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ASIA-PACIFIC GOVERNANCE WATCH

April 2024, Issue 246

UNPAN-AP
Editorial Department,
RCOCI





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Asia-Pacific Governance Watch

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1、 Government Policy and Legislation

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CHINA: Protection of Consumers' Personal Information Highlighted in New Regulations

Business operators in China are prohibited from collecting excessive personal information while providing commodities and services through apps, according to a set of newly released regulations for implementing the law on the protection of consumer rights and interests. An official from the Cyberspace Administration of China explained the provisions on the protection of consumers' personal information in the regulations at a briefing held by the State Council Information Office on Tuesday. According to the regulations, business operators are banned from using one-time general authorization and default authorization while providing commodities

and services through apps, said You Xueyun, an official from the rule of law in cyberspace bureau under the administration. She said business operators are prohibited from forcing consumers into consenting the collection and use of personal information irrelevant to business activities. The handling of sensitive personal information should comply with relevant laws and regulations, and business operators should protect consumers' personal information in accordance with the law, You said. China attaches great importance to the protection of personal information, You said, adding that the country enacted the law on the protection of personal protection in 2021, and this new set of regulations flesh out requirements concerning the protection of consumers' personal information. The regulations will take effect on July 1.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/09/2024

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China Releases Ecological Protection Compensation Regulations

Chinese Premier Li Qiang has signed a decree of the State Council, introducing new regulations governing ecological protection compensation. Effective June 1, 2024, the regulations comprise 33 items in six chapters, specifying details including the connotation of ecological protection compensation, the working principle and mechanism, fiscal vertical compensation, horizontal compensation between regions, market-oriented compensation, and strengthening guarantee, supervision and management. Governments above the county level shall strengthen organizational leadership, with relevant departments of the State Council assuming responsibility for related tasks in accordance with their respective duties, as outlined in the regulations. The country will provide compensation to entities and individuals engaged in the protection of important ecological and environmental elements, as well as ecological preservation efforts in areas with significant ecological functions, through financial transfers and other means.

The central government will encourage, guide and promote the establishment of ecological protection compensation mechanisms through consultation between the local governments of ecological beneficiary areas and ecological protection areas. The regulations give full play to the role of market mechanisms, and encourage social forces and local governments to engage in ecological protection compensation by purchasing ecological products and services in accordance with market rules. The government and its pertinent departments must issue and approve the distribution of ecological protection compensation funds in a timely manner. They reserve the right to delay, reduce, stop, or reclaim allocated funds from those who withhold, misuse, misappropriate, fail to pay, or misuse funds contrary to regulations and fail to rectify the situation within the specified timeframe.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/10/2024

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China Issues Plan to Support Creation of Online Literature, Drama Series

The China Writers Association has released a plan to support the creation of online literature, aiming to promote the development of online drama series in turn. A release conference was held on Thursday in Wuxi, east China's Jiangsu Province, with 50 projects selected for the plan, covering such themes as sci-tech innovation and science fiction. Micro and short drama series have emerged as vigorous drivers of the overseas appeal of Chinese culture, and online literature provides original content for new productions. Senior association official Hu Bangsheng called for efforts to strengthen copyright protection, safeguard the interests of writers, and nurture a sound cultural environment online. The conference was attended by network writers and online literature service providers, with attendees putting forward suggestions on promoting the sound and orderly development of the online drama industry in terms of creation direction, global vision and copyright protection.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/18/2024

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China Details Regulations on Non-bank Payment Institutions

The People's Bank of China on Monday began to solicit public opinion on the detailed rules regulating the non-bank payment institutions, as a part of efforts to enhance their supervision and management. The document aims to detail the regulations for the supervision and administration of non-bank payment institutions, which were issued by the State Council last December. The document offers further clarification on key concepts, such as major shareholders and actual controllers, as outlined in the regulations, and details administrative licensing procedures for the non-bank payment institutions. Through the move, the central bank hopes to bolster transparency and openness in the administrative process and foster greater efficiency in payment institutions so as to create a law-based business environment. In protecting the legal rights and interests of payment users, it specifies requirements regarding the retention period of user data and transaction records, as well as adjustments to fees. In recent years, China has witnessed remarkable growth in its non-bank payment industry. Data shows that over 1 trillion transactions are made in the country via non-bank payment institutions annually, with a total value at approximately 400 trillion yuan (about 56.3 trillion U.S. dollars).

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/22/2024

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China Unveils Guidelines on Improving Voluntary Service System

The general offices of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the State Council have jointly released a set of guidelines on improving the country's voluntary service system. It is the first document issued by the central authorities that lays out systematic plans for improving the voluntary service system in the new era. The guidelines comprise nine parts, focusing on areas such as the mobilization, supply and personnel organization of voluntary services. The document also expounds on work related to voluntary culture, a support system for voluntary services and international exchanges on voluntary services, while calling for stronger organization and leadership. The aim is to basically form a voluntary service system that is well-developed, procedure-based, collaborative and efficient by 2035, with solid ranks, expanded service areas, a sound network, extensive international exchanges and cooperation, and active public participation in place, according to the guidelines. The release of the document will be of great significance to improving the voluntary service and work systems and promoting the long-term development of the country's voluntary services, said an official with the Social Work Department of the CPC Central Committee. China currently has 236 million registered volunteers.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/22/2024

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China Mulls Improving Energy Exploitation, Utilization Through New Legislation

A draft energy law was tabled before Chinese lawmakers on Tuesday that is expected to improve the exploitation and utilization of energy. The draft was submitted to an ongoing session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the national legislature, for deliberation. Consisting of 69 articles in nine chapters, the draft makes stipulations on energy development in terms of exploitation and utilization, the energy market, energy reserves, emergency response and sci-tech innovation, among others. On improving energy exploitation and utilization, the draft charts the course for energy structure adjustment, proposing efforts to prioritize renewable energies, use fossil energy in a clean and efficient way, and substitute renewables for fossil energy and low-carbon for high-carbon. It also includes provisions on realizing clean, efficient and smart terminal energy consumption and facilitating energy development in rural areas. China's energy development is confronted with multiple challenges related to consumption, supply, structural adjustment, energy market, reserves and sci-tech innovation. Given this, the draft law is significant to promoting high-quality energy development and safeguarding national energy security, according to Wang Peng, executive president of an energy development institute of the North China Electric Power University.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/23/2024

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China Adopts Academic Degrees Law

Chinese lawmakers on Friday voted to adopt a law on academic degrees to optimize the awarding of such degrees. The law, which was passed at a session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the national legislature, will take effect on Jan. 1, 2025. The law, consisting of seven chapters, stipulates the qualifications, conditions, and procedures for conferring academic degrees, including bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees. The new legislation also clarifies the circumstances of rejecting or revoking academic degrees, including the malpractice of ghostwriting, plagiarism, and counterfeiting, and such offenses as grabbing enrollment in others' names and obtaining graduation certificates illegally. The adoption of the law is expected to protect the interests of academic degree applicants better and ensure high-quality academic degree awarding, thus serving the building of a modern socialist country.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/26/2024

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China Adopts Law on Customs Duties

Chinese lawmakers on Friday voted to adopt a law on customs duties to promote high-level opening up. The law, which was passed at a session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the national legislature, will take effect on Dec. 1, 2024. It maintains the basic stability of the existing tariff system, with the overall tax burden level remaining unchanged. The law is of significant importance for advancing high-level opening up and fostering a market-oriented, law-based, and internationalized business environment, said Li Xuhong, a professor at the Beijing National Accounting Institute. The move marked another step in China's tax legislation. Out of the country's existing 18 tax categories, China has enacted laws on 13 of them.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/26/2024

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China Unveils Regulations to Facilitate Operation of Int'l Cruises

Chinese Premier Li Qiang has signed a decree of the State Council, unveiling regulations to facilitate the replenishment of supplies for international cruises at Chinese ports. Effective from June 1 this year, the regulations aim to promote high-level opening up of the country and advance high-quality development of the cruise economy. The regulations apply to both foreign cruise ships and Chinese cruise ships sailing on international routes when acquiring necessary supplies and services for their operation at Chinese ports. China has vowed to protect the legitimate rights of international cruise operators and related goods and service suppliers, while also urging them to abide by Chinese laws and regulations.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/26/2024

China Issues Action Plan on Promoting Digital Commerce

The Chinese Ministry of Commerce said Sunday it has recently issued a three-year action plan aimed at advancing digital commerce. The action plan comprises 20 detailed measures spanning five key campaigns, according to the ministry. Over the next three years starting in 2024, China will work to cement the foundation of digital commerce development and invigorate digital consumption. During the period, the country will also pool efforts for enhancing the digitalization of service trade, building a strong digital industrial chain and supply chain, and deepening international cooperation in the digital economy. With the global economy undergoing rapid digital transformation, digital commerce has emerged as a pivotal driver of high-quality development. China has maintained its position as the world's largest online retail market for 11 consecutive years, with the proportion of cross-border e-commerce in total imports and exports of goods trade steadily increasing.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/28/2024

Beijing Unveils Plan to Facilitate Equipment Renewals, Trade-ins of Consumer Goods

The Beijing municipal government on Sunday unveiled an action plan to facilitate equipment renewals and encourage trade-ins of consumer goods. The plan comprises 23 specific measures, covering upgrades to rail transit, heating and natural gas systems, as well as advancements to educational and medical equipment. It also includes initiatives for green transformations and intelligent computing in data centers, along with support for old vehicle replacements. Government officials have lauded the initiative for presenting significant market opportunities. "After over 40 years of reform and opening-up, Beijing has amassed a wealth of machinery and equipment, entering its peak period for the renewal and replacement of existing assets ahead of the rest of the nation," said Lai Xianyu, deputy director of the Beijing Municipal Commission of Development and Reform.

"The city also boasts a large inventory of durable consumer goods." Based on estimates provided by Lai, Beijing residents had over 50 million household appliances and approximately 7.6 million motor vehicles by 2023, indicating significant renewal and replacement demand. Beijing will introduce a range of incentives to bolster the action plan. Zhao Weidong, deputy director of the Beijing Municipal Commerce Bureau, highlighted the government's plans to promote smart household appliances and modernized home furnishings, focusing on 26 types of eco-friendly and innovative products. Consumers purchasing new items could benefit from subsidies equivalent to 10 percent of new product prices, with subsidies capped at 1,000 yuan (about 138 U.S. dollars) per item, Zhao said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/29/2024

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JAPAN: Eyes Launch of New Dialogue Framework on Int'l AI Regulations

Japan is considering establishing a new framework for dialogue involving like-minded nations to discuss international regulations on the appropriate use of generative artificial intelligence technology, a government source said Saturday. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is expected to reveal the plan to launch a "Friends" meeting on AI issues at a ministerial council meeting of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development scheduled for May 2 to 3 in Paris, the source said. Through the framework, Japan will call for wider support for the "Hiroshima AI Process," an initiative launched last year by the Group of Seven nations to facilitate discussions on the creation of global rules, according to the source. The move comes as the world has been looking into how to harness rapidly developing generative AI tools, including ChatGPT, while fears grow that the spread of disinformation through the misuse of AI could threaten democracy and political stability. The source said Japan aims to play a leading role in international AI rulemaking that would push for both the development of the technology and its regulation.

The creation of the Hiroshima AI Process was agreed at the G7 summit chaired by Kishida in Hiroshima in May. In December, G7 digital ministers drew up a comprehensive policy framework of the process and this was agreed by the G7 leaders during a teleconference the same month. It is the first overall international scheme that includes guiding principles and a code of conduct not only for developers but also for users. The nonbinding guidelines are aimed at promoting safe, secure and trustworthy advanced AI systems, according to the Japanese government. Recognizing the necessity of setting universal rules and gaining broad support from governments and private actors as early as possible, Japan views that an OECD gathering, where new global challenges are discussed, is suitable for demonstrating the importance of the Hiroshima AI Process, the source said. At the third Summit for Democracy forum in March hosted by South Korea, Kishida said AI-generated fake images, video footage and audio content have made it difficult for people to distinguish between true and false information, hindering their ability to make political choices.

From <https://japantoday.com> 04/21/2024

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Japan's Cabinet Approves Bill to Curb Tech Giants' Market Dominance

Japan's Cabinet has approved a bill designed to regulate tech giants to ensure fair

competition in the smartphone business. Leading tech companies including Apple and Google hold superior positions in the smartphone field. There has been concern that their market dominance could hamper new entries and lead to higher costs for businesses that use their services. The bill endorsed on Friday would designate companies to be regulated in four areas: operating software, app stores, internet browsers, and search engines. The proposed legislation would define the practices that hinder competition and require banning. The designated firms would be prohibited from obstructing the use of rivals' app stores and payment services. They would also be banned from conducting discriminatory transactions with business partners. The companies would be required to submit an annual report on their compliance with the regulations. Violators would face penalties worth 20 percent of their sales in Japan -- more than triple the fine for obstructing another firm's business under the existing antitrust law. For repeat offenders, the penalty would be raised to 30 percent. The government plans to seek enactment of the bill during the current Diet session, set to run until late June.

From <https://newsonjapan.com> 04/27/2024

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Japan Govt Skips Submitting Active Cyber Defense Bill

The Japanese government has decided to skip submitting a bill on "active cyber defense," or detecting signs of cyberattacks and taking pre-emptive measures, during the current session of the Diet, it was learned on Tuesday. The decision comes as discussions on the bill's consistency with the secrecy of communications guaranteed by the Constitution have not progressed, government and ruling party sources said. Meanwhile, two opposition parties--Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Innovation Party) and the Democratic Party for the People--have submitted bills to introduce an active cyber defense system. Their bills both call for minimizing restrictions on people's rights and facilitating public understanding of the system. Active cyber defense systems monitor communications during normal times to prevent damage from cyberattacks, and if signs of a cyberattack are detected, they attempt to access the attacker's computer server to neutralize the threat. Such systems are expected to protect government agencies and key infrastructure such as power facilities, financial institutions, ports and airports.

From <https://www.nippon.com> 04/30/2024

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INDONESIA: Implementing "Bridging Visa" Policy for Foreigners

Indonesia implemented a transitory residence permit policy, known as a bridging visa, which allows foreigners to extend their residence permits without having to leave the archipelago country, an official said on Tuesday. Director General of Immigration

Silmy Karim said that a transitory residence permit serves as a bridge between getting a new residence permit and an earlier one. "Foreign residents in Indonesia will benefit from this time, energy, and accommodation cost-saving program, which also aims to give legal stability and convenience," said Karim. Even when their prior residence permit has expired, foreigners whose application for a transitional residence permit has been approved are not subject to overstay. This 60-day limited-stay permit is only valid for foreigners who are currently in Indonesia. It will expire if foreigners leave the archipelagic country.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/23/2024

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CAMBODIA: Launching 5-Year Strategic Plan on Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment

Cambodia's Ministry of Women's Affairs on Monday launched a five-year strategic plan on gender equality and women's empowerment. Speaking at the event in Phnom Penh, Minister of Women's Affairs Ing Kantha Phavi said the plan was a roadmap for promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls in the kingdom from 2024 to 2028. "It has been designed to respond to the situations and the evolution of society, which aligns with the policy framework of the royal government of Cambodia particularly, contributing to the implementation of the Pentagonal Strategy-Phase I, Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals Framework, and the commitments of the United Nations," she said. Through the strategic plan, the government would increase investment in gender equality and women's empowerment in the fields of economy, education, health, and public leadership, Kantha Phavi added. The United Nations Development Program said in a report released in March that Cambodia made remarkable progress in promoting gender equality -- as measured by the share of women in parliament, education, labor force, and maternal mortality ratio -- with an overall improvement from 0.679 in 1990 to 0.461 in 2023. The report explained that 1 indicates the highest gender inequality and 0 shows perfect gender equality. "The kingdom ranked 116 out of 170 countries on the gender inequality index in 2023," the report said. The launching event was attended by approximately 500 participants from across the country, representing ministries, institutions, diplomats, civil society organizations, national and international development partners, policymakers, researchers, academia, and youth.

