies. This ensures that firms market their products and their brand more efficiently and interact with their target audience. Therefore, some important elements that we will highlight are as follows:

Press releases help digital marketers to find out new opportunities by exposing their product and brand to the target audience. It helps them to get new ideas for marketing campaigns to spread more awareness about their business. Creating landing pages is not the only solution to generate more leads towards your business. As the competition is fierce in the digital world, it is vital for you to build a strong

connection and deeply engage your target audience about your brand and product. You definitely would want to increase the reach of your site. Well, this is also ensure by press releases. They help to increase more traffic to your side and to generate more leads. This is because people are more influenced by the print media and all the new stories. So pulling a highly engaging press release will encourage people to search about your web and know about your business; hence increasing traffic and generating leads. The increase your brand visibility a highly engaging press release will attract the journalists towards your brand. They will be encourages to take more media converge of your business. This will even spread more awareness about your existence to the masses and the prospects that you would want to cater to. Most importantly, press release even helps you to build your business and brand as high authority. This increases the credibility of your brand that is always beneficial to boost the conversion rate. These major benefits can be ensured by press release distribution service. So if you want to boost the image of your brand then make sure you hire the best press release distribution service for your business.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 12/24/2020

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SRI LANKA: SLT Clarifies Situation Regarding Recent Cyber Attack on Internal IT System

SLT says that they have detected an attempt of a cyber-attack, which has affected only a section of their internal IT systems. Releasing a statement, the telco firm said that their early warning systems detected the attempt, and precautionary measures with the shutdown of some servers have been implemented without delay. "A REvil attack, which has affected IT systems all over the world from time to time, has been identified as the reason," the SLT said. "We kindly advise our customers to implement required precautionary measures as much as possible by considering the current hostile nature of these cyber-attacks." On the issue of the attempted cyber-attack on SLT's internal systems, SLT wishes to clarify the current situation to all its customers. The following is the official communique released by the Management. We, SLT wish to communicate to our customers that we have detected an attempt of a cyber-attack, which has affected only a section of our internal IT systems. Our vigilant early warning systems detected the attempt and precautionary measures with shutdown of some servers were implemented without delay. These servers are isolated and corrective action is being taken. There is no impact to any system that is used to provide SLT services. Thus, there is no risk to any services offered to our customers and also there is no risk to customer information. System experts are attending to the issue and have already identified all the areas and SLT internal services will be restored in a short time. Our expert teams have detected the threat at a very early stage and successfully isolated the problem.

SLT would like to affirm that all our government & business services, Voice Services,

Broadband Services, PeoTV and Hosting Services are not impacted due to this internal issue and that the customer information is safe and secure. The value added services such as ordering extra GB for Broadband services are also provided online, through the MySLT app and via contact center on 1212. A REvil attack, which has affected IT systems all over the world from time to time, has been identified as the reason. We kindly advise our customers to implement required precautionary measures as much as possible by considering the current hostile nature of these cyber-attacks.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 12/01/2020

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Dialog Extends Critical Connectivity Solutions to IDH Hospital

In an effort to support medical professionals and essential medical services during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, Dialog Axiata PLC, Sri Lanka's premier connectivity provider extended free critical connectivity solutions for video conferencing facilities and Internet access to support the medical staff at IDH – the central healthcare institution spearheading the control of COVID-19 outbreak in the country. This timely set up enabled the health care providers of IDH to share information and provide synchronous remote medical assistance to other hospitals and health care institutions. The Dialog Engineering team managed to fulfil the urgent IDH request within the same day, installing equipment to provide Dedicated Internet Leased Line, facilitate high-speed WiFi broadband connectivity and provide several mobile devices required by medical staff. While doctors, nurses and medical personnel extend their tireless efforts on the frontline against the spread of COVID-19, Dialog stepped forward to support and equip IDH with critical connectivity solutions, video conferencing facilities and mobile devices to empower health care professionals by giving them the required digital tools with which they can focus completely on diagnosis, mitigation, patient tracking, contamination prevention, protecting medical staff, and effectively conducting their daily emergency care efficiently and expeditiously.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 12/02/2020

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President Reviews Current Status of Proposed Unique Digital ID for Sri Lankans

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa reviewed the current status of the proposed “unique digital identity card”, which will be issued by obtaining biodata of all citizens only once in the lifetime. Individual biodata could be viewed physically as well as through the internet. The new identity card which contains the most accurate data comprises

information required by departments and agencies governed under different laws. It includes information that has to be furnished not only for obtaining passports and driving licenses but also for purposes of pension, Samurdhi allowance, income tax, and casting vote. The new identity card will be prepared by a committee of experts under the direction of the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) and the supervision of a Presidential Task Force. President instructed the officials to take measures to issue the new identity card to every citizen as soon as possible.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 12/02/2020

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Seylan Bank Drives Digital Transformation Journey with Fiorano

Seylan Bank recently announced their successful implementation of the Fiorano Hybrid Integration Platform (HIP). Fiorano Software, a leading Enterprise Integration Middleware, API Management and Banking Solutions specialist has enabled Seylan Bank to implement a digital banking integration ecosystem ensuring flexibility, dynamic adaptability and innovation, to leverage legacy systems while significantly improving customer experiences. Seylan Bank is the first bank in Sri Lanka to comprehensively expose all application APIs as Web Services via the Fiorano HIP (ESB). Commenting on this, Harsha Wanigatunga, CIO, Seylan Bank said, "In 2019, Seylan embarked on an ambitious Digital Drive; moving to a microservices-based platform like Fiorano has helped in our journey towards integrating new technologies via Web Services on our ESB platform to integrate and develop new services faster with greater security and agility. We have made significant strides in advancing our IT security, data analytics via a bank-wide comprehensive data warehouse and implementing cutting-edge advanced technologies. We will continue to grow our digital footprint, significantly increasing customer convenience and security, while seeing an upward usage of our products and services." "We are happy to have successfully completed the Fiorano middleware stack implementation at Seylan Bank, which was a very comprehensive implementation covering all facets of the business and a commendable team effort. We strongly believe that the technology would facilitate and enable the Bank on a very successful digital journey, whilst responding to the constantly changing market demand rapidly," stated Sunimal Weerasooriya, Country Director of Transnational Group, the local partner for Fiorano.

With Fiorano HIP effortlessly integrated into Seylan Bank's Core Banking System and Payment Switch on AS/400, iSeries IBM servers and with other applications on Unix and Microsoft based systems, the bank can seamlessly integrate applications, enabling Seylan to fast track their digital transformation journey. Seylan Bank will continue to have a reliable, secure and agile infrastructure for real-time information exchange to drive meaningful business outcomes. Seylan Bank, the Bank with a Heart, operates with a vision to offer the ultimate banking experience to its valued customers through cutting-edge technology, innovative products, and best-in-class

services. The Bank has a growing clientele of SMEs, Retail and Corporate Customers and has expanded its footprint with 173 branches across the country and an ATM network of 216 units. Seylan Bank has been endorsed as a financially stable organization with performance excellence across the board by Fitch Ratings, with the bank's national long-term rating revised to 'A (lka). The bank was ranked second among public listed companies for transparency in corporate reporting by Transparency Global and is now part of the S&P Dow Jones SL 20 Index. These achievements are a testament to Seylan Bank's financial stability and unwavering dedication to ensuring excellence across all aspects. For more information on products and services please visit www.seylan.lk.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 12/05/2020

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Sri Lanka's Angel Fund Shortlists Five Startups for Investment

The Angel Fund, the first of its kind in Sri Lanka, has shortlisted its five early-stage startups for potential investment; Niftron, Traccular, Medica, Soulboner Clothing, and Ophir. This follows an intense application and selection process, spanning September, October, and November 2020, which initially attracted 80 applications. The Angel Fund, launched earlier this year by the Lankan Angel Network (LAN), was established with the support of ecosystem development partner Ford Foundation to catalyze the growth of Sri Lanka's startup ecosystem. Comprising 100 angel investors, including many high-profile entrepreneurs and corporate leaders, who represent more than a dozen sectors with proven competencies in over 20 functional domains, the Angel Fund is also distinct in that it features 20% of its investment from members based out of Canada, Dubai, Hongkong, Qatar, UK, and the USA. The process was guided by the Fund's high-profile Investment Committee (IC) consisting of Angel Fund members Dumith Fernando, Chairman of Colombo Stock Exchange/Chairman of Asia Securities, Dumindra Ratnayaka, Chairman/Senior Consultant at Martin & George. The IC also comprises Nathan Sivagananathan, Co-Founder of Hatch Works; Anarkali Moonesinghe, former CEO of CIMB Sri Lanka; Mangala Karunaratne, Founder/CEO of Calcey Technologies; and Imal Kalutotage, Founder/CEO of NCINGA. Joining them as Independent IC Member is Shiluka Goonewardene, Principal – Deal Advisory – KPMG. Angel Fund IC member Dumith Fernando stated, "The investment approval process for the Angel Fund was quite robust with seasoned experts from varied backgrounds participating in the Investment Committee. We were encouraged by the quality of the shortlisted startups that presented to us. We set a high bar for investment selection this time. And even among those founders who did not gain funding this quarter, we found several who would be investable with some tweaks to their business models and plan."

The top five shortlisted startups were: Niftron – A Blockchain-as-a-Service platform that allows for easy and efficient integration of blockchain with products or projects, enhancing ownership, transparency, and security. Traccular – A cloud-based IoT-enabled visitor management system that provides a scalable solution for companies looking for an efficient check-in and verification process to improve efficiency and security. Medica – A cloud-based patient and prescription management platform for doctors. From when a patient registers, to when they walk out with their medicines from the pharmacy, the entire process is managed within Medica, which aims to build a digital ecosystem for primary health care for Sri Lanka. Soulboner Clothing – A fun, casual Sri-Lankan streetwear line made for GenZ and the young Millennial. The brand focuses on creating a lifestyle and a community and boasts a customer base in many countries. Ophir – A brand focusing on a range of chemical and synthetic-free, all-natural body care and spa products, which deliver the rich benefits of Camellia Sinensis, Ceylon Tea. Ophir taps into the skyrocketing global demand for natural skincare products, with the added advantage of Sri Lanka's millennia-old fame resulting from its cornucopia of botanicals, spices, and herbs, as well as Ayurveda. Independent IC Member Shiluka Goonewardene said, "The finalists for evaluation by the committee were all startups with good ideas and opportunities. The varied experience of the IC members enabled us to evaluate and shortlist the best participants for the funding stage. Overall, it was a great learning experience for me as well, listening to the presentations of the finalists and the follow-up discussions among the IC members." These startups will be featured at the LAN hosted Angel Roundup, an exclusive virtual event to be held in mid-December for the network's angel investors. The event is partnered with Sri Lanka's largest private-sector retail bank Hatton National Bank PLC, a long-term strategic partner for LAN.

Commenting on behalf of the top five shortlisted startups, Ophir Founder Rohini Nordmann said, "The Angel Fund has been both rigorous and supportive of its participants. A winning combination for the investment seekers as well as the investors." Angel Fund IC member Anarkali Moonesinghe added, "The Angel Fund was created to bridge the gaps that exist within the startup ecosystem in terms of opening this alternative asset class to a wider audience as well as connecting these investors with incredible entrepreneurs. It serves as not only an avenue to secure funding at an early stage, but also affords startups access to an amazing group of individuals who can be true mentors while, also, opening doors to international markets and networks." The Rs. 100 million Angel Fund has plans to eventually invest in six to 10 high potential startups in total, gearing them up to scale domestically, and even internationally. It is managed by LAN's fund management team, which continues to identify and evaluate opportunities for investment across the island, including in traditionally underserved regions. The fund is dedicated to investing in, and mentoring and supporting, early-stage startups across multiple sectors; from making investments at the early stages, to even helping startups identify sources for future funding. The Angel Fund also periodically evaluates

early-stage startups. Held every three months, these evaluation cycles are announced by the Fund via the Lankan Angel Network pages on Facebook and LinkedIn. (Media Release)

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 12/05/2020

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PAKISTAN: Punjab Govt Implementing Agenda of Equal Development for All Cities

Year 2021 will bring glad tidings for the people. The Punjab government, according to the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan, has started implementing the agenda of equal development for all cities of Punjab including Lahore. This year will bring a lot of happiness for the homeless people as the Punjab government is launching an unprecedented project in the housing sector under which 35,000 apartments will be constructed on 8,000 kanals of land. In the first phase 4,000 apartments are being set up in LDA city and this project will cost Rs 40 billion. Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar has directed to complete the initial proceeding of the housing project at the earliest. Buzdar while taking a keen interest in plying electric buses in the city has sought an immediate report from the transport department about this project. This project will result in a visible decrease in environmental pollution as well as introducing positive change in transport culture will also eradicate smog from the city. This is the main reason that the government is considering to launch this project in other cities as well. On the instructions of the Punjab Chief Minister and according to his vision of equal development, projects worth billions of rupees are being launched in Lahore, the major city of Punjab.

In order to provide modern and quality healthcare facilities, a state-of-the-art one thousand bed hospital on Ferozepur Road will prove to be a gift for Lahories from the incumbent government. Two overhead bridges and two underpasses will be constructed for the smooth flow of traffic of Lahore. A project of setting up a modern bus terminal at Thokar Niaz Baig is being started. Similarly, ten underground water tanks will be constructed for the storage and timely drainage of rainwater. Usman Buzdar expressed sheer determination for the real development of Lahore in 2021 and said that no stone will be left unturned for the beautification of the megacity and the heart of Punjab. Usman Buzdar said that the government is intended to bring the neglected areas of the past at par with other cities. He said that despite spending billions of rupees in the near past a big portion of the population of Lahore is still not getting the benefit of development. He said that spending the national exchequer without determining the actual problems is equal to waste national resources. He said that PTI government has a clear vision for solving the residential problems of the people. He said that the government will not befool the people by launching self-projected and exhibitory projects.

Meanwhile, Usman Buzdar is performing his official engagements despite being in self-isolation. Usman Buzdar while expressing gratitude thanked Allah Almighty that he is recovering day by day. However, I am facing physical weakness due to Covid-19, he added. Usman Buzdar disclosed that his medical reports are satisfactory and there is a hope of early recovery. He said that he did not postpone discharging official affairs of Punjab not even for an hour. He thanked those who prayed for his early recovery. He termed wearing mask and observing social distance a best preventive measure.

From <https://dailytimes.com.pk/> 12/05/2020

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Number of Phishing Attacks on Azerbaijani Web Sites Down

One successful phishing attack on each 78th website in the ".az" domain zone (registered for Azerbaijan) was recorded in November 2020, which is 1.7 percent of the total number of attacks registered in the national domain of internet resources, [Trend](#) reports citing a report of the Netcraft analytical company. According to the company, a total of 461 Azerbaijani sites faced with phishing attacks, the number of which decreased by 25.8 percent compared to the previous month (621 sites). "Up until now, more than 36,000 were registered in the ".az" domain zone," the company said. As the company also noted, in Ukraine every 204th website faced with one phishing attack, in Russia - every 51st website, in Belarus - every 886th website, in Latvia - for every 109th website, in Lithuania - every 43rd website, in Estonia - every 130th website, in Kazakhstan - every 650th website, in Uzbekistan - every 325th website, and in Georgia – every 214th website also faced with 1 phishing attack. "The phishing attack is carried out by sending a large number of emails on behalf of popular brands. The emails often contain a direct link to a fake brand site that does not visually differ from the real one. By entering such a site, the user can provide hackers with valuable information that allows them to gain access to their personal accounts and bank accounts," added the company.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/01/2020

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Several Mobile Stations Commissioned in Azerbaijan's Liberated Territories

The project 'Such are matters' of the Azerbaijan Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies has issued video footage on the creation of

the first mobile network in the Karabakh region, [Trend](#) reports referring to the ministry. The footage presenters provided detailed information on the process of creating the first mobile communication network in the Azerbaijani territories liberated from the Armenian occupation. It was noted that the first Azerbaijani communications engineers who visited the liberated territories built the Zafar station in Jabrayil. They also built and commissioned the 'SHAKIR' (Shusha-Agdam-Kalbajar Implementation Radio) station, as well as the Shusha station in the center of Shusha city. The ministry, on the basis of modern technologies, will build telecommunications and postal infrastructure, expand television and radio broadcasting coverage, and provide modern passenger transportation services in the liberated territories. The population of the liberated territories will be provided with high-quality transport, telecommunication, and postal services.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/09/2020

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Pandemic Introduces Some IT Solutions in Azerbaijan

A great increase in demand for online services and solutions is observed in the Azerbaijani domestic market in 2020, Chairman of the supervisory board of the Bestcomp Group Rauf Hasanov said. Hasanov made the remark during the MAINTech Forum event within the Innovations and Technologies project, [Trend](#) reports on Dec. 16. "More than one million pupils have been connected to online education in Azerbaijan this year," chairman said. "Our company has been involved in connecting of the education sector to the Microsoft Teams solution." Besides the educational sector, Hasanov stressed that many entrepreneurs were forced to enter online markets and create their own platforms to continue their business and accept online payments. "Among these entrepreneurs, there is a big number of those who successfully launched the platforms for such a business and continue to develop in this sphere," chairman added.

"ASAN service has developed a number of applications and solutions in connection with the pandemic," Azer Bayramov, employee of the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the president of Azerbaijan (ASAN service), said. The main solutions of the ASAN service are the online provision of the population with public services, as well as an innovative solution for obtaining SMS permits, which aroused interest in foreign countries. "From the point of view of an innovative sphere, we have developed and have seen a number of solutions that we never even thought about," Bayramov said. "Many companies that have adapted to the modern requirements have been greatly developed and were able to enter the domestic and foreign markets." Bayramov stressed that besides rendering the services to the population, the ASAN service also renders all the necessary state services to the entrepreneurs of the country online. "Big IT companies and developers in the coming

years will establish cooperation with startups and their projects," Mammad Karimov, director of the INNOLAND innovation center, said. "

As opposed to the big companies, startupperes are the fastest in developing solutions, they work around the clock, do not require special permits for their activity, which can lead to the cooperation of big companies with them," Karimov said. "A huge number of start-up solutions have been developed since the beginning of this year," Karimov said. "Big IT companies in the future will focus on cooperation with startups to conduct joint development of projects and business."

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/17/2020

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Liberation of Azerbaijani Territories Contributes to Development of Regional Cooperation

The international online conference World Net Summit was held jointly by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies of Azerbaijan, UNDP, and FA International Trade Events, the ministry told [Trend](#) on Dec.18. Welcoming the online event's participants, the ministry's head Ramin Guluzade noted that the liberation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan (from Armenian Armed Forces as a result of 44-day war from Sept.27 through early Nov. 2020) has created new opportunities for their development and will contribute to the development of regional cooperation in the field of innovations. Guluzade stressed that modern technologies play an important role in solving the problem of the spread of the pandemic - one of the main problems of today and that digital technologies prevent the deterioration of its economic and social consequences. "During (COVID-19) pandemic, the need to use these technologies is growing rapidly, and we must be prepared for the changes brought by them.

Our country has adopted a reliable strategy to combat the pandemic and minimize its impact," he said. "We have provided high quality and sustainable services with extensive information technology applications. Digital development and innovation in Azerbaijan is a priority on the government's political agenda." Besides, as he stressed, the country is expanding the use of smart city solutions. This activity is one of the 'open government' initiatives and is reflected in the National Action Plan for the Promotion of 'Open Government' 2020-2022. "Digital technologies will play an important role in restoring a more reliable, coordinated, and sustainable world in the post-pandemic period. For this, governments need to work on new strategies and long-term programs and actively collaborate," he concluded. In turn, the technical director of Baykar Makina and the creator of the unmanned aerial vehicle Bayraktar TB2 Seljuk Bayraktar once again congratulated Azerbaijan on the liberation of its territories. He stressed that drones play an important role in the development of a startup ecosystem in the national military-industrial sphere. At the conference, which

is being held online in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, reports were presented on innovative strategies in the post-pandemic period, the steps that investors need to take, the problems faced by fintech companies during this period, and other topics.

Heads of the region's innovation centers discussed the current situation in connection with the startup ecosystem. Within the framework of the World Net Summit, such international online panels will be organized as Monex Summit Caspian, Global Influencer Day, Government Address, AutoTech Conf, StartUp Academy, Venture Summit, Corporate Innovation Forum, covering topics of the Internet, finance, banking, technology, transport, investment, business, insurance, innovation, and other related areas. World Net Summit is an important platform that brings together representatives of international organizations, government agencies, public organizations, micro, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, investors, experts, and start-ups. The event was attended by representatives of government bodies, the private sector, international organizations, high-ranking government officials of foreign countries, ministers, representatives of the foreign diplomatic corps in Azerbaijan country, as well as the technical director of Baykar Makina Seljuk Bayraktar and other experts.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/18/2020

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Azerbaijan Records Sharp Decline in Inflow of Foreign Tourists

Like other countries, Azerbaijan is also observing a crisis in the tourism sector caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Trend reports citing the State Border Service of Azerbaijan. From January through November 2020, 756,800 foreigners and stateless persons from 155 countries visited Azerbaijan, which is 3.9 times less compared to the same period of 2019, said the service's report. According to the report, 28.2 percent of those who came to the country during the specified period are citizens of Russia, 23.7 percent – of Georgia, 19.5 percent - Turkey, 8.9 percent - Iran, 2.1 percent - Ukraine, 1.7 percent - India, 1.6 percent - Saudi Arabia, 1.1 percent - the UAE and Kazakhstan each, 1 percent - Pakistan and Turkmenistan each, 0.9 percent - Kuwait and the UK each, 0.8 percent - Belarus, 0.7 percent - Uzbekistan and Iraq each, 0.5 percent - Germany and Israel each, 5 percent - citizens of other countries and 0.1percent - stateless persons.

Among those who arrived, 80.3 percent were men, 19.7 percent - women, added the report. During this period, the number of people who came to Azerbaijan from China decreased 16.4 times, from South Korea - 13.6 times, Israel - 10.7 times, Japan - 10 times, Poland - 9.9 times, Iraq - 9. 2 times, Saudi Arabia - 8.6 times, Hungary - 8.4 times, the UAE - 7.2 times, Oman and Canada - 7.1 times each, the US - 7 times, Turkmenistan - 6.1 times, France - 6 times, Germany and Qatar - 5.7 times, the

Netherlands and Kazakhstan - 5.3 times each, the UK - 5.2 times, and Italy - 4.3 times. Totally, the number of arrivals from EU countries decreased 5.9 times year on year, amounting to 22,100 people, from the Gulf countries, the number of arrivals decreased 4.8 times, amounting to 105,300 people, and from the CIS countries decreased by 4.1 times, amounting to 259,300 people. As reported, 69.7 percent of foreigners and stateless persons who arrived in Azerbaijan used rail and road transport, 27.9 percent - air and 2.4 percent – maritime transport.

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Azerbaijan's Electricity Supplier Introduces Easy Way to Replenish Smart Card Balance

Azerbaijan's Azerishig OJSC subscribers are already able to replenish the balance of smart cards of electricity counters using a mobile device, the company told Trend. As the company said, to replenish the balance of smart cards, subscribers will need a device called a 'card reader'. This device is on sale at 'ASAN Kommunal' and 'ASAN Service' branches. "Users of smartphones with Micro-USB, Type-C, and Lightning charger inputs, are needed to purchase a device with the corresponding input. To pay for Azerishig services via the mobile app, it is necessary to enter the 'subscriber's code' or the data of the smart card in the appropriate section," Azerishig added. These 'card readers' are not produced by 'Azerishig'. Azerishig OJSC is a developer of a mobile application (software solution) associated with this card reader. To remind, Azerishig OJSC plans to integrate into its projects a technical solution that allows subscribers to register their numbers in the company's mobile app. Through this, it will be possible to make payments through the NFC systems of mobile devices. At the same time, as the message of the Azerishig said, funds will be withdrawn from the balance of the SIM card.

