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Asia-Pacific Governance Watch

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1、Government Policy and Legislation

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CHINA: To Promote High-quality Development with Rule of Law

China's procuratorial authorities will fully leverage the rule of law to facilitate high-quality development in 2023, said a work report of the Supreme People's Procuratorate. Procuratorial agencies will support innovation-driven development and enhance protection on intellectual property rights (IPR), said the report submitted Tuesday to the ongoing national legislature session for deliberation. The report also pledges to step up judicial protection of the ecological environment. In 2022, China prosecuted 13,000 people over crimes concerning the rights of trademarks, patents, copyrights and commercial secrets, a 51.2-percent rise from 2018, according to the report. Over the past five years, a total of 621,000 people were prosecuted over disruption of market and economic order, up 32.3 percent from the previous five years, it said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 03/07/2023

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China Willing to Promote Security, Stability in Middle East

China is willing to promote security and stability, be partner for the development and prosperity, and boost the unity and strength in the Middle East, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang said Tuesday. The minister noted that China and the Middle Eastern countries enjoy a long history of being good friends and partners. In the first China-Arab States Summit held on Dec. 9, 2022, China and Arab states agreed to make all-out efforts to build a China-Arab community with a shared future in the new era, which pushed forward the China-Arab friendly cooperation, Qin said. He also mentioned the visit to China last month by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ebrahim Raisi, during which the two sides agreed to deepen the China-Iran comprehensive strategic partnership and push the bilateral ties to a new level. China supports the Middle Eastern countries in upholding strategic independence, and opposes external interference in Middle Eastern countries' internal affairs. China will continue to uphold justice and support the Middle Eastern countries in seeking political settlement of the region's hotspot issues through dialogue and consultation, Qin said. China fully respects the Middle Eastern countries as the masters of their own affairs, has no intention to fill the so-called vacuum, and will not build exclusive circles in the region, Qin added.

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China to Further Expand Opening Up

China will further expand opening up this year in alignment with high-standard international trade rules, and will open its door wider to the world with a better business environment and services, Premier Li Qiang said Monday. This year marks the 45th anniversary of China's reform and opening up, which has not only developed China but also influenced the world, Li told a press conference. The premier said China has remained a favored destination for global investment, given that foreign direct investment in the Chinese mainland, in actual use, reached a record high of more than 189 billion U.S. dollars in 2022. Opening up is a basic state policy of China, and no matter how the external situation evolves, China will stick to pursuing this policy, Li said. Li highlighted that the annual China International Import Expo, which is a major step for China to open its market to the world and share development opportunities, has been held for five consecutive years despite the pandemic. Last year, more than 2,800 enterprises from 127 countries and regions participated in the expo. This well proves that an open and big Chinese market provides big opportunities for companies from around the world, the premier said. China welcomes investors from all over the world, Li said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 03/13/2023

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Xi Emphasizes Putting People First on New Journey

It is a must to put the people first on the new journey of building China into a great modern socialist country and advancing national rejuvenation, Chinese President Xi Jinping said Monday. Addressing the closing meeting of the first session of the 14th National People's Congress, Xi said the people are the decisive force in building China into a great modern socialist country in all respects. Xi urged efforts to actively develop whole-process people's democracy, and to uphold the unity of the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the running of the country by the people, and law-based governance. He said a people-centered philosophy of development must be implemented so that the gains of modernization will benefit all people fairly, and that more notable and substantive progress will be made in promoting prosperity for all. Xi also stressed strengthening and expanding the great unity of the Chinese people of all ethnic groups and the great unity of all the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation at home and abroad. "By doing so, we will mobilize all favorable factors and form a mighty force that will facilitate the building of a great modern socialist country and the advancement of national rejuvenation," Xi said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 03/13/2023

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China to Advance Modernization with Good Law

China's national legislature passed an amendment to the Legislation Law on Monday, aiming to promote high-quality development and guarantee good governance by improving the quality of legislation. The amendment was adopted at the closing meeting of the first session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC). The amended law will come into effect on March 15. The Legislation Law, considered a foundation of China's legal system, regulates how national laws, government regulations and local laws come into shape and which organizations hold the legislative power. The law was first adopted in 2000 and amended in 2015.

PROMOTE HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) held last October called for efforts to build a modern socialist country in all respects under the rule of law. To that end, the amended Legislation Law adds a provision, "legislation should follow the new development philosophy and ensure that the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts should be advanced through a Chinese path to modernization," to its general provisions. Observers say the amended law, which aims to improve the legislative system and mechanism to enhance the quality and efficiency of legislation, is expected to promote the country's high-quality development with high-quality legislation. One of the changes is expanding the legislative power of cities with subsidiary districts. Such cities were granted legislative power within a limited scope after the 2015 revision. The new amendment

expands their legislative power to include affairs concerning primary-level governance and changes "environmental protection" into "ecological conservation."

"Expanding the legislative power of cities with subsidiary districts can better meet the actual demand for innovative governance of local authorities," said Li Zan, a deputy to the 14th NPC from southwest China's Sichuan Province. In line with the coordinated regional development strategy of the country, the amendment adds provisions on regional coordination on legislation, elevating the existing effective practices into the Legislation Law. On the first day of 2023, a document on the protection and utilization of the Grand Canal cultural heritage came into effect in Beijing and neighboring Tianjin Municipality and Hebei Province simultaneously. Through coordinated legislation in the region, Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei share the responsibility of protecting the Grand Canal culture.

WHOLE-PROCESS PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY

The amended law enshrines in the general provisions that whole-process people's democracy should be upheld and developed. In addition to existing rules in ensuring transparency and people's participation in legislative work, such as soliciting public opinions and publishing relevant documents, the amendment enshrines the system of local legislative outreach offices, which has existed for years, to solicit opinions from the grassroots and people from all walks of life on draft laws and legislative work. There are 32 local legislative outreach offices nationwide. Lawmakers have solicited public opinions on 142 draft laws and legislative work plans through local legislative outreach offices between 2015 and 2022, receiving more than 15,000 suggestions, of which over 2,800 had been taken.

ENFORCEMENT OF CONSTITUTION

The 20th CPC National Congress stressed that law-based governance and law-based exercise of state power must begin with compliance with the Constitution and called for efforts to give better play to the Constitution's important role in China's governance. The past five years have seen the NPC and its Standing Committee ensuring the implementation and publicity of the Constitution, including organizing activities to mark National Constitution Day, and organizing ceremonies for newly appointed officials to pledge allegiance to the Constitution. In this regard, the revision introduces new requirements for the constitutionality review system. In particular, it requires a bill's explanatory document to include opinions on issues of constitutionality. Jiang Fan, an NPC deputy and vice president of the Hunan Lawyers Association, said that codifying constitutionality review in the Legislation Law marks substantive progress in the constitutionality review system. The amendment is conducive to upholding the authority of the Constitution as well as the unity, sanctity and authority of the socialist legal system, said Li Jing, another NPC deputy who is also president of the Tianjin High People's Court, adding that the newly amended law will continuously improve the capacity and level of governance in accordance with the Constitution.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 03/14/2023

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China's Top Legislator Stresses Need for In-depth Research, Studies in Formulating Legislative Plan

China's top legislator has stressed efforts to implement a Party-wide campaign of carrying out in-depth research and studies, and work well to formulate the legislative program of the Standing Committee of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC), the national legislature. Zhao Leji, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, made the remarks during an inspection tour of the southern Guangdong Province from Tuesday to Friday. Underscoring the importance of formulating the five-year legislative program, Zhao said legislative tasks should be set out in a well-conceived, reasonable and coordinated manner, and the major decisions and deployments of the CPC Central Committee should be implemented in the process. He urged efforts to strengthen legislation in key and emerging fields and in foreign-related areas, and efforts to build a legal system that is essential to promote national governance, meet the people's increasing demand for better lives, and safeguard national security. Zhao also called on NPC deputies to consider close contact with members of the public to be a basic requirement to perform their duties and work to help resolve problems of the greatest concern to the people.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 03/24/2023

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China Issues Work Plan for Improving Police Stations

China's Ministry of Public Security has released a three-year work plan for police stations nationwide, stressing efforts to improve their work at the primary level, raise the quality of their work and enhance their basic capacity. It lays out requirements in seven areas of police station work from 2023 to 2025, including sounder systems, more reasonable distribution of police personnel and more meticulous fundamental work. Police stations should center on the real circumstances at the primary level, and carry out preventive police duties by switching their focus to more basic work, such as reducing the number of incidents and cases and defusing hazards, the plan says. By the end of 2025, villages and primary-level communities should have more police, according to the plan, which also stresses strengthening the protection of juveniles and implementing the system for warning against and handling domestic violence.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 03/28/2023

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JAPAN: OKs Bill to Reform Sexual Offense Charge, Raise Age of Consent

Japan's Cabinet approved a bill Tuesday to recognize a sexual violation even in the absence of physical violence or coercion and raise the age of sexual consent from 13 to 16, as part of reforms to the country's Penal Code. The amendments, which will see a sexual offense charge renamed to make clearer the illegality of nonconsensual intercourse, will also make upskirting and producing images of genitalia without consent crimes punishable under the Penal Code. The government aims to pass the bill during the current parliamentary session. The revisions will take effect 20 days after promulgation. The amendment to the sexual offense charge will define the circumstances for a violation as making it difficult for a person to "form, express or fulfill the intention to resist" a sexual act, listing eight examples such as taking advantage of a person's impaired ability to resist due to the influence of alcohol or drugs and abusing one's economic or social power. While Japan revised its Penal Code in 2017, renaming the crime of "rape" to "forcible sexual intercourse," it still required physical violence or coercion for a sexual violation to be defined as rape. Some actions that would not be charged under the current system due to the vague definition of what is punishable may become illegal under the new amendments.

The amendments will also criminalize sex with children under the age of 16 by raising the legal age of consent from 13. Japan's current age of consent has remained unchanged since its enactment in 1907 and is one of the lowest among developed nations. While the changes will make sexual intercourse with a person under 16 illegal regardless of consent, an exception is provided for cases in which an individual aged from 13 to 15 years has intercourse with a person less than five years older. In addition to making upskirting and the production of images of genitalia, buttocks and breasts without consent illegal, providing or circulating such images and videos will also be punishable. Promising payments to children below the age of 16 will also be criminalized under the revisions to prevent sexual grooming. Meanwhile, the statute of limitations for prosecution will be extended to 15 years from 10 years for nonconsensual intercourse, and to 20 years from 15 years for indecent assault resulting in injury. However, if a victim was less than 18 at the time of an assault, the statute of limitations will not commence until the victim turns 18 -- the legal age of adulthood in Japan.

From <https://english.kyodonews.net> 03/14/2023

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Japan PM Kishida Lays Out Plan to Reverse Falling Birth Rate

Prime Minister Kishida Fumio has laid out his vision to reverse Japan's plummeting birth rate, a key pillar of which is boosting parental leave benefits. Kishida said on Friday that the next six to seven years will be Japan's last chance to reverse its declining birth trend. He also said that his administration will carry out unprecedented

measures as a top priority to turn the situation around. The number of babies born in Japan last year fell below 800,000 for the first time since record-keeping began more than 120 years ago. Many couples are hesitating to add to their families because of rising costs. Kishida said the government will provide assistance to employers to encourage more of their male staff to take childcare leave. About 14 percent of eligible male workers in Japan took parental leave in 2021. The government aims to raise that number to 50 percent in three years. Kishida pledged to increase parental leave benefits when both parents take time off work after the birth of a baby. He also said a new system needs to be created to support freelancers and self-employed workers who stand to lose income due to child-caring responsibilities. The prime minister said his administration will reveal the plan's outline along with its policy package in June.

From <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/> 03/17/2023

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Parliament Passes New Law to Spur Investment

The Indonesian parliament passed an emergency regulation on job creation into law on Tuesday. The regulation was issued by President Joko Widodo in December, with an aim to create a quality business and investment climate for small and medium entrepreneurs and foreign investors in Southeast Asia's largest economy amid fears of a possible global recession. Indonesia has set an investment target of 1,400 trillion Indonesian rupiahs (about 91.28 billion U.S. dollars) this year, up from last year's target of 1,200 trillion rupiahs. The new law is expected to offer more convenience for domestic and foreign investors doing business across the country.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 03/21/2023

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CAMBODIA: Presenting Power Development Masterplan, National Energy Efficiency Policy

Cambodia's Ministry of Mines and Energy on Thursday hosted an energy forum here to present the recently approved Power Development Masterplan (PDP) and National Energy Efficiency Policy (NEEP). The PDP is Cambodia's first long-term plan for its power sector, comprising a broad range of scenarios for a 20-year planning period covering electricity demand growth, the expansion of power generation sources, and the development of the transmission and distribution network. The NEEP is Cambodia's first dedicated policy on energy efficiency and establishes the enabling framework for future developments in this area. The NEEP sets an ambitious national target for the reduction of energy consumption of at least 19 percent by 2030 in relation to a scenario without energy efficiency. The NEEP also identifies measures and instruments that the government will prioritize and develop

to support the wider adoption of energy efficiency. Cambodian Minister of Mines and Energy Suy Sem highlighted the significance of these policies to drive Cambodia's energy transition and meet international commitments under the Paris Agreement. "Cambodia is committed to maximizing the adoption of renewable energy and energy efficiency, which will also support the government's efforts to provide energy in a reliable, stable, and affordable manner," he told the forum with some 80 officials and relevant stakeholders. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) provided technical assistance in developing the PDP and the NEEP. Jyotsana Varma, ADB's country director in Cambodia, applauded the country's efforts in shifting to cleaner forms of energy and reiterated ADB's support for this transition through a combination of policy support and project investments. Varma said that ADB's ongoing projects support the reinforcement of the national power grid, expansion of solar PV through public-private partnerships, and acceleration of the adoption of emerging technologies such as battery storage systems.

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Cambodia Launches New Phase of Public Financial Management Reform Program

Cambodia on Monday launched the fourth stage of the Public Financial Management Reform Program (2023-2027), aiming at further strengthening the effectiveness of state budget management and public investment. Speaking at the launching ceremony in Phnom Penh, Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen said the program was essential to help ensure sustainable socioeconomic development, with transparency and accountability. He said the program began in the Southeast Asian nation in 2004 and had achieved satisfactory results since then. "In 2003, a year before this reform program was launched, our nation's total revenue was only 1.82 trillion riel and total expense was 2.99 trillion riel, but 20 years later after the program was carried out, our nation's total revenue in 2023 is estimated at 32.9 trillion riel and total expense is calculated at 41.5 trillion riel," Hun Sen said. The prime minister said Cambodia had graduated from a low-income to a lower-middle income country in 2015, and is moving forwards to becoming an upper-middle income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050. Meanwhile, Hun Sen touted the kingdom's hard-won peace in more than two decades, saying it was the prerequisite and fundamental condition for macroeconomic stability and social development. Speaking at the event, Economy and Finance Minister Aun Pornmoniroth said the first stage of the program lasted from 2004 to 2008 focusing on "Budget Credibility", the second stage from 2009 to 2015 on "Financial Accountability", the third stage from 2016 to 2022 on "Budget-Policy Linkages", and the fourth or final stage from 2023 to 2027 on "Performance Accountability". (4,056 riel equal 1 U.S. dollar)

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MALAYSIA: Introducing Medical Tourism Program to Boost Industry Recovery

Malaysia unveiled a medical tourism program on Friday, with four of the country's top hospitals participating in the initiative aimed at boosting the recovery of its medical industry. The program has seen the country's top hospitals increasing their efforts in delivering exceptional end-to-end services to their patients, with the goal of reinforcing Malaysia's position as a safe and trusted destination for top-notch healthcare services, the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) said in a statement. The participation of four hospitals, namely the National Heart Institute, Island Hospital, Mahkota Medical Center and Subang Jaya Medical Center, represents a significant step forward for Malaysia's healthcare industry in achieving its goal of being a major medical tourism destination by 2025, it said. The MHTC is optimistic that the program will fast-track the healthcare travel industry's recovery and growth, building upon the positive growth recorded in 2022 when it registered more than 1.3 billion ringgit (about 290 million U.S. dollars) in revenue, reaching 76 percent of its pre-pandemic performance of 1.7 billion ringgit in 2019. MHTC Chief Executive Officer Mohd Daud Mohd Arif said the program will play a catalytic role in expediting international recognition of the hospitals in Malaysia.

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VIETNAM: Plans to Raise Tax on Plastic Bags and Packaging

Vietnam's Ministry of Justice has put forward a plan to increase tax rates on non-biodegradable plastic bags and packaging, as well as impose new excise taxes on single-use food and drink containers made from polystyrene foam, local newspaper Vietnam News reported on Wednesday. A draft proposal, to be submitted to the National Assembly, is aimed to reduce the proliferation of the environmentally harmful products, discourage use, cut waste and tackle pollution issues in the country. Vietnam has instituted a tax on plastic bags and packaging since 2012 with the tax rate currently levied at 50,000 Vietnamese dong (2 U.S. dollars) per kilogram. Lawmakers argued that such a small levy has not effectively restricted the usage of disposable plastic items including food containers, bags, cutlery, cups, drink stirrers, and straws. Statistics from the Ministry of Finance showed that tax revenues collected from plastic bags and packaging were small compared to the overall imports. In 2016, Vietnam imported 65.6 million dollars worth of plastic bags and collected about 840,000 dollars in plastic taxes.

Audit authorities said the tonnage of taxable plastic bags has been on a decline over the years, dropping 23 percent between 2014 and 2017, while import volumes kept heading in the opposite direction, jumping 250 percent in the same period. Vietnam's plastic pollution is increasing with little sign of slowing down as with rapid economic growth and changing urban lifestyles. Though the country has been trying to tackle

its plastic habits for more than a decade, the result has fallen short. According to a World Bank report released last year, the Southeast Asian country discharges an estimated 3.1 million metric tons of plastic waste on land annually with at least 10 percent of this leaking into the waterway. Since 1999, the annual usage has increased from 3.8 kilograms to 63 kilograms per person in 2017, according to data released by the Vietnam Plastics Association. One survey conducted by World Wildlife Fund in 2019 in the capital of Hanoi and the southern business hub of Ho Chi Minh City found that only 31 percent of households sort waste at the source, and 55 percent of waste collectors classify waste. Meanwhile, 77 percent of people had limited knowledge, or absolutely no information, about the nature and origin of plastics as a material. In addition to increased tax rates, the Vietnamese government is striving to combat the growing problem through strengthening legal framework interventions and applying more practical measures with a focus on stricter waste management and tighter imports of waste into the country. Vietnam has aimed for zero disposable plastic use in urban stores, markets and supermarkets by 2025, and by 2030 the whole country will stop the production and use of single-use plastic products and non-biodegradable packaging.

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Master Plan on Hạ Long City till 2040 Announced

Plans are in place to further develop Hạ Long City. The People's Committee of northern Quảng Ninh Province and the Ministry of Construction on March 11 revealed details of the master plan which was approved by the Prime Minister on February 10. Secretary of the Hạ Long Party Committee Vũ Văn Diện said Hạ Long City is set to become a civilised and friendly tourist and service urban area, a world-class national service and tourism hub with modern and synchronous socio-economic infrastructure. Its sustainable development will be aligned with requirements for green growth and climate change responsibilities, with Cửa Lức Bay as a connectivity hub, in harmony with the natural wonder of Hạ Long Bay and the northern mountainous regions of the city. Regarding urban development, the city is expected to have a population of around 620,000-650,000 people by 2030 and approximately 800,000-830,000 by 2040. Hạ Long City is set to be a political, administrative, economic, and cultural hub of the province. It is also part of the expanded dynamic urban area of Hạ Long, Cẩm Phả, Quảng Yên, Uông Bí, and Đông Triều.

This is the comprehensive and multi-industry hub of the province, with tourism, service, processing, hi-tech, mining, seaport, and clean energy as the core industries. The development of Hạ Long is of utmost importance for the overall development of the province. Acting Chairman of the provincial People's Committee Cao Tường Huy said during 2022-2025, the city will complete urban infrastructure system, embark on green urban development integrated with a smart city model, complete the

construction of transport routes and tourism infrastructure. During 2025-2030, the focus will be on improving the quality of the coastal space, completing the construction of coastal roads, public and coastal tourism areas. From 2031-2040, there will be a greater connectivity with neighbouring areas such as Uông Bí and Cẩm Phả cities, Quảng Yên Town to create a harmonious development space in the principle of preserving and upholding the values of Hạ Long Bay.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 03/13/2023

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Vietnam Central Bank Plans to Cut Policy Rates to Support Growth

The State Bank of Vietnam on Tuesday said it would cut its policy rates by 100 basis points from Wednesday to address the liquidity problem for households and businesses. The discount rate will be cut to 3.5 percent from 4.5 percent, the interbank overnight lending rate to 6 percent from 7 percent, while the refinancing rate will be kept unchanged at 6 percent, the central bank said in a statement posted on its website. The central bank will also cap bank dong loan rates at 5 percent, down from 5.5 percent. The move is part of the government's effort to "disentangle difficulties that have arisen in the economy, cutting lending rates for businesses and households", the central bank said. The central bank's last cut of the rates was in 2020 to support the economy through the COVID-19 pandemic. Last year, as Vietnam was faced with upward pressure on inflation and downward pressure on its currency, the central bank, taking similar steps by policy makers around the world, raised policy rates in September and widened the exchange rate trading band in October. Vietnam will try to keep its economic growth at 6.5 percent this year, backed by public investment, foreign direct investment, exports and domestic consumption. Consumer price index in February rose 4.31 percent from a year ago and 0.97 percent higher than the end of last year, the government is striving for the targeted 4.5 percent for the year.

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Vietnam Plans to Extend Tax Relief in 2023

Vietnam is planning to extend tax relief this year to tackle the problem of liquidity for households and businesses to accelerate the economic growth momentum, local media reported on Tuesday. Tax authorities are drafting a range of tax relief measures, including the extension of the deadline for tax payments and submission of annual rental fees on publicly-owned land, according to the ministry of finance. Vietnam may allow an extension of up to six months for the payment of value-added taxes (VAT) this year, the finance ministry said in its proposal, estimating revenues from VAT payments eligible for the extension at 64 trillion to 65 trillion Vietnamese dong (about 2.7 billion U.S. dollars). The extension of payment deadlines will also

apply to corporate income taxes, under which the government would offer a three-month extension worth around 42.8 trillion-43.6 trillion dong (about 1.8 billion U.S. dollars). Household businesses will be allowed to extend their payments of VAT and income taxes until Dec. 30. Besides, fiscal efforts include extending up to six months the deadline for submission of land rentals, estimated at 3.5 trillion Vietnamese dong (147 million U.S. dollars). Despite a costly tax relief last year, Vietnam generated 1,803 trillion Vietnamese dong (75.9 billion U.S. dollars) in tax revenues, 27.76 percent higher than its official target and up 14 percent from the 2021 revenues, Finance Minister Ho Duc Phoc told the media.

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Measures Proposed to Ensure Ethnic Minorities' Land Use Rights

With the amended Law on Land expected to be reviewed and approved this year, experts have been voicing their opinions and discussing measures to protect the land use rights of ethnic minorities. According to the latest survey on the socio-economic status of 53 ethnic minorities, conducted by the National Assembly's Commission for Ethnic Minority Affairs in 2019, there are 24,532 households nationwide that witness a shortage of residential land among these communities. Meanwhile, approximately 210,400 ethnic minority households are in need of land support for production purposes. The causes identified include insufficient solutions for residential and production land, as well as a lack of regulations responding to the traditions and customs of ethnic communities in land use. A representative from Việt Nam Fatherland Front Central Committee has proposed that the amended law include the issuance of land use rights and transfer certification (called the 'red book') for ethnic minorities' residential and production land. "We think the residential and production land provided by the State support for ethnic minorities need to have a separate red book, and be limited, if not to say prohibited, in terms of land transfer," said the representative.

In the case where a person of an ethnic minority wishes to transfer their land for specific reasons, such as migration with their children, it is suggested that the opinion of the district-level People's Committee or province-level agency for ethnic minorities is required. Đinh Thị Chuyên San, deputy chairwoman of the Advisory Board on Democracy and Law of Bắc Kạn Province Fatherland Front, agreed that specific regulations are needed for land issues concerning ethnic minorities. She also voiced her concern regarding Article 52, which stipulates that individuals of ethnic minorities using land allocated by the State or under the State's support policies can transfer or donate their land use rights after 10 years. In reality, there are cases where poor ethnic households, due to extreme financial difficulties, transferred their land rights or put them up as collateral, after which they cannot afford to reclaim, she said. Alongside land management, many people also agreed that the amended Law on Land needs to address the current bottlenecks, especially when the State's policies

on land recovery, compensation and resettlement are implemented.

Quảng Văn Hương, vice chairman of the NA's Council for Ethnic Affairs said that the amendment needs to include detailed regulations which respond to the specific issues and traditions of ethnic minorities, especially in remote areas. He said: "If these people continue their agricultural production, they must be immediately assigned land which fits their practices and lifestyle, provided that a land fund is available. "If they move to a non-agricultural sector, vocational training offered to them must fit the market demands and without coercion." The document must also ensure that those who have their land recovered will be relocated with an income and living conditions equivalent to, or better than at the old location. Phạm Hải Hoa, chairwoman of Hà Nội Farmers' Union said the draft amendment stated government's responsibilities for the land areas for ethnic minorities and their cultures and traditions. This means that the document must also specify the detailed criteria for the 'equivalent' living conditions, she said. Nguyễn Tiến Thanh, vice chairman of Lào Cai Province's Advisory Board on Democracy and Law also said that the draft has clarified the regulations on building land pricing. He added that the same practices should be applied to the valuation of assets on a particular piece of land. He said: "If done well, this will address the shortcoming in protecting the interests of land users and prolonged complaints, as well as preventing corruption cases between businesses and officials." Thanh added that the amendment should also allow capital contributions through land use rights, which needs legal assistance from legal support centres and farmers' associations to prevent land appropriation.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 03/20/2023

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South Asia

INDIA: Waiting for Policy to Provide OneWeb's Satellite Broadband Services in the Country

Bharti Group-backed satellite communications company Network Access Associates Ltd (OneWeb) is awaiting India's Space Communication policy and the policy on Spectrum Allocation to launch its services in India, Bharti Enterprises Founder & Chairman and One Web Executive Chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal said. He also said India has a big role to play as regards OneWeb as the user terminals will be made in the country. Mittal also said the group is setting up two ground stations in India - one in Mehsana in Gujarat and the other in Madurai in Tamil Nadu. Interacting with a select group of reporters after the successful launch of 36 OneWeb satellites, Mittal said the group is awaiting India's policies on space communication, satellite spectrum allocation, and foreign direct investment (FDI). The country's Space Policy is in a work in progress stage. Mittal said the space spectrum is a shared resource and not a dedicated one for a player. Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) rocket LVM3 successfully orbited the final batch of OneWeb's 36 satellites. With this

launch, OneWeb has 618 satellites orbiting in space. By completing the constellation, it is taking a pivotal step forward in delivering global coverage including India, the company said.

Mittal said the life span of each satellite is about eight years and the company has backup satellites to replace the ones that go out of operation. According to him, OneWeb will not go directly to the end customer but would partner with telecom players and others across the globe to offer its services. As regards the markets, Mittal said, the US, Canada and Europe are large markets and Africa is also coming up in a big way. He said the satellite communication sector will see mergers and acquisitions and finally a handful of players like OneWeb, Starlink, SpaceX, Amazon, and Jio will be there. As a matter of fact, OneWeb and Eutelsat are in the final stages of the merger, Mittal said. According to him, it takes about three months for satellites put into orbit to come into operation. On the investment made by OneWeb, Mittal said about \$6 billion has gone into the venture. He also said while the initial capex will be high, the operational cost will be low in the case of satellite communications.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 03/27/2023

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Developing Programs to Turn Country into International Green Energy Hub

Azerbaijan is developing programs to turn the country into an international hub for energy, including green energy, MP of Azerbaijan's Milli Majlis (Parliament), Doctor of Economics, Professor Rufat Guliyev told Trend. According to him, their implementation is indeed important, as it contributes to the inflow of foreign currency into the national economy, the opening of new jobs, and the further growth of the country's image in the international arena. Guliyev noted that Azerbaijan's national interests always come first in the country's international projects and politics. He said that Azerbaijan is one of the countries that successfully extracts hydrocarbons and supplies them. Meanwhile, Doctor of Philosophy in Economics Ilgar Velizade told Trend, Azerbaijan is on the way to forming a green energy agenda. He noted that in recent years, a fairly effective infrastructure has been created in Azerbaijan, which is focused on the supply of large volumes of green energy to European markets. "In addition, Azerbaijan attracts funds from foreign investors for the implementation of these projects, in particular, from such companies as MASDAR, Acwa Power, BP, and others specializing in the production of this type of energy. The number of projects and initiatives for the construction of solar and wind power plants is also growing day by day. A significant part of them is on the territory of the Absheron Peninsula and near the city of Baku," he said. "This geography is expected to expand with the help of the resources of the Caspian Sea and liberated territories. The total

potential of Azerbaijan's green energy production capacity exceeds 200,000 megawatts," Velizade said.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/31/2023

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KAZAKHSTAN: Ratifying Agreement with Uzbekistan on Demarcation of State Border

The President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev signed the law on "Ratification of an Agreement between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on the demarcation of the state border", Trend reports, citing the press service of the President. The demarcation of the border was carried out on the basis of the agreements on the Kazakh-Uzbek border signed in 2001 and 2022. The negotiations on the demarcation started in 2003, and the works were carried out from 2004 through 2021. As a result of the work, 2,356 kilometers of state border were demarcated. The results were included in an 8,000 pages long document, which is a part of the legislation signed by President Tokayev. The agreement on demarcation was signed between Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the President of Uzbekistan, in the framework of the visit of the Kazakh President to Uzbekistan.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/28/2023

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: New Strategy to Help Guide Future Settlement of Refugees and Asylum Seekers

With humanitarian crises gripping the world and more people asking to call Australia home, the NSW Government has developed a new nation-leading strategy to better integrate people from refugee backgrounds and those seeking asylum into communities so they can thrive. Minister for Multiculturalism Mark Coure said the NSW Settlement Strategy represents the first time any level of government in Australia has a dedicated plan focused on helping people not just on their arrival but throughout their entire settlement journey. "When it comes to supporting refugees and people seeking asylum, the NSW Government has consistently stood up and taken on more responsibilities than we are charged with to make sure no one is left behind," Mr Coure said.

"While we don't control the number of people the Federal Government allows into NSW, we can be better prepared. This new strategy helps us do this by providing a structured, whole-of-government focus to better support the people that come into our state." Mr Coure highlighted that since 2015, over 35,000 people have permanently settled in NSW due to humanitarian crises, including more than 20,000 people from Syria and Iraq, 1,400 people that have escaped Afghanistan since the

fall of Kabul, and 1,500 Ukrainian nationals that have escaped Russia's invasion. "Everyone's needs are different, which is especially the case for refugees and people seeking asylum. That is why this Strategy was developed with lived experience at its centre, ensuring people can thrive," Mr Coure said.

"This means coordinating the specific needs of refugees and people seeking asylum across government, such as housing, healthcare, employment opportunities, language services and even family and social support. "By having a whole-of-government approach to their settlement journey, we will be supporting people to be active citizens in their communities." More than 80 per cent of refugees settle in the Greater Sydney region, with the remainder spread across primary settlement locations in the regional NSW settlement locations of Coffs Harbour, Newcastle, Armidale, Wagga Wagga, Albury and Wollongong. NSW Coordinator General for Settlement Professor Peter Shergold AC called the Strategy a guiding light for people seeking to rebuild their lives in NSW.

"NSW is in the enviable position to build on the learnings and achievements of the past several years to deliver a well-coordinated and collaborative approach to settlement policy," Prof. Shergold said. "By investing in better settlement processes now, we can improve refugee integration into the labour market and speed up the ability of newcomers to become full and active participants in civil society." Refugee Council of Australia CEO Paul Power said the strategy was the result of an impressive level of cooperation between government and non-government agencies. "Since the Federal Government's announcement in 2015 of an additional intake of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, the NSW Government has rethought and reformed its engagement in supporting the settlement of refugees in NSW," Mr Power said.

"Non-government organisations have been consulted and included in the planning of government settlement responses in a significant way for the first time, resulting in direct improvements in the planning and delivery of vital services. "This Strategy distils the wisdom and ideas of a broad range of organisations and individuals and outlines an impressive blueprint for the support of refugee newcomers regardless of visa class or status." The Strategy primarily focuses on people from refugee and refugee-like backgrounds within the first ten years of settlement in NSW. People from refugee and refugee-like backgrounds include people who come to Australia permanently through the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, Community Support Program, Family Reunion and Partner streams, and other similar pathways. The Strategy also includes people with unstable statuses, such as some bridging visa holders and people on temporary humanitarian visas.

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 03/01/2023

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NEW ZEALAND: New Legislation to Streamline Cyclone Recovery

The Government is introducing the Severe Weather Emergency Legislation Bill to ensure the recovery and rebuild from Cyclone Gabrielle is streamlined and efficient with unnecessary red tape removed. The legislation is similar to legislation passed following the Christchurch and Kaikōura earthquakes that modifies existing legislation in order to remove constraints on recovery. “The recovery phase needs to be timely and efficient, it should not be constrained,” Kieran McNulty said. “Previous emergencies like the Canterbury and Kaikōura earthquakes have required urgent legislation to remove or modify existing legislative constraints to support recovery. This bill is a similar response. “The urgent changes will help facilitate the initial stages of the recovery and provide legal certainty where needed.

“The legislation also removes unnecessary red tape. For example extending the period for a food business to renew its registration will mean that it can continue operating post the Cyclone without impractical administrative deadlines to contend with. “It’s important we enable communities to recover as quickly as possible after extreme weather events. These amendments will add certainty for businesses, help ensure food security by facilitating affected businesses to remain open throughout this uncertain period and help local authorities make emergency repairs,” Kieran McNulty said. “A month on from the national state of emergency being declared, we are moving away from the emergency response into the recovery phase,” Grant Robertson said.

“We have worked alongside communities as we respond to this major event. We have put in place a taskforce, led by Sir Brian Roche, which will ensure the recovery is also locally led and supported by central government. “We have also established a Cyclone Recovery Unit in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to coordinate the work at a central government level. “We are only just at the start of the recovery from these devastating weather events. While we have already provided significant resources through the response – affected regions should rest assured that the Government will continue to work closely with them as the rebuild and recovery begins in earnest,” Grant Robertson said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 03/14/2023

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Health and Safety Action Plan for Ports

The health and safety practices at our nation’s ports will be improved as part of a new industry-wide action plan, Workplace Relations and Safety, and Transport Minister Michael Wood has announced. “Following the tragic death of two port workers in Auckland and Lyttelton last year, I asked the Port Health and Safety Leadership Group to pull together a detailed picture of what is happening in ports and create a plan to address serious harm,” Michael Wood said. “The group has worked together to provide this important insights picture and action plan, and I fully support the work taking place. “Everyone has the right to go to work and come home

safe. We've made good progress, and research shows serious injuries on ports have declined over time, but there is still more work to do. The plan prioritises areas where improvements can have a real impact on workers.”

The Port Sector Insights Picture and Action Plan sets out actions across six key areas: Implementing the Fatigue Risk Management System: Good Practice Guidelines to reduce the risks associated with worker fatigue. Establishing an Approved Code of Practice around loading and unloading of cargo to implement more consistent regulatory standards in relation to some of the highest risk activities in ports. Recommending the Government extend the Maritime NZ designation to cover the whole port. Work to improve incident reporting, notifications, insights and learning across the ports, so the sector can get a better real-time understanding of harm and take necessary action. Action to improve training and workforce issues.

Actions to ensure there are easier ways of sharing good practice that the sector is doing here or overseas to encourage continuous improvement on ports. “The industry is on board with these actions and have started implementing many of these changes. I believe it will make a real difference to the health and safety of those working on ports,” Michael Wood said. “The leadership group has already rolled out guidelines for setting up a fatigue risk management system and is providing workshops, training, education and resources. “In addition, work on an Approved Code of Practice for stevedoring is well underway. “I want to thank the leadership group and all those in the sector for coming together and working in partnership to improve port safety. This has been a genuine tripartite process, with employers, unions, and the regulators working together in good faith to solve problems and everyone putting the safety of workers first,” Michael Wood said. Maritime NZ and the Transport Accident Investigation Commission continue to investigate last year’s tragic accidents.

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Next Steps Developing Clean Energy for NZ

The Government will progress to the next stage of the NZ Battery Project, looking at the viability of pumped hydro as well as an alternative, multi-technology approach as part of the Government’s long term-plan to build a resilient, affordable, secure and decarbonised energy system in New Zealand, Energy and Resources Megan Woods says. The NZ Battery Project was established in late 2020 to find innovative solutions to the ‘dry year problem’, when hydro-electricity lakes run low, leading to the burning of more fossil fuels to cover the electricity shortfall, and often higher power bills. “Until we address the dry year problem, we will continue to rely on burning expensive and polluting fossil fuels to produce our electricity. That’s bad for the climate and our power bills,” said Megan Woods.

“Pumped hydro is an ingenious way of storing energy in a big reservoir, which is released into a lower reservoir when more power is needed, like a giant battery. A dry year solution would be a huge step towards our mission to move towards more renewable energy generation and power more of New Zealand in New Zealand. “The Government has also agreed to continue looking at alternatives to the scheme including a combination of comparator technologies and scoping a possible smaller pumped hydro scheme in the central North Island, subject to agreement with iwi,” Megan Woods said. Biomass, flexible geothermal energy, and hydrogen have been identified as the possible alternatives to pumped hydro, as they have the most potential collectively to store enough energy to help solve the dry year problem.

Phase 1 investigations show a pumped hydro scheme at Lake Onslow would take approximately seven to nine years to build, with an estimated building cost of \$15.7 billion. In comparison, initial estimates for the capital element of the portfolio option are about \$13.5 billion, but with significantly higher ongoing operating costs. “We always knew that any dry year battery storage solution will require significant investment, that’s why it’s important we thoroughly test these scenarios and get it right. “Now some more detailed work has been done we have a much clearer picture of the projected costs which differ significantly from the 2006 high level costings. The next phase will be to dig even further before we look at spending such a huge amount of money, but one thing we do know is that doing nothing to plan for climate change is not an option.

“We have a choice to take a short term view and continue to pay for the increasing costs related to climate change or to be bold and take a long term view, for the good of the country. “But there’s still a long way to go. A lot more work is required to understand the full environmental, cultural, social and commercial impacts, as well as the engineering requirements. We will continue to work with our key stakeholders including mana whenua, and landowners, as well the technology experts,” said Megan Woods. A detailed business case is expected to be developed by the end of 2024, followed by a final investment decision, which is expected to take a further two years.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 03/16/2023

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National’s Education Policy: Where’s the Funding?

After three years of COVID-19 disruptions schools are finally settling down and National want to throw that all in the air with major disruption to learning and underinvestment. “National’s education policy lacks the very thing teachers, parents and students need after a tough couple of years, certainty and stability,” Education Minister Jan Tinetti said. “There was also a word missing from Luxon’s speech – funding. National haven’t said how much their changes will cost, how they will resource them and what their commitments to teachers’ pay is. “National’s track

record on education is one of serious underinvestment. Run down schools and classrooms and stagnant teachers' pay which has resulted in teacher shortages and a demoralised workforce. "Nothing in today's announcement shows they're prepared to back our kids and lift outcomes, or put up the funding to seriously invest in their future.

"Forcing children to do an hour each of reading, writing and maths every day isn't going to make them enjoy it or learn better, and more intensive testing isn't going to make school a place they want to be. "The curriculum shouldn't be a political football and changed every three years. "It looks like the National party are bringing back their failed experiment of National Standards. These kids' learning has already suffered but today they announced they want to revive this zombie of the past. "It's just buzz words and sound bites to paper over the cracks in the National Party's understanding of what is happening in our schools in this country." "Labour has invested in our kids, upgraded nearly every school in the country, improved teachers' pay and introduced programmes that help parents and make kids want to be at school. "Labour has a plan to properly fund education and make sure it works for every student. Schools need certainty and stability, not soundbites," Jan Tinetti said.

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Bills to Vet School Boards, Contractors Pass First Reading

Bills to ensure non-teaching employees and contractors at schools, and unlicensed childcare services like mall crèches are vetted by police, and provide safeguards for school board appointments have passed their first reading today. The Education and Training Amendment Bill (No. 3) and the Regulatory Systems (Education) Amendment Bill have now both been referred to the Education and Workforce Committee for consideration. The Education and Training Amendment Bill (No. 3) changes school board eligibility requirements so that all those convicted of an offence, under Schedule 2 of the Children's Act 2014, are ineligible to serve on a school board unless an exemption is approved by the Secretary for Education. The Bill also allows the Secretary for Education to conduct an audit on current board members to make sure eligibility requirements are met.

"Over the last few years, I have heard concerns from various community members about the eligibility requirements for school board members. The proposed changes enable school leaders, teachers, students and whānau to be more confident about board representatives," Minister of Education Jan Tinetti said. "In parallel to these changes, an amended code of conduct for school board appointees has been consulted on and is currently in development. "The Bill also clarifies that schools and licensed early childhood services must assess Police vets for non-teaching employees and contractors prior to them either beginning work or having unsupervised access to children. This coincides with the Regulatory Systems

(Education) Amendment Bill, which ensures Police vets for workers in unlicensed services like crèches in gyms and malls, are assessed before the person starts work.” The Education and Training Amendment Bill (No. 3) has other functions too, permitting the Ministry of Education to access and use more accurate and up-to-date early childhood service-level data held by Statistics NZ. “We want to make certain equity funding is allocated to learning services with children who need it most, through the Equity Index,” Jan Tinetti.

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Further Laws Passed to Keep Communities Safe from Gang Offending

The Government has provided Police with more tools to crack down on gang offending with the passing of new legislation today which will further improve public safety, Justice Minister Kiri Allan says. The Criminal Activity Intervention Legislation Bill amends existing law to: create new targeted warrant and additional search powers to find and seize weapons from gang members during a gang conflict; expand the range of offences where police can seize and impound cars, motorbikes, and other vehicles; create a new offence of discharging a gun with intent to intimidate; provide Police with the ability to seize cash over \$10,000 when found in suspicious circumstances; and add watches, jewellery, precious metals and stones, motor vehicles, and boats to a list of high-value goods prohibited for sale for cash over a specified value.

“Gang violence and intimidation is intolerable and leaves our communities feeling distressed. The Government has delivered practical and targeted measures for Police to continue to keep our communities safe,” Kiri Allan said. “The Government has a strong track record in combatting organised crime, gangs and drug use, including removing unlawful firearms off the street, actually progressing firearm prohibition orders, delivering nearly 1700 additional police officers and investing in hundreds more officers focused on serious and organised crime.” Under this new legislation, anyone caught discharging a firearm to intimidate others, such as during a drive-by shooting, faces up to five years in prison. Police will also have more powers to search for and seize weapons during times of gang conflict.

The new laws also target dangerous and intimidating driving, money laundering and the moving of large amounts of money to facilitate offending by gangs. “These new laws build upon the legislation passed yesterday to strengthen the Criminal Proceeds Recovery regime and make it harder for gangs and their leaders to benefit financially from crime. “I’m pleased to be able to deliver these measures at a time when police have just reached a major milestone of more than 30,000 charges laid in Operation Cobalt, which focuses on disrupting unlawful gang behaviour. This followed Operation Tauwhiro, which led to 1800 firearms being seized from organised criminal

groups,” Kiri Allan said.

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Law Levels Playing Field for Low-Emissions Commuting

A law passed by Parliament today exempts employers from paying fringe benefit tax on certain low emission commuting options they provide or subsidise for their staff. “Many employers already subsidise the commuting costs of their staff, for instance by providing car parks,” Environment Minister David Parker said. “This move supports more environmentally-friendly modes of transport used to commute to and from work including public transport, bicycles, electric bikes, scooters and electric scooters.” The Taxation (Annual Rates for 2022-23, Platform Economy, and Remedial Matters) Bill (No 2) will also require digital platforms to collect and return GST on supplies of certain services, including ride-sharing, food and beverage delivery and short-stay accommodation.

“Those who sell such services through apps are often able to do so without charging GST, giving them an advantage over traditional suppliers,” David Parker said. “Locally-owned businesses competing against the large, often overseas-based digital platforms will welcome this change. “The measures passed by Parliament today will level this playing field, but without requiring sellers to register for GST. “One submitter, representing hundreds of small businesses, told us that the uneven GST treatment when it comes to app-based accommodation providers had been a source of frustration for some of their members. These changes will help remedy that.” David Parker said the newly passed legislation contained other measures that will be welcomed by business. “An ongoing issue for businesses, particularly smaller ones, has been the GST apportionment rules. They were overly complex and so imposed compliance costs. The changes we’ve made will improve fairness and make the rules less onerous.”

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Law Changed to Protect Subcontractors

Changes have been made to legislation to give subcontractors the confidence they will be paid the retention money they are owed should the head contractor’s business fail, Minister for Building and Construction Megan Woods announced today. “These changes passed in the Construction Contracts (Retention Money) Amendment Act safeguard subcontractors who are often the first to miss out in the event a construction company becomes insolvent,” Megan Woods says. “While it is not a requirement to hold retention money, many head contractors choose to withhold part of their payment to specialist tradespeople for up to 12 months. This is one way to help ensure building work is done right first time, and acts as an

insurance that the subcontractor will return if there are any defects.

“The changes made today provide important protections for subcontractors so they can be certain their payment is kept safe, can’t be used for any other purpose, and will be paid out should the head contractor’s business fail.” Companies and directors who choose to hold retention money against subcontractors will now be required to hold retention money on trust in a separate bank account, which is unable to be mixed with other company money or assets. Information about the retention money held must be reported to subcontractors on a regular basis, at least once every 3 months. Where retention money is kept, there will be a strict liability offence for failing to hold retention money properly: for every breach of the retentions regime directors will face fines of up to \$50,000 and companies will face fines of up to \$200,000. It will also be an offence to intentionally provide false information about retentions money held for a subcontractor, with a fine of up to \$50,000 for each breach.

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment will have the ability to investigate and enforce retentions money offences, and further penalties will be incurred if head contractors fail to provide the Ministry with information necessary to support investigations. “Everyone should have the confidence they will be paid for their work. The changes announced today ensure that there are strict penalties in place for companies who fail to meet their obligations to those who carry out work for them,” Megan Woods says. Contractors looking to hold retention money have six months to ensure processes are established and standard contracts are amended before the new offences and penalties apply. The changes to the retention money regime will apply to new commercial construction contracts and existing contracts if they are amended from six months after the Act is passed.

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New Law Enhances Safety and Security in the Aviation Sector

The Government has passed new legislation that ensures New Zealand’s civil aviation rules are fit for purpose in the 21st century, Associate Transport Minister Kiri Allan says. The Civil Aviation Bill repeals and replaces the Civil Aviation Act 1990 and the Airport Authorities Act 1966 with a single modern law that strengthens our aviation security rules to keep New Zealanders safe. “A lot has changed in the aviation sector over the last 33 years and the Government recognises that the laws that govern this important industry need to reflect and be able to respond to the current times,” Kiri Allan said. “The Bill brings in greater controls and creates a zero-tolerance approach around the use of drugs and alcohol, including random drug testing. We know that operating aircraft under the influence of drugs or alcohol can be deadly and implementing the recommendations from the 2012 Carterton balloon crash is a key pillar of this legislation.

“New technology like cheap and easy to operate drones are creating new opportunities but they can also create problems when used around airports. This could lead to potential safety issues and this Bill gives Police new powers to take down drones if they are being flown in a dangerous manner.” The Civil Aviation Bill also provides a framework to allow New Zealand to meet its international aviation emissions obligations. “The recent weather events in Aotearoa demonstrated the crucial role our aviation sector in helping our communities stay connected during a crisis when other transport modes are affected. “These events are becoming more frequent and the Government knows we must act to reduce our transport emissions to help meet our climate goals as we adapt to the realities of climate change,” Kiri Allan said. “This legislation ensures New Zealand will continue to have a safe and secure aviation system. I know it’s something the aviation sector has been eagerly awaiting and I thank them for their input and patience in this process.” The Civil Aviation Bill will be implemented over 24 months.

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Next Steps for New Zealand’s Organic Regulations

The Government has passed the Organic Products and Production Bill through its third reading today in Parliament helping New Zealand’s organic sector to grow and lift export revenue. “The Organic Products and Production Bill will introduce robust and practical regulation to give businesses the certainty they need to continue to invest in our growing organics sector, Agriculture Minister Damien O’Connor said. “Last year, New Zealand’s primary sector hit a record \$53.3b in export earnings. The Government is committed to continuing to support our food and fibre businesses to capitalise on the opportunities presented by international markets. That includes the access we have secured in the UK FTA and the EU FTA. “In tandem, these regulations will give discerning consumers confidence in their choices and boost the credibility of New Zealand’s organic products on the world stage.

“Consumer demand for genuine and certified organic products is significant and customers around the world are becoming increasingly discerning about how their food is produced. “Accordingly, our organics sector is a rapidly growing market and was worth an estimated \$723m in 2020 with more than half of New Zealand’s organic output being exported overseas. “It is key that New Zealand has a framework in place to sustain this growth and to give businesses the certainty they need to continue to invest in organic production. This Bill ushers in practical guidelines and regulations for the organics industry and allows businesses to back up their organic status with a standardised system of official certification. “Internationally, an increasing number of countries are requiring compliance with their domestic regimes or certification from equivalent regimes. A robust domestic standard for our organic products will help to ensure New Zealand’s continued access in these markets, as

well as open doors in new markets for our premium organic exports,” Damien O’Connor said. A national organic standard for organic food, beverages, plant and animal products is currently being developed. The national organic standard will set the production and processing rules for products labelled as organic, and any requirements that are specific to the products covered by the standard.

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Asia-Pacific

World Bank Group Creates New Vice Presidency for Ethics and Internal Justice

World Bank Group President David Malpass today announced the creation of a new Vice Presidency for Ethics and Internal Justice to reinforce the Bank Group’s culture, promote corporate values, and strengthen the institution’s Ethics and Internal Justice function to better serve staff. Malpass announced that Lisa Rosen, currently Chief Compliance Officer for the Bank of England, has been chosen to fill this new role. “This appointment – and the creation of a new vice presidency for internal justice – mark important milestones in our efforts to further strengthen the ethics and values of the World Bank Group,” said Malpass. “As we continue our work to improve responsiveness to the needs of staff and enhance our corporate culture, Lisa Rosen’s deep experience in compliance and integrity makes her an excellent addition to our management team to lead these efforts.” Rosen, a British citizen, is responsible for the development and implementation of the internal compliance strategy at the Bank of England. Prior to this role, Rosen was the Chief Compliance Officer of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) where she led the team that covered all aspects of the EBRD’s ethics, compliance, and integrity mandate. Rosen also represented the EBRD at the Financial Action Task Force, the OECD’s Anti-Corruption Network, ENMO, and numerous other international and multilateral fora. Previous positions include Group Head of Compliance, Public Affairs and Regulatory Change Management at the global clearing house LCH.Clearnet, Global Head of Regulatory Affairs at Barclays Capital and Head of Litigation and Contentious Regulatory Affairs for Europe, the Middle East and Africa with Bank of America Merrill Lynch. Rosen’s start date will be announced in the near future.

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ADB’s Procurement Reforms Aim to Deliver Better Quality and Value for Money

The Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Procurement Policy Framework (PPF) is laying the foundation for the organization to modernize its procurement system and harmonize with those of other multilateral development banks, says an [independent evaluation report](#) released recently. With ADB managing around \$9.5 billion in procurement contracts for goods and services every year, the evaluation report reviews PPF implementation and identifies lessons and directions to help ADB in delivering better quality and value for money. "Procurement plays a big part in development effectiveness and the quality of public procurement practices is a major determinant of effective public spending," said Independent Evaluation Department Director General Emmanuel Jimenez. "The shift from a rule-based system with emphasis on compliance to a more principles-based approach which introduced quality and value for money as two new core procurement principles is a significant step forward."

These reforms are still in the early stages of implementation which began in earnest in 2019 only to be delayed by COVID-19. ADB must continue with its promising start and ensure that corporate behavioral change and process improvements remain salient as it takes on the pressing challenges of sustainable and green procurement in the years ahead, the report says. The report recommends that ADB's corporate culture and structure be updated to ensure that strategic procurement planning becomes an integrated, holistic practice to improve identification and prudent management of procurement risks. To successfully deliver quality and value for money, "ADB must better communicate complex procurement concepts to its client countries and among ADB staff, while managing contracts based on criticality, and not their size. This should be supported by sustained investments in long-term country capacity building and in improved procurement data management systems to strengthen transparency and governance," evaluation team leader Eungji Kim added.

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East Asia

CHINA: Law-based Gov't Advanced, Social Governance Innovated over Past 5 Years

The Chinese government continued to perform its functions in accordance with the law and develop new ways of conducting governance and ensured social stability in the past five years, according to a government work report submitted Sunday to the national legislature for deliberation. During the past five years, efforts were stepped up to develop a law-based government and ensure economic and social activities were carried out in compliance with the law, the report said. "We in governments at all levels, in compliance with the law, subjected ourselves to the oversight of people's

congresses and their standing committees at the corresponding level and readily submitted to the democratic oversight of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, public oversight, and oversight through public opinion," it said. "We also strengthened oversight based on audits and statistics. We continued to make government affairs more transparent," it said. New and better forms of social governance were developed, the report said. "We advanced the modernization of urban social governance, improved primary-level governance, and provided better community services," it said. The government tightened supervision over food, drugs, and vaccines and took a full range of measures to maintain law and order. It cracked down hard on illegal and criminal activities of all types and launched campaigns to combat organized crime.

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People's Congress System Displays Tremendous Vitality, Strength

The people's congress system has been brought into full play in the past five years and displayed tremendous vitality and strengths in practice, according to a report submitted to the National People's Congress (NPC) on Tuesday. The system serves as China's foundational political system that underpins the governance system and capacity, read the work report of the 13th NPC Standing Committee at the end of its five-year term. Li Zhanshu, chairman of the 13th NPC Standing Committee, presented the report to a plenary meeting of the first session of the 14th NPC. According to Li, a highlight of the work of the national legislature was adopting the amendment to the Constitution at the first session of the 13th NPC in 2018. The past five years have seen the Standing Committee ensuring the implementation of the Constitution and upholding its authority and sanctity. As part of the efforts, the Standing Committee revised the Electoral Law and submitted the draft revisions of the NPC Organic Law to the NPC for deliberation, to optimize the organizational and electoral systems of people's congresses and their operating mechanisms.

The draft amendment to the Legislation Law submitted to the ongoing annual session for deliberation is expected to improve the legislative system and mechanism and enhance the quality and efficiency of legislation. In addition, the top legislature has maintained the constitutional order in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) by enacting the Law on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong SAR and adopting a decision on improving the electoral system of Hong Kong SAR, which have fully demonstrated the central government exercises overall jurisdiction over the SAR and provided a strong legal foundation for Hong Kong's entry into a new stage. In promoting high-quality development, the Standing Committee formulated a raft of laws, including the milestone Civil Code. The Foreign Investment Law and the Hainan Free Trade Port Law were enacted to support a new round of high-standard opening up.

Legislative work in environmental protection was stepped up to promote ecological advancement, with the Law on the Prevention and Control of Soil Pollution, the Law on the Prevention and Control of Noise Pollution and the Wetland Conservation Law formulated over the past five years. With these legislative efforts, the Standing Committee improved the socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics and made good laws to promote development and ensure good governance, Li said. During the period, the national legislature enacted 47 laws, revised 111 ones, and passed 53 decisions on legal questions and other major issues. Regarding fulfilling the duty of oversight, the report said that over the past five years, the Standing Committee heard and deliberated the first comprehensive reports on the management of state-owned assets, the first report on financial work, and the first work report by the National Supervisory Commission. It also conducted the first special inquiries into the work reports of the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate.

In the course of exercising oversight, the Standing Committee ensured that the powers of all state organs and their employees were subject to oversight and checks. While carrying out inspections into the implementation of laws, the Standing Committee introduced third-party evaluations and adopted various measures like random inspections, unannounced visits, big-data analysis, and questionnaire surveys. It also delegated local people's congresses to do inspections nationwide. During inspections into the implementation of laws concerning environmental protection, nearly 900,000 questionnaires were gathered, according to the report. The Standing Committee has set a plan for the legislative work this year, saying that it will draw up the legislative plan for the next five years, enhance oversight over state-owned asset management, and step up training deputies.

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China to Restructure Ministry in Sci-tech Self-reliance Drive

China plans to restructure its Ministry of Science and Technology to better allocate resources to overcome challenges in key and core technologies, and move faster toward greater self-reliance in science and technology. The restructured ministry will play a bigger role in improving a new system for mobilizing the nation to make technological breakthroughs, optimizing sci-tech innovation, facilitating application of sci-tech advances, and coordinating science and technology with economic and social development, according to a reform plan of the State Council institutions submitted to China's national legislature for deliberation on Tuesday. Its macro management functions in science and technology-related strategic planning, institutional reforms, allocation of resources, comprehensive coordination, formulating policies and regulations, and supervision and inspection will also be strengthened, according to the plan. Explaining the reform plan to national

lawmakers, State Councilor Xiao Jie said that facing international sci-tech competition and external containment and suppression, China needs to further smooth its leadership and management system for science and technology-related work. To that end, a central science and technology commission will be established as part of the latest reform of the Communist Party of China and state institutions, to beef up the Party Central Committee's centralized and unified leadership over science and technology-related work. The restructured ministry will assume responsibilities as the working body of the new commission, Xiao said.

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Xi Stresses Enhancing Integrated National Strategies, Strategic Capabilities

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday stressed opening new ground for enhancing integrated national strategies and strategic capabilities. Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks while attending a plenary meeting of the delegation of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the People's Armed Police Force, during the first session of the 14th National People's Congress, China's national legislature. Consolidating and enhancing integrated national strategies and strategic capabilities has profound significance in building a modern socialist country in all respects and advancing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts, as well as in achieving the goals for the centenary of the PLA in 2027 and more quickly elevating the armed forces to world-class standards, said Xi. Highlighting the goal of maximizing China's national strategic capabilities, Xi called for efforts in integrating the strategic layouts, resources and strengths in all areas, in a bid to systematically upgrade the country's overall strength to cope with strategic risks, safeguard strategic interests and realize strategic objectives.

Xi urged efforts to advance collaborative innovation in science and technology, with a focus on independent and original innovation, thus building high-level self-reliance and strength in science and technology at a faster pace. Strategic capabilities in emerging fields must be bolstered in pursuit of new advantages in national development and international competitions, and the resilience of industrial and supply chains must be enhanced, Xi said. Xi ordered coordinating the construction of major infrastructure, accelerating the building of national reserves, and making the reserves more capable of safeguarding national security. Consolidating and enhancing integrated national strategies and strategic capabilities must draw momentum from reform and innovation, Xi stressed, urging more progresses in this regard. He also called for efforts to foster a sound atmosphere of caring for, devoting to, building and safeguarding national defense among members of the public to pool strengths for consolidating and enhancing integrated national strategies and strategic capabilities and for building a strong country with a strong military.

China Releases Plan on Reforming Party and State Institutions

The Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the State Council have released a plan on reforming Party and state institutions, and issued a circular demanding the faithful implementation of the plan. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, efforts have been made to further reform Party and state institutions, leading to systemic and holistic transformations of their functions, the plan said. However, the institutional setup and the allocation of functions of Party and state institutions are not yet fully adapted to new tasks, the plan noted, adding that further reforms and adjustments are needed. It stated the aim of reforming Party and state institutions is building a functional system of Party and state institutions that is well-developed, procedure-based and efficient. The plan said important arrangements were made at the 20th CPC National Congress for deepening the reform of Party and state institutions, which is of far-reaching significance.

Efforts are needed to deepen institutional reform in key areas and ensure that the Party's leadership over socialist modernization becomes more refined in institutional setup, more optimized in the division of functions, more improved in institutions and mechanisms, and more efficient in operation and management, according to the plan. The plan listed several reforms on CPC Central Committee institutions. A central commission for finance will be established to strengthen CPC Central Committee's centralized and unified leadership over financial work. It will be responsible for top-level planning, coordination, overall advancement of financial stability and development and for supervising the work's implementation. The commission will also study and deliberate major policies and matters in the financial sector, among others. An office of the commission will be set up, the plan said. A committee will be formed to strengthen the unified leadership over the Party's work in the financial sector.

A central commission for science and technology will be set up to enhance the CPC Central Committee's centralized and unified leadership over the work of science and technology, the plan said. Its functions include pushing forward the building of a national innovation system and structural scientific and technological reform, studying and deliberating major strategies, plans and policies for the country's sci-tech development, and coordinating efforts to resolve major issues of strategic, guiding and fundamental significance in the sci-tech sector. A social work department of the CPC Central Committee will be formed, the plan said. It will coordinate and guide the work in handling public complaints and soliciting people's opinions. The department will also be responsible for Party building work in mixed-ownership and non-public enterprises, and new types of economic and social organizations and among groups in new forms of employment, according to the plan.

The department will oversee the National Public Complaints and Proposals Administration. Party committees at the provincial, municipal and county levels will set up their social work departments accordingly. A Hong Kong and Macao work office of the CPC Central Committee will be formed on the basis of the existing Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, according to the plan. The new office will function as a working body of the CPC Central Committee. The name of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council will be retained, said the plan. On deepening reform of the National People's Congress (NPC) institutions, the plan said that a commission on work related to NPC deputies will be set up. On deepening reform of State Council institutions, the plan said the Ministry of Science and Technology will be restructured.