From https://english.news.cn 04/08/2024

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SINGAPORE: To Expand Regulation on Digital Payment Token Service Providers

The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) on Tuesday amended the Payment Services Act to expand the regulation scope and prevent digital payment token (DPT)

service providers from money laundering and terrorism financing. The amendment will bring more activities under regulation, including the provision of custodial services for DPTs, facilitation of the transmission and exchange of DPTs, and facilitation of cross-border money transfer between different countries. The amendment will take effect on April 4. The MAS on Monday launched COSMIC, a digital platform to share customer information among financial institutions to combat money laundering, terrorism financing, and proliferation financing.

From <https://english.news.cn> 04/02/2024

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VIETNAM: Documents Guiding Law on Land 2024 Should Be Developed Early

Documents guiding the Law on Land 2024 implementation must be compiled early, completely resolving issues with different opinions, ensuring synchronisation and consistency, said Deputy Prime Minister Trần Hồng Hà. At a meeting with ministries' leaders on developing guidance documents for the law, which took place on Tuesday in Hà Nội, Deputy PM Hà emphasised that the PM had requested ministries to urgently develop detailed guidance documents. The documents must be submitted to the National Assembly (NA) for consideration, allowing the Law on Land 2024 to come into effect at the beginning of July this year, five months earlier than previously scheduled, in January 1, 2025. This requires great efforts and determination of ministries, fully performing all steps of the legal document development process. In particular, the legal documents that each ministry and sector is responsible for compiling must be cohesive, carrying out the goals set out in the Land Law and being unified with other concerned laws. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) should clarify issues with differing opinions, such as on policies; and urgently take advice from localities, businesses and socio-political organisations.

Regarding regulations on land compensation, resettlement and valuation, Deputy PM Hà requested to promote digitalisation and conduct land administrative procedures in the electronic platform. From there, the MoNRE can have simplified procedures for a decree stipulating the penalties for administrative violations in the field of land. Regarding drafting two decrees on land use fees and land rent, the Deputy PM noted that policies and financial tools were needed to handle agricultural and forestry land areas that have not been or are slow to be put into use. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is responsible for detailing conditions and criteria for monitoring, inspecting and evaluating regulations on forestry land and rice growing land. Deputy PM Hà also requested the Ministry of Justice to work with the MoNRE to urgently prepare documents and ask the NA's permission to put the Law on Land into effect in July. The Ministry of Construction's duty is to promulgate documents detailing the Law on Housing 2023 and the Law on Real Estate Business 2023 to promptly take effect with the Land Law.

Reporting at the meeting, Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Lê Minh Ngân said that the MoNRE had presided over the drafting of six decrees and four circulars guiding the laws. The draft decree instructing the Law on Land implementation has 10 chapters and 115 articles. It regulates tasks and structure of land registration organisations and land fund development organisations; land use planning; land recovery and land requisition; management and exploitation of land funds. Land allocation, land lease and changing land use purposes; evaluating land management and use; specialised land inspection; resolving land disputes, handling violations on land laws are also clearly prescribed. The MoNRE established a drafting committee and editorial team to give opinions on the decree, and at the same time collect opinions from concerned departments of 63 provinces and cities. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Lê Minh Hoan said that many new problems arose while amending and supplementing No 156/2018/NĐ-CP related to the Forestry Law and rice growing land. The ministry is collecting comments on the draft decree according to regulations.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 04/17/2024

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Incentive Policy Drafted to Promote Settlement of Weak Credit Institutions

The State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) has proposed an incentive policy on the reserve requirement ratio for credit institutions (CI), which receives the compulsory transfer of specially controlled credit institutions, to promote the settlement of the weak credit institutions. Under a draft circular to amend Circular 30/2019/TT-NHNN, the SBV states credit institutions, which receive specially controlled credit institution transfers, will have their reserve requirement ratio reduced by 50 per cent. The move was made as the settlement progress of specially controlled credit institutions has been slow. According to a report of the State Audit of Vietnam (SAV), progress in handling weak credit institutions, including OceanBank, GPBank and CBBank, is still slow as it has lasted for many years (since 2015). The extension of the handling has led to an increase in the expected capital sources that have been used to aid the handling through special loan forms because the weak banks have reported consecutive losses. By the time of the audit in August 2023, the handling of the three banks was only at the stage of the Government's approval of the mandatory transfer policy, and determining the bank value. According to current legal regulations, DongA Bank must be transferred to another bank because its equity is negative. Therefore, the SAV recommended that the SBV speed up the handling of weak banks. The SBV should coordinate with agencies to urgently speed up the compulsory transfer of the poor-performing banks, the SAV said. According to the SAV, relevant agencies must propose monitoring and intervention measures in accordance with the law to avoid losing the property of the State and people and ensure the safety and stability of the banking system. According to the SAV's report, the financial situation of the banks

was still very difficult. Specifically, bad debts and mortgaged assets remained high; equity was negative; while accumulated losses continued to increase and failed to meet safety regulations in banking activities.

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AZERBAIJAN: Main Aim of Digital Code Announced

The primary aim of the Digital Code in Azerbaijan is to set guidelines, frameworks, and standards for digitalization within the country, Chairwoman of the Board of the Innovation and Digital Development Agency (IRIA), operating under the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport (MDDT), Inara Valiyeva told Trend. "Currently, the digitalization process is decentralized, maintaining historical heritage and various approaches. The Digital Code seeks to unify these approaches and set standards, streamlining management. It aims to accelerate decision-making and digitalization while enhancing the efficiency of public resources. Despite significant costs, a shared vision has been lacking, hindering the development of a strategic approach and desired outcomes," she stressed. Besides the Digital Code, there are expectations for the adoption of the digital development concept, an information management strategy, an artificial intelligence strategy, regulations for the electronic government information system, and legislation concerning digital documents. In late 2023, IRIA announced the start of the drafting of the Digital Code. The document will be drafted with the assistance of an international consulting firm, drawing upon both international and domestic expertise in digital development.

Utilizing the gathered materials and information analysis, a conceptual document outlining the framework of the Digital Code will be formulated. The project text will adhere to the stipulations of the "On normative legal acts" law and the "Regulations on the procedure of preparation, coordination, adoption, and publication of draft normative legal acts of executive authorities," as endorsed by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan's decree dated October 6, 2023. The Innovation and Digital Development Agency was established as a public legal entity under the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport following the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev dated October 11, 2021. The Innovation and Digital Development Agency coordinates efforts towards digital transformation within the country, cultivating a local innovation environment, and fortifying the ecosystem. Key focal points for the agency include conducting test experiments in nuclear science and technology, supporting individuals and entities in innovation-driven

scientific research and startup projects, facilitating access to modern technologies and solutions, ensuring accessibility to educational and career pathways in ICT, as well as establishing and managing digital government initiatives and promoting digital literacy within society.

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Azerbaijan Amends Law on Status of Municipalities

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has signed a decree on amendments to the law On the Status of Municipalities, Trend reports. The following amendments were made to the law: 1. To consider the text as the 1st part, the words uniting, dividing, and reorganizing shall be replaced by the words "reorganizing (uniting, dividing), and in this part, after the word peculiarities, add the words "also following the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on joint activity, uniting, dividing, and abolishing of municipalities. 2. Parts 2 and 3 are added to the following content: "2. Creation as a result of the organization or reorganization of municipalities with a population less than 3000 people and/or a number of households less than 1000 units is allowed, taking into account the existing socio-economic situation, historical, and other local peculiarities. 3. The record of households provided for in second part of this article is kept following the procedure established by the body (institution) determined by the relevant executive authority." The full text of the document can be found at the link.

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Azerbaijan to Elaborate Rules for Sale and Transfer to Management of Seized Property – Decree

Azerbaijan will develop rules for the sale, lease, or management of seized property, Trend reports. This is reflected in the decree signed by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev on the application of the law "On Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan". To note, the Cabinet of Ministers within three months must approve, in coordination with the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the rules of sale, lease, or management of property under arrest.

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GEORGIA: Adopting Draft Law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence" in First Reading

The Georgian Parliament has adopted the draft law "On transparency of foreign influence" in its first reading, Trend reports. According to the information, 83 MPs

voted in favor of the bill. Deputies from the opposition factions left the session hall. The bill stipulates that NGOs and media funded from abroad should be registered in a special register and fill out an annual declaration. The draft "On transparency of foreign influence" draft law requires three readings in order to enter into force.

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TURKMENISTAN: Introducing New Energy Conservation and Efficiency Law

Turkmenistan has officially adopted a new law on 'Energy Conservation and Energy Efficiency', Trend reports. According to the official source, the document establishes the legal, economic, and organizational foundations for stimulating energy conservation and energy efficiency in the country. The law defines basic concepts such as energy inspection, energy passport, consumption rates of fuel and energy resources, and others. The rights and obligations of consumers of fuel and energy resources are clearly spelled out. Furthermore, the document introduces mandatory energy inspections of facilities and buildings and defines the procedure for conducting energy audits. Energy-saving incentives are provided, including preferential loans, tax preferences, and tariff policies. The new law establishes the principles of legal regulation in the field of energy saving, including the scientific, technical, and economic validity of energy-saving measures and the priority of introducing energy-efficient equipment, technologies, and materials. Meanwhile, in recent years, Turkmenistan has been actively working on the development of energy conservation and energy efficiency, realizing their importance for sustainable development and reducing the negative impact on the environment. As part of this process, the country is conducting large-scale activities, including the modernization of energy infrastructure, the introduction of advanced technologies, the promotion of the use of alternative energy sources, as well as information and educational campaigns to raise awareness among the population and the business sector.

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Turkmenistan Introduces New Sanitary Standards for Greenhouses

The Ministry of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan has approved new state sanitary standards for the construction and maintenance of greenhouses in the country, Trend reports. The document was registered by the Ministry of Justice of Turkmenistan under the number 1785 and published on the official portal of legal information. The norms regulate the procedure for selecting land plots for the construction of greenhouses and the requirements for heating, air exchange, water supply, and sewerage facilities. Sanitary rules for the use of pesticides, biological plant protection products, and mineral fertilizers are also defined. The document

prescribes standards for special clothing and personal protective equipment for employees, rules for the organization of their work, and household services. A separate section is devoted to the requirements for environmental protection and medical care for greenhouse employees. Compliance with the new state sanitary rules is mandatory for all legal entities and individuals, regardless of the form of ownership of greenhouses in Turkmenistan. Meanwhile, Turkmenistan's agriculture is undergoing a period of intensive development, especially in the field of row crops. Government-supported modernization programs, the introduction of advanced technologies, and investments in agricultural infrastructure contribute to an increase in agricultural production.

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Oceania

NEW ZEALAND: Government Must Stand Up for Humanitarian Law

If humanitarian aid workers are not safe in war zones, then the appalling conditions for children and families in places like Gaza will get significantly worse, says CEO of ChildFund New Zealand, Josie Pagani. "We call on the New Zealand Government to stand up for humanitarian law whenever it is ignored, and to call for those who break the law to be held accountable," says Josie Pagani. The horrifying killing of aid workers from World Central Kitchen in Gaza has challenged all aid charities, including ChildFund and our partners in Gaza. "Aid organisations who have staff in war zones have to be able to keep their staff as safe as possible. While there are no New Zealand ChildFund staff in Gaza, our partners bringing aid to starving children are risking their lives, and it gets harder to keep them safe."

At least 196 humanitarian workers have been killed in Gaza since October, according to the United Nations. "If charities cannot get humanitarian aid to starving children in Gaza, then we are looking at an unprecedented humanitarian crisis." Right now, children in Gaza cannot access nutritious food or medical services and have less than 2 to 3 litres of water per day. Dozens of children in the Northern Gaza Strip have reportedly died from malnutrition and dehydration in recent weeks, and half the population is facing catastrophic food insecurity. Governments like New Zealand who are signatories to international humanitarian laws, have a legal and moral responsibility to ensure children have access to humanitarian services in war zones like Gaza.

"International law is split between the 'right to go to war' (jus ad bellum), and the right conduct within a war (jus in bello). Whatever your views on Israel's right to go to war after the horror of the October 7 attacks by Hamas, there is no excuse for breaching international law when it comes to its conduct during this war," says Josie Pagani.

International humanitarian law is purely humanitarian and seeks to limit suffering. It requires parties to discriminate between combatants and civilians, and to not put large numbers of civilians at risk. It calls on all parties to ensure that any military retaliation is proportionate. It also requires that those who break these laws are held accountable, whether they be soldiers on the ground carrying out attacks, or politicians calling the shots.

“If the staff who work for charities like ChildFund and their partners in-country are to continue doing the vital work of getting aid into places like Gaza, then governments like New Zealand must be prepared to stand up for the rule of law that protects humanitarian workers in conflict areas. “This situation not only challenges the ability of aid charities to deliver aid but also demands that aid organisations assess the risk to their staff and forces all charities to confront the critical question as to whether humanitarian operations can continue under such untenable conditions. “Some organizations have suspended operations already, and all humanitarian organisations are being forced to assess the risk every day. The situation is truly heart-breaking,” says Josie Pagani.

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Prime Minister Launches Government Targets

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon has announced further steps to get New Zealand back on track, launching nine ambitious Government Targets to help improve the lives of New Zealanders. “Our Government has a plan that is focused on three key promises we made to New Zealanders – to rebuild the economy, restore law and order, and deliver better public services,” Mr Luxon says. “We’ve made great progress, but we’re under no illusion about the scale of the challenges we face as a country. Despite the hard work of frontline staff like police, nurses and teachers, New Zealand has gone backwards in recent years. “That’s why our Government is bringing back public service targets, to focus our public sector on driving better results for New Zealanders in health, education, law and order, work, housing, and the environment.

“These targets are not going to be easy to achieve. But we’re not here to do what is easy – we’re here to do what is needed to reduce crime, shorten healthcare wait times and improve educational achievement, no matter how difficult.” The nine Government Targets to be delivered by 2030 are: Shorter stays in emergency departments: 95 per cent of patients to be admitted, discharged, or transferred from an emergency department within six hours. Shorter wait times for (elective) treatment: 95 per cent of people wait less than four months for elective treatment. Reduced child and youth offending: 15 per cent reduction in the total number of children and young people with serious and persistent offending behaviour. Reduced violent crime: 20,000 fewer people who are victims of an assault, robbery, or sexual assault. Fewer

people on the Jobseeker Support Benefit: 50,000 fewer people on Jobseeker Support Benefit.

Increased student attendance: 80 per cent of students are present for more than 90 per cent of the term. More students at expected curriculum levels: 80 per cent of Year 8 students at or above the expected curriculum level for their age in reading, writing and maths by December 2030. Fewer people in emergency housing: 75 per cent reduction of households in emergency housing. Reduced net greenhouse gas emissions: On track to meet New Zealand's 2050 net zero climate change targets, with total net emissions of no more than 290 megatonnes from 2022 to 2025 and 305 megatonnes from 2026 to 2030. "Part of why our Government is so focused on rebuilding the economy is so that we can afford to invest in the public services that New Zealanders deserve.