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Azerbaijan Takes Part in Event Dedicated to Use of Artificial Intelligence

The Azerbaijani side took part in the third plenary meeting of the Ad hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence, established by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE), the Center for the Development of Electronic Government under the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of Azerbaijan told [Trend](#). Azerbaijan was represented at the online event by Director of the Center Fariz Jafarov, Adviser to the Director of the Center on Artificial Intelligence Gunay Kazimzade, and specialist of the Center Aziza Vidadi. "The event was dedicated to the use of artificial intelligence," the center said. "The parties discussed

the issues of legal activity in this sphere, human rights, creation, development, and application of artificial intelligence based on democracy." Moreover, the parties exchanged views with stakeholders. During the preparation of the feasibility study presented by the committee, the Azerbaijani delegation made comments on the methodology, terminology, classification, and systematization, and also proposed the application of artificial intelligence and the legal framework in specific spheres. A feasibility study on a legal document on artificial intelligence, which will be submitted to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2021, was adopted following the meeting. EBRD Director Fariz Jafarov was elected as an observer member of the Bureau of the Committee on Artificial Intelligence from Azerbaijan by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe last year. Secretary-General of the Council of Europe Marija Pejčinović Burić, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Rik Daems, Federal Minister of Justice and Consumer Protection of Germany Christian Kastrop delivered speeches at the plenary session.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/24/2020

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Azerbaijan's Web Provider Switching to Prepayment-Based Service

Demand for internet services has significantly grown in Azerbaijan due to the introduction of a COVID-19-related quarantine regime in Azerbaijan and the transition of the schools and universities to distance learning, as well as distance work, a source in the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies told [Trend](#). According to the source, a need to ensure sustainable and alternative infrastructure in the country at a higher level has become obvious. Due to the growing demand of the users for internet services, the ministry is carrying out comprehensive work to improve the quality of service for internet infrastructure throughout Azerbaijan, said the ministry. "AzDataCom provider, which is the operator of the Data Processing Center under the ministry, renders broadband (ADSL) internet services in all cities and regional centers of the country," the source said. "Besides, the provider will switch to a prepayment service system from January 1, 2021. Starting from the first days of the upcoming year, internet fees will be paid on a daily basis. Thus, the last date of the month before the new one will be considered the last day of payment for the operator's services." AzDataCom subscribers can pay a monthly subscription fee through the online payment systems of Azerbaijan, in the branches of Azerpost LLC, as well as through POS terminals, the source added.

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Azerbaijani Parliament Approves Amount of Living Wage for 2021 in Second Reading

The Azerbaijani parliament considered a bill of the law 'On living wage in Azerbaijan for 2021' at the meeting held on Dec.28, Trend reports. According to the bill's forecast, the living wage will make up 196 manat (\$115.3) in the country. For the able-bodied population, the forecast amount will be 207 manat (\$121.7), for pensioners - 162 manat (\$95.3), and for children - 175 manat (\$102.9). On average, these indicators are 6 manat (\$3.5) or 3.1 percent more than in 2020. Following discussions, the bill was put up on a vote and adopted in the second reading.

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UZBEKISTAN: ADB Assists in Boosting Employment for Young People

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$93 million loan for improvement market-relevant skills development for young people and unemployed job seekers, Trend reports referring to the press service of ADB. "Uzbekistan has significant potential to drive economic growth and create jobs but a lack of skills has been a critical constraint for private sector growth and economic diversification," ADB Senior Social Sector Specialist Xin Long said. "This project will help students and job seekers pick up the relevant skills they need to thrive in the job market of the 21st century," she added. The Skills Development for a Modern Economy Project seeks to develop a skilled workforce in five priority trades: construction; textiles and garments; information and communication technology; agribusiness and food processing; and machinery-repair and maintenance. According to the ADB release, at least 60,000 people, including 48,000 unemployed job seekers and 500 people with disabilities will benefit from the project. The project will also benefit industries seeking skilled workers and returning migrants who pursue reskilling or recognition of prior learning in the target domains. "The project also represents a timely response to the coronavirus disease pandemic by supporting government expenditure on social assistance and labor market interventions," ADB Country Director for Uzbekistan Cindy Malvicini said. The project will also establish industry collaboration at key stages of skills development while introducing skills gap surveys to enable training service providers to dynamically plan ahead to fit the future skills needs in the market. In addition, the project will complement ADB's planned financing of the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Development Program in Uzbekistan, which aims to link enterprises with skills. It will form synergies with other

development partners' support for skills development and labor market development in the country.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: PM Morrison Applauds Economic Comeback

Australia remains on course to post its first quarter of economic growth this year and the emergence from recession when the national accounts are handed down on Wednesday. Despite some last minute tinkering, economists' forecasts centre on a 2.4 per cent rise in growth during the September quarter, a partial recovery from the massive seven per cent contraction three months earlier. A splash of economic indicators released on Tuesday also suggest the December quarter could be buoyant with consumer confidence on the rise again, house prices recovering and employment improving. "All this demonstrates that the comeback is on," Prime Minister Scott Morrison told parliament via video link from The Lodge, where he is isolating after a recent trip to Japan. Reserve Bank governor Philip Lowe agreed that recent data have generally been better than expected.

"This is good news, but the recovery is still expected to be uneven and drawn out and it remains dependent on significant policy support," Dr Lowe said in a statement following the central bank's final board meeting of the year. As expected, the board left its suite of monetary policy measures unchanged having cut the cash rate, and other key rates, to a record low 0.1 per cent last month. It also entered into a quantitative easing program for the first time, announcing in November \$100 billion of bond purchases over the next six months with the intent of keeping market interest rates low and, in turn, borrowing costs down. Dr Lowe said in the past month, the central bank bought \$19 billion of government bonds under the program. He also reiterated the board was not expecting to increase the cash rate for at least three years given the outlook for inflation and unemployment.

The final segments for the September quarter growth result rolled out on Tuesday, including a large \$6.3 billion fall in the current account trade surplus to \$10 billion. This resulted in exports detracting a relatively hefty two percentage points from growth in the September quarter. "Despite this and the lockdown in Victoria, the economy almost certainly expanded, with consumer spending able to rebound sharply as a result of the relaxation of restrictions and control of the disease," BIS Oxford Economics chief economist Sarah Hunter said. The Australian Bureau of Statistics latest payrolls report shows jobs grew 0.1 per cent nationally in the fortnight to November 14, but by 0.4 per cent in Victoria. ABS head of labour statistics Bjorn

Jarvis said this was the third consecutive fortnightly payroll jobs rise in Victoria, but they remain 5.4 per cent lower than mid-March when the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Nationally, payroll jobs are down 2.9 per cent since mid-March. Improving economic conditions has provided a bounce to consumer confidence. The weekly ANZ-Roy Morgan consumer confidence index - a pointer to future household spending - rose 2.9 per cent to its highest level since late February. The index fell in the previous week, which ended an 11-week run of consecutive gains. "This could bode well for economic activity and spending over the coming weeks," ANZ head of Australian Economics David Plank said. Growing new manufacturing orders also suggest a continuing recovery in the sector heading into 2021. The Australian Industry Group's performance of manufacturing index declined 4.2 points to 52.1 points in November, but held above the key 50 points level which separates expansion from contraction. "Encouragingly, both new orders and employment continued to grow in November, pointing to the prospect of a continuing recovery as we head towards the end of the year," Ai Group chief executive Innes Willox said.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/01/2020

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Aussies Urged to Embrace Domestic Tourism

The federal government is spruiking domestic travel as the summer holidays loom in an attempt to pull the tourism industry out of coronavirus-induced strife. "Hop on a plane, go interstate," Tourism Minister Simon Birmingham told Nine News on Saturday. "The borders are now open, the tourism operators have got generous terms and conditions in case anything happens to make sure you get your money back. "So you can do it with confidence, head across the country and help support an industry that's so crucial to our nation." He said international travel was off the menu for some time so Australians had an opportunity to explore at home. Western Australia remains the only state with a question mark over its border, as Premier Mark McGowan has yet to decide whether he will reopen to NSW residents as scheduled. WA remains on track to open up to Victoria from Tuesday, dropping the 14-day requirement for travel from that state.

But a decision on whether the NSW border will reopen from the same date won't be made until Monday when further information is available on a Sydney quarantine hotel cleaner's infection. It comes despite genome sequencing revealing the woman contracted the virus at work, rather than in the community. Travellers from NSW and Victoria have been blocked from entering WA for almost nine months unless they went into quarantine and, until recently, secured exemptions. NSW had almost reached 30 days without a locally-transmitted case when the quarantine hotel cleaner's case was confirmed, raising concerns she contracted it in the community.

But NSW Health on Saturday said the infection was likely linked to her workplace, with viral genome sequencing pointing to US origin. Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews is expected to announce a relaxation of mask-wearing rules and increase on social gathering limits on Sunday.

Victoria has been free of locally transmitted coronavirus cases for more than a month and with no active cases, has officially eradicated the virus. However, the impressive zero-case run has been achieved while international flights into the state have been diverted since June because of health breaches in hotel quarantine that caused a second COVID-19 wave. The state's health apparatus and a revamped hotel quarantine program will be put to the test from Monday as international arrivals resume. Meanwhile, Northern Territorians are embracing a new COVID-19 check-in system with more than 31,000 people downloading the smartphone application in the first week. The system helps health officials trace people who may have come into contact with the coronavirus. On Saturday, no new locally-acquired cases were recorded nationally, while NSW, Queensland and WA each reported a few new overseas virus cases, all in hotel quarantine.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/05/2020

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Australian Cashless Society Unlikely: RBA

Reserve Bank governor Philip Lowe doubts Australia will get to the point of being a cashless society but perhaps a "society with less cash in it". Dr Lowe told a payments systems online conference that cash still has an important role to play as an emergency payment method. He says there are always stories where a bank's systems have gone down or a merchant's internet is not working so an electronic payment can't be made. "In almost every case you can guarantee that you can use cash to make the payment," Dr Lowe told the Australian Payments Network conference. "So I think many people will want to hold cash." However, he said if the electronic system was more resilient, that would probably take away the desire of at least some people to carry \$50 or \$100 notes in case something goes wrong. "But we need a payment system that can work when the electronic system isn't working and cash is the best one so far," he said.

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic has seen the stock of notes in the economy at its highest in at least 50 or 60 years, with strong demand for \$50 and \$100 notes. Dr Lowe said in the first days of the pandemic people were nervous, some were taking their money out of the bank, although not to the same magnitude of the global financial crisis a decade ago. "That settled down pretty quickly," he said. Even so, many people were taking out a few hundred dollars extra to keep at home just in case something went wrong. "There was a lockdown and they wanted to make sure they had some kind of cash that they could use to buy the basic necessities". Dr

Lowe said in time he expected the notes to "come out of the system and back to the Reserve Bank". The governor made no reference to monetary policy or the state of the economy during his address.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/07/2020

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Farm Production Tipped to Hit \$65 Billion

Australia's farm production is tipped to hit \$65 billion on the back of a bumper harvest while exports are expected to fall amid ongoing trade tensions with China. The federal government's agriculture forecaster ABARES on Monday released its latest commodities report which predicts a seven per cent increase in 2020/21 production. "Overall, Australian agricultural production is bouncing back from the drought," ABARES executive director Steve Hatfield-Dodds said. Exports are forecast to fall seven per cent to \$44.7 billion because of residual effects from dry years and trade uncertainties. Australian barley and wine have copped the brunt of China's trade action. The anti-dumping measures are likely to reduce wine production value and sales with a lack of access to the key Chinese market. Fruit and vegetable prices are expected to rise in domestic markets due to coronavirus travel restrictions limiting labour available for harvesting.

Prices of summer vegetables, stone fruit, apples, pears and table grapes are forecast to rise by between 15 per cent and 25 per cent. Agriculture Minister David Littleproud said trade tensions and labour shortages would present challenges to the sector. "I am particularly concerned at the potential impacts of China's decisions to impose anti-dumping and countervailing duties on barley and the recent impost of provisional anti-dumping duties on Australian wine," he said. Dr Hatfield-Dodds said ebbs and flows in farm production were expected given Australia's variable environment. "We're expecting a near all-time high winter crop, the best ever in New South Wales, and a more favourable outlook for summer cropping than we have seen in recent years," he said. "Livestock prices have also stayed high with herd and flock rebuilding, and continued international demand."

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Some Risk Lengthy Unemployment, RBA Warns

Some Australians face a prolonged period of unemployment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, a Reserve Bank of Australia analysis has warned. It says while the economic outlook is highly uncertain, it is likely that the unemployment rate will remain elevated for a number of years. "As such, some unemployed people are facing the prospect of a prolonged period of unemployment," research in the central

bank's monthly bulletin says. It says the average duration of unemployment has increased steadily over the 2010s. Currently around one in every five unemployed people has been jobless for more than a year, an increase from about one in every eight a decade ago. The share of very long-term unemployed people also increased over this period with around 10 per cent having been without a job for two or more years. "The longer a person is unemployed, the harder it may be for them to find a job," it says.

"This could be because they lose skills and networks, there is a stigma associated with being long-term unemployed, or because people become discouraged and leave the labour force." Long-term unemployed people are more likely to be older and male and have lower levels of formal education than those who have been unemployed for a shorter period. The research shows the mean average of the long-term unemployed is 37 years of age, with 61 per cent male and with only 11 per cent having a university degree. Labor jumped on the figures, saying it confirms the Morrison government's hiring credit scheme will not help many of the people worst affected by long-term unemployment. The scheme is an incentive for businesses to employ additional young job seekers aged 16-35 years.

"More Australians will be left out and left behind in the wake of this recession because of deliberate and damaging decisions like this," opposition employment spokesman Brendan O'Connor and shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers said in a joint statement. "In the deepest and most damaging recession in almost a century, the Australian people deserve a government that chases jobs, not headlines, and doesn't leave workers over 35 behind." The Reserve Bank research says long periods of unemployment are associated with lower incomes and financial stress, which can also be debilitating for the individuals, families and communities that are affected. "For the economy as a whole, long-term unemployment reduces the effective pool of workers and increases the cost of welfare support," it says.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/10/2020

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Cheap Data and 5G Could Compete with NBN

Cheaper data and the roll-out of 5G technology could be a viable competitor to the NBN. Mobile prices fell 17 percent in 2019-20 thanks to a drop in the cost of entry level plans and significant growth in data allowances, according to the ACCC's annual Communications Market Report. The consumer watchdog noted a modest 2 percent fall in NBN broadband prices with an increase in the cost of entry level plans tempering the decline. "The growth in data allowances for mobile services means consumers received better value from their mobile plans," chair Rod Sims said. "Whether this trend continues into 2021 will depend on how strongly mobile operators compete for new customers." The ACCC noted that while the 5G footprint

is limited, operators continue to invest in roll-out plans to bring faster speeds, lower latency and the prospect of greater competition with fixed line broadband services.

"The impact in the mobile market is likely to depend on the willingness of consumers and businesses to upgrade to more expensive devices," Mr Simms said. According to comparative website WhistleOut, 5G speeds for home internet vary between around 50Mbps and 300Mbps. In terms of pricing, Optus offer a \$75 per month plan capped at 100Mbps which WhistleOut says is cheaper than most NBN 100 Mbps plans. It also offers a \$90 option with uncapped speed and both plans have unlimited data. Telstra charge \$85 per month for a 500GB plan currently available on an invite-only basis. "From my perspective, 5G is far more interesting as an NBN alternative than it is for mobile devices right now," WhistleOut Managing Editor Alex Choros said. "Given the speeds you can achieve for prices similar to NBN 50 and NBN 100 plans, it will be a compelling option for many Australians, especially those struggling with subpar speeds on Fibre to the Node connections or Fixed Wireless.

"As the 5G rollout progresses, it's inevitable NBN Co and NBN providers will have to factor this into how plans are priced." In September NBN Co announced it had concluded its initial build and the ACCC said this underlined the importance of commercial access arrangements to encourage competition in retail markets. "There are promising signs of further consumer benefit as RSPs (retail service providers) take up improved offers strengthened via commercial negotiation undertaken over the course of our public inquiries," Mr Sims said. "The importance of maximising use of the NBN through improved affordability and strong retail competition cannot be overstated if we are to realise the full economic and social benefits of this significant investment."

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

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Climate Action Calls Spill onto Streets

Protesters calling for the declaration of a "climate emergency" have clashed with police in Melbourne amid news the federal government is unlikely to rely on "carry-over credits" to reach its 2030 Paris emissions reduction target. Some activists glued and chained themselves to each other and the pavement on Saturday, before being arrested by officers carrying bolt-cutters. "Australia needs to be a climate lifter, not a climate leaner. We are about to go over a cliff but nobody seems nearly alarmed enough," rally participant Miriam Robinson said. "It has been five years since the Paris Agreement and we are still moving far too slowly to avert global catastrophe. Australia does not even have a coherent national plan, just piecemeal policies and a lot of excuses."

Saturday's dramatic street scenes follow Prime Minister Scott Morrison's address to

a Pacific Islands Forum overnight, during which he hinted the government could ditch the controversial plan to use Kyoto credits amassed before 2020. "Australia is very confident that we will now achieve our 2030 targets without the need to draw on our carry-over credits," he told the virtual forum. Australia's emissions are projected to be 29 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030 compared with its Paris accord target of 26 per cent to 28 per cent. Labor climate change spokesman Mark Butler on Saturday accused the government of misrepresenting the data, saying Australia was only on track for a 22 per cent reduction by 2030. He called for the government to commit to net zero emissions by 2050, as New Zealand has, and to work harder to meet the Paris target.

"The government's projections clearly show there will only be a reduction in emissions between 2020 and 2030 of less than seven per cent," Mr Butler said in a statement. "At that rate, it will take 146 years to get to net zero emissions. "Electricity is the only sector with considerable emissions reduction and that is due to state government policies and households choosing to install rooftop solar." Pacific island nations have long called for Australia and NZ, as regional leaders, to do more on climate. Climate is a sensitive coalition policy area and Mr Morrison has beefed up his language on the perceived emissions credits. "Those credits that have been earned have been earned by farmers investing in changes," he told reporters in Canberra on Friday. The forum comes days after the prime minister confirmed he would not speak at an online summit organised by the United Nations, the UK and France, a move Mr Butler said demonstrated Australia's "isolation" on climate policy.

More than 70 nations are speaking at the event, including China, which has recently committed to net zero emissions by 2060. Greenpeace Australia said it was embarrassing the prime minister wasn't speaking at the UN summit. Saturday's protest in Melbourne included a road block and boats on the Yarra. "We demand that the government declares a climate and ecological emergency, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero as fast as humanly possible," Ms Robinson said.

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Frydenberg Expects Fast Jobless Recovery

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg has cut his unemployment rate forecasts as new figures showed a further 90,000 people found employment in November. This was more than double the number expected by economists and trimmed the jobless rate to 6.8 per cent when it was forecast to remain 7.0 per cent. "It's terrific news," Prime Minister Scott Morrison told 2SM radio shortly after the data was released on Thursday. The Australian Bureau of Statistics data showed 84,200 full-time jobs were created in the November, along with 5800 part-time positions. The participation rate

of those people in work or seeking employment also rose to 66.1 per cent from 65.8 per cent. The release of the ABS figures coincided with Mr Frydenberg handing down his mid-year budget review. Aside from trimming the budget deficit and upgrading his economic forecasts, the treasurer also lowered the expected peak for the jobless rate to 7.5 per cent by the March quarter of next year, down from eight per cent forecast in the delayed October budget.

Economists at National Australia Bank believe the unemployment rate has already peaked, after hitting a 22-year high of 7.5 per cent in June. Even so, Mr Frydenberg expects the unemployment rate will recover to its pre-COVID-19 level of just above five per cent in around four years, compared with six years after the 1980s recession and a decade after the 1990s downturn. "We have come a long way from Treasury's initial estimate that the unemployment rate could reach 10 per cent or 15 per cent," Mr Frydenberg told reporters in Canberra. However, despite this positive news almost one million people are still unemployed. "The economy is a bit stronger now than the Morrison government and most forecasters imagined in the depths of this crisis, but is still much weaker than it needs to be," shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers and Labor's finance spokeswoman Katy Gallagher said in a statement.

"The economy still hasn't rebounded strongly enough or quickly enough for the 2.2 million Australians who are looking for work or more work right now." But BIS Oxford Economics chief economist Sarah Hunter says overall the latest job figures confirm the recovery is now well-entrenched. "Not unexpectedly, Victoria is responsible for the majority - 80 per cent - of the increase in employment in November, with the easing of restrictions in Melbourne allowing many businesses to re-open and take on staff," she said. However, Australian Industry Group chief executive Innes Willox felt this concentration of jobs growth in Victoria "illustrates that the pace of jobs growth and recovery in the rest of the country eased considerably in November".

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/17/2020

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NAB Boss Tips Economy to Fire in 2021

NAB chief executive Ross McEwan expects the Australian economy will be back to pre-COVID levels by the end of next year, but acknowledges some of the bank's customers face a long struggle. Mr McEwan on Friday gave an upbeat outlook to 2021 and cited the September GDP gain of 3.3 per cent and bank research. "We now think the economy will be back to 2019 growth levels by the end of 2021," he told NAB's annual general meeting, held online. "That's about a year earlier than we previously thought." He said the economic activity anticipated late next year equated to the bank's best case scenario from its planning earlier this year. Chairman Philip Chronican said the bank was in a much better economic environment than

anticipated a few months ago. Their comments came before most states and territories imposed coronavirus restrictions on travellers from Sydney or NSW. An outbreak has infected 28 people in the state capital.

NAB has had its challenges. Full-year profit slumped more than 45 per cent amid the pandemic. The organisation also set an additional \$1.86 billion aside for bad debts that could arise. NAB reported 90 per cent of customers who had loan repayments deferred, amounting to \$60 billion in loans, had since resumed repayments. Yet not all customers are recovering financially. Mr McEwan said he had written to 5.8 million customers in the past few weeks to offer help. "Most will just need a bit more time to recover," he said. "But some customers' situations have changed permanently." Mr McEwan and Mr Chronican were optimistic but guarded about dividends returning to regular levels about a total payout of 60 cents per share for 2020. "We will resume paying at higher levels when it's right to do so," Mr McEwan said. Mr McEwan has tried to focus the NAB's activities on banking and has reduced the number of projects. He said the sale of MLC Wealth to IOOF, due next year, was the last major structural change. Shares were down 1.87 per cent to \$23.40 at 1425 AEDT.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/18/2020

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Renewed Call for JobSeeker Increase

Welfare groups are calling for a permanent increase in JobSeeker payments to bring people above the poverty line as the federal government moves to reduce COVID-19 benefits. The Morrison government plans to lower the JobSeeker unemployment supplement by \$100 a fortnight from Friday, January 1, and the JobKeeper payment by \$200 on Monday. The new rates will be \$150 a fortnight for Jobseeker and \$1000 for JobKeeper and are effective until the end of March. The Australian Council of Social Service says the move will see vulnerable people trying to get by on \$50 a day. The agency has called for a permanent increase of JobSeeker to \$65 a day to bring people above the poverty line. "As 2021 begins and everyone tries to put 2020 behind them, people without paid work will be trying to get by on just \$50 a day, which simply isn't enough to cover housing, food, transport and bills," ACOSS CEO Cassandra Goldie said.

"The number of people on JobSeeker doubled to 1.5 million during the pandemic and is expected to rise still more when JobKeeper ends in March." JobSeeker is scheduled to revert to its pre-coronavirus rate of an "unliveable" \$40 a day, and the Youth Allowance will be \$33 a day, Dr Goldie said. "People and the economy need security to be able to rebuild - virtually every dollar of the coronavirus supplement goes straight back into the local economy, helping to keep other people in employment." The federal government has always said the increased payments were a temporary measure which began in March during the nationwide lockdown.