A national financial regulatory administration will be set up. Local financial regulatory mechanisms will be reformed. The China Securities Regulatory Commission will be placed directly under the State Council. Local branches of the People's Bank of China will also be reformed, according to the plan. The state-owned financial capital management system will be improved, said the plan. The management of the staff of financial regulators will be unified and standardized, according to the plan. A national data bureau will be established, said the plan, adding that the functions of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs will be optimized. The plan also specified efforts to improve the elderly-care work mechanism and the management mechanism for intellectual property rights. On deepening the reform of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) National Committee institutions, the plan said that the makeup of its sectors will be optimized.

A new sector -- the environment and resources sector -- will be added to the CPPCC National Committee, among other changes. The allocation of the staffing resources for Party and state institutions will also be optimized, according to the plan. Central Party and state institutions will downsize their staff by 5 percent, said the plan. Most of the retrieved staff resources will be invested in key areas and major projects. Staffing resource reduction at local Party and state institutions is left to the discretion of provincial-level Party committees in light of situations on the ground. Central authorities are expected to complete the reform by the end of 2023 while localities are expected to complete the reform by the end of 2024, according to the plan.

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China's Top Political Advisor Stresses Role of New Type of Party System in Modernization

China's top political advisor Wang Huning has called for fully leveraging the strengths and role of the country's new type of the political party system in the pursuit of modernization. He has called for striving in unity to build China into a great modern

socialist country in all respects and advance the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts through a Chinese path to modernization. Entrusted by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, Wang, chairman of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, recently made visits to the central committees of non-CPC parties and the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC) and made the remarks. Wang, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, called on the non-CPC parties to maintain the correct political direction and strengthen their political, ideological, theoretical and emotional identification with the leadership of the CPC and socialism with Chinese characteristics, consolidating the shared political foundation of multiparty cooperation.

The non-CPC political parties, functioning as advisors, assistants and colleagues of the CPC, should diligently perform their duties, conduct in-depth research and studies, and actively put forward suggestions, he said. Wang urged the ACFIC to guide the private sector to boost confidence in development, put into practice the new development philosophy, and fulfill their social responsibilities to promote its healthy and high-quality development. Leaders of the non-CPC parties and the ACFIC updated Wang, respectively, on their current situations and provided recommendations regarding the development of the united front and multiparty cooperation in the new era. Shi Taifeng, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and head of the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee, participated in the visits.

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Anti-graft Officials Urged to Better Fulfill Duties in China's Modernization Drive

China's anti-graft chief has called on fellow members of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) of the Communist Party of China (CPC) to faithfully perform their duties in the pursuit of modernization. Consistent efforts should be made to arm the Party with Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, said Li Xi, secretary of the CCDI, while addressing a seminar which concluded on Saturday in Beijing. Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, asked for making new accomplishments on the new journey of building a great country and pursuing national rejuvenation during the three-day seminar, which focused on "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" and the guiding principles of the 20th CPC National Congress. Discipline inspection and supervision bodies should carry out their duties effectively in advancing China's modernization, improving the system for exercising full and rigorous self-governance, he noted. Efforts should also focus on tightening political oversight and inspection, fighting

corruption concerning problems that hold back high-quality development, and improving the oversight system for the modernization of China's system and capacity for governance, Li said. Liu Jinguo, a member of the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee and deputy secretary of the CCDI, attended the seminar.

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CPC to Launch Party-wide Education Campaign on Xi Jinping Thought

The Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee has decided to launch a Party-wide thematic education campaign starting from April to study and implement Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. The decision was made at a meeting held by the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee on Thursday, which also deliberated the regulations on the reporting of personal information by officials. Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, presided over the meeting. It was pointed out at the meeting that the campaign, with a focus on leading officials at and above the county and director level, is to use the Party's new theories to achieve unity in thought, will and action, carry forward the great founding spirit of the Party, and see that the whole Party strives in unity to build a modern socialist country in all respects and advance the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts. During the meeting, participants stressed that the whole Party needs to develop a deep understanding of the decisive significance of establishing Comrade Xi Jinping's core position on the Party Central Committee and in the Party as a whole and establishing the guiding role of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.

They called on all Party members to comprehensively study, understand and implement the guiding principles from the Party's 20th National Congress, apply the new development philosophy, foster a new pattern of development, promote high-quality development, and advance Chinese modernization through the campaign. It was also emphasized at the meeting that efforts should be made to advance the Party's self-reform and always stay alert and determined in order to tackle the unique challenges that a large party like the CPC may face. The meeting noted that with the education campaign, the whole Party should rally more closely around the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core. It asked Party committees and leading Party members groups at all levels to address the pressing concerns of the people, make special efforts in tackling prominent problems, and ensure that the campaign is carried out in an effective and sustainable manner.

The system for officials to report their personal information has served as an important measure for strictly managing and supervising officials since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, said the meeting, adding that the revision of the regulations is of great significance. Reporting personal information to authorities

truthfully is a political and organizational discipline that officials must abide by, said the meeting, calling on officials to willingly submit to organizational oversight. It also asked those in senior positions to take the lead in implementation by reporting their personal information, thereby setting a good example. The meeting asked Party committees and leading Party members groups at all levels to ensure sound implementation of the reporting system so that it can play a bigger role in exercising full and rigorous self-governance of the Party. The meeting also discussed other issues.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 03/30/2023

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JAPAN: Four-Day Workweek System Recommended for Government Employees

A panel at Japan's National Personnel Authority has presented its recommendations for work-style reforms for central government employees, including the expansion of a four-day workweek system. The panel of experts released its final report on measures to eradicate overwork on Monday. The report says everyone should be eligible to work four days a week. The option is currently limited to people who are raising children or providing nursing care to family members. The report also says civil servants should be allowed to telework as much as possible, and should have at least 11 hours of rest after finishing work before starting work again. The experts urge the government to continue carrying out reforms on the matter. They also call on Diet members to reduce the burden on civil servants who help Cabinet ministers draft answers for questions in Diet sessions. The personnel authority says the recommendations would help government offices recruit talented people, adding that they are feasible.

From <https://www3.nhk.or.jp> 03/27/2023

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Japan Launches Expert Panel to Explore Digital Yen

NHK has learned that Japan's Finance Ministry plans to launch an expert panel next month to look at the feasibility of issuing a digital yen. The ministry's panel is expected to discuss how to create a framework for a digital currency backed by the central bank, otherwise known as "CBDC". They will use findings from a technical study the Bank of Japan conducted for two years up until this month. The launch of the panel coincides with the start of a digital yen pilot program involving the BOJ, financial institutions and other private-sector participants. BOJ officials say they currently have no concrete plans to issue a digital currency. It's expected to take time to hammer out the legal and framework issues needed to do so. The ministry plans to take into account the opinions of the panel and prepare for the possible introduction of a digital yen.

Central banks in Europe, the United States and China are already exploring the viability of digital currencies. They can be used in the same way as banknotes and coins. The implications of digital currencies came into the spotlight when US tech giant Meta announced four years ago that it was planning to issue its own cryptocurrency. Regulators raised concerns that it could be used for money laundering and may threaten monetary stability. Meta, previously known as Facebook, has since given up on the idea. China is seen as the frontrunner in issuing a digital currency. A digital yuan debuted on an experimental basis at the Beijing Olympics in February last year. The US Federal Reserve released its first report on a digital dollar in 2022. The European Central Bank is expected to decide this year whether to issue a digital euro. India is also planning to issue its currency in digital form.

From <https://www3.nhk.or.jp> 03/30/2023

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SOUTH KOREA: Aerospace Administration to Be Launched by End of 2023

South Korea will launch an independent aerospace administration to assume full charge of the state-led space programs and aeronautics research by the end of this year, the science ministry said Thursday. The Ministry of Science and ICT preannounced the enactment of a special law to establish the national aeronautics administration, or the Korean version of the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The ministry said it will seek parliamentary approval in June and open the administration in December. Under the new law, the new administration will lead the country's space program, aeronautics research and space research, including moon and Mars exploration projects. It will recruit top space experts and researchers at home and abroad, with foreign nationals to be eligible for a post in the administration, according to the science ministry.

The launch of the new aerospace ministry is part of the South Korean government's long-term plans to seek future growth momentum and make its presence felt on the world stage in the midst of the fierce competition for space projects throughout the world. So far, South Korea's space projects have been led mainly by the government and the Korea Aerospace Research Institute. Since the first satellite KITSAT-1 in 1992, the country has sent a slew of satellites into space. Last year, it conducted its first successful satellite launch using a domestically developed rocket, Nuri. And it sent the first lunar orbiter Danuri last year in South Korea's first space mission beyond Earth's orbit to measure the terrain, magnetic strengths, gamma rays and other traits of the lunar surface. South Korea will carry out its third launch of Nuri in May.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 03/02/2023

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Govt. Overhauls 52-Hour Workweek System to Provide More Flexibility

The government announced a set of measures on Monday to reform the controversial 52-hour workweek system by giving more flexibility and choice in work hours. Under the system introduced in 2018, employers must limit overtime work to 12 hours per week to ensure the total number of hours worked remains at 52. The revision, however, will allow companies to manage overtime not only weekly but on a monthly, quarterly, half-yearly or yearly basis so that employers can choose more hours during weeks with heavy workloads and fewer hours during weeks with less work. The revision also must guarantee a consecutive rest period of 11 hours between each working day. This will enable companies to increase the maximum weekly work hours to 69 while still keeping the average work hours within the 52-hour limit.

The government will also adopt a new sabbatical month system in which a worker can save overtime work hours as paid leave days, so that they can be used consecutively with annual paid leave days. The decision for such flexibility should be adopted on an agreement between the labor and the management of each company, "(The plan) will benefit workers with various working hour systems, such as a four-day workweek and a sabbatical month, while help companies in managing their workforce," Labor Minister Lee Jeong-sik told a press briefing. The change comes at the request of businesses that have complained of difficulties in meeting deadlines due to the 52-hour workweek. The public will have 40 days to submit their opinions about the revisions before they are sent to the National Assembly for approval in June-July. The revision, however, is strongly opposed by the main opposition Democratic Party and the minor opposition Justice Party, which hold a majority.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 03/06/2023

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Yoon Doubles Down on Corruption Fight

Corruption erodes freedom, putting democracy at greater risk, President Yoon Suk Yeol said Thursday, at a meeting South Korea co-hosted to bolster ties among global democracies against authoritarian rule. The speech -- given in person on the second day of the Summit for Democracy, a two-day US-led gathering that started Wednesday with a videoconference of world leaders -- marks South Korea's latest push to rally behind US efforts to regroup democracies in the Indo-Pacific region against a more assertive China. Representing the Indo-Pacific region, Seoul is one of four countries that co-hosted the event, alongside the Netherlands, Zambia and Costa Rica, representing Europe, Africa, and Central and South America, respectively. "To give back the international community what South Korea received in the past, we will push for a new initiative," Yoon said at the Shilla Seoul, dubbing the plan as the "Shared Vision for Democracy and Prosperity." It aims to aid countries in

need of financing tools -- digital and non-digital -- as they fight corruption. One hundred million dollars has been earmarked for the three-year project, according to Yoon.

The South Korean leader added that "corrupted individuals twist and paralyze decision-making at the national level." Yoon, a former top prosecutor, previously led high-profile bribery investigations -- including the one involving former President Park Geun-hye, who was impeached and removed from office for corruption. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Park Jin said in a separate speech Thursday that the meeting lays the groundwork for adopting what he called the "Seoul Declaration." "The Seoul Declaration embodies our shared resolve to prioritize the fight against corruption and reaffirm our commitment to the democratic values we cherish." Seoul will also host next year's summit but whether it will be the host or a co-host is still under discussion. Washington launched the meeting in December.

From <http://www.koreaherald.co> 03/30/2023

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South-East Asia

THAILAND: PM Says Prepared for Parliament Dissolution Ahead of Election

Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha said on Friday that he has prepared for the dissolution of the parliament, an expected move ahead of a general election. "I have prepared (for the parliament dissolution). We have to wait for the announcement in the Royal Gazette," Prayut told reporters during his visit to the northern city of Chiang Mai. This came as the House of Representatives is heading to the next week when its four-year term is scheduled to end. Within five days from the implementation of a royal decree for the dissolution of the House of Representatives, the country's Election Commission must set a date for the general election.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 03/17/2023

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Thailand to Hold General Election on May 14

Thailand plans to hold a general election on May 14, the country's Election Commission announced on Tuesday, a day after the House of Representatives was dissolved. Political parties must submit their prime ministerial nominees between April 4 and April 7, Election Commission Chairman Ittiporn Boonpracong told a news conference. In a statement, the Election Commission also announced the application schedule for 500 House of Representatives candidates. Under the two-ballot system, more than 52 million eligible voters will elect 500 members of the House of Representatives. Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn Phra Vajiraklaochaoyuhua on Monday endorsed a decree to dissolve the House of Representatives which was

formed after the 2019 general election, with a four-year term scheduled to end on March 23.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 03/21/2023

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VIETNAM: Ministry Proposes Adding Further Taxpayers to Compulsory Social Insurance

HÀ NỘI The Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA) has proposed to add a group to the list of people paying compulsory social insurance. The group includes individual business households, business managers, unpaid managers of cooperatives and part-time employees. According to the ministry, the Law on Social Insurance still misses this group of people who have the need and ability to participate in compulsory social insurance. The ministry is collecting experts' opinions on the draft amended Law on Social Insurance to expand coverage. There are now more than 5.1 million business households across the country, six times larger than the total number of enterprises. Of which, there are more than 1.7 million households declaring and paying taxes, according to the tax authority. However, a small number in this group participates in voluntary social insurance. Regarding cooperatives, data from the Ministry of Planning and Investment shows that, in 2022, the country had about 29,000 cooperatives, with nearly six million members. They are employing about 970,000 workers. However, up to now, only 7,000 cooperatives have registered to participate in compulsory social insurance for about 40,000 employees.

Survey results in some localities showed that many business managers and unpaid managers of cooperatives have the desire to participate in compulsory social insurance, MOLISA said. With these additional subjects, there will be an additional 5.1 million people participating in compulsory social insurance. For compulsory social insurance policy, each unpaid business or cooperative manager must pay 25 per cent of the salary rate based on whatever they choose to contribute to as the monthly insurance premium. For part-time employees participating in compulsory social insurance, the employees and employers will contribute 25 per cent to social insurance together. The employers have to contribute 17 per cent to the sickness, maternity, workplace accident, retirement fund, and survivorship allowance. The employees will contribute 8 per cent. This will result in additional fees for both the employee and the employer. However, in return, employees and employers both receive benefits from contributing to the social insurance fund, MOLISA said. As of 2022, 17.49 million people across the country had joined social insurance, accounting for 33.89 per cent of the labour force. In which, the number of people participating in compulsory social insurance is 16.03 million.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 03/16/2023

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Vietnam Mobilizes Military Forces to Cope with Staff Shortage in Vehicle Registration

Vietnam has mobilized military forces to cope with lack of staff in vehicle registration centers as many have closed for investigation in recent few months, local media reported on Tuesday. Since the end of 2022, police have investigated many vehicle testing and inspection centers, local newspaper Vietnam News reported. Roughly 500 leaders and employees of more than 70 centers have been charged with giving and taking bribes, and falsifying documents. To cope with the shortage of staff, the Department of Motorcycles has asked the General Department of Engineering under the General Staff of the Vietnam People's Army for support, the newspaper reported. The military inspectors were trained in motor vehicle inspection, including regulations and inspection management software at registration centers. Director of the Vietnam Register Nguyen Chien Thang said the military support would help ease the pressure on registration centers. As of March 17, 58 of 281 centers have been suspended from operations.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 03/21/2023

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President Thường Emphasises Quality Improvements, Reforms During Visit to Supreme People's Court

During a visit to the Supreme People's Court on Monday, President Võ Văn Thường emphasised the importance of fair, modern, and accessible judicial proceedings that uphold the rights of citizens and humanity. Praising the recent achievements of the People's Courts of all levels, the State leader emphasised that every judgement and decision of the court is of utmost importance. According to the report presented at the meeting, the number of cases handled by the People's Courts has risen by 6 per cent on average per year, with increasing complexity. The quality of trials has been improved, with the percentage of judgments being cancelled or corrected due to subjective reasons kept at a minimal level, at 1.5 per cent. In 2022, the number of cases accepted has increased by 29,900 compared to the previous year, with 89 per cent processed. Technology has also been applied for virtual trials and improving the quality of judicial procedures, saving significant financial resources for the Government and receiving acclaim from the public. Key cases of corruption and economic violations have also been promptly addressed with stringent actions, affirming the Party's and the State's determination to fight corruption.

However, the President also pointed out that there are shortcomings to be addressed, such as the percentage of judgements cancelled or corrected not meeting the National Assembly's requirements or the processing time for several cases being longer than the limit set in the law. Acknowledging the complicated developments, as well as corruption and economic crimes, President Thường said that building a rule-of-law socialist state and judicial reforms requires better quality of judicial

activities, especially in legal proceedings. Reforms will ensure that the courts, according to their jurisdiction, are independent and only follow the laws. The President also noted that the Supreme People's Court needs to improve the adjudication quality, ensuring strict actions, objectivity, fairness, law compliance and prompt actions, especially the cases from the Central Steering Committee on anti-corruption and related to national security. The quality of judgements and decisions must also be improved, ensuring clear and strict compliance with the laws, with a focus on recovering the assets acquired by crimes, especially the State's properties.

President Thưởng said: "Each case brought to trial must not only be handled strictly according to the law but also conducted with the Party's views and the national humane moral values." The State leader also requires better communication and explanation on the cases, how the laws are applied in proceedings, and the nature and level of violation in the specific case context, so that the people understand the court's decisions. This is also the basis for educating and raising people's awareness of law compliance. He also required better capacity of the judiciaries with good ethics, transparency, spirit and compassion with logical and insightful methods of working in the profession, especially in the context of international integration and science-technology development. Investment in courts' infrastructure and science-technology application is also expected to increase, with the priority on building an e-court system by 2025, improving the management and services of the courts on digital platforms. President Thưởng added: "No matter the progress science and technology make, it will not replace the bravery, the brain and the heart of the judge or of the People's Jury in legal proceedings, because the subject of the trial are humans."

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 03/28/2023

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South Asia

INDIA: Manik Saha Anointed Tripura's CM, 8-Member Team in the Cabinet

Manik Saha took oath for the second time as Tripura Chief Minister on 8th March after the BJP clinched a victory in the February 16 Assembly polls. Eight other ministers were sworn in Yesterday. The oath ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and BJP leader JP Nadda. Himanta Biswa Sarma, the chief minister of Assam and the brains behind the BJP's Northeast victories, was with them. Pema Khandu, N Biren Singh, and PS Tamang, the chief ministers of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, and Sikkim, were also present. BJP member Biplab Deb, who was later succeeded by Mr. Saha, was also present on stage. The previous administration has kept four of the new ministers. They are Pranajit Singha Roy, Shantana Chakma, Ratan Lal Nath, and Sushanta Chowdhury.

Tinku Roy, a close friend of Biplab Deb, Bikash Debbarma, the leader of the BJP's Scheduled Tribes Morcha, and Sudhanshu Das were all appointed as new ministers by the party. Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura (IPFT), a BJP ally that fared poorly in these polls, was given one ministerial position. As a minister, Sukla Charan Noatia of IPFT took the pledge.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 03/09/2023

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UP Govt. Transfers 8 IPS Officers, Piyush Mordia Posted as ADG, Lucknow Zone

In a major administrative move, The Uttar Pradesh government today shifted 8 IPS Officers across the state with immediate effect. The 1998 batch IPS officer Piyush Mordia who was presently holding the charge of Additional Director General (ADG) Joint CP (CP), Law & Order of Lucknow Commissionerate has been transferred and posted as ADG of Lucknow Zone. Upendra Kumar Agarwal, a 2005 batch IPS officer, who was presently serving as IG/DIG of Devipatan Range has been transferred as joint CP: Law & Order of Lucknow Commissionerate. The 2008 batch IPS officer Amarendra Kumar who is presently DIG-Ayodhya Range has been made DIG of Devipatan Range whereas 2001 batch IPS officer Praveen Kumar who is presently G-Meerut Range is transferred as IG Ayodhya Range. Nachiketa jha who is presently IG Agra Range has been transferred as IG Meerut Range. He belongs to the 2003 batch of IPS officers whereas Deepak Kumar, a 2005 batch IPS officer, who is presently G/DIG-Aligarh has been transferred as IG, Agra-Range. The 2008 batch IPS officer Suresh Rao A Kulkarni who is presently serving as Additional C-Kanpur Commissionerate is transferred as DIG- Aligarh Range. Amit Verma, a 2008 batch IPS officer has been transferred as Additional CP, Kanpur Commissionerate, Uttar Pradesh. He is presently serving as DIG, SIT, HQ, Lucknow.

From egov.eletsonline.com 03/21/2023

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Manmeet K. Nanda Appointed MD & CEO of Invest India

The Board of Invest India named Ms. Manmeet K. Nanda, IAS, West Bengal Cadre (2000 Batch), as the Managing Director and CEO (Addl Charge) of Invest India until a full-time regular appointment at its 32nd Board Meeting on March 20, 2023. Following Mr. Deepak Bagla's departure, Ms. Nanda is now in charge. The Board officially expressed its gratitude to Mr. Deepak Bagla for his vision and dedication in starting Invest India. He has approximately 8 years of service to the company and has helped Invest India grow. Created under the Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision of a New India, Invest India today is well acknowledged by stakeholders for its tangible contributions and instrumental role in executing the Government's flagship initiatives including Make in India, Startup India, National Single Window System, Project Monitoring Group, and Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation

Advisory Council. Invest India leverages private sector expertise to execute Government's vision, embodying high levels of transparency, ethics and corporate governance. The inclusive and merit-based team has been acknowledged by stakeholders and investors for its professional approach, consistently delivering on assigned goals. The Team today is working closely with State Governments, Embassies and Ministries of the Government of India in efficiently supporting their global investment promotion and outreach efforts. The strength of the Invest India team is its sense of pride, quality of work and inclusive decision making. It is based on these parameters of excellence that Invest India has received the Great Place To Work® Certification – a rare achievement for any government funded organization.

Team's nimble and swift action has even been recognized by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). This award, received thrice in a row, has commended Invest India for its excellence in partnering for investment promotion, promoting investment in sustainable development, and for best practices in COVID response. The Board of Invest India is Chaired by Mr. Anurag Jain, Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Government of India. Other members of the Board include Mr. P. K. Tripathi, Secretary (Coordination), Cabinet Secretariat, Ms. Arti Bhatnagar, Additional Secretary & Financial Advisor, DPIIT, Mr. Md. Noor Rahman Sheikh, Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, Mr. Anand Mahindra, Chairperson, Mahindra Group, Mr. Pankaj R. Patel, Chairperson, Cadilla Healthcare, Mr. Harshvardhan Neotia, Chairperson, Ambuja Neotia Group, Ms. Rekha R. Menon, Chairperson, NASSCOM; Chairperson & Sr. MD, Accenture, Ms. Debjani Ghosh, President, NASSCOM, Mr. Chandrajit Banerjee, Director General, CII.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com> 03/22/2023

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Former DGP Bhaskarjyoti Mahanta Takes Charge as Chief Information Commissioner of Assam

The Assam government has appointed Bhaskarjyoti Mahanta as its new chief information commissioner. He had served as former director general of police (DGP) and was recently retired on January 31, 2023. The appointment was made after Mahanta retired as DGP of Assam and was replaced by IPS officer Gyanendra Pratap Singh. Mahanta was an Assam-Meghalaya cadre IPS officer from the 1988 batch, and he previously held the position of Director General of Border. He is admired and respected for outstanding service and dedication to the state police force. Mahanta thanked the Assam police force and commended each police officer who marched in the procession during his leaving march. He continued by saying that he would always admire the Assam Police and that for every police officer, their work is more of a service than a job. Mahanta's nomination as the Chief Information Commissioner is seen as a significant development given his lengthy career in public service. The state's information commission will operate more effectively and

increase transparency as a result of Mahanta's nomination. Mahanta's tenure as Assam's director general of police (DGP) came to an end in January, and GP Singh was selected to take his place. After a distinguished career in public service, Mahanta retired, and his new position is seen as a continuation of his commitment to the state.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: President Ilham Aliyev Appoints Chairman of State Water Resources Agency

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has signed an order appointing Zaur Mikayilov as Chairman of the State Water Resources Agency of Azerbaijan, Trend reports.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/30/2023

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KAZAKHSTAN: Government Resigns Following Legislative Elections

The Government of Kazakhstan under the leadership of Prime Minister Alikhan Smailov has resigned before the elected Majilis (lower house) of parliament, Trend reports via Kazakh media. According to the media, the election of the lower house MPs was held on March 19, 2023, and most of the seats were taken by 'Amanat', the largest party in the country. The MPs of the new convocation have gathered for the first meeting. The media explained that according to the Constitution of Kazakhstan, the government resigns its powers before the newly elected parliament. "In connection with the resignation of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan before the newly elected Majilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, I decree the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan to fulfill its duties until the approval of the new composition of the government," the text of the decree of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, published by his press service, said. Now Tokayev must submit a new candidacy for the head of government for consideration by the MPs. After approval by the parliament, he will appoint the new candidate as prime minister. However, speaking at the first meeting of the new parliament, Tokayev suggested the 'Amanat' Party nominate a candidate for the post of prime minister. "Thus, this party will assume political responsibility, which once again confirms the 'strong president - influential parliament - accountable government' formula, he said. Smailov became Kazakhstan's prime minister in January 2022, succeeding Askar Mamin amid mass unrest, which, according to the official version, was a cover for a coup attempt.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/29/2023

TURKMENISTAN: President Takes Part in Parliamentary Elections

Today, President of Turkmenistan Serdar Berdimuhamedov took part in elections of deputies of the Mejlis (parliament), members of the Khalk Maslahaty and Gengeshes, Trend reports citing Turkmenistan Golden age. Early in the morning, the head of the state arrived in polling station № 48 of Kopetdag district of Ashgabat city located in specialized secondary school № 68 named after Annaniyaz Artyk for voting. As the President of Turkmenistan noted after voting, the holding of elections at high organizational level and on a wide alternative basis as well as support of the electoral process with cultural events significantly raise the level and importance of the socio-political event taking place in the country. The head of the Turkmen state also expressed his satisfaction with a preparatory work, which was carried out on the eve of present elections. Preliminary organizational work and necessary conditions created for voting attest to the steady development of democratic principles in the country. It also testifies to unity and cohesion of society.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/26/2023

Voter Turnout for Parliamentary Elections in Turkmenistan Reaches 91,12%

The turnout in the elections to the parliament of Turkmenistan by 19:00 was 91,12%, Trend reports citing CEC of Turkmenistan. "By 19:00, 91,12% of voters voted in the elections of deputies of Mejlis of Turkmenistan. More precisely, 91,74% of voters voted in Ahal velayat, 91,49% in Balkan velayat, 90,94% in Dashoguz velayat, 91,17% in Lebap velayat, 90,87% in Mary velayat, 90,91% in Ashgabat city. By 19:00, 91,10% of voters voted in the elections of members of the velayat, etrap, and city halk maslahats. More precisely, 91,74% of voters voted in Ahal velayat, 91,49% in Balkan velayat, 90,94% in Dashoguz velayat, 91,17% in Lebap velayat, 90,87% in Mary velayat, 90,78% in Ashgabat city. By 19:00, 91,20% of voters voted in the elections of members of gengeshes. More precisely, 91,74% of voters voted in Ahal velayat, 91,71% in Balkan velayat, 90,85% in Dashoguz velayat, 91,32% in Lebap velayat, 90,94% in Mary velayat", the CEC said in a statement.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/26/2023

CEC of Turkmenistan Discloses Results of Parliamentary Elections

A meeting of the Central Commission for Elections and Referendums in Turkmenistan was held on March 29 this year, at which the final results of the elections of deputies of the parliament, as well as members of the people's councils

of regions, districts, cities and local self-government, were summed up, Trend reports with reference to the Turkmen media. According to the information, 91.12 percent of the country's citizens who have the right to vote took part in the voting, which took place at 2,602 polling stations in the territories of electoral districts of Turkmenistan and 42 polling stations in foreign countries. At the CEC meeting, the lists of elected deputies of parliament, as well as members of people's councils of regions, districts, cities and local self-government were reviewed and approved. In accordance with the approved lists, 65 candidates from the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, 18 candidates from the Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, 24 candidates from the Agrarian Party, and 18 candidates from citizens' groups were elected to the new parliament consisting of 125 deputies. Meanwhile, on March 26, elections of deputies of the parliament, as well as members of the people's councils of regions, districts, cities, and local self-government were held in Turkmenistan.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/30/2023

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Oceania

NEW ZEALAND: New Website to Better Connect People to Free Wellbeing Services

Minister of Health Dr Ayesha Verrall said a new wellbeing website will give those with mild and moderate mental health and addiction issues an easier pathway to free support. "Improving mental health and addiction support is a priority for this Government and is why we invested \$455 million from the Wellbeing Budget 2019 in the Access and Choice programme," Dr Verrall said. "Access and Choice has laid the foundations for a new primary mental health and addiction system. The programme has been growing and going from strength to strength. "The increased need for wellbeing support following the destruction caused by recent severe weather events is proof of just how important the workforce is. www.wellbeingsupport.health.nz – launched today – provides a home for the Access and Choice primary mental health and addiction services all in one place.

"Our investment in the programme is now helping tens of thousands of New Zealanders each month. "As the number of participating services continues to grow, more people will be able to freely access support and better manage their mental and physical wellbeing. "The website will be a useful tool for whānau to find a local provider and connect people with services that offer free and easy-to-access to mental health and addiction support. "These primary mental health and addiction services simply didn't exist before this Government made a commitment to rebuild the mental health system." "Access and Choice is a good example of the progress we are making, with new and enhanced services in every area of New Zealand. "It is an opportunity for us to deliver transformational change to the mental health and wellbeing sector," said Dr Verrall.

3、 Management, Capacity Building and Innovation

Asia-Pacific

Pace of Reform Toward Equal Rights for Women Falls to 20-Year Low

The global pace of reforms toward equal treatment of women under the law has slumped to a 20-year low, constituting a potential impediment to economic growth at a critical time for the global economy, a new World Bank report shows. In 2022, the global average score on the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law index rose just half a point to 77.1—indicating women, on average, enjoy barely 77 percent of the legal rights that men do. At the current pace of reform, in many countries a woman entering the workforce today will retire before she will be able to gain the same rights as men, the report notes. “At a time when global economic growth is slowing, all countries need to mobilize their full productive capacity to confront the confluence of crises besetting them,” said Indermit Gill, Chief Economist of the World Bank Group and Senior Vice President for Development Economics. “Governments can't afford to sideline as much as half of their population. Denying equal rights to women across much of the world is not just unfair to women; it is a barrier to countries' ability to promote green, resilient, and inclusive development.”

Women, Business and the Law 2023 assesses 190 countries' laws and regulations in eight areas related to women's economic participation—mobility, workplace, pay, marriage, parenthood, entrepreneurship, assets, and pensions. The data—which are current through Oct. 1, 2022—offer objective and measurable benchmarks for global progress toward legal gender equality. Today, just 14 countries—all high-income economies—have laws that give women the same rights as men. Worldwide, nearly 2.4 billion women of working age still do not have the same rights as men. Closing the gender employment gap could raise long-term GDP per capita by nearly 20% on average across countries. Studies estimate global economic gains of \$5-6 trillion if women started and scaled new businesses at the same rate as men do. In 2022, only 34 gender-related legal reforms were recorded across 18 countries—the lowest number since 2001. Most reforms focused on increasing paid leave for parents and fathers, removing restrictions to women's work, and mandating equal pay. It will take another 1,549 reforms to reach substantial legal gender equality everywhere in the areas measured by the report. At the current pace, the report, notes, it would take at least 50 years on average to reach that target.

The latest Women, Business and the Law report provides a comprehensive

assessment of global progress toward gender equality in the law over the past 50 years. Since 1970, the global average Women, Business and the Law score has improved by about 2/3, rising from 45.8 to 77.1 points. The first decade of this century saw strong gains towards legal gender equality. Between 2000 and 2009, over 600 reforms were introduced, with a peak of 73 annual reforms in 2002 and 2008. Since then, reform fatigue seems to have set in—particularly in areas that involve long-established norms, such as the rights of women to inherit and own property. New analysis of the data shows that economies with historically larger legal gender gaps have been catching up, especially since 2000. Currently, equality of economic opportunity for women is highest in OECD high-income economies but important reforms have continued in developing economies. Sub-Saharan Africa made significant progress last year. The region accounted for over half of all reforms worldwide in 2022, with seven economies—Benin, the Republic of Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, Malawi, Senegal, and Uganda—enacting 18 positive legal changes. Although great achievements have been made over the last five decades, more needs to be done worldwide to ensure that good intentions are accompanied by tangible results—that is, equal opportunity under the law for women. Women cannot afford to wait any longer to reach gender equality. Neither can the global economy.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 03/02/2023

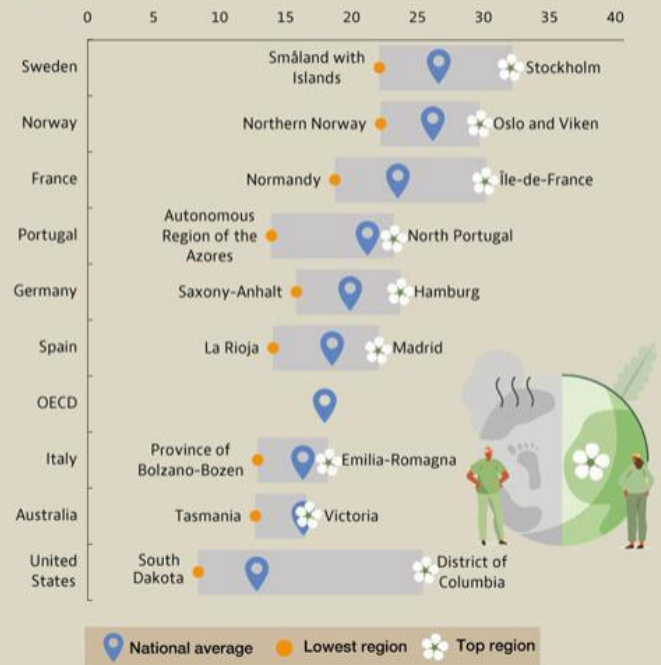
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Action on Jobs, Skills and Regional Disparities Vital for the Green Transition, Says OECD

A green skills shortage across the OECD is holding back growth in sustainable development jobs and could jeopardise the race to reach net zero by 2050, according to a new OECD report. “[Bridging the Great Green Divide](#)” shows the share of workers in green-task-jobs – defined as jobs where at least 10% of tasks directly supports sustainable development – grew just 2 percentage points across 30 OECD countries over the last decade, from 16% in 2011 to 18% in 2021, with significant differences within countries. Without urgent action to boost skills, the green transition could deepen inequalities and threaten progress towards 2050 net-zero goals.

Green jobs in regions

Share of jobs with at least 10% green tasks across regions (selected countries)



Source: OECD Job Creation and Local Economic Development 2023

Capital cities such as Paris, Stockholm and Vilnius usually have a greater concentration of highly skilled workers, with the share of green-task jobs as high as 30%. In comparison, this figure can be as low as 5% in more remote regions. This difference risks exacerbating a social divide. “The geography of the green transition is uneven across the OECD. There is increasing convergence between countries but increasing divergence within countries in the creation of green job opportunities,” **OECD Deputy Secretary-General Yoshiki Takeuchi** said. “Bridging this divide will be vital if we are to reach net zero by 2050. Investing in skills and, with women also underrepresented in green jobs, tackling gender biases can pave the way for a just transition.” The green transition also risks widening the gap between workers. More than half of workers in green jobs have completed higher education, compared to about one-third of those in non-green jobs, and enjoy a 20% wage premium compared with non-green jobs. Women account for only 28% of green jobs, reflecting their underrepresentation in key fields of study – less than 25% of graduates in engineering and less than 20% in computing are women.

While men predominate in green jobs, they also make up 83% of work in industries with the highest share of polluting jobs, such as mining and manufacturing – sectors where significant transitions will be required. Those working in polluting jobs are less likely to take advantage of training for green job opportunities. National governments

need to be alert to these differences, and empower and support vulnerable places and workers to develop the right skills to succeed in the green transition. This should also include targeted support for workers at risk of displacement, services to enable them to transition into new local jobs and measures that help firms to create new green jobs – which will not only enable a just transition but also accelerate global efforts towards net zero. See further information on OECD work on local employment and economic development at <https://www.oecd.org/employment/lead/>. For further information, journalists are invited to contact Shayne MACLACHLAN, Communications and Public Affairs Manager (Shayne.MACLACHLAN@oecd.org). *Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.*

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 03/14/2023

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Growing Securitisation in Technology Risks Co-Operation on Responses to Global Crises

The latest OECD Science, Technology and Innovation Outlook 2023 says that recent measures by China, the European Union and the United States – which between them account for more than two-thirds of global spending on Research & Development (R&D) – to reduce international technology dependencies could lead to a weakening of science, technology and innovation activities at a time when global challenges, more than ever, require international co-operation. Data on collaboration based on scientific publications shows early signs of China-US disengagement from bilateral collaboration in research. US co-authorship with China has fallen markedly in recent years, possibly owing to pandemic travel restrictions and denial of visas that restricted Chinese academics from travelling overseas. Most of the decline – which started in 2020 and accelerated in 2021 – is in engineering and natural sciences fields, areas that underpin developments in breakthrough technologies and which account for the bulk of bilateral research collaboration between China and the United States. “Strategic competition should be reconciled with tackling global problems and crises,” OECD Deputy Secretary-General Kerri-Ann Jones said, presenting the report at the European Commission in Brussels. “Leadership has inevitably involved some measure of protection of technologies from strategic competitors, but today, research and innovation are evermore interconnected across countries via trade flows, availability of critical materials and the race for talent.

It is important that OECD countries carefully target their measures while keeping channels open to ambitious research and innovation co-operation to tackle current and future global challenges.” The scale of China’s R&D expenditures today suggest it is gaining critical mass to innovate at the frontier in areas ranging from Artificial Intelligence to the processing of critical minerals. While the United States remains the world’s largest absolute spender on R&D, China sits in second place, more than

tripling its number of researchers over the past 20 years. China's R&D intensity (defined as its R&D expenditure as a share of GDP) has grown from 1.71% in 2010 to 2.45% in 2021, above the EU at 2.15% but below the US at 3.46%. China is now a market leader in some technologies, such as 5G, and at the forefront in others, including batteries and wind turbines. For further information, journalists are invited to contact Catherine Bremer in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 45 24 80 97). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

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Global Agriculture and Food Security Program Provides New Funding for Countries to Strengthen the Resilience of Smallholder Farmers

USD\$220 million in new agricultural investment grants for 15 countries was announced by the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), a global multilateral fund dedicated to reducing food insecurity and poverty in low-income countries. These grants will help countries design and implement solutions in line with their current agriculture and food security strategies, providing additional financing and co-financing of existing projects prioritized by the country with support from GAFSP's implementing partners - the African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Inter-American Development Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development, World Bank, and the World Food Programme. GAFSP works in close synergy with the Global Alliance on Food Security (GAFS), jointly convened by the German Group of Seven (G7) Presidency and the World Bank Group. The Program serves as a key mechanism to reinforce food security in-country dialogues highlighted by the GAFS, where GAFSP grant funding can be a source of financing for priorities identified through these country dialogues.

"Food security is no sprint but a marathon that needs investments in long-term resilient and sustainable agriculture - like the ones from GAFSP. The new contributions are a significant and sustainable multilateral response to the current food crisis," said Mrs. Svenja Schulze, German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development. Through the open Call for Proposals, the Program received complete applications from 27 countries, with about 80% of the requested amount for investment in the Africa region. Demand for GAFSP financing remains high and highlights the need in low-income countries to receive support for their actions to respond to the current food security crisis. "Hundreds of thousands of farmers have already benefited from GAFSP's grant support. Building on that success, this new grant financing will provide critical support to communities suffering from the aftershocks of multiple crises, by helping them build their resilience

to uplift their communities,” said Mr. Abdoul Salam Bello, the Executive Director of the Africa Group II, the World Bank Group Board of Directors. “We need GAFSP more than ever with its flexible and unique setup to provide support to the most vulnerable communities.”

The new country grants – to Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Lao PDR, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Nepal, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Togo, Republic of Yemen - will help countries build food systems resilience and help vulnerable communities secure their livelihoods. “As an international community we must continue to provide support to countries to respond to the ongoing food security crisis. GAFSP is exactly the type of instrument that can deliver for smallholder farmers by putting them at the center of the response,” said Mr. Hong Won Yu, Director of Food Security at Global Affairs Canada. This is the seventh call for agricultural investments in countries eligible for development assistance from the International Development Association (IDA) – the part of the World Bank that helps the world’s poorest countries. Proposals were selected based on recommendations of an independent review conducted by global agriculture experts, and then selected through a competitive process by the Program’s Steering Committee, composed of donors, recipient countries, civil society organizations, and multilateral development agencies, including the World Bank. GAFSP would like to thank its donors. The most recent contributions from Spain (USD\$10.6 million), the United States (USD\$10 million), and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (USD\$7.5 million) coupled with those received earlier from the United States (USD\$155 million) and Germany (USD\$220 million) enable GAFSP to continue supporting smallholder families and their communities in the most vulnerable countries in the world.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 03/20/2023

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Pacific SOE Commercialization Can Support Decarbonization, Climate Change Mitigation

Commercialization is an important tool in the arsenal of Pacific state-owned utilities as they seek to decarbonize and mitigate climate change-related risks, according to a new Asian Development Bank (ADB) report. *Finding Balance 2023: Benchmarking Performance and Building Climate Resilience in Pacific State-Owned Enterprises* compares the performance of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in nine Pacific island countries—Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu—and tracks the progress of SOE commercialization in the region. “Increasing the commercial orientation of Pacific state-owned utilities not only improves their performance but may make them more responsive to commercial incentives to decarbonize and invest in climate change adaptation,” ADB Pacific Liaison and Coordination Office Officer-in-Charge Matt Hodge said. “Where possible, governments should seek to incorporate private sector participation into the provision of SOE services.”

Finding Balance 2023, produced by the Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (PSDI), has a special focus on the risks posed by climate change, and how Pacific governments and state-owned utilities can manage its effects and build resilience. The report finds that Pacific state-owned utilities may be more inclined to respond to climate change-related challenges if they operate in a policy environment conducive to commercialization. Potential steps include the introduction of climate-related financial risk disclosures, the raising of capital to finance public investment in climate resilience and decarbonization, and the leveraging of private investment to expand renewable energy generation. The report, which focuses on the period 2015–2022, shows that SOEs in the Pacific have improved their returns but are still failing to cover their cost of capital.

Only two of the nine Pacific SOE portfolios assessed in *Finding Balance 2023* produced a return that covered their cost of capital between 2015 and 2020, while three SOE portfolios produced average returns on assets and/or average returns on equity below zero. In most surveyed countries, these low SOE returns were achieved despite subsidized capital, monopoly market power, and ongoing government cash transfers. PSDI is an ADB technical assistance program undertaken in partnership with the governments of Australia and New Zealand. PSDI supports ADB's 14 Pacific developing member countries to improve the enabling environment for business and to achieve inclusive, private sector-led economic growth. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

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ADB Promotes Digitalized Trade Through Regional Outreach Initiatives and Technical Assistance

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), through its Trade and Supply Chain Finance Program (TSCFP), has initiated a series of discussions with government agencies in several of its developing member countries to help them align their regulatory frameworks with international laws that enable paperless trade. In close collaboration with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the Digital Standard Initiative (DSI), and the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), ADB is advocating for the adoption and alignment of national regulations with UNCITRAL's Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records (MLETR). MLETR creates a legal framework for national laws to enable the use and recognition of electronic transferable records, both domestically and across borders. "Laws recognizing electronic trade documents are crucial to digitalize global trade and realize tremendous benefits for economies in terms of growth and jobs," said ADB Private Sector Operations Department Director General Suzanne Gaboury. "We are

convinced that the widespread adoption of MLETR, or comparable legislation, holds the promise of increased efficiency, security, and transparency of global trade and supply chains. Digitalization of trade is a key priority for ADB. We are working hard with our developing member countries to create more resilient, green, and inclusive trade and supply chains that are good for business, the environment, and economies.”

Replacing physical documents for trade, such as bills of lading, with electronic versions would allow more companies in developing Asia—especially small and medium-sized enterprises—to access global trade and supply chains. It will also make it easier to monitor activities in those networks to ensure adherence to environmental and social standards. This year, as part of accelerating digital trade under the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Integrated Trade Agenda 2030, ADB is providing technical assistance on MLETR to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Georgia. Working closely with the PRC’s Ministry of Commerce and with the Georgia Revenue Service under the Ministry of Finance, the initiative will raise public and private stakeholder awareness of MLETR, and its benefits to trade, as well as facilitate national-level discussions on the potential adoption of MLETR and enabling reforms to digitalize trade. “This initiative is extremely welcome and provides a model of best practice for other multilateral development banks. Time and again, I hear the same story from businesses. The number one obstacle to delivering a cheaper, faster, simpler trade system is legal barriers. It’s absolutely essential these barriers to digitalizing trade documents are removed and legal systems are aligned to MLETR,” said Legal Reform Advisory Board (LRAB) and ICC DSI Co-Chair Chris Southworth. “This will enable trade information to flow in digital form and all the unnecessary paper, bureaucracy, and inefficiency to be removed. Removing legal barriers will provide a trading environment fit for the 21st century, enabling technology solutions to scale, reduce barriers to finance, and crucially allow more small companies to participate at a lower cost.”

ADB, the ICC, and the Government of Singapore have formed LRAB as part of the DSI to help harmonize legislative frameworks. ADB is joined in this global initiative by partner multilateral institutions, including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Bankers Association for Finance and Trade, the Commonwealth, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the International Trade and Forfeiting Association, UNCITRAL, and the ASEAN Economy Community. Backed by ADB’s AAA credit rating and working with more than 250 partner banks, TSCFP enables trade and supply chains with loans and guarantees that underpin economic growth and create jobs to improve people’s lives. TSCFP initiatives help to make global trade and supply chains green, resilient, inclusive, transparent, and socially responsible.

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ASEAN Must Act to Strengthen Position in Global Value Chains

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) economies must strengthen their positions in global value chains to bolster resilience against new challenges including future pandemics, geopolitical instability, and climate change, says a report released today by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The report *ASEAN and Global Value Chains: Locking in Resilience and Sustainability* surveys the challenges and opportunities facing global value chains—the cross-border networks that separate production stages from concept to consumption—in Southeast Asia as countries seek to build greater resilience and promote sustainable and green development. It was launched on the sidelines of the Southeast Asia Development Symposium (SEADS) in Bali, Indonesia. “As ASEAN countries continue their recovery from COVID-19, we must ensure that economic revitalization happens in a greener and more sustainable way,” said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa. “This report proposes concrete measures that governments and businesses can adopt to decarbonize global value chains. Investments in renewable energy and improved efficiency, incentives to reduce trading costs for climate-smart goods, and the acceleration of digitalization can all contribute to greener and more sustainable value chains in ASEAN and beyond.”

The report finds that global value chains proved more resilient to the impacts of COVID-19 than expected, even as firms had to adjust to the disruption, given their dependence on only a few suppliers for essential inputs and goods. As such, the region needs to build stronger resilience in its global value chain segments while expanding trade, investment, and regional integration. The report also found that the competitive advantage of employing low-skilled labor is diminishing as new technology continues to upgrade global value chains. It is therefore imperative that the region creates a critical mass of workers equipped with new technology and technological skills. ASEAN economies also need to go “green.” The best case is that policies promoting decarbonization also strengthen ASEAN’s global value chains. They should accelerate trade digitalization and promote climate-smart trade, green transport infrastructure, and carbon pricing. Finally, the report notes that stakes are high for ASEAN economies. Recent global shocks and geopolitical trade protectionism could disrupt growth in ASEAN and elsewhere. The report explores the sizable policy impact and benefits of deepening Asia’s trade cooperation and expanding it to include other regions.

SEADS, ADB’s annual flagship knowledge event in Southeast Asia, gathers leaders from government, industry, academia, and other sectors to explore innovative solutions to critical development issues such as climate change and technology development. This year’s event, “Imagining a Net-Zero ASEAN,” will focus on how the region can make the transition to net zero and achieve climate resilience, while ensuring economic prosperity. The first three SEADS, held online due to the

COVID-19 pandemic, attracted over 10,000 participants and showcased a diverse lineup of speakers. SEADS 2023 aims to build on the priorities and successes of the G20 Summit and contribute to dialogue at the 2023 ASEAN Finance Ministers' Meeting.

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East Asia

CHINA: People Safer as Social Order Improves

China effectively curbed serious violent crimes and crimes related to guns, explosives and drugs over the past five years, said a work report of the Supreme People's Procuratorate. A total of 814,000 people were prosecuted over such crimes during the period, a drop of 31.7 percent from the previous five years, said the report submitted Tuesday to the ongoing national legislature session for deliberation. In particular, the number of prosecutions over homicide, arson, explosion, kidnap, robbery and theft in 2022 fell to the lowest level in nearly two decades, read the report, adding that the declines have pointed to a continuous improvement in the social order. This has brought a strong sense of security to the people, said the top procuratorate. The report also said procuratorial authorities have made all-out efforts to crack down on mafia-nature organized crimes, having prosecuted 265,000 people over the past five years. The country will continue to firmly guard social stability this year, with efforts to normalize the crackdown on organized crimes and severely punish behaviors that seriously disrupt the social order, the report said.

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Hong Kong, China Contributes to APEC's Research and Analysis

Hong Kong, China is contributing USD 200,000 to support APEC's research and analysis arm, the [Policy Support Unit](#). The contribution was confirmed in a memorandum of understanding signed by Maggie Wong, Hong Kong, China's APEC Senior Official and Dr Rebecca Sta Maria, Executive Director of the APEC Secretariat, on the margins of [the first APEC Senior Officials' Meeting in Palm Springs](#), United States last week. "We recognize of the exceptional and invaluable insights provided by the APEC Policy Support Unit in various topics crucial to our work in APEC," said Wong. "Hong Kong, China is committed to support the strengthening of APEC as an institution so that we can continue to be an incubator of ideas to achieve an open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful Asia-Pacific community by 2040."

The APEC Policy Support Unit was established in 2007 by APEC ministers as the research and analysis arm of APEC. It provides around 20 [policy reports and](#)

[papers](#) each year, as well as assists members and fora in designing robust, effective initiatives with measurable outcomes. Its policy research and analysis agenda is structured into three core areas:

- trade and investment
- innovation and digitalization
- strong, balanced, secure, sustainable and inclusive growth.

“Reliable and high-quality research is paramount to APEC as a forum as it informs officials in formulating sound, holistic policies to address persistent economic challenges and emerging issues,” Dr Sta Maria said. “The importance of having excellent data and research has never been more important as the region faces multiple trade and socioeconomic challenges” said Carlos Kuriyama, Director of the APEC Policy Support Unit. “The funding will support our goal to deliver high-quality policy analysis and recommendations that contribute to APEC’s goals.”

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How Innovation Props Up China's High-quality Development

Sci-tech innovation has played a decisive role in promoting China's high-quality development and modernization drive, just as President Xi Jinping emphasized at the ongoing "two sessions," an important political event concerning the country's further development. China has made strides in recent years in boosting R&D spending, expanding clean energy production, and nurturing growth poles with regional development strategies, alongside progress in other areas to seek innovative, coordinated, green, open, and shared growth. Facing fierce global competitions, China must open up new areas and new tracks in development and foster new growth drivers and new strengths, which, fundamentally, depends on sci-tech innovation, said Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, while attending a deliberation with his fellow deputies from the delegation of Jiangsu Province at the first session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC), the top legislature, on Sunday.

SMARTER MANUFACTURING

At Honor Device Co., Ltd., a smartphone manufacturer located in an intelligent industrial park in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen, new foldable phones are rolling off the assembly line one after another. With digital transformation, 75 percent of the processes in the assembly line are completed by automation equipment, and the numerical control rate of key equipment has reached 100 percent. "The digital platform enables us to track and manage product quality throughout the production process, and improve the production efficiency and quality," said Song Yiwen, president of Honor's supply chain management department. The manufacturing industry is the top priority of the high-quality development of the economy. According to the report to the 20th CPC National Congress, China will continue to focus on the

real economy in pursuing economic growth, and move the manufacturing sector toward higher-end, smarter, and greener production.

Over the past five years, China fully implemented the innovation-driven development strategy and improved and upgraded the industrial structure, said the government work report submitted Sunday to the national legislature for deliberation. The country will accelerate the modernization of the industrial system, according to the report. In 2022, the added value of China's high-tech manufacturing industry above the designated size increased by 7.4 percent over the previous year, and the investment in high-tech industries increased by 18.9 percent, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. Intelligent manufacturing is a main technical route and an inevitable option for the innovative development, industrial upgrading, and high-quality development of China's manufacturing industry, said Zhou Ji, an academician with the Chinese Academy of Engineering (CAE).

In Shenzhen, all the 13,000 industrial enterprises above the designated size planned to realize digital transformation by 2025, according to the municipal industry and information technology bureau. With a total of 65,000 5G base stations, Shenzhen has provided these enterprises with good communication infrastructure, said Yu Xiquan, director of the bureau. "China's industrial technology level should be constantly advanced to promote the upgrading and transformation of traditional industries through informatization, intellectualization and digitalization," said Zhou Li'an, a professor with the Guanghua School of Management, Peking University, and a member of the CPPCC National Committee.

GREENER DEVELOPMENT

As part of the better quality of development, China has seen reduced energy intensity and carbon emissions. It has accelerated the building of a green, low-carbon, and circular economic system, and promoted energy revolution and clean production, striving to achieve coordination between economic development and environmental protection. From 2012 to 2021, China planted 64 million hectares of trees, carried out desertification prevention and control over 18.53 million hectares of land, and added or restored more than 800,000 hectares of wetland, according to a white paper titled "China's Green Development in the New Era" by the State Council Information Office. Renewable energy has played a more significant role in the country's energy mix. The proportion of clean energy sources in China's total energy consumption increased from 14.5 percent in 2012 to 25.5 percent by the end of 2021, while the proportion of coal decreased from 68.5 percent to 56 percent.

Having set the goal of peaking its carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060, China is also transforming traditional chemical industries into greener ones. China's first offshore carbon dioxide re-injection well, developed by the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), is about to start drilling in the South China Sea in March. Energy saving

and carbon reduction measures such as associated gas recycling, power networking, and carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS) were deployed in the design of the well to make a long-term plan for the low-carbon transition. The platform on which the well is located will capture and process the carbon dioxide associated with oil and gas production and then inject it into the seabed for storage. It is estimated that about 300,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide will be stored every year, said Qi Meisheng, general manager of CNOOC Shenzhen Branch.

MODERN AGRICULTURE

China feeds nearly one-fifth of the world's population with only 9 percent of the world's arable land. Xi has stressed that building up strength in agriculture is the foundation of a great modern socialist country, and promoting agricultural modernization is an essential requirement for achieving high-quality development. Over the past 10 years, agricultural mechanization has made great progress, smart agriculture has taken off rapidly, and rural e-commerce has emerged as a new force in China. Hong Liangzhong, a farmer from the Lingao village in the Yazhou District of Sanya City in south China's Hainan Province, has recently learned to use biological technology to control cowpea pests and diseases, which has shortened the planting cycle by 10 days, increased the yield by 500 kilos per mu (0.067 hectares), and halved pesticide use. It was the "doctor village chief" who taught him the new technology.

Last June, 122 doctors from the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, the Chinese Academy of Tropical Agricultural Sciences, China Agricultural University, Hainan University, and other institutions came to Yazhou, forming 17 work teams of "doctor village chief." They transformed the latest research results from laboratory into stable and high yields. A seed laboratory in Yazhou has built a public scientific research platform to explore the national new sci-tech innovation model in the field of agriculture. China will further invigorate the seed industry and support the development of agricultural science, technology, and equipment, according to the government work report. Scientific and technological progress is the primary driving force of modern agricultural development, said Yin Yulong, a CAE academician who is also an NPC deputy. Modern agriculture should save costs, increase efficiency, reduce carbon emissions, and take the road of sustainable development, Yin said.

REGIONAL COORDINATION

In recent years, China has unveiled multiple plans to facilitate regional development, such as plans for the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the development of the Yangtze Economic Belt, the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and the ecological conservation and high-quality development of the Yellow River basin. In-depth implementation of coordinated regional development strategies has provided a driving engine and a model path for China's modernization drive. Located in Guangming Science City in Shenzhen, the large scientific facility for synthetic biology is under intense assembly.

With a total investment of nearly 1 billion yuan (about 144 million U.S. dollars), the facility to be partially put into use this year can provide an intelligent and engineered platform for synthetic biology research.

The facility will attract global researchers to carry out sci-tech innovation in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), said Liu Chenli, chief scientist of the facility. As a key area supporting the GBA to build itself into an international innovation center, Guangming Science City has laid out 24 sci-tech innovation entities, including large scientific facilities and cutting-edge cross-research platforms. It will become the highland of scientific research cooperation in the future. The construction of large scientific facilities can not only enhance scientific research resource sharing but also provide a research platform for collaborative innovation to break through the bottleneck of scientific problems, said Xue Qikun, an NPC deputy, who is also an academican of the CAS and president of Southern University of Science and Technology.

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Chinese Premier Vows to Further Improve Gov't Conduct

Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Monday pledged further efforts to improve the conduct of the government and vowed zero-tolerance for corruption. Li outlined four priorities on improving government efficiency and conduct at a press conference, including promoting the practice of research and studies, steadily advancing law-based government administration, exploring innovative ways in performing its duties, and upholding the principle of integrity. Government officials at all levels will be encouraged to engage more with local communities to learn about what the people need and seek their opinions on the work of the government, Li said. "They need to learn from the people, take people as their teachers, and help the people at the grassroots solve more actual problems," he said. Highlighting the importance of exercising law-based government administration, Li said the government must act within the confines of law, and all government conducts must be based on solid legal grounds. Government departments at all levels and civil servants must be conscious of the duty to serve the people and promote the country's development, Li said. When dealing with matters concerning administrative examination and approval, relevant government departments should not just set up roadblocks but also need to put up road signs, he said. Li voiced firm opposition to pointless formalities and bureaucratism in all forms, saying that the government must be creative in performing its duties. "All government officials must subject themselves to supervision and truly meet the requirements of being loyal, upright, and responsible," Li said.

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Secret to China's Rapid Rise in Innovation Prowess

During the just-concluded "two sessions," China's national legislature approved a reform plan for State Council institutions, which included the reorganization of the Ministry of Science and Technology, drawing particular attention from the foreign press. I believe the country's latest move is an effort to bolster its innovation drive and elevate its technological capabilities. Six years ago, when I first arrived in China, I was instantly captivated by its dynamic and rapidly-evolving innovation scene. I remember once on a scorching summer day, I found myself yearning for some cold noodles. As I settled down at a restaurant table, I noticed a small placard featuring a QR code. Curious, I pulled out my phone and scanned it, and to my surprise, a menu popped up on my screen. I could browse the cuisines, select what I wanted, and pay for my meal without ever having to interact with a server. It was like magic! These ubiquitous QR codes are not just simple black-and-white squares; in China, they are a gateway to a world of convenience.

From paying utility bills to renting a bike, these codes have revolutionized the way we interact with the world around us. Even the smallest of businesses, like a fruit vendor on the street corner, will have a QR code displayed for customers to pay for their purchases with ease. QR codes represent a microcosm of China's dynamic digital economy that serves as one of the critical catalysts for the country's innovation and progress. In the past five years, the digital economy has consistently been mentioned in the Chinese government's annual work reports. During this year's "two sessions," the country unveiled a momentous development that it will set up a national data bureau. China has stressed that in the fierce international competition, to open up new areas and create new drivers for development, scientific and technological innovation is of fundamental significance.

When I sit aboard China's high-speed train and gaze out at the stunning scenery whizzing by, I can't help but marvel at the "China speed." With an intercity railway boasting a maximum speed of 350 kph, it takes just 30 minutes for me to travel a distance of some 120 km from Beijing to Tianjin, two bustling megacities. Having traveled extensively throughout the world, I can confidently say that China's high-speed rail system is unrivaled by any other country's transportation infrastructure. From infrastructure development to groundbreaking technologies in a multitude of fields such as manned spaceflight, supercomputers, satellite navigation and airliner manufacturing, high-quality innovation has changed people's lives in ways that were once thought impossible.

SPIRIT OF INNOVATION AS A MISSION

During a visit to a restaurant in Shanghai, I couldn't help but eavesdrop as a group of young engineers huddled together at a nearby table passionately discussing their latest research project, a revolutionary new technology for bionic hands. Intrigued, I

struck up a conversation with the group and was amazed by their level of expertise and dedication. They are driven by a desire to make a positive impact on the world, to create something that will change lives for the better. For them, innovation is not just a job; it is a calling. This experience was just one of many that I encountered during my time in China as an Indian expat. Over the years, China has made remarkable progress in scientific and technological innovation, moving up to the 11th spot in the 2022 Global Innovation Index.