"But we know that spending more money will not in itself deliver better results. Despite significant increases in spending under the previous government, New Zealanders got worse results from their public services. "We are taking a different approach. Setting targets will put a focus on delivery in the public sector where there wasn't before. They will also drive greater value for taxpayer money. "The targets are deliberately ambitious – they will be challenging and require the public sector to think differently, dig deeply into root causes, learn from other places, and be innovative and disciplined in directing resources to where they will have the greatest impact on outcomes." Delivery of the targets is the responsibility of a lead minister and lead public service agency chief executive, working in partnership with other ministers and their agencies as appropriate. Progress reports will be released publicly every quarter, starting from mid-2024. More information on the Government Targets can be found here (link going live at 4pm – see attached factsheets in the meantime).

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Greens Look to Fast-Track Submissions on Harmful Law

The Green Party has today launched a step-by-step guide to help New Zealanders make their voice heard on the Government's democracy dodging and anti-environment fast track legislation. "So much of what people value about Aotearoa is under threat from this government's anti-environment power grab. If we are going to stop them we need as many voices as possible," says Green Party co-leader Marama Davidson. "Right now, MPs on the Select Committee are accepting public submissions on this terrible law. It is a crucial opportunity for our communities to make their thoughts and feelings known – but there is only one week to go. "Thousands have already signed our open letter warning the Prime Minister that this government's blatant disregard for environmental protection has no place in Aotearoa.

“Now we are organising for as many submissions as possible directly to the select committee, which are crucial for showing MPs directly that New Zealanders value nature over industry profit. “Despite the best efforts of the Government to dress this up as due process with shallow advisory boards and panels, the fact remains that Ministers are handing themselves extraordinary powers to approve projects that could include new coal mines, mining on parts of our precious conservation estate, and the destruction of the seabed. “Politics doesn’t just happen every three years with an election. It happens every day with decisions made by people in power. This power ultimately rests with the people and the Green Party will fight to ensure it is felt by the Government,” says Marama Davidson.

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Quick, Submit – Stop Govt’s Dodgy Approvals Bill

The Government is trying to bring in a law that will allow Ministers to cut corners and kill off native species, Labour environment spokesperson Rachel Brooking said. Submissions close this Friday 19th April on the Government’s Fast Track Approvals Bill, which skips checks and balances, and gives Ministers the final sign off on projects, instead of an independent panel. “The Bill enables private profit to trump our environmental protections,” Rachel Brooking said. “The Bill will enable projects to be given the tick with little regard for their impact. “Just this morning, Shane Jones announced changes to the Resource Management Act that will make it easier to mine coal – a massive backward step for New Zealand’s climate action. “Labour was already speeding up the approval and reducing the cost of consenting projects like school building projects, housing, clean energy projects and green areas to absorb water in a flood. But this Bill goes way beyond that.

“Instead of an expert panel making decisions within the confines of environmental protections, we have Shane Jones and Chris Bishop signing projects off instead. “One of these Ministers has already made it clear he will run roughshod over any species that gets in the way – Shane Jones said “if there is a mining opportunity and it’s impeded by a blind frog, goodbye, Freddy” in the address in reply debate last year. “This is scary. It allows projects with few or no criteria to be rushed through because a Minister deems it worthy. This could include decisions to allow overseas companies to mine our conservation land, the habitat for our precious, endangered species. “If Ministers are making the decision to push go on a project the door is open to lobbying from companies and interests here and offshore. It also undermines decades of environmental work by successive Labour and National Governments. “In reality, this will see projects slowed down as they will be opposed. It has the potential to undermine environmental protections and our international standing as a corruption-free country with good, transparent processes for decision-making. “I encourage anyone concerned about this to submit their thoughts on the Bill. But hurry – it has to happen by Friday night,” Rachel Brooking said.

3 Strikes Law Will Protect Families

Family First is welcoming the reintroduction of the Three Strikes Law, saying that it will protect families from repeat violent offenders who have already been given two chances. A 2023 poll found that just 16% of New Zealanders oppose bringing back the 'Three Strikes' law which was recently repealed by the Labour Government with the support of the Greens and Te Pati Maori. Two in three are supportive of the Three Strikes Law, and a further 19% were unsure. Ironically, the then-Minister of Justice Kris Faafoi when introducing the bill to scrap the law said "the public don't like this law". In a 2018 report, Justice Department officials admitted that "...in comparison with second strikeable offences committed before the law came into effect there has been a drop in the number of second strike offences since the laws implementation."

"The Labour government had no public mandate for scrapping it, and the evidence suggests that the law was having the desired effect. There had been a dramatic drop from the number of 1st strikes to 2nd strikes and then again to a third strike. Criminals aren't stupid. They are well aware of the law and its consequences. When the regime was scrapped, the government sent a message that we're not serious about the It's Not OK zero-tolerance message on family violence, or zero tolerance on gun violence or sexual violence, in fact violence in general. The Three Strikes law reinforces that we take victimisations seriously," says Bob McCoskrie, CEO of Family First NZ.

An Official Information Act request at the end of 2018 said that for 2nd and 3rd strikers: they had an average of 42 convictions as an adult. For 3rd strikers, it's an average of 74 convictions 91% were assessed as being at a high risk of reoffending 56% committed their 2nd strike on bail or parole or while serving a sentence. 40% have a "strike type" conviction from prior to the three strikes regime "This data indicates that the three strikes regime was accurately targeting the serious recidivist offenders, and that is why there has been such strong support for the law."

Gang-Patch Legislation 'Problematic for Human Rights'

Te Kāhui Tika Tangata Human Rights Commission says the proposed Gangs Legislation Amendment Bill falls short on a range of human rights standards and is likely to have unintended consequences. Submitting to the Justice Select Committee today, the Commission's Kāwanatanga Chief Executive Meg de Ronde raised concerns that measures proposed under the Bill will have a disproportionate impact on Māori and are likely to constitute indirect discrimination. "We would expect that

the Government engage with Tangata Whenua on the matters raised in this Bill, however this has not been the case, which demonstrates a neglect of the Government's te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations." An approach based on human rights requires policies to be evidence-based, non-discriminatory and developed in a way that ensures participation by those most likely to be impacted.

A report from the Attorney-General found that the measures proposed under the Bill would create unjustified limitations on the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association under the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990. de Ronde commented that the Commission would like to see greater constitutional protection for rights in Aotearoa New Zealand. "This legislation is a case in point – the Government's own Attorney-General has made it very clear that this law is inconsistent with the Bill of Rights, yet it could be passed regardless." There is valid concern about the harm caused by gang-related offending, and more can be done to make our communities safer. However, measures in the Bill are punitive and suppressive. They make substantial inroads into individual freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights Act without clear evidence they will be effective at reducing gang membership or gang-related offending.

"We are concerned with the large scope for unintended consequences from this legislation," says de Ronde. The Commission considers that adopting these measures is likely to exacerbate pressures in communities and the criminal justice system, and increase the economic and social burden on society. "We urge the committee to put the Bill aside and turn to a more human rights-based approach," says de Ronde. A human rights-based approach would have a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention within communities, would address structural and socio-economic disadvantage and would alleviate pressure on multiple systems (justice, health, corrections) in the long term, the Commission submitted. To reduce harm, there is also a need to understand the unique experiences of, and provide tailored support for, women and children in gang environments.

de Ronde urged the Justice Committee to consider the Bill within the Aotearoa-specific context, recognising the history of colonisation, intergenerational trauma and abuse in State care which has led to the formation of gangs. The Commission submitted that any legislation to address these issues should be paused until government has had time to consider the final report and recommendations from the Royal Commission into Abuse in Care, which are due to be released soon.

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RMA Changes Welcome, but Must Go Further

Responding to the Government's announcement of changes to resource management laws, Taxpayers' Union Executive Director, Jordan Williams, said:

“These changes are a step in the right direction in terms of removing ideological and unworkable red tape but they don’t go far enough. “While we welcome the removal of the requirement on consent applicants to demonstrate compliance with the Te Mana o te Wai hierarchy of obligations, the Government must go further and remove all references to Te Mana o te Wai altogether. “Te Mana o te Wai is vague and ill-defined, going so far as to mean different things in different parts of the country, depending on the local iwi or hāpu. We have serious concerns about councils continuing to waste money on work to uphold Te Mana o te Wai, even it it is not required by law. We are writing to Minister Bishop seeking clarification on a number of issues related to this and urge his Government to issue a direction to councils halting all work on this issue.”

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2、 Government System and Civil Services

Asia-Pacific

Transformative Policies and Anticipatory Governance Are Key to Optimising Benefits and Managing Risks of New Emerging Technologies

Science and technology ministers have highlighted the need for governments to develop co-ordinated approaches to harness the opportunities of new and emerging technologies, while better managing future risks, at their ministerial-level meeting at the OECD. Participants in the OECD Science and Technology Policy Ministerial 2024 – which drew high-level representatives from more than 50 countries – agreed on the need for policies to foster the development of and adaptation to technologies such as neurotechnology, synthetic biology and quantum technology. In their final [Declaration](#), Ministers called for transformative Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) policies to accelerate sustainability transitions and the embedding of shared values in international co-operation and technology governance, alongside policies to make STI more inclusive. “The OECD has helped shaped digital policy agendas for decades, through evidence-based recommendations and extensive multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation,” OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann said. “Today, Ministers have reaffirmed the key role for the OECD to play in supporting policy makers with evidence-based analysis to design and implement transformative policies, in reinforcing shared values in international governance, and in promoting diversity and accessibility for careers in research and innovation.”

Ministers and high-level representatives from OECD countries, the European Union and partner economies welcomed a new [OECD Framework for Anticipatory Governance of Emerging Technologies](#) that promotes responsible innovation and

offers tools to help governments identify and address the ethical, social, and legal implications for technological developments before they become entrenched. The Framework also offers governments and innovators pathways to promote and embed key values in technology development through upstream technology assessment, early deliberation and stakeholder engagement, agile regulatory approaches and international scientific co-operation. They also welcomed a new [Agenda for Transformative Science, Technology and Innovation Policies](#) designed to drive responsible and equitable research, development and innovation. The Agenda offers practical guidance for policymakers to formulate and implement Science, Technology and Innovation reforms. It also outlines key policy actions, including accelerating the productivity of research through AI and automation in science, investing in building digital expertise and specialised skills, and aligning national Science, Technology and Innovation priorities and co-ordinate funding for research and innovation activities to address global challenges.

The Framework and the Agenda both draw on prior OECD work and legal instruments, and are designed to equip governments and other innovation actors to anticipate and get ahead of governance challenges and build longer-term capacities to shape innovation more effectively. Ministers called on the OECD to develop tools for monitoring education and training to promote talent, inclusivity, mobility and careers in research and innovation, including through the launch of a new observatory on research and innovation careers. They also called for strengthening the evidence base for STI strategies and policies, through statistical improvements and strategic intelligence and foresight that will support the implementation and evaluation of both the transformative STI policy agenda and anticipatory governance framework. For further information, journalists are invited to contact the [OECD Media Office](#) (+33 1 45 24 97 00). *Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.*

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ADB Readies ASEAN Climate Finance Policy Platform

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) plans to launch an ASEAN Climate Finance Policy Platform, which will support Southeast Asian finance ministry leaders in advancing collective action in the battle against climate change, ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa announced today. “Climate change is the most urgent issue facing Southeast Asia,” Mr. Asakawa said. “This platform will strengthen economic and fiscal policies for climate action in the region.” He was speaking at the opening of the High-Level Policy Dialogue of the ASEAN Finance Ministers, Enhancing the Role of Ministries of Finance for Climate Action in Southeast Asia, on the sidelines of the 11th ASEAN Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors’ Meeting. Increasing numbers of ASEAN countries are integrating climate risks into public investment and

financial management, with the role of finance ministries becoming increasingly pivotal in addressing climate-related fiscal risks and mobilizing climate finance. The new platform will enhance collaboration and exchange across finance ministries, and support countries in sharing experience, building capacity, and strengthening evidence-based policies. The platform will be supported by technical assistance from ADB. The High-Level Policy Dialogue was hosted by Lao Minister of Finance Santiphab Phomvihane. Malaysian Minister of Finance II Amir Hamzah Azizan and Indonesian Vice Minister of Finance Suahasil Nazara also participated. On 5 April Mr. Asakawa will be joining the ASEAN Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' International Financial Institutions Meeting.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 04/03/2024

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East Asia

CHINA: Suggestions Made by Chinese Lawmakers Move Toward Implementation

A total of 9,235 suggestions made by national lawmakers have been distributed to 213 organizations to be processed, according to a meeting on the handling of these suggestions held in Beijing on Monday. The suggestions were submitted by deputies to the 14th National People's Congress (NPC), China's top legislature, during the second session of the 14th NPC held in March. Among all the suggestions, 20 were identified as priorities. A large number of the suggestions focus on issues such as new quality productive forces, emerging and future industries, the business environment and the digital governance system, which are closely related to the current key tasks in the country's socio-economic development. Li Hongzhong, member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and vice chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, attended the meeting and delivered a speech, urging the organizations to do their best to process each of the suggestions and pool wisdom and strength from all those involved for building China into a modern socialist country in all respects. He called on the organizations to raise their political awareness, soundly summarize the experience in processing the suggestions, and take concrete action to convert the suggestions into policies, measures and results in the country's high-quality development.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/01/2024

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Personages Without Party Affiliation Urged to Contribute to Chinese Modernization

Shi Taifeng, a senior official of the Communist Party of China (CPC), has called on personages without party affiliation to contribute insights on advancing Chinese modernization and high-quality development with a firmer confidence for the

country's development. Shi, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and head of the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee, made the remarks at a symposium in Beijing on Monday. In his speech, Shi emphasized the importance of the duty of personages without party affiliation to offer suggestions on state affairs. He noted that this duty is related to giving full play to the efficacy of China's new type of political party system and demonstrates the strengths and advantages of socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics. Shi called on personages without party affiliation to align their thinking and action with the Party Central Committee's scientific judgments, decisions and plans on the country's development, firm up their confidence and put forward insightful suggestions on advancing Chinese modernization and high-quality development. He also called on them to enhance their performance through conducting more research and investigation.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/08/2024

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CPC Launches New Round of Disciplinary Inspection, Targeting Economic, Financial Sector

Fifteen teams of disciplinary inspectors have been stationed at 34 economic work departments and financial agencies to carry out discipline inspection as of Wednesday, according to an official statement released Thursday. This is the third round of routine disciplinary inspection launched by the 20th Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee. According to the statement, this new round of disciplinary inspection will focus on the duty performance of Party organizations in the targeted units regarding promoting high-quality development, fending off and defusing major risks, promoting in-depth reform and high-quality opening up, and other issues. The inspection teams will stay at the units assigned to them for around three months, during which hotlines and mailboxes will be set up to solicit reports on the breach of discipline and other problems involving Party officials and personnel in key positions in these units. The inspectors are ready to receive complaints from the public until July 12, 2024.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/18/2024

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JAPAN: Local Govts Setting Up Unique Divisions to Revitalize Economy

Many local governments in Japan created unusual departments at the beginning of fiscal 2024, which began this month, in hopes of revitalizing the local economy in innovative ways. The town of Nishikawa in Yamagata Prefecture, northeastern Japan, newly established a "kasegu," or moneymaking, division, aiming at securing additional financial resources. The new division promotes a type of non-fungible

token (NFT) that allows people living outside of the town to become digital citizens of Nishikawa. "We don't want (the relationship) to end with just one (NFT) transaction," Tomohiro Ishikawa, head of the division, said. "We hope that people take a step further to become fans of the town." The town plans to host in-person and online gatherings that bring Nishikawa digital citizens together.