They have been extended in staggered reductions. Federal Labor warned it is too early to reduce the payment. "We are not out of the woods yet with this pandemic and the economic effects, they (are) reverberating around the economy, especially in regional towns and suburbs where there is a lot of casual workers who have borne the biggest brunt," Labor's Bill Shorten told Nine's Today Show on Tuesday. "For the less well off, we shouldn't be cutting their circumstances at this point in time." "The government should reconsider it."

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/30/2020

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Australia a Nation of 'Overcomers': PM

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has lauded the courage, resilience and attentiveness of Australians in 2020, saying he has never been prouder of his compatriots after a year blighted by bushfires and COVID-19. Australia is set to endure a subdued New Year's Eve, with people in both Sydney and Melbourne urged to stay at home amid fresh virus outbreaks. It comes after a difficult year in which Australia battled unprecedented bushfires and was forced into virus-induced lockdown for large stretches - including Victoria's deadly second COVID-19 wave. But Mr Morrison on Thursday said Australians had emerged from those challenges with good grace and geniality, and would hopefully kick on in 2021. "We proved that once again, we are a nation of overcomers - we're a nation that prevails and we're making this way through the crisis in a very Australian way, guided by our enduring principles and values," he said in a video message.

"Together, we have done better than almost any other country in the world. "We've found the grit, the ingenuity and the forbearance, and we've been upheld most of all by our wonderful spirit of mateship." Mr Morrison in his message thanked all frontline COVID-19 workers including doctors, nurses, aged care workers, mental health support workers and those working in the hotel quarantine program, as well as police and the military. He also warned that Australia would in 2021 need to remain vigilant as it awaits its COVID-19 vaccine rollout and seeks to rejuvenate its economy. "A safe and effective vaccine validated, proven by our scientists, doctors, will be available to all Australians and a key step in our recovery," Mr Morrison said. "Stronger, safer, together ... that's the path ahead of us." Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese also on Thursday issued a short New Year's Eve message on social media, saying: "I know 2020 hasn't been the year that any of us wanted. "But Australians got through it as we always have - by sticking together and by looking out for each other."

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/31/2020

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Economy Set for 2021 Lift Despite Worries

Australia's economy faces headwinds in the new year as it continues to grapple with the impact of the coronavirus, but growth is set to pick up earlier and faster. Growth momentum is already returning, and the economic outlook for 2021 looks more positive than it did a few months earlier, economists say. "Australia has done a better job than just about any other nation in controlling the spread of the virus," Commonwealth Bank chief economist Stephen Halmarick said. "This, combined with fiscal and monetary policy support being provided to the economy, and the role played by the Australian banking system means the economic impact of COVID-19 has been less severe than in many other nations, and less severe than initially expected."

That is being reflected in recent data with the economy expanding 3.3 per cent last quarter, record high building approvals, house prices returning to growth, consumer sentiment at a 10-year high, and a seven per cent surge in retail spending in November. St George Bank senior economist Hans Kunnen says the current household savings ratio - 18 per cent - is well above what it has been in years and bodes well for the economy. "It suggests there is a lot of cash out there. This money will now likely be spent in Australia because the borders are shut," he said. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg confirmed the speedy recovery when he upgraded economic forecasts while handing down the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook. The Treasury now expects Australia's economy to grow by 0.75 per cent in 2020/21, rather than contracting by 1.5 per cent as previously feared. The unemployment rate is set to peak at 7.5 per cent, rather than 8.0 per cent, in the March quarter.

"The rebound has been very strong. We would generally expect (economic) growth in the next year to be around 3.7 per cent," National Australia Bank chief economist Alan Oster said. In December, Westpac also raised its economic growth forecast for 2021 to four per cent, from an earlier estimate of 2.8 per cent. It expects the unemployment rate to taper down to six per cent by end-2021. "We now expect that economic activity will return to end-2019 levels by the June quarter next year, rather than the December quarter," Westpac chief economist Bill Evans said. But economists also caution this momentum could easily reverse. A key factor weighing on policymakers' minds is the winding back of the federal government's Jobkeeper wage subsidy and Jobseeker payments at the end of March.

"That will be a negative. But I do expect there will be some targeted aid towards those industries that are most affected," Mr Kunnen said. "I don't think the government would want to jeopardise recovery by letting too many businesses fall through the cracks." A growing area of worry is the fraught diplomatic relationship between Australia and China and its impact on trade. Agricultural exports have suffered the most damage, as China has restricted Australian coal, cotton, barley, beef, lobster, timber and wine in recent months. But iron ore exports, which account

for 7.5% of our GDP, have so far been untouched. A rising Australian dollar is also complicating efforts to gradually withdraw stimulus from the economy.

The Aussie has risen nearly nine per cent this year, to 76 US cents, boosted by strong macroeconomic data and rising demand for Australian minerals. Further gains could hit exports. Westpac is forecasting the Australian dollar to rise to 80 US cents over the course of 2021. The RBA may have to expand its \$100 billion bond-buying program to ease pressure on the currency, analysts say, a move that may also help with its 'national priority' of reducing unemployment faster. "Having entered the world of unconventional monetary policy, it is going to be a long time before the RBA can retreat from providing significant support to the economy," Mr Halmarick said.

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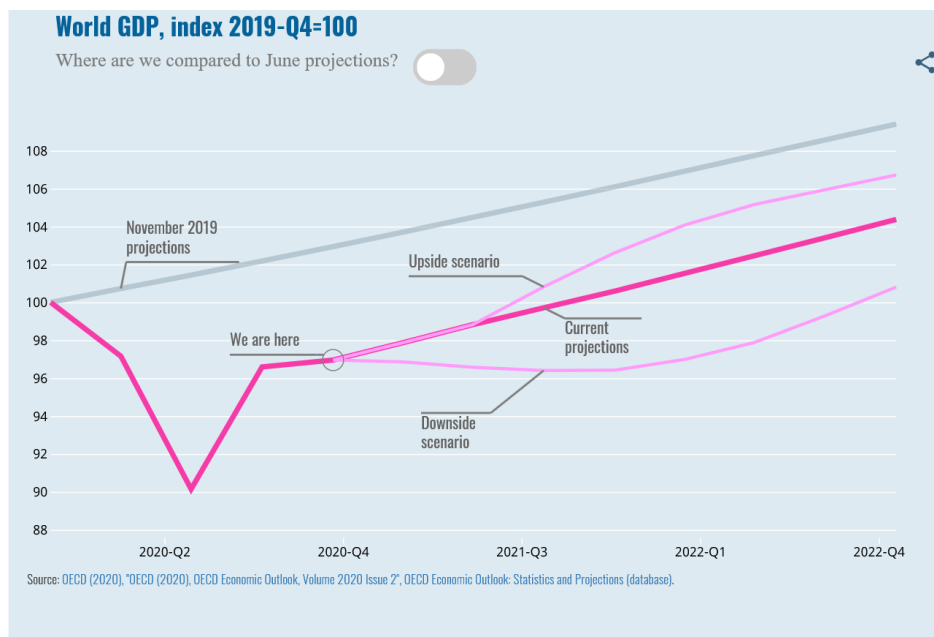
Asia-Pacific

Continued Fiscal Support and Public Health Action Needed to Make Hope of Recovery a Reality

The prospect of a number of COVID-19 vaccines becoming widely available next year has lifted hopes for a faster recovery, but policymakers will need to retain both public health and fiscal support while acting decisively for the momentum to pick up, according to the OECD's latest Economic Outlook. The OECD warned in its June Economic Outlook that a second wave of infections at the end of the year could knock an initial rebound off course. Europe and North America are now bearing the brunt of a resurgence of the virus, stalling the recovery. Global GDP in the fourth quarter of 2020 is expected to be 3% below the same quarter last year, while for the Euro area and the US the decline is projected to be 7.3% and 3.2%, respectively. Activity will continue to be restricted with social distancing and partly-closed borders most likely remaining through the first half of 2021, the Economic Outlook says. The global economy is expected to gain momentum only gradually, as vaccines are deployed throughout OECD countries in the course of 2021. After falling sharply by 4.2% this year, world GDP is projected to rise by 4.2% in 2021, with China expected to account for over a third of that growth.

The recovery will be uneven across countries and sectors and could lead to lasting changes in the world economy. Countries with effective testing, tracking and isolation programmes and where effective vaccinations can be distributed rapidly should perform relatively well, but a high degree of uncertainty persists. The Outlook

provides both upside and downside risks to its main projections. The release of pent-up demand and accumulated savings may reinforce a rebound if vaccines become available faster and more widely, boosting global growth to around 5% in 2021. But confidence may be hit if problems arise with the distribution or unexpected secondary effects of the vaccines and if the lessons from the first two waves of the pandemic are not learnt. In this scenario, global growth in 2021 would be lowered by 2¾ percentage points.



Presenting the Economic Outlook with OECD Chief Economist Laurence Boone today, Secretary-General Angel Gurría said: “There is hope, but that hope needs to be turned into reality. The pandemic is a global problem. International co-operation is needed now more than ever.” “Building back better requires leadership and action to build on the promises of vaccines, and to relaunch multilateral negotiations on trade, climate and digital standards to pave the way for a more sustainable growth and a society where opportunities are available for all.” Laurence Boone said: “With the prospect of vaccines and better virus management, the picture for the global economy is looking brighter, but the situation remains precarious, especially for the low-skilled and for struggling small businesses.” “Governments have been vindicated in the support they provided to shield people and firms. With rock-bottom interest rates expected to persist, governments can and need to sustain it to prevent long-term scarring effects of this crisis. The economic consequences will be with us for years to come. Governments must address decisively the effects on the most vulnerable, especially children and the young.” (See Summary handout for Economic Outlook news conference.)

The Outlook shows how the crisis has worsened inequality, hitting the most vulnerable in society the hardest. High levels of unemployment, particularly among

the low-skilled and young, risk persisting for years. Many children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have fallen badly behind in their education during lockdowns, further limiting their opportunities in the future. For millions of small and medium-sized businesses – the main drivers of job creation – mounting debts and continued uncertainty are putting their survival in jeopardy. The Outlook says declines in firms' profits will hit their ability to service debts in the future and undermine their capacity to invest. Young and small as well as less productive companies are expected to be badly affected, in addition to those in the accommodation and food, transport, and arts and entertainment sectors that are severely affected by the lockdown measures. The economic damage would have been even worse without the massive government financial support now in place to help people and companies weather the shock. With very low interest rates expected to continue for some time, exceptional spending can and should continue until the recovery gains momentum, the OECD says. Policy action should become better targeted to where it is needed most and to strengthen the recovery.

The balance of spending should gradually move towards more investment in health, education and infrastructure, encouraging a shift to a greener and more digitalised economy, it adds. The Economic Outlook calls for determined action from policymakers across a number of fronts:

- Strengthen public health services by investing in health workers, prevention strategies and capacity. Implement effective test, trace and isolate programmes. Start planning vaccination campaigns now. Co-ordinate internationally to ensure affordable vaccines and treatments are available wherever needed.
- Support the vulnerable by expanding social safety nets and improving training for youth and the low-skilled. Ensure that children from disadvantage backgrounds are equipped for the digital age to give them equal opportunities.
- Support businesses by providing grants and equity rather than loans adding to existing debt. Assist companies to invest in their future by, for instance, facilitating the adoption of digital technology.

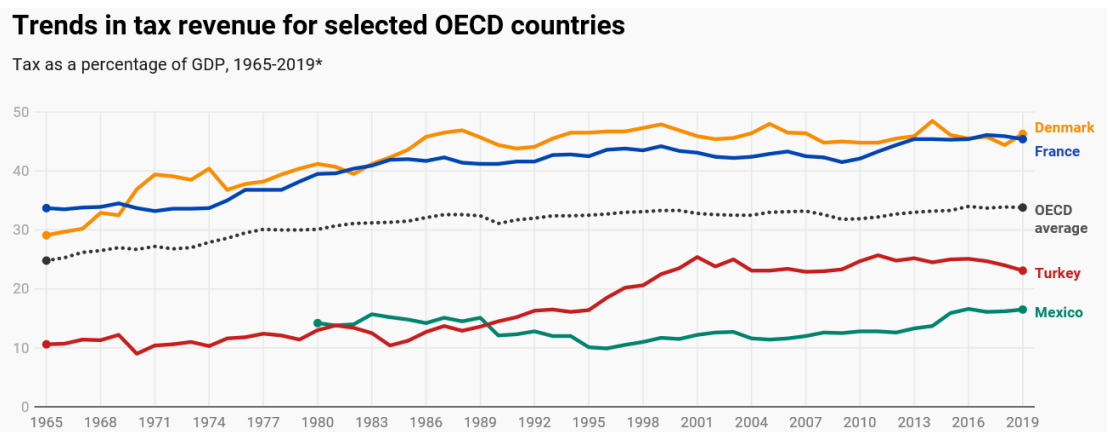
The Economic Outlook warns that corporate debt is reaching levels last seen in the global financial crisis a decade ago, raising the risk of insolvencies but also cutting firms' capacity to invest, which would weaken a broader economic recovery. For the full report and more information, visit the Economic Outlook online. Other OECD policy responses to the pandemic are available on the COVID-19 hub. They include the OECD's New Horizons report to G20 leaders last week on economic recovery from the pandemic. Media queries should be directed to the OECD Media Office (tel: +33 1 4524 9700). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 12/01/2020

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OECD Tax Revenues Fall Slightly Before the Covid-19 Pandemic, but Countries Face Much Larger Decreases Ahead, Particularly from Consumption Taxes

Tax revenues fell across the OECD for the first time in a decade during 2019, but a much larger decrease is expected in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic drives down economic activity and consumption tax revenues, according to new OECD research published today. The 2020 edition of the OECD's annual Revenue Statistics publication shows that the average tax-to-GDP ratio has fallen to 33.8% in 2019, a decrease of 0.1 percentage points since 2018. This was due to decreases in 15 OECD countries that were larger, on average, than the increases in the 20 remaining countries for which 2019 data were available.



The COVID-19 crisis is likely to significantly hit tax revenues in 2020, particularly from consumption taxes, due to the sharp fall in economic activity and consumption following lockdowns and the forced closure of many businesses. Drawing on the lessons from the global financial crisis of 2008, new analysis in Revenue Statistics shows that increases in government consumption and in households' consumption of essential goods will exacerbate this fall in the short- to medium-term. "Since the global financial crisis of 2008, we have seen a consistent trend of increasing tax revenues in the OECD, which have decreased slightly in 2019 for the first time," said Pascal Saint-Amans, Director of the OECD Centre for Tax Policy and Administration. "We expect to see much sharper decreases next year when the impact of COVID-19 starts to become more apparent. At some point, when the health crisis has passed and the economic recovery is underway, governments will need to reconsider whether their tax systems are up to the challenges of the post-pandemic environment."

Revenue Statistics confirms the longstanding diversity in tax-to-GDP ratios among OECD countries, which remained the case in 2019, ranging from 16.5% in Mexico to 46.3% in Denmark. The largest fall was seen in Hungary (1.7 percentage point),

partially due to a decrease in corporate income taxes following the removal of the compulsory tax advance supplement on business taxes. Other large decreases were seen in Iceland (1.1 p.p.), Belgium and Sweden (both 1.0 p.p.). Only one increase of over one percentage point was seen, in Denmark (2.0 p.p.), which overtook France as the country with the highest tax-to-GDP ratio. The data show that corporate income taxes in the OECD have continued to increase, from 9.2% of total tax revenues on average in 2014 to 10.0% in 2018. However, this is still lower than the peak recorded share of corporate income taxes at 11.5% of total tax revenues in 2007 and are expected to fall again as a result of the current crisis. In 2018, average revenues from taxes on goods and services declined in OECD countries: although revenues from VAT remained steady at 20.4% of total tax revenues, excise tax revenues fell by 0.4 percentage points to 7.2%.

Consumption Tax Trends highlights that standard VAT rates remained stable between 2017 and 2020, at a record high of 19.3% on average. Only one country increased its standard VAT rate (Japan, from 8% to 10%) in 2019, and no reductions were recorded until the COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020, when Germany and Ireland temporarily reduced their standard VAT rate as part of their economic stimulus packages (from 19% to 16 % and from 23% to 21%, respectively). Many countries have also introduced a range of VAT measures to support businesses and the healthcare sector during the crisis, as detailed in a special section of Consumption Tax Trends.

Standard value-added tax (VAT) rates in OECD countries (2020)



The OECD average is unweighted. / The United States is the only OECD country that employs a retail sales tax rather than a VAT as the principal consumption tax. The retail sales tax in the United States is not a federal tax but is imposed at the state and local government levels. Source: OECD (2020), Consumption Tax Trends 2020 - VAT/GST and Excise Rates, Trends and Policy Issues • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

With VAT rates at an all-time high, governments may need to explore base broadening options to restore VAT revenues after the crisis, according to the report. The surge in e-commerce following the COVID-19 outbreak has emphasised the

importance of reform to ensure that VAT is properly applied to digital trade. All OECD countries with a VAT have now implemented or committed to the OECD standards for collecting VAT on online sales of services and digital products. Many OECD countries are further expanding these e-commerce VAT regimes to include online sales of small parcels that are often imported from abroad by foreign electronic marketplaces and other digital vendors.

To access the Revenue Statistics report, data, overview and country notes, go to <http://oe.cd/revenue-statistics>. To access the report on Consumption Tax Trends, visit <https://www.oecd.org/tax/consumption-tax-trends-19990979.htm>. For further information or to obtain a copy of the report journalists should contact Lawrence Speer in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 4524 7970), Pascal Saint-Amans (+33 1 4524 9108) or David Bradbury in the OECD Centre for Tax Policy and Administration (+33 1 4524 1597). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 12/03/2020

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International Community Reaches Important Milestone in Fight Against Tax Evasion

New international standards on the automatic exchange of information for tax purposes have so far been satisfactorily implemented by countries worldwide, marking an important milestone in the global fight against tax evasion, according to a new report published today by the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes (the Global Forum). The first Peer Review of the Automatic Exchange of Financial Account Information shows that 88% of jurisdictions engaged in automatic exchange since 2017-18 were deemed to have satisfactory legal frameworks in place. The report notes that a second stage of the monitoring process, now underway, will assess the effectiveness of automatic exchange in more than 100 jurisdictions. The peer review report was presented during the first day of the annual plenary meeting of the Global Forum, which is bringing together ministers, high-level authorities and delegates from more than 100 member jurisdictions. The three-day meeting is focusing on how the tax transparency agenda can promote the fairness of tax systems while strengthening revenue mobilisation. The event will highlight recent achievements and challenges in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The Global Forum continues to be a game-changer,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. “In spite of the COVID-19 crisis, it has successfully delivered on the global peer review process, offering further proof that automatic exchange is becoming the global standard. Ensuring access to financial account information for

tax administrations helps ensure everyone pays their fair share of tax, boosting revenue mobilisation for countries worldwide, and particularly for developing countries.” In 2019, countries automatically exchanged information on 84 million financial accounts worldwide, covering total assets of USD 10 trillion. EUR 107 billion in additional tax revenues have been identified through voluntary disclosure programmes, offshore tax investigations and related measures since 2009, an increase over the EUR 102 billion figure reported in 2019. The Global Forum Secretariat provided technical assistance in 2020 to 59 developing country members, including training to thousands of officials, as part of efforts to strengthen tax collection capacity worldwide. “The battle for transparency is being fought on many fronts,” said Zayda Manatta, Head of the Global Forum Secretariat. “We are moving fast towards full implementation of the existing standards, and taking every effort to ensure all our members benefit from them.”

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 12/09/2020

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ADB Affirms Commitment to Water and Sanitation in Finance Ministers’ Meeting

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) today affirmed its commitment to water and sanitation investments in the 2020 Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) Asia and the Pacific Finance Ministers’ Meeting. “We know that every dollar invested in water and sanitation results in a four-fold return,” said ADB Vice-President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development Bambang Susantono. “Together with reduced healthcare costs and greater productivity in the workplace, water and sanitation investments bring long-term returns to individual households and the wider economy. It also helps reduce inequality and empower women.” Representatives of development agencies and finance ministers from Asia and the Pacific joined the virtual meeting and discussed concrete ways to ensure universal access to water, sanitation, and hygiene. Finance ministers highlighted success stories in the region where governments were able to implement a mix of financing and regulation to ensure people’s access to water and sanitation, which also generates substantial benefits for the economy, public health, and the environment.

Mr. Susantono discussed ADB’s \$20 billion coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic response package announced on 13 April. A multisectoral Water and Health Advisory Team was also established across ADB to expand water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and health interventions to address COVID-19 through these investments. ADB will invest through 2021 more than \$3.4 billion in water supply, sanitation, and wastewater treatment. ADB is also responding with numerous new integrated WASH and health-related technical assistance, loans, and strategic alliances. Aside from being a pandemic response, ADB’s WASH support will also focus on water-related diseases, health, and livelihoods in the long term. The

program will be using an inclusive approach targeting vulnerable groups. “We remain committed to providing universal access to WASH to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and build resilience against future pandemics. These are investments for the future of our people,” said Mr. Susantono. The SWA Asia and the Pacific Finance Ministers’ Meeting is one of three regional convenings organized by the SWA partnership. The co-conveners are UNICEF, the World Bank Water Global Practice, and the Asian Development Bank.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 12/02/2020

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ADB Joins 11 Leading Multilateral Development Banks and IMF in Launching First Joint Report on Financing SDGs

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) joined 11 multilateral development banks (MDBs) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) today in launching a first-ever joint report on financing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The report is released at the end of a critical year, in which the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic threatens to reverse progress on the SDGs. In response, MDBs have collectively mobilized a global response package of \$230 billion between 2020 and 2021 to reduce the impact of the pandemic, of which \$75 billion will be directed to the world’s poorest countries before the end of 2020. “As Asia and the Pacific continues its development journey and recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to focus on the core targets of the SDGs,” said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa. “Mobilizing domestic financial resources while ensuring debt sustainability is vital and will allow our partner governments to strengthen social safety nets and invest in high-quality green, resilient, and sustainable infrastructure to benefit the poorest.”

The joint report highlights collective and individual MDB efforts to support countries to achieve all 17 of the SDGs. It showcases examples of how their financing directly contributes to advancing SDGs that empower people, protect the planet, foster prosperity for all, and develop sustainable quality infrastructure. The report also emphasizes the critical importance of MDB partnerships to deliver financing, knowledge, and capacity building support for the SDGs. The report concludes that MDBs must continue their efforts to invest in people and human capital, with a deeper focus on inclusion. They will step up their efforts to promote green development and ambitious climate action reflecting the goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. They will also work to strengthen resilience to shocks and stresses, in order to preserve prosperity and continue to promote sustainable infrastructure, including to foster digitization to support innovation and sustainability. MDBs will continue to deepen their partnerships for the goals, including through knowledge sharing and common reporting on the SDGs.

“The MDBs are committed to working alongside all partner countries to help them emerge from this unprecedented crisis better positioned to achieve the SDGs,” the report says. ADB’s long-term Strategy 2030 commits that ADB’s operations will be designed to help developing member countries meet the SDGs, with the seven operational priorities set out in Strategy 2030 closely linked to SDG goals and targets. ADB’s corporate results management systems enable ADB to ensure its projects align with the goals and report on contributions to their achievement. Many ADB projects are focused on supporting the achievement of the SDGs. For example, the ADB Ventures impact platform established in 2020 deploys venture capital investments and technical assistance to support early-stage technology businesses intended to have an impact on achieving the SDGs. ADB also partners with the UN and others to support knowledge and policy dialogue that enables developing member countries to implement the SDGs.

The 12 organizations partnering on the report are the African Development Bank Group, the Asian Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Council of Europe Development Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank Group, International Finance Corporation, the International Monetary Fund, the Islamic Development Bank Group, the New Development Bank, and the World Bank Group (World Bank, MIGA).