From the sleek high-speed trains that crisscross the country to the cutting-edge medical treatments that save lives, the commitment to scientific advancement is evident in every corner of the nation. Also, it goes without saying that Chinese technology companies are among the best practitioners of the spirit of innovation. Tech giants such as Tencent and Baidu are investing heavily in AI research and development. The country is also home to some of the world's most innovative companies in sectors such as renewable energy, e-commerce, and biotechnology. Chinese companies such as Alibaba, BYD, and Huawei are making waves on the global stage with their innovative products and services. Over the past decade, the number of high-tech enterprises in China has increased from less than 40,000 to 400,000. Last year, investment in high-tech industries in China surged by 18.9 percent year on year. Such impressive growth highlights the country's dedication to technological advancement and relentless pursuit of excellence.

KEY TO RAPID ADVANCEMENT IN INNOVATION

As China stands tall as a bastion of innovation, what, one may wonder, is the secret behind the country's meteoric rise in the realm of invention and discovery? In my opinion, the answer is manifold, stemming from a blend of open markets, enlightened policies, and a steadfast focus on cultivating talent. First and foremost, China's embrace of an open market has been a game-changer in the field of innovation. By encouraging competition and facilitating the free flow of goods and ideas, the country has created an ecosystem that fosters creativity and ingenuity. China's policies to encourage innovation have been nothing short of visionary. These policies have paved the way for research and development in cutting-edge technologies, such as AI, robotics and biotechnology, and have provided a clear roadmap for the nation's future innovation endeavors.

The country's relentless focus on talent cultivation has also played a pivotal role in its innovation success. By investing in education, research and development, China has created a bevy of highly skilled and motivated professionals who are leading the charge in innovation. As the world undergoes constant transformation, it is evident that innovation will continue to play a pivotal role in propelling progress. China, being at the forefront of this revolution, has established itself as a powerhouse of scientific achievements. Undoubtedly, its impressive accomplishments will leave a lasting impact on the world for years to come. It is a privilege to witness and be a part of this thrilling era of unprecedented innovation and progress.

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Xi Stresses Unswervingly Advancing High-quality Development

China will unswervingly advance high-quality development on the new journey of building a great modern socialist country and advancing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, President Xi Jinping said Monday. The country should fully and faithfully apply the new development philosophy on all fronts and accelerate efforts to create a new pattern of development, Xi said when addressing the closing meeting of the first session of the 14th National People's Congress, the national legislature. He called for fully implementing the strategy for invigorating China through science and education, the workforce development strategy and the innovation-driven development strategy. China should work to achieve greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology, promote industrial transformation and upgrading, advance coordinated urban-rural and regional development, and foster green and low-carbon economic and social development, Xi said. Efforts should be made to effectively upgrade and appropriately expand the economy, and continuously increase the country's economic strength, scientific and technological capabilities and composite national strength, he said.

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China Actively Explores New Models of Cyber Justice: White Paper

China has been actively exploring new channels, domains and models for further integrating internet technology with judicial activities, according to a white paper published Thursday. The white paper titled "China's Law-Based Cyberspace Governance in the New Era" was released by China's State Council Information Office. China has been pushing for the application of latest technologies such as big data, cloud computing, artificial intelligence and blockchain in judicial proceedings, judgment enforcement, judicial administration, and other fields, read the document. It added that local courts are encouraged to explore new mechanisms with regional features for internet-empowered adjudication, on the basis of the development of local internet industry and the characteristics of local cyber disputes. China has empowered legal oversight with big data.

It has systematically integrated a wide range of case information, worked on models and platforms for big data-based legal oversight, and implemented oversight of the prosecution of individual cases and of similar cases in order to address the common problems they raise, thus improving the quality and efficiency of legal oversight, said the white paper. "These new models of cyber justice mark the further development of

the socialist judicial system with Chinese characteristics in cyberspace," said the document. It added that internet courts represent a success in creating new judicial models, citing the internet courts established in Hangzhou, Beijing and Guangzhou. These courts focus on 11 types of internet-related disputes in the cities under their jurisdiction, including those involving online loan contracts, online infringement, and online copyright, said the white paper.

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China to Boost Rural Consumption of Green Building Materials

China will launch a promotion campaign to boost purchases of green building materials in rural areas, according to a recent notice. The yearlong campaign will see a string of online and offline activities organized in pilot areas to accelerate low-carbon development in the building materials sector, according to the notice jointly unveiled by six government organs, including the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. Green building material producers, e-commerce platforms and shopping malls are encouraged to participate in the activities, the notice said, urging localities to provide subsidies or interest discounts for green building materials as appropriate. Efforts will go into expanding the variety and elevating the quality of green building materials, promoting modern methods of construction, advocating for green consumption among rural residents, and increasing the application of green building materials in rural construction projects, the notice said.

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China Strengthens Support for Poverty Alleviation Consolidation

The China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission shored up financial support in 2022 to consolidate poverty alleviation efforts and promote its effective coordination with rural revitalization. Last year, the commission issued micro-credit worth 93.35 billion yuan (about 13.58 billion U.S. dollars) to people lifted out of poverty, marking an increase of 24 percent year on year. It also strengthened support for regions that have shaken off poverty, especially key counties supported in rural revitalization. By the end of 2022, outstanding loans to regions lifted out of poverty totaled 10.7 trillion yuan, up 1.38 trillion yuan year on year. Outstanding loans to key counties which received assistance in rural revitalization rose 14.7 percent year on year to 1.64 trillion yuan, with a pace of 4.1 percentage points quicker than the general loan growth rate of the country. The commission will further improve financial support policies and the quality and efficiency of services to stimulate the internal impetus for the development of regions and people lifted out of poverty.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 03/21/2023

Chinese Premier Stresses Developing Advanced Manufacturing

Chinese Premier Li Qiang has urged efforts to prioritize high-quality development, place emphasis on the development of the real economy, make a big push to develop advanced manufacturing, advance high-end manufacturing, and accelerate the construction of a modern industrial system. Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during an inspection tour and at a symposium on the development of the advanced manufacturing industry in central China's Hunan Province from Tuesday to Wednesday. During his visits to several Zhuzhou-based enterprises, including CRRC Zhuzhou Locomotive Co., Ltd., the premier learned in details about the production, research and development, and market development of the enterprises. He said promoting the development of advanced manufacturing fundamentally depends on innovation and talent. The enterprises should accelerate to achieve breakthroughs in core technologies in key fields and in major technology and equipment. The value and vitality of technological innovation lies in its application, Li said. He urged greater synergies between industry, academia, research and application, and called for the standard and quality of products to be raised.

While visiting enterprises in Changsha, the provincial capital of Hunan, Li noted that enterprises are the main body of innovation, and efforts should be made to cultivate world-leading enterprises and enterprises that use special and sophisticated technologies to produce novel and unique products. At a symposium on the development of the advanced manufacturing industry, Li noted that the real economy, especially the manufacturing sector, is the very foundation of China's economy. As the domestic and external environments are undergoing profound and complex changes, the country's manufacturing sector is also at a critical juncture, he said, urging efforts to promote the transformation and upgrading of the traditional manufacturing sector, and to advance the cultivation and development of strategic emerging industries. A market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment should be created, and policy orientation to support the advanced manufacturing industry should be strengthened, he said. Li said Hunan should speed up building itself into a highland for key advanced manufacturing, scientific innovations with core competitiveness, and reform and opening-up in inland regions.

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Chinese State Councilor Stresses Further Stabilizing, Promoting Employment

Chinese State Councilor Shen Yiqin has urged efforts to thoroughly implement the employment-first strategy, further promote the steady recovery and maintain the overall stability of employment. Shen made the remarks during an inspection tour in Jiangsu Province from Monday to Wednesday, during which she visited enterprises, communities, technician colleges and odd job markets in Changzhou and Nanjing cities. Noting that employment has improved month by month and maintained overall stability in China since the beginning of this year, she urged the proper implementation of support policies and making further efforts to achieve the country's annual employment target. She stressed promoting high-quality and full employment through high-quality development, saying that measures should be taken to fine-tune and adjust time-limited policies on stabilizing employment in a timely manner, support enterprises to maintain and increase job posts, and enhance the market's ability to create jobs. Work should be done to strengthen employment support and guidance for college graduates, offer sound employment services to veterans, stabilize the employment of people lifted out of poverty, secure the employment of people in difficulties, and better protect the rights and interests of those in flexible employment, Shen said. She also called for the full mobilization of enterprises, human resources service agencies, social organizations and other parties to support employment.

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China Promotes Green, Low-carbon Industries to Optimize Industrial Layout

Addressing a room full of audiences, a staff member from a hydrogen energy demonstration zone elucidated the electrochemical reactions that occur between hydrogen and oxygen within hydrogen fuel cell engines, emphasizing that this process produces water, electricity and heat without generating pollutants or carbon emissions. Some three years ago, this Beijing Daxing International Hydrogen Energy Demonstration Zone, covering an area of 20 hectares, was an old factory of an auto parts manufacturer. Today, a new center for high-quality development has emerged through the transformation, upgrading and optimization of the hydrogen energy industrial layout. This location has attracted a cluster of hydrogen energy industry R&D, testing and production enterprises, forming a complete industry chain for hydrogen fuel cell engines. During the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, hydrogen fuel cell vehicles were widely used in Beijing, Yanqing and Zhangjiakou competition zones.

More than 1,200 hydrogen fuel cell vehicles were put into operation, with a total operating distance of more than 3.2 million kilometers and a carbon reduction of about 2,600 tonnes. The rapid development of the Daxing International Hydrogen Energy Demonstration Zone exemplifies China's efforts to promote green and low-carbon industries and optimize the industrial layout. Over the past decade, China

has consistently intensified efforts to boost high-quality and green development. In 2021, China's high-tech manufacturing accounted for 15.1 percent of the value-added of industrial enterprises above designated size (with main business revenue of 20 million yuan and above), marking an increase of 5.7 percentage points over that in 2012, according to a white paper titled "China's Green Development in the New Era." China is also the largest producer of clean energy equipment in the world.

In 2021, the output value of the energy conservation and environmental protection industry exceeded eight trillion yuan. In recent years, the country has integrated green development into all links of the industrial, agricultural and service chains. In pursuit of energy conservation, emissions reduction and improved efficiency, China has vigorously promoted innovation in technology and standards. Through these efforts, traditional industries have been transformed to become more environmentally friendly in an all-encompassing manner. Helan County in northwest China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region has many wetlands and lakes. In recent years, the county has made significant progress in alleviating the issue of tailwater pollution caused by traditional breeding modes through innovative breeding technologies and practices. Thanks to these efforts, Helan has been able to produce more high-quality and ecologically sustainable aquatic products.

"We have been continuously promoting the aquacultural technology with the assistance of experts," said Shi Wei, senior engineer at the aquatic technology promotion service center in Yinchuan, capital of Ningxia. He added that experts have introduced the "land-based ecological fishery," which is a rice-fishing cycle ecological planting and breeding system that uses water rich in nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus to irrigate rice fields. After being fully absorbed and utilized by the rice planting system, the purified water can be used as a high-quality water source for aquaculture. "This mode not only solves the problem of water quality deterioration caused by aquaculture residual feeds and excrement but also reduces the amount of fertilizer and medicine used in rice, effectively reducing the agricultural non-point source pollution and soil salinization and realizing the mode of using fish to fertilize the field and, in turn, using the field to purify water," Shi said.

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China's High-quality Development to Offer Broader Room for Foreign Businesses

China's high-quality development, which is characterized by accelerated innovation, coordinated urban-rural and regional development, expanded consumption and upgraded industries, will offer foreign businesses broader room for development, China's Vice Premier He Lifeng said on Tuesday. China will promote its high-standard opening-up in a steadfast manner, implement supportive policies for

foreign companies, and continue to build a sound business environment, He said at the "Invest in China Year" launch ceremony. China will not change its policy on foreign investment and will make greater efforts to attract investment, He said. Stressing the significance of the country's unchanged sound economic fundamentals, He said the economy is seeing notable recovery and various pro-growth policies are taking effect. "It is the right time for foreign companies to increase their investment in China," He said.

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Chinese Premier Calls for Building High-quality Hainan FTP

Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Wednesday called for building a high-quality and high-standard Hainan Free Trade Port (FTP) and improving old-age care and medical services. Li made the remarks during his inspection in south China's Hainan Province. At the construction site of a passenger transport hub in Haikou, the capital of Hainan, Li stressed efforts to push forward institutional innovation and opening up, and to accelerate building Hainan into an internationally influential FTP with Chinese characteristics. Li said Hainan should make use of artificial intelligence, big data and the Internet of Things to improve regulatory capacity and get better prepared for the island-wide independent customs operation by the end of 2025. During his trip to a nursing home, Li called for actively responding to the aging population and strengthening services for the elderly, such as exploring community-based services and better satisfying old people's food and healthcare needs. At a traditional Chinese medicine hospital, Li said Hainan should strengthen the medical and health service system so that people can enjoy more convenient and affordable services. The premier also highlighted the unique advantages of traditional Chinese medicine in preventing and curing diseases. Li fully recognized Hainan's achievements in economic and social development and called on the province to write a new chapter in reform, opening up and modernization.

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Deepening Ecological Protection and Water Pollution Control in China's Yangtze River Basin

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors today approved a US\$200 million loan to enhance ecological protection and reduce water pollution along China's Yangtze River basin in Hubei Province. This financing will strengthen ecosystem management, reduce water pollution from plastics and animal manure, and improve wastewater treatment. The Yangtze River basin covers 19 provinces in China and provides the main source of water for almost 600 million people. Due to increased human and industrial activity, the basin acts as a conveyor of plastic and other

pollutants to the world's oceans. It is also home to a third of China's endangered species and 40 percent of its rare or endangered plants. The Yangtze River Protection and Ecological Restoration Program (Hubei) complements a companion World Bank-financed program supporting Hunan and Jiangxi Provinces that was approved in December 2021 and expands the geographical coverage of World Bank support for ecological protection and water pollution control to the entire middle reaches of the river basin. Together the two programs will support implementation of China's Yangtze River Protection Law, which aims at improving the management of water resources in the basin, including through better coordination across line agencies and levels of government.

"The program is an excellent example of how the World Bank's support to China helps to address some of today's most pressing local and global challenges, including plastic waste, climate change and biodiversity loss," said Mara Warwick, World Bank Country Director for China, Mongolia and Korea. "By supporting cross-sectoral coordination, cooperation across provincial jurisdictions in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River, and innovation in the management of water resources, this program will help China achieve real impacts in pollution reduction in the Yangtze basin at scale." The program focuses on improving coordination, data collection and sharing, and water management planning and allocation across the river basin. Within selected demonstration counties, the program will also support activities to protect land-based ecosystems through soil and water conservation, prevent plastics from entering water bodies through collection and recycling of agricultural plastic film and other plastic wastes, improve wastewater management systems, and reduce nutrient runoff through improved management of animal manure.

Total program financing over the five-year period is expected to be US\$1.1 billion, with World Bank financing complementing \$874 million of China's own resources. Provincial level activities will focus on strengthening the policy and institutional responses. At the sub-basin level, integrated water management planning and operations will be carried out in the Qing River basin and Hong Lake basin. The project is in line with the World Bank's Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for China for FY2020 to 2025, which aims to help China address its development challenges, particularly in areas relating to global public goods, such as environmentally sustainable growth. The World Bank Group supports efforts to address China's interrelated climate and development challenges, as highlighted in the recent China Country and Climate Development Report, as well as ecosystem degradation and marine plastic pollution.

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JAPAN: Govt., Labor, Management Agree to Create Environment to Pass on Higher Wages

Government, business and labor representatives in Japan have agreed to create an environment to pass on higher labor costs to prices, allowing even smaller companies to raise wages. The first three-way meeting in about eight years was attended by Prime Minister Kishida Fumio and other Cabinet ministers, as well as the chairman of Keidanren, or the Japan Business Federation, Tokura Masakazu, and the president of Rengo, or the Japanese Trade Union Confederation, Yoshino Tomoko. The participants discussed the current situation of annual spring wage negotiations as many companies responded to labor unions on Wednesday. They agreed that pay raises seen at large companies need to filter down to small and medium-sized firms. They reached a basic agreement that they will work to provide conditions that small businesses can appropriately shift higher labor costs onto prices in contracting with their large scale counterparts. The government now plans to conduct a fact-finding survey and draw up guidelines to improve the momentum toward wage increases. Kishida said wage hikes are the most important challenge in his new capitalism, and he will use all policy measures available to provide the necessary environment. He said this year's spring negotiations will mark a turning point in bringing about a virtuous cycle of growth and distribution of wealth. Kishida also indicated discussions will start from this summer about steps toward further raises in the minimum wage after it tops 1,000 yen per hour.

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Japan Government Plans to Help Communities Identify Sources of PFAS

Japan's Environment Ministry announced Tuesday that it is planning to develop guidelines to help municipalities identify sources of potentially dangerous chemicals. They're being found in several parts of the country and above the government's target level. The group of organic fluorine compounds are known as PFAS. They have been used to coat frying pans and make water-repellent sprays. Studies in the US and elsewhere have found that the substances are hazardous, and are said to increase the risks of cancer and hamper child development. They have been found at 81 locations in 13 prefectures, including Tokyo. The government was unable to identify the source of PFAS in almost all of the cases. The Environment Ministry set up an expert panel to examine the situation. Members suggested the government come up with a specific method to track down the source of contamination. Associate Professor Harada Koji of Kyoto University Graduate School of Medicine is a panel member. He says it is necessary to keep track of the history of PFAS use, not only at the present, but also in the past. Harada says the government must also involve companies that have used PFAS in their products.

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NEC, Red Cross Develop AI Tech to Find Landmines

The Japanese electronics company NEC says it has developed artificial intelligence technology with the International Committee of the Red Cross to help detect landmines. People have conventionally found landmines by drawing on past experience and information from local people. But this requires a huge amount of time and effort. NEC says the new system can detect mines much more quickly with great accuracy. It uses geographical input, such as the locations of buildings and structures, as well as data on mines collected elsewhere. It incorporates the knowledge of local people. NEC says tests show the system is 90 percent accurate in pinpointing mines. The company plans to provide the technology to certain countries and organizations, putting it into practical use within a year.

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Japan to Crack Down on Social Media Stealth Marketing from October

Japan will regulate from Oct 1 stealth marketing in which influencers or others are paid to push products and services to their followers without disclosing a financial interest, the government said Tuesday. The Consumer Affairs Agency added stealth marketing within the definition of "improper representation," an activity banned under the law against unjustifiable premiums and misleading representations. At present, there is no legal provision in Japan that directly addresses stealth marketing. With this change, companies will be warned, named and shamed, and possibly more if found to be in breach. The change comes amid a growing concern that marketing of products and services without disclosure stops consumers from being able to make informed purchasing decisions.

According to the agency, marketing methods subject to the regulation are those that are difficult for consumers to identify as advertising or paid promotion. The regulation targets the companies and not the influencers or others who were paid to promote on social media, it said. The agency aims to determine whether social media posts are advertising or promotion by looking at the involvement of the company, including whether it instructed the promoters to make certain posts or request that they confirm they fulfilled a requirement to post. When those paid to promote products or services do so without direct instruction from the company, the agency will investigate exchanges and past relationships between the company and those making the posts to determine whether there was a violation. The agency's panel of experts on consumer affairs released a report in December last year proposing legal regulation of stealth marketing.

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NEC Reveals 90% Accurate Landmine-Predicting AI Technology

NEC Corp on Wednesday said it has developed artificial intelligence technology that is capable to predicting where landmines are most likely buried with about 90 percent accuracy. The technology could lead to more efficient removal of landmines and reduce the number of yearly deaths from the underground explosives, and the Japanese company said it aims to provide AI landmine prediction services to governments and international organizations by March 2024. In an experiment conducted between April and October last year in conflict zones around Asia, NEC used open data on landscapes and military facilities provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross as well as reports from local residents in successfully predicting where landmines in certain zones were buried, NEC said. Using the technology, the time needed in narrowing 800 sites down to probable landmine burial sites can be shortened to a few hours from several years. Although it is still necessary to manually confirm the landmine burial zones, the company said the technology is hoped to hasten the removal process. NEC said it aims to further improve the speed and accuracy of its forecasts by incorporating different information sources, such as data gathered from drones and satellites. In 2021, war remnants such as landmines and cluster bombs killed at least 5,554 people worldwide, most of whom were civilians, according to NEC.

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SOUTH KOREA: Lifting Set of Regulations to Pave Way for Projects Worth 2.8 Tln Won

South Korea's finance ministry said Thursday it has lifted a set of regulations to support local businesses' investment projects worth 2.8 trillion won (US\$2.14 billion) in various industries, including rechargeable batteries and logistics. The nine projects are expected to create around 12,000 new jobs, according to the Ministry of Economy and Finance. "Challenges for exports and investment have been rising following the slowing global economy amid monetary-tightening moves and the downcycle in the chip industry," the ministry said in a statement, pointing out that lifting excessive regulations is necessary to prop up business activities. For instance, the government will allow electric vehicles to enter automated parking garages, which is banned under existing regulations due to their weight. Such garages will also be able to install charging stations. South Korea aims to revise related rules by the second quarter of 2024 and develop safety guidelines for the chargers by 2025. In addition, the government has lifted the designation as farmland on a plot of land in Ochang, 100 kilometers south of Seoul, to help a company build a research and development center there for rechargeable batteries.

The government also plans to ease criminal punishments for minor violations of local rules that can restrict the freedom of citizens and companies. It will focus on revising

punitive measures with fines of 5 million won (US\$3,823) or less to avoid giving unnecessary criminal records to people. For example, individuals who use the title "cook" without a proper certificate will be fined 3 million won or less under the food sanitation law instead of facing a jail term of up to three years, which is the existing rule. In line with efforts to reduce excessive regulations, the Korea Customs Service also announced that it will no longer require inbound travelers to submit customs forms when they have nothing to declare, starting in July. The decision was made after the agency found that approximately 98.8 percent of inbound travelers, including foreigners, were required to submit these forms in 2019 despite having nothing to declare. The new policy will initially be applied at Incheon International Airport and Gimhae International Airport this year and will be expanded to other airports in 2024.

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Ruling Party, Gov't Agree to Tentatively Postpone Electricity, Gas Rate Hikes

The ruling People Power Party (PPP) and the government agreed to temporarily hold off raising electricity and gas bills but reaffirmed that rate hikes are "inevitable," a ruling party lawmaker said Friday. The decision was made in a policy consultation meeting amid concerns that a hike in utility fees may add onto economic burdens on the people amid high inflation and an economic slowdown. Rep. Park Dae-chul, the PPP's chief policymaker, said the government will decide on the rate hike after making additional assessments of international energy prices and discussions with experts. Park still said that the ruling party and government reached a consensus that the rate hike cannot be further looked upon. "We again reaffirmed that a hike in electricity and gas bills is inevitable," Park said. "But more discussion is needed on the timing and scope of the hike among multiple options suggested by the industry ministry."

The government jacked up the electricity rates for both consumer and industrial use for the first quarter by 13.1 won (US\$0.01) per kilowatt hour (kWh), the sharpest increase in about four decades, while it froze the first quarter natural gas prices to minimize the burden on the public, particularly during the winter. The move came as the Korea Electric Power Corp. (KEPCO) suffered a record high operating loss of 32.63 trillion won last year, more than quadruple on-year, amid limited electricity rate hikes and soaring global fuel prices. In 2022, the electricity rate rose 19.3 won per kWh, with the government freezing the rates for the first and second quarters of the year amid the COVID-19 pandemic and high inflation. In a report submitted to the National Assembly, KEPCO called for rate increases of 51.6 won per kWh this year.

The government also stressed the need to raise gas bills, as the Korea Gas Corp. had about 5 trillion won of uncollected payments last year. But President Yoon Suk

Yeol said last month that the government plans to freeze public utility fees in the first half of this year to help ease people's economic burdens. "The electricity and gas rate hikes are inevitable, as the financial status of energy public firms will worsen to hurt the country's stable energy supplies if energy rates continue to come below production costs. But the government will also make sure that the priority should be on minimizing public burdens," the industry ministry said in a release. Industry Minister Lee Chang-yang earlier said the government needs to take steps to "normalize energy rates in phases in accordance with market principles," while pushing for the transition to a low-consumption and high-efficiency structure, noting that global natural gas prices skyrocketed as much as 10 times due to the Ukraine crisis and other factors last year.

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Korea Sets Out W300tr Plan to Build World's Largest System Chip Cluster

South Korea will build the world's largest high-tech chip cluster in Yongin, Gyeonggi Province, with Samsung Electronics, the world's largest memory chip maker taking the lead in the 300 trillion won (\$230 billion) project. The plan, unveiled during a presidential meeting with Cabinet members on the economy held on Wednesday, is aimed at boosting the nation's competitiveness in the chip industry, particularly in the non-memory chip technology sector such as system chips. It is set to be completed by 2042. Despite South Korea's world-class manufacturing capabilities in high-tech industries such as memory chips, OLED and secondary batteries, the country lacks competitiveness in system chips, President Yoon Suk Yeol said, addressing the significance of the plan. Non-memory chips play the role of the brain responsible for processing and calculating information, but Korea's global market share is only 2-3 percent. The new high-tech system chip cluster will be located in Yongin in Gyeonggi Province close by the world's largest memory chip maker, Samsung Electronics.

"However, system (non-memory) chips, which are relatively weak compared to memory chips, lack the completeness of the industrial ecosystem and chronic labor shortages are the Achilles heel of our high-tech industry," Yoon said. Yoon vowed to form a massive ecosystem with related companies located in existing semiconductor manufacturing complexes such as Giheung, Hwaseong, Pyeongtaek, Icheon, Yongin and Pangyo in Gyeonggi Province in order to build the world's largest chip mega-cluster to surpass Taiwan's Hsinchu Science Park and chip clusters in Texas. The president said the government has chosen Yongin as the location of the new cluster because the city is the home to Samsung Electronics which is already equipped with a vast number of existing chip businesses. "We will build a manufacturing plant, manufacturing support facilities and material handling complex to create a large-scale national industry complex centered on foundries," the president said.

Samsung and the government plan to build five high-tech semiconductor manufacturing plants by 2042 and to attract up to 150 domestic and foreign materials, parts and equipment companies and fabless companies. The firm expected to induce direct and indirect production of 700 trillion won and create employment for 1.6 million people in Korea. Separately, the government will create 14 new national high-tech industrial complexes with an area of 33 million square meters in the provinces to foster high-tech industries such as space, future cars and hydrogen. Yoon said high-tech industries are key growth engines, security and strategic assets and are directly related to our jobs and livelihoods. “Recently, the economic battlefield that started with semiconductor is expanding to the entire high-tech industry, including batteries and future cars,” Yoon said. “Countries are spending large-scale subsidies and tax support to attract high-tech manufacturing facilities to their own countries.”

Nothing South Korea's world-class technology and production capabilities, Yoon vowed to firmly support private investment for further growth. “What matters is speed,” Yoon said. “The government will do everything in its power to expedite the creation of the national high-tech industrial complex announced today.” Yoon hoped that the related act to expand tax credit for high-tech industry facility investment will be passed as soon as possible. Specifically, the 14 national high-tech industrial complexes include nano technology, semiconductor, aerospace, future mobility, hydrogen and secondary battery in South Chungcheong Province. They also include core parts for future vehicles, space launch vehicles, and hydrogen storage and utilization manufacturing in Honam, which refers to Gwangju, the South Jeolla and North Jeolla Provinces.

The Yeongnam region, which includes the modern-day provinces of North and South Gyeongsang and the self-governing cities of Busan, Daegu and Ulsan, will have complexes for defense and nuclear energy, future automobiles, robots and biopharmaceuticals, as well as a small module nuclear power plant. At the meeting, private companies announced that they plan to invest a total of more than 550 trillion won in six high-tech industries, including system chips, displays, secondary batteries, bio, future cars and robots, by 2026. The meeting was attended by Chey Tae-won, chairperson of SK Group and the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Koo Ja-yeol, chairman of LS Group and the Korea International Trade Association; Kim Byong-joon, acting chairman of the Federation of Korean Industries; and chief executives from Samsung Electronics, SK, LG, Hyundai Motors and GS Construction.

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S. Korea, U.S. to Expand Cooperation in Science, Technology

South Korea and the United States agreed to expand bilateral cooperation in science and technology, Seoul's science ministry said Tuesday. The Ministry of Science and ICT said it signed a joint statement of intent with the Science and Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, in Seoul, to foster cooperation in digital transformation. Under the joint statement, the two countries will carry out joint research on core infrastructure, unmanned drone systems, cybersecurity and biochemical defense and promote human exchanges in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The deal is a follow-up to the Seoul-Washington summit last year when both leaders promised to strengthen bilateral partnership in up-to-date technologies, according to the ministry.

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PM Vows Better Child Care Services to Boost Birth Rate

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo said Friday that the government will make efforts to improve child care services, as the nation is struggling to tackle the world's lowest birth rate. Han made the remarks as he visited a child care center in Seoul earlier in the day, Han's office said in a statement. "The low birth rate is based on complex causes, such as jobs, housing, education and child care, but first of all, it is important to establish a child care and care environment that young people can experience," Han said. Han said the government will expand customized child care services so that parents can look after their children at any time. The country's total fertility rate, the average number of children a woman bears in her lifetime, sank to 0.78 in 2022, well below the replacement level of 2.1 that would keep South Korea's population stable at 51.5 million.

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Korea Mulls Measures to Spur Spending Amid Inflation Woes

The government is expected to unveil its scheme to invigorate domestic spending and tourism this week, amid stagnant exports struggles, to shore up the economy. The Ministry of Economy and Finance and Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism are drawing up measures chiefly aimed at reviving the local tourism industry, which remains depressed in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Authorities are looking at ways to launch a coupon program that provides a certain discount when booking hotels and resorts in the country, as well as expanding the volume of issuance of vouchers for shopping at traditional markets. Last year, the government ran a similar program, offering discounts of some 30,000 to 40,000 won (\$23-\$31) for accommodation reservations. Coupon users were found to have spent about 11 times the amount of support they received during their travel, according to government data.

Spurring private spending through such programs comes as sluggish consumption coupled with a continuous decline in exports could push the economy either into recession or a further slowdown. Earlier this month, Finance Minister Choo Kyung-ho hinted at rolling out plans to expand domestic consumption. "Amid the recent sluggish exports centered on semiconductors, there is a sense of the problem that consumption should be activated a little more due to difficulties in the people's livelihoods," he said. Local think tank Hyundai Research Institute also pointed out that the time is ripe for the center of gravity of fiscal and monetary policy to be shifted from "price stabilization to economic stimulation." "If domestic and global economic conditions continue to see downward risks, the possibility cannot be ruled out that the Korean economy will take a path of prolonged slowdown after a hard landing,"

But concerns persist that the consumption scheme could exert upward pressure on prices, which have been showing a slowing trend in recent months. In February, consumer prices rose 4.8 percent on-year, marking the first fall below 5 percent in 10 months. It is still far higher than 2 percent -- the Bank of Korea's inflation target over the medium term. Some experts also voiced concerns about universal financial support, such as the coupon programs. "At a time when the inflation rate is still in the upper 4 percent range, the distribution of consumption coupons is not only an ineffective waste of state funds, but also highly likely to act as an additional inflationary factor," said Seok Byung-hoon, an economics professor at Ewha Womans University. Meanwhile, the government is likely to announce its plan to jack up electricity and gas rates this week.

The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy and the Ministry of Economy and Finance have been continuing talks over rate hikes to be implemented in the second quarter of this year. Considering the country's sole power distributor, Korea Electric Power Corp., suffered a deficit of 32.6 trillion won last year due to an increase in international energy prices, electricity rates should be raised. But prolonged high inflation has made it difficult to raise electricity rates. At the end of last year, the Industry Ministry reported to the National Assembly that this year's electricity rate should increase by 51.6 won per kilowatt-hour to resolve Kepco's cumulative deficit by 2026. In the first quarter of this year, electricity rates rose by 13.1 won per kWh, the highest quarterly increase ever. In the remaining three quarterly rate adjustments this year, similar hikes must be made to achieve the targeted increase -- 51.6 won per kWh -- within the year

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Global Business Forum Examines Ways to Embrace 4th Industrial Revolution

Ways for South Korea to properly gear up for the Fourth Industrial Revolution era were explored at the Global Business Forum on Wednesday at the Ambassador

Seoul hotel. During the during the sixth session of the forum, Ahmad Fahmi Ahmad Sarkawi, charge d'affaires at the Malaysian Embassy in Seoul, emphasized South Korea's need to make necessary preparations to adapt and improve itself in the rapidly evolving world. As the pandemic fades out, Sarkawi said he believed it is "very timely" for organizations to look forward to adopt state-of-the-art technologies that would innovate the way people live. Lee Kwan-sup, the principal research engineer at Korea Railroad Research Institute, suggested that hyperloops, or ultrahigh-speed transportation system used for both public and goods transport, is the area that the government and businesses can work together for development. According to Lee, hyperloops, with their capacity to go at some 1,200 kilometers per hour, will function as a solution for spatial obstacles in everyday lives, while working even as a solution for social inequalities by tightly connecting differing regions and people. "Currently, we are receiving funds from the Ministry of Land and Ministry of Science to make this a reality," said Lee. "And with a big enough budget, we estimate that hyperloops in Korea can become a reality," he said, adding that the public sector and private sector should work closely together to manifest innovative future interests.

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INDONESIA: To Provide Incentives for EV Purchases

The Indonesian government will provide incentives for purchasing electric vehicles (EVs) starting March 20, Coordinating Minister for Maritime and Investment Affairs Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan said on Monday. "We hope that this policy can stimulate the market for EVs, boost the use of clean energy and decrease reliance on fossil fuels," said Pandjaitan in a press conference. Pandjaitan stressed his optimism for this program due to the nation's population dominated by young people, and its rich reserves of nickel, the metal widely used in producing electric batteries. Industry Minister Agus Gumiwang Kartasasmita stated at the same press conference that the state targets to provide incentives for sales of 200,000 electric motorcycles and 35,900 electric cars by the end of this year, as well as conversions of 50,000 motorcycles from using conventional fossil fuel to electric power.

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Indonesia Offers 95-Year Land Use for Investors of New Capital

The Indonesian government announced on Thursday a new regulation for investment in its new capital city project, including an incentive of 95-year land-use permits for the investors. The new capital, named Nusantara, is located in an area covering 256,142 hectares of land on Kalimantan, Indonesia's second-largest island.

"The new policy is expected to attract more investment from private sectors, particularly foreign investors, to invest in this new capital project. With this policy, we want to provide legal certainty as well as convenience and comfort for the investors," Chairman of the Nusantara Authority Bambang Susantono said in a statement. The regulation, signed by President Joko Widodo on March 6 and has taken into effect since then, grants land-use permits to investors for 95 years in one cycle, and can be extended in the second cycle for another 95 years. In total, the investors can hold the permits for up to 190 years. "This regulation shows the commitment of the Indonesian government to speed up the development of the new capital city whilst creating a comfortable investment climate," Susantono said.

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VIETNAM: Urging Localities to Take Immediate Action to Tackle Air Pollution

Many localities in Vietnam including the capital city of Hanoi have been urged to take swift action to address the increasingly severe air pollution problem, local newspaper Vietnam News reported on Monday. The air quality in Hanoi and other localities is worsening, negatively impacting people's health and economic activities, said the Department of Environmental Pollution Control under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment in a recent document. Compounding this, the current weather conditions are disadvantageous for the diffusion of air pollutants, which makes dust stay longer in the air, the newspaper cited the department as reporting. The Air Quality Index of Hanoi, southern Ho Chi Minh City and the northern province of Thai Nguyen are at either an "unhealthy" and "very unhealthy" level, it added. The environment department ordered local authorities to increase the frequency of air monitoring programs, install more automatic monitoring stations, and focus on inspecting and supervising industrial production companies to control emissions. It also requested local officials to closely monitor and oversee construction sites to ensure compliance with regulations aimed at curbing and mitigating harmful air emissions resulting from construction-related activities, the newspaper said.

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Government Asked to Devise 50 Per Cent Cut on Auto Registration Fee

The Government has asked the Ministry of Finance and other relevant ministries to devise a 50 per cent cut on auto registration fees for locally assembled or manufactured cars which aims to support the domestic automobile industry. This is the content contained in Resolution No. 31/NQ-CP of the Government's regular meeting reviewing February 2023. The resolution emphasises the importance of developing the domestic market and promoting exports. Earlier, two associations

have proposed the Government halve the registration fee for locally assembled or manufactured cars during the first half of the year to boost market demand. In a letter sent to the Prime Minister, both Vietnam Automobile Manufacturers Association (VAMA) and the Vietnam Association of Mechanical Industry (VAMI) also jointly asked for an extension of the deadline to pay excise tax. Both policies should be imposed in the first quarter or early second quarter, they added. The registration fees are calculated based on car prices in each locality. The rates are 12 per cent in Hà Nội and Hải Phòng, and 10 per cent in HCM City.

The proposals were made amid bleak business conditions, which have resulted from difficult access to tightened credit policy, high interest rates, market liquidity problems and rising auto inventory. The Vietnam Automobile Manufacturers' Association (VAMA) saw 17,314 units sold in January, down 51 per cent from December. Sales volume of locally-assembled cars reached 8,086 units or 54 per cent down while imported vehicles were down by 48 per cent to 9,228 units. Sales of the Thành Công Group, which assembles Hyundai cars, dropped 52 per cent to 3,496 units. And VinFast's sales of 358 units was down 83 per cent. TC Motor has forecast that Việt Nam's auto industry will see a 17.5 per cent drop in sales this year compared to last year, which is equivalent to 85,500 unsold cars. Although car manufacturers are giving discounts to boost sales of domestically assembled cars, they still need a boost from policies to help the market recover. This is an unusual and ominous signal because the months before Tết are usually the time when sales are high. VAMI said that the supporting industry had been receiving less orders this year, and that if sales did not bounce back, factories would have to reduce staff, which would hurt the economy. According to the associations, although car manufacturers are giving discounts to boost sales of domestically assembled cars, they still need a boost from policies from the Government to help the market recover. The market needs a stimulus package like in 2021-2022. In December 2021, the Government issued a resolution to reduce the car registration fee by 50 per cent. The fee cut came after the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic had inflicted heavy damage on almost all sectors of the economy, including the automotive industry, and helped auto sales bounce back. However, the fee returned to normal in 2023.

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Hà Nội Strives to End HIV/AIDS by 2030

The People's Committee of Hà Nội has set up a plan of HIV/AIDS prevention and control in the city by the year 2030. The plan, known as 55/KH-UBND dated February 20, aims to reach the goal of reducing the number of new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths and end the AIDS epidemic in the city by 2030 as well as minimise the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on socio-economic development. According to the plan, this year, the city strives for 90 per cent of people living with HIV will know their HIV infection status while 90 per cent of people living with HIV on

the management list are treated with anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs and 98 per cent of patients on ARV have an HIV viral load below the suppression threshold. The plan also sets out specific targets that this year 500 new HIV infections will be detected, 80 per cent of drug addicts will have access to a needle and syringe programme, 65 per cent of female prostitutes will have access to a condom programme, and 65 per cent of men who have sex with men (MSM) will have access to a condom and lubricant programme.

Under the plan, the health care sector will complete 300 key monitoring samples as prescribed by the Ministry of Health, and ensure 14,350 people living with HIV/AIDS will maintain on antiretroviral therapy while 633 HIV-infected people will start antiretroviral therapy, and 11,112 people living with HIV/AIDS who are on ARV will be tested for HIV load in monitoring ARV. To achieve the above objectives, the municipal People's Committee proposed three groups of solutions including prevention and harm reduction interventions; HIV/AIDS testing and surveillance; and treatment and care for people living with HIV. Specifically, for the solution of prevention and harm reduction interventions, the city will improve the quality of information, education and communication work; reduce stigma and discrimination related to HIV; and expand and renew interventions to reduce harm and prevent HIV infection. Regarding testing and surveillance, the health care sector must increase HIV testing counselling, diversify HIV testing and counselling services, promote HIV testing in grass-roots health facilities, expand testing in the community and mobile testing and self-testing at home. It is necessary to strengthen co-operation with projects and NGOs to implement testing activity and HIV detection in the community.

In addition, the city will enhance the sharing and use of data in HIV/AIDS prevention and control and establish systems of case monitoring from HIV infection to treatment participation, treatment facility transfer, treatment quality, and treatment adherence for each HIV-infected person. HIV infected persons will be treated with ARVs as soon as they are diagnosed. HIV/AIDS treatment in prisons and drug rehabilitation establishments will be maintained while HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) treatment will be provided to those who are at risk of HIV infection. The committee asked the health department and relevant offices of all districts and communes to set key targets for the implementation of the HIV/AIDS prevention and control plan in 2023. Moreover, it is necessary to accelerate the work of education and dissemination on HIV/AIDS prevention and control. Accordingly, civil servants and public employees should actively approach and mobilise relatives and friends, especially those at high-risk of being infected with HIV to test and access consultation and treatment. The people's committees of districts, communes and towns shall develop plans and monitor, inspect, and assign targets for the implementation of the city's HIV/AIDS prevention and control plan in 2023.

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HCM City's Health Department Announces Hotlines for Cases of Fraud

The HCM City Department of Health has launched hotlines 0967771010 and 02839307916 to receive reports from citizens about cases of fraud. The department has urged the public to be alert to all phone calls and messages from strange numbers to avoid being scammed. Recently, Chợ Rẫy Hospital reported that it had received many cases of parents being tricked into having their children hospitalised, with a demand to transfer money for emergency surgery. The person on the phone claimed to be a doctor at the hospital and told the parents to transfer large amounts of money immediately to save their children's lives. Last week, the Children's Hospital No. 1 discovered two cases of forged signatures and a counterfeit seal of the hospital's director used in letters providing information about patients' medical status to ask for donations. The hospital affirmed that its department of social work is the only unit authorised to receive donations to help poor patients. In addition, all children receive medical treatment even if they can't afford the healthcare costs, it said. Therefore, the Department of Health has asked medical facilities at all levels to manage the individual medical record system and ensure health records of patients remain confidential. It has also asked for the prompt reporting to its inspectors and the city's public security force of any fake information and documents related to patients being treated.

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Science, Technology, Innovation Promoted to Support National Development

Various measures will be rolled out over the next two years to fine tune science and technology organisations and perfect legal foundations for State management and innovation. The aim is to boost development and support the country's socio-economic growth, Minister of Science and Technology Huỳnh Thành Đạt told the Vietnam News Agency. The minister said that resources will be focused on stepping up science and technology research, transfer and application to serve socio-economic development and security-defence protection, to speed up digital transformation, green transition and circular economic development. The sector will design solutions to mobilise resources from society, especially the science-technology development funds of enterprises, for science research and innovation activities, he said, adding that synchronous measures will be applied to expand the science-technology market, and start-up and innovation ecosystems. Đạt underlined that the ministry will review and complete the legal system regarding science, technology and innovation, to better fit with the current requirements in the field. It will also propose new mechanisms, policies and laws related to public investment and procurement and tax to encourage developments in science and technology, while promoting public-private cooperation in the field. He said that the

ministry will connect with stakeholders to promote research and innovation to increase productivity and efficiency of the economy, while building breakthrough mechanisms at key economic regions to support socio-economic development.

At the same time, it will make a plan for the science and technology system in Việt Nam, linking science and technology organisations and businesses, said the official. The minister said that the improvement of the country's core technology capacity and the enhancement of productivity and quality is one of the top priorities of Decision No.2667/QĐ-BKHCN approving the science, technology and innovation directions, targets and tasks until 2025. In order to achieve this goal, the ministry will effectively implement national-level science and technology programmes in line with the sector's restructuring plan in the 2021-25 period with a vision to 2030, with businesses playing a core role in transforming science for commercial use, he said. Meanwhile, the ministry will continue to develop the Hòa Lạc Hi-Tech Park into a centre for high technology research and development, high-tech agriculture area and a concentrated information technology hub. This will serve to speed up administrative reform and improve the quality of the business environment to ensure healthy, equal and transparent competition for all businesses and protect the interest of consumers, said the minister.

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Ministry Carries Out Solutions to Effectively Exploit Domestic Market

Measures have been taken to effectively exploit the domestic market with a population of nearly 100 million to fulfil the goal of an increase of 8-9 per cent in retail sales of goods and services, according to the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MoIT). Since the beginning of this year, the ministry has strived to enhance connectivity and ensured a balance between the supply and demand of essential goods, contributing to keeping inflation under 4.5 per cent. The sales of goods, especially agricultural products in the harvest season, were facilitated, along with the establishment of a linkage between supply and demand in the online environment, based on new platforms. The MoIT will continue to accelerate the amendment and completion of a number of legal documents on domestic market development. It will also speed up the implementation of a strategy for developing domestic trade until 2030, with a vision to 2045, as well as related programmes such as a project on developing the domestic market in association with the campaign "Vietnamese people prioritise Vietnamese goods" in the 2021-25 period.

Domestic trade promotion activities will be integrated with consumer stimulus programmes. The ministry will support enterprises, especially small and medium ones, production facilities of craft villages, farmer households and cooperatives in trade promotion activities; building and protecting brands for domestic wholesale and

retail distribution chains; and popularising typical products of Việt Nam. Priority will be given to the development of modern commercial and digital platforms, and e-commerce and non-cash payment methods encouraged. The MoIT will focus on applying digital technology to trace goods' origin in commercial infrastructure systems such as supermarkets and markets, as well as developing new retail methods to meet the requirements of consumers. It will also encourage the expansion of green distribution system and green consumption, sustainable development and circular economy in the field of commerce. The sustainable connection between production, distribution, and consumption will be boosted along with the presence of environmentally friendly products at commercial centres and supermarkets. Under a draft project on restructuring the industry until 2030, the MoIT sets the goal of restructuring the domestic market towards fast and sustainable development. Accordingly, the models of sharing economy, night, tourism, green, circular and digital economy will be prioritised for development. The added value of domestic trade will increase by an average of 9-9.5 per cent per year.

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Ministry Proposes Extending Visa-Free Stay to 30 Days, e-Visa to 90 Days

E-visa holders might be able to stay in Việt Nam for up to 90 days, three times longer than the current 30 days, according to a proposed amended Law on Foreigners' Entry into, Exit from, Transit Through, and Residence in Việt Nam. An electronic visa, single entry, is currently being granted to citizens from 80 countries via Việt Nam's National Web Portal on Immigration. The amended law, penned by the Ministry of Public Security, also seeks to extend the visa-free duration of stay to 30 days (from the current 15 days) for citizens from countries that Việt Nam has unilaterally waived visa requirements. The current countries on the list where 15-day visa-free stays are applicable are mostly in Europe – Belarus, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Russia, France, Finland, Spain, Sweden, Italy, and the United Kingdom – along with South Korea and Japan. Tourist visa validity continues to be kept at three months. The public security ministry noted that the Government will decide on the list of countries and territories whose citizens are granted e-visas and the list of international border gates that allow foreigners to enter and exit with e-visas, taking into consideration that these activities would not constitute a threat to national defence, security nor the social order and safety of Việt Nam.

The relaxed policies aim to attract foreign tourists to Việt Nam amid fierce competition from countries in the region especially after nations have lifted COVID-19 restrictions. The easing of e-visa policy both in terms of applicable subjects and duration will help attract more foreigners to visit the country and seek investment and business opportunities, creating a driving force to promote socio-economic development in general and the tourism industry in particular, the

ministry noted. The public security ministry is seeking public feedback on the amended law, and the bill is set to be discussed at the fifth and sixth plenary session of the 15th-tenure National Assembly in May and October this year. The visa issue has received a lot of public attention in recent times as it was blamed for the disappointing number of foreign tourists to Việt Nam in 2022, 3.66 million against the target of five million, significantly lower than the over 19 million tourists the country received in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic struck. In a national conference on tourism chaired by Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính held on March 15, 2023, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Đỗ Hùng Việt has suggested the Government consider expanding the list of countries eligible for visa waivers.

The foreign ministry is also negotiating visa-free stays for citizens from countries with similar or higher development levels to Việt Nam, such as Latin American countries, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and Maldives. Việt also cited a number of favourable visa programmes that other countries are deploying to lure in foreigners, for example, Thailand with 10-year visas targeting rich people, retirees, experts and businesspeople along with their families; or Singapore, Indonesia, UAE all offering long-term visit visas that allow stays up to 10 years. The country aims to welcome eight million tourists this year, however, this target was set in the beginning of 2023 when China had not yet made announcements on its reopening plans. Chinese tourists made up one-third of the total international tourists to Việt Nam in 2019.

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Vietnam Eyes Better Management Amid Concerns About Water Shortage

Vietnam's water demand is likely to reach about 122 billion cubic meters each year from 2030, about 1.5 times higher than the current amount, leading to potential risk of severe water shortage without effective management of the resource, local media reported Thursday. The country is currently exploiting about 84 billion cubic meters of water each year, including 3.8 billion cubic meters of underground and 80.6 billion cubic meters of surface water, the Vietnam News reported, citing an official. The peak water consumption time is in the dry season from July to September when over 80 percent of water is used for agricultural activities, said Nguyen Minh Khuyen, deputy director of the Department of Water Resources Management under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. Some localities have still faced difficulties in accessing clean and safe water, especially those in central and south-central provinces and cities, he said. It is forecast that 11 out of the 16 major river basins in Vietnam will experience water stress, especially in the four main river basins from which 80 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) is generated, he said. Currently, the ministry is working on four key policies of ensuring water source security, socializing the water sector, promoting the water economy, protecting water resources and preventing harm caused by water, he said.

HCM City Launches First International Standards Electronic Training Centre

On March 25, the Saigon Hi-Tech Park Training Centre and Sun Electronics Group JSC launched the International Electronic Training Centre (IETC) in HCM City. According to Huỳnh Tấn Bửu, the General Director of Sun Electronics, the centre is the first in the country to offer training programmes that comply with the International Process Control (IPC) standard. These programmes are taught by Vietnamese experts who have worked in large electronic corporations in Silicon Valley in the US. The IETC aims to attract engineers from enterprises, recent graduates from universities and colleges, and entrepreneurs starting up in the electronics and microchip field. Minister of Science and Technology Huỳnh Thành Đạt said the centre is an important factor for the establishment of an electronic and semiconductor industry ecosystem of HCM City and the whole country in general. He said science and technology research and development for the electronics and semiconductor industry has always been one of Việt Nam's priority orientations over the past years.

The Ministry of Science and Technology has proposed the Government and the Prime Minister issue policies and perfect the legal corridor for the investment and development of high-tech products, including electronic products and semiconductor chips. Đạt added that the ministry has also coordinated with other ministries and sectors to design special incentives for high-tech, large-scale, high-value-added projects, including chip production. Chairman of the HCM City People's Committee, Phan Văn Mãi, said that the city considers the electronic and semiconductor chip industry one of the priority sectors for development and will focus on the product design stage. He said he hopes the centre will coordinate with local training facilities to improve the efficiency of training activities in the city. The Saigon Hi-Tech Park Training Centre and Sun Electronics Group JSC signed cooperation agreements with MediaTek Company to apply its chipsets in training and product design activities at IETC. The Saigon Hi-Tech Park Management Board also signed a cooperation deal with the National Innovation Centre (NIC) to implement the IETC model in Hà Nội.

South Asia

INDIA: STPI Mohali Hosts Successful Start-up Demo Day to Connect Investors with Innovative Start-ups

The Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) Mohali successfully hosted a two-day start-up demo day on 3rd and 4th March 2023. The event aimed to connect start-ups

with investors and provide them with a platform to showcase their innovative products and services. Day one of the event, 3rd March, began with an inaugural session that featured eminent speakers from the start-up ecosystem. The session was inaugurated at STPI Mohali with the lighting of the lamp by the dignitaries, followed by a welcome address by Sh. Ajay Prasad Shrivastava, OIC, STPI Mohali. Dr. Deepak Motwani, Sr. Manager, Ecosystem, Wadhvani Foundation, Ms. Nitika Khurana, Head of Operations, Chandigarh Angel Network (CAN), Ms. Ritika Singh, Member TiE Chandigarh & Founder CEO Kontent Factory, and Sh. Deepinder Dhillon, Joint Director, DIT, Govt. of Punjab also addressed the attendees. The session concluded with a special address by Chief Guest Sh. Paritosh Dandriyal, Director, STPI Gurugram. The day one event also featured technical sessions on 'UI/UX – User Experience evaluation method' by Dr. Nishtha Phutela, BML Munjal University and 'Big Data Analytics and AI in Healthcare' by Sh. Neeraj Rajput, Manager, M/s RT Global Info Solutions Pvt Ltd. Mrs Kulvir Kaur, Sr. Data Analyst and Sh. Suryakant, Sr. Machine Learning of M/s XenonStack Pvt. Ltd. also spoke about 'Top Data and Analytics Trends in 2023'.

In the inaugural session of the event, SPIT also launched Startup Demo Day and Investor Connect for startups under Next Generation Incubation Scheme in association with Wadhvani Foundation, to enable startups to raise funds for seed funding up to Rs.25 lakhs under the scheme. Apart from this, an opportunity can be provided to raise funds through the investor. Day two, 4th March, was Investor Demo Day and began with an introduction by Chandigarh Angel Network, TiE Chandigarh, STPI & Wadhvani Foundation. This was followed by startup pitches by M/s Vishwaaz.ai Pvt. Ltd., M/s HeyBarber, M/s E2EM Technologies Pvt. Ltd., M/s Xtealth Pvt. Ltd., M/s Ekosight Technologies Pvt. Ltd., M/s Magitech Innovision LLP, M/s Splenor Computers Pvt. Ltd., and M/s Racketail Solutions and Technologies Pvt. Ltd. The event concluded with a concluding session that featured feedback from investors. The startup demo day provided a great platform for startups to showcase their innovative ideas and connect with potential investors. Speaking about the event, Sh. Paritosh Dandriyal, Director, STPI Gurugram, said, "The STPI Mohali start-up demo day was a great success. We are delighted to have provided a platform for start-ups to showcase their innovative products and services and connect with potential investors. We look forward to continuing to support the start-up ecosystem and hosting more such events in the future." The Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) Mohali is a leading IT park in Mohali, Punjab that provides a range of infrastructure and support services to IT and IT-enabled services companies. STPI Mohali is dedicated to fostering the growth of the IT industry in the region and supporting the startup ecosystem.

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PM Modi to Inaugurate Hubballi-Dharwad Smart City Projects on March 12

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on March 12th, will inaugurate over 10 completed projects by the Hubballi – Dharwad Smart City Limited (HDSCL) at the IIT campus in Dharwad, Karnataka. These initiatives, such as the renovation of Tolankere Lake, a swimming facility, and improvements to the Chitguppi hospital, were initially slated to be unveiled months ago but will now be unveiled in the coming days. In Hubballi, HDSCL has taken on 62 projects in total, 53 of which have already been finished, and 9 of which are still in the planning stages. The government will continue to support the growth of smart cities in India by announcing 16 new initiatives at the upcoming inauguration.

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In a First, Kochi Metro Accepts e-Rupee

Kochi Metro has begun accepting the digital currency in its parking facilities as part of a campaign to support the Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC). The initiative was launched on Friday at the Thykoodam parking facility, and it will soon be implemented in all other Metro parking lots. Kochi Metro is the first Metro in the nation to take CBDC, according to Kochi Metro Rail Ltd (KMRL) authorities. The initiative was launched in collaboration with the technology startup Anantham Online and IDFC FIRST Bank. The Reserve Bank of India's pilot program served as the foundation for this effort. CBDC for retail customers has just been launched, according to the RBI. At Thykoodam Metro, KMRL MD Shri Loknath Behera launched the initiative. According to KMRL, the move would enable Metro users to make payments using their respective Bank's CBDC wallet and prevent the need to exchange cash. Cash-like store payments will be the primary use of the retail CBDC. It will be a digital rupee that represents legal tender in the shape of a token, released in the same denominations as coins and paper money, and distributed through middlemen like banks. The fact that Kochi Metro is the first organisation in the nation to use the e-rupee, which is currently seen as the currency of the future, is something to be proud of.

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Mumbai's Municipal Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal Felicitated with 'Spirit of Mumbai'

Honourable Governor of Maharashtra Shri Ramesh Bais felicitated Municipal Commissioner & Administrator Iqbal Singh Chahal with the 'Spirit of Mumbai' award, on Saturday at Shanmukhananda Chandrashekharendra Saraswathi Auditorium in Mumbai, for his indomitable leadership during Covid period in Mumbai. Municipal Commissioner of Mumbai Iqbal Singh Chahal, Assistant Mun. Commissioner Kiran Dighavkar, Dr. Anil Pachnekar, Pascal Saldhana, and Dattatraya Sawant were

presented the Corona Warrior awards on the occasion of the 3rd anniversary of the pandemic. The felicitation was organised by the South Indian Education Society (SIES) and Shri Shanmukhananda Fine Arts & Sangeet Sabha. President of the Society and Sabha Dr V. Shankar, former Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, Dr. R. Chidambaram, Vice President of the Sabha Dr. V. Rangaraj, Vice President of society Shri M. V. Ramnarayan and others were present.

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ChatGPT- 4: A Rise or Fall of Artificial General Intelligence

OpenAI has quickly become one of the biggest names in tech. The artificial intelligence (AI) company has made realistic image generators, 3D-model creators, and the thing it is now best known for, ChatGPT. In less time than it takes me to write this sentence, ChatGPT, the free artificial intelligence computer program that writes human-sounding answers to just about anything you ask, like explaining quantum physics with literary flair. But recently, the latest and most advanced version of its language model, GPT-4, was introduced, which also showed signs of artificial general intelligence (AGI). According to a preprint paper titled Sparks of Artificial General Intelligence: Early experiments with GPT-4, the model demonstrated abilities that were at or above the human level in a range of tasks, including mathematics, coding, vision, medicine, law, and psychology. The paper also showcased GPT-4's ability to write proof about the infinite number of primes, complete with rhymes on every line, and draw a unicorn in a drawing program. If you ask what the difference between ChatGPT and GPT-4, is ChatGPT is more like a car and GPT-4 is the engine behind it, a general technology that can be used in various applications, including language learning, chatroom monitoring, and assistive technology. Compared to its predecessor, GPT-3, GPT-4 performs better in technical challenges, such as answering math questions and avoiding false answers. It also has a sense of ethics built into the system to prevent it from performing malicious or harmful tasks. OpenAI has released a long paper of examples of harms that GPT-4 has defences against, including the ability to decline tasks like ranking races by attractiveness or providing guidelines for synthesizing sarin, a toxic gas.

One of the most significant changes to GPT-4 is its ability to handle over 25,000 words of text, making it ideal for long-form content creation, document search and analysis, and extended conversations. Additionally, GPT-4 can pass a simulated bar exam with a score around the top 10 percent of test takers, making it an invaluable tool for professionals in various fields. And other aspects of GPT-4 are its ability to understand and analyze images. GPT-4 is more advanced than Google Lens, as it can analyze an image and provide a detailed explanation. GPT-4 also outperforms previous versions when it comes to multilingual capabilities. OpenAI has demonstrated that it outperforms GPT-3.5 and other LLMs by accurately answering thousands of multiple-choice questions across 26 languages. While it handles

English best, Indian languages like Telugu are not far behind, making it an invaluable tool for users in non-English-speaking countries. However, the Microsoft researchers who authored the paper quickly dialled back their initial claim, acknowledging that GPT-4 still had significant limitations and biases. They noted that their definition of AGI was based on a 1994 definition of intelligence by a group of psychologists, which defines intelligence as a very general mental capability encompassing a broad range of cognitive skills and abilities. While GPT-4 showed progress in these areas, it still needed to catch up to many of the traditional definitions of AGI. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman also emphasized the limitations of GPT-4, stating that it was still flawed and limited and required a lot more human feedback to be more reliable. He noted that while OpenAI was focused on building AGI in the future, GPT-4 was not AGI. Altman warned against the hype surrounding GPT-4, stating that people were begging to be disappointed and that the model was not a substitute for human effort.

The limitations of GPT-4 highlighted by the Microsoft researchers included challenges with confidence calibration, long-term memory, personalization, planning and conceptual leaps, transparency, interpretability and consistency, cognitive fallacies, and irrationality. While GPT-4 showed impressive capabilities in various tasks, it still needed help with basic cognitive abilities that humans take for granted, such as knowing when it is confident or just guessing. The debate surrounding GPT-4's capabilities underscores the ongoing challenge of defining and developing AGI. While GPT-4 represents a significant advance in language modelling and natural language processing, it still falls short on many of the traditional definitions of AGI, which require a machine to exhibit not only a broad range of cognitive abilities but also consciousness, intentionality and other human-like traits.

Despite the safeguards and built-in sense of ethics, some worry that teaching an AI system the rules may also lead it how to break them. Dubbed the Waluigi effect, this outcome occurs when tricking the system into deciding not to be ethical, and it will merrily do anything asked of it. While GPT-4 has been designed to prevent such outcomes, researchers have demonstrated that it is still possible to simulate malicious behaviour with the system. In conclusion, GPT-4 is an impressive language model that has progressed in various tasks but still needs to be AGI. While it has built-in safeguards to prevent malicious or harmful schemes, concerns remain about potential unintended consequences. The hype surrounding its capabilities should be tempered by clearly understanding its limitations and biases. As AI continues to advance, it is essential to remember that developing AGI is a long-term goal that requires not only technological breakthroughs but also careful consideration of such a powerful technology's ethical, social, and political implications.