From <https://www.nippon.com> 04/24/2024

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Officially Declares Prabowo Subianto as President

Indonesia's General Election Commission (KPU) here on Wednesday declared Prabowo Subianto as the country's eighth president after appeals of two defeated presidential candidates concerning a dispute over presidential polls in February were rejected by the constitutional court. KPU Chairman Hasyim Asy'ari announced that Prabowo and his running mate Gibran Rakabuming Raka have been selected to be the president and vice president for the period of 2024 until 2029 with around 96 million or nearly 59 percent of the total votes. Prabowo-Gibran defeated the Anies Baswedan-Muhaimin Iskandar pair who got around 41 million votes, and Ganjar Pranowo-Mahfud MD who obtained around 27 million votes. Prabowo, who is currently the Southeast Asian country's defense minister, is scheduled to be inaugurated on Oct. 20 this year.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/24/2024

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Indonesia to Deploy 12,000 Military Personnel for World Water Forum Security

The Indonesian National Army (TNI) has planned to deploy 12,000 military personnel to beef up the security at the 10th World Water Forum to be held in Indonesia's resort island of Bali from May 18 to 25. "They are tasked with providing security and managing the health sector there," according to Head of the TNI Information Center, Major General Nugraha Gumilar, on Monday. Personnel that secure the straits of Bali and Lombok, which divide Bali from other Indonesian islands, will be put into place a week before the event. Additionally, certain aircraft will be equipped for evacuation in case of a natural disaster. This largest water sector event in the world, which has been held every three years since 1997, will bring together delegates from various countries and regions to discuss worldwide water challenges.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/29/2024

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CAMBODIA: King Presides over Inaugural Session of Senate After February Election

Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni on Wednesday presided over the inaugural session of the Senate for the fifth legislature after a non-universal election in February. The Senate, or the upper house of the parliament, has 62 seats, and the election was held for 58 seats, as two senators were appointed by the king and two others were nominated by the National Assembly, or the lower house. In the February non-universal election, the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) won 55 Senate seats and the opposition Khmer Will Party gained the remaining three seats. Sihamoni extended his warmest congratulations to the senators-elect, urging them to adhere to the rules and ethics of the Senate and to demonstrate a great sense of responsibility in carrying out their duties in order to bring confidence and warmth to their fellow citizens. "The Senate must protect the public interest and social justice for social equity, respect for the rights, freedoms, beliefs and dignity of everyone, and improve the quality of life by ensuring long-term happiness and harmony within the family, the community and our society as a whole," he said in a speech during the inaugural session.

"On this auspicious occasion, I would like to wish the Senate of the 5th legislature all the best in discharging its duties and responsibilities in a more efficient, transparent and accountable manner, in order to successfully pursue its mission in the interests of the nation, the homeland and the people as a whole," he added. Meanwhile, the Cambodian king highlighted the importance of peace, saying that maintaining peace and stability was an overall prerequisite and an indispensable environment to ensure the standards of living and the progress of the nation in all areas. After the inaugural session, the first senate session will be convened and former Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen, president of the CPP, is expected to be elected as the president of the Senate, according to a Senate's official schedule. All the senators are scheduled to take the oath of allegiance at the Royal Palace on Wednesday afternoon. The Senate was founded in 1999, with each term lasting six years.

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MYANMAR: Health Ministry Issues Heat Advisory amid Soaring Temperature

As temperatures continue to rise across Myanmar, the ministry of health is advising citizens to take precautions to protect their wellbeing, according to the ministry's statements on Thursday. The health ministry's advisory included guidelines for staying safe during periods of high heat and avoiding exposure to harmful ultraviolet light. The ministry's guidelines featured tips for recognizing and managing symptoms of heat exhaustion and heatstroke and first aid measures. According to meteorological reports, many regions across the country are experiencing a spike in temperatures, surpassing 40 degrees Celsius in many areas. U Hla Tun, a director from Myanmar's Department of Meteorology and Hydrology, told Xinhua on Thursday

that temperatures are likely to rise in central Myanmar and the Delta region on April 28 and 29. April and May are typically the hottest months for Myanmar as the temperature spikes before monsoon season begins, he said.

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THAILAND: FM Offers to Resign After Cabinet Reshuffle

Thailand's Foreign Minister Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara on Sunday announced his resignation from the ministerial post, the official Thai News Agency (TNA) reported, citing his resignation letter sent to Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin. The resignation came as Parnpree was removed from his position as Deputy Prime Minister following a reshuffle of several cabinet members in the Srettha government, as endorsed in the Royal Gazette on Sunday. Emphasizing the importance of the Deputy Prime Minister position for Thailand's foreign policy, Parnpree told the TNA that without the dual role, his ability to effectively advance the kingdom's foreign policy interests may be hampered. Traditionally, Thailand's Foreign Minister meanwhile holds the Deputy Prime Minister position, enhancing their stature and facilitating smoother negotiations during overseas engagements, he was quoted as saying.

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VIETNAM: National Assembly Chairman Vuong Dinh Hue Resigns

The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) Central Committee on Friday accepted the resignation of National Assembly Chairman Vuong Dinh Hue upon his personal request, Vietnam News Agency reported. Hue will also leave his position as a member of the Politburo, according to a decision announced at a CPV Central Committee meeting. Fully aware of his responsibilities towards the party, the state and the people, Hue submitted a request to cease holding all his posts and to stop working, said a statement released after the meeting. The statement said that recent reports by the CPV Central Committee's Inspection Commission and other relevant authorities showed that Hue has violated party regulations. His violations and shortcomings have sparked negative public opinion and affected the reputation of the party, the state and himself. Hue, 67, became the chairman of the National Assembly in March 2021.

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South Asia

INDIA: OpenAI Appoints Pragya Mishra as Head of Government Relations

OpenAI, the developer of ChatGPT, has made its first strategic move into India by appointing Pragya Mishra as the head of government relations. This development comes at a time when India is undergoing its 18th General Election, the outcome of which will hold significant sway over the formulation of regulations pertaining to artificial intelligence (AI) in the world's most populous nation. Sources familiar with the matter disclosed that the Microsoft Corp-backed company has enlisted Mishra, aged 39, to spearhead public policy affairs and partnerships in India. Having previously held positions at Truecaller AB and Meta Platforms Inc., Mishra is expected to commence her role at OpenAI by the end of this month, marking a significant step for the company's presence in the region. The move underscores OpenAI's proactive stance in advocating for favorable regulations as governments globally grapple with the complexities of AI governance. With India boasting a population of 1.4 billion and a burgeoning economy, it represents a lucrative market for tech giants. However, navigating the Indian regulatory landscape poses challenges as policymakers strive to ensure a level playing field for domestic companies. Furthermore, OpenAI faces competition from industry stalwarts such as Google, which is tailoring AI models specifically for India to accommodate its diverse linguistic landscape. CEO Sam Altman underscored the imperative of integrating AI into government services during his visit to India last year. Altman emphasized the urgency for governments to take a proactive role in shaping AI regulations in alignment with the technology's rapid evolution.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com> 04/20/2024

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FSIB Recommends Rana Ashutosh Kumar Singh for SBI MD Position

The Financial Services Institutions Bureau (FSIB) recommended Rana Ashutosh Kumar Singh for the position of Managing Director at State Bank of India (SBI) on Wednesday. Singh currently serves as deputy managing director at SBI. SBI, the country's largest lender, has four managing directors and one chairman. The FSIB, headed by former Department of Personnel and Training Secretary Bhanu Pratap Sharma, conducted interviews with 16 candidates on April 23 and 24. Following their performance and overall experience, the bureau chose Singh for the position. In its statement, the FSIB stated, "Keeping in view their performance in the interview, their overall experience and the extant parameters, the Bureau recommends Rana Ashutosh Kumar Singh for the position of MD in SB". The final decision on the FSIB recommendation will be made by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet, which is chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Other members of the FSIB include Animesh Chauhan, former chairman and managing director of the erstwhile Oriental Bank of Commerce; Deepak Singhal, RBI's former executive director; and Shailendra Bhandari, ex-managing director of erstwhile ING Vysya Bank. The selection of Singh for this position is seen as a crucial decision for SBI, which is one of the key financial institutions in India.

Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Appoints New Deputy Economy Minister

Anar Akhundov has been appointed Deputy Minister of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Trend reports. The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev signed a corresponding decree. Akhundov was born in 1975. He graduated from the Azerbaijan State Economic University in 1996, specializing in economics. He started his labor activity at the Baku Interbank Currency Exchange and also worked in several commercial banks. In 1999–2004, he worked in the State Committee on Securities under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan as a chief specialist, head of section, and head of department. Akhundov was Head and Chairman of the Board of the Stock Market Development Department of the Baku Stock Exchange in 2004–2006 and Executive Director of the Azerbaijan Investment Company in 2006–2009. He served as Deputy Chairman of the Board of Bank Standart CJSC from 2009 through 2014. In 2014–2022, he held the position of Head of Department at the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. He was appointed a member of the Supervisory Board of the State Oil Company of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) by the decree of the Head of State in 2022. He is married, and he has two children.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/18/2024

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KYRGYZSTAN: To Form Working Group for Assessment of Satellite Internet

A working group will be established in Kyrgyzstan to develop a pilot project for satellite internet to assess its feasibility, Trend reports. The decision was reached during a meeting between the leadership of the Ministry of Digital Development of the country and representatives of Starlink, according to the Ministry. It is noted that particular attention was given to the implementation of satellite internet and the development of necessary regulatory frameworks during the meeting. Starlink representatives shared their experience and projects related to satellite internet worldwide and in Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, discussing potential challenges and possible solutions. Participants expressed hope for successful collaboration and confirmed their readiness to provide additional support in achieving mutually beneficial goals for satellite technology development in Kyrgyzstan. A few years ago, representatives from Starlink visited Kyrgyzstan to discuss procedural matters regarding the opening of a Starlink office in the country. At that time, it was planned to launch the network in our country in 2023, but it was postponed. In June of last year, Starlink and some European companies contacted

the Ministry of Digital Development regarding providing Kyrgyzstan with satellite internet.

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KAZAKHSTAN: ADB Appoints New Country Director

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has appointed Utsav Kumar as its new Country Director for Kazakhstan, Trend reports. According to the ADB, he assumed office today. Kumar will lead ADB operations in the country and foster the bank's relationships with the government and other stakeholders. He will oversee the implementation of ADB's country partnership strategy, 2023–2027 for Kazakhstan, which aims to help the country achieve sustained and inclusive growth through public and private sector investments, innovative knowledge solutions, and institutional development. "For 30 years, ADB has been Kazakhstan's reliable development partner," said Mr. Kumar. "I look forward to building on our strong partnership and working closely with the government, private sector, and other stakeholders to support the country's development priorities. We will continue to assist Kazakhstan in addressing the impacts of climate change and decarbonizing its economy, promoting inclusive economic growth, and strengthening governance."

Kumar has 18 years of international experience, including over 11 years at ADB. Prior to his appointment to Kazakhstan, he was ADB Deputy Country Director for Sri Lanka where he led country programming, knowledge, and economics work, as well as helped to manage various aspects of client engagement and development partner coordination. Kumar, a national of India, holds doctorate and master's degrees in economics from the University of Maryland at College Park in the United States, and master's and bachelor's degrees in economics from the University of Delhi, India. He succeeds outgoing Country Director Nariman Mannapbekov, who held this position from 2020 and was recently appointed Advisor to ADB's Central and West Asia Department. Kazakhstan joined ADB in 1994. ADB has since committed about \$7 billion in loans to the government and private sector, grants, and technical assistance. Regional cooperation and integration initiatives under the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program remain an integral part of ADB operations in Kazakhstan, which is chairing the program this year.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/26/2024

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Industry and Investment Return to the Centre of Government

NSW Premier Chris Minns has today announced that industry, innovation, trade and

investment functions will return to the centre of government through the transfer of Investment NSW to the Premier's Department. This front door of Government will make it easier for industry, investors, and entrepreneurs to participate in major government priorities and ensure seamless co-ordination across government. It also brings management of unsolicited proposals back to central government. In addition, changes will be made to Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade, to provide a renewed focus on government priorities in the arts, hospitality, tourism and the night-time economy portfolios, as well as driving the implementation of key reforms, including the vibrancy reforms.

These changes will include a new name, the Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport. The changes will come into effect on July 1, 2024, subject to the approval of the Governor-in-Council: •Venues NSW, NSW Institute of Sport and the Office of Sport will be related agencies of the new Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport •Investment NSW and the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer to join the Premier's Department •All remaining functions and entities that are currently part of or related to DEIT will become part of or related to the Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport. NSW Premier Chris Minns said: "The changes announced today bring structure and better co-ordination to important portfolios which together ensure our trade and investment is at the centre of government.

"This is a government that is focused on opening up Sydney and NSW for business, boosting the economy and creating jobs in these important sectors." Minister for the Arts and Minister for Jobs and Tourism John Graham: "This new department structure will support the Government's commitment to cultivating thriving creative industries and night-time economies across the state. "The Department will oversee the state's first arts, culture and creative industries policy. This is a key framework for investment in the creative industries and our vibrant cities agenda – creating more equitable places to work, live and play. "Empowering our creative industries, unlocking our night-time economies and focusing on experience tourism will bring economic, social, and cultural benefit to communities across the state. This in turn creates greater employment across a range of sectors – and more economic activity across a greater proportion of the day."

Minister for Sport Steve Kamper said: "The NSW Labor Government has been clear on our goal to cement Sydney and NSW as the premier destination of the Asia Pacific. "In bringing these agencies together we can line up sporting and entertainment offerings that drive economic outcomes for our local economy. "Lifting the Concert Cap is a fantastic example of what is possible. This policy alone is set to deliver over \$1 billion in local economic activity and increase Venues NSW revenue by as much as \$210 million over the next 10 years, whilst also delivering opportunities for our local artists." Minister for Industry and Trade Anouack Chanthivong said: "There are significant benefits to bringing Investment NSW and

the Chief Scientist into the centre of government. Industry, innovation and trade are critical to driving the creation of quality jobs and a more resilient state economy. “I am focused on taking a coordinated, whole of government approach to working with industry and delivering on the NSW Government’s priorities.”

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 04/29/2024

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NEW ZEALAND: Govt Makes U-Turn on Suicide Prevention Office

Labour welcomes the Government’s U-turn on the closure of the Suicide Prevention Office, says Labour Mental Health spokesperson Ingrid Leary. “Christopher Luxon’s point blank claims this afternoon in Question Time that the Ministry of Health’s Suicide Prevention Office will not be closed is a win for New Zealanders,” Ingrid Leary said. “Following immense public backlash, it was a shame that health officials were forced to apologise for making cuts when they were told to do so by the Finance Minister according to her edict of 6.5 percent cuts. “The buck should have stopped with the budget-holding Minister of Health Shane Reti who continues to avoid responsibility. Meanwhile, the Minister for Mental Health Matt Doocey has been blindsided by the mishandling, and the Government has had to chaotically scramble to save face.

“If the left and the right hands were talking to each other, and costs had been worked through ‘line by line’ as promised, this mess would have been avoided. “It is still unclear whether the Health Minister knew, why the Mental Health Minister was blindsided by his own colleagues and why the Prime Minister is being left to clean up the mess. “We will be watching to ensure the current resourcing remains so that the Office is able to deliver for people. It cannot be reduced to a parred-back shell that doesn’t have the function to do the work it needs to,” Ingrid Leary said.