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\$9 Billion ADB Facility to Help Members Access and Distribute COVID-19 Vaccines

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has launched a \$9 billion vaccine initiative—the Asia Pacific Vaccine Access Facility (APVAX)—offering rapid and equitable support to its developing members as they procure and deliver effective and safe coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines. “As ADB’s developing members prepare to vaccinate their people as soon as possible, they need financing to procure vaccines as well as appropriate plans and knowledge to be able to safely, equitably, and efficiently manage the vaccination process,” said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa. “APVAX will play a critical role in helping our developing members meet these challenges, overcome the pandemic, and focus on economic recovery.” More than 14.3 million positive cases have been identified in Asia and the Pacific, causing more than 200,000 deaths. As the pandemic persists, economic growth in developing Asia is projected to contract by 0.4% in 2020—the first regional gross domestic product contraction since the early 1960s.

Promoting safe, equitable, and effective access to vaccines is a top priority for ADB’s COVID-19 response efforts. Vaccination programs can break the chain of virus transmission, save lives, and mitigate the negative economic impacts of the

pandemic by restoring confidence in people's ability to work, travel, and socialize safely. The APVAX provides a comprehensive framework and resource envelope for supporting developing Asia's vaccine access, using two complementary components. The Rapid Response Component will provide timely support for critical vaccine diagnostics, procurement of vaccines, and transporting vaccines from the place of purchase to ADB's developing members. The Project Investment Component will support investments in systems for successful distribution, delivery, and administration of vaccines along with associated investments in building capacity, community outreach, and surveillance. This may include such areas as cold-chain storage and transportation, vehicles, distribution infrastructure, processing facilities, and other physical investments. The component may also be used to develop or expand vaccine manufacturing capacity in developing members.

ADB financing for vaccines will be provided in close coordination with other development partners including the World Bank Group, World Health Organization (WHO), COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility (COVAX), GAVI, and bilateral and multilateral partners. APVAX promotes safe and effective vaccines to be accessed in a fair manner. For a vaccine to be eligible for financing, it must meet one of three criteria. It must be procured via COVAX, prequalified by WHO, or authorized by a Stringent Regulatory Authority. Additional access criteria, such as a vaccination needs assessment, a vaccine allocation plan by the developing member, and a mechanism for effective coordination among development partners also help ensure that vaccine support under APVAX can be fairly and effectively implemented.

ADB is also making available a \$500 million Vaccine Import Facility to support the efforts of its developing members to secure safe and effective vaccines, as well as the goods that support distribution and inoculation. The facility is part of ADB's Trade and Supply Chain Finance Program. AAA-guarantees available through the program's vaccine import facility will mitigate payment risks and facilitate import of these goods. This will employ the same eligibility criteria on vaccines as COVAX. Cofinancing with private sector partners could result in the Import Facility supporting \$1 billion in vaccine and related imports within a year.

In April, ADB approved a \$20 billion package to support its developing members in addressing the impacts of the pandemic and streamlined some procedures to deliver quicker and more flexible assistance. ADB has committed \$14.9 billion in loans, grants, and technical assistance, including \$9.9 billion in quick-disbursing budget support from the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Option (CPRO) and support for the private sector. In November, ADB announced \$20.3 million in additional technical assistance to establish systems to enable efficient and equitable distribution of vaccines across Asia and the Pacific.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 12/11/2020

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ADB Approves 2021 Administrative Budget

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) today approved a 2021 administrative budget (internal administrative expense budget) of \$771.2 million. This represents a 4.7% increase over the 2020 administrative budget, consisting of a price increase of 4.2% and a volume growth of 0.5%. The 2021 budget will support ADB's work program, which includes estimated commitments of \$21.2 billion for sovereign operations, \$2.1 billion for nonsovereign operations, and \$384 million for technical assistance. In addition, it will support ADB's \$9 billion Asia Pacific Vaccine Access Facility approved today. "ADB is committed to supporting our members' response to the COVID-19 pandemic and we have taken a highly prudent approach to preparing the 2021 budget, drawing on lessons learned this year," said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa. "Importantly, this budget allows flexibility to respond to alternative scenarios as well as to enable ADB's support to enhance COVID-19 vaccine access by our developing members." The main cost drivers in the 2021 budget include items related to COVID-19 response, additional information technology requirements, and support for resident missions.

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New Approaches Needed in PRC on Green and Blue Finance, for Sustainable Growth, Webinar Told

New approaches are needed to generating green and blue finance and managing catastrophic risks in the wake of the global public health crisis and economic shocks created by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), participants at a webinar heard today. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) organized the webinar on "Expanding Green Finance, Blue Finance, and Disaster Risk Financing for Innovative Operations" to discuss key financial measures required to improve financial and economic resilience and sustainability in the wake of COVID-19, and identify innovative financial sector operations in the People's Republic of China (PRC). This year marks the end of the 13th Five-Year Plan (FYP) in the PRC. As the country prepares to enter a potential new era of growth, it needs to continue its largely successful efforts in greening its production, lifestyles, and environment and building an ecological civilization, participants heard.

"We need to explore a new set of green and blue financing instruments, particularly in support of environmental sustainability, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and green transformation," said ADB Director General for East Asia James P. Lynch introducing the webinar. "Discussions such as those we are having today will help us identify ways we can work together to help both propel and safeguard PRC's ongoing social and economic achievements." In September 2020, the PRC's President Xi

Jinping made international commitments at the UN General Assembly for the PRC to peak CO2 emissions by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. The communique for the 5th annual plenary session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China held on 29 October 2020 further highlighted that one of the objectives of the 14th FYP is to reduce carbon intensity to peak carbon emissions by 2030.

ADB's new Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) with the PRC will begin next year and align in its time frame and core objectives with the 14th FYP. Mr. Lynch said that green development will feature prominently in the strategy, and climate change resilience and environmental sustainability are expected to be central pillars. "As the current ADB country partnership strategy with the PRC ends, we also want these discussions to generate practical ideas for even more innovative financial sector operations under the next CPS," Mr. Lynch said. The webinar used a hybrid approach with participants from government and academia from Beijing joining in situ at the Shang-ri La Hotel, and ADB staff joining online from Manila.

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East Asia

CHINA: Investing over 4 Bln Yuan to Boost Tourism, Culture for Rural Poor

China invested about 4.3 billion yuan (around 656 million U.S. dollars) in boosting cultural progress and tourism development in impoverished rural areas during the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-2020), an official with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism said Wednesday. The grants were used to fund opera performances, purchase facilities for cultural centers in rural areas, and support tourist projects in impoverished regions, said Li Qun, vice minister of culture and tourism, at a press conference. So far, China has trained more than 10,000 cultural specialists for deeply impoverished areas, Li added. More than 700 special training courses have been launched to empower the rural poor so that they can rise above poverty by developing culture and tourism, Li said.

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JAPAN: Gov't Considering ¥20 Tril Extra Budget to Spur Virus-Hit Economy

Japan is considering compiling a third supplementary budget totaling about 20 trillion yen (\$192 billion) for the current fiscal year as part of efforts to bolster the coronavirus-hit economy, government sources said Monday. The extra budget for fiscal 2020 through March is also intended to assist companies' efforts to cut carbon dioxide emissions, improve the country's disaster preparedness and help companies maintain employment, the sources said. Senior lawmakers of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's Liberal Democratic Party have been calling for a large-scale auxiliary budget to finance fresh fiscal stimulus as the country faces a resurgence of coronavirus infections. Suga has pledged to reduce Japan's greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero and achieve a decarbonized society by 2050. The budget is expected to be submitted to an ordinary parliamentary session to convene in January, during which an initial budget for fiscal 2021 will also be deliberated.

The Diet already passed two supplementary budgets for fiscal 2020 totaling 57.6 trillion yen for anti-virus measures under the government of Suga's predecessor Shinzo Abe, who stepped down in September for health reasons. However, the pandemic kept the output gap, a measure of the supply-demand balance in the economy, at minus 6.2 percent in the July-September quarter. Tokyo reported a total of 9,857 new coronavirus infections in November, topping the August level by around 1,700 to hit a record monthly high. Seemingly endless infections have hit other parts of Japan as well with the country on Saturday posting a daily figure of 2,684 new cases, while 472 serious COVID-19 cases were confirmed Monday, both record highs.

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Suga Pledges ¥2.2 Tril to Promote Ecological Businesses

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga pledged a 2 trillion yen (\$19 billion) fund on Friday to promote ecological businesses and innovation to achieve his goal of zero net carbon emissions by 2050. Suga, who took office in mid-September, set climate change as one of his main policy goals along with promoting a digital transformation of Japanese society — issues which were left behind by his predecessor, Shinzo Abe, who resigned because of ill health. “The fund is to bolster environmental investment as we aim to become a global leader in this area,” Suga said. He pledged to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 in a policy speech in October, though it will be a major challenge given Japan's significant reliance on fossil fuel. Suga, in his first full-fledged news conference since taking office, said Friday that his cabinet plans next week to approve an economic package that will also include 1 trillion yen (\$9.5 billion) to promote the country's digital transformation — a weakness that Japan recognized when companies were requested to allow employees to work from home in response to the coronavirus and many were unable to. Although he is known for a pragmatic approach to getting things done, it's unclear whether Suga has the political

heft to overcome vested interests in weaning the resource-poor nation from its reliance on imported oil and gas. He said Japan needs to strive to become a global leader in achieving carbon neutrality, and that investment in the environment is a growth opportunity, not a burden. Suga repeated that he plans to deepen Japan's alliance with the United States and promote a vision of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" to counter growing Chinese influence in the region.

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Japan's FY2021 Budget to Hit Record High of over ¥102.66 Tril

Japan's initial budget for fiscal 2021 will total more than 102.66 trillion yen (\$986 billion), a record high for the ninth straight year, mainly due to an increase in the amount of reserve funds to fight the coronavirus pandemic, government sources said Wednesday. In addition to setting aside 5 trillion yen for the funds, which the government can spend without parliamentary discussion, the budget for the year starting in April has been enlarged to deal with rising social security and defense outlays. The sources said the total, compared with the current fiscal year's 102.66 trillion yen, may even surpass 105 trillion yen. Additional debt issuance to finance the upcoming budget will further deteriorate Japan's fiscal health, the worst among major developed countries. Public debt exceeded 1,100 trillion yen as of the end of fiscal 2019, more than double the gross domestic product. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's cabinet is expected to approve the draft general-account budget late this month. It will be submitted to an ordinary parliamentary session to be convened in mid-January.

Amid the economic fallout from the pandemic, the government is expected to issue more new debt for the next fiscal year. In fiscal 2020, tax revenue is expected to total about 55 trillion yen, the sources said, far short of the government's initial projection of 63.51 trillion yen due to poor corporate earnings. New government bond issuance is on track to top 100 trillion yen for the first time in the current fiscal year. The government has already decided to issue new debt worth about 90.2 trillion yen for the year, as its total annual spending, also including the first and second supplementary budgets, has swelled to over 160 trillion yen. Apart from the pandemic-related factors, spending on social security in the coming fiscal year will increase by a few hundred billion yen from the current year as the population rapidly ages, according to the sources. In recent years, the costs for pensions and other social welfare services have accounted for about a third of Japan's initial budget. The country's defense expenditure in fiscal 2021, meanwhile, is expected to top 5 trillion yen for the sixth consecutive year to possibly surpass the record 5.31 trillion yen in fiscal 2020, according to the sources.

From <https://japantoday.com> 12/10/2020

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BOJ to Explore Better Ways to Hit Price Goal; Extends Fund Scheme

The Bank of Japan on Friday unveiled a plan to examine more effective ways to achieve its 2% inflation target, following in the foot steps of its U.S. and European peers as a renewed spike in infections threatened to derail a fragile recovery. As widely expected, the central bank kept monetary policy steady and extended by six months a range of measures aimed at easing funding strains of companies hit by COVID-19. In a surprise move, the BOJ said it will look at ways to make its policy "more effective and sustainable," as the blow to growth from the pandemic pushes inflation further away from its target and forces it to maintain its massive stimulus longer. BOJ Governor Haruhiko Kuroda said the review will be more a fine-tuning of its market operations and asset purchases, rather than an overhaul of its yield curve control (YCC) policy.

But he said the central bank was open to introducing new tools and reviewing the way it buys exchange-traded funds (ETF) to address the potential side-effects of prolonged easing. "We will examine operations under yield curve control and our asset purchases," Kuroda told a briefing. "It's true this is an extraordinary policy for a central bank," he said of the BOJ's ETF buying. "It's therefore necessary to examine ways to make this step effective and sustainable." The BOJ will announce the findings of the review in March. The move underscores a growing concern among policymakers over the diminishing return and rising cost of prolonged easing. Years of ultra-low interest rates have crushed commercial banks' margin, while its huge asset buying has drawn criticism for drying up liquidity and distorting market pricing. "The BOJ won't change its policy framework but may review components such as its ETF buying, bond purchases and its view on what constitutes an appropriate yield curve," said Yasunari Ueno, chief market economist at Mizuho Securities.

At the two-day rate review ending on Friday, the BOJ kept intact its YCC targets of -0.1% for short-term rates and 0% for 10-year bond yields. With the pandemic still hurting the economy, the BOJ decided to extend its fund-aid program, deployed in March through May to deal with the immediate hit from COVID-19, by six months. The package includes increased purchases of corporate debt and a lending scheme to channel money via banks to small firms. The central bank said it is ready to extend the deadline of the package further if needed to support the economy. Japan's economy rebounded in July-September from its worst postwar contraction in the second quarter, though the third wave of infections is dampening prospects for a strong revival.

The pandemic has added to headaches for major central banks including the ECB and Fed, which have conducted reviews on how to better battle a protracted low-growth, low-inflation environment with their dwindling policy ammunition. Data

released earlier in the day showed core consumer prices dropped at their fastest pace in a decade in November, stoking fears of a return to deflation and keeping policymakers under pressure to take stronger steps to prop up growth. Having conducted its own comprehensive review of its policy framework in 2016, the BOJ has argued there was no need to do another examination despite missing its 2% price goal for years. Kuroda stuck to the view, stressing that he had no plans to tweak the BOJ's yield targets or abandon negative rates. "We won't be weakening our monetary easing. Rather, we're examining ways to make our monetary easing more effective."

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Japan Prepares for Digital Currency, in Line with China and Others

Japan is gearing up preparation for the issuance of digital currency in both public and private sectors following swift moves by China and some other countries to do the same. Virtual money issued by central banks around the world is called "central bank digital currency" or CBDC, and is used for cashless payments via smartphones or electronic cards just as cash, while some private organizations, including one established by Facebook, also plan to introduce their own digital currencies. Different from credit cards and cashless payment services, digital currencies are expected to provide retailers commission-free payment systems while end-users are able to not only settle payments at stores but also quickly send money to others via their smartphone apps. One of the leading central banks for a CBDC has been considered the People's Bank of China, China's central bank.

It has accelerated its efforts to create the "digital yuan" this year as the coronavirus pandemic hit the country, rolling out pilot programs that provided 200 digital yuan (\$31) to each of 150,000 citizens selected by lottery in Shenzhen in October and Suzhou earlier this month. "China has prompted moves toward digital currency (around the world)," said Hiromi Yamaoka, a former senior official in charge of payment and settlement systems at the Bank of Japan. "It (has done so at) surprising speed, as central banks tend to take a cautious stance" for a new system, he added. Yamaoka said he expects the Chinese central bank to officially issue the digital yuan by 2022, when it will host the Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. He is also pushing to issue a private-sector driven digital currency, currently chairing the "Digital Currency Forum" in Japan, which started a joint study for developments with around 30 major companies including Japan's three megabanks of MUFG Bank, Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp and Mizuho Bank.

In the fall, news reports of an emergence of a couple of digital currencies stunned the financial world. In October, central banks of the island state of Bahamas in the

Caribbean Sea and Cambodia in Southeast Asia started to issue their CBDCs named "Sand Dollar" and "Bakong," respectively. "We are seeing a once-in-a-millennium change in the history of currencies after the long-time use of currency notes following the world's first introduction in China about 1,000 years ago," said Masashi Nakajima, a professor at Reitaku University and a former BOJ official. Nakajima said advances in technology including blockchain to counter cyberattacks and counterfeiting have largely contributed to the realization of digital currencies while people are now able to bring utilize their smartphones to use CBDCs anywhere at any time. Major central banks including the BOJ, the U.S. Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank as well as the Bank for International Settlements released a joint report in October, saying the group of central banks will collaboratively explore potential promotion of innovative payments.

"A CBDC could be an important instrument for central banks to fulfill their public policy objectives and to evolve in step with the wider digitalization of people's day-to-day lives," it added, but no major central banks have yet officially decided to introduce a CBDC. The BOJ has said it will launch a feasibility study on its digital currency in fiscal 2021 starting in April. "The bank considers it important to prepare thoroughly to respond to changes in circumstances in an appropriate manner," it said in a separate report. "Demand (for a CBDC) could be suddenly strong. We aim to be prepared well to respond to changes in our environment," BOJ Governor Haruhiko Kuroda told business leaders in Osaka in September when asked about digitalization in Japan's payment systems. But the BOJ is likely to take some years to decide whether to officially issue its digital currency, as are other major central banks.

"The design of a CBDC is very tricky and delicate," Yamaoka said. "In advanced countries, a CBDC could conflict with existing payment and banking systems." For example, the credit card business could lose ground if consumers and retailers prefer CBDCs, which do not request application forms or commission fees. Commercial banks could face "disintermediation" with a lower amount of deposits if people are inclined to hoard more CBDCs for convenience by converting money from their bank accounts, leading them to have fewer funds to lend money to companies and be reluctant to do so, experts said. But Reitaku University's Nakajima takes an optimistic attitude, saying setting the upper limit for transactions is one of the solutions. "When each of the 100 million people (out of 126 million in Japan) owns a tentative upper limit of 50,000 yen in the digital currency, the total amount would stand at 5 trillion yen," he said.

"This figure accounts for only 5 percent of cash circulating in Japan. I don't think the digital yen will affect commercial banks so much when the upper limit is imposed." Yamaoka's Digital Currency Forum plans to start a feasibility study for its virtual currency next year, aiming at bridging the various existing cashless payment services and boosting interoperability by offering their "common" digital currency. Yamaoka said the consortium hopes to create "some form" of digital currency, similar

to Facebook's Diem plan, by 2023 while seeking collaboration with the BOJ to develop technologies if possible. "Japan would lag behind other countries if we take a wait-and-see stance until the rollout of the BOJ's CBDC," said Yamaoka, stressing that his consortium will aim to match the innovation for digital currencies in the world, even though the BOJ will take several years to issue its CBDC. "We hope Japan leads (other major countries) for digital currency. The leader takes advantages."

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SOUTH KOREA: To Revamp Taxation, Set Up Fund for Carbon Neutrality Goal

South Korea said Monday it plans to overhaul a taxation scheme related to carbon emissions and set up a fund designed to fight climate change in a bid to achieve the goal of carbon neutrality by 2050. The country also plans to accelerate the reduction of reliance on coal as it nurtures eco-friendly industries and builds up the low-carbon economic structure to effectively reduce carbon emissions to zero by that year. President Moon Jae-in announced in October that the country will seek to go carbon neutral by 2050 in an effort to transform the country's fossil-fuel reliant economy into an eco-friendly one. Carbon neutrality has emerged as a global agenda for fighting climate change since the Paris climate accord went into effect in 2016. Major countries, including the European Union, China and Japan, have unveiled the timeline for their carbon zero goals. The Korean government unveiled its commitment to "proactively" respond to climate change challenges and strategies in achieving carbon neutrality.

The move gained urgency as South Korea heavily relies on fossil fuels and its backbone industries -- manufacturers, steelmakers and the petrochemical segment -- are traditionally high carbon emitters. The finance ministry said the country plans to overhaul the carbon pricing system after taking into account related taxes, financial burdens and carbon-emission trading scheme. It will also set up the tentatively named Climate Response Fund. "As for (the introduction of) carbon taxes, the government plans to considerably review many factors, including the fallout on climate, income distribution, inflation and industrial competitiveness," Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki said at a press briefing. "But at the current stage, it is not desirable to mention details about whether to introduce carbon taxes or raise taxes on diesel," he added. The country plans to seek to support technical development in various fields, including power generation and transportation, in a bid to spur the early reduction of greenhouse gases, according to a joint statement by the finance, industry and science ministries. In a related effort, the country will accelerate its efforts to scale down dependence on fossil fuels and further develop green energy sources such as hydrogen and renewable energy.

Of the country's power generation sources, coal accounted for 40.4 percent as of end-2019, followed by liquefied natural gas (LNG) with 25.6 percent and nuclear power with 25.9 percent. The country will also strive to support high-carbon emitting industries to help them transform to the low-carbon economic structure. It will back up the development of eco-friendly cars and nurture new industries to take the lead in such segments as rechargeable batteries and power-efficient chips, according to the ministries. The initiative is part of the Moon government's efforts to shift its energy policy from nuclear and fossil fuel-based power generation to renewable energy sources, such as solar power, under its nuclear phase-out policy. The carbon neutrality campaign is also in line with the government's Green New Deal drive being pushed to achieve sustainable growth through eco-friendly policies. The country said it will seek to slash the emissions of greenhouse gases in 2030 by 24.4 percent from the 2017 level. The government said it plans to set up a presidential committee on a carbon-neutral campaign to push for the vision as it seeks to draw up detailed action plans starting next year.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 12/07/2020

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S. Korean Public Sector Debt Grows at Fastest Pace in 5 Years in 2019

South Korea's public sector debt climbed at the fastest clip in five years in 2019 to exceed the 1,100 trillion-won (US\$1 trillion) mark, the government said Thursday. The country's public sector debt, known as D3, which includes the debt of the central government and state-funded firms, came to 1,132.6 trillion won as of end-2019, up 5.1 percent, or 54.6 trillion won, from the previous year, according to the Ministry of Strategy and Finance. The on-year increase in the public debt represents the highest growth rate since the 6.5 percent gain recorded in 2014. The 2019 tally accounted for 59 percent of the country's gross domestic product last year, up 2.2 percentage points from a year earlier. General government debt (D2), which covers the central and provincial governments, and nonprofit public institutions, reached 810.7 trillion won, up 6.7 percent, or 51 trillion won, from a year earlier. Its percentage of the GDP climbed 2.2 percentage points to 42.2 percent last year. The ministry said general government debt increased in 2019 from the prior year due to a decline in tax revenue and increased government bond sales. Asia's fourth-largest economy had the sixth-lowest D2-to-GDP ratio among 33 members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The OECD average stood at 110 percent.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr/> 12/24/2020

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BOK to Keep Monetary Easing in 2021 to Support Economic Recovery

The Bank of Korea (BOK) said Friday it will maintain an accommodative monetary policy next year to help the nation's economic recovery from the pandemic, but it will closely watch the side-effects of monetary easing. "Under the direction of its monetary policy in 2021, the Bank of Korea will maintain the easing stance of its monetary policy to support the recovery in growth and to ensure the rise in consumer prices will be stabilized at around the target level," the BOK said in a statement. Next year, the BOK said it will "effectively" operate its loan program to support small- and medium-sized firms hit by the pandemic. The BOK will also take its "market stabilization measures" in foreign exchange and financial markets in a timely manner, while seeking to sign currency swap deals with central banks of other countries, according to the statement. The global economy is expected to show a "modest recovery" next year, helped by progress in vaccine developments and stimulus measures by advanced economies, the BOK said.

South Korea's economy is likely to grow at around 3 percent next year, but uncertainties remain due to a global resurgence of the virus, the BOK said. The BOK's monetary policy direction also came as the country's consumer prices are expected to rise 0.5 percent from a year earlier in 2020. The BOK expects consumer prices to grow 1 percent next year, but that too will fall far short of its long-term target of 2 percent. Last month, the BOK 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 the nation's third wave of coronavirus infections. Driven by signs of a modest recovery in exports, the BOK revised up this year's economic growth outlook to a 1.1 percent contraction, compared with a previous forecast of a 1.3 percent retreat. The BOK expected the economy to grow 3 percent next year, faster than a previous forecast of 2.8 percent expansion for 2021.