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How the Technology Impact Through Agriculture's New Digital Push

AgriStack is an innovative technology stack designed to provide farmers with granular information on crop selection, market trends, and formal credit arrangements. The stack will incorporate various technology tools such as satellite imagery, weather forecasting, and soil sensors to offer farmers valuable insights into their farming operations. It has the potential to revolutionize the agricultural sector by providing farmers with the tools they need to make informed decisions, increase their productivity, and ultimately improve their livelihoods. India's livelihood, civilization, culture, and legacy based on agriculture. With 1.39 billion people, India is the second-most populous nation in the world and is predicted to pass China in population by 2027–2030. India is the seventh-largest country in the world, with 328 million hectares (Mha) of land. After the US, India has the second-largest amount of arable land at 160 Mha. Digital technology is increasing global connectivity. Mobile devices are used in more minor, faster, cheaper, and more effective ways. Assistance is being provided to help businesses and farmers make better decisions. The "Green Revolution," which started in the 1960s and assisted the nation in making significant breakthroughs in domestic food production, agriculture, and allied disciplines, is commonly linked to Indian agriculture. With the help of this industry, India went from having a food deficit to having a surplus of food and an emphasis on exports. Agriculture and allied businesses undoubtedly provide most of India's income, particularly in the country's extensive rural areas. Agriculture is made up of numerous intricately linked processes. For a decent yield, it should be organised into effective stages. A given product's success is determined by a triangle made up of the farmer, technology, and the service and consultancy idea. Agriculture will eventually become digitalized, just as other sectors of the economy.

How AgriStack technology is impacting agriculture. Precision farming: AgriStack technology includes precision farming techniques that use data analytics, sensors, and satellite imagery to improve crop yield, reduce input costs, and minimize environmental impact. For example, precision agriculture enables farmers to optimize the use of water, fertilizer, and pesticides, reducing waste and minimizing environmental impact. Internet of Things (IoT) devices: IoT devices are increasingly being used in agriculture to monitor crop health, soil moisture, and other critical parameters. These devices can be integrated with other agricultural technologies, such as drones and autonomous tractors, to automate farming operations and reduce labor costs. Blockchain technology: Blockchain technology is being used to enhance the transparency and traceability of the food supply chain. By using blockchain, farmers can track their products from the farm to the table, ensuring food safety and quality. Artificial intelligence (AI): AI is being used in agriculture to optimize crop yield and reduce waste. For example, AI algorithms can analyze data from sensors and other devices to predict weather patterns, soil moisture levels, and other factors that impact crop growth.

Implementations on agriculture sector. Governments use digital technologies to

improve the effectiveness and efficiency of current policies and programs and create new ones. For instance, the availability of free, high-quality satellite photography drastically reduces the expense of monitoring various agricultural activities. This would enable governments to adopt more specialized policies that compensate farmers as per environmental effects noticed. Digital technologies enable new ways for governments to monitor and ensure compliance with standards and to provide quicker and more effective border procedures, which are crucial for perishable goods. These technologies can also support trade in agriculture and food products by connecting private-sector suppliers to new markets. Agriculture and the food system are evolving due to the Internet, mobile technology, data analytics, artificial intelligence, digitally delivered services, and apps.

The Digital India Plan, which intends to overhaul India's public service sector digitally, was introduced by the Indian government in 2015. With a 14% GDP share, agriculture, the largest employment sector, is crucial to this digital initiative. Due to mechanization and knowledge dissemination initiatives, India has seen a significant improvement in yields and crop diversification, despite rising consumption due to population growth and increasing wealth. AgriStack technology is revolutionizing the agriculture sector in India, providing farmers with new tools and methods to improve crop yield, reduce input costs, and minimize environmental impact. With the implementation of precision farming, IoT devices, blockchain technology, and AI, farmers can optimize their farming operations, increase efficiency, and ensure food safety and quality. Governments are also leveraging digital technologies to monitor compliance with standards, support trade in agriculture and food products, and provide better public services. The Digital India Plan is a step in the right direction, and its success in the agriculture sector can pave the way for the digital transformation of other industries. By embracing technology, India can achieve sustainable growth, improve the livelihoods of its citizens, and secure its position as a global leader in agriculture.

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EnableX Launches "Founders' Peak Program" to Support Early-Stage Start-ups in India

EnableX a global full-stack communications platform and solutions provider, has announced the launch of the "EnableX Founders Peak Program", an initiative to support entrepreneurs across incubator programs. At launch, it has launched the program at India's leading campuses, including IIM Bangalore, IIM Ahmedabad and XLRI. EnableX Founders' Peak Program will help start-ups through free access to EnableX's CPaaS platform through complimentary credits for building their customer engagement journeys and offer mentorship from EnableX's experienced leadership team. EnableX is working with leading academic institutions globally to bring the program to more incubated start-ups. Under the MoU, EnableX will specifically

support startups that emerge from NSRCEL, IIM Bangalore, CIIE, IIM Ahmedabad, and XCEED, XLRI- all incubators that assist founders in launching high-impact new ventures through a variety of resources. Sharing his view on the MoU, Chandan Agarwal, COO of EnableX, said, "We are thrilled to collaborate with top B-schools through our EnableX Founders' Peak Program. This partnership marks the start of an exciting journey to further support early-stage startups and play our part in the Startup India mission. We hope these leading B-schools and EnableX's collective forces will work as game-changers for young entrepreneurs. We are committed to making this a success." Commenting on the partnership, Dr. Fr. K.S. Casimir SJ, Director- XCEED, XLRI- Delhi NCR, said, "We are excited to work with partners like EnableX who understand, encourage, and support founders in their entrepreneurial skills. The EnableX Founders' Peak program exemplifies how the convergence of technology and education can unlock possibilities and avenues for growth and development. We look forward to having the team engage with founders to help them grow."

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FIDE and Tech Mahindra Announce Dates for First & Biggest Global Chess League

The International Chess Federation (FIDE) and Tech Mahindra, a leading provider of digital transformation, consulting and business re-engineering services and solutions, today announced the launch dates and format of Global Chess League (GCL). The 12-day Global Chess League (GCL) will begin on June 21, 2023, and end on July 2, 2023. GCL will be played in ten round-robin matches, with six teams competing (six players in each team), followed by a final match between the top two teams. GCL is the world's first and largest official franchise league of its kind, with chess players competing in a unique joint team format. GCL will feature male and female chess champions competing on the same team. The league's joint male-female teams will have the rare distinction of being the only joint team in a professional sports league. Jagdish Mitra, Chief Strategy Officer & Head of Growth, Tech Mahindra, said, "As a key constituent of Global Chess League (GCL), it is a matter of great pride for us to announce the dates of the first broadcast sports experience through GCL. We are proud to partner with FIDE and have a mentor and coach like Viswanathan Anand, former five-time world chess champion. GCL is a unique opportunity to promote this remarkable game of strategy, intellect, and rigor which we feel is strongly intertwined with business. GCL, fueled by technology and opportunities, will bring together the best players from around the world in order to popularize the game and provide players with a formidable platform to hone their skills. Tech Mahindra will leverage its expertise in technology to provide chess fans with a unique experience. We are keen to make this the largest and the most exhilarating experience for players, fans, and viewers – truly where global talent comes together and is recognized and rewarded."

FIDE and Tech Mahindra will explore innovative ways to promote the game through interactive technology-enabled platforms by leveraging next-generation technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality, among others. The FIDE President, Arkady Dvorkovich, said, "We are very excited to announce the dates and format of this one-of-a-kind GCL with Tech Mahindra. As a partner, Tech Mahindra brings in its tech expertise to help scale and take the game to millions of fans. The league will help increase Chess's popularity while expanding commercial opportunities. As a part of FIDE's commitment to growing women's chess, this league will also witness the joint male and female team format, a first-of-its-kind in a professional sport. We invite team owners and sponsors to join in the effort to bring chess closer to its fans around the world. We are looking forward to meeting the teams and new talent in June 2023." GCL will aim to bring sports fans together to witness chess in a never-seen-before avatar. The winning team will get crowned with the title of World Champion Franchise Team.

Viswanathan Anand, five-time world chess champion and Indian chess legend, said, "Chess is a game that millions of people all over the world enjoy playing. We've seen a surge in new fan engagements since the pandemic, increasing the fan base. It is indeed a momentous occasion for the world of chess to stage a Global Chess League with players participating worldwide. I am confident that the league will bring a new perspective to chess and chess viewership. Looking forward to collaborating with FIDE and Tech Mahindra to make the 12-day GCL a huge success." The long-standing partnership between Tech Mahindra and FIDE will promote playing of chess in new and innovative formats, create opportunities for youth, and foster many champions globally.

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Mahindra-Qualcomm-backed Deep Tech Startup Carnot Technology Enters the Agri Fintech Space

Carnot Technologies, India's leading agri AI-IoT platform backed by Mahindra, begins a strategic partnership with Avanti Finance. Having revolutionized the tractor renting module in India with their deep tech that monitors tractors and improves earning potential of Rental Entrepreneurs, Carnot now forays into the agri-fintech space. Through this strategic partnership, Carnot has launched the Industry's first working capital credit access while leveraging IoT data as well as unique tech capabilities and resources. Carnot currently works with more than 26,000 rental entrepreneurs, a specific set of communities in the rural ecosystem who are the driving force behind the mechanization in India. The rental business is seasonal and REs capital investment is at risk for a long time as payment from the farmers is often delayed. This RE community heavily relies on informal sources of lending and uses its hard-earned savings to continue its business operations. Through this unique partnership, Carnot Technology and Avanti Finance have created an apt credit

product that will help REs manage their business operations and improve their working capital requirements. With an AI-enabled IoT Kit connected to tractors, REs uses the mobile-based application for real-time live tracking of their assets, exact acreages of work done, fuel status, and Accounting solutions. With a first-of-its-kind data infrastructure model, this partnership will enable new ways to credit underwrite the customers, allowing them to access tailored credit solutions based on their cash flow.

Pushkar Limaye, CTO & Co-Founder of Carnot Technologies, said “Carnot’s vision is to build products and solutions to help Bharat’s rental entrepreneurs succeed. Easy access to financing solutions is central to their livelihood, which is highly seasonal in nature. Our partnership with Avanti Finance is a perfect example of how agri-tech companies can work with lenders and deliver first-of-its-kind innovative solutions.” “We at Avanti are excited about this partnership with Carnot. Together we will be able to further serve customers in the Agri value chain including farm-implements. In line with our mission of supporting livelihoods and inclusion, this partnership will enable credit access to farmers by involving all stakeholders in the ecosystem. This will be possible by combining Avanti’s platform with Carnot’s on ground technological solutions.” says Sunil Kumar Tadepalli, Chief of Partnerships, Avanti Finance.

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SRI LANKA: Dialog Axiata Awarded Winner of ACCA Sustainability Reporting Awards 2022

The ACCA Sustainability Reporting Awards 2022 recognized Dialog Axiata PLC as the Overall Winner and the Winner of the General Services category for its exceptional commitment to sustainability and transparency in reporting. The awards for this year had received an impressive range of entries from various industries, with Dialog being recognised for its comprehensive and well-structured sustainability report. The Company was commended by the judging panel for its country-first strategy, clear understanding of the materiality of sustainability issues and its resolute dedication to addressing them. Moreover, the panel recognised Dialog’s transparent and informative disclosure of its sustainability performance, which showcased its unwavering commitment to continuous improvement. “We are honoured to receive this recognition from ACCA, which endorses our commitment to sustainability,” said Supun Weerasinghe, Group Chief Executive of Dialog Axiata PLC. “Sustainability is at the core of our business model and is embedded in everything we do. We are committed to continuously improving our impact to society and the standard of sustainability reporting. We will continue to work towards a sustainable future for all our stakeholders.” The ACCA Sustainability Reporting Awards, presented annually since 2004, recognise and celebrate organisations that have demonstrated excellence in sustainability reporting, highlighting the strong link between business strategy, corporate governance, and sustainability. The awards

aim to encourage and recognize organizations that have made a commitment to sustainability in their reporting and practices.

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Innovative Digital Marketplace to Help Sri Lanka's Small Businesses

To expand the reach of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), including women-owned small businesses, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) is supporting the Commercial Bank of Ceylon (CBC) launch a digital marketplace in Sri Lanka, helping business owners connect with more customers locally and abroad. Named Commercial Bank LEAP, this one-of-its-kind initiative, which is supported under the Women in Work partnership between IFC and the government of Australia, will open new market opportunities and build business connections all SMEs including women-owned SMEs, corporate and businesses creating an international marketplace to buy and sell products and raw materials. The platform will also assist businesses to digitize their core banking activities, provide business intelligence and will feature multiple sales channels. It will also provide access to CBC's banking services including loan products, non-financial services and insurance. "Commercial Bank is extremely pleased to join hands with IFC to launch this pioneering digital marketplace 'Commercial Bank Leap'. Building digital experiences around customers' journeys is an ideal fit for the Bank, considering our committed focus on digitizing the banking landscape in Sri Lanka. We believe this will address the need gaps of enterprises including women led businesses and allow them to reach cross boarder levels in the global marketplace," said Sanath Manatunge, Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer of CBC.

Of all SMEs in Sri Lanka, a quarter of which are owned or managed by women. Overall, SMEs account for around 45 percent of Sri Lanka's formal employment. But the research shows lack of access to finance and business know-how holds many businesses in Sri Lanka, specifically women-owned, back from expanding their businesses beyond their informal micro-scale enterprises. "Sri Lanka's macroeconomic crisis has had a negative and disproportionate impact on small businesses, particularly those owned by women, in their access to a wide range of customers and export revenue," said Joon Young Park, IFC's Regional Portfolio Manager, Financial Institutions Group for South Asia. "This is a timely and innovative initiative, offering a real avenue for small business owners to connect on a digital platform, access new financial products and grow their businesses, to help them not only survive but thrive, which will also positively impact the growth of Sri Lanka." Widespread differences between men and women in digital and financial inclusion continue to hold back women entrepreneurs. In 2020, an IFC study assessing over 400 SMEs highlighted the significant gaps in Sri Lanka in terms of the uptake of digital business channels, with only a quarter of women-owned businesses trying a

new digital channel, compared to one-third of male-owned.

“Even though there are many women-owned SMEs in Sri Lanka, a lot of them have limited access to markets, finances and business processes. This makes doing business a challenge”, said Sophie Gordon, Second Secretary, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. “It is wonderful that Australia has been able to support CBC develop a platform where women-owned SMEs can access digital banking products such as loans, non-financial services and insurance in one place. We hope this will allow facilitate access to new markets for more small businesses owned by women.” Under this initiative, Globalinker has been selected as the platform provider for the newly built digital marketplace, with the platform allowing SMEs to not only connect with others in the country but also abroad. In IFC’s over 50 years of operations in Sri Lanka, CBC has been a longstanding partner, dating back to 2003. IFC has supported CBC through multiple investments as well as through advisory support and currently holds a 7 percent equity stake. CBC is also one of the three banks that received support from IFC through a \$400 million cross-currency swap facility to help facilitate the imports of essential goods such as food, medicines and fertilizers. Further, IFC and CBC recently joined forces to establish early childhood development centers to help meet demand for quality childcare services among employed parents in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka as well.

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We Have Not Authorized Anyone to Operate Cryptocurrency Schemes in Sri Lanka, Warns CBSL

Sri Lanka’s Central Bank says that they have not issued any licence or authorized any individual or business to operate schemes involving cryptocurrency, and has not authorized any Initial Coin Offerings (ICOs) or any variant of it, cryptocurrency mining operations, cryptocurrency exchanges, deposit-taking or custody services related to cryptocurrency or any cryptocurrency investment advisory service. Releasing a statement, the bank said that as per Directions No. 03 of 2021 under the Foreign Exchange Act, No. 12 of 2017, Electronic Fund Transfer Cards (EFTCs) such as debit cards and credit cards are not permitted to be used for payments related to cryptocurrency transactions. Considering the recent public inquiries and the developments observed relating to cryptocurrencies, which are also commonly referred to as “crypto”, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) wishes to reiterate to the public of the significant risks associated with using and investing in cryptocurrency. Cryptocurrency is a type of virtual currency that is generated by private entities and not by a monetary authority of a country. The term ‘cryptocurrency’ refers to a digital representation of value that is implemented using cryptography and Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT) or similar technology. It is observed that crypto-trading is widely promoted by certain entities as a profitable

investment.

However, recent complaints received by CBSL have shown that members of the public have incurred heavy losses on their crypto-investments and in certain instances have also been subject to financial scams conducted through crypto-related schemes. CBSL has already highlighted, through Press Releases issued in 2018, 2021, and 2022, the significant financial, operational, legal and security related risks as well as customer protection concerns posed to users of cryptocurrency. These risks and concerns have already materialised with the recent failures of various global institutions engaged in cryptocurrency businesses, and the collapse and loss of value of some cryptocurrencies. The public is reminded that cryptocurrencies are unregulated investment instruments which are not recognized as an asset-class in Sri Lanka. Further, cryptocurrencies are not considered as legal tender in Sri Lanka and have no regulatory safeguards relating to their usage in the country. As per the Directions No. 03 of 2021 under Foreign Exchange Act, No. 12 of 2017, Electronic Fund Transfer Cards (EFTCs) such as debit cards and credit cards are not permitted to be used for payments related to cryptocurrency transactions. Cryptocurrency operates through informal channels, and therefore, it does not contribute to the national economy and can also cause a loss of valuable foreign currency to the country.

The public is also warned of the growing number of financial scams operating with the promise of high returns based on crypto-investments. These scams include deceiving individuals and obtaining money from them with the promise of providing a high return by investing money in cryptocurrency, as well as deceiving individuals to invest in fraudulent cryptocurrency projects. Such scams circumvent traditional regulatory and legal protection mechanisms, resulting in individuals losing their hard-earned money. CBSL strongly advises the public to safeguard their hard-earned money and not to invest or engage in any cryptocurrency scheme offered through the Internet, other forms of media, or directly by any persons. The public is also notified that CBSL has not issued any licence or authorized any individual or business to operate schemes involving cryptocurrency, and has not authorized any Initial Coin Offerings (ICOs) or any variant of it, cryptocurrency mining operations, cryptocurrency exchanges, deposit-taking or custody services related to cryptocurrency or any cryptocurrency investment advisory service. CBSL also urges those who are engaged in promoting and facilitating the promotion of investing and trading in cryptocurrency to refrain from such activities, considering the wide range of risks associated with cryptocurrency and the resulting hardships to the public, including financial losses.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Improving Drinking Water Supply to Number of Villages in Tovuz District

The supply of drinking water to seven villages of Azerbaijan's Tovuz district is improving within the state regional socio-economic development program, approved by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, Azersu OJSC told Trend. According to the company, the project, implemented through public investment, covers Aghdam, Vahidli, Ashaghi Oysuzlu, Yukhari Oysuzlu, Alibayli, Hajiali and Mulkulu villages. The company said that, so far, the residents of Aghdam and Vahidli villages have satisfied their needs for drinking water mainly at the expense of trucked-in water. Other villages used sub-artesian wells for irrigation, water from the Tovuzchay river and drains. In some villages covered by the project, the water lines laid by the residents individually didn't allow for a normal water supply. In accordance with the approved project, drinking water will be supplied to Aghdam and Vahidli villages through existing drainage devices and springs, and to Alibayli, Hajiali, Mulkulu, Yukhari Oysuzlu and Ashaghi Oysuzlu villages - from seven sub-artesian wells planned for drilling.

The construction of a chlorination plant, pumping stations and reservoirs is also envisaged for the treatment of borehole waters. According to the project, springs will be built for the general use of the population. Currently, the construction of inter-well, main and network water pipelines, as well as reservoirs, continues. To date, a 13-kilometer section of main water pipelines with a length of 31 kilometers has been built. At the same time, a 111 km section of a 150 km network water line was built. Within the framework of the project, 690 springs are planned to be installed in seven villages of the Tovuz district for the general public use. Completion of construction and installation works is scheduled for the summer of 2023. The implementation of the project will improve the supply of drinking water to 20,000 residents in seven villages of the Tovuz region. Along with the Tovuz district, projects are currently being implemented to supply drinking water to villages and settlements in the Gazakh, Aghstafa and Neftchala districts.

Quality indicators of drinking water provided to consumers in Azerbaijan are determined according to the Interstate Standards (GS 2874-82). At present water taken from sources is processed according to "Drinking Water" State Standards No 2874-82 prior to convey to consumers. In the future it is intended to apply international standards (World Health Organization and European Union) for identification of quality indicators of drinking water treated by "Azersu" OJSC. For this purpose Central Laboratory that meets all requirements put into operation in Baku. More than 50 parameters of drinking water are set under the standards adopted by the World Health Organization and more than 75 parameters by the European Union.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/04/2023

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Azerbaijan Simplifies Visa Procedure for Foreigners Coming to Watch F1 Races – Decree

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has signed a decree to simplify visa procedures for foreigners and stateless persons arriving in the Republic of Azerbaijan in connection with the organization and holding of the Formula 1 Azerbaijan Grand Prix 2023, Trend reports.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/29/2023

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Government, EU and World Bank Review Progress of the Rapid Technical Assistance Facility for Azerbaijan

Today, the Ministry of Economy of Azerbaijan, European Union (EU) and World Bank (WB), together with partners and colleagues from the government, development community, civil society, academia and media, met to review the implementation of the Azerbaijan Rapid Technical Assistance Facility (AZTAF). AZTAF is a three-year program with a total budget of Euro 5.25 million funded by the EU and managed by the World Bank. Its objective is to provide advisory and analytical support and capacity building to the Government of Azerbaijan in line with the Azerbaijan 2030 National Priorities, to support enhanced social inclusion and connectivity, spur economic reforms, strengthen public sector governance, and facilitate an effective COVID-19 recovery. The AZTAF program includes a series of programmatic and on-demand activities that are aligned with the four priority areas of the EU-Azerbaijan Partnership Priorities, namely i) strengthening institutions and good governance; ii) economic development and market opportunities; iii) connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate action; iv) mobility and people-to-people contacts.

“The European Union is a committed partner in supporting the socio-economic development of Azerbaijan,” said Ambassador of the European Union to Azerbaijan Peter Michalko. “Through this partnership, together with the World Bank and our government counterparts, we are focusing our interventions on strategic areas that are key to equitable, inclusive and lasting growth. Important achievements have been reported today across all these sectors. We will continue to work together in the years to come, sharing European expertise and international best practices and, ultimately contributing to strong partnership between the EU and Azerbaijan.” AZTAF has nine technical assistance activities that build on the World Bank Group’s ongoing and long-standing engagements in areas such as inclusive growth, public and corporate governance, green environment and sustainable development, human capital development and social inclusion.

“The World Bank Group is currently embarking on developing its new Country Partnership Framework for Azerbaijan, which will be aligned with the country’s strategic goals and priorities and the Azerbaijan 2030 vision. We expect that

successful implementation of AZTAF will not only have immediate benefits for the population, but will also help to create a solid analytical foundation and source of innovation for the new projects and initiatives to be included in our program in the country moving forward.”, said Sarah Michael, World Bank Country Manager for Azerbaijan. This meeting is the first in a series of public events to discuss the progress and impact of the AZTAF program, and to engage with stakeholders and the broader public on details of each activity – and will help to ensure strong synergies and mutual learning with other initiatives in the country.

The European Union is made up of 27 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of more than 60 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders. With 189 member countries and offices in over 130 locations, the World Bank is a unique global partnership working to reduce poverty and build shared prosperity in developing countries. 2022 marked the 30th anniversary of Azerbaijan’s membership in the World Bank. Since 1992, the World Bank has financed over 50 projects in the country, with total commitments of \$4.4 billion, spanning many national development priorities, including building human capital, strengthening access to infrastructure, public services and jobs, investing in agricultural competitiveness and rural development, and supporting the livelihoods of internally displaced persons.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 03/29/2023

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TURKMENISTAN: Discussing Food Security Issues with Central Asian Countries

The ministers of Agriculture of Central Asian states discussed issues related to the partnership in the field of food security in the context of climate change in the framework of an international forum held in the capital of Turkmenistan Ashgabat, Trend reports with reference to the Turkmen media. The two-day forum, held on the initiative of President of Turkmenistan Serdar Berdimuhamedov, was organized by the Turkmen Government jointly with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) with the support of the UN Resident Coordinator for Turkmenistan. The meeting, held in a hybrid format, was attended by the FAO Sub-Regional Coordinator for Central Asia Viorel Gutu, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia Vladimir Rakhmanin, heads of relevant ministries of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, as well as representatives from Iran. During the discussion of the issues on the agenda of the meeting, the close relationship of climate change, food systems and socio-economic conditions was noted. One of the important elements in strengthening food security, including the smooth functioning of global

agricultural production, was identified as the sustainability of transport chains of food delivery. Summing up the results of the ministerial meeting, the constructive exchange of views on various aspects related to further ways of implementing regional cooperation for the development of sustainable agriculture adapted to climate change and its consequences was emphasized. In this regard, the importance of intensifying cooperation between the relevant departments of the Central Asian countries with the participation of such a major UN structure as the FAO was noted.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/10/2023

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Turkmenistan Discloses Top Banks by Number of ATMs

Turkmenistan's Dayhanbank State Commercial Bank has become the market leader in the number of ATMs, Trend reports with reference to the Central Bank of Turkmenistan. Dayhanbank has 1,022 ATMs as of the beginning of March 2023. Turkmenistan State Commercial Bank ranks second in this indicator with 437 ATMs, and the Turkmenbashi Joint-Stock Commercial Bank closes the top 3 with 357 ATMs. At the same time, Dayhanbank ATMs are located mainly in the regions of Turkmenistan. Thus, most of the bank's ATMs are located in the Mary (275), Lebap (263), and Dashoguz (196) regions. The other two ranking leaders, Turkmenistan and Turkmenbashi, have most of their ATMs located in Ashgabat - 205 and 92, respectively. The table below shows the full rating of banks in Turkmenistan by the number of ATMs as of 01.03.2023:

Bank:	Number of ATMs
Dayhanbank State Commercial Bank of Turkmenistan	1 022
Turkmenistan State Commercial Bank	437
Turkmenbashi Joint-Stock Commercial Bank	357
Halkbank Joint-Stock Commercial Bank	143
Senagat Joint-Stock Commercial Bank	92
State Bank for Foreign Economic Affairs of Turkmenistan	50
Rysgal Joint-Stock Commercial Bank	20
Turkmen-Turkish Joint-Stock Commercial Bank	10
Total number of ATMs	2 131

Turkmenistan's financial sector is constantly expanding. In particular, mobile applications are being introduced, as well as the number of transactions, ATMs and terminals is increasing. For example, over the past six years, the number of ATMs in the country has increased from 1,886 to 2,144 units.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/25/2023

UZBEKISTAN: Making Reforms to Education System

Improving the field of education is one of the priority areas in Uzbekistan. In recent years, a number of laws and resolutions have been adopted to improve and develop the school education system. "I have been working as the head of a school for 25 years," said Dilnoza Ismailova. "In the new Uzbekistan, deep reforms are taking place in every field, and the school education system is also demonstrating its importance." All of the reforms are aimed at preparing each child in the country for a comprehensive education, considering individual characteristics and providing them with a personalised education within the school.

From <https://uzreport.news/> 03/29/2023

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: New Incentives to Encourage More Cops to Go Bush

Police relocating to work in some of the State's more remote communities will be backed with cash payments of up to \$36,000 and more career development opportunities under a modern new incentives scheme, announced by the NSW Liberal and Nationals Government in Broken Hill today. The scheme, to be rolled out from July 1, will see an additional investment of \$7.5 million over the next five years. Deputy Premier, Minister for Regional NSW and Minister for Police Paul Toole said the scheme took a new approach to incentivising officers to go bush and become part of regional communities like Broken Hill, Wentworth and Hay. "These new incentives aren't just about encouraging officers to move to the bush, it's about encouraging them to stay in these communities for up to five years, building their capabilities and gaining incredible career experience in a job that is like no other in the Force," Mr Toole said.

"It rewards relocation and retention and gives officers the flexibility to invest these incentive payments in what matters to them and their families. "It's an investment in the police who work across large areas in some of the most remote parts of the State to keep their communities safe." The new incentives beginning on July 1 2023 and shaped by officer feedback include: Increased payments to up to \$36,000 over five years for officers who move to select regional locations Housing provided by NSW Police at specific locations at a rate of 3 per cent of an officer's salary per annum – well below the rental market rate Reduced mandatory tenure periods at identified locations to allow greater mobility opportunities for officers Additional funding to support officers in remote and special remote areas to travel and build their capabilities and career

Under the current arrangements an officer who transferred to Broken Hill Police Station would receive a one-off payment and additional incentives up to the value of \$9000 over five years. Under the new incentives model, this will increase to \$36,000 over five years split over annual payments. NSW Police Commissioner Karen Webb said the new scheme would provide a great opportunity for officers looking to make a change and diversify their skills to relocate to a regional position. "Policing in regional NSW brings a whole new set of skills to learn, and the rewards gained from working closely with small and unique communities is an experience you just can't get in the big cities," Commissioner Webb said. "We acknowledge that it is currently a very competitive labour market and the NSW Police Force will continue to strive towards providing the best benefits and working conditions possible to nurture and develop our officers.

"The enhanced regional incentives package is another step forward by the NSW Police Force in creating a flexible and accommodating workplace, delivering world class policing across the entire state." Deputy Commissioner Regional NSW Field Operations Paul Pisanos said the NSW Police Force has listened to the needs and concerns of regional officers in formulating the enhanced package. "We have consolidated the current financial and non-financial incentives into a more modern and flexible package, with greater financial benefits offered to officers who choose to relocate to our traditionally hard-to-fill locations," Deputy Commissioner Pisanos said. "In my opinion, policing doesn't get any better than policing out in the regions – you become fully immersed in local communities and develop a new set of skills that will follow you throughout your career.

"The bush is renowned for its hospitality, however moving to a new town can also be daunting, especially when moving with a family. "We want to highlight and enhance the benefits of these locations and promote retention, while providing as much financial support as possible to our regional officers and their families." Police Association President Kevin Morton welcomed the move. "This is about getting police in the right place at the right time. Our members operate at the heart of these remote communities and go above and beyond to protect and serve," Mr Morton said. "For too long, police stations in remote areas have struggled to attract police officers. These improved incentives will go a long way to attract officers to serve these rural communities.

"This is a significant financial win that will go a long way to retain our members in the bush who elect to police our most remote and regional communities, rewarding them for their ongoing commitment." The new incentives scheme will apply to officers transferring to 55 communities classified as remote, special remote and remote offshore locations including Broken Hill, Hay, Wee Waa, Walgett, Wentworth and Coonamble. Officers currently attached to remote and special remote locations who have been stationed at those locations for more than five years will also benefit from

a one-off payment of \$4,300. The new scheme is part of a landmark investment of more than \$100 million by the NSW Liberal and Nationals Government, announced last year, to recruit, retain and better take care of our police at every stage of their career.

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 03/01/2023

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Funding Boost for Research into Deadly Cancers Affecting Women

A re-elected NSW Liberals and Nationals Government will shine a spotlight on deadly cancers affecting women by providing \$7 million in research grants for ovarian and other gynaecological cancers. This will include the provision of a \$5 million Translational Research Grant and four \$500,000 fellowships to support research and pave the way for future improvements to treatments. Premier Dominic Perrottet said this will help shine a spotlight on two of the most deadly cancers affecting women. "We want to give women affected by these terrible diseases, which often have very poor prognoses, the best chance of survival," Mr Perrottet said. "These grants are important in enabling the very best researchers to continue their work to help improve survival rates for these awful cancers.

"The better we can understand these deadly diseases, the better we can tailor treatments for women and improve their chances of being able to overcome them." Health Minister Brad Hazzard said gynaecological cancers vary in prevalence and can have very poor prognoses. "For ovarian cancer specifically, just over half (51 per cent) of women diagnosed will not survive five years. This is a tragic statistic we need to turn around and by investing in research we can try to achieve this," Mr Hazzard said. "Translational research helps us understand how innovations may work in the real world and on a large scale and aims to quickly bring these new ideas from benchtop to bedside and improve outcomes for patients."

Minister for Women and Regional Health Bronnie Taylor said the \$7 million in additional funding will bring new hope for women suffering from cancers of the female reproductive system. "Fellowships fund researchers to continue their important work at an early-middle stage of their career, ensuring we maintain a pipeline of world-class researchers right here in NSW," Mrs Taylor said. "By investing in early-mid career researchers with a focus on gynaecological cancers, we aim to accelerate the journey toward potential new treatments and interventions for these deadly women's cancers." Gynaecological cancers include ovarian cancer, uterine or endometrial cancer, cancer of the fallopian tubes, primary peritoneal cancer, cervical cancer and vaginal cancer.

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 03/12/2023

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NEW ZEALAND: Government Delivers on Dawn Raids Commitment

The Government is today delivering on one of its commitments as part of the New Zealand Government's Dawn Raids apology, welcoming a cohort of emerging Pacific leaders to Aotearoa New Zealand participating in the He Manawa Tītī Scholarship Programme. This cohort will participate in a bespoke leadership training programme that supports partner countries to build knowledge and skills. "On August 1 2021 the New Zealand Government offered a formal apology for the 1970's Dawn Raids, and today marks another new chapter and step along the reconciliation journey as we strengthen our ties between Aotearoa New Zealand, tangata whenua and the Pacific," Deputy Prime Minister and Associate Minister of Foreign Affairs (Pacific Region) Carmel Sepuloni said.

"In welcoming this cohort of emerging Pacific leaders to Aotearoa New Zealand, we're embracing the opportunity to grow a generation of Pacific leaders that will gain the knowledge and understanding to make a difference to their communities and countries," Carmel Sepuloni said. "Fifty years on from the Dawn Raids, the Pacific story continues to evolve, and these scholarships underline our Government's ongoing commitment to fostering pathways and opportunities for Pacific peoples to contribute to the chapters of that story. "As part of that story, strong and balanced leadership, across all sectors of society, is critical to the sustainable development of Pacific Island nations. The nations of Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu, from which the emerging leaders come from, will be well-served by fruits of this scholarship programme.

"He Manawa Tītī scholarships take their name from the Māori whakatauki meaning 'a person of great endurance,' and aim to increase leadership knowledge and skills for emerging Pacific leaders in the public, private and voluntary sectors; and enhance public and civil society sector efficiency and effectiveness," Carmel Sepuloni said. The Minister for Pacific Peoples Barbara Edmonds has heralded the new cohort as another step forward towards a more united Pacific future across Aotearoa New Zealand. "Through delivering on our reconciliation commitments, we are strengthening our ties with our wider Pacific whānau and ensuring that we truly learn from our past," Barbara Edmonds said. "This programme complements existing long-term reconciliation efforts including, the Ministry of Education's Tūlī Takes Flight scholarships offered for Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Teu le Va – Dawn Raids History Community Fund.

"As our Pacific story continues to evolve, these scholarships provide an opportunity to build proud and confident Pacific leaders who can support our communities here and in our region to thrive," Barbara Edmonds said. "Minster Edmonds and I look forward to following these scholars and their leadership achievements throughout the He Manawa Tītī training programme, and over the coming years" Carmel Sepuloni

said. He Manawa Tīti scholarships form part of the goodwill gesture of reconciliation marking the New Zealand Government's apology for the Dawn Raids. These Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade scholarships, developed for Pacific peoples in the Pacific, complement the Ministry of Education's Tūti Takes Flight scholarships offered for Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand. The twenty-eight recipients, aged between 25 and 35, will be in Aotearoa New Zealand for just over two months for the He Manawa Tīti scholarships leadership training programme.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 03/13/2023

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World-Leading Family Harm Prevention Campaign Supports Young Nzers

Associate Minister for Social Development and Employment Priyanca Radhakrishnan has today launched the Love Better campaign in a world-leading approach to family harm prevention. Love Better will initially support young people through their experience of break-ups, developing positive and life-long attitudes to dealing with hurt. "Over 1,200 young kiwis told us they need support to deal with early experiences of love and hurt, and break-ups were identified as a common challenge," Priyanca Radhakrishnan said. "We know that break-ups hurt. We want to support our young people to deal with the hurt and know that there is a way through without harming themselves or others. "By supporting young people through these formative experiences, we can positively impact how they approach future relationships.

"Love Better, which asks young people to 'own the feels,' is a primary prevention campaign that features young people sharing real stories to help their peers who may be going through similar experiences. "This is an authentic way to inspire others to build their own strength, self-worth, and resilience. "This approach hasn't been trialled by any government around the world. New Zealand has shameful statistics of family and sexual violence and we need innovative approaches to break the cycle," Priyanca Radhakrishnan said. Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence and Sexual Violence Marama Davidson welcomed the innovative new campaign as a positive way of getting rangatahi talking about the tough emotions of relationships and break-ups.

"The launch of Love Better continues the government's delivery on Te Aorerekura – New Zealand's first ever National Strategy to Eliminate Family Violence and Sexual Violence. "Since the launch of Te Aorerekura and our initial Action Plan in December 2021, all 40 actions are underway. We have cross-agency support and Ministers taking collective action to identify opportunities for minimising harm, improving the safety of responses and strengthening violence prevention and intervention. "This campaign sits alongside work already underway to support young people with healthy boundaries and attitudes to relationships, including the refresh of the school

curriculum.”

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 03/22/2023

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Government Delivers Levy Change to Support Fire and Emergency

The Government has passed new legislation amending the Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) levy regime, ensuring the best balance between a fair and cost effective funding model. The Fire and Emergency New Zealand (Levy) Amendment Bill makes changes to the existing law to: charge the levy on contracts of insurance for fire damage; calculate the levy on the sum insured in an insurance contract for fire damage; clarify how the levy applies to motor vehicles; and amend the commencement date for the new levy framework to 1 July 2026. “Fire and Emergency New Zealand provide services that play a critical role in keeping our whānau, communities and whenua safe,” Internal Affairs Minister Barbara Edmonds said. “With FENZ funded by a 97 percent levy collection on insurance policies, it’s important that we ensure a fit-for-purpose funding model that supports their work.

“These changes will make the current framework more predictable and stable for both FENZ and levy payers. It will also ensure that the administration for insurance companies and brokers is much simpler. “Under the new provisions, greater clarity will be given to which insurance arrangements will have the levy applied, simplifying levy calculations and avoiding some properties being charged twice. “We have also amended the start date of the new levy system which will now come into force on 1 July 2026. This extension will give the insurance sector more time to implement the new system, along with time for associated regulations to be completed. “By getting this framework right, we are delivering on a more effective and efficient levy regime that benefits insurance holders. These changes will reduce cost pressures on the insurance sector, keeping costs lower for New Zealanders. “Passing this legislation is a significant milestone towards realising the benefits of the levy regime in the FENZ Act and will support FENZ to continue delivering services when we need them most,” Barbara Edmonds said.

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4、 Economic and Social Development and ICT

Asia-Pacific

Strengthen Productivity to Boost Living Standards and Prioritise the Low-Carbon Transition, Says OECD

Canada's economy has fully recovered from the COVID-19 crisis but faces risks from high inflation and global economic uncertainties stemming from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, according to a new OECD report. The latest OECD Economic Survey of Canada says faster growth in living standards will require strengthening the business environment, to bring Canada's weak productivity and investment growth back in line with leading OECD economies. Reforms to improve tax and spending efficiency would help federal and provincial governments to keep financing key commitments without putting pressure on budgets. Canada's economic output recovered to pre-pandemic levels by early 2022. Global price pressures have since driven up inflation, albeit by less than in many other OECD countries. As an open economy, Canada will be vulnerable going forward to any sudden slowing in global demand and to volatility in commodity and financial markets from the war in Ukraine.

"Like many economies, Canada faces the difficult challenge of tackling inflation without undermining economic activity," OECD Acting Chief Economist Alvaro Pereira said, presenting the Survey at an event in Ottawa hosted by the Canadian Association of Business Economics and the Ottawa Economics Association. "Fiscal and monetary policy need to work in tandem to ease inflation pressures while governments shore up public finances. Meanwhile more needs to be done to strengthen productivity through removing barriers to internal trade and competition." The Survey welcomes action taken by the federal government to ease cost-of-living pressures, including through increased access to affordable childcare and reduced housing costs for low-income households. In the short term, as cost-of-living increases erode real incomes, it will also be vital to continue targeted support to vulnerable households, favouring use of income support over across-the-board energy cost measures.

The Survey presents updated projections of GDP growth of 1.3% for 2023 and 1.5% for 2024. Tight monetary policy over the past year will help drive down inflation towards 2% by the end of 2024. Public finances are also expected to have strengthened in 2022, helped in part by revenue boosts from higher commodity prices. The consolidated fiscal deficit across all levels of government is estimated to have shrunk to 0.6% of GDP in 2022 after peaking at 11.4% in 2020. An ongoing review of competition legislation is a positive step towards bolstering the business climate. The Survey recommends prioritising the lightening of restrictions on foreign ownership in relevant sectors and adapting competition law to handle challenges related to Big Tech. These include barriers to firm entry linked to data access, abusive and exclusionary practices, and lock-in of consumers and businesses to service providers. More can also be done to lower inter-provincial trade barriers and to ease regulatory burdens on businesses.

The Survey also underscores the challenges Canada faces in reaching its climate policy goals. As a major producer of heavy crude oil and natural gas, Canada emits

more greenhouse gas emissions per person than most other OECD countries. Its weather and geography contribute to large energy requirements to heat homes, and transport people and goods across large distances, which also drives up the emission-intensity of its economic activity. The government has put in place multiple policies to decarbonise the economy, but achieving its climate targets and reaching net zero by 2050 will require deep energy savings and widespread action to replace fossil fuels with clean energy. Federal and sub-national governments will need to work together to ensure complementary climate policies create strong incentives for greener production, without a large toll on the economy. See an Overview of the Survey with key findings and charts (this link can be included in media articles). For further information, journalists are invited to contact Lawrence Speer in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 45 24 80 97). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 03/06/2023

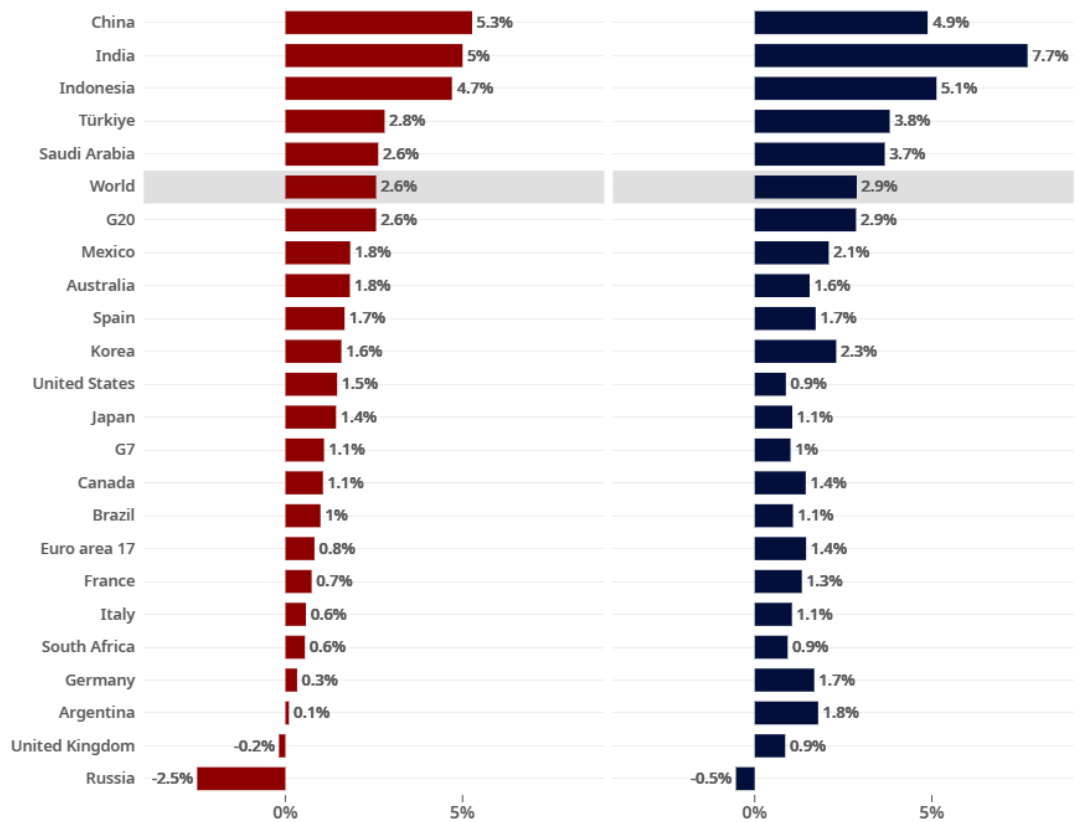
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Economic Outlook: Slightly More Optimistic but Fragile, Says OECD

On the back of improved business and consumer confidence, declining food and energy prices and the re-opening of the Chinese economy, the OECD's latest Interim Economic Outlook projects global growth to reach 2.6% in 2023 and 2.9% in 2024. Headline inflation is projected to recede gradually through 2023 in most G20 countries, from 8.1% in 2022 to 5.9% in 2023 and 4.5% in 2024. This is due to tighter monetary policy taking effect, energy prices easing after a mild winter in Europe, and global food prices declining. However, core inflation remains persistent, held up by strong service price increases and cost pressures from tight labour markets. Inflationary pressures will require many central banks to maintain high policy rates well into 2024.

Real GDP growth projections for 2023 and 2024

Year-over-year, %



Source: OECD Economic Outlook, Interim Report March 2023

Annual GDP growth in the United States is projected at 1.5% in 2023 and 0.9% in 2024 as monetary policy moderates demand pressures. In the euro area, growth is projected to be 0.8% in 2023, but pick up to 1.5% in 2024 as the drag on incomes from high energy prices recedes. Growth in China is expected to rebound to 5.3% this year and 4.9% in 2024. “The outlook today is slightly more optimistic than our previous forecasts, though the global economy remains fragile,” OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann said. “Some key risks, such as persistent large-scale energy and food market disruptions have been mitigated for now, however Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, persistence in services inflation, financial market turbulence, and the steady decline in underlying growth prospects, could be sources of further disruption. More targeted fiscal support and structural reforms to revive productivity growth will be key to optimising the recovery and long-term growth prospects.”

The OECD notes that the improvement in the outlook is at an early stage, and risks remain tilted to the downside. Uncertainty about the course of the war in Ukraine and its broader consequences is a key concern. The overall impact from monetary policy changes is difficult to gauge and could continue to expose financial and banking sector vulnerabilities and make it more difficult for some emerging market economies

to service their debts. Pressures in global energy markets could also reappear, leading to renewed price spikes, and higher inflationary pressures. Monetary policy needs to stay the course until there are clear signs that underlying inflationary pressures are lowered durably. Fiscal support should be prudent and needs to become more focused on those most in need to mitigate the impact of high food and energy prices. Better targeting and a timely reduction in overall support would help to ensure fiscal sustainability, preserve incentives to lower energy use, and limit additional demand stimulus at a time of high inflation.

Rekindling structural reform efforts is needed to revive productivity growth and alleviate supply constraints. Enhancing business dynamism, lowering barriers to cross-border trade and economic migration and fostering flexible and inclusive labour markets would boost competition, mitigate supply shortages and strengthen gains from digitalisation. For the full report and more information, visit the Economic Outlook online. Media queries should be directed to the OECD Media Office (+33 1 4524 9700) Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 03/17/2023

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Global Economy’s “Speed Limit” Set to Fall to Three-Decade Low

The global economy’s “speed limit”—the maximum long-term rate at which it can grow without sparking inflation—is set to slump to a three-decade low by 2030. An ambitious policy push is needed to boost productivity and the labor supply, ramp up investment and trade, and harness the potential of the services sector, a new World Bank report shows. The report, *Falling Long-Term Growth Prospects: Trends, Expectations, and Policies*, offers the first comprehensive assessment of long-term potential output growth rates in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These rates can be thought of as the global economy’s “speed limit.” The report documents a worrisome trend: nearly all the economic forces that powered progress and prosperity over the last three decades are fading. As a result, between 2022 and 2030 average global potential GDP growth is expected to decline by roughly a third from the rate that prevailed in the first decade of this century—to 2.2% a year. For developing economies, the decline will be equally steep: from 6% a year between 2000 and 2010 to 4% a year over the remainder of this decade. These declines would be much steeper in the event of a global financial crisis or a recession. “A lost decade could be in the making for the global economy,” said Indermit Gill, the World Bank’s Chief Economist and Senior Vice President for Development Economics. “The ongoing decline in potential growth has serious implications for the world’s ability to tackle the expanding array of challenges unique to our times—stubborn poverty, diverging incomes, and climate change. But this decline is reversible. The global economy’s speed limit can be

raised—through policies that incentivize work, increase productivity, and accelerate investment.”

The analysis shows that potential GDP growth can be boosted by as much as 0.7 percentage points—to an annual average rate of 2.9%—if countries adopt sustainable, growth-oriented policies. That would convert an expected slowdown into an acceleration of global potential GDP growth. “We owe it to future generations to formulate policies that can deliver robust, sustainable, and inclusive growth,” said Ayhan Kose, a lead author of the report and Director of the World Bank’s Prospects Group. “A bold and collective policy push must be made now to rejuvenate growth. At the national level, each developing economy will need to repeat its best 10-year record across a range of policies. At the international level, the policy response requires stronger global cooperation and a reenergized push to mobilize private capital.” The report lays out an extensive menu of achievable policy options, breaking new ground in several areas. It introduces the world’s first comprehensive public database of multiple measures of potential GDP growth—covering 173 economies from 1981 through 2021. It is also the first to assess how a range of short-term economic disruptions—such as recessions and systemic banking crises—reduce potential growth over the medium term. “Recessions tend to lower potential growth,” said Franziska Ohnsorge, a lead author of the report and Manager of the World Bank’s Prospects Group. “Systemic banking crises do greater immediate harm than recessions, but their impact tends to ease over time.”

The report highlights specific policy actions at the national level that can make an important difference in promoting long-term growth prospects: Align monetary, fiscal, and financial frameworks: Robust macroeconomic and financial policy frameworks can moderate the ups and downs of business cycles. Policymakers should prioritize taming inflation, ensuring financial-sector stability, reducing debt, and restoring fiscal prudence. These policies can help countries attract investment by instilling investor confidence in national institutions and policymaking. Ramp up investment: In areas such as transportation and energy, climate-smart agriculture and manufacturing, and land and water systems, sound investments aligned with key climate goals could enhance potential growth by up to 0.3 percentage point per year as well as strengthen resilience to natural disasters in the future. Cut trade costs: Trade costs—mostly associated with shipping, logistics, and regulations—effectively double the cost of internationally traded goods today. Countries with the highest shipping and logistics costs could cut their trade costs in half by adopting the trade-facilitation and other practices of countries with the lowest shipping and logistics costs. Trade costs, moreover, can be reduced in climate-friendly ways—by removing the current bias toward carbon-intensive goods inherent in many countries’ tariff schedules and by eliminating restrictions on access to environmentally friendly goods and services.

Capitalize on services: The services sector could become the new engine of

economic growth. Exports of digitally delivered professional services related to information and communications technology climbed to more than 50% of total services exports in 2021, up from 40% in 2019. The shift could generate important productivity gains if it results in better delivery of services. Increase labor force participation: About half of the expected slowdown in potential GDP growth through 2030 will be attributable to changing demographics—including a shrinking working-age population and declining labor force participation as societies age. Boosting overall labor force participation rates by the best ten-year increase on record could increase global potential growth rates by as much as 0.2 percentage point a year by 2030. In some regions—such as South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa—increasing female labor force participation rates to the average for all emerging market and developing economies could accelerate potential GDP growth by as much as 1.2 percentage points a year between 2022 and 2030. The report also underscores the need to strengthen global cooperation. International economic integration has helped to drive global prosperity for more than two decades since 1990, but it has faltered. Restoring it is essential to catalyze trade, accelerate climate action, and mobilize the investments needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

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Global Gas Flaring Falls to Lowest Level Since 2010

Progress in reducing gas flaring resumed in 2022, with gas flared worldwide falling by 5 billion cubic meters (bcm) to 139 bcm, its lowest level since 2010, according to new satellite data compiled by the World Bank's Global Gas Flaring Reduction Partnership (GGFR). "After a decade of stalled progress, global gas flaring volumes fell in 2022 by around three percent, which is a welcome drop, especially during a time of concern about energy security for many countries. We continue to encourage all oil producers to seize opportunities to end this polluting and wasteful practice," said Guangzhe Chen, World Bank Vice President for Infrastructure. Three countries, Nigeria, Mexico, and the United States, accounted for most of the decline in global gas flaring in 2022. Two other countries—Kazakhstan and Colombia—stand out for consistently reducing flaring volumes in the last seven years. In addition to the overall reduction in flare volume, global flaring intensity—the amount of flaring per barrel of oil produced—also fell to its lowest level since satellite data began, due to the 5 percent increase in oil production in 2022. This indicates a gradual and sustained decoupling of oil production from flaring.

Despite this progress, the top nine flaring countries continue to be responsible for the vast majority of flaring, with Russia, Iraq, Iran, Algeria, Venezuela, the United States, Mexico, Libya, and Nigeria accounting for nearly three-quarters of flare volumes and under half of global oil production. The satellite data shows that decreased Russian gas exports to the European Union did not increase gas flaring in Russia.

Throughout 2022, the European Union significantly increased its liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports from the United States, Angola, Norway, Qatar, and Egypt, and via pipeline from Azerbaijan and Norway. Of these countries, only the United States, Angola, and Egypt have made substantial progress in converting associated gas that would otherwise be flared into LNG exports. GGFR estimates that in 2022 gas flaring released 357 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents, 315 million tonnes in the form of carbon dioxide and 42 million tonnes in the form of methane. The report also considers the 'state of the science' and the uncertainty surrounding how much methane is released from flaring. It finds that methane emissions due to flaring could be significantly higher than previously estimated. For example, if the average flare is just five percentage points less efficient at combusting methane, then globally, the amount of methane released would be three times higher than currently estimated.

"We're concerned by the amount of methane emitted through flaring, particularly from flares that are not working properly. Methane is a far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide in the short term. So we need to understand this more and are ramping up our efforts to help developing countries tackle methane emissions," said Zubin Bamji, the World Bank's GGFR Program Manager. About: Gas flaring is the burning of natural gas associated with oil extraction. This wasted gas could displace dirtier energy sources, increase energy access in some of the world's poorest countries, and provide many countries worldwide with much-needed energy security. The World Bank's GGFR is a trust fund and partnership of governments, oil companies, and multilateral organizations working to end routine gas flaring at oil production sites around the world. GGFR helps identify solutions to the array of technical, economic and regulatory barriers to flaring reduction. GGFR, in partnership with the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Payne Institute at the Colorado School of Mines, has developed global gas flaring estimates based upon observations from two satellites, launched in 2012 and 2017. The advanced sensors of these satellites detect the heat emitted by gas flares as infrared emissions at global upstream oil and gas facilities.

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New World Bank Regional Hub Signals Growing Commitment to the North Pacific

The World Bank has officially opened a permanent office in Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia, following several years of an expanding presence and portfolio across the North Pacific. The new regional hub will play a vital role in delivering the near half-billion USD in total support across Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Marshall Islands, and Palau. World Bank assistance across the three countries has grown rapidly in recent years, with the number of projects tripling between 2016 and 2023 and amount of financing increasing six-fold. These projects include support for communities in Marshall Islands to prepare for the impacts of climate change; work

to scale up renewable energy in Marshall Islands and FSM; an expansion of digital connectivity and the digital economy in FSM, Marshall Islands and Palau; improved maritime and road transport in FSM; and support for Early Childhood Development initiatives in Marshall Islands.

“We’re pleased to have the opportunity to host this important new hub for the World Bank in Pohnpei State,” said David W. Panuelo, President of the Federated States of Micronesia, who attended the opening event. “While we are honored the World Bank has selected the Federated States of Micronesia for their hub, it is important to make clear that this center is for our use and the use of our brothers and sisters in the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau equally, and we call on our North Pacific neighbors to treat this as their own asset, and link into the World Bank’s data, knowledge, and experience – as well as The FSM’s.” President Panuelo was joined at the opening by Marshall Islands’ Minister of Finance, the Hon. Brenson Wase, with official remarks also delivered by Palau’s Minister of Finance, the Hon. Kaleb Udui, Jr. The World Bank’s total commitment to the North Pacific has increased from US\$76.9 million in 2016 to US\$486.2 million in 2023. All support is delivered in the form of grants from the International Development Association, the World Bank’s fund for the world’s most in-need countries.

“Our growing commitment and deepening relationship with the governments and people of the North Pacific are clearly reflected in the size and ambition of our portfolio of projects here,” said Stephen Ndegwa, World Bank Country Director for the Pacific Islands and Papua New Guinea. “While we’re proud of our existing work to drive digital transformation, early childhood health and education, oceans management, and climate adaptation in the region – I am pleased that this important hub will deepen our local knowledge and strengthen our North Pacific team on the ground.” “As the first Resident Representative of the World Bank in the North Pacific, I look forward to expanding our presence and bringing more North Pacific knowledge, culture, and spirit of inclusiveness into the way we work both here and across the Pacific,” said Degi Young, World Bank Resident Representative for the North Pacific. “This new space is an invitation for greater collaboration and will mark an increase in North Pacific people’s representation and engagement within our portfolio – I look forward to seeing how that changes our assistance and support, for the better.”

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Unlocking Brighter Futures Through Investment and Institutional Strengthening in Early Childhood Development

Investment in Early Childhood Development (ECD) is one of the most important tools available to ensure children benefit from formal schooling, and later in life, from improved health, social, and economic outcomes, to reduce the intergenerational transmission of poverty. In light of this, the World Bank and South Africa’s

Department of Basic Education jointly launched the Public Expenditure and Institutional Review (PEIR) for Early Childhood Development in Pretoria today. Speaking at the event, South Africa's Minister of Basic Education, Angelina Matsie Motshekga emphasized the importance of investing in Early Childhood Development Centers to reduce poverty, improve academic performance, and decrease the probability of prematurely dropping out of school. The purpose of the PEIR is to inform planning and programming to help ensure all young children in South Africa receive a comprehensive package of integrated ECD services to build the foundations to thrive later in life. The PEIR presents new evidence on public expenditure on early learning, support for families, and early nutrition services to promote ECD. Based on this evidence, it identifies opportunities to increase and improve public expenditure to support further expansion of ECD services and quality improvements. This is combined with suggestions on how to strengthen inter-departmental and cross-government collaboration to ensure improved delivery of ECD services.

"The PEIR recommends that increased investment in ECD should focus on a set of critical actions with the highest expected returns, combined with targeting of groups of children that are at a disadvantage in terms of access to ECD services," says Asmeen Khan, World Bank Manager of Operations, for Southern Africa, responsible for Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, and South Africa. "The indicative cost of implementing these actions to reduce child malnutrition and improve access to and the quality of early learning is just over R11 billion annually which is minimal when we consider the potential benefits of these investments in terms of child development." The PEIR finds that a substantial increase in funding for the ECD system is required if the Government of South Africa's goals of reduced malnutrition in the early years and improved early learning are to be achieved. To adequately fund the ECD system is challenging in an environment of limited fiscal resources and uncertainty over the future economic outlook. Therefore, additional investments in ECD should involve focusing on a set of key services with the highest expected returns, sequenced to ensure fiscal affordability, as well as targeting of additional funding to groups of children, currently at a disadvantage in terms of access to ECD services. Increasing access to early learning services will require three priority actions: (i) streamlining the processes for ECD programme registration and subsidy application in cooperation with private intermediaries; (ii) increasing access to infrastructure grants for private providers of ECD programmes; and (iii) providing provinces with sufficient funds to provide subsidies for all children attending ECD programmes who meet the eligibility criteria, while returning the subsidy amount to the equivalent of its 2015 value.

Five priority actions for improving the quality of early learning services were identified as: (i) conducting a capacity needs assessment of the Department of Basic Education and provincial departments of education, and recruiting and training staff as required given the ECD function shift; (ii) regularly measuring child development outcomes, including for those not attending ECD programmes; (iii) establishing a

system to assure the quality of ECD programmes that is focused on supporting and incentivising providers to improve quality; (iv) training ECD practitioners to follow effective child development practices; and (v) improving the attractiveness of a career as an ECD practitioner through higher remuneration. In order to reduce malnutrition in the early years, the PEIR presents two main priorities: (i) allowing women to apply for the child support grant (CSG) during the second trimester to be processed during pregnancy, and (ii) raising the CSG amount for children ages 0-24 months from its current level to cover a basic per child food cost. Lastly, the PEIR recommends strengthening the institutional arrangements for ECD service delivery by (i) reviving and strengthening existing coordination structures and linkages in the ECD system and (ii) working towards holistic planning, budgeting and implementation, to ensure adequate funding that is efficiently allocated, to help achieve the desired ECD outcomes of reduced malnutrition in the early years and improved early learning.

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Global Crises Further Threaten Progress on SDGs: ADB–UN Report

The convergence of multiple global crises is further jeopardizing Asia and the Pacific’s ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, according to a report released today by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The polycrisis—referring to major economic and social crises including severe climate change, impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine—has caused severe disruptions to energy, food, and finance systems in the region. It has introduced new and intensified shocks and stresses, especially for the most vulnerable groups, according to *Delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals through Solutions at the Energy, Food and Finance Nexus*.

“These crises created a perfect storm that has derailed the global economy, the livelihoods of millions of people in Asia and the Pacific, and progress toward the SDGs,” said ADB Managing Director General Woonchong Um. “However, this could be a historic turning point toward a more secure future, initiating renewed momentum to transform food and energy systems. Emerging from the polycrisis and building systemic resilience will require countries to respond to these immediate vulnerabilities while also maintaining focus on longer-term development objectives.” The report notes that without substantial progress on climate change mitigation, climate-related disasters will become more frequent and extreme. Preparing Asia and the Pacific to navigate ongoing and future crises will require coordinated efforts from governments and nonstate actors at regional, subregional, national, subnational, and local levels, to bring about inclusive transformation of energy, food, and finance

systems.