From <https://voxy.co.nz/politics> 04/09/2024

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Government Forced to Release Its ‘Top Secret’ Fast-Track List

Forest & Bird is demanding an extension to submissions on the contentious Fast-track Approvals Bill, after successfully asking the Ombudsman to investigate a lack of transparency over who was lobbying to have their projects fast-tracked. Among the list of organisations that have been invited to apply are organisations associated with projects that would destroy a pristine mountaintop and rip up the seafloor. It includes organisations that have lost cases in the Environment, High and Supreme Courts, with proposals roundly rejected through prolonged court action. The Ombudsman directed that the list be released. In a deeply cynical move, Minister Chris Bishop gave the public its first glance at the list just hours before submissions on the National-led Coalition Government’s Bill are due to close (11:59pm, Friday 19 April).

This only happened after Forest & Bird made an official complaint to the Ombudsman's office. "There's nothing proactive about this. It's disgraceful that Forest & Bird had to go to the Ombudsman to get this government to release the list of who it has invited to fast-track the destruction of our environment," says Richard Capie, Group Manager Conservation & Advocacy. "That the government didn't want to release this information, and that it's now only coming out the day that submissions close, shows just how anti-democratic this whole thing is. "How much longer will New Zealanders be kept waiting to find out which of these organisations will have their projects included in the first 100 projects destined to be fast-tracked?" "In light of this just-released information, at the very least, the select committee needs to extend the submission process so that people have time to see what kind of environmental destruction is being proposed in their communities," Mr Capie says.

"Tens of thousands of New Zealanders have submitted on the Fast-track Approvals Bill – including almost 13,000 who used Forest & Bird's quick submission template. But they did so not knowing which projects are going to be green lit under the new legislation. "Essentially, we will have three ministers in Wellington making decisions about communities behind closed doors, shutting out the public from having a say. "We have Ministers picking winners and sending invitations to some organisations to get their projects named in legislation, but not others. The whole thing stinks and New Zealanders deserve better. "This bill needs to be scrapped – it is anti-democratic and anti-nature."

From <https://voxy.co.nz> 04/19/2024

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Mental Health Foundation Facing Staff Cuts from Govt Funding Squeeze

The PSA says it's appalling in a mental health crisis that one of the key agencies funded by the Government is proposing to shed a fifth of its staff. The Mental Health Foundation is considering laying off 10 staff saying its funding from the Government has not kept pace with inflation. "How can this be happening when we know we have a mental health crisis, when this Government has made it a priority to tackle this problem by appointing the first dedicated Minister for Mental Health?" said Kerry Davies, National Secretary for the Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi. "Just two weeks ago we learnt that Government funding cuts had resulted in the proposed disbanding of Suicide Prevention Office operating out of the Ministry of Health – thankfully this has been reversed for now, though the PSA still has no clear idea whether it will remain fully staffed and fully funded.

"The Mental Health Foundation provides support and resources for those facing the loss of their job, so it's wrong in the very week the Government adds another 1000 jobs to its tally of cuts, that this is happening. "The PSA calls on the Government to

stop its reckless funding cuts going so much wider and deeper into the community. “Stuff reports that other charities supporting food banks, alcohol counselling, support for the elderly and other critical community services are also struggling to secure funding for the next financial year to cover cost increases. “If the Government is serious about frontline services including those delivered in communities through charities, we need to see a commitment to increased funding at the rate of inflation at least and a commitment to long term investment in these agencies. “The PSA says the Government can end the uncertainty for these charities today – give an assurance ahead of next month’s Budget now. “How can \$15 billion of tax cuts for landlords and others be a priority over properly funding charities doing such vital work? This Government’s priorities are all wrong,” said Kerry Davies.

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Labour Supports Urgent Changes to Emergency Management System

Labour welcomes the release of the report into the North Island weather events and looks forward to working with the Government to ensure that New Zealand is as prepared as it can be for the next natural disaster. “Labour commissioned the review into the severe weather events last year in Government, so that New Zealand can be better prepared,” Labour emergency management spokesperson Camilla Belich said. “The severe weather events included Cyclone Gabrielle and the Auckland floods. We are thinking of those who lost loved ones, and those still dealing with the aftermath. Many people lost everything and still have a long recovery ahead. “I would also like to thank all of the people who responded without question, during the events and afterwards. This report is not about them, but about the system and the changes needed to ensure they are supported better.

“We encourage the Government to implement the report’s recommendations, including making legislative change, as quickly as possible. “The report shows that the Emergency Management system in New Zealand requires urgent reform and investment to make sure New Zealand is best placed to respond to a major natural disaster. It also makes the case for increased investment in resilient infrastructure and support for local councils. “We support the recommendation for increased staffing and resources for NEMA, including an appropriate alternative Civil Defence Headquarters outside of Wellington. “Iwi were a significant part of the response, but their role is not formally integrated into decision making. We support the report’s recommendation to empower iwi Māori and bring clarity to the important role they play.

“We do not consider the case is made in the report for the wholesale abandonment of the Emergency Management Bill. The report provides some suggested changes and significant amendments to the Bill, but also supports some aspects of it. “This

would've been the quickest way to implement some of the recommendations of the report. Labour's plan had been to make any amendments needed to the Bill following this report at the committee stages, so they could be passed straight away. "We are concerned that waiting to bring a new Bill to the House this term risks too much of a delay. We don't know when the next disaster will strike and must be prepared. "Labour is willing to work with and assist the Government in ensuring the recommendations of this report are introduced as soon as possible," Camilla Belich said.

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3、 Management, Capacity Building and Innovation

Asia-Pacific

Massive Investment Is Needed in Sustainable Infrastructure to Build Climate Change Resilience

Record global temperatures around 1.4 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial averages led to more heatwaves and floods, longer wildfire seasons and widespread droughts in 2023. A new OECD report details the growing pressure of such climatic events on infrastructure in all sectors, from electricity, communication and transport networks to water and waste treatment, with developing countries often particularly hard hit. The [Infrastructure for a Climate-Resilient Future](#) report released today during the [OECD Infrastructure Forum](#), recommends governments systematically factor climate resilience into infrastructure planning and decision-making, including by prioritising sustainable projects, to help reduce societal and economic vulnerability and avoid long-term costs. Climate-resilience measures can also protect investment returns, ensure business continuity and support continued economic growth and development. At the most recent UN Climate Change Conference (COP28), countries committed to increase the resilience of infrastructure by 2030. Countries will need to take action to address this, with regional and local governments playing an essential role, being responsible for 69% of climate-significant public investment in OECD countries.

The investments needed to seize these opportunities are significant: according to OECD, World Bank and UN Environment analysis, an annual investment of USD 6.9 trillion in infrastructure will be necessary by 2030 to ensure infrastructure investment is compatible with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. In parallel, infrastructure assets make up an important share of the economic damages with the economic losses from disasters increasing sevenfold between the 1970s and the 2010s from an average USD 198 billion to USD 1.6 trillion. This, in turn, multiplies the losses (e.g. forgone income) for businesses whose operations are

disrupted. “The right type of infrastructure investment can help enhance the quality of growth, by supporting climate action while protecting biodiversity and reducing pollution and enhancing resilience to risks from climate change,” **OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann** said. “But the investments needed are significant. Unlocking private investments in climate resilience will require long-term project planning, reducing regulatory barriers, effective risk-sharing arrangements and, when required, the targeted and strategic use of public support to attract private financing – particularly when the timeline for resilience investment returns may constitute a barrier to private sector participation.”

Developing countries are significantly more exposed to climate-related disasters, especially least developed countries (LDCs) and Small Island Development States (SIDS), between 10 and 30 times more than OECD countries. They face important resource shortages and higher financing costs, hindering their ability to build quality infrastructure. In order to address their challenges, the report shows the need for new forms of international partnerships and enhanced mobilisation of resources by development banks. Besides financial resource needs, the report also points to the effectiveness of nature-based solutions – for example using mangroves or coral reefs to reduce risks from coastal floods or storm surges – in providing cost-effective measures to protect infrastructure assets and services. The report provides policymakers and stakeholders with important considerations and tools to support change towards more climate-resilient infrastructure. The [Compendium of Good Practices on Quality Infrastructure 2024](#) was also launched today. For further information or interview requests, journalists are invited to contact the [OECD Media Office](#) (+33 1 45 24 97 00). *Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.*

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World Bank Group Announces New Approach to Measuring Impact

The World Bank Group is developing a [new corporate scorecard](#) that will track results across 22 indicators—a fraction of the previous 150—to provide a streamlined, [clear picture of progress](#) on all aspects of the World Bank Group’s mission, from improving access to healthcare to making food systems sustainable to boosting private investment. For the first time, the work of all World Bank Group financing institutions will be tracked through the same set of indicators. The new scorecard will track the Bank’s overarching vision of ending poverty on a livable planet. “*The new scorecard is a significant step forward in how we will measure results and be accountable for the outcomes,*” said **Anna Bjerde, World Bank Managing Director of Operations**. “*It’s a real game changer, providing a new guidepost that our teams can rally around, and provides full visibility on how well we*

are tackling the most difficult challenges like poverty, climate change, fragility, and food insecurity.” This is an important milestone in the World Bank Group’s efforts to focus on outcomes, rather than inputs. For example, instead of showing how many people have access to financial services, we will focus on the number of people that use them. This will drive action towards results and allow us to course-correct throughout.

The indicators have been carefully selected through wide consultation with shareholders and partners. The goal is to measure key outcomes, manage with evidence, and communicate results. The scorecard will provide a yardstick for us on how we deliver on our new mission and vision and redouble our focus on accountability and impact. All the data and underlying methodologies will be available in a user-friendly online platform that will make it easier to harmonize results measurement with other multilateral development banks. Adding a more detailed breakdown of the data will also enhance the Bank Group’s ability to disaggregate results by gender, youth, region, country groups, and other parameters, improving the ability to make the right decisions for development. The new scorecard will serve as an important management tool, with detailed results showing exactly how many people have benefited from our operations—and the results will inform future investment and project decisions. The World Bank Group will report the first results in coming months and will have all data ready to share at the 2024 IMF-World Bank Group Annual Meetings. Annual updates will be released from FY24 until FY30.

22 New Indicators

1. Millions of beneficiaries of social safety net programs
2. Millions of students supported with better education
3. Millions of people receiving quality health, nutrition, and population services
4. Millions of people benefitting from strengthened capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to health emergencies
5. Countries at high risk or in debt distress that implemented reforms toward debt sustainability
6. Countries with tax revenues to GDP ratio at or below 15% (including social security contributions) that have increased collections, considering equity
7. Net GHG emissions per year
8. Millions of people with enhanced resilience to climate risks
9. Millions of hectares of terrestrial and aquatic areas under enhanced conservation and management
10. Millions of people provided with water, sanitation, and hygiene, of which (%) is safely managed
11. Millions of people with strengthened food and nutrition security
12. Millions of people that benefit from improved access to sustainable transport infrastructure and services
13. Millions of people provided with access to electricity

14. GW of renewable energy capacity enabled
15. Millions of people using broadband internet
16. Millions of people using digitally enabled services
17. Millions of people benefitting from greater gender equality, of which (%) from actions that expand and enable economic opportunities
18. Millions of people and businesses using financial services, of which (%) are women
19. Millions of new or better jobs
 - of which (%) for women
 - of which (%) for youth
20. Millions of displaced people and people in host communities provided with services and livelihoods
21. \$ billions in total private capital enabled
22. \$ billions in total private capital mobilized

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/09/2024

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World Bank Group Debars Individual for Fraudulent Practices

The World Bank Group today announced the 43-month debarment with conditional release of Mr. Bounlert Chanthasounthone, a national of the Lao People's Democratic Republic ("Laos"), in connection with fraudulent practices as part of the [Reducing Rural Poverty and Malnutrition Project](#) (the "RRPM Project"). The debarment makes Mr. Chanthasounthone, and any firms that he controls, ineligible to participate in projects and operations financed by institutions of the World Bank Group. It is part of a settlement agreement under which he does not contest culpability and responsibility for the underlying sanctionable practices and agrees to meet specified compliance conditions as a condition for release from debarment. The RRPM Project aims to support the design and implementation of nutrition-sensitive social assistance programs in Laos. According to the facts of the case, Mr. Chanthasounthone submitted a falsified prior consulting contract to support the negotiation of an inflated salary for his consultant contract under the project, which is a fraudulent practice. Mr. Chanthasounthone also simultaneously claimed and received payments under the RRPM Project and another project that is financed by the Asian Development Bank, which is a fraudulent practice. The settlement agreement provides for a reduced period of debarment considering Mr. Chanthasounthone's cooperation with the investigation and voluntary restraint from seeking additional World Bank Group-financed contracts. As a condition for release from sanction under the terms of the settlement agreement, Mr. Chanthasounthone commits to undertaking corporate ethics training that demonstrates a commitment to personal integrity and business ethics; commits that any firms that he controls will implement a corporate ethics training program; and commits to continue to fully cooperate with the World Bank Group Integrity Vice Presidency. The debarment of Mr. Chanthasounthone qualifies for cross-debarment by other multilateral

development banks (MDBs) under the Agreement for Mutual Enforcement of Debarment Decisions that was signed on April 9, 2010.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/10/2024

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Innovative Co-Financing Platform Will Improve Development Impact

A coalition of ten MDBs today launched a new co-financing platform that will enable them to channel additional capital for development scale and impact.

The **Global Collaborative Co-Financing Platform** will consist of:

- The digital **Co-Financing Portal** which will create a secure platform for registered co-financiers to share project pipelines. This tool, hosted at the World Bank, will increase efficiency and transparency and make it easier for MDBs to share information and identify opportunities for co-financing.
- The **Co-Financing Forum** which will provide a space for participants to discuss co-financing opportunities, best practices, and common issues, and will support ongoing efforts to coordinate policies to reduce the burden on partner countries.

For countries, the new platform will reduce the administrative burden and transaction costs, and enable better coordinated financing in line with their priorities—resulting in greater development impact. By leveraging partnerships and promoting transparency, the platform will enable MDBs, partner agencies, and client countries to address global challenges more effectively and efficiently.

Strengthening partnerships is a key element of the World Bank Group's new playbook aimed at boosting impact. Co-financing has been identified as an effective way to improve strategic alignment, crowd in concessional resources, promote efficiency, and strengthen coordination.

MDBs that will be part of the new co-financing platform include:

- African Development Bank
- Asian Development Bank
- Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
- Council of Europe Development Bank
- European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
- European Investment Bank
- Inter-American Development Bank
- Islamic Development Bank
- New Development Bank
- World Bank Group

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From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/19/2024

New Measures Unveiled to Further Boost Capital Markets

China unveiled new measures on Friday to enhance the connectivity between mainland and Hong Kong capital markets as the country's latest step to expand its financial opening-up and reinforce Hong Kong's position as an international financial center. The China Securities Regulatory Commission said it will, in collaboration with its Hong Kong counterpart, expand the scope of eligible stock exchange-traded funds under the stock connect programs, easing requirements regarding the size of assets under management and index weighting. Other measures to optimize the stock connect programs between mainland and Hong Kong exchanges include incorporating real estate investment trusts, or REITs, into the programs and making the renminbi trading counter available in southbound trading. The CSRC will also further liberalize the sales of Hong Kong-founded securities funds in the Chinese mainland and step up efforts to support leading mainland-based enterprises in getting listed in Hong Kong. Also on Friday, the CSRC released measures to further facilitate the financing of technology-oriented enterprises, including their overseas listings, and reduce the commission rate charged by publicly-offered securities funds.