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S. Korea to Jack Up R&D Spending for Future Growth Engines

South Korea said Tuesday it plans to invest around 5 trillion won (\$4.5 billion) in research and development (R&D) projects in 2021 to foster new growth engines while seeking green growth. The amount marks a 19 percent jump from 4.1 trillion won allocated this year, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. "The policy reflects the government's willingness to expand investment in R&D projects in new areas despite the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic," the ministry said in a statement. Under the plan, the country plans to spend 1.5 trillion won on fostering materials, parts and equipment segments. The country has been pushing to

beef up the three areas amid growing protectionism around the globe, including the ongoing trade row with Japan. South Korea also plans to invest 966.5 billion won in the emerging sectors, including non-memory chips, eco-friendly automobiles and biotechnology products. The amount marks a whopping 43 percent jump from 2020. In line with the country's green growth policy, South Korea plans to spend 859.2 billion won on R&D projects related to sustainable resources and speed up the growth of the hydrogen economy. The country earlier set a goal of cutting its greenhouse gas emissions to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

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S. Korea to Invest over 150 Bln Won into Climate Research in 2021

South Korea said Wednesday it will spend 150.1 billion won (US\$137.8 million) on climate and environment-related research next year, up 12.9 percent from this year, to bolster the country's efforts to become carbon neutral by 2050. The Ministry of Science and ICT said it will invest in 30 new climate and environment-related research projects next year, such as committing 3.6 billion won into four projects that develop technology to improve energy efficiency in buildings. South Korea has recently pledged to go carbon neutral by 2050, vowing to reduce reliance on high carbon-emitting power sources. The ministry said it will focus on researching new sources of energy, committing 14.1 billion won next year into an existing project that researches ways to produce and safely store hydrogen. It will also invest 34.6 billion won to research renewable energy-related projects, such as solar cells and rechargeable batteries. The ministry added it will provide 18 billion won to research sources of fine dust and technology for its reduction. As of end-2019, coal accounted for 40.4 percent of the country's power generation, followed by nuclear power at 25.9 percent and liquefied natural gas at 25.6 percent.

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Records Budget Deficit of over 62 Bln USD as of November

Indonesia has recorded a state budget deficit of 883.7 trillion rupiahs (about 62.39 billion U.S. dollars) from January to November this year, or 5.6 percent of the gross domestic product, Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati said on Monday. The minister said the country collected 1,423 trillion rupiahs (about 100.46 billion U.S. dollars) in state revenue and spent 2,306.7 trillion rupiahs (about 162.85 billion U.S.

dollars) in state expenditure. The state revenue in the January-November period was 83.7 percent of the state budget target of 2020, she said, adding that this performance showed a decline of 15.5 percent compared to the January-November 2019 period. The decline in state revenue was mainly due to the lack of tax income, which was 1,108.8 trillion rupiahs (about 78.28 billion U.S. dollars), or 78.9 percent of the target. The state expenditure was 84.2 percent of the target amount.

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CAMBODIA: Extending Tax Breaks for Airlines, Tourism Businesses for Another 3 Months

The Cambodian government has extended tax holidays for airline companies and tourism establishments for another three months from January to March, 2021 to help offset losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. "The extended measures aim to continue stabilizing businesses, as Cambodia is still facing the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis," the government said in a statement released to the media on Thursday. The statement said people, whose livelihoods have been hit by the pandemic, will also receive cash reliefs from the government for another three months. It added that unemployed workers in the garment-textile, footwear and travel goods sector will continue to receive 40 U.S. dollars from the government and 30 dollars from the suspended factory per month for another three months, while the jobless in tourism also get 40 dollars a month from the government for the same period. The government will also continue to provide cash reliefs to approximately 700,000 poor and vulnerable families for another three months, the statement said. According to the statement, since the onset of COVID-19, Cambodia has controlled the situation of the virus effectively. As a result, the kingdom has seen zero deaths among a total of 363 confirmed cases. Currently, there are 12 active cases in the country, according to the Ministry of Health.

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MALAYSIA: PM Muhyiddin's Government Wins Parliamentary Clearance for National Budget with Slim Majority

The Malaysian government led by Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin on Tuesday secured parliamentary approval for the national budget by a slim majority. The 2021 budget proposed by Muhyiddin's Perikatan Nasional coalition, passed the third reading for the bill with the support of 111 members of parliament (MPs) with 108 voting against and one abstaining. Opposition leaders had previously indicated they would attempt to vote down the budget as a confidence vote against Muhyiddin and his government. Muhyiddin came to power in March following the abrupt resignation

of his predecessor Mahathir Mohamad, with the opposition having disputed the number of MPs supporting his administration. The budget for 2021 is an expansionary one and has been allocated 322.5 billion ringgit (78.08 billion U.S. dollars) compared to 297.02 billion ringgit (70.96 billion U.S. dollars) allocated for 2020 in the previous budget. It outlines several measures to aid the country in recovering from the adverse effects of COVID-19 including an additional 1 billion ringgit next year on top of 1.8 billion ringgit already allocated this year.

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PHILIPPINES: Gross International Reserves Rise to 104.51 Bln USD

The Philippines' gross international reserves (GIR) level rose to 104.51 billion U.S. dollars as of end-November 2020 from the end-October 2020 level of 103.80 billion U.S. dollars, the Philippine central bank said on Tuesday. The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said the latest GIR level represents an adequate external liquidity buffer, which can help cushion the domestic economy against external shocks. "This buffer is equivalent to 11.2 months' worth of imports of goods and payments of services and primary income," the BSP said in a statement, adding it is also about 9.3 times the country's short-term external debt based on original maturity and 5.3 times based on residual maturity. The BSP said the month-on-month increase in the GIR level reflected inflows mainly from its foreign exchange operations and income from its investments abroad. However, the BSP said these inflows were partly offset by the foreign currency withdrawals the national government made to pay its foreign currency debt obligations and revaluation losses from the BSP's gold holdings resulting from the decrease in the price of gold in the international market.

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Philippine Central Bank Maintains Interest Rate at 2 Pct

The Philippine central bank on Thursday decided to maintain the interest rate on the overnight reverse repurchase facility at 2.0 percent. The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said that the interest rates on the overnight deposit and lending facilities were likewise kept at 1.5 percent and 2.5 percent, respectively. BSP Governor Benjamin Diokno said the monetary board's decision was based on its assessment that the inflation environment remains benign, the BSP said. He said the latest baseline forecasts have risen slightly due to the sharp increase in global crude oil prices and the higher-than-expected food inflation in November. However, since the rise in food prices is transitory, he said it is expected that the future inflation path will remain firmly within the government's 2 to 4 percent target over the policy horizon. "The

balance of risks to the inflation outlook also leans toward the downside from 2020 to 2022 owing largely to potential disruptions to domestic and global economic activity amid the ongoing pandemic," Diokno said in a virtual briefing.

Meanwhile, he said the inflation expectations remain broadly consistent with the inflation target. He said the board noted that the resurgence of COVID-19 cases globally has tempered economic activity with the reimposition of preventive measures in recent weeks. However, he said that optimism over the delivery of vaccines has lifted market confidence, supporting improved prospects for global growth. On the domestic front, he said the board also observed early indications of improved mobility and sentiment. "While recent natural calamities could pose strong headwinds to growth, the further easing of quarantine measures should help facilitate the recovery of the economy in the coming months," he said. "Given these considerations, the Monetary Board is of the view that monetary policy settings remain appropriate," Diokno said. He said the board believes that an accommodative monetary policy stance, together with sustained fiscal initiatives to ensure public welfare, should quicken the economy's transition toward a sustainable recovery. The Philippines now has 454,447 confirmed COVID-19 cases, including 8,850 deaths.

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World Bank Approves 900 Mln USD in Loans to Philippines

The World Bank (WB) has approved two project loans worth 900 million U.S. dollars to support the Philippines' efforts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, improve competitiveness, and build resilience against shocks and natural disasters, the multilateral development bank said on Thursday. The first 600 million U.S. dollar project will support reforms meant to hasten the adoption of digital technologies, promote greater competition, and reduce the costs of doing business to revive more economic activities and jobs. These will help small and medium-sized enterprises bounce back from the coronavirus epidemic, help citizens cope with social distancing measures and other health protocols, and improve the delivery of social assistance to the most disadvantaged groups in society, the WB said. "Reforms to improve digital infrastructure and speed up adoption of digital technologies will not only help the country's efforts to recover from the impacts of the pandemic but will also boost its export competitiveness that is vital for creating more and better jobs in the future," Ndiame Diop, World Bank Country Director for Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand, said. The WB said the second 300 million U.S. dollar project will help address poverty in poor rural communities. According to the bank, the additional funding will provide grants to finance community-identified and community-managed responses that restore or improve basic social services to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other disasters that affect the poorest and most vulnerable municipalities. Using community-driven development, the WB said poor communities

are expected to organize themselves, analyze their situation, prepare project proposals to address common problems, and compete for block grants to finance their projects. In the COVID-19 context, the WB said the communities can secure funding for isolation facilities, improvements in water and sanitation, and construction or upgrading of health stations. Community members are also responsible for the implementation and maintenance of these projects, the bank said.

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Philippine President Signs 93.7 Bln USD Budget for 2021

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte on Monday signed the 4.5 trillion pesos (roughly 93.7 billion U.S. dollars) 2021 national budget intended to revitalize the country's pandemic-hit economy and boost its response to the continuing threat of COVID-19. The 2021 budget includes 72.5 billion pesos (roughly 1.5 billion U.S. dollars) for the purchase, storage, transportation, and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. "The budget will enable us to heal, rebuild and resume our economy's upward trajectory," Duterte said in a speech during the signing ceremony at the presidential palace. He said the budget will allow the government to continue to pursue its flagship Build, Build, Build infrastructure program, revitalize the industry and service sectors, and support its much-needed social services project. Duterte assured the Filipinos that his administration "would ensure efficient use of resources through a sound fiscal policy that will enable us to overcome the debilitating effects of the pandemic on public health and our economy." "Every centavo of this budget must be spent to ensure our nation's recovery, resilience, and sustainability," Duterte added. The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) said the 2021 budget, equivalent to 21.8 percent of gross domestic product, is the country's largest to date, larger by 10 percent than the fiscal year 2020 budget. "(The budget) will prioritize health-related COVID-19 response programs to address the continuing threat of the pandemic," DBM said. The Philippines aims to inoculate up to 70 million Filipinos in three to five years. The Philippines now has 470,650 confirmed COVID-19 cases, including 9,124 deaths.

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SINGAPORE: To Renew Loan Commitments to IMF

The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) announced on Wednesday that Singapore will renew its loan commitments to support multilateral efforts to strengthen the capacity of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). MAS said that the renewals will help boost the IMF's resources to enable it to effectively play its role in safeguarding global economic and financial stability in response to the COVID-19

pandemic. According to a press release from MAS, the loan commitments will be made under the New Arrangements to Borrow with a 1.86-billion-U.S.-dollar loan for the period 2021-2025 and the Bilateral Borrowing Agreement with a 1.72-billion-U.S.-dollar loan for the period 2021-2024. MAS said that the loan commitments take the form of contingent loans to the IMF and are not made directly to countries borrowing from the IMF.

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THAILAND: Central Bank Holds Policy Rate Steady, Cuts 2021 Growth Forecast

The Bank of Thailand (BOT), the country's central bank, on Wednesday maintained the policy rate at a low level amid efforts to support economic recovery, but lowered its economic growth forecast for 2021. The BOT's monetary policy committee held the policy rate unchanged at 0.5 percent, saying the economy continued to recover but downside risks and uncertainties remained high in the period ahead. "The committee voted to maintain the policy rate at this meeting to preserve the limited policy space in order to act at the appropriate and most effective timing," according to a statement on the BOT website. It expected the economy to shrink 6.6 percent in 2020, better than previously expected contraction of 7.8 percent, due to improvement in private consumption and merchandise exports. However, it lowered the 2021 growth forecast to 3.2 percent from previous 3.6 percent over concerns about the tourism industry and the situation of COVID-19. The committee also expressed concerns over the baht's potential rapid appreciation, which would further weigh on exports, saying it would consider the necessity of implementing additional appropriate measures. The Thai economy, which is heavily reliant on tourism and exports, was hit hard by COVID-19. It shrank 12.2 percent year on year in the second quarter of the year, the worst contraction since the Asian financial crisis in 1998. The economic growth declined 6.4 percent in July-September from a year ago.

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Cabinet Earmarks Bt11.3 Billion for Projects to Curb New Wave of Covid

The Cabinet on Tuesday approved Bt11.3 billion for 10 projects to curb the new round of Covid-19 infections, deputy government spokesperson Ratchada Thanadirek said. The Bt11.3 billion is part of the Bt45 billion the government had earmarked to fight the outbreak from the Bt1 trillion borrowing under the emergency decree. The 10 projects are divided into three groups, the first of which will be

granted Bt4.33 billion. The first group, focusing on curbing the outbreak, will cover five projects. The first project, costing Bt1.57 billion, will cover one million village public health volunteers who will work on preventing and monitoring infections from January to March. This project comes under the Department of Health Service Support. The Department of Disease Control will be given Bt419 million for the second project, involving preparation for emergencies, and Bt503 million for the procurement of medical equipment and medicine. The fourth project will see Bt1.81 billion allocated to the National Vaccine Institute to accelerate Thailand's access to vaccines, while Bt24 million will be given to Chiang Mai University to develop a Level 3 biosafety lab. The second group will get Bt6.96 billion for three projects. The first project, which will be granted Bt2.037 billion, will see the Public Health Ministry upgrading public health systems in different regions of the country. The ministry will also be allocated Bt1.92 billion to supply medication and equipment to its public health units. A budget of Bt2.99 billion will be allocated to the National Health Security Office to provide services. The third group will focus on two projects worth a total of Bt27.2 million, including the acquisition of screening equipment for the Department of Health Service Support.

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VIETNAM: UNFPA Earmarks Additional US\$800,000 for Flood-Affected Women, Girls

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has provided an additional US\$800,000 for women and girls in Đà Nẵng City and eight provinces in the central region affected by historic flooding in October-November, raising its total aid to US\$1.34 million. "When emergencies like this strike, life changes in a moment," said Naomi Kitahara, UNFPA Representative in Việt Nam. "This natural disaster has already destroyed thousands of homes and forced people to flee. Women and girls are among the most vulnerable. Women do not need to die giving birth, and this must hold true even in emergencies." "While fleeing, people are in need of basic necessities, ranging from food and water to hygienic supplies and medical care.. "UNFPA is striving to assist the Government in restoring and improving the lives of flood victims, particularly the most vulnerable. UNFPA expresses sympathy for victims and their families affected by the latest tragedy, especially women and girls. This contribution underlines our solidarity with the people of Vietnam, many of whom have suffered the loss of homes, livelihoods, and belongings in the wake of the devastating floods."

According to the joint rapid assessment carried out in October, in which UNFPA experts played a lead role in the most affected areas of central Việt Nam, health facilities have been hit hard by floods and landslides, and routine public health

programmes such as antenatal, delivery, post-natal care and family planning services have been disrupted. Women and girls continue to be unable to access basic healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health. The disaster forced women and girls to move to evacuation centres without having time to pack essential supplies. They are unable to manage their hygiene properly as a result and lack access to basic needs such as sanitary pads, clothes, and underwear, which are needed to manage their menstrual periods. In addition, access to water and places to wash and dry reusable pads and clothes, or to dispose of used materials, is currently challenged. The UNFPA funding and support includes the distribution of Dignity Kits, with essential hygiene items, along with vital maternal health equipment (such as the Doppler Foetal Heart Rate Detector, which detects the heartbeat of a pregnant woman's foetus). In addition, UNFPA is supporting the delivery of mobile and outreach sexual and reproductive health services, as part of the wider health sector response to violence against women and girls in flood-affected areas.

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ADB Grants US\$600,000 to Assist Việt Nam's COVID-19 Response

The Asian Development Bank announced it has provided US\$600,000 in material aid to help Việt Nam fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The aid, sourced from ADB Technical Assistance Special Funds, comprises \$500,000 worth of personal protective equipment for the National Lung Hospital in Hà Nội (under the management of the Ministry of Health), who would be in charge of distributing the equipment to all hospitals across the country. The aid is expected to help frontline medical staff protect themselves against exposure to the coronavirus, a vital need in the fight against the pandemic, according to the ADB. It also includes an additional \$100,000 to help upgrade machinery and equipment for Việt Nam Public Health Emergency Operations Centre (PHEOC), which belongs to the Ministry of Health's Steering Committee for Disease Prevention and Control, which the ADB expects to boost the coordination and operations of the centre in suppressing local COVID-19 outbreaks. Andrew Jefferies, Country Director of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in Việt Nam, commended the Vietnamese Government's swift and effective response against COVID-19.

Under the determined leadership of the Government and the discipline of the people, Việt Nam was one of the rare countries in the world that had kept coronavirus under control domestically, he added. Nguyễn Thanh Long, Minister of Health of Việt Nam, during the handover ceremony on Thursday, said the country had entered a 'new normal' with the resumption of most socio-economic and cultural activities, including commercial flights for selected groups of eligible entries into Việt Nam, and the authorities were committed to strictly implement prevention measures to avoid the spread of the virus in the community. Long added that Việt Nam was also robustly

pursuing its own locally made COVID-19 vaccine, which hopefully would not just fulfil domestic demands but could also be exported. He thanked ADB for the valuable aid for the health sector of Việt Nam, and asked ADB to continue to prioritise health issues in its future support. Việt Nam as of Friday currently logs a total of 1,385 COVID-19 cases, with the majority being imported ones. Previously in April 2020, ADB approved \$20 billion in quick-disbursing loan package for developing member countries in Asia to deal with COVID-19.

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ADB, Imexpharm Sign Loan to Support Medicine Production in Việt Nam

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Wednesday signed an US\$8 million loan deal with Imexpharm Corporation to help the company sustain its production of generic medicines despite global supply disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The financing will support the company's working capital needs to ensure an ample supply of ingredients for essential medicine production. "Asia has witnessed disruptions across the pharmaceutical supply chain in 2020, including a shortage of active pharmaceutical ingredients," said Head of Health and Education Investments at ADB's Private Sector Operations Department Aniruddha Patil. "This project demonstrates ADB's continued efforts to enhance health outcomes in Việt Nam by encouraging the development and use of local generic medicines." "We are pleased to be working with ADB," said Imexpharm's Chairman Nguyễn Quốc Định. "The financing will improve our liquidity situation and ensure a consistent supply of affordable generic drugs to hospitals and pharmacies across Việt Nam." This debt financing is part of ADB's \$20 billion assistance announced on April 13 to help its developing members manage the pandemic. Imexpharm was established in 1977 and incorporated in 1983 as the Đồng Tháp Pharmaceutical Union. The firm was transformed from a State-owned enterprise into a joint-stock company and renamed Imexpharm Corporation, and its shares were listed on the Hồ Chí Minh Stock Exchange on December 4, 2006. As of September 30 this year, Imexpharm had 1,252 employees, total assets of VNĐ2.07 trillion and six pharmaceutical manufacturing facilities.

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Việt Nam Imposes an Official Anti-Dumping Tax on Imported Cold Rolled Steel Products

The Ministry of Industry and Trade has issued Decision 3390/QĐ-BCT on the application of official anti-dumping measures for some coil and sheet cold-rolled steel products originated from China. Based on the request for anti-dumping measures by representatives of the domestic manufacturing industry, the Ministry launched an investigation of the case on September 3 last year. Due to the complicated development of the COVID-19 pandemic and a number of issues which need clarification related to the product range, the ministry issued Decision No 2240/QĐ-BTC on August 21 this year to extend investigation period. But because of the inability to conduct the on-site investigation of foreign manufacturing and exporting companies, the ministry sent a questionnaire for firms to provide additional information and documents to explain and clarify contents provided in the preliminary stage and give opinions on the case. The investigation results showed that the amount of investigated cold-rolled steel imports amounted to 272,073 tonnes during the period, accounting for 65.5 per cent of the total cold-rolled steel imported into Việt Nam. The domestic manufacturing industry was under threat of considerable damage, reflected in most indicators, especially profit, inventory and market share, the ministry said. Besides, the dumping margin of imported goods is determined from 4.43 per cent to 25.22 per cent. On the basis of the results, the Ministry of Industry and Trade issued the decision to apply the official anti-dumping tax on cold-rolled steel products from China to prevent and minimise damage to the domestic manufacturing industry due to impacts from a large amount of imported cold-rolled steel products being dumped into the country. The anti-dumping measures will be valid within five years from the effective date of Decision 3390/QĐ-BCT.

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New Tax Policy for Ride-Hailing Services Sets Off Storm

Earlier this month the Government's amendment of tax regulations for ride-hailing services, which increases the tax they actually pay, was a topic of hot debate in the media. With effect from December 5 ride-hailing firms have to pay value added tax (VAT) of 10 per cent on the fares passengers pay for a ride unlike earlier, when they only had to pay the 10 per cent on their revenue after paying the drivers' 80 per cent share of the fare. The drivers then paid 3 per cent VAT on their 80 per cent share. Under the new tax regime, the effective rate is more than double the old one of around 4.4 per cent. Drivers' incomes are estimated to have fallen by around 7.3 per cent. Policy makers said the changes are aimed at rationalizing the tax regime for ride-hailing companies, treating them as transporters to create a level playing field for traditional taxi firms. For a long time it was not clear if ride-hailing companies were considered to be technology service providers or transport companies, but the new decree makes it clear they are the latter. The ride-hailing market in Việt Nam saw substantial growth of 57 per cent between 2015 and 2019, the highest in South East Asia, Grant Thornton said, quoting a study by Google and Temasek.

This growth drew the attention of Vietnamese tax authorities, who have been making efforts to develop a mechanism to collect tax from tech-based drivers on incomes generated from the ride-hailing business, it said. An official from the Department of Tax Administration for Small and Medium Enterprises and Individuals said VAT rates for ride-hailing companies like Grab and Gojek had so far been too low and tax authorities need to raise them to the correct level. The 10 percent VAT rate would be appropriate for ride-hailing firms since they operate like transport companies, she said. Many experts agree with the changes, saying the new tax regime creates a level playing field for ride-hailing firms and traditional taxi operators. But the changes have led to other controversies as Grab, one of the biggest ride-hailing firms in Việt Nam, decided to hike fares. On the same day the new decree to change the taxes took effect (December 5) it increased fares by 5-6 per cent, saying it wanted to protect drivers' incomes. Taxi fares in major cities and provinces like Hà Nội, Bắc Ninh, HCMC, Bình Dương, Đồng Nai and Cần Thơ went up by VNĐ2,000 to VNĐ27,000 for the first two kilometres. In Hải Phòng, Quảng Ninh and Đà Nẵng they rose by VNĐ3,000 to VNĐ25,000. For each subsequent kilometre the fares were increased by VNĐ500 – 1,000. GrabBike fares increased from VNĐ3,400 to VNĐ4,000 per kilometre after the first two kilometres. The company also decided to increase its commission on taxi fares from 28.3 per cent to 32.8 per cent, including an app service fee of 25 per cent. For bikes, it increased from 25 per cent to 27.2 per cent, including an app service fee of 20 per cent. The hikes in fares and commissions have sparked arguments among drivers, customers and experts. Two days after Grab announced the changes hundreds of GrabBike drivers turned off their app and gathered outside the company's office in Hà Nội to protest and demanding a return to the old rates.

Consumers

Nguyễn Ngọc Nga of HCMC's District 2 said she used Grabbike to go to office daily due to the convenience and promotions, which made the fares reasonable. "I got a shock as my daily fare increased from VNĐ40,000 to over VNĐ50,000." She said she was considering using public transport from now on. Trần Thị Thu Hồng of District 3 said to visit her daughter in District 1 the GrabCar fare is now VNĐ45,000, VNĐ9,000-10,000 higher than before. "Most of us have seen incomes severely affected by the Covid-19 outbreak, and so we will have to reconsider the use of this service." Many other customers have been making similar comments and started comparing ride-hailing fares with traditional taxi and motorbike taxi services before booking.