To build more sustainable and inclusive energy and food systems, the report calls for scaling up technology, policy frameworks, and social innovations to increase efficiency and yields, reduce environmental degradation, and add value for farmers and consumers. Amid fiscal constraints, innovative financing solutions will be critical. To boost investments in the SDGs, governments need to recalibrate public financial management by aligning SDGs to national budget processes and exploring new sources of revenue, the report says. Scaling up private sector financing for the SDGs is crucial, including by promoting the use of the SDG framework for impact measurement in investments. Regional and subregional initiatives such as lowering trade barriers will also promote food and energy security.

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East Asia and Pacific Regional Growth to Accelerate as China Rebounds

Growth in developing East Asia and the Pacific is forecast to accelerate in 2023 as China's economy reopens, while the pace of growth in most of the economies in the rest of the region is anticipated to ease after a strong rebound last year, a World Bank report said on Thursday. Economic performance across the region, while robust, could be held back this year by slowing global growth, elevated commodity prices, and tightening financial conditions in response to persistent inflation, according to the World Bank's East Asia and Pacific April 2023 Economic Update. Growth in developing East Asia and the Pacific is forecast to accelerate to 5.1% in 2023 from 3.5% in 2022, as China's reopening helps the economy rebound to a 5.1% pace from 3% last year. Growth in the region outside China is anticipated to moderate to 4.9% from the robust post-COVID-19 rebound of 5.8% in 2022, as inflation and elevated household debt in some countries weigh on consumption.

"Most major economies of East Asia and the Pacific have come through the difficulties of the pandemic but must now navigate a changed global landscape," said World Bank East Asia and Pacific Vice President Manuela V. Ferro. "To regain momentum, there is work left to do to boost innovation, productivity, and to set the foundations for a greener recovery." Among the larger economies of the region, most, including Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, are anticipated to grow more modestly in 2023 than in 2022. Most Pacific Island countries are forecast to grow faster in 2023, but Fiji's exceptionally strong economic pace in 2022 is likely to moderate. Most countries in the EAP region have seen two decades of higher and more stable growth than economies in other regions. The result has been a striking decline in poverty and, in the last decade, also a decline in inequality. However, the catch-up to the per capita income levels of advanced economies has stalled in recent years as productivity growth and the pace of structural reforms has slowed.

Addressing the significant “reform gap,” especially in services, could magnify the impact of the digital revolution and boost productivity in sectors from retail and finance to education and health.

The economies of the region must also cope with three important challenges as policymakers act to sustain and accelerate economic growth in the aftermath of COVID-19. Rising tensions between major trading partners will affect trade, investment, and technology flows across the region. The rapid aging of the major economies of East and Southeast Asia heralds a new set of challenges and risks with implications for economic growth, fiscal balances, and health. Finally, the region is particularly exposed to climate risks, in part due to the high density of population and economic activity along its coasts. “De-globalization, aging, and climate change are casting a shadow over the growth prospects of a region that has thrived through trade and is growing old fast,” said World Bank East Asia and Pacific Chief Economist Aaditya Mattoo. “However, promoting trade, addressing population dynamics, and enhancing climate resilience could strengthen growth.”

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East Asia

CHINA: Belt and Road Initiative Promotes Economic Growth, Improves People's Lives

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has facilitated economic growth and improved people's livelihood along the routes, a spokesperson said Friday. BRI construction has also brought effective investment and more quality assets to participant countries, said Guo Weimin, spokesperson for the first session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, at a press conference. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the BRI. By mid-February this year, China had signed cooperation agreements with 151 countries and 32 international organizations, and its annual trade value with countries along the Belt and Road almost doubled from 2013 to 2022, according to Guo. Responding to claims about China creating “debt traps,” Guo said such “noises” are baseless. China attaches great importance to the prevention of debt risks in pushing ahead with the BRI, and promotes a long-term, stable and sustainable investment and financing framework that keeps risks under control, he said. China will take the BRI's 10th anniversary as an opportunity to make greater progress in BRI construction and to further provide new energy and space for global economic cooperation, said Guo.

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China's Continued Economic Recovery to Help Stabilize Employment

China's continued economic recovery will provide solid support for stabilizing employment, a spokesperson said Friday. With the optimization and adjustment of epidemic prevention policies and further implementation of various measures to stabilize the economy, the Chinese economy will continue to recover and provide solid support in stabilizing employment, said Guo Weimin, spokesperson for the first session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). CPPCC National Committee members have put forward many good suggestions on how to promote employment, Guo said when answering questions at a press conference. Some CPPCC National Committee members believe that only when enterprises are stable can employment be stable, and only when enterprises grow can employment grow. Therefore, it is necessary to sustain and develop existing enterprises.

Some other members pointed out that it is necessary to speed up the development of new industries, and increase supportive and preferential efforts in such areas as finance, taxation and social security for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in order to maintain and create more jobs, Guo said. Some believe that the protection of the rights and interests of employees in industries including express delivery, take-away service and online ride-hailing should be strengthened, and the development of new employment forms should be actively promoted and guided, according to Guo. Stabilizing employment still faces many difficulties and challenges, according to Guo, given that it is estimated that there are more than 11.5 million college graduates this year. At the same time, there is a gap between workers' skills qualification and job requirements, and structural contradictions are prominent. Some CPPCC National Committee members suggest that it is necessary to innovate working ideas and methods for the employment of college graduates and introduce practical and effective measures to help them, which requires the joint efforts of the government, enterprises and relevant institutions as well as individuals.

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Chinese Premier Pledges to Focus Efforts on High-quality Development

Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Monday pledged to focus efforts on promoting high-quality development. As the world's second largest economy, China has made great progress in economic and social development, but its development is still imbalanced and inadequate, Li told a press conference held after the conclusion of the first session of the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature. Li added that any aggregate volume when divided by the 1.4 billion population will become a small per capita figure. Going forward, the focus of China's development will be shifted from providing for people's basic needs toward delivering a better life quality for the people, said the premier. In particular, Li said China will enhance the

capacity in science and technology as well as innovation, accelerate the building of a modern industrial system and advance transition toward green development.

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Institutional Strength an Advantage for China's Economic Development

Chinese Premier Li Qiang said Monday that the notable institutional strength is one of the advantages for China's economic development. China is facing multiple advantages and disadvantages in its economic development, Li told a press conference after the conclusion of the first session of the 14th National People's Congress. Its huge market, complete industrial system, rich supply of human resources, solid development foundation, and institutional strength have been supporting the country's development, Li said. Noting that disadvantages are challenging not only China but also the rest of the world, Li said the Chinese people have always managed to pull through difficult times and achieve new progress. Citing several stories of Chinese heroes, the premier highlighted that Chinese people, with resilience, tenacity and perseverance, have never been overwhelmed by any difficulty. Li said the economic performance over the past about two months has demonstrated that the Chinese economy is stabilizing and picking up again, and some international institutions have raised their forecasts for China's 2023 economic growth. "I believe the Chinese economy will brave the wind and waves and sail toward a brighter future," Li said.

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China Sees Historical Achievements in Law-based Cyberspace Governance

China has made historical achievements in law-based cyberspace governance in the new era since the 18th Communist Party of China (CPC) National Congress in 2012, said a senior official with the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) Thursday. With integrated development of cyber legislation, law enforcement, justice, and law popularization, China has been improving its law-based cyberspace governance system, said Cao Shumin, deputy head of the CAC, at a press conference on a white paper titled "China's Law-Based Cyberspace Governance in the New Era" released by the State Council Information Office. Cao said China will strengthen international cooperation in law-based cyberspace governance and contribute to a fair, rational, inclusive, safe, stable, and vibrant cyberspace. Yue Zhongming, an official with the Legislative Affairs Commission of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, said at the press conference that China had seen remarkable progress in cyber legislation and basically formed a cyber legislation framework since the 18th

CPC National Congress. Yue said China had enacted five specialized laws respectively on cyber security, e-commerce, data security, personal information, and anti-telecom fraud over the past 10 years. Legislation work is important to promoting law-based cyberspace governance, said Li Changxi, an official with the CAC, at the press conference, adding that China will further improve cyber legislation regarding data, platforms, and technology.

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China's Property Market Heading for Solid Recovery, Healthy Development

China's property market has seen a strong recovery after a tough year in 2022, as the economy logged palpable expansion at the beginning of 2023 and an array of policies to shore up the sector have taken effect. In the Jan.-Feb. period, encouraging signals indicated rising confidence on both ends of supply and demand of the market, a "pillar" of China's economy, with its added value accounting for 6.1 percent of the country's gross domestic product last year. To reinforce the trend of stable growth in the sector, China is setting out to optimize structure on the supply side to defuse risks and address the pressing needs of key groups on the side of demand.

CONFIDENCE FOR STEADY GROWTH

In February, 55 out of 70 large and medium-sized cities saw month-on-month increases in new home prices, up from 36 in January, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Meanwhile, 40 cities witnessed higher resale home prices, up from 13 in the previous month. Warming signs were also seen on the second-hand market as prices went up 0.7 percent and 0.1 percent month on month in first and second-tier cities, respectively, while such prices remained flat in third-tier cities to end a losing streak. The effect of government policies to stabilize the property market gradually appeared, and the housing demand was further unleashed, said NBS Senior Statistician Sheng Guoqing. Compared with 2022, a decline in investment and sales in the real estate sector largely narrowed during the first two months of this year. Specifically, the drop in property development investment narrowed by 4.3 percentage points, that for real estate developers' funds in place shrank by 10.7 percentage points, and the decrease in commercial housing sales in terms of floor area narrowed by 20.7 percentage points, NBS data showed.

Ni Hong, minister of housing and urban-rural development, told media during the country's "two sessions" earlier this month that he "has full confidence" in the steady recovery of China's property market. China's optimized anti-epidemic response has benefited both the supply and demand side by promoting work resumption of real estate projects and stimulating demand, he said. The country's commercial housing sales reversed the streak of decline for 13 months in January and February this year.

Work to ensure timely delivery of pre-sale housing is under solid advancement, effectively protecting the lawful rights and interests of home buyers and improving reasonable financing for property developers, he said, noting that the confidence of market entities is recovering. Ni also underlined the impact of the country's policies to ensure people's well-being by supporting the purchase of first and second homes while curbing housing speculation. "We expect the recovery of the property market to adhere to the principle that housing is for living in, not for speculation, satisfy people's rigid housing demand and demand for housing improvement, avoid sharp ups and downs in the market, and promote high-quality development of the sector," he added.

RISK PREVENTION ON SUPPLY-SIDE

In this year's government work report, China pledged to ensure effective risk prevention and mitigation in high-quality, leading real estate enterprises, help them improve debt-to-asset ratios, and prevent unregulated expansion in the real estate market to promote stable growth. To fend off systemic risk triggered by a mix of real estate risks and risks in the financial sector and local government debts, Ni said accurate measures will be taken to offer equal support to quality state-owned and private property developers to improve their debt and asset situations and meet their reasonable financing needs. At the same time, measures will support property enterprises with risks to survive, with strict crackdowns on violations of people's interests under laws and regulations.

Work will also be done to vigorously rectify the order of the real estate market and create an honest and trustworthy market environment, Ni said. It offers support from the supply side and helps ease the liquidity strain of the sector by effectively preventing and resolving the risks of high-quality, leading housing firms and improving their balance sheets, according to China Galaxy Securities Co., Ltd. Everbright Securities Company Limited predicted that based on the strict control of debt scale, the industrial pattern of commercial housing development will be reshaped by meeting reasonable financing demand of the market and prudently dealing with the risks of some leading firms with radical development plans, which will promote the healthy and sustainable growth of the property sector.

FOCUS ON PRESSING DEMAND, KEY GROUPS

Highlighting the work of ensuring people's wellbeing as one of the key objectives of the country, this year's government work report has proposed to "improve the housing support system, support people in buying their first homes or improving their housing situation, and help resolve the housing problems of new urban residents and young people." Demand for first homes and housing improvement is projected to remain high in the coming decade. From 2021 to 2035, first homes with a total floor area of about 3.9 billion square meters will be required, accounting for 18 percent of the total demand for housing, while the need for housing improvement is expected to be around 12 billion square meters, taking up 54 percent of the total demand,

according to a report released by the Beike Research Institute. The country will continue to implement city-specific and targeted policies to vigorously meet the rigid demand for home-owning and housing improvement to increase confidence and promote steady recovery and healthy development of the real estate market, Ni said.

Stressing the importance of the continuous recovery of new housing sales, Dongxing Securities Corporation Limited said policies at both ends of supply and demand are forming a synergy to stabilize the property sector, and market sales are bottoming out. To solve the difficulties for new city residents and the youth, Ni said measures will be taken to increase the supply of affordable rental housing and the construction of long-term rental housing. While supporting housing leasing and increasing housing supply, different cities will implement policies according to their specific market and population situations, and formulate standards such as mortgage and purchase restrictions in a differentiated manner to stimulate potential purchasing power, according to Haitong Securities Company Limited.

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China Moves to Bolster Economic Recovery with RRR Cut

China has announced its first cut in the amount of cash that banks must hold as reserves this year to bolster the economic growth momentum after investment stabilized and consumption rebounded in the first two months. The People's Bank of China, the central bank, said Friday it would cut the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) by 0.25 percentage points for financial institutions from March 27 to keep liquidity reasonably ample and serve the real economy. After the reduction, the weighted average RRR for lenders, except those already implementing a 5-percent ratio, will drop to around 7.6 percent. The central bank said the move aims to serve the real economy and keep liquidity reasonably ample in the banking system. With 268.2 trillion yuan (about 39 trillion U.S. dollars) of deposits in Chinese banks at the end of February, the cut will unleash around 600 billion yuan of medium and long-term liquidity, Bruce Pang, the Greater China chief economist of real estate and investment management services firm JLL, said.

With more cash reserves unlocked, banks will be able to enhance their ability to expand credit, analysts said. As some lenders face tightening liquidity after strong credit expansion in the first two months, the stable long-term funds provided by the RRR cut will ease banks' liquidity pressures and allow them to more actively support weak areas of the real economy and major emerging industries, said Zhou Maohua, an analyst with the China Everbright Bank. New yuan loans hit a monthly record in January at 4.9 trillion yuan. It retreated to a lower but still vibrant 1.81 trillion yuan in February, up 592.8 billion yuan from the same period last year. China has adopted several policy tools to strengthen financial support for the economy. In 2022, the central bank lowered the RRR twice to bring more than 1 trillion yuan of liquidity and

also cut the prime loan rate, a market-based benchmark lending rate, three times. The latest RRR cut would lend significant support to sustaining the economic recovery that has become increasingly palpable since the beginning of the year.

The country's retail sales reversed a three-month losing streak in January and February combined, and its industrial output also picked up pace from December. Other economic indicators, including fixed-asset investment and the services production index, also posted year-on-year growth. The capital demand has increased markedly due to a warming economy, and will grow much bigger in the second quarter and beyond in consumption, real estate, technology and innovation, and infrastructure construction, said Wang Yunjin, a researcher with the Zhixin Investment Research Institute. Wang believes that with the liquidity injection, banks will be better prepared for the next phase of demand expansion. Moreover, as recent U.S. and European banking turmoil exposed the global financial fragility, analysts believe the RRR cut sent a positive signal of China's stable financial market and built up confidence in the world's second-largest economy. China aims to achieve faster growth of around 5 percent with better development quality in 2023, according to this year's government work report. The country's gross domestic product registered a 3-percent increase last year.

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China's Non-cash Payments Maintain Steady Growth in 2022

Non-cash payments handled by Chinese banks continued stable expansion in 2022, with electronic payments sustaining growth momentum, a central bank report said. Non-cash payments via bank cards, electronic payment vehicles, commercial papers, credit transfers, and other settlements, hit 4,805.77 trillion yuan (about 702.86 trillion U.S. dollars) last year, up 8.84 percent year on year, according to the report from the People's Bank of China. Electronic payments took a lion's share of the non-cash payments, with a total transaction value of 3,110.13 trillion yuan, the report showed. The total number of transactions made with bank cards reached 451.95 billion in 2022, with the combined value up 0.98 percent year on year to 1,011.94 trillion yuan. Non-bank payment networks processed 337.87 trillion yuan of transactions in 2022, down 4.95 percent year on year, the report said.

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China's Economic Potential Offers Investors More Opportunities

The huge potential and sound development of the Chinese economy will provide broad cooperation space and development opportunities for domestic and foreign investors, a senior Chinese official said Sunday. "Investing in China is investing in

the future," Zheng Shanjie, head of the National Development and Reform Commission, said during the ongoing China Development Forum 2023. During the past decade, China's economic aggregate has reached a new level and its economic structure has been optimized, Zheng said, highlighting that since the beginning of this year, the Chinese economy has continued to rebound with stronger growth drivers. Looking ahead, the Chinese economy has strong resilience, great potential and vitality, and the sound economic fundamentals for long-term growth remain unchanged, he said. Efforts will be made to expand domestic demand, pursue innovation-driven development, comprehensively deepen reform and opening-up, coordinate urban-rural development, and ensure both development and security, Zheng added. The country will make greater efforts to build a high-standard market system, appropriately shorten the negative list for foreign investment, grant foreign-funded enterprises national treatment, and promote high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, Zheng said.

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Chinese Premier Calls for Global Efforts on Economic Risks, Challenges

Chinese Premier Li Qiang met on Monday with attendees at an international development forum, calling on them to reinforce confidence and stabilize expectations in order to address the risks and challenges facing the world economy. Li made the remarks when meeting with representatives of overseas attendees of the China Development Forum (CDF) 2023 in Beijing. Political leaders of relevant countries, heads of Fortune 500 companies, experts and scholars from renowned international academic research institutions, as well as representatives of major international organizations, attended the event. "The current world economic development is in a difficult period of multiple complicated shifts," Li said. He called on all parties to strengthen confidence and stabilize expectations, and in particular, to keep a broad vision and take a long-term view, so as to address risks and challenges. "It's like traveling on a rainy day. If you always look down at your feet, you will only see mud all over the ground. If you can often look up ahead, you can see the rainbow after the rain," Li said. He also called on all parties to enhance consensus, strengthen cooperation and jointly promote global economic recovery. Over the past decade, the Chinese economy has maintained steady growth, playing the role of "ballast stone" and "power source" for the world economy, and injecting more and more certainty into world peace and development, Li said.

He noted that in the future, while maintaining a certain growth rate, China's economy will accelerate reform in quality, efficiency and driving force, strive to achieve development of higher quality, and make people's lives better. "All these will provide a new driving force for world economic growth and broad space for foreign companies to develop in China," he said. Li stressed that China's economy has been

deeply integrated into the global division of labor system and China will unswervingly open up to the outside world, no matter how the international situation may change. China will align high-standard international economic and trade rules, steadily expand institutional opening up, and foster a world-class business environment that is market-oriented, law-based and internationalized, said the premier. The foreign representatives expressed appreciation for China's important achievements in economic and social development, saying that multinational enterprises have benefited from China's reform, opening up and rapid development. They said they believe that China will continue to open wider and make significant contributions to world economic development.

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Tourism Expo in Shanghai Signals Strong Economic Recovery

A comprehensive tourism expo, Tourism Plus Shanghai 2023, opened here on Tuesday. Covering an area of 600,000 square meters, the expo includes six main exhibitions, over 90 forums and summits, and 22 competitions and award events. About 5,000 exhibitors will participate in the expo. The expo includes two stages, with the first one running from March 28 to 31 and the second from May 29 to June 1. "The return of large-scale exhibitions makes us more confident about the development of the tourism economy," said Sun Jian, general manager of BTG Homeinns Hotels (Group) Co., Ltd., one of China's major hotel groups. Sun said the occupancy rate of the hotels under the group in first-tier cities such as Beijing and Shanghai increased by 30 percent year on year from January to February 2023

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China's Economic Bounce Welcome, Positive for Global Growth, Says Business Professional

China's progressive economic performance since the beginning of 2023 is a welcome development for the world and is positive for global growth, said a senior business professional attending the ongoing Boao Forum for Asia annual conference. "Chinese economic data is definitely looking better over the past two months. We've seen a real ... bounce," said Ben Simpfordorfer, a partner at leading international management consulting firm Oliver Wyman. "Particularly, manufacturing is up strongly, expanding new orders, which suggests that we're gonna see strength in production going forward," he said. "At the same time, retail sales are a little bit stronger: spending on restaurants, spending on gasolines as well as consumer staples are also strong." China's retail sales, a gauge of consumption growth, increased 3.5 percent year on year in the January-February period, reversing declines seen in the previous three months.

In the first two months, China's value-added industrial output went up 2.4 percent year on year, while the index gauging the country's service industry output rose 5.5 percent. "China's recovery means that it will play a more important role in driving global growth going forward, particularly in the year when worries about global recession are mounting," said Simpfendorfer, also a board member of the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong. He pointed out that China is a major importer of products for other economies, especially countries across Asia and the Middle East. "And so, recovery in demand (in China) would be most welcome." "While we're on the right path to recovery, we need to see spending, both consumer spending as well as capital spending, begin to strengthen from here," said the expert, who has been working in Asia and the Middle East for over 20 years.

As this year marks the 10th anniversary of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the business expert noted that the growth-oriented initiative has been advancing collaboration in Asia, and its progress is a welcome and profitable development for the wider world. "As the initiative's projects are collaborative and bringing multiple parties, especially local partners, it certainly helps in driving collaboration across the region," he said. "At the same time, the initiative itself is beginning to evolve, which once focused on primarily very large-value infrastructure projects. We're beginning to see spending refocus on supply chains, particularly in Southeast Asia, business parks, ports, roads, anything that supports global manufacturing," he said. "That's a welcome development because these types of investment are more likely to be profitable for investors," Simpfendorfer added.

He highlighted Asia's commitment to regional integration and economic globalization, saying the positive benefits of the region's backbone free trade agreements will continue to expand, which will ultimately propel global growth. "Asia is home to two of the world's leading trade agreements, RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) as well as CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership), which really underscores the fact the region's committed to globalization, committed to trade as a driver of growth," he said. As Asia remains the world's largest manufacturing hub and a growing source of demand with around 60 percent of the world's population, its commitment to the free flow of goods and services "will ultimately be positive for global growth," he said. Looking into the future, Simpfendorfer said Asia will emerge as "perhaps the world's largest trade bloc," and Asian integration boosts economic globalization.

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JAPAN: Robberies Prompt Crackdown on Online Recruiting of Perpetrators

Following a recent series of robberies across Japan, the government is accelerating

its crackdown to prevent similar crimes from taking place. The plan targets online recruitment of people to take part in such crimes, and unauthorized disclosures of personal data. Cabinet ministers related to anticrime measures held a meeting on Friday, with Prime Minister Kishida Fumio attending. They decided on an emergency plan to prevent similar robberies in the future. Many of the robbers involved in recent cases were recruited online, such as via social media posts. The plan seeks to identify and remove such dubious online recruiting information immediately. To achieve this, it urges the use of Artificial Intelligence to do automatic searches of such recruiting information. It also asks that internet operators delete such information. Recent robberies also showed that criminal targets were possibly chosen from leaked lists of personal information. The plan aims to crack down on those who provide such lists to criminal groups by using all applicable laws. The plan also urges people to avoid receiving deliveries in person and use package-drop services instead. It will also support households that install security cameras around their homes. Kishida said the recent robberies have caused concern among the public. He said it is the government's overriding responsibility to ensure safety and security in people's lives.

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Worker Shortage in Japan May Top 10 Million in 2040

A projection by a Japanese research institute shows that Japan may face a shortage of more than 10 million workers in 2040, when children of postwar baby boomers will have turned 65 or older. Recruit Works Institute, a research institute of a major information services company Recruit, released the forecast, which is based on future GDP estimates and proportions of workers by gender and generation. By prefecture, it is projected that all prefectures except for Tokyo will suffer worker shortages. The rate of the labor shortages will be over 20 percent in 18 prefectures, or about one third of them. The figure is expected to top 30 percent in prefectures such as Kyoto, Niigata and Nagano. While demand for labor will likely be high as they will have a certain economic scale, workers will be in short supply because of a declining birthrate coupled with an aging population. On the other hand, labor shortages in Shimane, Kagawa and Toyama prefectures are forecast to be low because demand for workers will decline in these areas. By occupation, the rate of labor shortage is predicted to be high among workers in the nursing care service at 25.3 percent, followed by sales clerks, drivers and construction workers. Furuya Shoto, a researcher at the institute, said Japan's structural worker shortages will make the situation of local economies even worse. He went on to say that Japan will be unable to resolve the problem unless people change their mindset.

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SOUTH KOREA: Facing Growing Woes Over Economic

Slowdown

South Korea is faced with escalating jitters over an economic slowdown down the road despite a forecast-beating upturn in its latest industrial output tally, analysts said Thursday. The surprise rise in industrial production, however, is overshadowed by sluggish exports due to tumbling overseas demand for mainstay chips, which has sent manufacturers' inventories to the highest level in 25 years. Making matters worse, private consumption remains in the doldrums, sending retail sales dropping for the third straight month in January and stoking concerns over future economic uncertainty. In a monthly report, Statistics Korea said South Korea's industrial output edged up 0.5 percent in January from December, the first on-month increase in four months. The country's industrial production shrank 1.2 percent and 0.4 percent on-month in October and November, respectively, before remaining unchanged in December. January's rebound came as the combined output in the mining, manufacturing, gas and electricity sectors increased 2.9 percent in January from the previous month.

Growth in January's overall industrial output surpassed a forecast of a 0.47 percent on-month decline in a survey of seven domestic and foreign financial institutions, taken by Yonhap Infomax, the financial news arm of Yonhap News Agency. Despite January's gain, officials and market watchers point out there are growing signs of a slowdown in Asia's fourth-largest economy. "Uncertainty remains high over how the economy will perform down the road as exports remain anemic amid slowing domestic economic indicators," Finance Minister Choo Kyung-ho said during an emergency meeting with economy-related ministers to discuss export issues. Worries over South Korea's economic slowdown are fueled mainly by a protracted slump in its overseas shipments, which stems from tumbling exports of semiconductors, its top export item. The country's exports sank 7.5 percent on-year to US\$50.1 billion in February, falling for five months running and marking the first time since 2020 that exports have declined for five months in a row.

The overall drop came as exports of chips nose-dived 42.5 percent from a year earlier amid weak global demand in the wake of economic uncertainties abroad. "Without a rebound in overseas demand for chips, there will be limits in the recovery of exports for the time being," Choo said. "The government plans to further bolster the competitiveness of key industries, such as chips, rechargeable batteries and electric vehicles by securing next-generation technologies and nurturing experts," he added. Shin Eol, chief investment strategist at Sangsangin Investment & Securities Co., chimed in, voicing his concerns of semiconductor exports. "Starting this year, expectations for the volume of chip exports have weakened amid a situation that it is hard to secure stable prices due to slackening overseas demand. At a separate meeting on exports, Industry Minister Lee Chang-yang said both external and internal conditions for exports and investment are far from favorable, citing a global economic slowdown, high interest rates, the country's massive energy imports and a

delay in the revision to a tax incentives law for technology investment as major challenges.

"The government is strongly committed to backing exporters by extending trade financing and state budgets and by supporting their push for joint projects with the Middle Eastern nations," he said. South Korea has set this year's export target at \$685 billion, up 0.2 percent from last year's total, though the finance ministry earlier said that exports were forecast to register a 4.5 percent on-year fall in 2023. Against such a backdrop, domestic demand, another backbone of South Korea's economy, along with exports, remains stuck in a slump in recent months after showing a recovery following the removal of some COVID-19 restrictions. Retail sales, a key barometer of consumer spending, shrank 2.1 percent in January from the prior month due to weaker demand for semidurable goods, foodstuffs and winter clothes as a result of warmer-than-usual weather. It was the third straight on-month decline.

"In 2021, retail sales, led by durable goods, shot up following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, since last year, consumption has shifted towards the service sector as outdoor activities have returned to normal," said Kim Bo-kyung, a senior official at Statistics Korea. Analysts are also voicing concern over South Korea's high consumer inflation. South Korea's consumer prices expanded 5.2 percent in January from a year earlier as energy costs shot up to a record level. It was higher than the 5 percent on-year gain in December. Consumer inflation rose 5 percent or higher for the ninth month in a row. January's figure stayed above 2 percent -- the central bank's inflation target over the medium term -- for the 22nd straight month. With most major economic indicators taking a turn for the worse, South Korean businesses and consumers remain jittery over how the local economy will fare.

Local companies' business sentiment index (BSI) for March came to 71, up 3 points from the previous month but remaining far below par, according to a recent central bank survey. A reading below 100 means pessimists outnumber optimists. Affected by sinking exports and high prices, the country's consumer sentiment stood at 90.2 in February, down 0.5 point from a month earlier and below the benchmark 100. Analysts warn that weak business and consumer sentiment, combined with plunging exports, will likely have a negative impact on the South Korean economy this year. South Korea's economy is estimated to have grown 2.6 percent on-year in 2022, slowing from a 4.1 percent gain the previous year. A week ago, the central Bank of Korea lowered its growth outlook for this year to 1.6 percent from a 1.7 percent rise predicted three months earlier, citing global monetary tightening.

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OECD Slashes S. Korea's 2023 Growth Outlook to 1.6 Pct

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on Friday

revised down South Korea's growth outlook for 2023 to 1.6 percent, as the global economy continues to stand on "fragile" grounds amid uncertainties. The latest outlook, released through the Paris-based organization's interim report, marked a 0.2 percentage-point drop from a 1.8 percent growth projection in November. The downward revision is in line with the Bank of Korea's assessment released in February, when the central bank lowered its growth outlook from the previously predicted 1.7 percent. The OECD, however, revised up the forecast for 2024 by 0.4 percentage point to 2.3 percent. The OECD also estimated South Korea's inflation for 2023 at 3.6 percent, down 0.3 percentage point from its previous outlook. The inflation outlook is slightly above the 3.5 percent estimated by the central bank last month. South Korea has been grappling with inflation following soaring energy costs amid the prolonged war between Russia and Ukraine, although its on-year growth in consumer prices fell below 5 percent for the first time in 10 months in February amid monetary tightening moves.

The central bank kept the benchmark interest rate unchanged at 3.5 percent last month due to concerns that aggressive monetary tightening could hurt economic growth. It marked the first freeze after seven straight increases delivered since April last year intended to tame inflation. The OECD, meanwhile, hinted the global economy will gradually recover through 2024 following improved consumer sentiment, falling energy and food prices, along with the full-fledged reopening of the Chinese economy. "Korea and Australia will benefit from the expected growth rebound in China, offsetting the impact of tighter financial conditions," the OECD said in a statement. It added China's neighboring Asian countries could also benefit from the resumption of overseas travel by its people. The organization nevertheless pointed out the global economy still faces more downward risks, as it is standing on a "fragile" foundation amid uncertainties, including the war and fragmentation of supply chains, as well as global monetary tightening moves. "In addition, sharp changes in market interest rates and in the current market value of bond portfolios could also further expose duration risks in the business models of financial institutions, as highlighted by the failure of the US Silicon Valley Bank in March," the OECD added.

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S. Korea to Start Preparations for ICT Cooperation with Japan Official

South Korea will start preparations for resuming science and information technology cooperation with Japan, which has been stalled for years due to trade and historical issues, following the Seoul-Tokyo summit last week, a senior government official has said. "As the Korea-Japan relations are expected to improve in a future-oriented manner, we are considering launching projects to get ready for the upcoming diplomatic improvement," Park Yun-kyu, vice minister of the Ministry of Science and ICT, said in a media briefing held Wednesday last week. "We need to map out new

strategies and put forth efforts to make contact with the partner country," he added. The long-running historical disputes over compensation for Koreans forced into hard labor for Japanese companies when Korea was under Japan's colonial rule from 1910-1945 have affected the bilateral relations between the neighboring nations. Japan imposed export restrictions against South Korea and removed South Korea from a "white list" of favored trade partners in 2019. In retaliation, Seoul filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization over the export controls.

But the strained atmosphere was recently eased as Seoul decided to compensate Korean victims of Japan's wartime forced labor on its own without Japanese firms' contributions earlier this month. Subsequently, Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol visited Japan to hold summit talks with his Japanese counterpart, Fumio Kishida, the first top-level meeting in more than a decade. Park, the vice minister, said renewed bilateral cooperation, especially in the digital sector, will bring about mutual benefits to both countries. "Japan is an advanced country and has experienced many social, demographic challenges in the past. And we can discuss ways to solve those challenges with digital technologies, of which we, South Korea, have a relatively competitive edge," the vice minister said. "We are considering expanding cooperation in sectors that include artificial intelligence, 5G and 6G wireless networks, space satellites and quantum technologies," he added. He also said as part of the plan, the ICT ministry is seeking ways to resume regular working-level talks on radio wave issues between the two governments and expand them to a minister-level meeting. Last week, Yoon instructed the government to look for new projects to help South Korea and Japan increase cooperation and build a future-oriented relationship.

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Half of S. Koreans See Marriage, Childbirth as Not a Must

Half of South Koreans viewed marriage as unessential and nearly 60 percent of those in their 10s and 20s said childbirth after marriage is not a must, a government report showed Thursday, illustrating the country's demographic crisis amid a record-low birthrate. Only 50 percent of South Koreans aged 13 and older said marriage is a must. Of male respondents, 55.8 percent voiced support for marriage, but only 44.3 percent of female citizens did so, according to the report by Statistics Korea on the country's social indicators for 2022. While some 65.3 percent of South Koreans said childbirth is needed after getting married, the proportion fell to 41.1 percent among teenagers, the lowest level among age brackets, the report showed. Of those in their 20s, 44 percent said childbirth is essential for marriage life, and 54.7 percent of those in their 30s regarded childbirth as a must. In 2022, the country's total fertility rate, the average number of children a woman bears in her lifetime, came to 0.78, marking the lowest since 1970, when it was 4.53. Last year's figure was much lower than the replacement level of 2.1 that would keep South Korea's

population stable at 51.5 million.

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South-East Asia

MYANMAR: Attracting over 1.62 Bln USD FDI in 11 Months

Myanmar attracted more than 1.62 billion U.S. dollars in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the first 11 months of the fiscal year 2022-23 starting in April last year, according to figures released by the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA) on Thursday. From April 1 last year to Feb. 28 this year, the Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC) approved 73 foreign investment enterprises. During the period, the power sector attracted most foreign investment with capital of over 820.27 million dollars, followed by the services sector with over 500.91 million dollars and the manufacturing sector with over 258.02 million dollars, the DICA's figures showed. Singapore, China and Thailand are largest investors in Myanmar.

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Myanmar to Boost Local Product Sales Through e-Commerce Platform

Myanmar's Ministry of Industry has invited domestic producers to sell their products through an e-commerce platform the government has established in a bid to promote export. The ministry said Saturday that local producers intending to use the electronic platform can get connected by April 28 to its respective departments. The ministry launched the e-marketplace for Myanmar products in 2022. The platform features delivery services for quick transport of the products for international buyers and easy means for e-payment, according to it.

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Myanmar Designates New Protected Forest Area to Protect Biodiversity

Myanmar's government has designated a new protected public forest area in western region Sagaing's Katha district. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation last week designated the area of more than 550 hectares as "Gahe-2" protected public forest, in Katha's Indaw Township. The move is aimed at conserving watershed areas for farmland for local residents to meet their daily needs and protecting biodiversity, according to the ministry. On the land in this area grow varieties of Myanmar hardwoods and there are large pasturelands for wild animals. The Southeast Asian country expects to establish 30 percent of its total

area as forest reserves and 10 percent as protected areas, according to local media reports.

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Myanmar's Foreign Trade Up 14.08 Pct in over 11 Months

Myanmar's total goods imports and exports surged 14.08 percent year on year to over 32.01 billion U.S. dollars in over 11 months of the 2022-23 fiscal year beginning in April last year, official data showed Tuesday. The country's total trade during the same period a year earlier was valued at more than 28.06 billion dollars, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed. From April 1 last year to March 10 this year, exports rose 9.52 percent to over 15.65 billion dollars from a year earlier, while imports climbed 18.8 percent to over 16.36 billion dollars, the ministry's data showed. Myanmar's sea trade during the period was valued at over 24 billion dollars, while its border trade amounted to over 8 billion dollars, the ministry's data showed. The Southeast Asian country usually does most of its foreign trade through sea routes as it has a long coastline. It conducts border trade with China, Thailand, Bangladesh and India. The country exports agricultural products, animal products, fisheries, minerals and forest products, manufacturing goods and others, while it imports capital goods, intermediate goods and consumer goods.

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Myanmar Targets to Expand 4 Mln Acres of Sunflower Plantations to Cover Domestic Oil Consumption

Myanmar targets to expand the sunflower plantations up to 4 million acres across the country to cover domestic oil consumption, Ye Tint Tun, director general of the Department of Agriculture, told Xinhua on Thursday. Sunflower oil is one of the major cooking oils in the domestic market. Major cooking oils come from groundnuts, sesame seeds and sunflower seeds in Myanmar. Though the department targeted to plant 1.5 million acres of sunflower plantations, only 1.08 million acres were planted in the 2022-2023 fiscal year, according to the official. "We already planted 1.08 million acres of sunflowers trees across the country last monsoon and winter seasons, we're targeting to expand more sunflower plantations up to 4 million acres gradually," the official said. The government agency planted sunflower trees mostly in Mandalay, Magway, Sagaing and Ayeyarwaddy Region, and Shan State. "Domestic oil prices are good in the market this year, so we hope that farmers will be interested to plant more sunflower trees in the coming fiscal year," Ye Tint Tun added. Myanmar cultivates more than 8 million acres of edible oil crops per year while oil mills produce around 300,000 tons of edible oil per year, according to the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar last year.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 03/23/2023

PHILIPPINES: Numbers of Working Children, Child Laborers Increase in 2021

The number of working children aged five to 17 in the Philippines increased in 2021, estimated at 1.37 million, according to government data released on Friday. The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data also showed that the number of child laborers or children doing hazardous work and long hours in a dangerous environment in the Philippines increased in 2021. In a report, PSA head Dennis Mapa said the total population of children was estimated at 31.64 million in 2021. Of the 31.64 million children, Mapa said 1.37 million or 4.3 percent were working. "(The number) was higher than the proportion of working children in 2019 and 2020 of 3.4 percent and 2.8 percent, respectively," he said. The data showed that the number of working children was higher among boys than girls. Of the 1.37 million working children in 2021, 62.8 percent were boys, while 37.2 percent were girls. In 2019 and 2020, more than 65 percent of the working children were boys.

Children of the older age group, 15 to 17 years, were more likely to work than the younger ones. Most working children were 15 to 17 years of age, accounting for 63.8 percent of the total working children in 2021. The 2021 number was lower than the proportion of working children aged 15 to 17 years, of 68.9 percent in 2020 and 67.4 percent in 2019. The data showed that most working children are in the agriculture sector, followed by services and the industry sector. Northern Mindanao in the southern Philippines posted the highest number of working children. In 2021, the data revealed that the total number of working children engaged in child labor was estimated at 935,000, higher than the reported working children involved in child labor in 2020 at 597,000 and in 2019 at 640,000. Child labor is any work or economic activity a child performs that subjects them to exploitation, harms their health and safety, or affects physical, mental, or psychological development. Of the estimated 935,000 working children engaged in child labor in 2021, 626,000 or 67.0 percent were boys, while 309,000 or 33.0 percent were girls.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 03/03/2023

ADB Invests in Hard Discount Food Retail in the Philippines

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has signed an equity investment of \$15 million in DALI Hard Discount to expand its network of retail stores and distribution centers and cold chain infrastructure in the Philippines, creating at least 4,300 new jobs, nearly half of them for women. "Almost half of households in the Philippines are moderately or severely food insecure, and rising inflation is making it more expensive for them to purchase essential household products," said ADB Director General for Private Sector Operations Suzanne Gaboury. "ADB's support for DALI's expansion

will contribute to food security and food safety by ensuring essential products are available to consumers at affordable prices, in a hygienic environment, and by integrating local agricultural suppliers into the company's supply chains." DALI is the first company in the Philippines to focus on hard discount retailing, establishing stores mostly in rural and peri-urban communities instead of premium commercial centers in the cities. Hard discount retailing keeps product prices low through high sales volume of a limited product range and lean operations. The project will also finance off-grid rooftop solar panels for 200 stores and 5 distribution centers including green building certification for sample buildings and reducing at least 3,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions by 2026. DALI operates the DALI Everyday Grocery chain of hard discount stores in the Philippines. By the end of 2022, DALI had more than 250 retail stores and three distribution centers in the south of Metro Manila.

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VIETNAM: Speeds Up Digitalisation in Trade Promotion Activities

At a conference held in Hà Nội on Thursday, experts discussed the potential benefits of cross-border e-commerce channels for Vietnamese firms struggling with declining demand in traditional markets due to inflation. Participants highlighted the importance of leveraging these channels to promote exports and expand market reach. One success story was shared by Mê Trang Coffee Joint Stock Company, which had previously allocated a significant portion of its budget towards sending delegations to international exhibitions and fairs in search of customers. However, the company has shifted its focus to cross-border e-commerce, resulting in a more cost-effective approach and wider access to global consumers. In the current economic climate, such measures may become increasingly necessary for firms seeking to remain competitive in the global marketplace. Addressing a conference on digital business strategy in the VUCA (Volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) era, jointly held by the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the e-commerce platform Alibaba.com, Dương Khánh Toàn, Director of international sales and import and export of Mê Trang Company, said they once failed to put the coffee on the e-commerce platform Alibaba.com.

However, they did not give up and decided to conquer this sales channel when the COVID-19 pandemic caused market disruption. When putting products on the online channel, he said, they determined that e-commerce is not only a sales channel but an inevitable trend if they want to survive in the context of the unstable world market, making the demand in major markets such as the US and EU decline because of inflation. "If businesses still keep the traditional approach of participating in fairs and exhibitions, they will be very passive in responding to unpredictable developments in the market, especially in large markets with fierce competition," Toàn said. At the same time, the cross-border e-commerce channel helps the company bring its coffee

to new markets where they could not have thought that the consumers are very fond of Vietnamese coffee. Sharing ideas, Vũ Bá Phú, Director of the MoIT's Việt Nam Trade Promotion Agency (Vietrade), said digitalising trade promotion activities and the application of information technology are essential aspects of the country's strategy for building a digital government, digital economy, and digital society.

"2023 is a crucial year for Việt Nam to successfully implement the economic development plan in the 2021–25 period," Phú added. He said within the framework of cooperation between Vietrade and Alibaba, the two sides have coordinated to successfully deploy many international events, which helped introduce reputable brands, quality products, and success stories of Vietnamese exporting businesses. Over 200 training courses were organised by the MoIT and Alibaba in localities nationwide, focusing on raising awareness of digital transformation, access to digital business methods, how to operate digital pavilions, and online sales. Businesses need to pay heed to improving and controlling product quality and competitiveness to meet regulations of import markets and coordinate with trade promotion agencies in building plans and joining trade promotion activities to take advantage of opportunities from markets, Phú said. According to Roger Luo, director of Alibaba in Asia-Pacific, through Việt Nam's export data in recent years, it can be seen that Vietnamese goods are at the top of the world's consumption demand. More and more foreign partners are willing to consider Việt Nam as the first choice for purchasing goods, Luo said, adding that products of Vietnamese small- and medium-sized enterprises are always highly valued for their quality, export skill as well as after-sales service.

Support needed

However, through preliminary statistics, Phú said that the number of enterprises exporting directly through cross-border e-commerce platforms is still modest, accounting for a small proportion of 200,000 enterprises participating in exporting activities in the country. The difficulties for the firms were resources, personnel, and technology. "The best way for businesses to sit in one place and sell products to global consumers is to prepare a high-quality workforce, make sure they speak the native language of the customers, and answer online for 24/24 hours to ensure the finest customer service," he said. In particular, enterprises need to be proactive and active in understanding information, mechanisms and policies, market research, and partner appraisal, and focusing on improving and controlling product quality to meet the regulations of the import market. Vũ Thế Tùng, director of Business Development and Government Relations at Alibaba Vietnam, said this year, the e-commerce platform Alibaba.com will focus on improving the quality of services to connect exporters and importers and providing information on market demand to increase efficiency when businesses decide to do business on the platform. Minister of Industry and Trade Đỗ Thắng Hải said continuing to promote the distribution of Vietnamese goods through cross-border e-commerce platforms is essential in the current context of high inflation. The ministry would support Vietnamese enterprises

to sell goods on cross-border e-commerce platforms; continue to mobilise the banking system to support export firms with diversified financial solutions. The report Digital B2B Outlook for Việt Nam in 2023 of Alibaba shows that over 50 per cent of businesses choose to sell their products on e-commerce or digital platforms and expand sale channels to "survive" amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Mobile Subscribers with Incorrect Personal Information to Be Blocked

Mobile phone subscribers with personal information that does not match the national population database will be blocked from March 31. Nguyễn Phong Nhã, deputy director of the Department of Telecommunications under the Ministry of Information and Communications, said the standardisation of information is carried out following Decree 49 on mobile telecommunications. Phone numbers with incorrect information will receive a notification from the mobile carriers. Mobile phone providers will send messages to customers for five days at least once a day to ask subscribers to update their information as requested. The providers will block incoming calls 15 days after the first notification is sent out, while the two-direction block would take effect after the following 15 days if the subscriber still fails to update their personal information with the carriers. After 60 days from the first notification, uncooperative subscribers would have their contracts terminated. The notifications will be launched from March 15, Nhã said at a meeting on information standardisation of mobile phone subscribers on Monday. The Department of Telecommunications also asked customers to coordinate with mobile service providers to update their information, avoiding impersonation to perform illegal acts. The agency also said it is still very difficult to wipe out junk SIM cards. According to reports from major mobile phone providers – MobiFone, VinaPhone, and Viettel, there are about 3.5 million mobile subscribers whose information does not match the national population database. According to Decree 49, all mobile subscriptions need to provide accurate personal information of owners, including name, identification number and profile picture. The regulation aims to help protect the interests of customers using the service and limit the number of junk SIMs in the market. In 2022, the Government ordered that every active mobile phone number must be linked to the national population database.

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Vietnam Vows to Boost Renewable Energy

Working towards a low-carbon economy is obviously in Vietnam's economic interest, and the Vietnamese government is facilitating a long-term national energy roadmap to reach net zero emissions by 2050, Vietnam News Agency reported on Monday. Vietnam needs global partners to support its green transition through long-term and

low-interest financing for renewable energy projects, said Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh at the annual Vietnam Business Forum (VBF) held here in the country's capital on Sunday. According to the latest report by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), Vietnam will need 368 billion U.S. dollars, or 6.8 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) per year, through 2040 to tackle climate change. "Working towards two targets, becoming a high-income country and achieving carbon emission neutrality in the next 30 years, will require Vietnam to raise a large funding from the private sector," said Alfonso Garcia Mora, the IFC Vice President for Asia and Pacific. The Southeast Asian country has also tried to attract global investors through favorable clean energy development policies.

Vietnam has piloted and will encourage a direct power purchase mechanism, which enables renewable energy generators to directly sell electricity to customers, said the prime minister. This is expected to facilitate Vietnam's energy transition since the state-owned utility Electricity Vietnam (EVN) is also the sole purchaser in the market under the current regulations. The prime minister also called for an energy pricing mechanism based on the principle of harmonious benefits and shared risks for both buyers and sellers, after 36 renewable energy developers signed a petition letter to the government last week which raised concerns that they may go bankrupt due to a new pricing. There are 84 wind and solar projects with a total capacity of 4,676 megawatts subject to the new tariffs which would be 20-30 percent lower than previous tariffs. At Sunday's VBF conference, foreign investors and international organizations put forward proposals to further improve the investment environment and create better business conditions to ensure Vietnam's green energy development path, including accelerating the energy transition amid risks of electricity shortage.

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Vietnam Aims to Bolster Local Medicine Production

As Vietnam's pharmaceutical market is expected to swell to 16.1 billion U.S. dollars in the next three years, the government has aimed for domestic medicine production of up to 80 percent by 2030, Vietnam News reported on Tuesday. In a strategy aimed at cutting reliance on imports and boosting local pharmaceutical industry, the Vietnamese government will prioritize the production of more advanced technology products, urging domestic companies to focus on research and development. The Ministry of Health estimated the market at 6.9 billion dollars in 2021, while BMI Research forecast the market to reach 16.1 billion dollars in 2026 with a compound annual growth rate of 11 percent. However, domestic companies still have to face tough competition from foreign investors, said Nguyen Dieu Ha, general secretary and office chief of the Vietnam Pharmaceutical Companies Association. Ha pointed out that locally-manufactured drugs accounted for 46 percent of resident spending on medicine during 2015-2021, significantly up from 17 percent in the 2001-2011 period,

but well below the world average.

Poor research and development investments due to a lack of skilled personnel, technical knowledge and adequate infrastructure have caused the local market to depend on drug importing, said Le Van Truyen, former deputy health minister. With an ageing population and urbanized lifestyles that give rise to hypertension, obesity and other chronic diseases, Vietnam's pharmaceutical market is poised to grow larger, said industry experts. Each Vietnamese citizen spends an average of 73 dollars on medicine in 2021, up from just 6.7 dollars in 2002, Ha said, adding that the resident spending on drugs is expected to grow at a faster pace, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic when medicine accessibility became a huge challenge for the healthcare system. This current production has turned the Vietnamese government's attention to encouraging the investment in pharmaceutical production to produce at least 75 percent of the total drugs in the local market by 2025 and 80 percent by 2030, according to the country's long-term development plan.

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Digital Banks Attract Significant Numbers of Customers

The number of new customers of commercial banks has increased dramatically in recent years thanks to their digital applications. After only six months of launching MyVIB 2.0 digital banking application – which uses multi-cloud computing technology to process 60-70 per cent of the input data to help banks realise ideas, bring products and services to the market faster and respond sooner to customer requests, VIB has doubled the number of customers compared to the previous year and reach the target of 4 million customers nearly a year earlier than expected. Not only VIB, the wave of “cloudisation” of digital banking applications to expand modes and storage capacity, and increase integrated processing and user data security capacity has been invested in and implemented by many commercial banks. Currently, VietABank, PVcomBank, VietinBank, Techcombank, SeABank, ABBank and OCB have all integrated cloud computing technologies to launch new digital banking platforms serving the sales of retail products and services, attracting millions of users.

The business results by the end of 2022 of banks showed a sharp increase in the number of new customers attracted by banks thanks to their digital applications. For example, MB last year added 7 million customers in the wake of developing Biz MBBank and Charity app while Techcombank with E-Banking apps (using AWS cloud computing technology) attracted an additional 1.2 million users in 2022. ACB and TPBank also said they recorded an annual growth of 30 per cent in the number of customers using digital applications in the 2019-22 period. Along with the increase in the number of customers, the investment in new technologies and digitalisation of business activities have helped many banks attain significant achievements. For VIB

and ACB, the proportion of revenue from retail activities was around 90 per cent in 2022. Retail activities at other banks such as MB, Techcombank and Sacombank currently account for more than 50 per cent of their business portfolio. Recent research by Gimigo Vietnam showed 2023 will continue to witness fierce competition between banks in developing retail digital banking applications to gain market share. According to Gimigo, the group of large State-owned banks such as Vietcombank, BIDV, Agribank, VietinBank and MB was leading in the retail segment thanks to being trusted by users and having a widespread network by the end of 2022. However, the group of private banks such as Techcombank, Sacombank, ACB, VPBank and TPBank have significantly improved their awareness level and attracted a large number of users in recent months.

Gimigo's survey in Hà Nội, HCM City and some other big cities showed the digital applications of Techcombank, ACB and Sacombank are currently competing strongly with large-sized State-owned banks. Other private banks such as TPBank and VPBank also have high net promoter scores (NPS). Thus, the group of banks has many opportunities to expand the customer base thanks to the existing group of loyal customers and the new customers. According to experts, developing the networks of branches, transaction offices, POS and ATMs is no longer the banks' top priority. Instead, they focus on digitisation of products and services. To maintain the number of customers, banks need to pay more attention to transaction costs, quality of products and services, staff attitude, customer service, and continuous improvement of online procedures. Regarding the development trend of digital application generations this year, Gimigo said besides investment in cloud computing technologies and applying Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning to develop applications to support retail sales of products and services, banks will tend to pour in an integrated open banking ecosystem. Some banks, which have so far invested in purely digital banking models such as Cake, Timo, Tnex, Octo and Ubank, have attracted users. For example, VPBank's Cake app currently has 1 million users. Experts forecast banks will invest more in developing completely new digital banking brands in the near future. In which, micro products and services will be integrated into personal financial management tools to attract customers to use banks' retail products and services.

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Việt Nam Targets 100 Per Cent Usage of IPv6 Service by 2025

The Vietnam Internet Network Information Centre (VNNIC) hosted a conference on Tuesday to evaluate the initial phase of the transition to Internet Protocol version 6 for State agencies (IPv6 for Gov) and to plan for the programme's second phase. The first phase of IPv6 for Gov, conducted between 2021 and 2022, primarily focused on State agencies. Half of all ministries, agencies, and localities were targeted to adopt IPv6 transitional plans and successfully shift towards IPv6 for their

portals. It is expected that all of them will roll out their plans during the second phase between 2022 and 2025. The transition to IPv6 in networks, services, applications, and software is an evolution that ensures the capacity of internet resources and security requirements in Việt Nam. This is vital to support the nation's digital transformation and the development of e-government and smart city services. IPv6 is expected to meet Việt Nam's demand to offer new and quality services such as the Internet of Things, 4G-LTE and 5G networks, contributing to digital transformation and digital government building.

The Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) has worked closely with relevant ministries, sectors and localities to speed up and ensure the successful implementation of the scheme. According to statistics of VNNIC, as of December 2022, Việt Nam's IPv6 usage reached 53 per cent, ranking 10th globally with more than 65 million Internet subscribers using IPv6 service. According to VNNIC Nguyễn Trường Giang, the IPv6 for Gov has exceeded its set goals in the first phase, as 94 per cent of ministries, sectors and localities have issued IPv6 transition plans. As many as 78 per cent of stakeholders have successfully converted IPv6 for their portals and public services, and more than 1,300 staff and experts have been trained on IPv6, 2.6 times the training target for five years. The country's IPv6 usage rate is expected to reach 60-70 per cent in 2023. In the second phase of 2023–2025, VNNIC set a goal to convert the national Internet network into IPv6, 100 per cent of Internet subscribers will use the IPv6 service, and all IDC, Cloud, and Hosting businesses to provide services on the IPv6 platform. Deputy Minister of Information and Communication Phạm Đức Long has urged stakeholders to accelerate the transition to IPv6. VNNIC was requested to promote communication and training activities and support and supervise the transition process.

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South Asia

BANGLADESH: ADB President, Bangladesh Prime Minister Mark 50 Years of Development Partnership

Asian Development Bank (ADB) President Masatsugu Asakawa and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina led a celebration of 50 years of close development partnership in Dhaka today. In a bilateral meeting after the event, Mr. Asakawa said ADB is committed to widening its partnership with the country and to increasing financial support for key development priorities to help achieve the country's goal of becoming an upper middle-income country by 2031. "I have witnessed the many ways Bangladesh has been transformed through steady and inclusive economic growth with vibrant private sector engagement over the past decade and a half," said Mr. Asakawa. "ADB stands ready to support Bangladesh in a bigger way on this path to a more prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future, enhancing our

assistance in climate change adaptation and mitigation, and critical economic reforms to diversify the economy and mobilizing more domestic resources.”

“On 50 years of partnership, the Government of Bangladesh conveys its deep gratitude to ADB for the invaluable and generous support and contribution to our development journey,” said Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. “I consider ADB as one of the most trusted development partners of Bangladesh, and request strategic focus on skills development, health, ITC-based entrepreneurship, quality infrastructure, and climate change, while helping unleash the potentials of the private sector.” Mr. Asakawa also met with Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal and other senior officials on 13 March as part of his 5-day visit. Mr. Asakawa commended Bangladesh’s economic and social development, particularly over the last decade and a half. Between 2013 and 2022, Bangladesh’s gross domestic product grew about 6.5% on average, reaching 7.9% at its peak just before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019. In 2015, Bangladesh attained the status of lower middle-income country, with per capita gross national income reaching \$1,210. It rose to \$2,793 by 2022. Bangladesh is on track to graduate from least-developed country status by 2026. Mr. Asakawa is scheduled to visit various ADB-supported projects, including a rail station under the Chittagong–Cox’s Bazar Railway Project and a water supply facility in Cox’s Bazar camp for sheltered people under ADB’s [Emergency Assistance Project](#). He will also visit a garment factory and a training center under the [Skills for Employment Investment Program](#), which contribute to women employment and entrepreneurship. Bangladesh joined ADB in 1973, and in 1982 became the first ADB member to host a field office. ADB has mobilized around \$50 billion in loans, grants, and technical assistance for the country, including cofinancing.

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INDIA: Bharat Forge to Start E-bike Manufacturing Facility at MIDC, Chakan

Kalyani Powertrain, a fully owned subsidiary of Bharat Forge, opened the company’s first e-bike production plant at MIDC, Chakan. The factory, whose production capability is scalable to 1 lakh units annually, will assemble E-bikes for Tork Motors, a company that is 64.29 percent owned by Kalyani Powertrain. Construction, mining, oil & gas, aerospace, locomotives, marine, energy (from both renewable and non-renewable sources), general engineering, and automobiles (commercial and passenger vehicles) are just a few of the industries for which Bharat Forge (BFL) produces a wide range of critical and safety components. In comparison to Q3 FY22, the company recorded a 14.3% decline in standalone net profit, falling to Rs 289.2 crore from Rs 337.4 crore. During the quarter, total income increased by 21.8% YoY to Rs 1,952.1 crore. Bharat Forge’s shares increased on the NYSE by 0.38% to Rs 837.

PM Modi to Launch Projects Worth Rs 16000 Crore in Karnataka

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on 12th March, will lay the foundation stones of projects worth around Rs 16,000 crore in Karnataka. The PM will dedicate and lay the foundation stones for significant road projects in Mandya on Sunday. He will then inaugurate and lay the foundation stones for a number of Hubballi-Dharwad development initiatives at around 3:15 pm. The Bengaluru-Mysuru Expressway will be officially dedicated by Prime Minister Modi to the country. The project entails widening NH 275 to six lanes along the Bengaluru-Nidaghatta-Mysore stretch. The 118 Km-long project's development expense came to approximately Rs. 8480 crores. The journey from Bengaluru to Mysuru will take only about 75 minutes instead of about 3 hours. He will also lay the foundation stone for the four-lane highway connecting Mysuru and Hushalnagar. The project, which spans 92 km, will be built for about Rs 4130 crores. The initiative will be crucial in improving connectivity between Bengaluru and Kushalnagar and will reduce travel time from approximately 5 to only 2.5 hours. Prime Minister Modi will also dedicate to the nation IIT Dharwad, the foundation stone of which was laid by the prime minister in February 2019. IIT Dharwad, which was created at a cost of over Rs 850 crore, presently offers 4-year B.Tech. programs, a 5-year, multidisciplinary BS-MS program, M.Tech., and Ph.D. programs. At Sri Siddharoodha Swamiji Hubballi Station, PM Modi will also dedicate to the country the longest railway platform in the entire globe. The Guinness Book of World Records recently acknowledged the mark. The 1507 m-long structure was constructed for roughly Rs 20 crores.

2 Million Transactions, 1 Powerful Ecosystem: 5ire Chain's Breakthrough

With a lot of anticipation and excitement, the 5ire Testnet: Thunder Beta had gone public on Feb13,2023. In a little over a month, we had hit our first big milestone of a million transactions on the EVM and Native chain respectively. True to the words of American poet and author Heming way, our journey to the testnet launch happened 'slowly and then suddenly'. But before we dive into the testnet data, demographics and more, let's take a step back. The Fourth Industrial Revolution held the promise of increased productivity through automation of manual tasks. It envisioned a world of unleashing human creativity and unlocking technological potential. While the jury is still out on whether it will meet its promise, what is alarmingly obvious is the disastrous impact it has had on climate change and sustainability. The Fourth Industrial Revolution's "for-profit" paradigm has caused excessive depletion of natural resources, climate change, and biodiversity loss. The need for a paradigm

change from for-profit to for-benefit is pertinent. Driven by the idea of taking the world to the 5th Industrial Revolution, 5ire was conceptualized. We are a Layer 1 Patent Pending Sustainable Blockchain at the consensus level with a mission to make Blockchain sustainable & accessible for 1 billion + people by 2030 which became a billion-dollar unicorn in a record eleven (11) months. Our Testnet Alpha went live on November 30, 2022. Shortly after that, the Testnet Beta (public release) went live on February 13, 2023. Here's how the numbers look so far (as of March 20, 2023) :

Total transactions: 2.2M

Native chain transactions: 1.2M

EVM chain transactions: 780K

Total wallets: 270K

Native chain wallets: 510K

Native chain smart contracts: 2000

Getting to the golden number of million transactions has been an adventurous journey. In addition to providing us with key insights, it has made us very enthusiastic about our road to main net. To achieve 1 million transactions, we had to level up our transaction speed game significantly. The testnet became an important litmus test for the combined power of our EVM and Native chains. The Native Chain operates natively with out relying on other plat forms or technology, while the EVM Chain runs on the Ethereum Virtual Machine. Together, they create a powerful combination that can handle high transaction volumes while ensuring scalability and security. The power of community always compounds. Our google analytics data shows us that our testnet has seen participation for 163 unique countries. What is even more promising for us is that in the top 15 countries the numbers are fairly uniform, ranging between 11k to 4k. This list includes countries where we don't have offline presence yet and the adoption is driven purely by community efforts and support. From day one at 5ire, we have kept community building as a core priority. The beauty of this is that while it is often difficult to quantify community building effort and calculate ROI in the short term, in the long term it has high returns. Quality and quantity need to go hand in hand. In addition to the number of overall adoption, what makes us even happier is the data we see on usage patterns. So far the average time spent on the testnet is upwards of 8 minutes. This shows that not only do we have quantity we also are doing well on quality.