From <https://investinchina.chinaservicesinfo.com/> 04/20/2024

Applications Open for APEC's Healthy Women Research Prize

Applications for the 2024 APEC Healthy Women, Healthy Economies Research Prize, which calls for innovative research on the link between women's health and economic participation, are now open. The annual prize recognizes research that enables policymakers, business leaders and other stakeholders to shape policies that will further boost women's full economic participation. It aims to encourage the creation of sex-disaggregated data and gender-based research within APEC member economies. The initiative was launched in 2019 and is supported by Merck. Interested candidates may access the application form through this [link](#). The application deadline is Friday, 17 May 2024. "Women, compared to men, spend a greater portion of their lives in poor health, which restricts their ability to fully engage in domestic, community and economic activities," said Chantelle Stratford PSM, Chair of APEC's [Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy](#). "Initiatives like APEC's Healthy Women, Healthy Economies, which champion innovative feminist research to tackle these challenges and eliminate gender inequality, create ripple effects that contribute to a more inclusive, robust and sustainable global economy," Stratford added.

In 2023, the prize was awarded to Dr Jason Junjie Huang of the Chinese University of Hong Kong's Centre for Health Education and Health Promotion. His study, in

collaboration with the Non-Communicable Diseases Working Group of the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU) Global Health Program, [investigated the global burden of endometrial cancer](#), one of the most common cancers affecting women. Dr Huang's research highlighted that many of the risk factors that contribute to endometrial cancer are lifestyle choices, and that education campaigns as well as investing in preventive measures and early detection are critical for raising awareness and reducing its incidence. "I strongly encourage applications from women researchers across the Asia-Pacific region to join our efforts in bridging the gender gap in research and leadership. Empowering women researchers is not just a matter of equity, it is a catalyst for innovation and progress," said Stratford. "Together, we can create a more inclusive and dynamic scientific community that reflects the diversity of our society." Applicants for the 2024 APEC Healthy Women, Healthy Economies Research Prize can be individuals or teams, with the stipulation that one official participant be from an APEC member economy.

Applicants do not need to come from academia as long as the research is evidence-based and addresses at least one of the pillars outlined in the [Healthy Women, Healthy Economies Policy Toolkit](#):

1. Workplace health and safety
2. Health awareness and access
3. Sexual and reproductive health
4. Gender-based violence
5. Work/life balance

The winner will receive USD 20,000 and their research will be featured at a ceremony during the Third APEC Senior Officials' Meeting in Lima, Peru. The two runners-up will receive USD 5,000 each.

"At Merck, we believe healthcare companies have a responsibility to invest in and prioritize women's health," said Hong Chow, Executive Vice President, Head of China & International, Healthcare Business of Merck. "When we join forces with government and civil society to drive innovation and solutions for women, we enable gender-responsive care and a healthier economy for all." Chow concluded. For more information, please visit the APEC Healthy Women, Healthy Economies [website](#) or contact HWHE@accesspartnership.com for further details.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 04/04/2024

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ADB Remains at Forefront of Capital Management Through Better Clarity on Callable Capital

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) remains at the forefront of efforts by multilateral development banks (MDBs) to optimize their balance sheets in line with the Group of 20 (G20) Independent Review on Multilateral Development Banks' Capital Adequacy Frameworks. A report released today by [ADB on callable capital](#) provides, for the first time, greater clarity and transparency regarding its utilization. "ADB's analysis of

our callable capital is the result of collaborative efforts and support from our shareholders and peer institutions. It sheds light on the robustness of our financial strategies and will reassure our stakeholders of the solid foundation underpinning our operations,” said ADB Vice-President for Finance and Risk Management Roberta Casali. “We trust that stakeholders and credit rating agencies will find this analysis useful in valuing callable capital and look forward to strengthening our dialogue with them on this.” Callable capital is capital that is subscribed to by shareholders that has not been paid-in. Unique to MDBs, callable capital is a commitment from each shareholder to make additional capital available to an institution, but only in the event additional capital is required for an institution to avoid defaulting on its borrowings or guarantees. No major MDB has ever had to use this financial instrument. In 2021, the G20 launched the Independent Review of Multilateral Development Banks’ Capital Adequacy Frameworks to help MDBs maximize their development impact. It recommends strategic shifts in five areas, including one on callable capital.

ADB’s analysis of its callable capital reached several conclusions:

- The ADB Charter clearly outlines the conditions under which callable capital may be utilized.
- ADB can call upon additional capital well in advance of a potential default.
- Shareholders have expressed their readiness to respond positively to a call, reflecting their strong support to ADB and its mission.
- Reverse stress test results confirm the very low likelihood of ADB ever needing to call upon additional capital, reaffirming ADB’s triple A credit rating and financial resilience.

The results not only demonstrate ADB’s strong financial footing but also enhance stakeholders’ understanding of ADB’s financial policies, further building trust in ADB’s capacity to drive meaningful change across the region. The results are also in line with G20 and shareholders’ calls for MDBs to become better, bolder, and bigger. Last September, ADB’s Capital Adequacy Framework review increased ADB’s lending capacity by **\$100 billion** over the next decade. Other initiatives by ADB to grow its lending headroom include the Innovative Finance Facility for Climate in Asia and the Pacific (IF-CAP) and exposure exchange agreements that aim to increase ADB resources to support developing member countries in addressing simultaneous and overlapping crises, especially climate change.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 04/12/2024

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East Asia

CHINA: Launching Campaign to Boost Grain Output

China has initiated a new round of action to significantly increase its grain output in the coming years, in the latest effort to ensure food security. According to an action

plan published by the State Council, the country aims to boost the grain production capacity by over 50 million tonnes by 2030. At that time, the grain growing area will total about 1.75 billion mu, or 117 million hectares, and the grain yield per mu will reach 420 kilograms. China has seen a grain harvest of over 650 million tonnes for nine consecutive years, with the per capita share of grain at 493 kilograms. However, the grain supply and demand is still characterized by a "tight balance" and the gap may expand in the future, hence the need to further increase output to ensure food security, said an official of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the country's top economic planner. Corn and soybeans will be the major contributors of the grain output increase, the plan said. In terms of rice and wheat, the emphasis is on improving quality and optimizing structure. Potatoes and other types of grain and beans will be promoted based on local conditions. Major projects from water conservation to high-standard farmland construction and revitalization of the seed industry will be implemented in 720 crucial grain producing counties, under the guidance of the NDRC and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/08/2024

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China's Political Advisors Discuss Foundations of Food Security

The National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), China's top political advisory body, held a biweekly consultation session on Friday to discuss consolidating the foundations of food security. The session was presided over by Wang Huning, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the CPPCC National Committee. Noting that food security is among the country's most fundamental interests, Wang called on political advisors to focus on long-term problems and trends, as well as the challenges facing farmers and major grain-producing areas, and to put forward targeted and effective suggestions based on research. He also stressed efforts to publicize the country's historic achievements in advancing the work related to agriculture, rural areas and farmers, and promote the policies rolled out by the Party and the country to benefit farmers. Nine political advisors, two farmers and an expert spoke at the meeting, expressing the need to motivate farmers and major grain-producing areas, strengthen policy support, improve the agricultural insurance system, and build a modernized grain-industry system. Officials from the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs gave briefings on pertinent matters and exchanged views with political advisors.

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China's Securities Regulator Tightens Delisting Regulation

China's securities regulator on Friday released a guideline on strict implementation of delisting regulation. The guideline, released by the China Securities Regulatory Commission, focuses on improving the overall quality of listed companies, clearing out "zombie shell" companies and "black sheep" stocks, and reducing the value of "shell" resources through stricter delisting regulation, expanding diverse exit channels and strengthening investor protection. Specifically, the guideline demands adopting stricter standards for compulsory delisting, forcing companies found guilty of serious falsification within a year or engaging in continuous falsification to delist. It also calls for a resolute crackdown on vicious and long-term systemic financial frauds. It requires improving policies and regulations in areas such as mergers and acquisitions, encouraging and guiding leading companies to integrate industrial chains based on their main businesses.

The guideline also urged efforts to intensify delisting supervision, severely punish illegal activities such as financial fraud, insider trading and market manipulation, and optimize investor compensation remedy mechanisms. The commission released the aforementioned set of measures after China's State Council released a guideline on strengthening regulation, forestalling risks and promoting the high-quality development of the capital market. This is the third guideline document on the capital market from the State Council in two decades. The first two were issued in 2004 and 2014, respectively. The country should build a secure, regulated, transparent, open, dynamic and resilient capital market, the State Council guideline noted. The securities regulator has also started soliciting public opinions on six draft rules covering regulations on issuance, listed companies, securities companies and trading, starting on Friday.

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China's Take on Industrial Production Capacity

China has reiterated the importance of viewing industrial production capacity objectively and dialectically from a market-oriented and global perspective on several occasions. This response comes as a rebuttal to the allegation that the country now faces "overcapacity." From a market viewpoint, the quantity of production capacity is determined by the relationship between supply and demand, and having production moderately greater than demand is conducive to full market competition and promoting the survival of the fittest in the market, said Chinese Premier Li Qiang during his talks with Federal Chancellor of Germany Olaf Scholz in Beijing earlier this week. Li added that from a global perspective, the production capacity of different countries is determined by their comparative advantages. As long as countries strengthen cooperation, they can achieve common development.

China's new energy vehicle (NEV) sector, which has been a focal point of some Western countries' "overcapacity" narrative, has seen rapid development in recent

years. Official data showed that China's NEV output rose 35.8 percent to nearly 9.59 million units and NEV sales gained 37.9 percent to around 9.5 million units last year. NEV exports surged 77.6 percent to over 1.2 million units in the same period. During the first quarter of this year, the output, sales and exports of NEVs continued to log double-digit growth. The sector's competitive advantage is rooted in China's super-large market, a complete industrial system and abundant human resources. It is inseparable from the huge investment in R&D and innovation, as well as the unremitting spirit of entrepreneurs, Chinese vice minister of finance Liao Min said in a press briefing on U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's recent trip to China.

"Enterprises reduced production costs through technological innovation and improved the affordability of new energy products," he said, adding that this means that China, apart from meeting its own carbon emission goals, has also made positive contributions to the global response to climate change and green development. "And this must be objectively evaluated," he said. The global demand for NEVs is rising rapidly, and the current production capacity is far from sufficient to meet this demand. The growth potential is clearly evident when comparing the estimated global electric vehicle fleet of nearly 250 million units in 2030, predicted by the International Energy Agency, and an estimate of around 15 million units in global NEV sales in 2023. China has cautioned against using the "overcapacity" narrative to justify protectionism and has called for "pragmatic" and "rational" policy decisions.

Foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said Wednesday at a regular press briefing that those who spread that narrative to justify protectionism have nothing to gain from it, but will only destabilize and disrupt industrial and supply chains, hinder global green transition, and curb the growth of emerging sectors. "China has been and will always be open to industrial cooperation. We hope relevant countries will keep an open mind, embrace fair competition, contribute to a world-class, market-oriented and law-based environment for trade and economic cooperation, and work with China for mutual benefits and inclusive economic globalization that benefits all," Lin said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/19/2024

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China's New Quality Agricultural Productive Forces to Be Fully Developed: Report

In the coming decade, China's agricultural sector will witness the full development of new quality productive forces, accompanied by an accelerated pace of agricultural transformation and upgrading, according to a report released on Saturday. The China Agricultural Outlook Report (2024-2033), released at the 2024 China Agricultural Outlook Conference held at the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, reviewed the market situation of China's major agricultural products in 2023, and provided an analysis of the production, consumption, trade and price

trends in the country's agricultural sector over the next decade. China's grain production in 2023 reached 695 million tonnes, an increase of 1.3 percent compared to the previous year. The country's annual grain production has remained stable at over 650 million tonnes for nine consecutive years, according to the report. Significant strides have been achieved in the high-quality development of agriculture, with the nationwide creation of over 1 billion mu (about 66.67 million hectares) of high-standard farmland, promoting the construction of high-standard farmland, the report said.

China's grain yield per hectare will reach 5,933 kg in 2024, up 1.5 percent compared to the previous year, and grain production is expected to hit 704 million tonnes, increasing 1.3 percent from 2023, according to the report. With new breakthroughs in biological breeding technology, widespread promotion of high-yield and efficient technology models and continuous improvement of farmland quality, it is expected that China's grain yield per unit will increase by 10.7 percent by 2033, reaching 6,438 kg per hectare, the report said. China's annual grain production is expected to reach 766 million tonnes in 2033, with an average annual growth rate of 1.1 percent, according to the report. As the incomes of Chinese residents steadily rise and nutrition and health concepts become more widespread, the structure of food consumption will continuously improve, leading to a shift towards healthier, greener, more diverse and personalized agricultural product consumption, the report said. China's agricultural trade structure will also continue to optimize, with diversified import sources and a sustained growth trend in agricultural trade, the report added.

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China Strives to Secure Water Supply in Drought-hit Irrigation Areas

The Ministry of Water Resources said on Sunday it had concerted efforts to secure water supply in around 500 large and medium-sized irrigation areas in drought-affected regions of southwestern China. Since this spring, droughts have hit the Yunnan and Sichuan provinces, producing areas of wheat and corns, according to Zhang Xiang, a researcher with the ministry. Zhang highlighted that Yunnan's precipitation level since the spring is 42.3 percent less than usual, with the drought projected to persist. To date, a total of 160 million cubic meters of water have been delivered to the drought-affected regions in Sichuan and Yunnan, irrigating over 3.5 million mu (about 230,000 hectares) of farmlands. Meanwhile, China has earmarked 174 million yuan (about 24.49 million U.S. dollars) for bolstering drought relief and ensuring sufficient water supply.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/21/2024

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China Ramps Up Efforts to Become IP Powerhouse

China is accelerating efforts to build itself into an intellectual property (IP) powerhouse, providing robust support to advance high-quality development, said the country's IP regulator on Wednesday. In 2023, China made significant strides in various aspects of IP, encompassing quantity and quality, transformation and utilization, and protection efforts, as well as international cooperation in the field of IP, said Shen Changyu, head of China National Intellectual Property Administration (CNIPA), at a press conference. A total of 921,000 invention patents were authorized throughout the year, marking a 15.3 percent year-on-year increase, about 4.4 million trademarks were approved for registration, 13 geographical indication products received recognition, and 201 collective trademarks and certification trademarks were approved for registration as geographical indications.

In a report released by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), China's count of the top 100 technology clusters worldwide reached 24, ranking first globally for the first time. For the first time, China's industrialization rate of enterprise invention patents surpassed 50 percent, sustaining growth for five consecutive years. The total registered amount of patent trademark pledge financing reached 854 billion yuan (about 118 billion U.S. dollars), marking a year-on-year increase of 75.4 percent. The amount of copyright pledge guarantee reached 9.9 billion yuan, up 80.8 percent year on year. The total annual import and export value of IP usage fees amounted to 376.5 billion yuan. The first group of 10 national IP protection demonstration zones has started to show promising results in their development, while the selection process for the second group of 15 zones has been completed.

A total of 112 national-level IP protection centers and rapid enforcement centers were established in 2023. Throughout the year, 44,000 cases of patent and trademark infringements were investigated and resolved, along with 68,000 administrative cases related to patent infringement disputes. Additionally, 4,745 cases of copyright infringement were addressed. In 2023, China successfully hosted two events commemorating the 50th anniversary of its cooperation with the WIPO in Beijing and Geneva, effectively enhancing the collaboration between the two parties. There has also been significant progress in advancing IP cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, with multiple achievements included in the list of outcomes of the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation.