Grab drivers

Drivers said the fare increase is likely to force customers to opt for competing services and business has already fallen significantly. Nguyễn Xuân Cang of Long An Province has worked as a Grab driver for more than a year in HCMC. "I support the Government's tax payment policy but I expect Grab to share the tax burden with

drivers. “We insist on Grab’s taking that the company should go back to the old 20 per cent commission rate. An increase of 2 or 3 per cent may be fine, but over 7 per cent as the company just did is too much.” But a Grab spokesman blamed the Government’s new tax policy for reducing drivers’ incomes. He told online newspaper VnExpress that if his company did not increase fares, drivers’ incomes would decrease by around 7.3 per cent, and the hike would keep it at just 1 per cent. “The new fares still ensure Grab’s competitiveness in the market.” The company also had plans for more promotions, he added.

According to Nguyễn Thái Hải Vân, general director of Grab Vietnam, Decree No.126 has a number of provisions that are not suitable for ride-hailing services, and this has contributed to increasing ride costs and affecting drivers’ incomes. The country is going through a difficult time, and the new tax policy therefore has an impact not only on drivers but also customers and the company. On December 11 Grab wrote to the General Taxation Department protesting against its decision to amend the VAT regime even for motorbike drivers. It said Decree 10 that came into force in April covered only the automobile transportation business but not motorbike taxis. The new VAT policy had badly affected Grabbike drivers’ incomes and many had stopped working in protest, it said.

What is the impact on other ride-hailing firms?

Việt Nam also has many other app-based motorbike taxi services like Gojek, Aber, FastGo, VATO, Mygo, and be Group JSC. Five days after Grab adjusted its fares and commission rates, Gojek also announced fare and commission hikes for some of its services. For instance, the fare for GoRide for up to two kilometres has been increased by VNĐ1,000 to VNĐ13,000 in Hà Nội, and VNĐ11,000 in HCMC. Analysts say people pay the 10 per cent VAT on all kinds of goods and services, including traditional taxi services, and so the 10 per cent VAT for ride-hailing services like Grab is nothing out of the ordinary. They only had reservations about the timing, saying most sectors are struggling to cope amid the downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and so there has been a sharp increase in joblessness and decrease in people’ incomes. So a tax hike that causes a spike in the price of any product or service will simply make people stop spending on it, they point out. It has been going on for nearly a month but the last of the story has not been heard yet.

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South Asia

Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Establishes State Standardization Fund

The Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan has approved the 'Rules for the organization, maintenance, renewal and protection of the State Fund for Standardization', Trend reports.

The fund is an information resource consisting of a set of documents on standardization and is managed by the national standardization structure, as well as created in cooperation with the relevant state bodies (institutions), relevant international, regional, and local organizations.

The national structure for standardization is the 'Azerbaijan Institute for Standardization' public legal entity.

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ADB Approves Project to Support Startups in Azerbaijan

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved technical assistance for the INNOLAND Incubation and Acceleration Center as part of its partnership strategy for Azerbaijan for 2019-2023, Trend reports referring to the ADB. The project is funded by the South Korean Partnership Fund and the amount of technical support is \$500,000, which will contribute to the creation of effective and efficient institutional mechanisms at the local level in the country to support technology start-ups. According to ADB, incubation and acceleration services in Azerbaijan will be provided in the cities of Ganja and Shaki through the Ganja State University and the Azerbaijan State Agrarian University, as well as through the Innoland Sheki branch. Since 1999, the ADB has allocated funds in the amount of \$4.4 billion to the country within the framework of cooperation with Azerbaijan.

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Azerbaijan Names Target Inflation Rate for Upcoming Year

The ultimate goal of Azerbaijan's monetary policy in 2021 will be to manage inflation within 4 ± 2 percent, [Trend](#) reports on Dec.29 referring to the country's Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA). According to the CBA, the priority goal of monetary policy in 2021 will also be price stability, which is the main guarantor of confidence in the national currency. Reforms aimed at strengthening the possibilities of influencing inflation will continue. The bank noted that next year, as in previous years, the goal will be to change the consumer price index over the past 12 months. To achieve the inflation target, the interim monetary policy objectives will be to use the exchange rate, money supply, and interest rates taking into account the transmission characteristics of decisions. When carrying out the monetary policy, the short- and

medium-term transmitting of the national currency manat to inflation will be taken into account. Next year, the balance in the foreign exchange market will also depend on the state of the balance of payments, demand, and supply of foreign currency by the state. If necessary, preventive measures will be taken together with the government to ensure a balance in the foreign exchange market. The work on streamlining the currency regulation will continue in 2021. The Central Bank added that maintaining the stability of the manat exchange rate will act as the main anchor of macroeconomic stability in both the short and medium-term.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/29/2020

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Azerbaijan to Render Financial Assistance to Entrepreneurs Affected by COVID-19

Financial assistance will again be rendered to business entities in accordance with the order of the Azerbaijani Cabinet of Ministers dated December 23, 2020 in connection with the tightening of the quarantine regime in Azerbaijan, [Trend](#) reports with reference to the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy. Financial support for entrepreneurs will be carried out in two ways. The first way involves the payment of a certain part of the wages to employees working in the spheres affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Within this program, which will cover about 22,000 taxpayers, a certain part of the wages will be paid to more than 200,000 employees working in the spheres affected by the pandemic. For this purpose, the Azerbaijani government will render financial assistance to entrepreneurs in the amount of 52.5 million manat (\$30.9 million). Financial assistance will be rendered to taxpayers who received funds within the previous programs and did not allow big reduction in the number of employees, in the amount of half of the monthly wage fund, based on the number of employees as of December 1, 2020. At the same time, newly registered enterprises can also benefit from state support for their employees. The application form for such payers is the same as for the previous ones. The application procedure [can be found here](#). The second way involves financial support for individual (micro) entrepreneurs working in the spheres affected by the pandemic. This program envisages rendering of the state financial assistance in the amount of 30.5 million manat (\$17.9 million) to about 90,000 individual entrepreneurs engaged in entrepreneurship in the spheres affected by the pandemic. Within this stage of financial assistance, individual (micro) entrepreneurs who received lump-sum payment worth up to 1,000 manat (\$588) at the first stage will be provided with funds again. Taxpayers do not need to send the appeal twice. Financial assistance is rendered to taxpayers who previously received these funds.

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Azerbaijani State Social Protection Fund's Budget for 2021 Approved

The budget of the State Social Protection Fund of Azerbaijan for 2021 was discussed at a meeting of the country's Parliament on Dec. 29, [Trend](#) reports. Revenues and expenditures of the state fund's budget were proposed in the amount of 5.15 billion manat (nearly \$3.03 billion). After discussions, the proposal was put to a vote and adopted in the third reading.

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Azerbaijan's 2021 State Budget Adopted in Last Reading

The state budget of Azerbaijan for 2021 has been adopted in the third reading at the plenary session of the Parliament, [Trend](#) reports on Dec. 29. In the draft submitted to the Parliament, the consolidated budget revenues for 2021 are projected at 23.83 billion manat (\$14.01 billion), which is 1.465 billion manat (\$861.7 million), or 6.6 percent more than in 2020. Consolidated budget expenditures will amount to 31.16 billion manat (\$13.32 billion), which is 855.1 million manat (\$503 million), or 2.8 percent more than in the current year. The budget deficit for 2021 is 7.335 billion manat (\$4.314 billion), which in turn is 610.1 million manat (\$358.8 million), or 7.7 percent less than this year. The deficit will be equal to 9.7 percent of projected GDP, which is also 1.4 percentage points less than this year.

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UZBEKISTAN: Commercial Banks Increase US Dollar Rate

Commercial banks of Uzbekistan again increased the rates of selling and buying the American currency, [Trend](#) reports. Starting from December 17, the dollar purchase rate in commercial banks of Uzbekistan amounted to 10,440 - 10,480 soums (\$0.9968 - \$1.0007), and the selling rate accounts for 10,500 soums (\$1.0026). A list of some banks that have already set a new dollar rate is provided below:

Bank	purchase (soums)	sale (soums)
Universal bank	10,450	10,500
Ipoteka bank	10,440	10,500
Infinbank	10,470	10,500
Kapital bank	10,480	10,500

The official exchange rate of the Central Bank dollar as of December 15 amounted to 10 463.12 soums.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/17/2020

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: More Job Gains Expected, Budget in Review

There are two key events before economists and investors start winding down for year-end - jobs figures and the mid-year budget review. Thursday's labour force report for November is not expected to be the blockbuster seen in the previous month, when there was a surprising 178,800 surge in the number of people employed, aided by a return to work in Victoria as its lockdown ended. For November, economists' forecasts centre on a 40,000 increase in employment. The unemployment rate is expected to remain at seven per cent, still shy of the spike to 7.5 per cent seen in June and during the depths of the pandemic, which was the highest level in 22 years. But this would still mean nearly a million people are without a job. An analysis by the Reserve Bank last week warned that while the economic outlook remains highly uncertain, it is likely that the unemployment rate will remain elevated for a number of years.

"As such, some unemployed people are facing the prospect of a prolonged period of unemployment," it says. Currently around one in every five unemployed people has been jobless for more than a year, an increase from about one in every eight a decade ago. The mid-year budget review - or the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) to give it its formal title - is due at some stage this week. It comes just weeks after the Treasurer Josh Frydenberg's 2020/21 budget was handed down in October, which was delayed from May due to the pandemic. Even so, there has been some significant developments in that short space of time. The economy's rebound from recession has been stronger than expected, as has the rise in employment, while confidence among Australian and business confidence has gone through the roof - a key pointer to future activity.

"(MYEFO) is likely to see an upgrade to the growth outlook and a downgrade to the budget deficit projections, reflecting stronger revenue flows and slightly less emergency spending than expected in the budget," AMP Capital chief economist Shane Oliver said. Dr Oliver expects growth for 2020/21 will be upgraded to flat (0.0 per cent) from a 1.5 per cent contraction and the jobless rate revised down to seven per cent from 7.25 per cent for the financial year. He also predicts the budget deficit for 2020/21, while still huge, will be \$200 billion rather than \$214 billion. "Hopefully peak deficit has been seen, but peak debt will be years away," he says. An analysis by the independent Parliamentary Budget Office last week predicted net debt would still be \$1.3 trillion in 2030/31 compared to just \$374 billion in 2018/19.

Meanwhile, the Australian share market looks set for a flat opening on Monday after

Wall Street was kept in check by the lack of an aid package from Washington and rising levels of COVID-19. The US S&P 500 index slipped 0.1 per cent to 3,663.46, the Dow Jones Industrial Average managed a 0.2 per cent rise to 30,046.37 and the tech-heavy Nasdaq lost 0.2 per cent to 12,377.87. Australian SPI 200 futures were down one point at 6630. On Friday, the Australian S&P/ASX200 benchmark index closed 0.6 per cent down at 6642.6 after CSL chose not to continue with its coronavirus vaccine. But it still managed to rise 0.1 per cent on the week, its sixth consecutive weekly gain.

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Potential Tax Incentive for Career Change

The challenges of an ever-changing labour market have prompted the federal government to consider tax incentives for Australians to change careers. A discussion paper published on Friday is calling for stakeholders' views on whether tax deductions on education and training expenses unrelated to a person's current job could support their future employment. "People no longer expect a job for life, and may have multiple careers over their lifetime," the paper from Treasury says. "The increased rate of globalisation and technological change, the changing nature of work and the labour market are among the forces driving the need for continued upgrading of skills throughout life." Currently, Australians can only access tax deductions on study and materials related to their current field of work, the expectation being that further training increases career progression and therefore, income.

The policy idea aims to boost Australians' employability and income security by diversifying their skills and was announced as an initiative to be consulted on in the 2020-21 budget in October. The discussion paper says the policy would only benefit those who are able to pay upfront costs of training and who are already employed with an income against which tax could be deducted. "Low-income earners, including those outside the workforce, with little or no income tax liability would not benefit from a new income tax deduction," the paper says. Organisational behaviour expert Ann Brewer told AAP she was concerned the government's proposal would exacerbate the gap between "haves" and "have nots". Because the scheme would require a person to already have an income, it could not help the underemployed or the unemployed, she said.

As the head of education transformation for the NUW Alliance - a collaboration between the universities of Newcastle, Wollongong, Western Sydney and UNSW - Prof Brewer has researched what forms of re-training actually work. The research overwhelmingly indicated that reskilling was best achieved when it was employer-sponsored, on-the-job training, she said. "Government sponsored training

has moderate effects whereas training linked to current or prospective employment has far greater value and is more likely to lead to productivity and better outcomes," she said. University of Sydney Business School's John Buchanan said there was more demand than ever for Australians to have complex skills to make them employable in the long term. The types of work Australians do had changed dramatically in three decades, illustrating the need for improvement in this area, he said.

In 1986 about two-thirds of the Australian workforce was in this kind of "routine" work, compared with about half the workforce now. Prof Buchanan said he doubted the government knew how best to give people the right mix of skills because it had already shown an "instrumental" approach to further education. He referred to the Morrison government's decision earlier this year to increase funding subsidies for perceived high-need courses such as nursing, teaching, engineering and IT, to the detriment of arts and humanities degrees.

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ASX Rises 1.16pc After Jobs, Budget Boost

Shares on the ASX had their best day since late November, as the heavyweight sectors and dollar were boosted by better employment and budget reports. The S&P/ASX200 benchmark index closed higher by 77.5 points, or 1.16 per cent, to 6756.7 on Thursday, after mixed results in US trade. The gain was the best since November 24. The closing position was the highest for the index since February 25. The All Ordinaries closed better by 83.4 points, or 1.21 per cent, to 7000.1. The materials sector, which includes miners, added 1.6 per cent as iron ore prices remained above \$US150 a tonne. Financials climbed 1.08 per cent. There were helpful contributions from energy, up two per cent, and information technology, which gained 3.34 per cent. Investor optimism was helped by the unemployment rate falling to 6.8 per cent in November as a larger-than-expected 90,000 people joined the workforce.

Economists had forecast a 40,000 rise in employment and jobless rate of seven per cent. A stronger than expected recovery from the COVID-19 recession has helped to wipe billions of dollars from the federal budget deficit. The mid-year economic review showed the deficit for the 2020/21 financial year is forecast to be \$197.7 billion, rather than the \$213.7 billion from October's delayed budget. The Aussie dollar had spikes towards 76 US cents after both sets of figures were published. Westpac's head of foreign exchange Richard Franulovich said the improvement came as the US dollar was down across the board. "The broader environment is a negative one and the Aussie is making hay," he said. Australian government bond yields edged higher and Mr Franulovich said investors were reappraising Australia's economic

recovery.

Deep Data Analytics chief executive Mathan Somasundaram doubted the jobs data and budget update meant much to shares investors. He believed the JobKeeper wage subsidy masked the reality of employment. He said the ASX rise was influenced by it being the day of the month when options expired for futures trading. Traders set new index levels, which produced substantial moves in trade, he said. "People are taking a guess on where the market will be," Mr Somasundaram said. On the ASX, Fortescue was best of the big miners and closed up 2.0 per cent to \$22.41. In banking, ANZ was best of the big four. Shares closed up 1.29 per cent to \$23.58. Freedom Foods sold its cereals and snacks operations to Arnott's for \$20 million as it focuses efforts on dairy, nutritional and drink products. Freedom said the sale included brands Arnold's Farm, Barley+, Freedom Foods, Heritage Mill and Messy Monkeys.

Arnott's will also gain manufacturing sites in Darlington Point and Leeton in NSW, and in Dandenong in Victoria. Freedom shares were in a trading halt. Casino giant Crown Resorts will face a review of its Melbourne casino after being criticised in a NSW inquiry. The Victorian government requested its gambling regulator bring forward Crown's review, after its last evaluation in 2018. Shares closed up 0.2 per cent to \$9.87. A2 Milk had its shares in a trading halt after it said it needed to revise its earnings guidance. Shares last traded lower by less than one per cent to \$13.28. Earlier on Wall Street, markets had mixed results but investors remained optimistic US politicians could deliver economic stimulus. On Friday, the National Australia Bank will have its annual general meeting. Resources and agricultural equipment provider Incitec Pivot will also have its annual meeting with shareholders.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/17/2020

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Deficit Trimmed on Better Economic Outlook

A stronger than expected recovery from the COVID-19 recession has helped to wipe billions of dollars off the federal budget deficit. The mid-year review released on Thursday shows the deficit for the 2020/21 financial year is now forecast to be \$197.7 billion, rather than the \$213.7 billion announced in October's delayed budget. However, the shortfall still remains the largest on record as a result of the pandemic. Handing down the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook on Thursday, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg also upgraded his economic forecasts. The economy is now expected to grow by 0.75 per cent in 2020/21, rather than contracting by 1.5 per cent as previously feared, while the jobless rate is expected to peak at 7.5 per cent in the March quarter, down from eight per cent forecast in the budget.

"Today's budget update confirms that the Australian economy is rebounding

strongly," Mr Frydenberg told reporters in Canberra. The unemployment rate for November, also released on Thursday, unexpectedly fell to 6.8 per cent from seven per cent in October. But shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers said despite some slightly better figures, the defining features of the budget update were still record deficit, a record trillion dollars in debt and weaker wages growth. "The economy is recovering but it isn't rebounding strongly enough or quickly enough for the 2.2 million Australians who still don't have a job or can't find the hours that they need to support their loved ones," Dr Chalmers told reporters in Canberra. An ongoing recovery in consumption and investment is expected to be underpinned by continued improvements in confidence and a further easing of social distancing restrictions.

Stronger economic growth, resulting in higher tax receipts and a lower number of people receiving the JobKeeper wage subsidy, has helped to absorb additional policy decisions to support the recovery and \$1.6 billion to secure access to COVID-19 vaccines. These supports includes \$3.2 billion to extend the temporary JobSeeker coronanvirus supplement, \$1 billion for aged care and \$241 million to extend the HomeBuilder program. Despite a spike in the iron ore price to over \$US150 per tonne in recent weeks, budget assumptions still anticipate the price falling to \$US55 per tonne next year, albeit three months later than predicted in the budget. "Underpinning the MYEFO forecasts today are our continued prudent commodity price assumptions," Mr Frydenberg said.

Business Council of Australia chief executive Jennifer Westacott says the government has softened the blow of the worst of the pandemic but now it is time for the private sector to take over the heavy lifting. "To do this we have to drive new investment across the country with the right tax incentives, stop the antiquated industrial relations system working against job creation, wind back unnecessary red tape, get big infrastructure projects happening quickly and fix the skills system," she said in a statement. Global credit rating agency Standard & Poor's said the financial indicators in the budget update are within the tolerances of Australia's AAA rating. "We believe high iron ore prices are providing some benefit to the general government budget, as will the country's relatively quick economic recovery," S&P said in a statement. "(But) it will take years for a substantial fiscal recovery to occur in Australia." The agency has Australia's top-tier rating on a negative outlook, saying that risks remain tilted toward the downside.

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Government Ad Spend Approaching \$1 Billion

The coalition government has spent almost \$1 billion on media campaign advertising since it came to power, new figures show. The finance department's latest report on campaign advertising showed \$127.9 million was spent in the 2019/20 financial year

to get a wide range of government messages out to the community. Since the 2013/14 financial year, the government has spent \$913.3 million, the department report revealed. The past financial year's figure was down on the \$140 million spent in 2018/19. The government is required to report on all advertising campaigns where spending is expected to be over \$250,000. The spending is overseen by an independent communications committee. Among the biggest campaigns of the year were: COVID-19 Health (\$47.8 million), Defence Force Recruiting (\$31.3 million), COVID-19 Economic Response (\$17.7 million) and Tax and the Economy Phase 2 (\$7.1 million). The two COVID-19 related campaigns were given special exemption from guidelines on the basis of a national emergency and "extreme urgency". The bulk of the spending went to digital (\$42 million) and television (\$36.2 million), while one in eight taxpayer advertising dollars went to print publications.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/18/2020

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Aust Shares Slip Despite Late Recovery

The Australian share market has ended lower, dragged by technology and industrial stocks, despite paring back losses in the last hour of trade. The benchmark S&P/ASX200 index closed 17.9 points, or 0.27 per cent lower, at 6,682.40 on Wednesday, the last full session for the year. The index fell as low as 6630 early in the day. The All Ordinaries closed down 19.2 points, or 0.28 per cent, to 6942.90. Traders took early cues from overnight declines on Wall Street and booked profits in a holiday shortened trading week. Local sentiment was hit further by a rebound in coronavirus case numbers in NSW. The state reported 18 cases of community transmission and a second cluster of the deadly disease in Sydney's inner west, prompting stricter New Year's Eve restrictions.

But shares across Asian markets regained some momentum late in the session, as investors bet central banks would continue to pump liquidity next year to deal with the global impact of the pandemic. Shares in Asia-Pacific were heading towards a record high, led by gains in Chinese shares on Wednesday. The local market remained a sea of red through most of the session, with technology, utilities and industrial stocks most affected. Construction giant CIMIC Ltd and toll road operator Transurban ended 1.5 and 2.4 per cent lower respectively, while Sydney Airport finished 0.8 per cent down. Technology shares were most impacted by a nearly 4.0 per cent decline in buy-now-pay-later company Afterpay. Wisetech and Appen Group also sustained losses of around 1.5 per cent each.

Energy and mining stocks staged a smart recovery late in the session, with BHP and Rio Tinto ending 0.5 per cent higher each but Fortescue Metals closed unchanged. A weaker US dollar helped gold stocks recover early losses. Among energy stocks, Oil Search and Woodside Petroleum closed higher but Origin Energy ended in the red.

Three of the four major banks finished down around 0.5 per cent, while Westpac was unchanged through the session. A2 Milk shares lost 1.5 per cent to \$11.44 after a two-day rally on the back of announcing a takeover of a dairy company in New Zealand. Meanwhile, the Aussie dollar jumped to 76.61 US cents amid broad based weakness in its US counterpart. It closed at 75.95 US cents on Tuesday.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/30/2020

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Australian Tariff Cuts to Expand Exports

Australian exporters battered by an increasingly bitter trade dispute with China can pin their hopes on tariff cuts with key trading partners to help fill the void. Cuts delivered by Australia's network of free trade agreements on Friday should fuel export expansion and job growth, Trade Minister Dan Tehan said. Australia's relationship with China faltered last year, with the economic powerhouse launching trade strikes and tariffs on \$20 billion worth of lucrative Australian exports including beef, wine and barley. Live seafood, cotton, timber and coal were also caught in the crosshairs. With no signs of a breakthrough in the tension, Australia is strengthening agreements with countries including Canada, Korea and Indonesia from January 1. "Reducing trade barriers will boost export opportunities for Australian farmers and businesses in key export markets, which translates to more jobs and economic growth in Australia," Mr Tehan said.

Beef exports to Canada increased by 92 per cent to reach \$33 million in 2019-20 with more to come. "Australian fresh or chilled beef exporters will benefit from further cuts to Canadian tariffs in 2021 under the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership," Mr Tehan said. Tariff reductions on Australian sheep and goat meat exports to Korea also grew eight per cent, to reach \$169 million, with tariffs on those products to be slashed from 6.7 to 4.5 per cent. Under a bilateral free trade agreement with Indonesia, Australian honey exporters will benefit from tariffs being cut from 3.25 to 3 per cent in 2021, with sales having already increased 191 per cent to \$808,000 in 2019-20. "International trade helps create jobs and drive economic growth, and the Morrison government has focused on negotiating free trade agreements in the national interest," Mr Tehan said. Prime Minister Scott Morrison meanwhile continues to lobby for a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The pair last spoke during a G20 Summit in Osaka in June 2019. Mr Morrison says Australia is always looking for opportunities to discuss tensions but agreeing to meet is a matter for the Chinese government.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 12/31/2020

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6、 Private Sector

Asia-Pacific

Urgent Action Is Needed to Reduce Over-Fishing and Reform Support to the Fisheries Sector

Urgent action is needed to reduce over-fishing, improve fisheries management and reform support to the sector, or the world will fail to meet a key United Nations goal on the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and marine resources, according to a new OECD report. The OECD Review of Fisheries 2020 updates and analyses the OECD fisheries support estimate (FSE) database, the most comprehensive, detailed, and consistent collection of country level data on governments support to fisheries reported by governments. The latest Review shows that at least a quarter of global fish stocks with known status are overfished and a third of fishing activity is not adequately managed, jeopardizing attainment of UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 and the health of our ecosystems. Current fisheries policies are part of the problem: over the 2016-18 period, the 39 countries in the Review reported spending USD 9.4 billion annually in support to fisheries, accounting for about 10% of the value of catches. Over a third of this support lowered the cost of fuel, vessels and gear, which frequently encourages overfishing.