Accessibility needs to be a design principle, not an afterthought. Often in early days of ecosystem building the focus is on getting the numbers and the big milestones. But for us, inclusion and accessibility has been a core component and our ambassadors have helped us champion it. All major updates and announcements by 5ire have been translated by our ambassadors and made available in different regional languages. We believe this is what has helped us see a high degree of global adoption. This achievement marks a significant breakthrough for blockchain technology and sets us apart as leaders in the industry. We have opened up new use cases for blockchain technology, such as high-frequency trading, micropayments,

and real-time gaming. We have provided businesses and developers with a platform that can handle their needs, and we have shown the world what is possible with blockchain technology. We will continue to push the boundaries of blockchain technology, exploring new technologies and techniques to improve the performance and scalability of 5ireChain. The future is bright, and we are excited to be at the forefront of the blockchain revolution. Join us as we continue to innovate, explore, and push the limits of what's possible!

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Successful Launch of 36 OneWeb Satellites with ISRO/NSIL Marks a Key Milestone to Enable Global Connectivity

Bharti-backed OneWeb, the Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite communications company, today confirmed the successful deployment and contact of 36 satellites launched by NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC-SHAR) in Sriharikota, India. Lift-off took place 26th March 2023 at 9:00 am local time. OneWeb's satellites separated successfully from the rocket and were dispensed in nine phases over a period of 1 hour and 14 minutes, with the signal acquisition on all 36 satellites confirmed. This is OneWeb's 18th launch, its third this year, bringing the total of OneWeb's constellation to 618 satellites. The OneWeb constellation design calls for 588 satellites for global coverage and additional satellites are planned for resiliency and redundancy. Thanks to today's successful launch the constellation is in place to soon deliver global services. By the year-end, OneWeb will be ready to roll out global coverage, enhancing its existing connectivity solutions that are already live in regions north of 50-degrees latitude as it brings new areas online by partnering with leading providers. This mission marks OneWeb's second satellite deployment from India, highlighting the strong partnership with NSIL and ISRO and OneWeb's commitment to provide connectivity across the length and breadth of India. Once activated, OneWeb's coverage solutions will bring secured connectivity to enterprises, towns, villages, municipalities and schools, including the most remote areas across the country.

Sunil Bharti Mittal, Executive Chairman of OneWeb, said: "In my work, I have seen the power of connectivity to bring benefits to all, wherever they are. Yet half the world's population does not have access to fast, reliable connectivity. Today's launch represents a major step towards closing the digital divide. OneWeb's global constellation will play a pivotal role in realizing this dream. "I am particularly proud that OneWeb has crossed the threshold to be able to provide its global coverage in India, a country whose ambitions in enhancing Space-based connectivity are being driven by NewSpace India and ISRO. Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Government of India's target to significantly expand access to high-speed internet connectivity is vital, and OneWeb is grateful for all the support. Overall, this is an incredibly exciting time for the satellite connectivity

industry, and I am delighted that the UK and India are at the forefront of developments. “I would like to thank colleagues, our partners, vendors, investors, and customers who have realized the potential of OneWeb and made this launch possible. I am incredibly excited for the future of OneWeb and the opportunity its connectivity services provide to communities globally.” Shri. Somanath S, the Secretary, of the Department of Space and Chairman, of ISRO, commented: “This launch is a very important milestone for ISRO as we demonstrated the successful launch of a second consecutive commercial payload of OneWeb. This valued customer trusted our capability and we have proved it in a very short span of time. This launch has created a new record in Indian space history. With this launch of LVM3, through NewSpace India Ltd, ISRO is confident of handling many more such launches on demand for both LEO and GEO missions in the future. I wish OneWeb great success in globalizing the completed constellation.”

Radhakrishnan D, Chairman-cum-Managing Director, NewSpace India Limited, said: “Successful injection of 36 OneWeb Gen-1 satellites from UK by LVM3 today, is an extremely proud moment for NSIL and the entire ISRO fraternity. NSIL would like to thank M/s OneWeb for believing in our capabilities and giving us this important opportunity to undertake the mission. We are doubly happy, as this mission would mark the accomplishment of the full constellation and commencement of commercial broadband services globally by M/s OneWeb. NSIL looks forward to be associated with M/s OneWeb not only in the area of providing Launch solutions but also in several other business endeavors that would benefit both companies. We would like to extend our heartfelt congratulations to the entire OneWeb technical and management team.” UK Secretary of State for Science, Innovation, and Technology Michelle Donelan said: “The completion of the LEO constellation is hugely significant both for OneWeb and the UK’s wider sector. “We invested in OneWeb’s vision to bridge the global digital divide, and our burgeoning space sector is transforming the UK into the perfect base for like-minded companies to realize their stratospheric potential.” Neil Masterson, Chief Executive of OneWeb, added: “This is the most significant milestone in the history of OneWeb, as we reach the satellites needed for global coverage. Over several years we have remained focused on our commitment to deliver a network that will provide connectivity for our customers and communities that need it most. With today’s satellite deployment, facilitated by our expert team and our partners at ISRO and NSIL, we are realizing this central ambition and are even closer to changing lives at scale. “I would like to pay tribute to all of my colleagues at OneWeb who have driven our rapid momentum and progress over recent years. It is thanks to them that we will be able to deliver high-speed, low-latency connectivity around the world later this year.”

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**Adani Stocks Recover as Group Rebuts Debt Repayment Reports;
All 10 Counters in Green**

Adani Group stocks recovered in market after the ports-to-power conglomerate rebutted reports that it has not finished repayment of loans backed by shares worth \$2.15 billion. "Adani has completed full prepayment of margin linked share backed financing aggregating to USD 2.15 billion and all corresponding shares pledged for those facilities have been released," the group stated in a regulatory filing. The conglomerate has denied the reports in separate statements Tuesday, calling the Economic Times' claims that the group is seeking to renegotiate the terms of \$4 billion worth of loans "baseless speculation." The group's flagship entity, Adani Enterprises, advanced as much as 6.69 percent to Rs 1,708 per share, while Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone added 4.71 percent to Rs 621.35 apiece and were among the top Nifty 50 gainers. Other group companies also gained, paring losses on Tuesday spurred by reports from the Economic Times and The Ken. Among other stocks, Adani Power climbed 4.98 percent, Adani Wilmar 4.22 percent, and Adani Green Energy 4.15 percent on the BSE. The stock of NDTV surged by 3.73 percent, Adani Transmission went up by 2 percent, Adani Total Gas by 2 percent, Ambuja Cements by 1.94 percent and ACC by 1.92 percent. Adani Group CFO Jugeshinder Robbie Singh on Tuesday said stock exchanges update data on promoter share pledges at the end of the quarter, as he tried to clarify on present data not matching with the conglomerate's statement of repaying all the \$2.15 billion of share-backed debt.

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Launch of Waka Turning Around the Face of Virtual Hangouts

Waka Voice has emerged as a trailblazer in the realm of virtual socializing with its audio-focused platform that offers an engaging social experience. Its popularity is soaring owing to its mission to make voice communication accessible to everyone through a user-friendly interface that is convenient and effortless to use. The interface is designed to be visually appealing and easy to navigate, leading to enhanced usability and an enriched experience for users. Waka is revolutionizing conventional voice platforms by directing its attention towards tier 2 and tier 3 users, intending to bring about a positive shift and a fantastic user experience. Waka believes that connecting with others is an indispensable aspect of leading a content and gratifying life, and its real-time voice chat feature enables users to do just that by establishing connections with people globally, sharing their interests, and forging new bonds of friendship. Waka Voice is rapidly emerging as a favored choice for individuals seeking to socialize and interact with people worldwide. Waka's distinctive features, including voice rooms, offer users an opportunity to communicate using their voice instead of text. This feature can prove to be immensely beneficial for those desiring immersive conversations or discussions. Additionally, Waka provides an instant messaging service complete with custom effects, comprising filters, animations, and other visual elements that add to the

charm and excitement of conversations and interactions. Waka Voice is dedicated to offering a secure and comfortable environment for users to explore their interests and establish connections with others. The platform's emphasis on audio communication fosters a sense of closeness and warmth that surpasses traditional text-based communication techniques. Waka strongly believes that voice communication is a vital component of effective communication and strives to make it easily accessible to everyone. The company suggests that whether individuals are seeking to connect with new acquaintances, share their interests or unwind and have fun, Waka is the ideal platform for them. Waka Voice is gaining significant recognition as a revolutionary platform in the realm of virtual hangouts. The platform's concentration on audio communication, captivating features, and dedication to creating a secure and inviting atmosphere for users is enabling individuals to connect with others in more meaningful ways.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 03/30/2023

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UiPath and Amelia Partner to Usher in a New Era of Seamless Digital Experiences for the Future of Work

UiPath, a leading enterprise automation software company, and Amelia, the enterprise leader in Trusted AI, today announced a partnership that brings together the power of the UiPath Business Automation Platform with Amelia's enterprise-grade Conversational AI to create a fully integrated IT digital agent solution. Together, the market leaders will enable customers to deliver personalized employee experiences at scale, helping businesses drive efficient growth by doing more with less. Despite the proliferation of digital technologies in the enterprise, employee experiences still lag behind. UiPath and Amelia bridge the gap between powerful automation and simplified user experiences with an integrated solution that reimagines the employee experience and delivers measurable improvement in productivity and net promoter scores (NPS). Employees can make support requests via chat, messaging, or voice. Amelia processes the request and natively integrates with UiPath software robots to resolve the issues with workflow automation and AI. Once complete, Amelia summarizes the resolution for the employee via their preferred channel. Requests that cannot be resolved are escalated to support agents, with the combined solution learning from the interaction to better address similar issues in the future.

Companies that deploy UiPath and Amelia's joint solution empower their employees and boost their satisfaction with immediate, 24/7/365 resolutions for a full suite of IT and administrative requests, including application troubleshooting, VPN access, password resets, vacation balance checks, payroll changes, and more.

With its combined solution, Amelia and UiPath can create extraordinary user experiences through rapid resolution of everyday tasks, allowing employees to focus on propelling company growth and providing premier customer service. It enables

end-to-end resolutions for high-volume requests, which reduces service desk wait times, accelerates request handle times, and improvements of employer NPS. Customers are empowered to scale custom solutions and applications with the offering as their business needs evolve. "UiPath is motivated by the fundamental beliefs that automation liberates humanity's boundless potential and that it is critical to transform employee experiences in today's resource-constrained market," said Dhruv Asher, Senior Vice President of Alliances and Business Development at UiPath. "In Amelia, we found a partner that is both home to a market-leading Conversational AI solution, and perfectly aligned with our mission and vision for automation. We are thrilled to bring our joint solution to market to help employees everywhere and drive productivity at organizations around the world." Lanham Napier, President and Chairman of Amelia, said, "We are extremely pleased to partner with UiPath to create a fully integrated automation solution for seamless support experiences. Employees are undoubtedly the engine that drives companies' success, yet people are often hindered in their jobs by repetitive, time-consuming tasks that distract them from their goals. Our joint solution eliminates barriers to productivity and creativity by bringing together the market's leading Conversational AI and business automation technology, and we're excited to deliver new innovations across industries."

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Seeing Significant Growth in Average Speed of Broadband Internet

The average speed of fixed broadband internet has increased by 50 percent compared to last year in Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport told Trend. The ministry emphasized that this result was achieved thanks to investments in updating the internet infrastructure in our country. "As a result of the increase, the average internet speed in January of this year amounted to 26.3 Mbps. In the same period last year, the speed was 17.5 Mbps. The measurements were carried out on the basis of the world-famous methodology Speedtest Global Index by Ookla," the ministry said. Work is underway to provide access to high-speed internet in all settlements of Azerbaijan until the end of 2024. In December 2022, the average download speed for Azerbaijan's broadband internet access was 27.15 Mbps. Thus, the country made its way up to 118th from 116th by data transfer rate on broadband internet access in the Speedtest Global Index ranking among 178 countries.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/03/2023

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Volume of Payments Through Green Card System in Azerbaijan Revealed

A total of 22,187 insurance contracts were issued within the Green Card system in 2022, for which insurance premiums in the amount of 3.01 million manat (\$1.7 million) were collected, Trend reports via Compulsory Insurance Bureau of Azerbaijan. According to the Bureau, the number of contracts increased by percent compared to 2021, while the insurance premiums grew by 25 percent. Last year, the average insurance premium under Green Card insurance contracts amounted to 136 manat (\$80), which is 9.3 percent less than in 2021 (150 manat or \$88.2). The Green Card is an international certificate of insurance providing visiting motorists with proof of the minimum compulsory insurance cover required by the law of the country visited. The green card system is designed to facilitate the movement of vehicles across international borders through an internationally acceptable document proving the existence of insurance.

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Azerbaijan's State Customs Committee to Launch Digital Portal on Transit Operations

The digital portal of the State Customs Committee of Azerbaijan, which will directly process applications for transit operations, is expected to be launched in the near future, Chairman of the committee Shahin Bagirov told reporters, Trend reports. He made the remark during a multilateral meeting on the project to simplify the transit customs procedure on the principle of "single window" as part of the Trans-Caspian East-West-Middle Corridor. According to him, the State Customs Committee aims to introduce digital tools to speed up customs procedures. "It is planned to achieve the goal of conducting customs procedures on the principle of "single window" as part of the international East-West corridor. In the near future, the State Customs Committee portal is expected to be put into operation, which will directly process applications for transit operations," he said. "First of all, we are aimed at obtaining information about the cargo that is expected to arrive, which will ensure the efficiency of cargo transportation. After the physical arrival of the cargo on the territory of Azerbaijan, we will be able to arrange and send it further in the shortest possible time," he added. Bagirov also noted that Azerbaijan continues to work on the implementation of international conventions on cargo transportation.

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Azerbaijan to Prepare Digital Map on Creating Smart Cities, Villages

A digital map on the creation of smart cities and villages will be prepared in Azerbaijan, Deputy Head of the Agro Services Agency Anar Azimov said during an event dedicated to the implementation of the technical assistance program for

Azerbaijan, Trend reports. Azimov noted that the concept of smart cities in Azerbaijani villages includes the development of smart infrastructure and services, social employment, smart management and other tools. According to him, in Karabakh, the government of Azerbaijan has begun to implement this concept and the leading countries of the world, including the EU, are interested in applying our experience. "Today, work is underway to assess and develop tools to create smart cities and villages in a particular region of Azerbaijan. We also evaluate investment plans and opportunities. After the implementation of these and other works, an appropriate digital map will be prepared," the official explained. Azimov added that the implementation of projects of smart cities and villages will allow Azerbaijan to improve the investment environment, and expand the technical capabilities of the country. The first smart village project in Azerbaijan has been implemented in the Aghali village of Zangilan district.

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Visa Ready to Expand Cashless Payments in Azerbaijan's Transport

Visa is ready to work with all market participants to launch cashless payments in Azerbaijan's transport, Senior Director, Regional Manager of Visa in Azerbaijan Nurlan Hajiyev said in an interview with Trend. He mentioned that Visa was the first to launch cashless payments in Azerbaijan's railway transport. "Currently, validators for accepting non-cash payments have been installed in all 14 stations of the Baku suburban railway. In 2022, we also launched the Mobility & Transit Transaction (MTT) technology for the first time in Azerbaijan. The MTT model allows operators to offer passengers a range of flexible fares, including fixed fares, distance, and time-based fares, multi-modal fares, as well as features such as fare capping, benefits, and delay refunds," he added. Hajiyev noted that Visa is glad to work in Azerbaijan's transport sector. "We are open to working with all transport organizations and are ready to continue our cooperation to expand the acceptance of bank cards in the country's transport," the regional manager said. The volume of non-cash payments in Azerbaijan amounted to 58.56 billion manat (\$34.45 billion) in 2022, which is 21.1 billion manat (\$12.4 billion) or 56.26 percent more than in 2021. A total of 562.1 million transactions worth 54.2 billion manat (\$31.8 billion) were carried out through debit cards (an increase of 54.9 percent), and 80.8 million transactions worth 4.3 billion manat (\$2.5 billion) through credit cards (an increase of 78.3 percent).

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Azerbaijan Providing Oghuz District with High-Speed Internet

Azerbaijan's Aztelekom LLC under the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport has provided 2,046 households in the Oghuz district with high-speed internet, the

ministry told Trend. According to the ministry, 1,082 subscribers are using high-speed internet services so far. "The construction of the GPON (Gigabit Passive Optical Network), the most modern wired technology for accessing internet, has been completed in Oghuz city. The construction of this network has begun in Jalut and Bayan villages of the Oghuz district," the ministry said. The new GPON technology offers subscribers high-speed (from 30 Mbps to 100 Mbps) internet packages: internet, internet + telephony, internet + telephony + TV. The cost of tariffs varies from 18 manat (\$10.59) to 54 manat (\$31.7). As of early March 2023, more than 814,000 households were provided with the GPON technology-based broadband internet in Azerbaijan. By the end of 2024, it's planned to cover the entire country with broadband Internet with a minimum transfer rate of 25 Mbps.

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TURKMENISTAN: IRU Supports Digitalization of Customs Sphere

The International Road Transport Union (IRU) has supported the Turkmen Association of International Road Carriers (THADA) in promoting digital invoices for the customs sphere of Turkmenistan, IRU's Director of TIR and Transit Services Tatiana Rey-Bellet told Trend. According to her, the result of this support was that in December 2022 Turkmenistan joined the e-CMR protocol (digital version of the CMR consignment note). "At the same time, the customs and transport authorities of Turkmenistan have actively responded to the IRU's offer to cooperate with experts from other countries within the framework of a special UNECE group established to facilitate the practical implementation of digital waybills (e-CMR) based on a harmonized approach," the representative of the organization said. Furthermore, she added that throughout 2022, the organization and the Government of Turkmenistan have maintained fruitful and close cooperation, achieving practical and tangible results in the field of international trade and transport. "We have also laid a solid foundation to continue our collaboration in 2023 with even more ambitious goals. The transport industry warmly welcomed the gradual opening of Turkmenistan's borders for international traffic, which began in June 2022, after which the country's border crossings began to provide unhindered transit traffic," the director of the organization's department said.

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UZBEKISTAN: 109th in Updated Economic Freedom Index

At the end of February, the Heritage Foundation and The Wall Street Journal released the "Economic Freedom Index" report for 2023. According to the report, Uzbekistan ranked 109th among 176 countries with a score of 56.5 and rose by eight positions. Out of 12 indicators, Uzbekistan showed positive changes in 7 and negative changes in the other 5. Specifically, positive changes were recorded in:

Government Integrity (+1.1 points), Fiscal Health (+2 points), Labor Market Freedom (+0.1 points), Monetary Freedom (+2.3 points), Trade Freedom (+0.4 points), Investment Freedom (+10 points), and Financial Freedom (+10 points). The report highlighted Uzbekistan's policy of openness and modernisation to ensure economic freedom since 2017, after several years of economic stagnation. However, property rights (-0.7 points), effectiveness of the judiciary (-0.1 points), government spending (-3.2 points), fiscal health (-11.3 points), and business freedom (-0.2 points) indicators showed a decline. As significant barriers to economic freedom in Uzbekistan, the report emphasised the need for important reforms to improve the indicators of property rights, effectiveness of the judiciary, and government integrity, which are lower than the global average.

From <https://uzreport.news/> 03/07/2023

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Uzbekistan Introducing 5G Technology

Since March 2023, the process of increasing the speed of mobile Internet and introducing 5G technology throughout the country has begun, the head of the Uzbektelecom press service Timur Mamajonov said, Trend reports citing Kun.uz. As part of the project, more than 3,000 existing base stations across Uzbekistan will be modernized using the latest technologies, and more than 2,000 new base stations will be built and put into operation. The process of upgrading base stations to the 5G standard is an important stage of the project. As a result, mobile subscribers will be able to comfortably use mobile Internet at the speed of the fifth generation. The first stage of the project provides for full coverage of the city of Tashkent with a 5G network, as well as partial coverage of regional centers. After completion of the work, the next stages of the implementation of 5G technology throughout the country will be analyzed.

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Species Diversification Could Be Costly to Achieve

Government agencies, fish farmers, and researchers from Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Central Asian countries discussed the potential opportunities and constraints of species diversification in aquaculture. The workshop was organized as part of the FAO-Türkiye Partnership Programme's FISHCap Project, which seeks to develop sustainable fisheries and aquaculture management.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: 100,000 NEW Jobs for Western Sydney

A re-elected Liberal and Nationals Government will create 100,000 new jobs in Western Sydney over the next five years, turbocharging the economy and ensuring Western Sydney remains a thriving place to live and work. Premier Dominic Perrottet said the Liberal and Nationals would deliver better paying jobs for the people of Western Sydney to support local businesses and futureproof the region. "Western Sydney is one of the fastest growing regions in the country and the engine room of our state's economy. That's why we will deliver more better paying local jobs so the region continues to thrive," Mr Perrottet said. "We will deliver 100,000 new jobs in Western Sydney over the next five years across a range of sectors including construction, manufacturing, health, transport, professional services, science and more.

"Our Government has a strong track record of delivering jobs growth, with 209,100 more people employed in NSW now than before the pandemic, and that strong track record of jobs growth will only continue under the Liberal and Nationals. "Our \$116 billion infrastructure pipeline is already supporting thousands of jobs in Western Sydney, including on the new toll-free M12 motorway, Sydney Metro, and the Western Sydney Airport aerotropolis. "Backing Western Sydney with 100,000 new jobs is only possible thanks to the Liberal and Nationals long-term economic plan to keep our state moving forward." Treasurer Matt Kean said creating more, better quality jobs will provide a significant boost to the economy. "Western Sydney is the third largest economy in the country after Sydney and Melbourne and home to over 230,000 businesses employing over 1 million people," Mr Kean said. "The state's unemployment rate is currently 3.1 per cent, which is the lowest in the country, but with so much happening in Western Sydney we know there is an opportunity to create thousands more jobs. "This compliments our long term plan to help 95,000 women enter the workforce or take on more hours by making childcare more affordable and accessible."

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 03/01/2023

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AER Publishes Roadmap Determination That Will Lead to Cleaner, Cheaper Energy

The Australian Energy Regulator has published its contribution determination for the Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap that will see an average household save \$130 on their energy bills. New energy infrastructure is being built to help NSW transition to cleaner, more reliable and cheaper energy. As part of that transition, costs of around 25-35 cents a week or the equivalent of three coffees a year are expected to be recovered from the typical household electricity consumer in financial year 2023-24. Energy Minister Matt Kean said the Roadmap including these costs delivers an outcome that is \$130 less than if the Roadmap wasn't in place. "The NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap remains critical to replacing aging power stations as they

retire with secure, affordable, reliable and sustainable energy,” Mr Kean said.

“The Roadmap will deliver value for money by introducing more low cost renewables and storage into the grid and putting downward pressure on electricity bills. “Overall, the Roadmap including these costs will see typical household bills \$130 less a year than if the Roadmap wasn’t in place.” The requirement for a determination was set out in the Roadmap legislation, which passed with cross party support. Since the Roadmap was released in late 2020, significant work has been undertaken to establish Roadmap entities and begin delivering projects across the State. This includes the development of the Waratah Super Battery at Munmorah and procurement of network infrastructure for the Central West-Orana Renewable Energy Zone. The NSW Liberal and Nationals Government has implemented the Commonwealth’s coal cap that has already seen electricity futures prices fall by more than 40 per cent next financial year. Energy bill rebates and assistance worth \$330 million are available and a re-elected Liberals and Nationals Government will also ensure every household receives \$250 off their bill for searching for a better deal.

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Investing in Better Justice for Aboriginal People

The NSW Liberal and Nationals Government has announced two new sites for the expansion of an innovative program which aims to divert Aboriginal people away from the criminal justice system by investing in community-led initiatives that address the underlying causes of crime. Attorney General Mark Speakman said Nowra on the state’s South Coast and Kempsey on the Mid North Coast will be the second and third justice reinvestment sites in NSW supported by the NSW Government, with an investment of \$9.8 million. The first justice reinvestment approach in NSW was the Maranguka initiative in Bourke, first launched as a pilot by the NSW Liberal and Nationals Government in 2012. “The underlying causes of offending are complex,” Mr Speakman said. “The justice reinvestment approach works to divert Aboriginal people away from the criminal justice system with evidence-based, preventative, diversionary and community development initiatives.

“Justice reinvestment builds stronger, safer communities, focusing on getting to the underlying causes of crime and stopping crime from occurring in the first place. “I look forward to seeing the positive impact that the justice reinvestment approach will have on these two regional communities.” Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Ben Franklin said the NSW Government will seek community involvement in expanding justice reinvestment approaches in Nowra and Kempsey. “The NSW Liberal and Nationals Government is dedicated to improving Aboriginal outcomes in criminal justice, child protection and housing, as well as improving services and programs to achieve meaningful, permanent outcomes that improve the lives of Aboriginal people,” Mr

Franklin said. “Both Kempsey and Nowra have experienced significant crime-related issues and have the capacity to support justice reinvestment activities.

“Consultation will be undertaken with the respective local communities on expanding justice reinvestment in these areas, including the co-design of community led initiatives.” The expansion of justice reinvestment is part of the NSW Government’s \$20 million investment in justice initiatives aimed at reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system. This includes: \$9.8 million for new justice reinvestment pilots \$5.8 million to expand the Youth Koori Court to the Children’s Court at Dubbo and to provide more funding for Aboriginal Legal Services, Legal Aid NSW and a specialist Children’s Magistrate to oversee the Youth Koori Courts including at Surry Hills and Parramatta \$4.2 million to expand Circle Sentencing program from 12 to 20 high-priority Local Court locations.

Mr Speakman also announced the staged commencement of the eight new circle sentencing locations, during a visit to the South Coast today: Broken Hill and Wagga Wagga have commenced circle sentencing. Campbelltown is ready to take referrals from the court. Wollongong aims to take referrals as early as next month. Batemans Bay and Penrith are expected to take referrals from April 2023. Waverley and the Sydney Downing Centre are expected to take referrals later in the year. Circle sentencing is an alternative sentencing method in which a local court magistrate works with Aboriginal Elders, victims, respected members of the community and the offender’s family to determine the appropriate sentence. “Since the circle sentencing program began as a pilot in Nowra 21 years ago this month, more than 1,518 circle sentencing sittings have been held for Aboriginal offenders, helping them to address the causes of their behaviour and turn their lives around,” Mr Speakman said.

“The circle sentencing program has proven that the justice system can work with Aboriginal communities on common goals of reducing re-offending and helping victims of crime in their recovery.” A 2020 study by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research showed that, compared with those sentenced in traditional ways, Aboriginal offenders participating in circle sentencing are 9.3 percentage points (51.7 per cent) less likely to go to prison, 3.9 percentage points (9.6 per cent) less likely to re-offend within 12 months and (if they do reoffend) take 55 days longer to reoffend.

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Boost for Nature-Based Tourism Operators Across NSW

Tourism operators and businesses seeking to develop nature-based experiences may be eligible for a share in \$3.5 million to support the creation and enhancement of tourism experiences. The NSW Liberal and Nationals Government is providing dollar-for-dollar matched grants from \$100,000 up to \$250,000 including tour, attraction and accommodation providers and landholders to fund eligible projects to

grow the visitor economy. Minister for Tourism Ben Franklin said the Nature-Based Visitor Experience Development Grant program would enable the creation of new attractions or capacity to significantly grow existing offerings and drive visitation to local communities. “This program allows tourism operators to expand or improve their business by creating a new nature experience, build viewing platforms, establishing infrastructure such as walkways or glamping accommodation, which will significantly drive visitation and inject more money into their local economy,” Mr Franklin said.

“Reconnecting with nature is one of the themes that sets NSW apart, with abundant opportunities for visitors to see our National Parks, enjoy the bush and outback stargazing, get up close with marine life or to experience walking, cycling and mountain biking trails. “The NSW Liberal and Nationals Government is proud to work with industry stakeholders to grow our capability and visitor appeal, and shows our commitment to support new products and visitor experiences that showcase our State’s tourism strengths. The program was developed in consultation with industry and in-line with NSW Government strategies, including the Destination Network Destination Management Plans, to address key opportunities and actions.

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 03/04/2023

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\$1.2 Billion Boost for NSW Hospitals and Health Facilities

A re-elected Liberal and Nationals Government will inject \$1.2 billion in critical health infrastructure to build and upgrade 20 hospitals and health facilities, providing a major boost to communities right across state. Premier Dominic Perrottet said this investment would improve the quality of healthcare facilities delivered across the state. “Since 2011, the Liberal and Nationals have delivered more than 180 health infrastructure projects across NSW, with more than 130 projects currently underway,” Mr Perrottet said. “This major \$1.2 billion investment will see a further 20 hospitals and health facilities built or upgraded right across the state, future-proofing our health system and ensuring our communities continue to have access to world-class healthcare.

“As part of this investment, \$260 million will be allocated for stage two of the Concord Hospital redevelopment, which is already transforming patient care in Sydney’s inner west following the completion of stage one earlier last year. “These critical investments in health infrastructure are only possible thanks to the Liberal and Nationals long-term economic plan to keep our state moving forward.” Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional NSW Paul Toole said the NSW Liberal and Nationals Government had driven the biggest investment in regional hospitals and health services in the State’s history to deliver better care closer to home. “With these new projects in the pipeline, we are on track to have built or upgraded more than 150 hospitals and health services in the regions by 2027

including in some of our most remote communities like Wentworth and Buronga,” Mr Toole said.

“At the last election, Labor threw everything at blocking the new \$723.3 million Tweed Valley Hospital, the single largest hospital project ever seen in regional NSW. The Liberal and Nationals knew it is what the community needed and look where we are now – on track for it to be treating patients later this year. Labor can’t be trusted when it comes to regional health.” Regional Health Minister Bronnie Taylor said only a re-elected Liberal and Nationals Government can guarantee that regional health projects are delivered. “While Labor plan on dumping the Regional Health portfolio, the NSW Liberal and Nationals in Government are focused on improving health outcomes for our regional, rural and remote communities,” Mrs Taylor said. “It is only the NSW Liberal and Nationals that are committed to future-proofing health care in the bush – that is our track record. We will continue to ensure our rural and regional communities have the health facilities they need and deserve.

“We are also investing in our workforce, with regional communities reaping the rewards of our \$883 million incentive scheme. Thousands of health workers have taken up the package and they will be the ones working in our new hospitals and health facilities that are being delivered by this government.” Health Minister Brad Hazzard said since 2011, the NSW Liberal and Nationals Government has more than tripled Labor’s previous annual health infrastructure spend. “These world class facilities are only as good as the people who work there, which is why last year we also announced the largest workforce boost in the nation’s history of 10,148 staff for our metropolitan and rural/regional hospitals,” Mr Hazzard said. “The physical surroundings in which you spend your working life can be an important source of job satisfaction, productivity and wellbeing but especially so for health staff.

“Building new health facilities plays a big part in helping to attract and retain health workers and ensuring better health outcomes for patients. “Unlike Labor, every hospital and health facility that our Government has promised to build, has been delivered or is in progress and planning.” The \$1.2 billion investment includes \$260 million to deliver stage two of the Concord Hospital redevelopment, and \$243 million for two new integrated health hubs recently announced for south west Sydney, which will help ease pressures on local hospitals by providing many of the same services closer to home. It also includes \$114 million announced for the Manning Base Hospital redevelopment, \$66 million for a major upgrade of the Warren Multipurpose Service and \$7.5 million for improved health services at Milton-Ulladulla Hospital.

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 03/12/2023

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NEW ZEALAND: Government Working Faster and Smarter to Support Response and Recovery

The Government has announced \$17.5 million to further support communities and community providers impacted by Cyclone Gabrielle, and the streamlining of application processes to support a faster and smarter response and recovery. “The Government is continuing to focus on and support the locally-led recovery with further support on the way for communities and community groups in cyclone affected regions,” Minister for Social Development and Employment Carmel Sepuloni said. “The damage from Cyclone Gabrielle is extensive. People and families have been displaced, whole communities have been devastated, businesses have been hard hit and social providers working at the frontline are continuing to see increased demand,” Carmel Sepuloni said.

“This next phase will see further support for community food providers in affected regions and bulk purchasing of food for distribution. This will support providers to meet demand for food assistance in their communities, and will mean providers are less likely to be putting extra strain on already stretched supermarkets. “To bolster the response on the ground, disability providers with Care in the Community disability funding will be able to pivot to support cyclone and flood impacted households. This will create greater capacity to support more disabled people than is currently possible with only five providers. “Whilst having increased support available for providers and community groups is important, it’s equally as important that the process for applying is as seamless as possible. That’s why the Ministry of Social Development is also proactively reviewing and streamlining the application process to make it easier to access the Community Provider Support Funds.

“In addition to this, we are increasing the amount of money they can access. As we have learnt more about the impacts of Cyclone Gabrielle in particular, we have heard that the current funding caps are too limiting,” Carmel Sepuloni said. The cap will increase for the Provider Fund from \$7,000 to \$40,000. This will benefit providers who currently receive regular government funding in the social sector and who are involved in the response including Whānau Ora and family violence providers for example. The Community Fund, which provides funding for smaller community groups, will increase from \$3,500 up to \$20,000. “I’m confident and it is my expectation that increasing the cap will better serve our response and recovery, allowing for the existing funds to be distributed at a faster rate and better reflect the types of needs identified by community groups.

“We are focused on backing our community and NGO providers who we know have been pivotal in supporting their communities as part of the flood and cyclone response,” Carmel Sepuloni said. The Associate Minister for Cyclone Recovery Barbara Edmonds has welcomed the NEMA announcement of a streamlined mechanism to speed up funding access for community groups for costs already

incurred during the Cyclone response. “These groups have been instrumental to the cyclone response and we are extremely grateful for their mahi. It’s important to reimburse them as quickly and easily as possible so they can continue the fantastic work they do for their communities,” Barbara Edmonds said.

“Many groups dug deep into their own resources, which are now under considerable strain. This additional support by way of reimbursement, will help marae, Iwi, Pacific, ethnic and recognised rural and community groups to continue delivering essential support to people, families and their households. “The \$12 million funding for NEMA will provide fast reimbursement of costs already incurred by eligible organisations during the state of national emergency, rather than through NEMA’s existing processes. “An additional \$3 million will cover costs not covered by existing funding mechanisms but which were essential to support the immediate response, such as buying generators,” Barbara Edmonds said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 03/09/2023

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Freeing Up More Government Bandwidth and Money to Focus on the Cost of Living

A second tranche of government programmes is being stopped or delayed to allow the Government to focus more time, energy and resources on the bread and butter issues facing New Zealanders, Prime Minister Chris Hipkins announced today. The second group of programmes set out today add to the already announced stopping of the RNZ-TVNZ merger and biofuels mandate, and putting a hate speech law and social insurance scheme on a slower track until economic conditions allow. “I want New Zealanders to know the Government is doing its bit and is cutting its cloth to suit the times we are in,” Chris Hipkins said. “Some of these things we’re delaying or stopping mean a lot to us. But we’re taking the hard decisions because we know Kiwis are also making some tough calls. “It will give Ministers and wider government more bandwidth to deal with cost of living issues and the cyclone recovery.

“The two lots of reprioritisation will save about \$1 billion, which will be reallocated to support New Zealanders with the cost of living. “That’s in addition to the over \$700 million in savings we reallocated to fund the petrol excise cut and half-price public transport extension through to the end of June. “This \$1.7 billion in savings represents a clear intent of the Government to focus on the issues that matter most to New Zealanders and provide a little bit extra in support to households. The programmes that are being reprioritised include: Saving \$568 million by stopping the clean car upgrade scheme, where households can scrap their old cars in return for a grant for a cleaner vehicle or to pay for public transport. Refocusing our goal of increasing and improving public transport as an alternative to driving to the five main centres of Auckland, Hamilton, Tauranga, Wellington and Christchurch.

Significantly narrowing the speed reduction programme to focus on the most dangerous one per cent of state highways, and ensuring Waka Kotahi are consulting meaningfully with affected communities. That means speed limits will reduce in the places where there are the highest numbers of deaths and injuries and where local communities support change. We will continue to make targeted reductions in the areas immediately around schools and marae and in small townships that a state highway runs through. Stopping the social leasing car scheme. The scheme was to provide leasing arrangements to low income families for clean cars but was proving difficult to implement. And several of the communities where it was to be trialled have been affected by the recent weather.

Deferring advice on the second part of legislation looking at alcohol reform that relate to pricing, sponsorship and advertising. This will now be pushed back to April 2024, rather than come to Ministers in March this year. These are areas that need time to investigate properly and ensure there are no unintended consequences. For example, when community groups are doing it tough, the Government doesn't want to see any restrictions on sponsorship increasing costs for community sports teams. Not introducing legislation to lower the voting age to 16 for general elections. Instead, we will shift focus to lowering the age for voting in local body elections. Deferring work on the container return scheme that would see small refunds for returning containers. It's estimated it will add a small cost to the average household and we don't want to be imposing additional costs on families at this time.

Deferring public consultation on a new test to determine who is a contractor and who is an employee. A recent Employment Court ruling has significant implications on the legal definition of a contractor, so rather than pushing ahead with our proposed consultation on changes we will put our work on hold until all appeals of the case are heard. "I can also confirm today that we will roll out transport projects in Auckland in stages. "Reducing transport emissions is critical to achieving New Zealand's climate change targets, but we need to focus our efforts on the areas where we can achieve the greatest reductions, such as our biggest cities. "With around a third of New Zealand's population estimated to live in our biggest city, it's where we can make the largest single gains in future-proofing transport systems to tackle congestion and reduce emissions.

"Work on Auckland Light Rail will continue alongside other city-shaping investments like a second Waitemata Harbour Crossing, more rapid busways, and better connections to growth areas like the North-West. "But just like the London Underground didn't suddenly appear fully formed, and in fact took many years to develop, Auckland Light Rail will happen in stages – with the first stage expected to be confirmed by the middle of this year. "There's nothing new in taking a staging approach to significant transport projects. The Wellington Northern Corridor and Northern Busway projects, for example, are being delivered by successive governments in stages. "The Waikato Expressway started in 1993, with the Bombay

Hills to Mercer construction, and was only finished last year.

“Auckland Light Rail is no different. Staging the rollout will align it with other critical transport investments, particularly the second Waitematā Harbour Crossing. “Investing in a modern Auckland where people can get around, where there’s less congestion and cleaner travel options is the least the city should expect. Our Cabinet is absolutely agreed on that. “Today’s announcement doesn’t mean there won’t be more areas we will look at. My expectation is that Ministers will continue to prioritise their own work programmes, including by re-scoping plans and amending policy where necessary.”

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More Than 160,000 New Kiwis to Call NZ Home

Over 160,000 people have become New Zealand residents now that 80 per cent of 2021 Resident Visa (2021RV) applications have been processed, Immigration Minister Michael Wood announced today. “The 2021 Resident Visa is one of a number of measures the Government has taken to keep and attract workers to New Zealand to help fill the global skills shortage post COVID,” Michael Wood said. “We created New Zealand’s largest one-off path to residence in late 2021 to give migrants certainty about their future here, and allow them to continue to put down roots. “Within the 160,000 Kiwis who now call New Zealand home the top occupations represented were nurses, early childhood education teachers, software engineers, and primary school teachers.

“We’re working with businesses to take practicable steps to unlock additional labour through the streamlined Accredited Employer Work Visa, the expansion of the Green List, reopening the Pacific Access Category and Samoa Quota, delivering the largest increase in a decade to the RSE scheme, and resuming the Skilled Migrant Category and Parent Category so as to strengthen our international offering. “Alongside the 2021 Resident Visa our immigration plan is starting to pay off with a continued trend of people choosing New Zealand. We’re seeing significant increases in migrant arrivals month on month since our borders fully opened last year, and international migration numbers show our net migration is also steadily increasing. “We’re also seeing huge demand for visitor and work visas, in particular the Working Holiday Scheme for which we have now granted over 53,300 visas, and welcomed over 33,900 of those holding these visas into the country.

“We’ve been moving quickly to review applications and have reached this important milestone of 80 per cent of 2021RV applications processed three months earlier than scheduled. The quick work to process the vast majority of applications in 15 months is equivalent to around five years of standard residence processing. “Although the vast majority of applications have now been decided I appreciate some applicants

are still waiting to hear the outcome of their applications. I'm assured by INZ that they are working hard to process all remaining applications as quickly as possible," Michael Wood said.

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Investment in Blue Highway a Lifeline for Regional Economies and Cyclone Recovery

The Government is delivering a coastal shipping lifeline for businesses, residents and the primary sector in the cyclone-stricken regions of Hawkes Bay and Tairāwhiti, Regional Development Minister Kiri Allan announced today. The Rangitata vessel has been chartered for an emergency coastal shipping route between Gisborne and Napier, with potential for the route to be extended to Tauranga and the South Island, using funding approved by Regional Economic Development Ministers. "Our regions are the backbone of Aotearoa and this Government investment will ensure our hardest hit regions can get back on their feet quicker," Kiri Allan said. "Cyclone Gabrielle has significantly damaged key roads and rail routes. Currently the transportation of products between Gisborne to Napier is more than nine hours by truck.

"Agriculture and horticulture is vital to the East Coast economy and this investment will respond to the critical need to get products – vegetables, meat, wool, timber and wine – out of Gisborne and to the market. "In 2022, Coastal Bulk, the owner of Rangitata, was one recipient of the Government \$30m Coastal Shipping fund, which co-invested with four coastal shipping companies to improve domestic shipping services and efficiency, transport resilience, reduce emissions, and upgrade maritime infrastructure. "Without Government support, this coastal shipping capability between regional ports would not have been available to New Zealand. "This investment in the blue highway will also speed up recovery efforts, allowing for the swifter delivery of construction and rebuild materials into the East Coast.

"The Government is providing a \$500,000 grant and \$2.25 million underwrite to Eastland Port for the charter of the Rangitata for the coming three months. "Swift, purposeful support following a natural disaster such as Cyclone Gabrielle is crucial to keep our regions going. By shaping up this coastal route now, we should see Gisborne's produce shipping out bi-weekly before the month is out. "There is strong support for this coastal shipping route from local produce growers, manufacturers, wine industry, meat processors, and timber exporters, based in both Gisborne and Wairoa," Kiri Allan said. Eastland Port Chief Operating Officer Regional Infrastructure Andrew Gaddum said the Rangitata will arrive in port around midday on Monday. "Without this grant we wouldn't be able to make this happen, so we are over the moon and very grateful we can continue to service our community. "We've heard from our customers that the current road freight alternative to Napier is costing them

thousands of dollars, so it's great we can keep the money in the pocket of our local people. "Normally you would have months of preparation to get a project of this size in place but our team have adapted to the needs of the community and made it work. I am really proud of what we have achieved in such a short space of time. "This is a huge win for our region," said Mr Gaddum.

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Government Confirms Vital Roding Reconnections

The Government has responded quickly to restore lifeline routes after Cyclone Gabrielle and can today confirm that an additional six bailey bridges will be constructed, Transport Minister Michael Wood has announced. "Our immediate priority has been to reopen lifeline roads and reconnect isolated communities. So far 91 per cent of the 1,346km of damaged state highways have been reopened to lifeline access," Michael Wood said. "Today I can confirm that six further Bailey bridge sites have been approved, with construction committed to at Hollywood, Moeangiangi, Whanawhana, Ellis-Wallace, Mangatutu low level, Makiekie (Coal) Creek and site investigation and design are now underway. Four additional sites are being considered. "We have enough stock and components available or on order for all of the approved bridge sites.

"In the next few weeks we're expecting to reopen SH2 Tangoio to Tūtira, SH1 Brynderwyn, and SH38 from Tuai to Aniwaniwa Falls. However, the damage to our road and rail has been massive and so some connections will take longer to restore. "We know that communities and businesses in affected areas want up to date and reliable information so they can regain a sense of certainty. The Government is committed to providing that information. "To ensure communities have access to the most up to date information Waka Kotahi is releasing recovery dashboards for Northland, Gisborne, Waikato, and Hawkes Bay that outline which roads have been reopened, and indicative opened timeframes for roads still being worked on. "We've made a lot of progress already and I want to thank the tireless work of contractors who have made this happen.

"While we're making good progress we know that some routes like SH35 and SH25A will take some time to reopen. I want to thank the community for their patience and understanding as we undertake this massive job. "Once we're confident all communities are reconnected, and lifeline routes are open, we'll move onto the next stage of the rebuild. This stage will focus on getting more permanent solutions for affected areas. Waka Kotahi is still undergoing assessments and planning to work out what those solutions could look like and at what cost, but it's too soon to say. "We know that the work past the initial recovery stage will take time and require additional funding. We are absolutely committed to standing alongside and supporting local communities through the rebuild," Michael Wood said.

Government Focus on Jobs Sees Record Number of New Zealanders Move from Benefits into Work

Two reports released today by the Ministry of Social Development show the Government's investment in the COVID-19 response helped drive record numbers of people off Benefits and into work. It also shows that Main Benefit numbers continue to fall, and young people are leaving the benefit system faster than expected. "COVID-19 had a significant impact across the benefit system in 2020 and saw a substantial increase in the number of New Zealanders needing support. However, this most recent report shows the system recovered faster than expected, and we did not hit the level of unemployment predicted at the start of the pandemic," Carmel Sepuloni said. "Compared to what happened following the Global Financial Crisis, the report found that this Government has delivered lower unemployment and fewer people on Main Benefits.

"As at June 2022 there were nearly 23,900 fewer people receiving the Jobseeker Support – Work Ready benefit than at June 2020. "Likewise the Youth Report followed young New Zealanders aged 16-24 through the pandemic to June 2022 and finds that young people were one of the fastest groups to recover from its impact. "The Government's fast actions in response to COVID-19, alongside the Ministry of Social Development's added focus on supporting people into work, training and education has resulted in young people getting back to work faster than expected. "Initiatives such as the Apprenticeship Boost programme, He Poutama Rangatahi and Mana in Mahi have supported young people into work, apprenticeships, and education as New Zealand moved through COVID-19 and into recovery.

He Poutama Rangatahi has supported nearly 3,900 rangatahi into employment, education or training since 2018; Mana in Mahi has supported almost 5,800 placements by the end of February 2023; and the Apprenticeship Boost Initiative programme has paid more than 55,800 apprentices to date. "The report found that while there was a significant increase in young people receiving benefits in March 2020, it decreased faster than during the Global Financial Crisis. The GFC was the last time we saw a shock to the benefit system like this and it's pleasing to see we have applied the lessons learned during that crisis well. "Youth Main Benefit numbers decreased by 22% over the 18 months following the COVID-19 peak in benefits, twice as fast as the 11% decrease over the 18 months following the GFC peak. By June 2022, youth main benefit numbers were closer to pre-pandemic numbers than other age groups.

"While the rapid decreases in young people supported by the benefit system are pleasing, the report also shows that young people who are receiving the main benefit

tend to have more complex needs than the general youth population and they will need more support. For example, young people who received a Main Benefit at the end of the September 2021 quarter were 2.4 times more likely to have interacted with Oranga Tamariki in childhood. “Our investment in employment programmes is paying off. The Government and MSD will continue our focus on assisting New Zealanders into jobs and supporting businesses to find the workers they need,” Carmel Sepuloni said.

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Continued Progress on Reducing Poverty in Challenging Times

Measures taken by the Government during the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic shock have avoided more children falling into poverty according to official statistics released today. “Despite the most challenging economic conditions in a generation or more, actions taken by the Government have ensured that New Zealand children have not fallen backwards,” Minister for Child Poverty Reduction Jan Tinetti said. “It’s a challenging environment but child poverty figures staying steady this year is encouraging. It shows the Government’s policies targeting kids and families are helping, despite the pandemic and tough economic times. “Programmes like the COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme, the doubling of Winter Energy payments and increases to Working for Families and benefit levels have ensured child poverty rates have continued to track down.

“The extensive package of income and other supports put in place since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a very effective public health response, have helped avoid the big increases in child poverty rates in 2021/22 that some feared and expected. “We know families are doing it tough right now. But the changes we have implemented over the past five years to support families such as our \$5.5 billion Families Package, successive main benefit increases, minimum wage increases, Working for Families increases, and the implementation of our Healthy School Lunches programme are really helping at the moment. “In spite of the economic challenges we are continuing to move towards our poverty reduction goals. Across the three primary measures, we are closer to both the intermediate and 10-year child poverty targets than reported last year.

“We are starting to see the longer term benefits to the changes we have implemented over the last five years since taking office. Reducing child poverty will take time, but the evidence shows we are moving in the right direction. “The fact that eight out of nine child poverty measures have seen a statistically significant decrease since 2018 shows the effectiveness of the measures we have put in place to support families over several years. Last year, there were only five measures that had moved a statistically significant amount. The Stats NZ 2021/22 data shows some statistically significant signs of improvement in poverty rates for some population groups.

There are 15,700 fewer tamariki Māori living in poverty on the after-housing-costs primary poverty measure compared to 2018/19 There are 20,700 fewer children impacted by disability living in poverty on the after-housing costs primary poverty measure compared to 2019/20). However, as in previous years, disparities continue to be evident for Māori and Pacific children, and children impacted by disability, compared to New Zealand children overall. “We know that there’s more work to do to achieve our target of more than halving child poverty within 10 years – and we’re absolutely committed to doing so,” Jan Tinetti said. “Looking ahead, the Government’s biggest priority is to support New Zealanders facing cost-of-living pressures – particularly low-income households and those affected by Cyclone Gabrielle and recent flooding.

“The bread-and-butter package of support announced last week will be critical in helping approximately 1.4 million people with the cost of living. Families are also benefiting from earlier measures including the extension of half-price fares on public transport, fuel tax cuts, and minimum wage increases. “There is still so much more to do and the Government won’t let up on our goals of reducing child poverty,” Jan Tinetti said.

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Government Investments Boost and Diversify Local Economies in Lower South Island

The Government is continuing to invest in projects in the Central Otago District as part of an ongoing strategy to diversify its economy beyond tourism, Regional Development Minister Kiri Allan announced today. A \$2.9 million Government investment has been approved for the expansion of Scapegrace Distillery in Cromwell, to meet growing national and international demand and consolidate their three New Zealand productions sites into one. “This investment supports our goal of supporting local businesses to do great things for local economies. The further development of the food and beverage industry in Central Otago will add to the region’s international brand reputation,” said Kiri Allan. “The expansion of Scapegrace Distillery will create 218 jobs during construction and 24 permanent roles once operational and also aim to reduce emissions through deploying an electrode boiler, an energy efficient way of creating process heat without the use of fossil fuels.”

The Government is also supporting the Central Otago film industry, with an underwrite of \$4.5 million for Silverlight Studios’ project to build a film studio. “The screen industry employs approximately 16,200 New Zealanders and contributes \$3.3 billion to the economy every year, making it a key component of Central Otago’s economic diversification initiatives. “Silverlight Studios will provide new opportunities

for local talent to be at the forefront of an evolving industry in the region,” Allan said. Tomorrow, Gore will also see the opening of the James Cumming Community Centre and Library, which received \$3 million support from government investment. “In 2020, the Government made the best of challenging times and used the downturn in tourism as a chance to upgrade infrastructure. Just a couple of years later, we’re seeing the results of these investments. “Libraries are the touchstone of every community, and this library will serve generations of Southlanders to come,” said Allan.

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Government Target Increased to Keep Powering Up the Māori Economy

A cross government target for relevant government procurement contracts for goods and services to be awarded to Māori businesses annually will increase to 8%, after the initial 5% target was exceeded. The progressive procurement policy was introduced in 2020 to increase supplier diversity, starting with Māori businesses, for the estimated \$51.5 billion spent on government procurement every year. Māori Development Minister Willie Jackson said the initiative has had early success such as government agencies already exceeding the initial 5% target by reaching 6% in the first full year of reporting. “Māori businesses made up 6% of the total of government procurement contracts for the 2021/22 financial year. This meant more than 3,200 contracts were awarded to Māori businesses across the public sector, worth a total value of about \$930 million.”

“We know our collective buying power can deliver better value for people and communities. All businesses must still win contracts based on merit but getting agencies to consider benefits other than just price, is making a positive social impact and boosting the Māori economy.” “This creates wider outcomes for Aotearoa such as Government engaging with more small to medium businesses, helping regional business growth and creating jobs and training opportunities.” Minister Jackson said that the government procurement spend was significant and there is an opportunity to address inequities faced by Māori through the economic benefits realised for Māori businesses and subsequent employment opportunities. “We must utilise this market so New Zealand builds the economic resilience of our Indigenous small to medium enterprises (SME), as other countries have successfully done with similar initiatives.”

Te Puni Kōkiri and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment have engaged with over 400 Māori businesses across 25 industries on government procurement in two years. Minister Jackson says, “Through our capability uplift programme, we’ve supported 18 Māori businesses to secure government contracts worth a total of \$8 million. “Going forward, we will keep delivering targeted Māori

business support, scale up local networks and work with agencies to increase supplier diversity.” The new 8% target will be reviewed in 2024. The other progressive procurement policy features will remain until the review, with some refinements to the services to Māori businesses and agencies.

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600 More Workers to Support Recovery

The new Recovery Visa to help bring in additional migrant workers to support cyclone and flooding recovery has attracted over 600 successful applicants within its first month. “The Government is moving quickly to support businesses bring in the workers needed to recover from Cyclone Gabrielle and the Auckland floods,” Michael Wood said. “In the short term we are likely to need additional workers like builders, infrastructure and utilities engineers, and heavy machine operators to support the skilled workers we already have in country. “The Recovery Visa is less than five weeks old, so the numbers are very encouraging as we build the workforce to reconstruct affect regions. “A total of 602 Recovery Visa applications have been approved to date, another 287 are being processed and 75 have been declined or withdrawn. Immigration New Zealand is fast tracking applications and the average processing time is four days, which is a fantastic result.

“Within the approved Recovery Visas the most common occupation was labourer with 253, followed by cleaners with 108 applicants, and carpenters with 42. “So far 161 people whose applications have been approved have arrived in New Zealand, but it’s important to note that it takes time for people to arrange their travel to New Zealand. This number is expected to increase over the coming days and weeks. “In addition to these numbers 66 weather related special purpose visas were granted before the creation of the Recovery Visa, and 55 people have arrived. “As we gain a greater understanding of the scope and specialist skills required for the recovery, we will look to introduce further initiatives to support access to additional offshore labour. “Similar visa pathways were used for the responses to the Christchurch and Kaikoura earthquakes. However, the Recovery Visa will not change global workforce shortages that are still at play. We need to accept the visa may not see the same level of uptake of those in the past – but we understand how important it is to do all we can to have a wide range of tools to deal with the unprecedented situation, and support the recovery,” Michael Wood said.

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Major Investment to Support the Safety of Frontline Police and Communities

The Government is backing Police and making communities safer with the roll-out of

state-of-the-art tools and training to frontline staff, Police Minister Ginny Andersen said today. “Frontline staff face high-risk situations daily as they increasingly respond to sophisticated organised crime, gang-violence and the availability of illegal firearms,” Ginny Andersen said. “The Tactical Response Model being launched today will make it safer for Police on the job by applying smart Policing to anticipate dangerous and high-risk situations before they arise. “The model uses Police intelligence to risk-assess situations early, builds decision-making and critical thinking skills while under pressure and backs that with Offender Prevention Teams and two-person Tactical Dog Teams coming on board in each district.

“This Government is proud to deliver another significant investment in Police, this follows investment in front line staff. We are on track to reach our target of 1800 more officers on the ground by the end of June this year. “We’ve supported the programme at every step since its inception, culminating in Cabinet approval for a further \$122.5 million to fully train and equip all front line officers in these areas nationwide. “It’s critical to give front-line Police a higher level of protection without changing New Zealand’s community policing approach – which we strongly believe is effective and appropriate for our country. “Police has been testing the model since November 2021 in four Police Districts – Northland, Counties Manukau, Waikato, and Central – with impressive results and strong support from frontline staff.

“It was developed with significant input from frontline officers and received extensive community consultation, including with Māori, Pacific and ethnic community leaders. “Policing the public will see under the new model will be the same as what they see now, but those causing most harm in our communities will feel the difference because Police will have an increasingly comprehensive suite of tools to work with.” National roll-out is starting about now and primarily involves standing up and equipping Tactical Teams in the eight Districts not involved in the trial.

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Tax Incentive to Boost Housing Passes Third Reading

Legislation to enable more build-to-rent developments has passed its third reading in Parliament, so this type of rental will be able to claim interest deductibility in perpetuity where it meets the requirements. Housing Minister Dr Megan Woods, says the changes will help unlock the potential of the build-to-rent sector and give tenants more opportunities to secure long-term homes. “The exclusion from interest limitation rules means build-to-rent developments will become more attractive and continue to contribute to quality rental supply in Aotearoa New Zealand. This in turn will create better wellbeing outcomes for New Zealanders who rent long-term.” “We recognise the big role the build-to-rent sector can play in filling a gap in the general rental market by increasing the supply, density, and diversity of housing.

“Build-to-rent housing aligns with a number of housing objectives, including improving rental supply, quality, affordability and security of tenure. Increasing the supply of build-to-rent developments will have positive benefits for individuals and whānau who rent,” Megan Woods said. The legislation just passed excludes approved new and existing build-to-rent developments on registered build-to-rent land from the interest limitation rules in perpetuity. To be eligible for the exclusion, developments must meet the requirements of build-to-rent land in the Income Tax Act 2007: 20 or more dwellings in a single development on a single block or adjacent blocks, held in one or more titles owned by the same person (a person includes a legal entity like a company) each dwelling is being prepared for use, available, or occupied under a residential tenancy every residential tenancy has the option of a 10-year term, with the ability for the tenant to give 56 days’ notice of termination every tenancy agreement includes a personalisation policy.

Build-to-rent providers must apply to Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga – Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to have land registered as build-to-rent to receive the exclusion. Existing build-to-rent providers need to apply by 1 July 2023. Once approved, Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga – Ministry of Housing and Urban Development will record the land on the build-to-rent register and share relevant information with Inland Revenue. Taxpayers can then indicate this in their yearly tax returns. Once Royal Assent has been received, eligible build-to-rent providers will be able to apply on Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga – Ministry of Housing and Urban Development’s website for the exclusion. We expect Royal Assent to occur in the next few days.

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Asia-Pacific

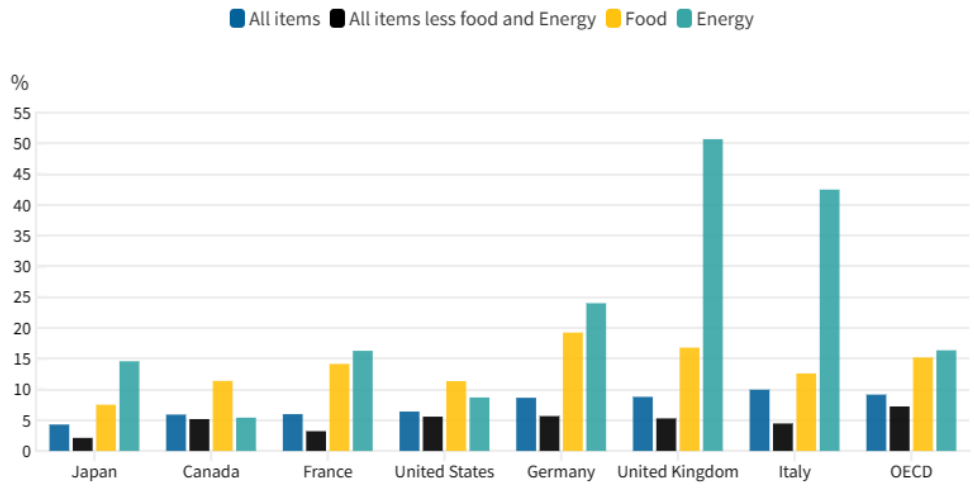
OECD Inflation Edges Down to 9.2% in January 2023, as Energy Inflation Slows

Year-on-year inflation in the OECD as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) fell slightly to 9.2% in January 2023, down from 9.4% in December 2022 (Figures 1 and 3). Declines in inflation between December 2022 and January 2023 were recorded in half of the OECD countries, compared to two-thirds between November and December 2022. The highest inflation rates were recorded in Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Türkiye (all remaining above 20%). After the peak observed in June 2022, energy inflation continued to fall in the OECD, albeit at a slower pace than the previous month. It reached 16.4% in January 2023, its lowest level since March 2021, down from 18.2% in December 2022. The fall in energy inflation stemmed partly from shifting policy in the Netherlands (introduction of a price cap on energy) and Italy

(decrease of regulated energy products prices). In Belgium, Denmark, Italy and Türkiye, the deceleration in energy prices in January 2023 was largely explained by the strong increase in the consumer price index for energy in January 2022 (i.e. base effect). Food inflation in the OECD declined to 15.2%, from 15.6% in December 2022, while inflation excluding food and energy was stable.

In January 2023, inflation was broadly stable in G7 as a whole. It increased in Germany, Japan and, to a lesser extent, in France, while it was broadly stable in the United States. Italy recorded a marked decline, while Canada and the United Kingdom recorded meaningful but less substantial falls. Food and energy inflation continued to be the main contributors to headline inflation in France, Italy and Japan, while inflation excluding food and energy was the main driver in Canada and the United States. In Germany and the United Kingdom, both components contributed almost equally to headline inflation (Figure 2). In the euro area, year-on-year inflation as measured by the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) fell to 8.7% in January 2023, from 9.2% in December 2022. Energy inflation continued to fall, while food inflation as well as inflation excluding food and energy both increased slightly. Eurostat's flash estimate for February 2023 points to a further decrease in year-on-year inflation in the euro area, with energy inflation falling significantly while inflation excluding food and energy slightly increased. In the G20, year-on-year inflation was broadly stable, reaching 8.4% in January 2023. Inflation decreased in Indonesia and South Africa, but increased in Argentina, China and India. It was broadly stable in Brazil and Saudi Arabia.