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Chinese Vice Premier Underscores Innovation in Medical Science

Chinese Vice Premier Liu Guozhong has called for greater efforts to address weak points in the country's healthcare sector and make breakthroughs in medical science. Liu, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central

Committee, made the remarks during a research trip in Shanghai that took place from Tuesday to Wednesday. He urged research institutes, medical schools, hospitals and enterprises to pool their strengths and make breakthroughs in cutting-edge fields of medical science. He also highlighted the importance of research and development in the pharmaceutical industry, and the application of artificial intelligence in healthcare services. The government will continue pushing forward the reform of public hospitals, updating medical facilities, expanding staff numbers and improving services, Liu said.

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Chinese Vice Premier Stresses Innovation in Development

Chinese Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang on Thursday stressed that innovation is the primary force in the country's development. Ding, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks while delivering a speech at the opening ceremony of the 2024 Zhongguancun Forum. China has implemented the strategy of innovation-driven development, achieved new breakthroughs in scientific and technological innovation, and cultivated new industries, business models and growth drivers, which have become a prominent highlight of economic and social development, Ding said. He added that Zhongguancun plays a crucial role in advancing high-level scientific and technological self-reliance and in building Beijing into an international scientific and technological innovation center, and it should further advance pilot reforms and accelerate the construction of a world-class science and technology park.

China is willing to work with the international community to put into action the principles of "open, fair, just and non-discriminatory" international cooperation in science and technology, and foster a global community of science and technology, Ding said. He urged the international community to jointly create an open innovation ecosystem, cultivate and develop new quality productive forces, and solve major scientific and technological problems. This year's annual conference of the forum is themed "Innovating for a Better World." About 1,000 scientific and technological personnel from home and abroad, business leaders, government officials, and representatives of international organizations attended the opening ceremony.

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China's Clean Energy Sectors Gain Edge via Innovation, Supply Chain

A notion that China's burgeoning clean energy sector is propped up by market-skewing subsidies has been a new whisper in Washington's corridors of power. Yet, an on-the-ground investigation at the nation's industrial powerhouse debunked the myth. A glimpse into the inner workings of a solar panel facility revolutionized by augmented reality (AR), a highly automated and intelligent assembly line of electric vehicles, and a battery manufacturer using smart robotics in warehousing tells a compelling story. Their cost competitiveness, a boon for global consumers and for initiatives to wean off fossil fuels, is a direct result of tech prowess and the strength of supply chains instead of a reliance on subsidies.

AUTOMATED FACTORY

At new energy vehicle (NEV) maker NIO's state-of-the-art manufacturing hub in the eastern Chinese city of Hefei, Anhui Province, an innovative vehicle storage and retrieval platform, aptly named the "Rubik's Cube," efficiently manages over 700 car bodies, facilitating a seamless process for personalized production. Within the bustling workshop, a fleet of over 800 intelligent robots are operating with high precision. These advanced machines are capable of installing four car doors with remarkable accuracy in a mere 98 seconds, achieving an error margin that does not exceed 0.5 millimeters. The entire process, from the moment a customer submits an order to the car's completion on the production line, is streamlined to take just 14 days. Hefei is rapidly emerging as a hub for NEV manufacturing. The city is fortifying its NEV industry infrastructure by successfully attracting key industry players, including the headquarters of NIO, the Volkswagen MEB platform factory, and the BYD Hefei base.

BYD's 2023 annual report revealed that its research and development (R&D) expenditures for the year soared to about 39.6 billion yuan (5.47 billion U.S. dollars), marking a 112 percent year-on-year growth and surpassing Tesla's R&D spending. China's NEV sector is at the forefront of technological innovation, with a significant upsurge in R&D activities. According to a report released in February by Patsnap, a global patent database, the emerging industry saw a 21.9 percent year-on-year growth in the number of invention patent applications filed in 2023, with an impressive 54.9 percent year-on-year increase in overseas patent applications. "China has been taking a proactive approach in the development of new technologies and materials throughout the new energy vehicle industry chain, with a multitude of technological innovations emerging from within the country," said Xia Yingsong, chairman of Zhongding Group.

Zhongding, based in Anhui Province, specializes in a range of automotive components, including sealing solutions, systems for vibration and noise reduction, fluid management, and air suspension systems. "Capitalizing on the benefits of a vast market scale and a diverse array of product types, Chinese manufacturers are verifying the compatibility and stability of automotive components and forging ahead with innovations amid intense market competition," Xia said.

SMART TECH

Tech advancements are also transforming the landscape of solar panel manufacturing in China. At JA Solar's smart photovoltaic module factory in Hefei, an engineer wears 5G-enabled AR glasses and directs his gaze at an assembly machine. With a simple verbal command to capture an image, the AR system, supported by artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms, swiftly presents a detailed equipment inspection report in less than a second, reporting its status: "No vibration, clamping normal, no screw protrusion on the nylon block." This cutting-edge intelligent system, the brainchild of the Hangzhou-based startup Rokid, has boosted the production line's efficiency by over 50 percent. This smart assembly line has contributed to half of the factory's overall production output. Sungrow Power Supply, headquartered in Hefei, is a leading company in China's solar energy sector.

It has incorporated large AI language models into its safety warning protocols and launched a pre-diagnostic system designed to elevate the industry's standards of predictive maintenance. "With this system, we can continuously monitor vital parameters such as voltage, current, and temperature for each battery cell," said Xu Sheng, general manager of Sungrow's smart energy product center. "For a power station capable of generating electricity of 100 megawatt hours, the system can produce a comprehensive diagnostic report in just a single minute," said Xu. This intelligent solution offers proactive alerts up to seven days before the onset of anomalies and has the potential to enhance operational efficiency by 30 percent.

CLUSTER

As China advances in the realm of new quality productive forces, a substantial surge in total factor productivity is recognized as a core hallmark of this progress. Within the expansive 6,000-square-meter three-dimensional warehouse at PTL's Liyang facility in Changzhou, a fleet of 50 intelligent four-way forklifts and 34 transport robots operate tirelessly. These machines meticulously orchestrate the logistics of raw materials for lithium battery anodes, all under the direction of an AI-driven robotic system. The warehouse's operational capabilities have seen a remarkable boost, increasing by 70 percent, while its storage density has been optimized by 30 percent. Moreover, compared with traditional stackers, the system achieves a 30 percent reduction in energy consumption.

The improved logistics efficiency is part of a large picture of the robust supply chain ecosystem that bolsters the NEV industry in China's economically brisk Yangtze River Delta region, where industrial cities such as Hefei and Changzhou are situated. Particularly, Changzhou has risen to prominence as the nation's hub for the manufacturing of power batteries. Regional specialization, paired with a concentrated pool of industrial expertise, has given rise to a self-reinforcing momentum that spurs innovation and effectively drives down production costs. In contrast to traditional fuel-powered vehicles, the cycle for updating NEVs has been

substantially shortened. Minor updates are usually made on an annual basis, while significant overhauls occur every two years.

Scientists from the Chinese Academy of Sciences have located their research center in Liyang County, capitalizing on its proximity to the industry chain, which can facilitate the seamless transformation of their research findings into practical applications. "Over ten of our suppliers have been relocated here in the wake of our own establishment in the city," said Hua Xia, manager of a power battery plant in Liyang under Contemporary Amperex Technology Co., Ltd. (CATL), China's largest automotive lithium-ion battery maker. A multitude of enterprises within the NEV supply chain, complemented by the region's extensive network of high-speed rail and expressway infrastructure, have created a dynamic industry circle within a distance of a four-hour drive, said Song Tingting, chief analyst in the automotive industry at Huatai Securities Research Institute.

"This approach complies with the principle of local sourcing, which can lead to a significant reduction in transportation costs," Song explained. "Furthermore, it endows the supply system with the agility and responsiveness needed to swiftly adapt to changing demands, and this not only boosts production efficiency but also minimizes storage costs." "Bolstered by a robust supply chain infrastructure, Tesla Shanghai is able to commence production and complete deliveries within a single year," Cui Dongshu, secretary general of the China Passenger Car Association, elaborated on China's distinctive advantage in propelling the growth of the NEV sector. This week, Elon Musk said that the Shanghai factory is the company's best-performing factory, thanks to the diligence and wisdom of its Chinese team.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/30/2024

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JAPAN: Seeking to Reclaim Tech Edge with Overseas Help

Massive overseas and domestic investments offer Japan a chance to reclaim its tech crown, but to become a convincing alternative to China the country must embrace rapid innovation, experts say. U.S. tech giants are pumping billions of dollars into artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and chip production in Japan, which dominated the hardware industry in the 1980s. Google launched a regional cyber defense hub in the country last month, and Amazon Web Services is spending \$14 billion to expand Japanese cloud infrastructure. And in the latest move, last week saw Microsoft, a partner of ChatGPT-maker OpenAI, pledge \$2.9 billion to boost the nation's AI prowess. "Geopolitical tensions have made Japan a more attractive and stable partner compared to China," said Khos-Erdene Baatarkhuu, CEO of fintech company AND Global. "Japan's tech sector, once a leader, lost ground due to a slower response to digital and mobile trends" compared with neighbors such as South Korea, he told AFP. But "now, with supportive government policies, resilient start-ups, and a potentially shifting global tech scene, Japan has an opportunity to

regain its tech edge".

It's not there yet, however. Japan was ranked a lowly 32nd in the latest global classification of digital competitiveness by Swiss management school IMD. And only seven Japanese firms appear among more than 1,200 tech "unicorns" -- start-ups worth more than \$1 billion -- listed by CB Insights. A "perfection-seeking approach" and preference for "stability and gradual improvement" among businesses is partly to blame, Khos-Erdene said. "The traditional corporate culture in Japan tends to be risk-averse and hierarchical, which can stifle the rapid innovation typically seen in the software industry." Masayoshi Son, CEO of Japanese tech investment vehicle SoftBank Group, has warned the country could be left a gawping "goldfish" if it ignores AI. "Wake up Japan!" he said at a corporate event in October. "I want to be on the side of evolution." Son and tech titans including Apple boss Tim Cook and Amazon founder Jeff Bezos joined Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and U.S. President Joe Biden at a Washington dinner last Wednesday.

At a summit that day, Kishida and Biden had vowed to strengthen "our shared role as global leaders in the development and protection of next-generation critical and emerging technologies". They also agreed to work with "like-minded countries to strengthen global semiconductor supply chains" in a joint statement. Semiconductors, which power everything from mobile phones to cars, have become a key battleground in recent years. The United States and some European countries have blocked exports of high-tech chip technology to China over fears of military use. Meanwhile, Taiwanese chip behemoth TSMC is facing pressure to diversify its production from customers and governments worried about the possibility of China invading Taiwan. TSMC opened a new \$8.6 billion chip factory in southern Japan in February, and is planning a second, \$20-billion facility for more advanced chips. On a visit to the TSMC plant this month, Kishida said he "felt first-hand the revival of our country's semiconductor industry".

Japan has spent 3.9 trillion yen (\$25 billion) in the past three years on chip-related subsidies -- a larger portion of gross domestic product than the United States or Germany. Japanese firms including Sony and Toyota are also collaborating with U.S. giant IBM on a semiconductor project called Rapidus, aiming to mass-produce two-nanometre logic chips in Japan from 2027. "This is a great time to invest in Japan" with the yen's value at a 34-year low, said Hideaki Yokota, vice president of the specialist IT think-tank MM Research Institute. Tech firms hope the country can become their "best partner in Asia" while its workforce boasts many highly educated engineers ready to be snapped up, he told AFP. Established Japanese businesses, especially in the auto and household appliance sectors, provide real-world opportunities to make AI profitable, he said.

But Khos-Erdene warned that Japan should not rely on its legacy as a manufacturer, given its low labour productivity and shrinking workforce. "As CEO of a tech company,

I see Japan at a crossroads," he said, with the question not if but how quickly the country can become a "producer, not just a consumer, of these transformative technologies". Microsoft plans to offer AI training to three million of Japan's population of 125 million. Japanese and American universities are also teaming up on new technology research programs funded by global companies such as Nvidia and Arm. "Overall, Japan's commitment to AI holds tremendous potential for economic revitalization," Khos-Erdene said. "By fostering collaboration, retaining top talent, and learning from successful models like the U.S. and China, Japan can bridge the AI gap and re-establish itself as a major force in the global tech landscape."

From <https://japantoday.com> 04/15/2024

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Japan Govt to Take Coordinating Role in Future Pandemics

The Japanese government will take a coordinating role and issue instructions to local governments on responses when public health crises involving infectious diseases happen again, based on lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, according to its draft plans. The draft plans seek to take infection prevention measures flexibly to lessen the impact on social and economic activities while calling on local governments and hospitals to sign accords to conduct pandemic response drills in ordinary times. The plans represent the first full-scale update to the central government's 2013 action plan for responding to public health crises involving outbreaks of infectious diseases. The central government plans to adopt the update as early as June. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of clarity over the boundary between the authority of the central and local governments led to confusion over response measures. The draft plans include specific cases in which the central government will give instructions to local governments, such as when restrictions, including requests for shorter business hours at stores, vary by municipality.

From <https://www.nippon.com> 04/19/2024

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Japan to Tighten Export Controls for Cutting-Edge Technologies

The Japanese government will require advance notification from private firms seeking to export cutting-edge technologies such as quantum science, in an effort to prevent such technologies from being diverted to military purposes in countries like Russia and China. Export controls will also be tightened for non-cutting edge fields at risk of being used in conventional weapons, with the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry to request that firms investigate the possibility of such use, it said. A trade ministry ordinance under the foreign exchange and foreign trade law will be amended to include penalties for violations. The law currently requires firms to seek permission from the ministry before exporting technologies in 15 fields, including nuclear power, chemical weapons and cutting-edge materials. The proposed

amendment will strengthen the "catch-all regulation," which covers items not explicitly listed but at risk of being diverted for weapons manufacturing.

The move means that some of Japan's advanced technologies will require prior approval from the trade ministry before being exported if deemed they could be used in weapons in the future, even if the original transaction was for civilian use. Firms will need to notify the ministry of their intention to export such cutting-edge tech, after which they will be provided with information on risks related to trading partners and regions. If there are concerns of military diversion, the export will require permission from the ministry. In light of Russia's use of general-purpose items such as drones in its invasion of Ukraine, the export of goods and technologies in fields not considered cutting-edge will also be subject to approval if investigations find they could be diverted to military use. The ministry will publish criteria to help firms assess whether a transaction is of high risk, aiming to reduce confusion about whether their actions violate the law.

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Japan Reviewing Foods with Function Claims System

A Japanese government panel is reviewing the system allowing food products to be labeled as having specific health benefits, in the wake of deaths and hospitalizations of users of Kobayashi Pharmaceutical Co.'s dietary supplements containing "beni koji" red yeast rice. Aiming to draft measures to overhaul the "foods with function claims" system by the end of May, members of the Consumer Affairs Agency expert panel are focusing on ensuring the safety of functional foods and clarifying standards for reporting health damage. Under the system, makers can obtain permission to make such claims by only reporting in advance certain scientific evidence regarding safety and functionality to the agency. The system has been criticized for leaving it entirely up to functional food makers to guarantee the safety of their products. The agency's current guidelines call for health damage to be reported swiftly. However, the unprecedented beni koji supplement problem had not been reported for some two months since the company discovered it.