“Governments should stop subsidising fishing inputs, directing support to helping fishers operate their businesses more effectively and more sustainably,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. “Countries have an opportunity to come together at the WTO in an agreement to reduce harmful fisheries subsidies. They must do so, to refocus efforts and limited resources to ensure the protection and sustainability of our oceans, marine biodiversity and the livelihoods of coastal communities.” The report also provides the latest information about illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, which undermines the effectiveness of management and threatens the sustainability of fish stocks. While there has been significant progress over the past fifteen years in fighting IUU fishing, particularly on implementation of port state measures, more needs to be done to improve the transparency of vessel registration and authorisation processes; the stringency of transshipment regulation; the market measures to increase traceability; and to close markets and fisheries services to IUU fishing operators.

Effective management of fish stocks is crucial for the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the sector. Yet policy is lagging in many countries. Only about two-thirds of management mechanisms directly control reported catches and landings, and only about a third of countries and economies use total allowable catch limits (TACs) in all the management processes they report on. How support is given matters. With the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to be a major source of

disruption and uncertainty across the entire seafood sector, governments need to continue providing support to the sector. However, the Review shows that support is most effective and supportive of sustainable fisheries when it is time-limited, targeted, cash-based and consistent with longer-term sustainability objectives. Drawing on experience across major fishing countries, the Review argues that government policy action can make the fisheries sector more productive, sustainable and resilient by:

- Moving away from policies that support inputs and unsustainable capacity towards those that help fishers operate their businesses more effectively in a sustainable manner, and increase their revenue (e.g., through education and training), or that provide direct income support in a way that does not incentivise unsustainable fishing.
- Addressing regulatory loopholes and moving towards internationally recognised best practices to fight IUU fishing.
- Investing in sufficient capacity for management, control and surveillance to effectively and sustainably manage fisheries, including in the high seas, and to eradicate illegal fishing.

Read the OECD Review of Fisheries 2020 report in English: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/agriculture-and-food/oecd-review-of-fisheries-2020_7946bc8a-en. More information on Fisheries and Aquaculture at the OECD: <https://www.oecd.org/agriculture/topics/fisheries-and-aquaculture/>. For further information, journalists are invited to contact Lawrence Speer 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/> 12/12/2020

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ADB, Gojek to Initiate Research on Digitization, COVID-19 Impact on MSMEs

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Gojek, formally known as PT Aplikasi Karya Anak Bangsa, today signed a collaboration agreement to conduct joint research on the impact of digitization and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the operations and development of Indonesia's micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). The agreement, signed by ADB Chief Economist Yasuyuki Sawada and Gojek Chief of Public Policy and Government Relations Shinto Nugroho, outlines research into the benefits of business digitization on MSMEs using Gojek's extensive digital ecosystem. This is ADB's first formal research collaboration with Gojek, one of Indonesia's prominent online platforms. "We are excited about this pioneering knowledge partnership with Gojek, which will help assess how digital technology and facilitative platforms can support a more sustainable and inclusive economic development path, improve business resilience,

and enhance consumer welfare—all within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Mr. Sawada. “We anticipate the findings of this research will help shape policies that expand opportunities for unique and innovative online platforms like Gojek to further contribute to inclusive and sustainable development.”

The collaboration is part of a wider knowledge and support technical assistance program to assess the impact of digitization on business resilience and consumer welfare during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research will include empirical analyses of Gojek’s big data to capture the impact of COVID-19 on small businesses; descriptions of emerging patterns; and studies to identify targeted policy measures, public interventions to enhance the impact of recovery, and growth programs post-COVID-19. “We are excited to establish our partnership with ADB and build upon our commitment to our ecosystem partners, especially small businesses and driver partners as individual entrepreneurs during this pandemic,” said Ms. Nugroho. “We believe that the digital transformation enabled by our technology and ecosystem has been an important factor contributing to our partners’ resilience during this pandemic and as we head towards recovery.” Gojek is a leading Southeast Asian on-demand, multi-service technology platform providing access to a wide range of services including transport, payments, food delivery, and logistics. As of October 2020, Gojek’s application and its ecosystem have been downloaded over 190 million times by users across the region.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 12/02/2020

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Collaboration in Chemical Industry Essential to COVID-19 Response and Recovery

The APEC Chemical Dialogue, the premier forum for the chemical industry in the Asia-Pacific, strengthened cooperation on regulatory affairs in order to facilitate trade in essential goods and assist the recovery effort by APEC member economies by creating jobs and promoting sustainable development. The Asia-Pacific region represents more than 45 percent of the global chemical manufacturing business or an equivalent of 7 percent of global gross domestic product. Of the 120 million jobs supported by the industry, more than 69 percent of them are in the Asia-Pacific, according to the American Chemistry Council. “Chemicals are a critical part of many essential goods. In fact, 96 percent of all manufactured goods rely on chemistry,” said Sergio Barrientos, industry co-chair of the APEC Chemical Dialogue. “From masks and other personal protective equipment to hand sanitizer and crucial disinfectants, the chemical industry plays an essential role in producing important supplies in the fight against COVID-19,” he added.

Government and industry representatives convened virtually in early November and discussed top priorities in the chemicals sector as well as a plan of actions moving

forward, including prioritizing collaboration between public and private sectors to develop innovative solutions for sustainable economic, and environmental and social development through the application of good regulatory practices. Through its virtual working group, the APEC Chemical Dialogue forum advances APEC's agenda on trade and investment by promoting regulatory alignment and convergence to the globally harmonised system of classification and labelling of chemicals and encouraging the sharing of information and best practices on the sound management of the industry. "One of the key areas of interest in the forum is good regulatory practices," said acting government co-chair, Renee Hancher. "When applied uniformly and consistently, good regulatory practices produce more effective and efficient regulatory outcomes, prevent unnecessary obstacles to trade caused by regulations and provide a more predictable regulatory environment that encourages trade and investment."

The forum promotes cross-cutting collaboration to bolster development of and investment in innovative solutions to land-based waste management and ensure coherence on marine debris initiatives with the APEC Oceans and Fisheries Working Group and other APEC fora. The forum recently reiterated their commitment to join the global effort in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 by providing essential materials needed to fight the pandemic, in the Asia-Pacific region as well as globally. "Collaboration between industry and government drives a forward-thinking agenda and contributes to a more coherent regulatory environment for chemicals in the Asia-Pacific, promotes higher health, safety, and environment standards, and prevents barriers to trade," Barrientos concluded.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 12/10/2020

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East Asia

CHINA: Medical Equipment Industry Expands in 2019

China's medical equipment industry saw a total revenue of more than 720 billion yuan (about 109.9 billion U.S. dollars) in 2019, an industry report showed. The revenue was 12 percent higher than that in 2018, according to a report released by the China Society for Drug Regulation (CSDR). Wang Baoting, vice president of CSDR, said China's medical equipment industry will continue to expand, with more innovative products entering the market. The country has started an emergency approval procedure this year, approving 43 kinds of diagnostic kits and a large quantity of medical equipment to combat COVID-19.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/06/2020

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China Extends Financial Support to Major Foreign-funded Companies

Chinese authorities have urged efforts to extend financial support to major foreign-funded firms to lower their fund-raising costs and help them weather the COVID-19 economic fallout. Major foreign-funded companies should get equal access to some financing programs as their Chinese counterparts, according to a circular released jointly by the Ministry of Commerce and the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission. According to the circular, major foreign-funded companies are also eligible for a re-lending and rediscount quota of 1.5 trillion yuan (about 229.5 billion U.S. dollars) from the People's Bank of China. Meanwhile, 570 billion yuan worth of new loans from the Export-Import Bank of China could be used to support qualified major foreign-funded enterprises to offer them diversified and comprehensive financial support, said the circular.

Local government agencies must timely address financial services-related problems that foreign-funded companies face and promote cooperation between foreign-funded companies and financial institutions, the circular added. Major foreign-funded companies include but are not limited to those in electronic and telecommunication equipment sectors, medical devices, automobile, and garment manufacturing. They also include companies related to trade and services, such as wholesale, travel, and elderly care, which have operational challenges, according to the circular.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/17/2020

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China to Continue with Credit Policy Tools to Help Small Businesses

China will continue with two credit policy tools to provide financial support to small and micro-sized companies next year, said a State Council meeting. China will continue with the policy which allows small and micro-sized businesses to postpone principal and interest repayments on inclusive loans in the first quarter of next year, and will extend the policy period appropriately, according to the meeting presided over by Premier Li Keqiang on Monday. The country will also extend the credit loan support tool to help small businesses stabilize their operations, the meeting said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/22/2020

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China's Transport Sector Seeks Low-carbon Development: White Paper

China has worked hard to conserve energy, reduce emissions and develop low-carbon transport to boost economic development, says a white paper released Tuesday. It has strictly implemented a system that controls both the total amount and intensity of energy consumption to improve the overall efficiency of transport, says the white paper titled "Sustainable Development of Transport in China" released by the State Council Information Office. The national railway electrification rate has reached 71.9 percent. There are now more than 400,000 buses and 430,000 trucks using new energy, 180,000 natural gas vehicles and 290 liquefied natural gas (LNG) ships. It says about 14 percent of airport vehicles and facilities are run on new energy sources, substitute facilities for aircraft auxiliary power units (APUs) are in full use and the numbers of postal vehicles run on new and clean energy and those that are in service in key regions are steadily increasing.

More than 7,400 charging piles have been built and operated in 942 expressway service areas across the country, more than 5,800 sets of shore power facilities have been built at ports, covering over 7,200 berths, and container terminals at major ports along the Yangtze and coastlines have switched from oil to electricity for power, the white paper says. The annual energy saved by green transport provinces and cities, green highways, green ports and other demonstration projects has exceeded 630,000 tonnes of coal equivalent, according to the document. It points out that the central government has used vehicle purchase tax funds to support the construction of comprehensive passenger terminals, freight hubs and port railways, and coordinated the development of road-rail, sea-rail and other multimodal forms to restructure the transport network.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/22/2020

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China to Build More Entrepreneurship, Innovation Demonstration Bases

China will launch the third batch of demonstration bases for mass entrepreneurship and innovation as part of an effort to propel reform, stabilize employment, and enhance growth impetus. The country will build 92 demonstration bases in designated areas, enterprises, universities, and research institutes, according to a circular released on Thursday by the State Council, China's cabinet. A differentiated development strategy will apply in the development of these bases, the circular said. The aim is to develop them into platforms for entrepreneurship and employment and make them pioneers of integration and innovation. The country also seeks to help micro, small and medium-sized enterprises become significant sources of innovation and focuses on deepening open and innovative cooperation to build a global platform. The circular urged related departments to step up support for these demonstration

bases. It also urged the strengthening of operation monitoring and evaluation to facilitate innovation and entrepreneurship.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/24/2020

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China Encourages Foreign Investment in More Industries

China's National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Commerce on Monday released a revised industry catalog that names more sectors encouraging foreign investment. Compared with the 2019 version, the list has 127 more items, a rise of 10 percent in the number of sectors encouraging foreign investment, according to the commerce ministry. Meanwhile, up to 88 existing items have been modified to expand their coverage. New sectors added to the national-level catalog include respirators, ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) devices, online education service and 5G mobile telecommunication technologies. Foreign investors entering industries on the catalog will enjoy preferential policies in fields such as taxation and land use subject to laws and regulations. The new catalog will come into effect on Jan. 27, 2021, the ministry said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/28/2020

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Suning to Expand Business in China's Duty-free Retail Market

Leading Chinese retail company Suning Holdings Group and its subsidiary Suning International have inked a deal with Hainan Tourism Investment Development Co. Ltd. for cooperation in China's duty-free retail business, Suning said. Both sides will leverage their advantages to focus on logistics, commercial real estate, tourism retail and other fields to integrate various industrial chains and help in the construction of Hainan Free Trade Port in south China's Hainan Province, Suning added. "Riding the strong growth momentum of Hainan Free Trade Zone, this strategic partnership has granted us a great opportunity to bring more prosperity to the area by leveraging the global supply chain of Suning," said Steven Zhang, vice president of Suning. According to Suning International, the domestic demand for duty-free goods has increased due to the global pandemic and Hainan has become a more attractive alternative for buying such goods amid the travel restrictions. The global business arm of Suning said it will deliver more overseas goods such as cosmetics, designer home furniture and health products to consumers in Hainan and beyond.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/29/2020

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China Tightens Regulation for Loans to Real Estate Sector

China's regulators on Thursday announced a policy to tighten regulation for loans to the real estate sector and home mortgage loans to guard against systemic risks and improve the stability of the financial system. The People's Bank of China and the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission will require domestic banks to limit the ratio between their outstanding property loans and total RMB loans. The two regulators also set ceilings for the ratio of home mortgage loans. The upper limits are set in five different grades based on factors such as asset sizes and functions of financial institutions. The caps for large banks are the highest at 40 percent for property loans and 32.5 percent for home mortgage loans, involving lenders such as the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China and the China Construction Bank. Medium-sized banks, such as China Merchants Bank, will see their ceilings set at 27.5 percent and 20 percent, respectively. The policy will take effect on Jan. 1, 2021, but will provide a "transition period" of up to four years for those that fail to meet the standards.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 12/31/2020

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JAPAN: Businesses Must Devise Ways to Maintain Efficiency in Teleworking

As an increasing number of companies have introduced teleworking as coronavirus infections rise, problems have come to light such as how to maintain productivity and evaluate workers' results. It will surely be necessary to make flexible responses depending on the type of business and how infections are spreading. Telework has also been expected to help reduce congestion for commuters and for the time not spent commuting to be effectively used for work or leisure. The Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry should present easier-to-understand guidelines regarding labor management, personnel evaluations, health maintenance and cost burdens including communications fees, based on problems that have been revealed as many companies have introduced teleworking.

While some industries and professions can make it easier for workers to start telecommuting, such as those related to the tech sector, others cannot, such as sales staff who focus on face-to-face communications with customers, and medical workers who take care of patients. A good combination of commuting to work and working from home should help telecommuting take root. With the management and labor sides both devising ideas, companies are encouraged to explore working styles that can suit the realities of their operations. At some companies that started teleworking in haste, employees have been forced to use home computers and

communications devices and there are many cases in which the companies have been harmed by cyber-attacks. The central and local governments must continue to provide support for cybersecurity measures at small and midsize enterprises.

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

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Tech Giants' Treatment of Smaller Businesses to Be Monitored

The government will impose new regulations on tech giants from next spring, such as requiring them to notify business partners, such as online shop operators, at least 15 days in advance when changing their terms and conditions, The Yomiuri Shimbun has learned. The government will also require them to state their reasons if any unfair treatment is reported regarding the treatment of their own products versus products of other companies. The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry will hire several experts in the IT field to investigate the current situation among dominant companies in the industry. The regulations will be set out in a government ministerial ordinance or guidelines based on the law concerning the enhancement of transparency and fairness of specified digital platforms, enacted in May this year. Such tech giants as Google, Apple, Amazon, Rakuten and Yahoo are expected to be subject to the regulations.

The regulations will stipulate that such leading tech companies will be required to notify their business partners 15 days in advance when changing the terms and conditions of transactions, such as commission fees for opening an online shop on their site, and 30 days beforehand when ceasing to do business. The tech giants will also be required to explain the reasons when their own products are given preferential treatment, for example in commission fees, compared to products of business partners. The government also aims to improve a consultation system to properly respond to complaints. The new law obligates tech giants to compile annual business reports. The ministry and organizations related to tech fields will set up consultation services so that business complaints and other issues can be addressed promptly. The IT experts to be hired by the ministry will be in charge of monitoring the tech giants closely through analyzing their businesses and technologies. It has been found through an investigation by the Fair Trade Commission on online shopping and smartphone app market that such companies, being in stronger positions, have forced unilateral agreements upon their business partners.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 12/16/2020

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Japanese Firms Explore Quantum Cryptography to Make Stock

Trading Secure

A group of Japanese firms has launched the country's first study into quantum cryptography in a bid to enhance the security of stock trading. The joint study, commenced the same day by Toshiba Corp, NEC Corp and Nomura Holdings Inc among others, comes amid increasing threats from cyberattacks on financial institutions. Quantum cryptography, in theory, is considered to be impossible for third parties to crack, the group said. The companies expect to put the technology into use in stock trading within several years. In the joint research, they will connect a cryptographic device developed by Toshiba to a trading system at Nomura Securities Co, the brokerage unit of Nomura Holdings, and test run encryption using virtual customer details and trading data. The simulations, conducted with a help from the National Institute of Information and Communications Technology, will look into the ability to encrypt numerous orders without delay even when millions of orders are made simultaneously, they said. It will also check if there is any impact on the system when operations stretch for days.

From <https://japantoday.com> 12/28/2020

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SOUTH KOREA: Mobile Carriers Consolidate Tech Biz for New Growth Drivers

South Korean mobile carriers are merging their tech subsidiaries and consolidating new businesses to boost synergy as they search for new growth drivers beyond their telecommunication operations. Telecom giant KT Corp. announced it will merge its digital content distribution and television commerce subsidiary KT Hitel Co. and its mobile coupon and advertisement unit KT mhows Co. by July next year. KT said the consolidation of KT Hitel's logistic channels and KT mhows' 30,000 corporate clients will boost its efforts in the mobile commerce market. The move comes as KT seeks to develop its non-telecom operations and foster budding tech services. KT CEO Ku Hyeon-mo said in October the company aims for an equal share in sales from its new non-telecommunications businesses, such as cloud and artificial intelligence (AI) services, and from its telecom operations. Rival wireless carrier SK Telecom Co. has also decided to merge its security subsidiaries in line with efforts to develop new tech services.

The carrier's digital security solutions subsidiary, SK infosec, plans to merge with its physical security unit ADT Caps Co. by the first quarter of next year. ADT Caps is South Korea's second-largest physical security service operator with a user base of 700,000, while SK infosec offers services such as cyberattack detection. The carrier said it aims to create the country's top all-round security company through the merger and for the merged company's value to reach 5 trillion won (US\$4.5 billion)

within three years after the merger. The move is the latest in SK Telecom's shakeup of its new tech businesses. In November, the carrier's shareholders approved a spinoff plan for its mobility business, which will work with U.S. mobility giant Uber Technologies Inc. to operate a taxi-hailing service in South Korea. Major telecom operator LG Uplus Corp. has also reconfigured its business divisions to support nascent tech services. The wireless carrier said late last month it has decided to create a new business division next year that will oversee its new services, such as those related to smart health, security and education.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 12/01/2020

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S. Korea Seeks to Nurture 100,000 Talents in AI Sector by 2025

South Korea plans to nurture 100,000 talented individuals in the artificial intelligence (AI) sector by 2025 by supporting related graduate schools and colleges centering on software development, the finance minister said Thursday. Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki also said the country plans to spend more than 23 billion won (US\$21 million) next year to support software firms' marketing in and forays into overseas markets. "Through AI-related graduate schools and colleges focusing on software development, the government plans to foster 100,000 key talented individuals by 2025 and support software education for students and the public," Hong said at a government meeting over strategy on innovative growth. The government has campaigned for nurturing innovative growth and developing the software industry in an effort to help prop up the sagging economy, hit by the new coronavirus outbreak. In a related effort, the government plans to foster 100 leading software companies by 2025 and convert more than five regional software clusters into software development complexes, Hong noted.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 12/03/2020

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Govt. to Offer Relief Grants of Up to W3m to Virus-Hit Small Biz

South Korea will offer relief grants of up to 3 million won (\$2,700) for small business owners hit by the new coronavirus outbreak, ruling party and government officials said Sunday. The decision on the country's third round of emergency relief package was reached during a high-level policy discussion between officials from Cheong Wa Dae, the government and the ruling party at the National Assembly. After the meeting, the ruling party announced the decision to offer 1 million won to all small businesses owners, and provide an additional 1 million won to stores subject to partial restrictions, or an additional 2 million won to businesses forced to shut down entirely due to toughened schemes. The government's goal is to provide the relief grants

within January. The move comes as more small merchants and self-employed people are facing the growing burden of paying fixed rent fees amid government orders to suspend their businesses to curb the spread of community transmissions.

The government will also provide low-interest loans to small businesses and allow deferrals of electricity and insurance bills of store owners from January to March. The government also plans to offer support for medical institutions dealing with the pandemic. Specifically, the government will help provide additional negative pressure room sick beds for hospitals dedicated to treating infectious disease and compensate damage stemming from dealing with the coronavirus. The ruling party and the government also decided to raise the amount of tax credits offered to landlords who voluntarily reduce rents for small businesses, from the current 50 percent to up to 70 percent for the corresponding discounted amount. The program will not apply universally to all landlords but only to those with incomes "under a certain level." The government will also offer grants to contract workers and freelancers in the new relief program. Such workers were eligible to receive 500,000 won in emergency funds in the government's fourth supplementary budget passed earlier this year.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 12/27/2020

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South-East Asia

CAMBODIA: Development Partners Join Hands to Boost E-Commerce as Covid-19 Forces Businesses to Go Online

Cambodia's Ministry of Commerce (MoC), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) have joined hands to boost online commerce as the COVID-19 pandemic has forced more businesses to move online, said a joint press statement on Monday. Some 125 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are set to gain grants and training in online commerce through a joint investment of 500,000 U.S. dollars, the statement said. The funds will fuel an innovative six-month incubation and training initiative and small grants program to help SMEs move online, sell online, and, for some, sell to overseas customers through a new online marketplace being developed by the MoC, it said. "This joint initiative by the MoC and UNDP will form one of the key components of Cambodia's e-commerce acceleration project (Go4eCam) that aims to boost domestic and international opportunities for SMEs through a digital platform and create over 10,000 new jobs by 2022," the statement said.

Cambodia's e-commerce sector has grown exponentially in the last decade and the enhanced support comes as the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many more businesses to move online, it said, adding that e-commerce and digitization are seen as crucial to ensure a full, rapid and sustained economic recovery for the country.

Cambodia has stepped up efforts in recent years to strengthen its e-commerce ecosystem, including regulatory framework and strategy, such as passing the landmark 2019 E-commerce Law, a set of sub-decrees to ease registration for e-commerce-based businesses, the Consumer Protection Law to protect the rights of online shoppers and businesses, and the recently launched E-commerce Strategy. In support of Cambodia's response to COVID-19, UNDP is working to reskill workers, support the onboarding of 1,000 SMEs into the e-commerce market and promote the adoption of e-commerce across the country through an advocacy campaign to create a robust regulatory environment. "The Go4eCam project is launching at the right time, coinciding with the approval of the e-commerce law and the launch of the e-commerce strategy," Cambodian Minister of Commerce Pan Sorasak said. "The project will provide many other benefits, including increasing productivity, innovation, business expansion and job creation in Cambodia," he added.