Figure 1 - Consumer prices, G7 economies and OECD -Total inflation and its components
January 2023, year-on-year inflation rate

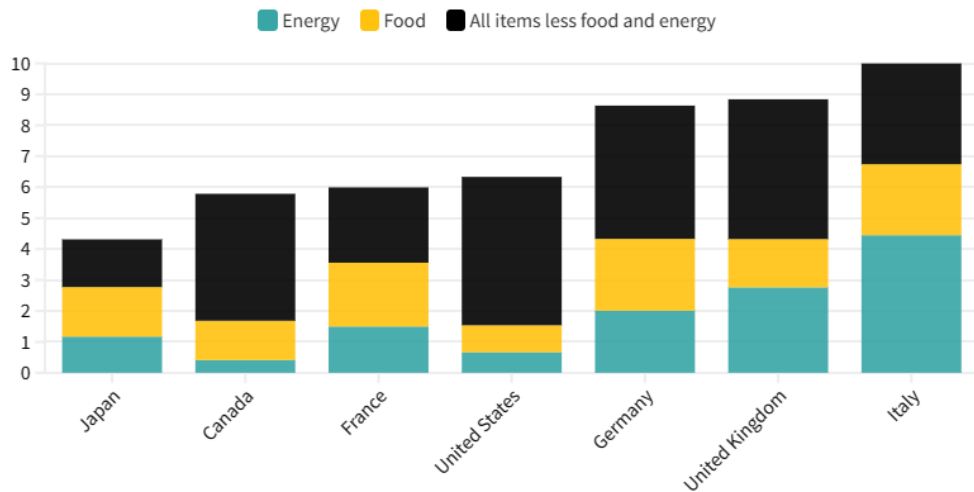


Source: OECD (2023) [Prices: Consumer Prices \(Database\)](#)



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

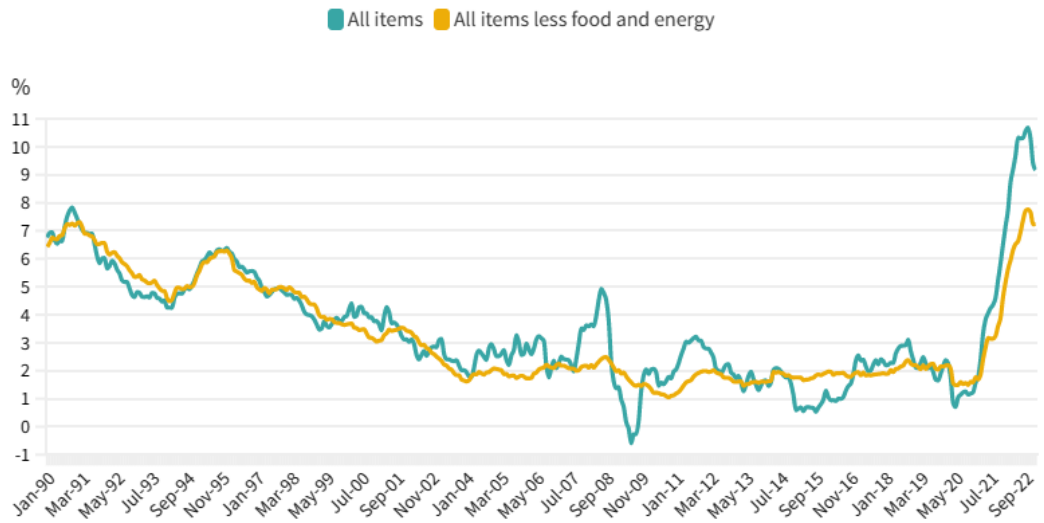
Figure 2 - Contribution to year-on-year CPI inflation in the G7 countries
January 2023, percentage points



Source: OECD (2023) [Consumer Prices \(Database\)](#)



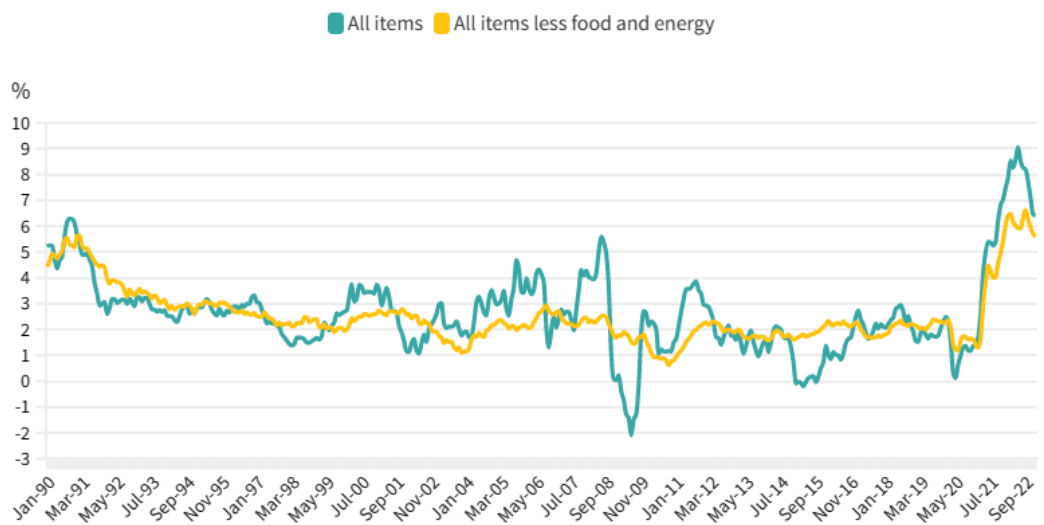
Figure 3 - Inflation since 1990's: All items and all items less food and energy
 OECD (CPI), year-on-year inflation rate



Source: OECD (2023) Prices: Consumer Prices (Database).



Figure 3 - Inflation since 1990's: All items and all items less food and energy
 United States (CPI), year-on-year inflation rate

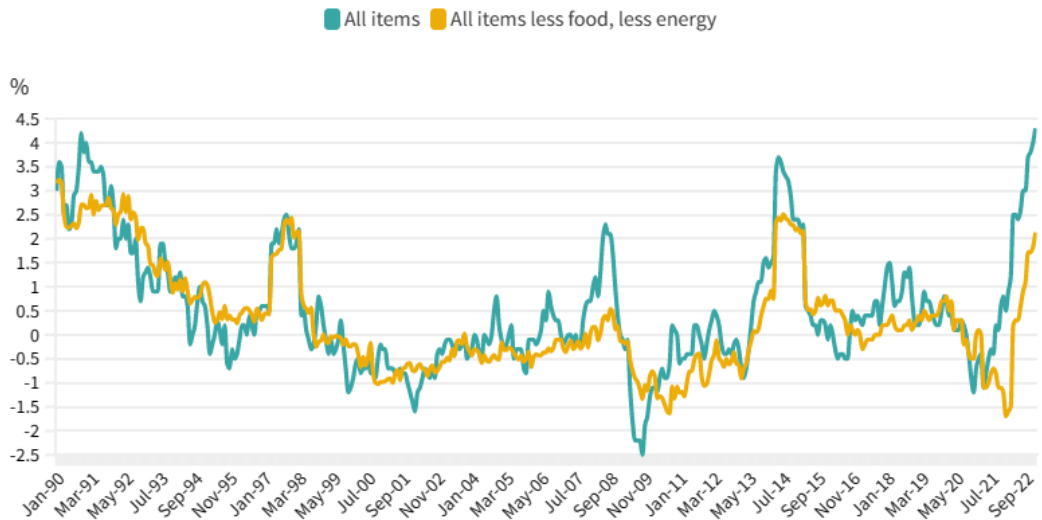


Source: OECD (2023) Prices: Consumer Prices (Database).



Figure 3 - Inflation since 1990's: All items and all items less food and energy

Japan (CPI), year-on-year inflation rate

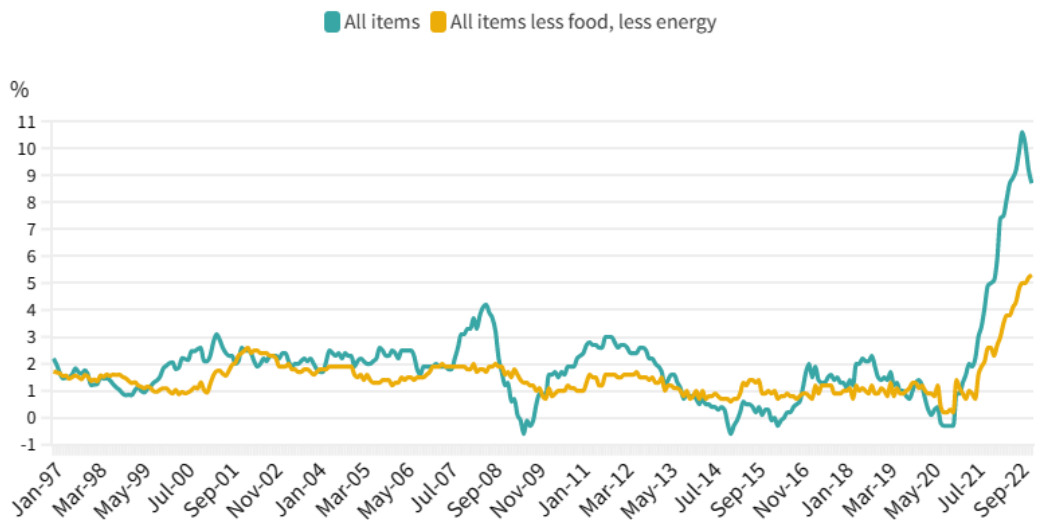


Source: OECD (2023) Prices: Consumer Prices (Database).



Figure 3 - Inflation since 1990's: All items and all items less food and energy

Euro area (HICP), year-on-year inflation rate, percentage



Source: OECD (2023) Prices: Consumer Prices (Database).



Visit the [OECD Data](https://www.oecd.org) to explore these data further.

From <https://www.oecd.org> 03/07/2023

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East Asia

JAPAN: BOJ Opinion Summary Calls for Continuing Monetary Easing

Several policymakers at a Bank of Japan meeting earlier this month called for

continuing current monetary-easing measures to achieve the 2-percent inflation target. That position is noted in a summary of opinions presented at the officials' monetary policy meeting held on March 9 and 10. The policy meeting was the last for BOJ Governor Kuroda Haruhiko before his tenure ends in April. Participants were unanimous in their support of the ultra-loose policy. The summary released on Monday mentions one opinion stating that necessary reforms would be delayed if the bank were to lower its inflation target and change its accommodative stance, just because the target is taking time to achieve. The reforms are aimed at achieving wage rises in tandem with economic growth. One policymaker said there is no need to modify a joint statement released in 2013 by the BOJ and the government. The document vowed that both sides would bolster their cooperation in pulling Japan out of deflation. The official noted that "starting a discussion on the target may lead to unnecessary speculation on the conduct of monetary policy."

From <https://www3.nhk.or.jp> 03/20/2023

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Japan Decides on 2-Trillion Yen Package to Ease Burden of Rising Prices

Japan's government has decided on an additional package worth more than 2 trillion yen, or about 15 billion dollars, to cushion the impact of surging prices on households and businesses. The package was approved at a government taskforce meeting on Wednesday. It will provide a lump-sum payment of 30,000 yen, or about 226 dollars, to low-income households. Another 50,000 yen, or about 377 dollars, will be provided for each child at such households. The government also plans to cut the fees that households pay from May on top of their power bills for April and following months. These surcharges are collected to promote the use of renewable energy sources. The assistance package will be used to ease the burden on households that use liquefied petroleum gas and businesses that consume large amounts of power. The government plans to tap its reserve fund in the current fiscal year's budget to finance the package.

From <https://www3.nhk.or.jp> 03/22/2023

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Diet Enacts Record ¥114 Tril Budget for FY2023

The Diet on Tuesday enacted a record 114.38 trillion yen budget for the new fiscal year from April to beef up defense capabilities in the face of security threats from its neighbors and to support the economy, which has been struggling with inflation. The defense budget will reach 6.82 trillion yen, the largest on record. Fiscal 2023 marks the start of a five-year period intended to fundamentally revamp the country's defense posture by spending a combined 43 trillion yen to cope with an increasingly assertive China, alongside a nuclear-armed North Korea and a volatile Russia. The government of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is aiming to double its annual defense

budget to around 2 percent of gross domestic product from the current 1 percent while upholding its postwar pacifist credo. The approval of the state budget by the House of Councillors comes at a time when the debt-ridden nation has been ramping up spending to ease the burden put on households by rising prices of everyday goods. Core consumer inflation has already hit a four-decade high, mostly due to higher energy and raw material costs amplified by a weaker yen.

The powerful House of Representatives approved the draft budget in February, meaning that under the Constitution it must be enacted before the new fiscal year begins. Both houses of parliament are controlled by a ruling coalition made up of the Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito. About a third of the 114 trillion yen budget, or 36.89 trillion yen, will be used to cover social security costs, as Japan has one of the world's fastest-aging populations. The government will issue around 35.62 trillion yen worth of government bonds. Separately, the cabinet decided to use 2.22 trillion yen in reserve funds for the current business year ending Friday to fund a fresh inflation-relief package ahead of nationwide local elections. Low-income households will receive cash handouts, while the government will subsidize liquefied petroleum gas bills for households on top of those for electricity and city gas. It will also mitigate the rise in the price of imported wheat and reduce feed costs for livestock borne by farmers. The Bank of Japan, with academic Kazuo Ueda taking the helm next month, expects inflation will decelerate this year and undershoot its 2 percent target.

Still, average Japanese households will have to spend 60,000 yen more on food items in 2023 than a year earlier, as businesses are expected to raise prices in the coming months, according to an estimate by Mitsubishi UFJ Research and Consulting. Any boost to the economy from the latest inflation-relief package may be limited. Economists polled by the Japan Center for Economic Research expect the world's third-largest economy to grow 1.03 percent in fiscal 2023 from April. Faced with sluggish public support, Kishida has vowed to aid the country's nascent recovery from COVID-19, which is now threatened by inflation. His government has decided to spend over 45 trillion yen on economic stimulus since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. The outcome of the local elections in April will serve as a gauge of voter confidence in his administration. The COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have pushed the government to increase fiscal spending at a time when its financial health remains the worst among the advanced economies, with outstanding debt more than twice the size of its GDP.

The use of reserve funds, allocated for emergencies that can skip parliamentary approval, has come under greater scrutiny since the fiscal 2022 budget included a largest-ever figure of 11.76 trillion yen in reserve. The fiscal 2023 budget includes 5.5 trillion yen for emergency use to cope with the pandemic and inflation. "Part of the unused reserve funds for fiscal 2022 will be treated as surplus money, which in turn will be used for defense spending," said Takuya Hoshino, a senior economist at the Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. Kishida has said the government will secure the

necessary funding by reallocating surplus money from other sources and hiking taxes, among other means. The exact timing of imposing higher corporate, tobacco, and income taxes is yet to be decided. "If the government continues to allocate huge reserve funds for emergency use and divert part of what is left unused to future defense spending, it makes the flow of funds more complicated than necessary," Hoshino said.

From <https://japantoday.com/> 03/29/2023

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Japan Eyes \$50 Bil. Investment in Power Grid by 2050

Japan has come up with a plan to strengthen its power grid by significantly expanding the use of renewable energy. It envisions total investments of around 50 billion dollars by 2050. Japan is working toward a carbon-free society. It considers solar, wind and other renewables a major component of this. Building a cross-regional power transmission system is essential to the effective use of renewables. The plan was drawn up by an industry body made up of large and small utilities, energy-related companies, and different levels of government. Its mandate is to coordinate power transmission across Japan's different regions. The plan assumes renewable energy will account for around 50 percent of the country's total energy mix by 2050. It says a new transmission network is needed connecting Tokyo and the northern regions of Tohoku and Hokkaido, home to many solar and wind plants. The plan also suggests power transmission lines connecting western and eastern Japan need to be improved. It estimates a total of around 6 to 7 trillion yen, or about 50 billion dollars, should be invested in these projects by 2050. The ministry of economy and industry says it will begin consultations with power companies and other entities to work out the specifics, and determine how to cover the costs.

From <https://www3.nhk.or.jp> 03/30/2023

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SOUTH KOREA: To Spend 70% of Budget for Job Creation in H1 Finance Minister

South Korea plans to speed up spending the employment-related budget in the first half of 2023 amid signs of a slowdown in the job market, the finance minister said Wednesday. The remark came after Asia's No. 4 economy reported the largest number of job additions in more than 20 years in 2022 at around 820,000, while the figure is expected to rise at a narrower margin of just 100,000 on-year in 2023 amid economic uncertainties and the country's falling population. "Considering the economy and the slowing job market, the government plans to execute at least 70 percent of this year's employment-related budget of 14.9 trillion won (\$11.4 billion) in the first half," Finance Minister Choo Kyung-ho said ahead of a closed-door meeting with economic ministers. Choo added that South Korea plans to provide jobs to around 1.04 million people in the economically vulnerable group, with a goal of hiring

88.6 percent of them by the end of this month. "As the country is expected to feel the effects of the slowdown in the job market following a slower increase in the number of jobs and the overall economic slowdown, the government plans to expedite policy measures to secure jobs," the minister added.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 03/08/2023

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S. Korea to Raise Guard Against Market Instability After Fed Rate Hike

South Korea's chief economic policymaker warned Thursday of the possibility of further instability in the global financial market, such as a recent bank turmoil sparked by the failure of American lenders, amid the continued monetary tightening moves by the United States and major economies. Finance Minister Choo Kyung-ho made the assessment during an emergency meeting on the macroeconomic situation, which was also attended by Bank of Korea Gov. Rhee Chang-yong and other officials. On Wednesday (U.S. time), the Federal Reserve raised the rate by 25 basis points to a range of 4.75 percent to 5 percent, the highest level since September 2007. It was the ninth rate hike in a row. During a press conference following the rate-setting meeting, Fed Chair Jerome Powell dismissed any rate cuts this year, stressing its commitment to restoring price stability. "We cannot rule out the possibility of the recurrence of instability in the global financial market, such as the recent crisis facing smaller U.S. banks as the global economy has been adapting to aggressive monetary tightening," Choo said. The government and the Bank of Korea will maintain a round-the-clock market monitoring system on a real-time basis, and will closely check the financial soundness of our financial system and related companies, the minister said, vowing to "implement market stabilization measures swiftly if needed."

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 03/23/2023

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2024 Budget to Boost Defense, Welfare Spending

South Korea will continue to tighten its belt by reducing more than 10 percent of its discretionary expenditure while planning to funnel the budget into boosting national security and creating jobs for young people. Next year's budget plan is expected to remain at around 670 trillion won (\$515.9 billion), up about 4.8 percent from this year's 638.7 trillion won, which was proposed as a mid- to long-term plan by the government. The budget will be earmarked for enhancing economic vitality, such as expanding exports, protecting the vulnerable, and reforming labor, education and pension systems. "Next year, while maintaining a sound fiscal stance, the government will properly perform essential national functions such as national defense and rule of law, enhance future growth foundations and job creation capabilities, and make sufficient fiscal expenditures to strengthen welfare for the

vulnerable people,” President Yoon Suk Yeol said during a Cabinet meeting on Tuesday.

The budget guideline, approved during the meeting, was the first official budget drafting guideline established by the Yoon government, which contains the basics of fiscal management, investment focus and fiscal innovation direction for the next year. As concerns grow over rising national debt and tax revenue, improving fiscal health has become one of the government’s top agendas. “Unjust financial leakage, such as subsidies given to organizations whose accounting and fund execution are unclear, cash distribution and subsidies for which the use is unclear, must be thoroughly prevented and the welfare delivery system must be streamlined,” Yoon said. Over 10 percent of discretionary expenditure, which accounts for about half of the total budget, will be reduced. Spending on state-run programs that have been showing poor performance or donations and investments that have been routinely carried out without tangible results will be subjected to the budget cut.

The 2024 budget will provide bold support in four areas: enhancing private economic vitality; protecting the socially underprivileged and the vulnerable; innovating the economic constitution and structure; and strengthening the basic functions of the state. “The 2024 budget will invest boldly, focusing on welfare for the weak, creating high-quality jobs for young people, and strengthening defense, security, judicial and administrative services that protect public safety and property,” said Second Vice Finance Minister Choi Sang-dae during a press conference at the government complex in Sejong. To enhance economic vitality centered on the private sector, ministries will funnel the budget toward initiating an export drive, nurturing startup firms and securing 12 national strategic technologies which include semiconductor and display, secondary cells, leading-edge mobility and next-generation nuclear energy.

In the defense sector, the government has decided to spend its budget on advanced weapons systems such as asymmetric power response and the establishment of a homegrown three-axis system against North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats. It will also continue to raise salaries for conscripted soldiers and improve their living conditions. For public safety, investigative vehicles and detection equipment will be expanded to prevent and respond to drug crimes. It also plans to strengthen its ability to respond to house renting fraud, voice phishing, stalking and digital sex crimes. The government will establish a mechanism to respond to and preemptively prepare for new and complex disasters, strengthen food and drug management and invest more into maintenance of areas vulnerable to traffic accidents. In order to “create high-quality jobs for young people,” the government will support small and medium-sized companies’ exports through trade finance and developing new export items such as in the area of nuclear power plants and defense.

For the protection of the socially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, the Finance

Ministry said it will spend on expanding welfare services tailored to the vulnerable while reducing cash handouts. It will seek to cover welfare blind spots, such as isolated young people cut off from society, and strengthen the guarantee of welfare systems, such as the basic living security system. The government plans to support the implementation of three major structural reforms, including those in the labor, education and pension systems, in terms of finances and to find solutions for boosting the ultralow birth rate throughout the marriage, pregnancy, childbirth and child care cycle. Parental benefits will be raised from 700,000 won to 1 million won per month next year, and support for national scholarships and student loans will be expanded. Based on the budget requests received from each ministry by the end of May, the government will consult related ministries, local governments and the public on the budget proposal from June to August, before submitting it to the National Assembly by Sept. 2.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 03/28/2023

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South-East Asia

LAOS: ADB Signs Loan for First Cross-Border Wind Power Project in Asia, First Plant in Lao PDR and Largest in Southeast Asia

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Monsoon Wind Power Company Limited (Monsoon) signed a \$ 692.55 million nonrecourse project financing package to build a 600-megawatt wind power plant in Sekong and Attapeu provinces in the southern region of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) to export and sell power to neighboring Viet Nam. Comprising 133 wind turbines, the project will be the largest wind power plant in Southeast Asia and the first in the Lao PDR. As sole mandated lead arranger and bookrunner, ADB has, arranged, structured, and syndicated the entire financing package—the largest syndicated renewable project financing transaction among ASEAN countries to date. The package comprises a \$100 million A loan from ADB's ordinary capital resources, a \$150 million syndicated B loan, \$50 million in concessional financing, \$382.55 million in parallel loans, and a \$10 million grant. Cutting edge use of concessional blended finance was critical in overcoming the project's bankability hurdles to crowd in commercial capital.

“Developing economies in Asia and the Pacific face shortfalls in climate investments that are needed to clear a pathway to green growth. The syndication of development and commercial financing for this project bridges this gap by mobilizing private capital to develop wind resources which are translated into clean power generation that can spur economic and social advancement in the region,” said ADB Private Sector Operations Department Director General Suzanne Gaboury. “The financing from ADB and its partners will help unlock the Lao PDR's untapped wind resources, providing a basis for a transition to clean energy and green growth that will have

lasting benefits for the economy.” Cross-border power supply has been a pillar of the Lao PDR’s economic growth. Harnessing the country’s untapped wind resources can provide energy diversification as the seasonality of the wind resource is countercyclical to the rainy season, which supports the country’s hydropower generation. The project will reduce annual greenhouse gas emissions by at least 748,867 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent.

The B loan comprises \$100 million from Siam Commercial Bank and \$50 million from Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation while the concessional financing administered by ADB comprises \$20 million from the Leading Asia’s Private Infrastructure Fund (LEAP) and \$30 million from the Canadian Climate Fund for the Private Sector in Asia (CFPS, CFPS II). Parallel loans include \$120 million from the Japan International Cooperation Agency, \$100 million from Kasikorn Bank, \$72.55 million from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, \$60 million from the Export-Import Bank of Thailand, and \$30 million from the Hong Kong Mortgage Corporation Limited. A \$10 million grant from ADB’s Asian Development Fund (ADF) – Private Sector Window (ADB-PSW) will help mitigate key project risks, including potential curtailment risk, which is a key bankability issue for lenders. “Together with ADB, we take this milestone step in the global fight against climate change coupled with our own corporate mission to uplift the well-being and happiness of the local communities we work within,” said the project’s developer Impact Electrons Siam Company Limited Chief Executive Officer Peck Khamkanist. “We thank ADB for its leadership in their catalytic arrangement of this deal’s financing bringing together multiple parties both from commercial as well as the development sphere.”

LEAP is an ADB-managed fund capitalized with a \$1.5 billion commitment by the Japan International Cooperation Agency. Established in 2016, LEAP focuses on delivering high-quality and sustainable private sector infrastructure projects that reduce carbon emissions, improve energy efficiency, and offer accessible and affordable health care, education, and communication services to ADB’s developing member countries. CFPS and CFPSII are ADB-managed concessional funds, established with contributions of \$231.5 million from Global Affairs Canada. The funds are designed to support greater private sector participation in climate change mitigation and adaptation in low and lower middle-income countries and upper middle-income small island developing states in Asia and the Pacific. The funds also seek to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. ADB-PSW is a facility approved by ADF donors in 2020 that supports private sector development in frontier markets by offering grant resources to fund financial products that address and reduce common financing constraints that hinder many private sector transactions.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 03/01/2023

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MALAYSIA: Attracting 59.9 Bln USD Approved Investments in

2022

The Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA) said Wednesday that Malaysia has attracted 264.6 billion ringgit (59.9 billion U.S. dollars) approved investments in 2022. The approved investments include a total of 4,454 projects and are expected to create 140,370 job opportunities for Malaysians, MIDA said in a statement. According to MIDA, foreign direct investment accounted for 61.7 percent of total investments, or 163.3 billion ringgit. Meanwhile, domestic direct investment made up 38.3 percent, or 101.3 billion ringgit. China led the way in total approved foreign investments, followed by the United States, the Netherlands, Singapore, and Japan, it said. The services sector is the major contributor with 154 billion ringgit, followed by 84.3 billion ringgit in the manufacturing sector, and 26.3 billion ringgit in the primary sector. "Moving forward, as Malaysia strives to become Asia's investment gateway, we are making every effort to quickly emerge as ASEAN's digital hub, owing to our highly developed information and communication technology infrastructure, talented science, technology, engineering and mathematics pool, strong intellectual property protection framework, and rule of law," said Malaysia's International Trade and Industry Minister Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 03/08/2023

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Malaysia's Property Transactions Value Rises to 40 Bln USD Last Year

Malaysia's property transactions value rose 23.6 percent year-on-year to 179.07 billion ringgit (40 billion U.S. dollars) in 2022, the National Property Information Center (NAPIC) said on Wednesday. According to NAPIC, more than 389,000 property transactions were recorded last year, up 29.5 percent year-on-year. The residential sub-sector led the overall property market activity, with a 62.5 percent contribution in volume. There were 243,190 transactions worth 94.28 billion ringgit recorded in the review period, increasing by 22.3 percent in volume and 22.6 percent in value year-on-year. The commercial property segment recorded 32,809 transactions worth 32.61 billion ringgit in 2022, increasing by 46.3 percent in volume and 16.7 percent in value compared to the previous year. The property market performance is expected to grow in line with the moderately lower economic growth projected for 2023 given the unpredictable external environment, said NAPIC. Notwithstanding this, it said the accommodative policies, continuous government support, well execution of all planned measures outlined in the revised Budget 2023, and the proper implementation of strategies and initiatives under the 12th Malaysia Plan are expected to remain supportive of the property sector.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 03/15/2023

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PHILIPPINES: Budget Deficit Narrows by 3.45 Pct in 2022

The Philippine government's budget deficit narrowed by 3.45 percent to 1.6 trillion pesos (29.1 billion U.S. dollars) in 2022 from 1.7 trillion pesos (30.9 billion dollars) in 2021, the Bureau of Treasury said on Wednesday. "The fiscal outturn was driven by revenue growth of 17.97 percent, outpacing the 10.35 percent expansion in government spending," the bureau said in a statement. It said the 2022 deficit was equivalent to 7.33 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), down from 8.6 percent in 2021 and below the 7.58 percent program. Meanwhile, the bureau said the budget gap for December widened to 378.4 billion pesos (6.88 billion dollars), 11.94 percent higher than the 338 billion pesos (6.15 billion dollars) recorded a year ago as the increase in public expenditures outweighed the increase in government receipts. "Netting out interest payments from expenditures, the national government recorded 1.1 trillion pesos (20 billion dollars) primary deficit for 2022, dropping by 10.43 percent from 2021's primary deficit of 1.2 trillion pesos (21.8 billion dollars) and 2.34 percent below program," the bureau said. On the other hand, the bureau said the primary deficit for December 2022 increased to 334.8 billion pesos (6 billion dollars), up 7.75 percent from a year ago.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 03/01/2023

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Philippines' Approved Inward Investments Reached 7.52 Bln USD in February

The Philippines' Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said Tuesday that its investment promotion arm, the Board of Investments (BOI), has approved around 414 billion pesos (roughly 7.52 billion U.S. dollars) worth of investments as of February this year. "Due to the recent game-changing economic reforms adopted by the country, inward investments have shown positive signs," Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual said, adding the BOI has recently raised its investment target to 1.5 trillion pesos (roughly 27.26 billion dollars) because of this development. Pascual said the Philippines has shown robust consumption and gross domestic product growth, which prompted investors' interest. "The Philippines is on a path toward economic recovery and growth following the COVID-19 pandemic," Pascual said. On several occasions, he quoted Philippine President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos' statements that the Philippines "is now open for business." "Our country's strong macroeconomic fundamentals and well-crafted structural reforms will serve us well as we confront the challenges of the current tightening of global financial markets and the prevailing inflationary pressures," Pascual said. Pascual cited several reasons why the Philippines is an ideal investment location, including the country's large population which reflects a vast potential market. He said the country's strategic location makes it an ideal place to set up a regional hub for various businesses and the government's continuous work creates an enabling environment where businesses can thrive and prosper.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 03/14/2023

VIETNAM: Tourism Revenue Hits 3.6 Bln USD in January-February

Vietnam's tourism earnings hit 3.6 billion U.S. dollars in the first two months of this year, up 12 percent from a year earlier, the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism said on Friday. Even though the number of international visitors has not quite recovered to pre-pandemic levels, the Southeast Asian country is enjoying a much-needed boost due to its full reopening. Vietnam received nearly 1.8 million international passengers, mainly through airports in January and February, about 58 percent of the figure recorded in the same period of 2019, according to the General Statistics Office. During the period, foreign arrivals to Vietnam by air accounted for 90.7 percent of the total, followed by road with 8.6 percent and sea routes with 0.7 percent, respectively. South Korea remained the largest source market in the first two months, with 560,000 visitor arrivals, followed by the United States with 148,000 and Thailand with 97,000. Vietnam targets 8 million foreign arrivals this year and expects its tourism revenue to hit 27.3 billion U.S. dollars in 2023, up 31 percent from last year when the tourism activity earned the country 20.8 billion U.S. dollars, said the country's tourism administration.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 03/03/2023

VN Needs \$13.3 Billion to Develop Seaports

Việt Nam would need VNĐ312.6 trillion (US\$13.3 billion) to develop the seaports system by 2030, according to the Ministry of Transport. Specifically, 78 per cent of the capital would be reserved for developing ports and the rest for public maritime infrastructure. By 2024, the focus would be placed on upgrading Cái Mép – Thị Vải navigational channel to enable it to serve ships of up to 18,000 TEU, navigational channels for large ships to enter Hậu, Văn Úc and Chanh rivers. In addition, investment would be poured into developing sea lights in islands and archipelagos under Việt Nam's sovereignty and infrastructure for marine safety, building coastal information stations, search and rescue centres and a representative office of Nha Trang Maritime Administration in Trường Sa. By 2030, the investment would focus on the construction of breakwaters at Vũng Áng Port (Hà Tĩnh Province), sand barrier system at Cửa Việt and Cửa Gianh as well as upgrading Cẩm Phả, Ba Ngòi, Hòn La, Trần Đề, Diêm Điền, Văn Úc channels. The vessel traffic services (VTS) would be installed for Hòn Gai – Cái Lân channel and the channel into Hậu River. The Ministry of Transport said that it would call for investment into potential ports such as Vân Phong and Trần Đề. By 2030, construction would be started for a port in Nam Đồ Sơn (Hải Phòng) and ports in Cái Mép and Trần Đề. As of October 2022, there were 296 ports with a total length of 107km (five times the figure of 2000). Việt Nam also established international gateway ports in the northern and southern

regions with 34 shipping routes including 11 routes in Asia, three to Europe and 20 to America, only after Malaysia and Singapore.

<https://vietnamnews.vn/> 03/30/2023

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South Asia

INDIA: Bihar Govt. Presented Rs 2.61 lakh crore 'Revenue Surplus Budget' for FY 23-24

Bihar Finance Minister Vijay Kumar Choudhary presented on February 28, 2023, a 2.61 lakh crore "revenue surplus Budget" in the State Assembly with a special emphasis on the job, health, and education sectors. Mr. Choudhary also asked the Central government to give Bihar particular attention. After presenting the budget for the fiscal year 2023–2024 in the State Assembly, he told the media, "In our anticipated revenue arrangement this is a revenue surplus Budget in which the State's growth rate will be above 10%." In the Budget, Mr. Choudhary also made a strong case for the employment, health, and education sectors and claimed that the State's spending on social services had grown by an astounding 11 times. "Within the primary sector, livestock and fishing, aquaculture have been the two most significant contributors to the growth of GSDP, recording growth rates of 9.5% and 6.7%, respectively," he said. The proposed Budget's overall spending for the fiscal year 2023–24 is 2,61,885.40 crore, which is 24,194.21 crore more than the prior fiscal year. The fiscal deficit stayed below the imposed conditional limit of 4.5% at 3.78% of the State Gross Domestic Product (SGDP). The Budget also noted that the anticipated grants-in-aid from the Centre for the current fiscal year was \$53,377.92 crore, which was \$4,623.37 crore less than what was received in the previous fiscal year. The State's share of Central taxes did, however, slightly rise, as noted in the Budget.

Major Highlights: Rs 5,540 crore has been allocated for Patna Medical College and Hospital's (PMCH) redevelopment. Rs 40 crore allocated for reconstruction of madrassas. 21 Sadar hospitals will be upgraded, nine new medical colleges will be constructed across Bihar. The Centre has Efforts are being made to increase the revenue without increasing the tax burden. There are limits to revenue receipts. GST limited the ability of states to levy taxes. Objected to not getting a positive signal on the demand for continuation of GST compensation. Fiscal deficit under control. Fiscal deficit has been reduced from Rs 11,325 crore to Rs 422 crore. The state government is giving priority to education and health. Infant mortality rate has come down from 43 thousand in 2012 to 27 in 2020. In the field of education, 2.1 crore enrolled in the eighth standard in 21-22. Gross Enrollment Ratio 2021-22 is also being improved. Expenditure on social services has been increased 11 times. Many ambitious schemes of Bihar are now being followed by the Central government. Har Ghar Nal Jal Yojana: Bihar government implemented it in the year 2016, Center

implemented it in 2019 under Jal Jeevan Mission. Jeevika was implemented in Bihar in 2007, Deendayal Yojana Center started in 2015 on the basis of our Jeevika Yojana. We started the scheme to provide electricity to every house in 2016. Later, in September 2017, the Center also came up with a similar plan. Bihar launched Jal Jeevan Hariyali Yojana in the year 2019, Center started Amrit Sarovar Yojana on the same lines in April 2022. The state government is increasing the expenditure despite the challenges of Covid. The whole country including Bihar was affected due to the economic recession. Youth power is the basis of the future, 10 lakh jobs will be created. Along with skill development, proper arrangement of capital is being given priority in the budget. Requisition of 49 thousand posts has been sent to Bihar Public Service Commission, 2900 posts to Staff Selection Commission. Out of 75,543 and 90 thousand teachers in Bihar Police, 42 thousand have been appointed.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com> 03/01/2023

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Tech Mahindra Seeks \$7 Billion Revenue Run Rate This Fiscal, \$3 Billion from Telecom Business

IT company Tech Mahindra expects to soon reach \$7 billion revenue run rate for current fiscal year, out of which the telecom vertical is estimated to contribute \$3 billion, a top official of the company said on Monday. Tech Mahindra MD and CEO CP Gurnani said the company has hit a run rate of \$1 billion (about Rs 8,300 crore) from 5G solutions that it provides to telecom companies. "We are at an annual revenue run rate of \$6.6 billion. We expect to reach \$7 billion run rate for this fiscal. Telecom vertical is expected to contribute \$3 billion in this. We have already touched a revenue run rate of \$1 billion from 5G services," Gurnani said at Mobile World Congress (MWC) 2023. Tech Mahindra posted a 5% decline in consolidated profit after tax at Rs 1,297 crore for December quarter. Revenue from operations, so, raised 20 per cent to Rs 13,734.6 crore from Rs 11,451 crore a year ago. Tech Mahindra president, communications, media and entertainment business, and CEO, network services, Manish Vyas said 50% of the company's business comes from the America region, 30% from Europe and 20% from rest of the world. "We believe this trend will continue because we have invested in these geographies. All the sectors within telcos, be it growth of fiber, fixed wireless, new product build and all the transformation on the digital side, have continued to provide us growth," he said. Speaking about the impact of the global macroeconomic situation on the company, Vyas said uncertainty still remains across the globe and there will be an intense pressure on cost of services.

"The overall macroeconomic situation still remains uncertain. People will need to conserve as we go forward. It is an important opportunity for us to continue to drive cost optimization through simplification. The broad macroeconomic situation also will evolve as we come out of this uncertain time. People will need to continue to innovate more. Particularly with the whole focus on generative AI as well as the way

metaverse will be used by enterprises," he said. Vyas said that globally the firm has acquired 42 new logos this year to whom it is providing network transformation including solutions for private 5G networks. "It is essentially a network on cloud, software defined network and private network. The growth driver has been a requirement of enterprises to simplify their operations and modernise tracking of their business data," he said. Gurnani said many companies are engaging with Tech Mahindra to simplify, modernise and monetise their networks, and rollout of 5G network across the globe will continue to drive business of the company. "We are very keen to look at how the rollout of 5G and deployments will happen. It is a big year from a deployment standpoint. It is a big year for modernisation of the digital stack. I think telcos will look to find adjacencies with fintech, learning, manufacturing, IoT etc for growth. We are very excited about 2023. There are a lot of case studies that will emerge in all these areas," Vyas said.

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Ministry of Railways Received ₹ 2,40,000 Cr Budgetary Support for Capital Expenditure for FY 2023-24

The Ministry of Railways has been allocated ₹ 2,40,000 crore as Gross Budget Support (GBS) for Capital Expenditure during 2023-24. It comprises ₹ 1,85,000 crore under Capital, ₹ 45,000 crore under Railway Safety Fund and ₹ 10,000 crore as contribution towards Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh. A total of ₹ 31,850 crore out of Gross Budgetary Support has been allocated to the Plan head "New Lines" for 2023-24. Introduction of new trains / train services is a part of regular day to day operations of the Railways. A provision of ₹ 13,150 crore out of Gross Budgetary Support has been made for the Plan head "Customer Amenities" for 2023-24. Development of 35 hydrogen fuel cell based trains for various heritage/hill routes has been included in Budget 2023-24 at a cost of ₹ 2800 crore. Further, setting up of Hydrogen Infrastructure for heritage routes has also been included at a cost of ₹ 600 crores. This information was given by the Minister of Railways, Communications and Electronic & Information Technology, Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw in a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha today.

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Uttarakhand Brings Rs 77,707 Crore Budget for FY 2023-24

Uttarakhand Finance Minister Premchand Aggarwal on Wednesday presented a budget with a total income expenditure of Rs 77,407 crores for the financial year 2023-24. The emphasis in the budget has been put on small businesses, protecting the environment, independence, good administration, and self-employment. Among other significant statements, the state government suggested allocating Rs 1,000 crore in funds for any rescue operations in Joshimath and other areas vulnerable to

land subsistence. Rs 101 crore has been made available for metro service in the state capital city Dehradun. For 2023–2024, roughly Rs 40 lakhs have been set aside for the Chief Minister Swarojgar Yojana. The state's per capita income (provisional) in the year 2020-21 has been estimated at Rs 185,761, while in the year 2021-2022, it is estimated at Rs 205,840. Finance Minister Prem Chand Aggarwal in the legislative Assembly on Wednesday said, "Our government is continuously increasing capital investment. Inclusive development is being done...Roads, railways and waterways are being prepared. Apart from this, a roadmap has been prepared for many schemes,"

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Delhi Govt. Presents ₹78,800 Crore Budget for FY 2023-24

Finance Minister of Delhi Kailash Gahlot is presenting a ₹78,800 crore budget to the Delhi assembly on Wednesday. The Delhi government's budget was cleared by the ministry of home affairs (MHA) the day after it was allegedly stalled, as claimed by the Arvind Kejriwal administration. MHA had requested additional information regarding the budget's allocation of funds for infrastructure and advertising, and had urged the National Capital government to resubmit the budget. Amid the fresh flashpoint between the Centre and the Delhi government, chief minister Kejriwal Tuesday had written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, requesting him not to stop the city government's budget. The budget requires approval from the President through the Union home ministry. The theme of this year's budget is "Saaf Sundar aur Aadhunik Dilli". Since coming to power AAP has been presenting a theme based budget, the first budget was themed on 'Swaraj'. Major Highlights: Delhi budget 2023. Sweeping machines, anti smog guns to be used to keeping roads dust free. The Delhi government will introduce 210 water sprinklers and 70 mechanical road sweeping machines in order to keep the nation's capital's roadways dust-free. ₹8,241 crore financial assistance to local bodies, In the fiscal year 2023–2024, local bodies will receive financial help totaling 8,241 crore, according to Finance Minister Gahlot, who unveiled the budget 2023 on Wednesday. 26 flyovers, bridges, underpasses, 3 double decker flyovers for national capital. According to Kailash Gahlot on Wednesday, the Delhi government has proposed building 26 new flyovers, bridges, and underpasses and has said it will also construct three distinctive double decker flyovers as part of a major infrastructure push. Focus on infrastructure, sanitation, transportation. Delhi budget 2023 will focus on enhancing the capital's infrastructure, sanitation, transportation facilities besides the usual focus on health and education.

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ADB, SAEL Industries Sign \$91 Million Loan Agreement to Promote Biomass Generation in India

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and SAEL Industries Limited have signed loan agreements of up to 7.5 billion Indian rupees (around \$91.14 million) to promote the generation of biomass energy using agricultural residue, helping diversify India's energy mix and reduce carbon intensity. ADB's support will fund the construction of five 14.9-megawatt biomass power plants in the districts of Bikaner, Churu, Hanumangarh, Jhunjhunu, and Sikar in the state of Rajasthan. Around 1.5 billion Indian rupees will be provided for each power plant to subsidiaries of SAEL Industries: Chattargarh Renewable Energy Private Limited, KTA Power Private Limited, Sardarshahar Agri Energy Private Limited, TNA Renewable Energy Private Limited, and VCA Power Private Limited. "Establishing biomass power plants that can repurpose agricultural residue will help protect the environment while contributing to the government's goal of expanding renewable energy sources and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. It will also help increase income of local farmers through sales of agricultural residue and reduce burning of agricultural waste, contributing to improvement of air quality," said ADB Vice-President for Private Sector Operations and Public-Private Partnerships Ashok Lavasa. "ADB's assistance will have a powerful demonstration effect for biomass power by helping reduce risk perceptions and by creating awareness of its benefits and potential for use in other rural communities and developing member countries."

More than half the land in Rajasthan is dedicated to agriculture. Local farms burn huge volumes of waste including stalks, husks, and straw, causing air pollution. These crop stubble burnings contribute to the worsening of air quality. High levels of fine particulate matter have been linked to health effects such as asthma and decreased lung function. The burning of crop stubble also contributes to reduced soil quality, requiring increased use of agriculture chemicals which causes other health issues. The power plants will convert about 650,000 tons of agricultural residues into electricity and are expected to generate 544 gigawatt-hours of energy per annum, helping avoid up to 487,200 tons of carbon dioxide annually. Local farmer incomes will rise through the sale of agricultural residue. The project also aims to purchase agricultural residue and other goods and services from at least 100 women-owned microbusinesses and 10 women's self-help groups. "By collecting the crop stubble to be used as fuel in our waste-to-energy plants, we help combat one of our nation's greatest health issues, while at the same time creating local employment and generating extra income to farmers and local entrepreneurs. We are happy to have ADB partnering with us in these efforts," said SAEL Industries Chairman and Managing Director Jasbir Singh. SAEL Industries is a renewable energy company with strong focus on the creation of green assets to contribute to transition to green energy, with biomass and solar power projects in various states in India.

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World Bank Approves \$108 Million to Improve Disaster

Preparedness for Flood-prone Districts of Assam

The World Bank's Executive Board of Directors today approved a \$108 million loan to help the northeastern Indian state of Assam improve disaster preparedness and enhance flood forecasting. The project will benefit around 6 million people and is part of a larger \$500 million investment program for Assam. The Assam Integrated River Basin Management Project will help the state reduce vulnerability to floods and river erosion by building green infrastructure in the Beki and Buridehing river basins, protecting around 100,000 people. The Project will also help strengthen the state's response to disasters through improved flood forecasting and accurate early warning systems, including through mobile alerts. The Project will provide safer evacuation and shelter facilities including access to climate-resilient flood shelters to at least 10,000 people. The project will also help government agencies to respond faster during crisis with upgraded state and district emergency operational centers. "The 2022 floods adversely impacted millions of people in Assam," said Auguste Tano Kouame, the World Bank's Country Director for India. "This project will build on Assam's disaster risk management approach thus contributing to climate-resilient growth while protecting lives and property for the people of Assam."

The Project will support Assam tackle the immediate challenges of floods and erosion while also helping manage its complex river systems. The Brahmaputra River system is the economic lifeline of Assam, and a critical part of the state's rich natural resources and cultural heritage. But flooding, riverbank erosion, sedimentation and loss of biodiversity have significant economic and environmental impacts on the state, leading to loss of livelihoods for its people. The government of Assam has projected an increase in extreme rain fall events by 5-35 percent and an increase in the rise of flood events by more than 25 percent due to climate change. "Water resource management combined with disaster preparedness is a critical way to protect natural resources and increase economic growth," said Greg Browder, Anup Karanth, and Satya Priya, the Task Team Leaders for the project. "The project will contribute to designing climate resilient villages and develop flood shelters that provide sufficient space for community members and livestock." The \$108 million loan from the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) has a maturity of 11.5 years and a grace period of 4 years.

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Digital Lending Platform LoanTap Acquires Unofin

Digital lending platform LoanTap on Wednesday said it has acquired Unofin, a healthcare-focused fintech startup, for an undisclosed sum. With this acquisition, LoanTap aims to leverage Unofin's expertise in healthcare financing to expand its reach in the rapidly-growing healthcare sector in the country. Unofin has serviced over 12,000 customers with Rs 120 crore of gross loan disbursements so far. It has

partnership with 1,600 healthcare service providers in seven cities, making it a key player in the healthcare financing industry. "This acquisition is a strategic move for us to expand our product offerings and tap into the immense potential of the healthcare sector. We believe that healthcare financing is a niche segment with tremendous growth potential," said Satyam Kumar, CEO and co-founder of LoanTap. The acquisition will also enable LoanTap to leverage Unofin's strong relationships with leading hospitals, clinics, and medical equipment suppliers to offer customised financing solutions to these entities. "With LoanTap's digital capabilities, we will be able to reach a much larger customer base and provide them with seamless access to credit," said Tushar Aggarwal, Co-founder, and CEO of Unofin. India's healthcare market is estimated to be worth \$130-140 billion, with more than \$64 billion in the in-patient market.

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How to Use Hard Money Loans to Finance Commercial Real Estate Investments

Commercial real estate (CRE) is a popular and effective investment strategy for investors looking to increase their wealth and diversify their portfolios. Investors can exert more control over their investments and boost their profits by directly owning commercial real estate sites. Money loans are a kind of finance secured by real estate and sometimes have a shorter payback term than conventional loans. With the right planning, investing in emerging markets is now the finest method to generate money. Many regions of the nation are developing into the best places to get the best offers on various sorts of commercial real estate. Hard money loans are a wonderful choice for real estate investors because traditional loans have a drawn-out procedure that might conclude with approval or denial. Hard Money Loans For Commercial Real Estate Projects? Commercial real estate investors might use short-term credit products, hard money and fix-and-flip loans to finance an investment opportunity. Compared to traditional bank loans, they often feature higher interest rates and fees but provide quick access to funds and more lenient lending standards. Private lenders frequently provide hard money loans, often short-term, and have payback terms of a few months to a few years. They have been well-liked by investors who want to resell a house after renovations quickly, but they are also useful for speeding up the purchase of a property. At the same time, the terms of the principal financing are still being worked out with the lender. While hard money loans provide certain benefits over conventional finance, there are also some drawbacks. When choosing, investors should compare the costs and risks with the prospective rewards.

Given below are the two most important advantages of hard money loans for commercial real estate investments: 1. This Loan Is Easily Accessible. A strong business strategy and accurate financial predictions are necessary for the lengthy

and challenging process of obtaining a commercial real estate loan. Dealing with a seasoned lender or broker can speed up the loan procedure and improve the likelihood of acceptance. Even after closing, the traditional loan procedure might take several months to complete before funds are released. This can reduce the investor's return on investment (ROI). Investors with less-than-perfect credit might conclude deals more swiftly with alternative financing options like hard money loans or bridge loans. Bridge loans may be useful for investors trying to optimize earnings while having higher interest rates and shorter payback durations. Hard money loans are perfect for ventures with short timescales because they are approved and disbursed within a few weeks.

2. Higher Flexibility With Credit Scores. Real estate is usually used as security for hard money loans with higher interest rates than conventional bank loans. Borrowers frequently use them for emergency financial requirements or when they are not eligible for conventional bank loans. They are a popular option for real estate investors who need to move quickly to obtain a property since they can customize certain loan components to fit their needs better. Hard money loans are an excellent and flexible loan for real estate investors who need to move swiftly and have some flexibility in the loan conditions. Still, they have higher costs and more stringent payback requirements than conventional bank loans. Because of the fact that hard money lenders are more concerned with the value of the property than the borrower's creditworthiness, they may be more prepared to deal with borrowers who are having financial troubles.

3. You Can Get Additional Insights. For you to obtain financing for your commercial real estate investment, it is critical to have a sound financial strategy and a high credit score. Bank lenders may not be lucrative and have no interest in the property you invest in. Hard money lenders may be more accommodating with their loan requirements because they are better familiar with the neighborhood where you purchase the home. Free advice and loans are the two services that hard money lenders provide. Compared to traditional bank lenders, they often demand higher interest rates and costs but also offer helpful advice. They can also give money more quickly and have a quicker approval procedure. Before making a choice, it's crucial to carefully evaluate the loan's terms and circumstances to ensure they match your financial objectives and capacity. [Get The Best Hard Money Lenders For Your Next Investment!](#) Now that you know what it's like to get a hard money loan for your commercial real estate projects, it's time to start looking for a trustworthy private lender. Due to its expertise, security, and quick response, hard money loans are gaining popularity with real estate borrowers with low credit ratings. It enables borrowers to obtain cash more quickly than conventional loans, enabling them to take advantage of investment possibilities that need quick decisions. Hard money lenders also have more latitude in their lending standards and could be open to working with borrowers in atypical financial situations or with properties with unusual features.

New Analysis from Securin Inc. and Ivanti Finds Potential Security Gaps in Indian State Governments' Public-Facing Assets

Securin Inc. and Ivanti have conducted an investigation into the cyber hygiene of Indian state government domains and found several potential gaps in their current security practices. The investigation used the Securin Attack Surface Management platform to passively examine the domains of Indian state governments and union territories. A few key findings are as follows: Over 10% of domains in Indian states do not have Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) encryption—a basic security protocol layer. Without the SSL encryption, hackers and threat groups can mount attacks easily and intercept sensitive data. Hundreds of highly sensitive protocols are currently exposed to the internet. These are the most vulnerable and popular exposures threat actors seek. We found 293 instances of the SSH protocol and 67 instances of the FTP exposed to the internet. Additionally, 700+ credentials with passwords from all state domains leaked onto the deep and dark web, making these domains extremely vulnerable to phishing attacks, credential misuse, and impersonation. The investigation also found 537 instances of ransomware exposure, which makes the domains extremely vulnerable to ransomware attacks. “When basic cyber hygiene is not robust, it leaves governments and organizations extremely vulnerable to cyberattacks,” said Srinivas Mukkamala, Chief Product Officer at Ivanti. “All organizations and governments must remain vigilant when shoring up their cyber defenses. Together with our partners at Securin, we will continue to highlight areas of improvement for governments and organizations to protect against ransomware attacks.”

According to the 2023 Spotlight Report released last month, there has been a staggering 503% increase in ransomware attacks globally since 2019. The report also revealed that 76% of vulnerabilities being exploited by ransomware groups were actually discovered before 2020, highlighting that attackers still rely on old tactics that continue to be effective. This highlights the critical importance of paying close attention to cyber hygiene practices and implementing effective security measures to safeguard against these types of attacks. “India saw the highest number of cyberattacks on government agencies in 2022, which highlights that cyber hygiene cannot be ignored,” said Ram Movva, Co-Founder and Chairman of Securin Inc. “The government sector was the third most attacked industry in 2022, and we are seeing a sharp increase in the number of attacks being deployed on Indian organizations and government entities. Organizations must continuously strengthen their security posture, and the first step to that is knowing where your weaknesses are.”

Loans Disbursed Digitally Rose 12-Fold between 2017 and 2020

There was a 12-fold increase in the volume of loan disbursement through digital mode by banks and non-bank finance companies (NBFCs) between 2017 and 2020, an RBI panel report said. According to the findings by a working group constituted by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), between 2017 and 2020, the quantum of loans disbursed rose from Rs 11,671 crore to Rs 1,41,821 crore, i.e. a 12-fold rise. A bulk of loans disbursed by these entities were personal loans, followed by loans to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the report further said. Also, as per the findings of the report, there were approximately 1,100 lending apps in the country between January 1, 2021, and February 28, 2021.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Central Bank Elaborating Financial Sector Development Strategy

The Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) is elaborating financial sector development strategy, Trend reports via the CBA. The Council for Cooperation with Entrepreneurs, established to further strengthen cooperation between the financial and banking sector and entrepreneurs, and improve business access to financial services, has held a regular extended meeting. During the meeting, the CBA Governor Taleh Kazimov noted the importance of economic diversification processes in terms of maintaining macroeconomic and financial stability in the country in the medium and long term. The mentioned strategy reflects priority issues in the direction of solving the problems of the financial sector. In the real sector, especially in regions and rural areas, work continues to expand the access of economic entities to financial resources, the CBA said. During the meeting, it was noted that the activities of the Council for Cooperation with Entrepreneurs, which is a platform for an active dialogue between entrepreneurs and the financial and banking sector, contribute to the development of manufacturing and services in general.

Moreover, the council's activities contribute to diversification of the national economy, further acceleration of economic growth in the non-oil sector, creating conditions for improving the access of entrepreneurship entities to financial and banking services. Besides, the speakers noted the intensification of lending to the real sector, strengthening the activities of investment companies to accelerate the economic development of regions, expanding the coverage of concessional loans, further focusing on the development of small, medium-sized businesses, the real sector, and agriculture, as well as consideration of the use of alternative financial instruments such as Islamic banking. The simplification of financial and banking services for

entrepreneurs, the organization of trainings to improve their financial literacy, as well as discussions with entrepreneurs in the elaboration of relevant bills and amendments, the necessary measures to support the CBA as a regulator, and other issues were put forward. The importance of informing entrepreneurs about processes in the national economy by the Central Bank, analysis and research results related to their impact was stressed.

In conclusion, Kazimov expressed confidence that in the context of socio-economic reforms carried out in Azerbaijan, business representatives will benefit more from the opportunities created by a strong and stable financial environment. The meeting was attended by representatives of the National Confederation of Organizations of Entrepreneurs of Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijan Banks Association, the Small and Medium Business Development Agency, the Azerbaijan Microfinance Association, the American Chamber of Commerce in Azerbaijan, the Association of Azerbaijan Travel Agencies and other structures.

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Measures Taken by Country Reduce Impact of Inflation

Inflation has become a serious problem around the world in recent years, Azerbaijan's Prime Minister Ali Asadov said during the discussion in the Azerbaijani Parliament of the report on the activities of the Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan in 2022, Trend reports. He noted that the average annual inflation rate in the world was 20.4 percent. According to him, last year, the inflation rate in Azerbaijan was 13.9 percent. The prime minister noted that the annual index growth of imported products amounted to more than 20 percent. "There was imported inflation in Azerbaijan. Despite this, high oil prices and measures are taken within the country to soften the consequences of inflation. The Cabinet of Ministers approved an anti-inflation plan, and measures taken by state bodies reduced the impact of inflation," Ali Asadov said. The Azerbaijani Parliament is holding a meeting for the discussion of the report on the activities of the Cabinet of Ministers in 2022. The meeting is attended by PM Ali Asadov and members of the government.

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Azerbaijan Reveals Amount of VAT Refund to Consumers

Over 400 million manat (\$235.2 million) have been returned to consumers since the start of the project to refund part of the VAT (Value Added Tax) in Azerbaijan, Trend reports via the State Tax Service under Azerbaijan's Ministry of Economy. Only from January through February of this year, more than 24.7 million manat (\$14.5 million) were returned to consumers. In order to receive a refund of a certain part of VAT, the consumer, that is, the party making the purchase or using the service, must be an

individual, and the seller or the party providing the service must be a VAT payer. In 2022, more than 68.4 million manat (\$40.2 million) of VAT were returned to consumers for non-cash purchases of goods or services. At the end of last year, Azerbaijan increased the VAT refund for cashless payments. This issue was discussed at the Azerbaijani Parliament's meeting on December 9. The relevant draft proposes to reduce VAT refund during cash transactions from 10 to 5 percent and increase it from 15 to 17.5 percent for cashless payments in order to promote non-cash transactions. The bill was put to the vote and adopted in the third reading.

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KAZAKHSTAN: National Bank Shares Updates on Inflation Data

Inflation in Kazakhstan reached 21.3 percent in February 2023, compared to 20.7 percent in January 2023, Igor Osipov, Head of the Real Sector Monitoring Department of the National Bank, said, Trend reports, citing the National Bank. Inflation in February amounted to 1.3 percent, which is significantly higher than the aggregate February average of 0.6 percent registered during the previous five years. The price for food products increased by 26.2 percent in year-over-year terms, compared to an increase of 25.7 percent recorded in January. Mangystau region demonstrated the worst level of food product inflation (32.1 percent), while the best result was observed in Almaty city (24.6 percent). Non-food prices also increased across the country by 20.5 percent YoY on average during February, while an increase of 20.2 percent was recorded in January. Non-food product inflation was the most significant in Astana (31.3), exceeding the national average by more than half. On the other end of the spectrum, the Almaty region demonstrated the best result with 16.1 percent. Paid services became 15 percent YoY more expensive in February, compared to 14.2 percent in January. Akmola region became the inflation leader for this category of products with 20.2 percent, while Shymkent city performed above the average with an 11.2 percent increase being recorded in the city. In regional terms, inflation accelerated in 17 regions, while a slowdown was registered in three regions. The National Bank is the central bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The objective of the institution is to ensure price stability in Kazakhstan, in addition to regulating fiscal and monetary policy.

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TURKMENISTAN: Unveiling Top Banks by Number of Users of Mobile Banking Services

Halkbank Joint-Stock Commercial Bank became the leader in the number of registered users of Mobile Banking services in Turkmenistan as of the beginning of March 2023, [Trend](#) reports with reference to the Central Bank of Turkmenistan. Halkbank has 16,340 registered users of this service. In second place - is

Turkmenistan State Commercial Bank (13,820 users), and in third - is Dayhanbank State Commercial Bank (12,425 users). Halkbank mainly works with clients in the regions of Turkmenistan. Thus, most of the users are located in Mary (8,106 users) and Lebap (6,200 users) regions. The table below shows the full rating of banks in Turkmenistan by the number of registered users of the Mobile Banking service as of 01.03.2023:

Bank:	Number of registered users
Halkbank Joint-Stock Commercial Bank	16,340
Turkmenistan State Commercial Bank	13,820
Dayhanbank State Commercial Bank of Turkmenistan	12,425
Turkmenbashi Joint-Stock Commercial Bank	9,201
Senagat Joint-Stock Commercial Bank	9,197
Turkmen-Turkish Joint-Stock Commercial Bank	1,294
Rysgal Joint-Stock Commercial Bank	254
Total number of registered users	62 531

Turkmenistan's financial sector is constantly expanding. In particular, mobile applications are being introduced to pay for various services and goods, the number of transactions is increasing, and payment methods are being offered through bank payment terminals. For example, over the past six months, the number of Mobile Banking service users in the country has increased from 56,451 to 62,531.

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UZBEKISTAN: State Debt to Reach Record Level of \$29.2 bln

The state debt of Uzbekistan in 2022 amounted to 29.2 billion dollars. This amount is the highest level of the country's debt. According to the Ministry, the state debt reached 36.4% of the GDP in the fourth quarter. This is 2.3% more than the previous quarter. In the last quarter of 2022, the national debt increased by \$2.9 billion compared to 2021 and by \$3.1 billion compared to the third quarter. Also, the state debt in Uzbekistan increased by 17.6 billion dollars in 2022 compared to 2017.

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YEMEN: World Bank's \$207 Million Additional Financing - A Beacon of Hope for Millions of Yemen Is Battling Food Insecurity and Overlapping Crises

The World Bank has approved a second additional financing of \$207 million for the Emergency Social Protection Enhancement and COVID-19 Response Project (ESPECRP) in Yemen, aimed at addressing chronic food insecurity and malnutrition in Yemen. This funding, provided as a grant by the World Bank's International Development Association, will help sustain and scale up the impact of the ongoing project, including \$150 million from the Crisis Response Window. The financing will enable the cash transfer program to deliver its annual benefits in three payment cycles per year, reducing the risk of operational delays. The project will also target areas with high food insecurity and malnutrition, bundling geo-focused interventions to maximize impact and improve sustainability. Around 1.8 million Yemeni households are set to benefit from the additional financing. The project will also further the transition towards digital payments in cash transfers, fostering a digital payment-friendly local ecosystem. This includes supporting the acquisition of national IDs and providing access to financial literacy interventions on a pilot basis. It will also extend crucial support to poor and vulnerable households coping with multiple overlapping crises, including conflict, food price inflation, climate-related emergencies like the August-September 2022 floods, and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Notably, the additional financing will implement the geo-focused bundles of interventions introduced in the parent project, in line with the World Bank Group's Country Engagement Note. By combining cash for nutrition, labor-intensive works, and support to SMEs (as well as complementary resilience-building interventions from other Bank projects) in areas with high incidences of food insecurity and malnutrition, the AF is expected to have a more sustained impact on food insecurity within target communities. Yemen remains one of the poorest and most food-insecure countries in the world, with the ongoing conflict, severe economic decline, and collapse of essential services exacerbating an already precarious situation. About 21.6 million people need some form of humanitarian assistance in 2023, with a staggering 19 million people in crisis, emergency, or catastrophic levels of food insecurity. "This additional financing reflects the World Bank's unwavering commitment to improving the lives of Yemenis caught in the midst of multiple crises, including conflict, food insecurity, and climate-related emergencies," said Tania Meyer, World Bank Country Manager for Yemen. "By promoting digital payments and extending crucial support to poor and vulnerable households, we aim to offer a lifeline to those who need it most, laying the groundwork for a more resilient and sustainable future for the people of Yemen."

The ESPECRP has already made significant implementation progress, reaching on average 1.42 million poor and vulnerable Social Welfare Fund beneficiary households. The second additional financing will continue to be implemented by the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Development Programme, with support from the Social Fund for Development and Public Works Project. The project meets the criteria for the World Bank's International Development Association

Remaining Engaged in Conflict priorities, particularly on strengthening local systems and attention to sustainability, with a goal of working directly with local institutions and preserving their programs and systems critical for supporting current needs and post-conflict recovery. The World Bank's country-wide program for Yemen has reached US\$3.5 billion in IDA grants since 2016. In addition to funding, the World Bank provides technical expertise to design projects and guide their implementation by building strong partnerships with UN agencies and local institutions with working capacity on the ground.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 03/27/2023

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: \$385 Million to Upgrade Richmond Road

Families, tradies and truckies in Sydney's north-west will benefit from a \$385 million upgrade to Richmond Road, thanks to the NSW Liberal and Nationals Government's \$5 billion WestInvest program. Premier Dominic Perrottet said these critical upgrades would be a game-changer for families and business owners who travel along this road every day. "We are making sure families across Western Sydney who use Richmond Road can get to where they need to safely and sooner," Mr Perrottet said. "This upgrade to Richmond Road is only possible because of the NSW Liberal and Nationals long-term economic plan to keep our state moving forward." Treasurer Matt Kean said \$385 million has been allocated to transform Richmond Road and ensure a smoother, safer journey for drivers.

"The Liberal and Nationals Government is committed to future proofing the primary north-south arterial route between Richmond and the M7 Motorway, which passes through the key communities of Hawkesbury, Penrith and Blacktown," Mr Kean said. "We are able to support the growth of Sydney's North West because of the NSW Government's strong economic management and the WestConnex asset recycling program." Minister for Metropolitan Roads Natalie Ward said two sections of Richmond Road would be upgraded which would also improve flood resilience. "This is a rapidly growing area and we need to ensure families, tradies and truckies can rely on this key route to get to work and home to their loved ones," Mrs Ward said.

"We are connecting people to areas of employment, education facilities, shopping centres, and providing an evacuation route for those living in the Hawkesbury-Nepean flood catchment." The funding includes: \$285 million for planning and early works to widen to six lanes a 2.2 kilometre section between the M7 Motorway and Townson Road and to build a new off-ramp bridge to connect Richmond Road to Westlink M7. \$100 million to widen to four lanes a section of Richmond Rd between Elara Boulevard and Heritage Road at Marsden Park. Transport for NSW will keep the community informed as these projects progress.

Over \$20 Million Additional Funding for Animal Welfare

The NSW Liberal and Nationals Government is boosting the record investment in improving animal welfare outcomes with two additional initiatives worth over \$20 million, including a \$15.6 million digital renovation of the NSW Pet Registry and a new \$5 million grant program for animal rehoming organisations. Minister for Local Government Wendy Tuckerman said the grant program was available for approved rehoming organisations in NSW for funding of up to \$100,000 to improve rehoming outcomes and reduce euthanasia rates. “The Liberal and Nationals Government is committed to improving the welfare of animals, and we know that rehoming organisations have an important role to play,” Mrs Tuckerman said. “In recent years we’ve seen significant improvements in the rehoming of companion animals in NSW and a substantial drop in euthanasia rates, however we will continue to work hard to bring those numbers down even further.

“Approved rehoming organisations support the companion animal management activities of councils, often relying on the efforts of volunteers, with this new grant program set to make it easier for those groups to continue their work.” Mrs Tuckerman also said the new \$15.6 million digital Pet Registry is part of the NSW Liberal and Nationals Government’s commitment to strengthening animal welfare standards and promoting responsible pet ownership. “The NSW Pet Registry will be a state-of-the art, user-friendly portal, making it easier for vets, owners and rehoming organisations to ensure animal details are up to date and allowing delay-free transfers of ownership,” Mrs Tuckerman said. “This will be a game-changer for NSW, assisting in future animal welfare enforcement activities and helping us reunite lost pets with owners faster.

“This investment will ensure that whenever there’s a new cat or dog coming into the family, it will be quick, simple and secure.” Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government Victor Dominello said the Office of Local Government and Department of Customer Service are working together on the upgrade, with a pilot program currently underway involving up to 10 breeders and 50 new pet owners. “Under the Pet Registry pilot, breeders can easily enter litters of puppies and kittens, vets can add microchip numbers, and owner transfers are instant,” Mr Dominello said. “It’s giving us valuable insights as we build the new system, which will be a secure end-to-end digital solution for pet registration. “The new pet registry will also reduce paperwork and make it faster and easier to update and track critical information like change of address and ownership transfers, while providing real-time reminders for regulatory requirements like desexing.” The pilot runs until June and the first phase of the new online Pet Registry is expected to be rolled out across the State from the end of 2023. Both programs bring the total investment by the Liberal and Nationals

Government in animal welfare and rehoming work to over \$60 million in the 2022-23 financial year alone.

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 03/04/2023

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NSW Liberal and Nationals Government Backing Families Following RBA Rate Rise

The NSW Liberal and Nationals Government is providing targeted cost of living support for families as the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) delivers its tenth consecutive rate rise. Following its monthly board meeting, the RBA today lifted the cash rate by 0.25 percentage points to 3.60 per cent. Treasurer Matt Kean said the NSW Liberal and Nationals Government's economic discipline has enabled it to deliver targeted support for people doing it tough. "The economy is facing challenges with rising inflation and interest rates but the Liberal and Nationals Government is well placed to fend off those headwinds because we have a long term economic plan," Mr Kean said. "A re-elected NSW Liberal and Nationals Government will slash energy bills by \$250 and help households unlock up to \$400 in further savings by switching to a better deal.

"We are already easing cost of living pressures with more than 70 rebates and vouchers to assist families, businesses and people in need." Mr Kean said a re-elected Liberal and Nationals Government will also guarantee that there will be no new taxes on households and small businesses in the next term of government. "The biggest threat to our economy is a Labor Government that would open the purse strings to their union mates," Mr Kean said. "NSW Labor's plan to scrap the public sector wage cap for pay rises linked to inflation would blow an \$8.6 billion black hole in the Budget and risk making inflation worse." The March Statement of Monetary Policy said the RBA "remains alert to the risk of a prices-wages spiral, given the limited spare capacity in the economy". "This may as well be a warning about Chris Minns, Daniel Mookhey and their reckless approach to wages," Mr Kean said.

"Labor is already cancelling infrastructure projects. Our state cannot risk going back to the old Labor days with infrastructure backlogs and school closures to fund public sector union wage claims." Last week global ratings agency Standard and Poor's (S&P) noted Australian wages caps, like the one in NSW, have "struck a pragmatic middle ground" as the "fiscal scars and debt overhang from COVID-19 linger". NSW has had the lowest unemployment rate among the states for the past five months, recording 3.1 per cent in January 2023, and the Liberals and Nationals Government remains on track to return the Budget to surplus in 2024-25. NSW remains the only Australian state with two triple-A credit ratings and a double-A plus rating.

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\$180 Million for Small Projects with Big Impact for Regional Schools

Families across regional NSW will see hundreds of projects delivered at their local public schools through a \$180 million investment from a re-elected NSW Liberal and Nationals Government. Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional NSW Paul Toole said the commitment will more than double the Liberal and Nationals Government's investment in small capital works projects at regional schools through the Regional Renewal Program. "We've already invested more than \$160 million in small projects that make a big difference to regional schools like upgrades to the tuckshop or a new shade sail – and we want to keep delivering," Mr Toole said. "The long-term economic plan of the NSW Liberal and Nationals Government means we can get behind the small projects that schools, local P&Cs and parents really care about and help bring them to life.

"This is about building projects we know local schools and parents want and need, while providing work for hundreds of local tradies in the process." Minister for Education and Early Learning Sarah Mitchell said she was pleased the Liberal and Nationals' strong economic management means communities are supported through incredible programs such as this one. "Schools play such an important role in their communities and this funding allows us to work with those communities to identify and deliver projects that are important to them," Ms Mitchell said. "Only a NSW Liberal and Nationals Government with a proven track record of delivery will make investment in the regions a priority and ensure this program is delivered. "Families in the bush know that under Labor they will go backwards, given Labor's track record of closing 90 schools when they were last in government. It's only the Liberal and Nationals Government that will keep NSW moving forward."

The Regional Renewal Program was launched in November 2020 with the NSW Government co-contributing up to 80 per cent of the cost for local school projects such as covered outdoor learning areas, playground upgrades and canteens nominated by schools. More than 950 projects have been approved across more than 840 schools, with 750 projects already completed. This is an investment of more than \$160 million in regional communities. The NSW Liberal and Nationals Government is investing \$8.6 billion in school infrastructure over the next four years, continuing its program to deliver 160 new and upgraded schools to support communities across NSW. This builds on the more than \$9.1 billion invested in projects delivered since 2017, a program of \$17.7 billion in public education infrastructure.

This latest commitment is another example of the NSW Liberal and Nationals Government's nation-leading work to give our kids the best start in life: A \$15.9 billion Early Years Commitment, including delivering universal pre-Kindergarten for every child in the year before school and rolling out a full suite of health and development

checks to NSW preschools. A once-in-a-generation back-to-basics school curriculum that puts literacy and numeracy first for all students. A \$250 million tutoring program to support up to 120,000 students in 2023, bringing the total to \$890 million invested in tutoring since 2021. Making sure we have the best teachers in our classrooms by supporting our students with a guaranteed 6% pay rise for teachers over the next two years, and a \$100 million commitment to pay excellent teachers salaries of up to \$152,000.

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NEW ZEALAND: New Funding for Cyclone Waste Removal

The Government will provide \$15 million in the short term to local councils to remove rubbish, as a longer-term approach is developed, the Minister for Emergency Management Kieran McNulty announced today. "Several regions are facing significant costs associated with residential waste removal, which has the potential to become a public health and environmental risk. "We've heard from some councils that they don't have the financial capacity to deal with the issue so it's important we support them to ensure funding money isn't a barrier to clean up," Kieran McNulty said. This additional funding will go towards the urgent collection, removal, and disposal of solid waste caused by Cyclone Gabrielle from residential properties.

"We're contributing short term funding of \$15 million to assist local authorities to remove and dispose of residential solid waste between 13 February 2023 to 30 June 2023 while a longer term approach to waste management is being developed," Kieran McNulty said. The intention is for it to be locally led as local authorities are best placed to determine which properties are classified as residential. "In many areas, particularly in Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti, the next steps of recovery cannot begin until rubbish is properly disposed of. "This funding will be a welcome relief to those communities that are heading towards recovery. It's been a hard time after the impacts of the Cyclone but communities have rallied together and supported each other through the worst of it. "Local Councils are having to face unprecedented damage from the Cyclone, I am glad we are able to get funds to them that enable them to help their communities as fast as possible," Kieran McNulty said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 03/09/2023

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Govt Approves \$25 Million Extension for Cyclone-Affected Businesses

The Government is providing a further \$25 million in grants to help more businesses in cyclone-affected regions with the clean up and get them back up and running. This follows an initial \$25 million emergency package, which also included business support and advice services. Grant Robertson said the extension of funding provided

help to more businesses whose operations had been severely disrupted by the flooding and cyclone and help address their immediate cashflow needs. “As more is known about the scale of the cyclone damage, it is important that the local agencies on the ground working with affected businesses have the financial support to deal with the most pressing needs in their regions,” Grant Robertson said.

“The uptake of grants has been strong. For example, in Tairāwhiti 372 applications for business support have been approved with \$4.1 million paid out. “Based on the applications to date, it is clear that the initial \$25 million business support package announced in late February is likely to be oversubscribed. Ministers will ensure that support will be targeted at those regions where the need is greatest. “The extension of funding would not change the current settings or intent of the grants, but would allow more firms to be supported up to the \$40,000 per-business cap. “We are committed to helping people and businesses recover from the cyclone. We will continue to closely monitor the needs of local communities and work with local agencies, iwi and councils as the regions move to recovery and rebuild from these extreme weather events.

“This work will include exploring further support for larger affected firms, drawing on lessons learned from COVID-19. It will also be informed by the Cyclone Recovery Taskforce, whose role is to advise on recovery priorities and the planning and sequencing of recovery efforts.” Grant Robertson said. Today’s announcement adds to the \$55 million in support that is already going out the door to our farmers and growers and a new recovery visa to help bring in more workers to help with the recovery. The agencies distributing the business support grants will be: NorthlandInc Auckland Business Chamber Toi Economic Development Agency Thames Coromandel District Council Trust Tairāwhiti Hawkes Bay Chamber of Commerce Taranaki District Council Masterton District Council

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 03/15/2023

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6、 Private Sector

East Asia

CHINA: Supreme Court Pledges Better Protection of Property Rights of Private Business

Chinese courts will take resolute actions to protect legitimate property rights and interests of private businesses and entrepreneurs, a Supreme People's Court report said Tuesday. Courts will work to stop illegal acts violating personality rights of entrepreneurs, support honest business operations and encourage fair competition, according to the report submitted to the ongoing session of the 14th National

People's Congress, the top legislature, for deliberation. Chinese courts have enhanced their protection on property rights over the past five years. From 2018 to 2022, wrong verdicts of 209 major criminal cases involving property rights had been corrected, and 290 business operators acquitted, according to the report. Concrete actions had been taken to prevent turning business disputes into criminal prosecution, the report added. All enterprises were treated equally no matter whether they are state-owned or private, domestic or foreign-funded, small or big, the report said.

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Xi Calls for Guiding Healthy, High-quality Development of Private Sector

President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, visited on Monday afternoon national political advisors from the China National Democratic Construction Association (CNDCA) and the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC), who are attending the first session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). Xi participated in their joint panel discussion and heard their comments and suggestions. He stressed that the CPC Central Committee always stays committed to unswervingly consolidating and developing the public sector of the economy, and at the same time unswervingly encouraging, supporting and guiding the development of the non-public sector of the economy.

The non-public sector's status and functions in the country's economic and social development have not changed, the principle and policies to unswervingly encourage, support and guide the development of the sector have not changed, and the principle and policies to provide a sound environment and more opportunities to the sector have not changed. The CPC Central Committee has always considered private enterprises and private entrepreneurs as being in our ranks. Efforts should be made to guide private enterprises and private entrepreneurs to understand the principles and policies of the CPC Central Committee, and boost their confidence and unburden them of their worries, so that they can ambitiously pursue development, and therefore the healthy, high-quality development of the private sector can be achieved.

Ahead of International Women's Day, which is celebrated on March 8, Xi, on behalf of the CPC Central Committee, extended holiday greetings and best wishes to female deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC), female members of the CPPCC National Committee, and female staff of the two sessions. Greetings and best wishes were also extended to women from all ethnic groups and sectors of society on the Chinese mainland, to female compatriots in Hong Kong and Macao

special administrative regions, in Taiwan, and overseas. Those who joined Xi in the visit and the discussion included Wang Huning, who is a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and presides over the meetings of the presidium of the first session of the 14th CPPCC National Committee, and Cai Qi and Ding Xuexiang, also members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee.

During the joint panel discussion, CPPCC members Zeng Yuqun, Xie Dong, Liu Zhendong, Chen Xiaoping, Xie Ru and Sun Dongsheng made remarks regarding topics on developing a globally competitive new energy industry, providing financial support for scientific and technological innovation, creating a better environment for the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, promoting the high-quality development of platform economy, advancing the revitalization of rural industries, and how to give full play to the strengths and vitality of the private sector. Xi made an important speech after listening carefully to the members. He said he was pleased to visit and have discussions with national political advisors from the CNDCA and the ACFIC. On behalf of the CPC Central Committee, he extended sincere greetings to those who were present, to members of the CNDCA and the ACFIC and individuals from the non-public sector of the economy, and to all CPPCC members.

Xi stressed that the year 2022 was an extremely crucial year of great importance in the history of the CPC and the country. Faced with high winds and choppy waters in the international environment and multiple greater-than-expected factors at home, with all the Chinese people meeting difficulties head-on and striving in unity, we secured some accomplishments of major significance and far-reaching influence, resulting in substantial achievements in advancing the cause of the Party and the country. The CPC successfully convened its 20th National Congress, drawing an ambitious blueprint for building a modern socialist country in all respects. We overcame difficulties and challenges including the COVID-19 epidemic, and safely and successfully hosted the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics and Paralympics as scheduled. We dynamically optimized and adjusted the measures and policies for COVID-19 prevention and control, securing a smooth transition within a relatively short period of time.

As a result, China's mortality rate of COVID-19 has been kept at the lowest level globally. We have scored a major and decisive victory in our response to COVID-19. We fully and faithfully applied the new development philosophy on all fronts and focused on fostering a new development pattern and promoting high-quality development. While the global inflation reached a new high in over four decades, consumer prices in China remained stable in general. China's economic growth for the whole year was 3 percent, which is quite high among major economies in the world. All these achievements did not come easily. Xi pointed out that the past five years since the 19th CPC National Congress have been truly momentous and

extraordinary. The external environment for China's development has changed drastically, with uncertainties and unexpected factors increasing remarkably.

In particular, Western countries headed by the United States have contained, encircled and suppressed China in an all-round way, bringing unprecedentedly severe challenges to China's development. At the same time, China has also faced various difficulties such as the resurging COVID-19 epidemic and the mounting downward pressure facing the domestic economy. Adhering to the general principle of pursuing progress while ensuring stability, we have met obstacles and difficulties head on and responded to them calmly, remained unswayed by fallacies, not cowed by pressure or hardships. China's GDP registered an annual growth rate of 5.2 percent over the past five years. We won the critical battle against poverty as scheduled and finished building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, thus attaining the First Centenary Goal, achieving impressive advances in the cause of the Party and the country, and taking China on a new journey toward building a modern socialist country in all respects.

The achievements of the past five years should be attributed to the concerted efforts of the whole Party and the Chinese people, as well as to the contribution of the CPPCC members. Xi stressed that, in the face of profound and complex changes in the international and domestic environment, we must remain calm, maintain firm resolve, pursue progress while ensuring stability, demonstrate enterprise in our work, unite as one, and have the courage to carry on our fight. To remain calm and maintain firm resolve means to keep a cool head in observing the profound changes in the international landscape, and calmly respond to various risks and challenges. We should accurately identify, soundly respond to, and actively steer changes, and timely optimize and adjust our strategies and policies. At the same time, we should maintain firm strategic resolve, stay tenacious, never be afraid of any risks, and move forward firmly toward the established strategic plans.

To sustain progress while ensuring stability and demonstrate enterprise in our work means to maintain stability in our general direction, principles and policies, as well as strategic plans. On the basis of securing our foundation and position, we must forge ahead vigorously, move forward as fast as possible and strive for the best possible results. We should unite as one and have the courage to carry on our fight as we draw our strengths from unity. Over the years, we have encountered various risks, challenges and battles one after another, and have overcome every one of them with all the people striving in unity and fighting tenaciously. In the near future, we will only face more and increasingly serious risks and challenges. Only when all the people work together with one heart and one mind, unite as one, and have the courage and ability to carry out our fight, will we continue to win new and greater victories.

Xi pointed out that the private sector is an important force for our Party to maintain its long-term governance and to unite and lead the people of all ethnic groups to realize

the Two Centenary Goals and the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation. We always regard private enterprises and private entrepreneurs as being in our ranks, giving them support when they are in difficulties and offering them guidance when they are uncertain about what to do. We should improve the development environment for private enterprises, remove the institutional obstacles that prevent them from fairly participating in market competition, and safeguard the property rights of private enterprises and the rights and the interests of private entrepreneurs according to law. We should substantiate the requirement that state-owned enterprises and their private counterparts should be treated equally through institutional arrangements and legal guarantee to encourage and support the development of the private sector and growth of private enterprises, and boost market expectations and confidence.

It is necessary to give full play to the important role of private enterprises in stabilizing employment and boosting income, take more effective measures to support the development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and self-employed individuals, and support the platform companies to play an active role in creating jobs, expanding consumption and competing in the global market. Work should be done to fully establish a cordial and clean relationship between government and businesses, and resolve concerns and difficulties for private companies and private entrepreneurs, so that they could be given a free hand and concentrate on development with no worries. It is also necessary to strengthen theoretical and political guidance, help private companies and private entrepreneurs properly perceive the Party Central Committee's principles and policies of unswervingly consolidating and developing the public sector, unswervingly encouraging, supporting and guiding the development of the non-public sector, as well as promoting the healthy growth of the non-public sector of the economy and encouraging those working in this sector to achieve success, so that they can let go of misgivings, be unburdened and develop with courage.

Xi stressed that the pursuit of high-quality development places higher requirements on the private sector. Private enterprises should put into practice the new development philosophy, thoroughly understand the shortcomings existing in and challenges faced by the private sector, so that they can transform their growth model, adjust industrial structure and shift to new growth drivers, stick to the main business, strengthen their industries and consciously take the path of high-quality development. Those who have the ability and the conditions should strengthen self-dependent innovation to play a greater role in promoting sci-tech self-reliance and strength and the application of sci-tech achievements. Efforts should be made to unleash the vitality of private investment, and encourage and attract more private capital to take part in the development of major projects and programs in key industrial and supply chains, enabling such capital to make a greater contribution to fostering a new development pattern and promoting high-quality development.

Work should be done to regulate and guide the sound development of all types of capital in accordance with law, and effectively prevent and defuse systematic financial risks, with the goal of creating an environment for enterprises under all forms of ownership to compete equally and grow together. Xi pointed out that Chinese modernization is meant to realize common prosperity for all Chinese people. Both state-owned enterprises and their private counterparts are important forces for promoting common prosperity. Both should take their social responsibilities in this regard. He called on private entrepreneurs to strengthen their sentiment and concern for the country and the people, and consciously apply people-centered development philosophy, and have a strong sense of responsibility and mission to help others get rich and promote common prosperity.

Xi said that private enterprises should strive to build harmonious internal labor relations and foster an employees' community with shared interest, making sure that the achievements of private enterprises' development can equally benefit all staff members. He underlined the requirement that private enterprises and private entrepreneurs should adhere to the bottom line that their business operations must be in compliance with law and regulations, carry forward the fine spirit of entrepreneurship, and act as patriotic and dedicated role models who always abide by law in business operations, actively start up businesses while seeking innovation, and repay the society. Private enterprises and private entrepreneurs are called on to pass on and further develop traditional Chinese virtues, actively join in and initiate social charities, being responsible, righteous and benevolent while being wealthy. Shi Taifeng, He Lifeng, Hao Mingjin, Gao Yunlong and others were present.

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China's Privately Offered Funds See Expansion in February

The scale of China's privately offered funds stood at 20.29 trillion yuan (about 3 trillion U.S. dollars) at the end of February, according to data from an industry association. The volume edged up 0.25 percent from the previous month, according to the Asset Management Association of China. The number of registered privately offered funds came in at 148,171 as of the end of February, 1,826 more than the previous month. Meanwhile, 22,174 institutions managed these funds, up by 18 from the previous month, the data showed. Established in 2012, the association is a self-regulatory organization that represents China's mutual fund industry.

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JAPAN: Big Firms Offer Largest Pay Rises in Decades

Japan's top companies offered their largest pay increases in a quarter century on

Wednesday, as the outcome of annual labour talks showed Japan Inc heeding Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's calls for higher wages to counter a surge in inflation. Japanese wages have been a casualty of years of sputtering growth since the late 1990s, leaving worker pay nearly flat and well behind the OECD average. But now, with inflation at its highest in four decades, thanks to a weaker yen and rising commodities costs, Kishida is pushing hard for higher pay. Whether that will be sustainable by companies remains to be seen. This year companies are expected to raise wages at "shunto" spring wage talks that wrap on Wednesday by 2.85%, according to a survey of 33 economists taken by Japan Economic Research Center (JERC). That's far above last year's 2.2% and the fastest gain since 1997, when Japan slid into 15 years of deflation.

The Rengo umbrella labour group has called for a 5% pay increase. The wage talks involve both base and bonus pay. Given that consumer inflation, at 4.1%, outpaces wage hikes, pay rises of 3% or more need to continue in the coming years to sustain price stability at 2%, the central bank's target, said Hisashi Yamada, senior economist at Japan Research Institute. Industrial conglomerate Hitachi Ltd 6501.T, a cornerstone of corporate Japan, said it would increase overall pay by an average of 3.9%, compared to a 2.6% increase a year earlier. It remains unclear, however, whether the wave of wage hikes could spread to small firms, which employ seven out of 10 workers in the country but struggle to pass on costs to their bigger clients at the end of supply chains.

Takahide Kiuchi, a former Bank of Japan board member who is now executive economist at Nomura Research Institute, said base pay rises hold the key in determining how wages may affect prices. The JERC survey showed that excluding seniority-based pay, base compensation that boosts fixed labour costs accounts for just 1.08%. "We need to focus on base pay. It will likely be a little above 1%, still way lower than price increase," Kiuchi said. Kishida's government will likely hold a joint three-party meeting with labour and management for the first time in eight years on Wednesday to ensure structural wage hikes. There are already some encouraging signs. Workers from Japan's largest group of trade unions last week struck early agreements for hefty wage hikes. Other unions from Toyota, the world's No. 1 automaker, and Honda, have also secured their biggest pay rises in decades.

What's unique about shunto in Japan is that every March, more than 300 major firms capitalised at 1 billion yen or more and with 1,000 or more workers, negotiate with their union following wages pace-setters such as Toyota Motor Corp. Unions have historically tended to settle for relatively meagre pay hikes around 2% in recent years, as unions are inclined to cooperate with management in keeping job security rather than aggressively demanding pay rises. Some analysts are also sceptical that unions will be as aggressive in demanding higher pay in coming years if inflation eases, as it is expected to from the middle of the year. Real wages fell in January at the fastest pace since May 2014 when the sales tax was raised to 8% from 5%. Japan's wages

have grown just about 5% over the last 30 years, far below an average 35% gain among member countries during the same period, OECD data shows.

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Japan Reluctant to Accelerate G7 Power Sector Decarbonization Push

Japan, host of the Group of Seven ministerial meeting on climate issues next month, has shown reluctance about bringing forward the framework's agreement last year to decarbonize power sector by 2035, sources close to the matter said Wednesday. The G7 gathering on climate, energy and environment issues on April 15-16 in Sapporo, northern Japan, is set to focus on the seven developed countries' decarbonization efforts after each of them committed to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. In prior negotiations, at least one G7 member has proposed achieving the target for decarbonizing the power sector earlier than 2035 agreed on in last year's G7 ministerial meeting in Germany, the sources said. In last year's post-meeting communique, the G7 ministers said they "further commit to a goal of achieving predominantly decarbonized electricity sectors by 2035." Japan is apparently reluctant about the new proposal on the back of its plan to keep relying on coal, which is estimated to account for around 19 percent in its energy mix in fiscal 2030, the sources said.

While Japan says it will gradually reduce coal power and pivot back to nuclear energy, it has not set out a path to completely wean itself from coal with most of the country's nuclear plants remaining offline due to stricter safety regulations introduced after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster and local opposition. Another focus at the upcoming ministerial meeting is the G7 countries' commitment on promoting zero emission vehicles, including whether they will set a target for such vehicles' market share or even a timeframe for phasing out fossil-fuel vehicles. Japan, whose domestic manufacturers have strengths in gasoline-electric hybrids and plug-in-hybrids, is at odds with some of the member countries after Tokyo at one point put forward a proposal to halve carbon dioxide emissions from automobiles by 2035 from 2000 levels. Japan is aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the country by 46 percent by fiscal 2030 compared to fiscal 2013 levels. The pledge includes a 35 percent emission cut in the transport sector. The G7 groups Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United States plus the European Union.

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SOUTH KOREA: KT, Intel Join Hands to Launch World's First Wi-Fi 7

South Korean telecommunications giant KT said Thursday it is joining hands with

Intel to introduce Wi-Fi 7 technology as the first network service operator. KT and Intel signed an agreement on Tuesday to work together to develop and promote Wi-Fi 7 technology, next-generation Wi-Fi standard, on the sidelines of this year's Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, Spain, the Korean telecommunications giant said. Wi-Fi 7 would pack more data into each transmission and raise the speed significantly and is a more enhanced technology than existing Wi-Fi 6/6E. "With this collaboration with Intel, KT has a foundation to provide a perfect experience for Wi-Fi 7 that will be applied by sharing KT's excellent Wi-Fi development and operation expertise. KT will continue to play a leading role in technology," said Kim Byung-gyun Kim, KT's Device Business Unit senior vice president. Eric McLaughlin, vice president of the Client Computing Group and general manager of the Wireless Solutions Group at Intel, also expressed excitement to work with KT.

"Our close collaboration and co-engineering to help ensure interoperability and performance with KT's APs and Intel PC Client devices aims to significantly improve the wireless connectivity experience for our customers," McLaughlin said. With its collaboration with Intel, KT said it plans to develop its own Wi-Fi 7 AP, while Intel seeks to develop Wi-Fi7 client solutions. The two companies will run interoperability tests and pursue technology innovation, KT said. Among other features, Wi-Fi 7 introduces a key technology called multilink operation that aggregates and uses two or more frequency bands concurrently. This allows KT's Wi-Fi 7 AP to deliver up to 11.5 Gigabits per second with four antennas, which can be used to build service infrastructure for multi-gigabit broadband utilization. This provides huge capacity to support multiple high-speed devices, massive P2P sharing, teleconferencing and immersive AR and VR experiences. During the MWC, the world's largest mobile show, KT presented its next-generation Wi-Fi 7 technology at its booth called GiGA Wi-Fi Premium 7, interoperating with an Intel platform-based PC configured with Intel's upcoming Wi-Fi 7 solution. The Wi-Fi 7 standard is expected to be finalized in early 2024.

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SK Geocentric Readies World's 1st Plastic Recycling Complex

SK Geocentric, a chemicals unit under South Korean conglomerate SK Group, said Friday it has completed technological preparations for the Ulsan Advanced Recycling Cluster with its US partner, Purecycle Technologies. The Ulsan Advanced Recycling Cluster is expected to be the world's first plastic recycling complex, according to SK Geocentric. The companies aim to complete construction of the recycling complex in 2025. Researchers and engineers at the South Korean chemicals firm conducted technological consultations with Purecycle Technologies' workers at the US company's commercial plastic recycling plant in Ohio for about two months beginning in January. According to the officials, the two sides ran various tests to optimize the recycling process for plastic waste in Korea. "The two companies have been working

together for the growth of the Asian region for the past two years, and this will be another turning point to apply recycling technology in Korea," said Dustin Olsen, CEO of Purecycle Technologies.

Purecycle Technologies is a chemical recycling company that utilizes recycling technology with solvents to extract ultrapure recycled polypropylene from plastic waste by removing pollutants, odors and colors. SK Geocentric and Purecycle Technologies agreed to establish a joint venture to build the Ulsan recycling site in October 2022. The companies plan to begin construction of Ulsan Advanced Recycling Cluster this year with the goal to fully begin operations in 2026. "Through this cooperation, the two companies have enhanced their understanding of technology and optimized the recycling process plan to suit the nature of plastic waste in Korea," said Kim Jong-hwa, vice president and chief strategy officer of SK Geocentric. "We will successfully build the Ulsan ARC by strengthening the partnership between the two companies to set up a circular economy."

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 03/10/2023

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Korean Chips Act Aims to Extend Tax Cuts for Local Chipmakers

South Korea on Thursday passed a revision bill deemed the "Korean chips act" with greater tax breaks for investments in the semiconductor industry to lighten the burden for Korean chipmakers competing in the global chips arms race. The National Assembly passed a revision bill to the Restriction of Special Taxation Act, which raises the corporate tax break for facility investment in the semiconductor and other strategic industries to 15 percent for large corporations such as Samsung Electronics and SK hynix, from the previous 8 percent. The tax deduction rate for small- and mid-sized enterprises also rose to 25 percent from 16 percent, following the passage. Among the 231 lawmakers present, 179 voted to approve the revision, while 13 opposed and 39 abstained. With the latest amendment including a new provision offering an additional 10 percent tax deduction on the increments in investment, conglomerates and companies could receive a tax cut of 25 percent at maximum.

The revision proposal raising the tax break rate came in about four months after the previous bill passed in December came short of industry expectations. While the industry anticipated a deduction of some 20 percent, the amendment that passed at the time offered an 8 percent cut. Amid rising calls for another increase, President Yoon Suk Yeol had instructed the Finance Ministry to come up with greater tax cuts for the semiconductor and other strategic industries. The latest revision is anticipated to help the local chip industry save some trillions of won, especially for Samsung and SK hynix, the world's top two memory chipmakers, which have announced plans to launch large production facilities in Korea. According to the Korea Economic Research Institute, South Korea's top 10 chipmakers would save up to 360 billion won (\$277 million) if the tax deduction rate is increased by 1 percentage point. Under

the calculation, the latest revision raising the tax deduction rate from 8 percent to 15 percent would save some 2.5 trillion won for the local chip industry, KERI estimated.

Samsung recently announced that it would put some 300 trillion won toward building a massive chip cluster with five advanced chip manufacturing plants in Yongin, Gyeonggi Province by 2042. SK hynix is also currently working to establish a semiconductor cluster in the same city, investing some 120 trillion won. Amid the ongoing downturn in the semiconductor industry, the business sentiment in the manufacturing sector recovered in March. According to the Bank of Korea, the Business Survey Index on business conditions in the manufacturing sector rebounded in the month to record 70, up 7 percentage points from the previous month. The BSI is calculated based on the survey on entrepreneurs' perceptions and outlook for the month and the following month, and the figure goes below 100 when negative responses outnumber positive ones. The BSI for the manufacturing sector had been on decline consecutively for the past three months from December last year. In February, the score marked 63, the lowest after the figure stood at 59 in July 2020.

Meanwhile, South Korean Minister for Trade Ahn Duk-geun met with US Trade Representative Katherine Tai on Thursday to discuss the series of pending issues regarding the US Chips Act and the regional economic initiatives. Meeting the US trade representative in Seoul, Ahn relayed concerns the government and South Korean chip makers have over the US' strict requirement and the guardrail provision for its chips subsidy program, South Korea's Finance Ministry said. Ahn also suggested the two sides expand cooperation in the semiconductor industry. The US announced a \$52 billion semiconductor funding program requiring the applicants to share sensitive business information and excess profits with the US government. With the program largely aimed at keeping China in check, the guardrail provision limiting fund recipients from expanding production in China has also prompted concerns for Korean chipmakers who run production facilities in China.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 03/30/2023

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South-East Asia

MALAYSIA: Manufacturing PMI Rises to 48.4 in February

The seasonally adjusted S&P Global Malaysia Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose to 48.4 in February from 46.5 in January, posting its highest reading in four months. S&P Global said in a statement there were signs of positive momentum building in the Malaysian manufacturing sector midway through the opening quarter of 2023. The relative improvement in the data from the January survey suggests that official figures for gross domestic product (GDP) and manufacturing production will continue to show year-on-year expansions, following slowdowns in the rates of growth showed by recent official data releases, it said. S&P

Global Market Intelligence Economics Director Andrew Harker said there were reasons for optimism provided by the latest PMI survey for Malaysia, with signs that the recent soft patch may be coming to an end. "Both output and new orders moderated to much lesser degrees than was the case in January, with firms looking to maintain their purchasing activity and workforce numbers," he said. He also said operations are being helped by an improving supply chain environment, with suppliers' delivery times quickening to the greatest degree in almost a decade as some of the difficulties of the past couple of years subside. "With inflationary pressures also muted, we will hopefully see further improvements in demand and production in the months ahead," he added.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 03/01/2023

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THAILAND: Business Sentiment Improves in February amid Tourism Boom

Thailand's business sentiment improved in February as rising tourist arrivals boosted confidence in the country's economic recovery, data showed on Wednesday. The country's business sentiment index (BSI) climbed to 50.6 in February from January's reading of 49.8, rising above the 50-threshold for the first time in eight months, driven by stronger confidence in performance, total order books and employment, according to the Bank of Thailand (BOT), the central bank. The improved sentiment came as increasing foreign tourist arrivals boosted confidence of respondents in almost all sectors of the non-manufacturing business, the BOT said in a statement. The three-month expected BSI remained stable at 56.2, and the overall and most sub-sectors indices remained above the 50-threshold, reflecting improved confidence in most businesses going forward in the next three month, the written statement said. The reading was based on a survey of 522 respondents from large and medium-sized firms, the central bank said.

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VIETNAM: To Support SMEs to Drive Innovations

Vietnam will improve policies and solutions to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) amid new challenges posed by unpredictable global economic development, the shift in the global value chain and new green development requirements, local media reported on Friday. Specifically, Vietnam will accelerate the national digital transformation and promote the development of private enterprises, especially in the fields of manufacturing, high technology and information technology, local newspaper Vietnam News reported, citing Deputy Prime Minister Le Minh Khai. Pointing out that there were limitations in corporate governance, the application of science and technology, and the linkage between SMEs, the official stressed the need to drive innovation and boost brand

competitiveness. SMEs should modernize their production and business models and expedite restructuring efforts following the emerging trends of the green economy, digital economy, and circular economy, he said. Vietnam currently has nearly 900,000 firms, over 25,000 cooperatives and 5 million business households in operation. Among them, SMEs account for 97 percent of the total number of firms, he said.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 03/24/2023

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South Asia

INDIA: Tech SME Sector Revenue to Reach \$40 bn by FY30

The Indian tech small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) sector revenue is likely to grow in double digits to reach \$40 billion by FY30. With growing tech demand, the tech SME sector is expected to contribute 7-9 percent to the overall FY23E tech industry revenue at \$15-\$20 billion, higher than the pre-pandemic share of the tech industry at 4-6 percent. In terms of headcount, the Indian tech SME sector is estimated to close FY23 with 740,000 employees, with hiring for digital skills growing 2 times faster than traditional tech talent in FY20, according to the report by Nasscom, in collaboration with ProHance. Areas such as cloud, digital engineering services, advanced AI/ML and analytics and IoT and Blockchain constitute key digital talent areas for the sector in FY23E. "The Indian tech sector has more than 10,000 SMEs dedicated to providing traditional and digital services to tech buyers globally as well as domestically," Nasscom President Debjani Ghosh said. "Fast tracking innovation, supportive government policies and incentive schemes and dedicated SME-industry-academia connect will further augment the sector's growth and help achieve double digital revenue growth vision by FY30E," she added. The India tech SME segment is also diversifying digital offerings across geographies. North America accounts for 50-55 percent of the Indian tech SME revenue with specific focus on niche cloud, AI, IoT, and SaaS products. This is followed by Europe at 19-20 percent and the domestic market at 17-18 percent, in FY23E. SMEs have also increased their presence in the APAC region by making inroads into non-traditional Japanese and Australian markets and are exploring deeper penetration into the Middle East markets like the UAE and Saudi Arabia, the report mentioned. Increased investment in cloud, migration, SaaS, and AI-based solutions have led to significant growth of 4X in digital technology SMEs since FY19. Although the digital tech SMEs are growing rapidly on the back of IT modernization and increasing digital demand, the segment still operates at a lower base compared to the traditional SME sector. "Lack of leadership pipeline, limited enterprise clients, and no sustained product innovation are some of the growth headwinds faced by tech SMEs today, resulting in slower growth and range-bound pricing," the report mentioned.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 03/28/2023

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Trustt Launches First Major GPT Product Suite for Banking Industry

Trustt - a leading SaaS cloud-based banking solution provider, today announced the launch of Trustt GPT, the first major suite of banking products based on GPT or Generative Pre-trained Transformer AI technology. Revolutionizing the industry, Trustt GPT comprises of three compelling offerings, namely, Conversational Product Inquiry, Conversational Customer Support, and Conversational Origination Workflow. The Conversational Product Inquiry allows customers to literally talk to the bank's WebApp/MobileApp in their native language and colloquial style about their banking needs, be it a loan or an insurance cover, or a savings product. At the same time, Conversational Customer Support offers customer service that is more human-like and personalized, generating responses based on the Banks FAQs and customer interaction history. The third offering, "Origination Flows," streamlines any origination process using the power of Trustt GPT, reducing the time to acquire new customers. Introducing this groundbreaking product suite, Srikanth Nadhamuni - Executive Chairman, Trustt, said, "I'm very excited that Trustt is bringing this world-changing GPT technology to the banking and financial sector. The ability to talk to the banking apps in the native language brings not only the new convenience of a truly conversational UI but also access to a new class of customers from semi-urban and rural areas. With the advent of generative AI, banking will never be the same again. It can be more convenient, faster, and accessible to all"

Adding to the above, Gautam Bandyopadhyay - CEO of Trustt stated, "Our GPT Suite will prove to be a game-changer, given that it offers a more natural and intuitive way for customers to interact with their banks. The core of the banking industry lies in how comfortable a customer is in communicating with you. Technology should provide financial inclusion so that underserved sections of society continue to have full access to banking products without requiring literacy or English knowledge; Trustt's GPT technology is the future of banking, and we are proud to be the first company to bring this major advance to the BFSI industry. By offering personalized and efficient services that are tailored to each customer's needs, we are helping banks to stay ahead of the curve and attract new customers in underserved areas." The Trustt GPT Suite is designed to help banks and financial institutions provide more personalized and efficient services to their customers. The enterprise is committed to continually growing this vertical of its offerings aligned with customer requirements and industry demands.

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CRYPTOVSUMMIT to Highlight Latest Developments in Cryptocurrency Industry in Dubai on May 10th, 2023

CRYPTOVSUMMIT, the premier conference for the cryptocurrency industry, is set to take place on May 10th, 2023, at the Address Dubai Mall Hotel. The event will bring together industry leaders, innovators, investors, and policymakers to discuss the latest developments and opportunities in the rapidly evolving world of cryptocurrency. With the rise of decentralized finance (DeFi) platforms and the increased adoption of cryptocurrencies as a means of payment, the industry has experienced unprecedented growth and innovation over the past year. At CRYPTOVSUMMIT, attendees will have the opportunity to hear from experts on the current state of the industry and the trends that are shaping its future. Keynote speakers will include industry leaders, such as Veiko Krunberg, the CMO of Riddec, and Dr. Zayed Al Hemairy, the UAE's leading advisor on Blockchain for Gov. sectors. In addition, the event will feature a panel discussion on the impact of regulation on the industry, with policymakers and industry leaders sharing their insights on the best practices for navigating the changing regulatory landscape. As part of the event, attendees will have the opportunity to network with fellow industry professionals, explore the latest products and services from leading companies, and participate in workshops and training sessions on the latest technologies and trends. "We are excited to bring together the best and brightest in the cryptocurrency industry for CRYPTOVSUMMIT," said the event organizer. "With the industry experiencing unprecedented growth and innovation, this is the perfect opportunity for attendees to learn from industry leaders, network with peers, and explore the latest technologies and trends." Registration for CRYPTOVSUMMIT is now open, and limited seats are available due to the invite only policy. For more information on the event and to register, visit the CRYPTOVSUMMIT website.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 03/30/2023

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SRI LANKA: Ekva to Power Start-ups

A high-profile team from Ekva LLC, a US company with strong Sri Lankan roots will launch their accelerator in mid-March in a bid to strengthen, support and grow local start-ups. Ekva Together is a company with equal opportunity irrespective of language, colour, gender identity or persons differently-abled entrenched in their ethos. Their accelerator, uniquely called ek'celerator will accept applications from incorporated or non-incorporated startups at any stage from an idea, proof of concept (PoC), or minimum viable product (MVP) to those vying for traction and early revenue. Amith Boteju, CEO Ekva said the ek'celerator will place the can did at es through specialised educational courses to enhance their skills such as finance, management, relationship building, language, presentation skills, go-to-market strategies, crisis management, and fund raising. Selected startups should aim to raise the first round of seed funding in 6-12 months and will be selected by the Ekva Investment Committee (IC) to participate in a part-time accelerator programme during a 3-4- month period to build their companies. The companies will receive a pre seed investment from Ekva Accelerator to support the company and fast track its

development during the program. Selected companies will participate in the program while working full time in company building. Initial rounds will be done in major cities such as Colombo, Jaffna, Kandy, and Galle with the finale done Live in Colombo. Boteju added that exclusive video production will be made and there will be a live YouTube and

Television broadcast of this program. The local and international TV rights are under negotiation, he added. Ekva has established international expertise with decades of experience in entrepreneurship, financial management, marketing, fundraising, entertainment, and business management from the US and Europe. "With Sri Lankans at the lead, we understand the local needs, local flavor, and local thinking. We teamed up with International experts who have worked in top management positions at leading corporate giants such as JP Morgan, Deutsche Bank, AT&T, Cirque Du Soleil, MGM Hospitality, Akon Legacy Ventures, Rabo Bank, Finish Line etc. to bring in international expertise to find bright lights in the country," he added. Ekva will secure special support from partners such as AWS, Google, Azure, Salesforce, Hubspot, etc. to provide essential tools to the selected start-ups. "We will give umbrella support in HR, Legal, Marketing, Accounting & Compliance to the selected startups," Bradley Seelig, CFO said noting, "Our long-term aim is for Sri Lanka to join the Unicorn Club within the next 10 years, hopefully with one of our portfolio companies."

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com> 03/10/2023

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MALDIVES: ADB, BML Sign \$41 Million Financing Package to Support SMEs and Blue Economy Tourism

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed a \$41 million finance package with the Bank of Maldives Plc (BML) to support locally owned small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and tourism companies in Maldives. As the sole mandated lead arranger and bookrunner, ADB has arranged, structured, and syndicated the entire financing package, comprising a loan of up to \$13 million from ADB's ordinary capital resources, a parallel loan of up to \$13 million from the Japan International Cooperation Agency, and a parallel loan of up to \$5 million from the Development Bank of Austria. To improve development impact and to address bankability issues relating to blue economy transactions in Maldives, ADB blended the project's debt financing with a concessional loan of up to \$9 million from the [Canadian Climate Fund for the Private Sector in Asia II](#) (CFPS II) and a grant of up to \$1 million from ADB's [Asian Development Fund](#) (ADF) – Private Sector Window (ADB-PSW). "The blue economy is crucial to future prosperity in Maldives, as its people and economy are intrinsically linked to the health and wealth of the ocean, coral reefs, beaches, and marine life. However, investments in the blue economy including by SMEs and through climate adaptation projects have been lacking," said ADB Director General for Private Sector Operations Suzanne Gaboury. "This partnership with BML will

deliver much-needed financing to the tourism sector and support climate projects and locally owned SMEs, including those owned and run by women.”

At least 60% of the loan package will be earmarked for lending to SMEs and 5% allocated to women-owned or led firms. The CFPS II loan and PSW grant will support BML’s capacity to support and promote climate change mitigation and adaptation projects focused on the blue economy. Maldives is highly vulnerable to natural hazards and extreme climate events due to its fragile ecological profile and low elevation. Moreover, Maldives lacks domestic conventional energy resources and is dependent on imported fossil fuels. Financing from ADB-administered funds will help improve the resilience and sustainability of the economy, especially the tourism sector. “We are pleased to partner with ADB in this project that focuses on blue economy lending. We will continue to enhance our focus on supporting sustainable tourism and economic recovery in the country while helping to mitigate the impacts of climate change,” said BML Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director Karl Stumke. BML is the largest bank in Maldives with more than 41.9 billion Maldivian Rufiyaa in assets and a network of 38 branches and 142 ATMs across all 20 atolls. BML offers a full range of banking services to its over 325,000 customers, with a leading market share in retail, corporate, and SME segments.

CFPS II is an ADB-managed concessional fund, established with contributions of \$149.5 million from Global Affairs Canada. The fund is designed to support greater private sector participation in climate change mitigation and adaptation in low and lower middle-income countries and upper middle-income small island developing states in Asia and the Pacific. The fund also seeks to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. ADB-PSW is a facility approved by the donors of ADB’s ADF in 2020 that supports private sector development in frontier markets by offering grant resources to fund financial products that address and reduce common financing constraints that hinder many private sector transactions. The ADF provides grants to ADB’s poorest and most vulnerable developing member countries.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 03/28/2023

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Women Entrepreneurs Switch to E-Commerce

Women leaders from Azerbaijan and the entire region of Eastern and Southeastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus are gradually switching to e-commerce and using convenient and reliable digital payments, Trend reports via the Visa international payment system. According to the company, 'increase in income' (41 percent) and 'making a dream come true' (24 percent) are the main motivation of Azerbaijani women entrepreneurs to run businesses. "Female entrepreneurs consider raising capital (45 percent) and high competition (24 percent) the biggest

problems when starting and running a business. At the same time, some women entrepreneurs are concerned that they 'will not be able to pay enough attention to the family' (27 percent), or 'will fail' (26 percent)," said the company. According to the company, the top most popular skills are as follows: digital marketing (49 percent) and social media management (34 percent) are at the leading positions, followed by strategies for obtaining additional financing (34 percent) and e-commerce (26 percent). It was also noted that the rates of non-cash payments in Azerbaijan are 50 percent, while cash payments are 41 percent. "Customers mostly pay by card (46 percent versus 38 percent who pay in cash). And half of Azerbaijani women entrepreneurs said that they prefer to pay for their goods and services by card," Visa added.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/08/2023

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Women's Role in Azerbaijan's Economy, Private Sector Development Grows

The role of women in Azerbaijan's economy, employment, and private sector development is increasing, Trend reports referring to the Small and Medium Business Development Agency of Azerbaijan (SMBDA). In particular, interest in micro- and small- entrepreneurship and self-employment has increased. As of January 1, 2023, 22 percent of entrepreneurs registered to carry out entrepreneurial activities without creating a legal entity, were women. Women entrepreneurs work in such fields as agriculture, services, and other industries. Some 29.9 percent of women entrepreneurs are registered in Baku, 10.2 percent - in Lankaran-Astara zone, 8.9 percent - in Gazakh-Tovuz zone, and the rest - in other economic regions of Azerbaijan. Furthermore, the SMBDA also conducts relevant activities to promote female entrepreneurship in the country, including training and consultations in the field of business, access to financial resources and sales markets, grants, internal market research, startup certificates, and so on. As part of financing educational, scientific, research, and ancillary projects of SMEs, the agency has currently decided to provide financing for 40 projects, 9 of which were submitted by women entrepreneurs. Only in 2022, about 3,000 female entrepreneurs passed business training on various topics arranged by the agency's centers for the development of SMEs. Currently, more than 100 women entrepreneurs and managers have participated in the "German-Azerbaijani Joint Program", coordinated by the SMBDA. A total of 11 women entrepreneurs were granted startup certificates. In 2022, more than 40 percent of 1,050 economic entities that used the agency's support mechanism for participation in exhibitions and fairs were enterprises of women entrepreneurs. In addition, out of the 25 business entities that have used the mechanism to support access to retail chains, 12 are enterprises run by women entrepreneurs.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/08/2023

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Azerbaijan Has Potential to Further Strengthen SME Digitalization, Says OECD

Azerbaijan could further strengthen SME digitalization by improving framework conditions, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) told Trend. "In 2020, building on the regional publication "Beyond COVID-19: Advancing Digital Business Transformation in the Eastern Partner Countries", the OECD carried out an assessment of Azerbaijan's support to enterprise digitalization. The report "Promoting Enterprise Digitalization in Azerbaijan" concludes that Azerbaijan made significant progress in improving the business environment for SMEs over the last decade, by reforming the operational and regulatory environment and strengthening the institutional support for SME development through the establishment of the Small and Medium Business Development Agency and the Innovation and Digital Development Agency," said OECD. However, the organization believes that a significant gap remains with regards to the digital transformation of SMEs.

"Moving forward Azerbaijan could further strengthen SME digitalization by improving framework conditions (e.g. through the implementation of a well co-ordinated National Digitalization Strategy), and by promoting the adoption of digital tools by SMEs through more targeted financial support and advisory services, leveraging the existing business and innovation support infrastructure," said the OECD. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development is an international organization that works to shape policies that foster prosperity, equality, opportunity and well-being for all. Together with governments, policy makers and citizens, it works on establishing evidence-based international standards and finding solutions to a range of social, economic and environmental challenges. From improving economic performance and creating jobs to fostering strong education and fighting international tax evasion, OECD provide a unique forum and knowledge hub for data and analysis, exchange of experiences, best-practice sharing, and advice on public policies and international standard-setting.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/15/2023

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UZBEKISTAN: Number of Foreign Enterprises Exceed 13 Thousand

13,161 enterprises and organizations with the participation of foreign capital operating in Uzbekistan. Russia enterprises are the largest number of enterprises operating in Uzbekistan The number of enterprises operating with the participation of foreign capital in the cross-section of states: Turkiye – 1,806 China – 1,763 Kazakhstan - 988 Korea-748 The number of newly established enterprises in the

cross-section of states in January-February 2023 with the participation of foreign capital: Russia - 151 China-65 Turkiye - 40 Kazakhstan - 34.

From <https://uzreport.news/> 03/09/2023

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Pharmacy Plan to Allow Easier Access to Medications and Treatments

NSW will be the first state in Australia to allow pharmacists to renew prescriptions for the contraceptive pill as part of a fast-tracked plan to make it easier for people to access important medications and treatments. Under a re-elected NSW Liberal and Nationals Government it will be more convenient and cheaper for women to visit their pharmacist with consultations related to the contraceptive pill and UTI treatments to be free for a 12 month trial period. Premier Dominic Perrottet said this pharmacy plan would transform healthcare with people able to book online to see a pharmacist or simply walk into their local pharmacy and get the care they need. "This is about making it easier and quicker for people, particularly women, to access important prescription medications and treatments," Mr Perrottet said.

"It's harder than ever to get into a GP and that's why these changes will make a real difference to people who need to access a range of prescriptions and treatments. "It's clear changes are needed at the federal level to help our GPs but NSW is not going to sit back and wait, instead we're fast-tracking these important reforms to give people the care they need now." Under our pharmacy plan, the NSW Liberal and Nationals will: Cover the cost of the patient consultation fee for the treatment of UTI and the contraceptive pill; Commence the prescribing trial for the treatment of UTI on 1 April 2023; and Accelerate the commencement of the trial for the renewal of oral contraceptive pill prescriptions to 1 July 2023 and allow pharmacists to extend an original script issued by a GP or nurse practitioner in the past 2 years.

Health Minister Brad Hazzard said many pharmacists already help women in need of emergency contraception, so extending the scope of what they can prescribe enhances their role in providing this care. "The community pharmacist has an important role to play in providing healthcare and allowing them to do more will benefit patients and help ease the pressure on other healthcare providers, including GPs and hospitals," Mr Hazzard said. Minister for Women, Regional Health and Mental Health Bronnie Taylor said the trial will make a huge difference to women across the State, particularly those living in rural and regional NSW. "The NSW Liberal and Nationals Government has heard loud and clear that the process of getting a script for your UTI or your birth control pill needs to be made simpler," Mrs Taylor said.

“We know that the GP shortages in the bush are blowing out appointment wait times to days and even weeks. This reform will ease the pressure on primary care and ensure women are able to get the help they need, when they need it.” NSW Health will work with participating pharmacists who will be required to undertake additional training for these specific conditions to ensure safe prescribing practices. The NSW Government has partnered with the University of Newcastle to design and implement the clinical trial. Data gathered from the clinical trial will be used to inform any future changes to the role of pharmacists in the healthcare system.

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 03/01/2023

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NEW ZEALAND: Government Investments Drive Health and Business Outcomes in the Bay of Plenty

A new health centre has opened with financial support from the Government and further investment has been committed to projects that will accelerate Māori economic opportunities, Regional Development Minister Kiri Allan says. Community health provider QE Health will continue its long history in Rotorua with the official opening of the new QE Health Centre today, replacing an 80-year-old facility. “The Government is continuing to deliver for the regions by setting up our communities for the future. QE Health’s history in the area began in 1942 as a rehabilitation service for World War II soldiers. Its ongoing presence in the community will enable Rotorua to continue to be a driving force behind building prosperous and thriving regions.”

“With the support of \$9.5 million from Kānoa’s Provincial Growth Fund, the project enabled QE Health to retain its 75 existing staff, including 15 highly skilled roles, create up to 26 internship opportunities, and also support over 140 construction related roles while continuing to offer an important service to the local community. “Today I also announced further investment from the Regional Strategic Partnership Fund (RSPF) towards four horticultural businesses, to advance developments on underutilised whenua Māori in the Bay of Plenty. “Horticulture offers the opportunity Māori to leverage one of their key assets, their whenua, to generate economic return for the benefit of their communities and these investments work hand-in-hand with the priorities of the RSPF.

Paengaroa North A1 Section 2 have been approved a loan of up to \$1.16m and the Waihau Bay Horticulture have secured a loan of up to \$2.12m, to develop kiwifruit orchards. Ngāi Tamarāwaho have been approved a grant of up to \$726,000 to develop a purpose-built contracting yard that will provide nursery services to support ecological restoration, planting and eco sourcing seedlings on Māori freehold land. Te Moana a Toi Truffles Collective, made up of seven Māori landowners, will receive a grant of up to \$1.11m to plant 13 hectares of truffle trees in the Eastern Bay of Plenty. “The Bay of Plenty has a credible history of producing high value horticulture.

These investments will see the region continue to grow in capability and build strong relationships with technical partners to thrive in this sector.” “Across New Zealand, Māori own approximately 400,000 hectares of land in farms engaged in primary production; less than 1 per cent of this land is in horticulture. Investing into these kinds of enterprises will be a promising pathway to creating sustainable regional growth in Aotearoa.”

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 03/10/2023

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Free Programme to Help Older Entrepreneurs and Inventors

People aged over 50 with innovative business ideas will now be able to receive support to advance their ideas to the next stage of development, Minister for Seniors Ginny Andersen said today. “Seniors have some great entrepreneurial ideas, and this programme will give them the support to take that next step,” Ginny Andersen said. “The Senior Enterprise Pilot Programme, being launched today, will be offered free in five locations, and tap into the creativity and drive we know exists among older New Zealanders. “The programme will provide practical assistance to participants through a variety of supports to help establish and develop their ideas and potentially get them to market. “Not only can that provide value in communities but it would be an extremely fulfilling process.

“Who knows, it could lead to a product or process that we all come to rely on. It could make someone a household name. I can’t wait to see the outcomes for the people who take part,” Ginny Andersen said. The five providers for the programme are: Creative HQ in Wellington will deliver entrepreneurial e-learning modules Nelson Tasman Regional Chamber of Commerce will provide qualified business mentors in a collaborative approach-supported by Nelson City Council, Business Assist, Age Concern and Tiore – Māori Business Network Ngā Toi, in Hawkes Bay will focus on older Māori entrepreneurs Trust MYRIVR in Pukekohe will focus on older Māori and Pacific people and provide a tailored programme for each client. Univentures Ltd in Christchurch will develop an online model, building on a previous senior entrepreneurship programme in partnership with Selwyn District Council.

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UNPAN-AP Editorial Department, RCOCI