Nick Beresford, UNDP's resident representative in Cambodia, said inclusive investment in people, in skills development and in digital infrastructure for everyone are crucial. "Cambodia's new e-commerce strategy, combined with the right incentives and investments, could be a game-changer to propel inclusive growth in the recovery from COVID-19," he said. Ratnakar Adhikari, executive director of the Executive Secretariat for the EIF at the World Trade Organization (WTO), said Cambodia has great potential on e-commerce. He said the recently launched e-commerce strategy, supported by the EIF, with a concrete plan of action will tackle bottleneck in critical areas, such as the legal and regulatory framework, ICT infrastructure, digital skills and SME support. "Together with the Go4eCam project and strong partnership on the ground, I strongly believe that Cambodia is putting in place a conducive ecosystem necessary to boost e-commerce, export competitiveness, promote entrepreneurship and tap into new sources of growth in the digital era," he said.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 12/28/2020

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MYANMAR: Earning over 1.25 Bln USD from Manufacturing Exports in over First Two Months of FY 2020-21

Myanmar earned over 1.25 billion U.S. dollars from the export of finished industrial goods in over first two months of present fiscal year (FY) 2020-2021 which started in October, according to figures released by the Commerce Ministry on Monday. As of Dec. 11, the finished industrial goods or manufacturing goods sector topped the list with the most export value, followed by agriculture and mineral sectors among other exports. This year FY's figures decreased by over 819 million U.S. dollars, compared to the same period of FY 2019-2020 when it registered over 2.07 billion U.S. dollars. During the period, the country's export totaled over 2.64 billion U.S. dollars while its import shared over 2.92 billion U.S. dollars, the ministry's figures said. Myanmar

mainly exports agricultural products, animal products, marine products, minerals, forest products, manufacturing goods and others to foreign trade partner countries. About 80 percent of the country's external trade is done through sea-borne trade and its border trade is being conducted through 17 border gates with neighbouring countries.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 12/21/2020

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VIETNAM: HCM City Draws Up Plans for Underground Space, Seeks Private Sector Financing

The HCM City Department of Planning and Architecture has submitted suggestions to city authorities for underground space planning for the 930-ha city centre comprising Districts 1 and 3 and the Thủ Thiêm new urban area in District 2, according to Thanh Niên (Young People) newspaper. The underground spaces will connect to areas near metro lines, according to the department. Nguyễn Thanh Nhã, head of the department, said that an international contest to seek ideas for the underground space planning has been approved by the People's Committee. Architect Khương Văn Mười, former chairman of the HCM City Association of Architects, said that facilities in the underground space would relieve pressure above ground and provide additional parking space as well security and defense. Underground spaces connecting metro lines and public transport vehicles will be important, and the main metro stations should have many services, with underground tunnels connecting markets, trade centers, and others, he said. The city's current planning projects include underground space at Quách Thị Trang Square and the 23.9 park that will connect to metro stations in the Bến Thành area in District 1.

On the streets of Lê Lợi, Nguyễn Huệ, and Hàm Nghi, more services will be developed to attract tourists, and on Tôn Đức Thắng Street, a parking area will be built and a pedestrian street will connect the metro station in the Ba Son area and waterway transport along the Sài Gòn River. The basements of hotels and shopping centres along these streets should be connected with each other and to metro lines, experts have said. Financing is the biggest obstacle for underground space planning, Mười said, adding that the city faces a budget shortfall for above-ground space. He said the city should call on the private sector for additional investment in underground space planning. Experts have said that foreign consultants should be hired because they have practical experience in planning and spatial design. However, collecting initial data should be done by a local consultant because they will understand the actual situation and be able to research geological information and collect data for underground projects, Mười said. While waiting for the complete underground space planning, the city also needs to collect information about existing underground facilities such as parking lots and shopping centres so that new

management regulations can be drawn up.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 12/03/2020

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ADB Uses MVV Technologies to Support Women-Owned SMEs

Asian Development Bank (ADB) has selected MVV Education's two technologies, Consultant Anywhere and Everlearn, to implement a COVID-19 business counseling and training programme for 500 women-owned small- and medium-sized enterprises (WSMEs) in Việt Nam. The programme will focus on providing tools to improve their capacity management capacity and skill sets to run their businesses successfully during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of specialised business training programmes has created barriers for Vietnamese WSMEs to be recognised and represented, even though they play a key factor in economic development. The programme aims to give them training in various business aspects, financial advisory services, and technical knowledge to mitigate the impact of the economic downturn. Components of the programme include recruitment with screening and registration for WSMEs, business counseling using the Consultant Anywhere app, offline and online training using the Everlearn platform, and mentoring with peer support using the team's network. The training programme for WSMEs includes 12 modules, focusing on business and financial knowledge, building a business plan, action planning in HR management, operating costs management, and re-engineering products and customer service, among others. All are expected to help enterprises respond to the COVID-19 situation effectively. In addition to strong technical capabilities, MVV has partnered with Women's Initiative for Start-up Entrepreneurship (WISE) to provide subject-matter experts in various fields. They are well-known business consultants with experience working with numerous authorities and global businesses. The team is represented nationwide and has performed consulting projects in most cities and provinces in Viet Nam, of which many of them were female-owned small and medium-sized businesses. MVV is a provider of business and capacity building solutions uniquely delivered through multiple platforms that enable fully-integrated and seamless online and onsite interactions.

From https://vietnamnews.vn 12/09/2020

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South Asia

INDIA: Pega Develops New System for Bavarian Government to Aid SMEs amidst COVID-19 Outbreak

Pegasystems Inc. (NASDAQ: PEGA), the software company empowering digital

transformation at the world's leading enterprises, has announced the development of a new application and process system for the Bavarian Government to provide emergency COVID-19 financial aid to self-employed workers, farmers, and small to medium-sized companies. Hosted in secure, scalable data centres by T-Systems, the solution will allow those eligible for assistance to apply through an entirely digital process, which will accelerate the distribution of funds where they are most needed. Pega worked alongside the Bavarian Ministry of Economic Affairs and T-Systems to develop the system in just five days. "I'm proud of how quickly we were able to build this system," said Jörg Scholz, vice president public sales and head of IT business, T-Systems. As of April 7, more than 108,500 Bavarian companies had already used the application to apply for the assistance. "With this new online procedure, we will be able to speed up the processing of applications to the district governments and the state capital of Munich," said Hubert Aiwanger, Bavarian Minister of Economic Affairs.

"I would like to thank Pegasystems and T-Systems for their extremely high level of commitment to helping self-employed workers, farmers, and businesses in need get the relief they need more quickly", he added. The solution, developed with the highly configurable low-code capabilities of the Pega Platform, replaces the existing process, which required applicants to manually complete, scan, and email documents to the application centres. The new process allows applicants to enter their data online, which enables administrators to review and approve claims far more quickly. Payment orders for successful applicants are then automatically forwarded to the relevant administrative staff of the Free State of Bavaria and the City of Munich before a payment notification is generated and received by the approved self-employed workers, farmers, and businesses via email. The system also allows government staff to access the application from their workstation at home – which would be problematic in the old manual system. In addition, it offers a statistical evaluation of the speed and efficiency of the application process, which will allow the ministry to refine and improve it further in the weeks ahead. Applicants can access the solution here: <https://www.stmwi.bayern.de/soforthilfe-corona/>

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 12/13/2020

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Tech Mahindra Joins Niti Aayog to Support Women Entrepreneurs

IT major Tech Mahindra on Monday announced a partnership with NITI Aayog to empower women entrepreneurs in the country. The company will provide mentorship, co-create solutions leveraging new-age technologies and support in partnership with the panel's Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP). "Our partnership with WEP will enable us to nurture an ecosystem for women entrepreneurs that can foster conditions as well as facilitate technological support for innovative ideas and better

positioning," CP Gurnani, Managing Director and CEO, Tech Mahindra, said in a statement. Through this collaboration, Tech Mahindra and WEP will jointly focus on breeding new ideas, identifying gaps and providing technological prowess to develop innovative solutions for better positioning in the market and commercial success. The company's lab will support women entrepreneurs through joint research, building go-to-market strategies to drive their growth and by leveraging next-generation technologies to develop cutting-edge solutions. "This partnership with Tech Mahindra underscores our mutual commitment of leveraging new-age technologies to uplift societies and support the aspirations of women entrepreneurs in India," said Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 12/23/2020

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SRI LANKA: Hatch and LAN Gear up to Launch First Fintech Accelerator

Hatch in partnership with Lankan Angel Network (LAN) and through the support of the Ford Foundation, will officially launch the first chapter of its start-up accelerator programme 'HatchX', establishing Sri Lanka's first fintech accelerator. The programme's strategic partner will be the Fintech Association of Sri Lanka (FASL). It has also received the endorsement of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL). This first chapter will stay true to HatchX's unique vision of moving beyond the traditional accelerator model by linking six innovative start-ups with financial regulators in order to bridge the divide between the two in the start-up ecosystem. The programme is being launched at a time when Sri Lanka is urgently looking towards fintech solutions to address essential needs, especially as businesses and financial institutions are seeking digital solutions to deliver timely services to their customers in order to meet unprecedented demand. HatchX acts as a platform that supports start-ups and mature companies to scale their products and services in Sri Lanka and the region, while also opening up opportunities for collaboration, encouraging sharing and enabling access.

Through HatchX's foundational pillars focused on education, investment readiness and networking, entrepreneurs can access knowledge, expertise, collaboration and investment opportunities- all within the safe space of a curated accelerator programme designed by an internationally experienced expert team. Commenting on the accelerator programme, Hatch co-founder Jeevan Gnanam said: "This will really put our cohort of start-ups through the mill. They'll learn everything they need to about making it in a tough space and emerge stronger and more investible. They'll be linked directly with banks, investors, and service providers as well as CBSL. Eventually, they will become products that will hugely improve how we access finance in Sri Lanka and beyond. Especially now, that the country is waking up to the need for digital financial solutions to meet their daily needs. Everyone benefits, and

everyone learns.” The fintech chapter of HatchX is funded by the Ford Foundation through LAN, a platform for angel and private investors who invest in high-growth early stage Sri Lankan ventures. Since 2012, LAN has supported more than 30 start-ups via funding and mentored over 1,000 start-ups. Recently, LAN launched Sri Lanka’s first Angel Fund to back early-stage start-ups via a structure fund.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 12/02/2020

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Hosts Auction for State Property Privatization

The State Service (formerly Committee) on Property Issues under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy held new auction on December 1, 2020, [Trend](#) reports citing the service. During the auction, 4 state properties were privatized, of which 2 were small state enterprises and 2 vehicles. The privatized enterprises are located in Hajigabul and Yevlakh districts of Azerbaijan. The service said that those wishing to participate in such auctions can not only place an electronic order for the selected object of the service, but also join the online auction. Interested participants can visit the Space for the provision of property services of the State Property Service of Azerbaijan on the day of the auction, as well as observe it without registration online. All those wishing to partake in the auction on the official website of the service (emlak.gov.az) or on the privatization.az portal must, after registering, pay a deposit of 10 percent of the initial auction price of the object, thereby obtaining the status of the customer. On the day of the auction, bidding can be joined by selecting the section ‘Electronic auction’ on the e-services portal (e-emdk.gov.az).

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/02/2020

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New E-Service for Entrepreneurs Launched in Azerbaijan

The Small and Medium Business Development Agency of Azerbaijan has launched a new e-service, the agency told [Trend](#). As part of the digital transformation program, an opportunity has been created to take an online queue for entrepreneurs wishing to use the services of SME Houses, said the agency. “Entrepreneurs can download the ‘SME Queue’ app on their mobile devices through the Android operating system (via GooglePlay). A user who has downloaded the application can register and create a personal account by entering the serial number and FIN of the ID,” said the SME agency. The purpose for creating the mobile app is to provide prompt service for entrepreneurs who apply to SME Houses, and thereby minimizing contacts between people, which is appropriate to the pandemic period, the agency noted. In the coming days, it will be possible to download the app via the AppStore.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/11/2020

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State Tax Service Reveals Data on Financial Aid for Azerbaijani Entrepreneurs

The State Tax Service under the Ministry of Economy of Azerbaijan has provided financial aid to 12,982 individual entrepreneurs, [Trend](#) reports on Dec.24 referring to the service. According to the service, the aid worth over 5.9 million manat (\$3.5 million) was provided to the entrepreneurs in Lankaran, Shaki, Jalilabad, Bilasuvar, Gakh, Zagatala, Masalli, Ismayilli, Guba, and Khachmaz districts with the toughened quarantine regime through the decision adopted by the Azerbaijani Cabinet of Ministers to continue financial support within the 3rd stage of the payment of a certain part of wages to employees in the areas affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/24/2020

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Azerbaijani State Service to Auction Off Small Enterprises

The State Property Service under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy will hold an auction on January 26, 2021, [Trend](#) reports referring to the ministry. According to the data, 25 state property facilities (small public enterprises and non-finished buildings) will be put up for the auction. "Everyone can take part in the auctions. Also, those interested in the process can observe the progress of the auctions both in the Space for the provision of property services of the State Property Service, and online," said the service. "Those wishing to participate in the auctions on the official website of the Service (emlak.gov.az) or the privatization.az portal, after registering, must pay a deposit of 10 percent of the initial auction price of the property, thereby obtaining the status of the customer," the service said. On the day of the auction, by selecting the section "Electronic auction" on the e-services portal (e-emdk.gov.az), it is possible to join the auction.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 12/29/2020

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KAZAKHSTAN: Identifies Strengths, Weaknesses of Local Industrial Enterprises Via Analysis

Kazakhstan conducted a technological analysis to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each enterprise following the criteria of the Methodology for determining the Technological Maturity Index, a source in the Zerde Holding JSC, responsible for the Digital Kazakhstan State Program's implementation, told [Trend](#).

The source said that currently, almost all countries use digital technologies to raise labor productivity in the economy and to improve the quality of life in the social life of the population. "So, according to global analysts, the Internet economy on emerging markets grows 15-25 percent per year, and 40 percent of the economic growth of the European Union until 2020 will be due to the development of the digital economy," noted the source. "The correlation between the digitalization index and economic development reaches 70 percent. This gives us an understanding that digitalization is indeed a very timely initiative today."

"To achieve the set goals in 2017, Kazakhstan Institute for Industry Development JSC, together with the Fraunhofer Society for Applied Research, selected 7 digital model factories, at which following the criteria of the Methodology for determining the Technological Maturity Index, a technological analysis was carried out to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each enterprise," the source pointed out. "These factories are implementing 51 projects, of these, 16 projects have been implemented, the main effect of which was a 25 percent and 5 percent growth in labor productivity and the service life of equipment respectively." "Besides, on March 4, 2020, the President of Kazakhstan adopted a decree about 'Elaboration of a set of regulatory and incentive measures to develop the elements of 4.0 Industry, including the expansion of the Model Digital Factories project, the use of artificial intelligence, The Internet of Things and other IT technologies ", noted the source. In order to expand the positive results of the seven model factories, the project is planned to be scaled up to other industrial enterprises, added the source.

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TURKMENISTAN: USAID Promotes Warehouse Digitization of Turkmen Logistics Company

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) is supporting a private Turkmen logistics company, Shaylan Economic Society, to fully digitize all its warehouse and transportation management systems, a spokesperson for the US Embassy in Turkmenistan told [Trend](#). "IT logistics system will allow Shaylan Economic Society to fully digitize all its warehouse and transportation management systems. This will allow the company to offer streamlined logistics to foreign traders, with the goal of expanding online customer access," he added. He noted that the Shaylan Economic Society hopes to increase annual revenue by more than 30 percent in the 2H2020 due to the new system. Once the roll-out of software is completed by mid-2021, Shaylan plans to launch a brand new "third-party logistics" service for the Turkmen market. The third-party logistics service (commonly referred to as "3PL") will enable other market players to hire Shaylan's 3PL service to handle their distribution, warehousing, and fulfillment services so that they can focus on their core business, the spokesperson pointed out. "The new service will offer integrated

operations of warehousing and transportation that can be customized and scaled to meet each customers' needs. More importantly, the launch of integrated supply chain management services can potentially increase export of Turkmen producers since successful international business is not only reliant on a superior product offering but also on effective, responsive supply chains which Shaylan will be better able to offer to nascent local exporters," concluded the spokesperson.

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AUSTRALIA: Services Sector Lifts as Restrictions Ease

The relaxing of coronavirus restrictions has given a further boost to the services sector, which is now enjoying conditions not seen for a year. The Australian Industry Group performance of services index rose a further 1.5 points to 52.9 points in November, another improvement in conditions after a slump for much of the year. An index reading above 50 points indicates the sector is expanding. Four of the five sectors covered by the report expanded during November, with only retail and hospitality continue to contract. "Sales, new orders, employment and deliveries improved as activity restrictions eased and businesses ran down their inventory levels," the report released on Monday said. "Improved conditions and a boost in sales was mainly due to greater movement of goods and people as restrictions across borders and within Victoria eased."

The report follows a run of largely positive data over the past week, which suggests the economy will finish the year on a relative high after enduring the first recession since the early 1990s. The national accounts posted last week showed the economy had expanded by 3.3 per cent in the September quarter, rebounding from the nation's record seven per cent contraction in the June quarter. Reserve Bank governor Philip Lowe's initial response to the figures, while facing a parliamentary committee last Wednesday, was "good". The Reserve Bank is not expecting the growth rate to return to its pre-COVID levels until the end of 2021. "If we keep getting numbers like that it will be a bit quicker," Dr Lowe said. The governor is preparing to deliver a speech on payment systems to industry figures on Monday. ANZ will also release its monthly job advertisement report for November, a pointer to future employment. Job ads rose by a further 9.4 per cent in October, but were still down 13.5 per cent from their February level prior to the onslaught of the coronavirus pandemic.

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New Car Dealership Rules 'Doomed to Fail'

The federal government's guiding principles to help manage relations between car companies and their dealers is a "do-nothing policy" that is "doomed to fail", the Australian Automotive Dealer Association says. At the same time, the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries has described the new measures as a classic example of overreaction and an effort to maintain the government's "cosy relationship" with dealers. The six best practice principles were released on Friday, providing for a voluntary framework on issues such as compensation and dispute resolution. The government said the measures struck a balance between better protecting car dealers while ensuring Australia remained an attractive investment prospect for vehicle manufacturers. But AADA chief executive James Voortman said the government had sided with multi-national companies at the expense of the nation's car dealers and their 60,000 employees.

"It is clear that car dealers in Australia desperately need a strong set of mandatory protections which protect against the abuses from car manufacturers," Mr Voortman said. "What we have today is a do-nothing policy cynically released on a Friday afternoon. "The voluntary approach being announced by the government is doomed to fail and the potential damage that can be done before these principles are reviewed in two years' time is immense." FCAI chief executive Tony Weber said government's measures were unhelpful, with the commercial environment in the sector already governed by a raft of regulatory checks and balances covering all parties. "Steps by the government and dealers to deter change and innovation will come at the expense of consumers," he said. "Like every other part of the retail economy, the way customers wish to buy vehicles is changing.

"This change should be encouraged by government, not hindered to maintain a cosy relationship with car dealers." Among the six best practice principles, car companies are urged to include provisions for fair and reasonable compensation to dealers if they withdraw from Australia or rationalises their network. This should include allowances for loss of profits, wind up costs and unrecovered capital expenditure. They also called for agreements to allow time for dealers to secure a return on their investments and for companies to buy-back or compensate dealers for vehicle inventories, parts and special tools. The final principle said agreements should include provision for timely resolution of disputes. Their release pre-empts a Senate inquiry report due in March next year which has also looked at the issues between dealers and car companies following this year's departure of Holden from the local market.

The inquiry was established to review the circumstances in which General Motors decided to retire the Holden brand, effectively ending 185 dealer agreements, and heard how many Holden dealers felt compelled to take what they considered to be inadequate compensation. It has since expanded to more broadly explore the

relationship between car manufacturers and dealers and has heard of issues with other vehicle brands. In a joint statement, Industry Minister Karen Andrew, Employment Minister Michaelia Cash and Assistant Treasurer Michael Sukkar said the guiding principles were designed to deliver the best outcome for Australian consumers. "The government has worked to balance the need to better protect car dealers with an environment that is attractive to manufacturers to invest in our nation - as well as ensuring the best deal for everyday Australians buying vehicles," the ministers said.

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Mining, Energy Industries Eye Jobs Bonanza

More than 24,000 jobs could be created across almost 100 mining, oil and gas projects likely to start over the next five years. Resources and energy employer group AMMA has detailed the jobs bonanza in a groundbreaking report analysing federal government major projects data. Based on 98 projects worth a combined \$84 billion considered likely to proceed, the 22 linked to coal will be the largest driver of growth, with around 8000 new production jobs. Nine iron ore projects could lead to 5000 jobs, the report predicts. There are 20 gold mining projects considered likely to start by 2026 and 14 in gas and petroleum. AMMA chief executive Steve Knott said the forecast of 24,400 new operational-phase employees was highly conservative. "It only factors in projects either already committed or very close to receiving final investment decision," he said.

"When considering the construction workforces required to build these projects and the flow-on effects throughout the supply chain, it's reasonable to expect the true impacts of this investment pipeline to be well over 50,000 jobs." Forecast mining occupations include 9233 plant operators, 3014 heavy diesel fitters and 4484 engineers, geologists and other technical roles. Oil and gas occupations include 952 trade technicians, 532 production technicians and operators and 487 management and supervisory roles. AMMA is hoping its report helps government to determine emerging skill shortages and inform people about career opportunities. Under the projections, Australia's direct resources and energy workforce would grow more than 10 per cent, propelling the industries past 260,000 employees for the first time since February 2014.

The Morrison government last week introduced a bill to parliament which would allow more eight-year enterprise agreements on major projects. Mr Knott said the proposed changes to greenfields agreements would offer stable industrial arrangements for the length of major construction phases. "This simple improvement will make a massive difference to getting the \$84 billion worth of advanced projects, and their potential to bring more than 24,400 new jobs, over the line," he said. Unions

have criticised the threshold of \$250 million, arguing greenfields deals should only be for major resources projects worth more than \$5 billion. The ACTU is concerned workers' right to strike and take other industrial action could be hampered on smaller sites like hospitals. An additional 192 projects, worth around 35,000 jobs, are listed as being early in feasibility stages and not included in the report.

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Fashion Stores Act on Supply Chain Poverty

David Jones and Best & Less are among the major fashion brands that have committed to a measure to help protect the wages of workers who make their clothes. The Australian retail chains have published pledges to "ringfence" labour costs in price negotiations with their international suppliers. Ringfencing means garment workers' pay will be listed as a separate line item in negotiations and contracts between the brands and the factories that make the clothes. This helps protect the workers' wages. Anti-poverty charity Oxfam Australia has congratulated the two retailers along with Country Road and Hanes, which owns Bonds, on the development. "This is vitally important," Oxfam Australia's chief executive, Lyn Morgain, told AAP. "For the women who make our clothes, we're ensuring that the big brands are not using their power in negotiations to effectively drive worse conditions."

Ms Morgain said the move adds transparency, showing how much money is going towards labour costs and insulating them from downward pressure on prices. A living wage is calculated based on a person working 48 hours a week and earning enough money for their basic daily needs. Oxfam has been campaigning for better treatment of garment workers in Southeast Asia, who make clothes Australians wear. In November, the charity published a report evaluating how retailer business practices affected the quality of life among Bangladeshi garment workers, most of whom are women. H&M ranked highest of the brands surveyed, while the companies behind Just Jeans and Rivers had room to improve. At least 19 other major fashion brands have promised to ringfence labour costs, Oxfam says. They include H&M, Big W and Cotton On.

Oxfam is on Friday launching an advertising blitz in shopping centres to raise awareness of low wages in the fashion industry. Ms Morgain said this week's development showed brands are aware that consumers don't want to "wear poverty" and are informing themselves about the ethics of retail supply chains. "We've got a number of brands that have been, if you like, intransigent...They are making a calculated risk that the market doesn't care and I wonder whether their shareholders would share that view. "Because there's an awful lot of evidence now, and you can see it in the behaviour of the other brands, that it is increasingly a part of the value

proposition of a brand. There are risks in being associated with poverty wages."

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