From <https://www.nippon.com> 04/30/2024

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SOUTH KOREA: World IT Show 2024 Kicks Off in Seoul

World IT Show 2024, the largest information and communications technology exhibition in South Korea, kicked off Wednesday in Seoul to showcase cutting-edge technologies of local and global companies, its organizer said. The three-day event is themed on "Innovation in everyday life, created by artificial intelligence (AI)," with 446 companies and institutions from 10 countries, including South Korea, attending, according to the Ministry of Science and ICT. Tech giant Samsung Electronics Co.

plans to present its AI platform, Galaxy AI, allowing visitors to experience AI functions on its latest Galaxy S24 smartphone series, including real-time translation. The company said it will also showcase its electronic wallet service, Samsung Wallet, and AI-powered home appliance products. LG Electronics Inc. will exhibit products based on its "affectionate AI," an on-device AI that has strength in orchestrating and fine-tuning various electronics in a user-friendly manner. The products include LG's next-generation mobility vision of "Alpha-able" and Alpha 11, an AI processor which powers organic light-emitting diode TVs. Major mobile carriers, SK Telecom Co. and KT Corp., will also display their AI technologies at the event.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/17/2024

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Yoon Renews Focus on AI, Bio, Quantum Tech

President Yoon Suk Yeol said Monday that artificial intelligence, biotechnology and quantum technology constitute the three major pillars of South Korea's future economy, renewing his push for breakthroughs in research and development. At a Telecommunication Day celebration held in Gwacheon, Gyeonggi Province, Yoon promised during his speech to make South Korea a "top 3 global science technology powerhouse" through massive investment and strategic cooperation with partners in the sectors of AI chips, cutting-edge biotechnology and quantum technology. Yoon's pledge followed similar remarks he made during a Cabinet meeting on March 26, where he described AI, biotechnology and quantum technology as "game-changers" and vowed to invest more in their research. Also in January, during his New Year's greetings with scientists and telecommunication specialists, Yoon promised to provide more budget support and tax relief for investment in the three sectors.

Korea celebrates the foundation of the first post office in Korea on April 22, 1884, and has designated April 22 as Telecommunication Day. The day follows Science Day on April 21, which marks the establishment of the precursor to the Ministry of Science and ICT in 1967. A national celebration for two days takes place every year. According to Yoon's office, Yoon was the first Korean president to have attended the celebration since former President Park Geun-hye eight years ago. At Monday's celebration, Yoon also pledged to carry out reforms on the feasibility analysis required before the launch of a research project, so that scientists involved in the research can "embark on the research in a timely manner." He also vowed to support researchers trailblazing scientific milestones, helping scientists here to embrace the "first-mover" spirit.

Yoon's remarks renewed his conservative administration's push to rejuvenate the national science research landscape, following its abrupt decision last year to cut the science research budget for 2024. The cut was aimed at achieving nationwide research reform to remove red tape and boost transparency in government-backed science projects, according to Yoon's office. The decision to cut the budget by 14.7

percent to 26.5 trillion won (\$19.2 billion) for 2024, seems to have worked against the ruling bloc in the recent April 10 general election. Making matters worse, an incident occurred where a student protesting the budget cut at an event Yoon attended was dragged out with his mouth covered by presidential security. The incident happened when Yoon visited Daejeon, Korea's science hub, to deliver a commencement speech at the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology. In Daejeon, the main opposition Democratic Party of Korea won all seven constituencies.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 04/22/2024

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S. Korea to Seek Global Leadership in AI Chip, Advanced Bio, Quantum Technologies Gov't

South Korea will launch an initiative to become one of three leading nations in the so-called game-changer industries that include artificial intelligence (AI) chip, advanced biology and quantum technologies by 2030, the science ministry said Thursday. The Presidential Advisory Council on Science & Technology held a meeting and decided to adopt the "game-changer technology initiative" aimed at making the country the "first mover" in such areas that the Ministry of Science and ICT said will change the future. The decision came three days after President Yoon Suk Yeol vowed to nurture the science and technology sectors to make South Korea one of the world's top-three countries in the field. Under the initiative, the ministry said South Korea will strengthen investment on AI chip, advanced biology and quantum science technologies, advance the value chain of the markets and bolster strategic cooperation with its allies. For the AI chip industry, the government will work to develop artificial general intelligence, a next-generation AI with equally advanced cognitive ability as human, low power AI and AI safety technologies.

The government also plans to foster innovations in the industry, such as the application of processing-in-memory technology on memory chips and the development of neuromorphic AI semiconductor and advanced chip packaging systems. For the advanced biotechnology industry, the country will focus on fostering digital biotechnologies that connect data, AI and biology, and securing synthetic biology technologies, including DNA and RNA design, protein design and genetic circuit control, according to the ministry. The ministry said the government will also double its budget from this year for quantum science in 2025 to prepare for the era of quantum technology, which will play a pivotal role in the future economy as well as national defense. In detail, the government will bolster the country's capacity in quantum science by developing quantum processor units for quantum computer and quantum algorithm, software, network and sensing technologies, the ministry added.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/25/2024

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INDONESIA: Prioritizing Malaria Control in Eastern Region

Indonesia has been prioritizing malaria control in endemic areas in the country's eastern region, the Health Ministry said on Thursday. "Of the total 418,546 malaria cases in 2023, 369,119 of them were found in Papua, Central Papua, South Papua, and Highland Papua," said Imran Pambudi, the ministry's director of infectious disease prevention and control. Malaria cases in the archipelagic nation fell from 443,530 in 2022 to 418,546 in 2023, but Indonesia still has the second highest cases in Asia after India. With 217,025 cases in 2015, the number of cases has increased within a decade. Pambudi suspected that the increase was triggered by the improved surveillance recording and reporting system. The country has conducted 3 million malaria tests in 2023, mainly in endemic areas.

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MALAYSIA: Making Progress in Combating Plastic Pollution

Malaysia is making progress in combating plastic pollution as it formulates a national policy on plastic production, use and waste, an official said on Friday. The policy includes negotiations and consultations with various stakeholders to ensure results in compliance with the Global Plastics Treaty (GPT) which is currently being negotiated, Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad said in a statement. "The GPT, once in force, will lead to a decrease in unnecessary plastic consumption via a just transition. Malaysia has so far taken part in four rounds of international negotiations on the GPT at the inter-governmental negotiating committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution including in the marine environment," he said. The negotiations for a global plastics treaty stem from the adoption of a landmark resolution at the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly held in Nairobi, Kenya in February 2022.

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Malaysia Sets Up Energy Exchange for Cross-Border Green Electricity Sales

The Malaysian government has agreed to establish Energy Exchange Malaysia (ENEGEM) for cross-border green electricity sales to neighboring countries. The Ministry of Energy Transition and Water Transformation (Petra) said in a statement on Monday that the move is in line with Malaysia's energy transition aspiration and commitment to support regional power integration via the ASEAN Power Grid Initiative. The cross-border sales of energy through the ENEGEM platform will be implemented based on the latest "Guide for Cross-Border Electricity Sales" issued by the Energy Commission. The ministry is also inviting interested and eligible parties to

participate in the inaugural auction for the purchase of green electricity from Malaysia's electricity supply system to be supplied to Singapore via the ENEGEM platform. The auctioning process for cross-border sales of green electricity will commence with a 100 megawatts pilot run, utilizing the existing interconnection between Singapore and Peninsular Malaysia, according to the statement. The ministry believes that the initiation of auctioning via the ENEGEM platform will allow Malaysia to further strengthen its cross-border electricity integration framework, while paving the way for greater renewable energy development and regional cooperation on cross-border energy trading between ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries.

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PHILIPPINES: Hones Skills of Workforce in Digital Technology

The Philippine government is honing the skills of the Filipino workforce in digital technology as the country aims to create 45 million "green and high-quality jobs," according to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) statement released Friday night. During Friday's meeting with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the DTI, Trade and Industry Secretary Alfredo Pascual highlighted the crucial role of digital capabilities in elevating the Philippine workforce. "We are steering our workforce towards high-value tasks that enable them to climb the ladder of value creation," said Pascual, adding that the move "is especially crucial in the field of digital technology, which does not require extensive machinery but focuses on intellectual and creative skills." He said the DTI and DOLE collaboration aims "to establish a robust employment framework focused on job creation, quality, and sustainability." Pascual also announced the government's initiative to create digital learning hubs, which will equip Filipinos with the skills needed to thrive in the global market. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, the digital economy amounted to 2.05 trillion pesos (35.396 billion U.S. dollars) in 2023, contributing 8.4 percent to the country's gross domestic product, while employing 9.68 million people nationwide.

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SINGAPORE: Launching Information Sharing Platform Against Financial Crimes

The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) on Monday launched COSMIC, a digital platform to share customer information among financial institutions to combat money laundering, terrorism financing, and proliferation financing. The platform is developed by the MAS and six commercial banks in Singapore, according to a statement issued by the MAS. Information sharing is currently voluntary and focuses on the misuse of legal persons, the misuse of trade finance for illicit purposes, and proliferation

financing, the MAS noted. COSMIC will help uphold Singapore's reputation as a well-regulated and trusted financial center, said Loo Siew Yee, MAS assistant managing director.

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VIETNAM: Health Ministry Orders Improvement of Medical Service Quality, Risk Prevention

The health ministry has urged medical facilities to improve their management and quality to raise patient safety and satisfaction, as well as minimise risks of medical incidents. The official document is issued following inspections on patient quality and service quality conducted by the Department of Medical Service Administration under the Ministry of Health (MoH). Hospitals under the MoH, provincial and municipal health departments, ministries and universities are required to take measures and be responsible for improving quality and safety at their facilities, preventing and classifying incidents and conducting reports per Circular 43/2018/TT-BYT. They should also review and identify safety concerns that can affect patients and medical workers and promptly address them. Other areas of focus include periodic reviews of technical procedures and standards, especially in classifying emergency cases, infection control as well as medication, equipment and supply management in emergency rooms, intensive care units and surgical departments. Identified risks should be compiled into a mandatory incident reporting list for each facility, including the specifics for each medical speciality, procedure, department and unit function.

In the appendices to this list, the MoH requires that medical facilities accurately identify the patients to avoid confusion in providing services, prevent risks due to miscommunication, and regularly monitor medical records and consultation procedures as regulated. Health facilities must also comply with principles on surgical safety and related checklists as specified in MoH Decision 7482/QĐ-BYT dated December 18, 2018. Medical facilities must also conduct training on patient safety and enhance medical staff's sense of responsibility, including new recruits and interns, in medical incident and risk reporting. They should also raise awareness for cooperation among patients and their caretakers regarding this matter. Inspection and supervision must be strengthened for periodic compliance reports on regulations on medical incident prevention and patient safety. Inspectors and supervisors are responsible for reporting to the unit's management level. In case of a medical incident, managers of the unit must immediately act upon receiving reports and allocate people in charge to contact and calm the patients and their caretakers while proposing appropriate solutions to the issues. They must also provide support to medical practitioners involved in the incidents, avoiding emotional influence and premature conclusions on individual oversight without taking into account systematic errors. The MoH also issues a guideline to differentiate between medication errors (ME) and adverse drug reactions (ADR). Reviews should be conducted to detect

common medication-related incidents in each stage, such as prescription, distribution, use and during monitoring period.

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South Asia

INDIA: Kochi Metro Integrates with ONDC, Bringing Innovation to Urban Travel

Kochi Metro has recently integrated with the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), becoming the second mass rapid transport system after the Chennai Metro to do so. This integration allows travellers to book single or return trips on the Kochi Metro using various apps like Yatri, Paytm, Rapido, redBus, and PhonePe. Additionally, ongoing efforts are to enable ticket bookings through Google Maps, Uber, and EaseMyTrip, highlighting the move towards a unified digital transit system. This development was announced at an event, underscoring Kochi Metro's role in evolving towards a digital multimodal-transit system, facilitating smooth travel experiences across different transport modes. Sanjiv, the Joint Secretary of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), noted at the event that Kochi Metro's integration with ONDC signifies progress in digitizing and optimizing urban transportation, aiming for wider accessibility and efficiency. Bejoy John, a DPIIT Director, emphasized that this initiative supports the vision of a seamless digital ecosystem, benefiting commuters and influencing urban transport policies. This integration, according to T. Koshy, CEO of ONDC, is a crucial step in transforming urban mobility, anticipating further expansions to include a variety of services within this open network. Loknath Behera, KMRL's managing director, remarked on the significance of offering metro ticketing through diverse apps on the ONDC network, aiming for greater accessibility and convenience. Nitin Nair of ONDC highlighted the benefits of QR-based ticketing, offering commuters more options beyond traditional methods. The ONDC aims to accelerate digital adoption, allowing metro services to extend their ticket offerings and innovate further, including integrating shopping for groceries or necessities into the travel experience. Established in 2021 by the DPIIT under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, ONDC is not a specific app or platform but a series of standards promoting open and interoperable digital networks, aimed at transforming and streamlining commercial activities across various sectors.

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Government Approves 11 EV Manufacturers for Incentives Under EMPS

In a move to boost electric vehicle (EV) adoption, the Ministry of Heavy Industries

has given the nod to 11 prominent EV manufacturers for incentives under the Electric Mobility Promotion Scheme (EMPS) 2024. Notable beneficiaries include Ather Energy, Bajaj Auto, Hero MotoCorp, Ola Electric, and Mahindra. Replacing the earlier Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles II (FAME-II) scheme, EMPS has been allocated INR 500 crore and came into effect on April 1, slated to run until July 31. The government has streamlined the certification and approval processes under EMPS, ensuring a smoother experience for applicants, as confirmed by an official. Earlier concerns raised by EV companies regarding potential incentive exclusions for sales post-April 1 have been addressed. Approved companies will be eligible for incentives from their respective approval dates. The government has trimmed the maximum subsidy cap to alleviate the burden on EV manufacturers amid rising demand. Electric two-wheelers will now receive a maximum subsidy of INR 10,000 per vehicle, down from INR 22,500, while electric three-wheelers will receive INR 50,000, down from INR 111,505. Additionally, both categories will benefit from incentives of INR 5,000 per kilowatt-hour (kWh). Government data indicates that FAME-I supported approximately 278,000 pure EVs with total demand incentives of INR 343 crore. FAME-II, initiated in April 2019 with an initial allocation of INR 10,000 crore for three years, was extended until March 2024. Despite subsidy reductions and regulatory changes, EV sales have surged by over 45 per cent this year. Registrations in 2023 nearly hit 1.5 million units, marking a significant uptick from just over 1 million units in the previous year. This growth has propelled India's overall EV penetration to 6.3 per cent from 4.8 per cent in 2022, surpassing the 5 per cent milestone.

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India Takes the Lead in Global Generative AI Adoption

Elastic, the company behind Elasticsearch®, has announced the results of its latest study titled “The Elastic Generative AI Report: One Year On,” shedding light on the impact and challenges of early Generative AI implementation worldwide. According to the report, India emerges as the front-runner in embracing Generative AI (GenAI) technologies, with a staggering 81% of organizations already integrating this cutting-edge technology into their operations. Karthik Rajaram, Area Vice president and General Manager, India, Elastic, expressed, “The disruptive potential of GenAI has captured the imaginations and budgets of India’s IT and data leaders, as seen by India’s lead in GenAI adoption.” He emphasised the importance of businesses adopting search-powered GenAI grounded in business context to drive innovation, efficiency, and customer experiences securely. The report underscores high enthusiasm for GenAI across various regions and industries in India. Despite this enthusiasm, notable challenges persist, particularly in data management and security, with 99% of respondents expressing concerns about data processing and usage. Accessibility and accuracy also remain significant challenges, with 93% highlighting issues in search capabilities. Furthermore, the report indicates that

Indian organisations believe GenAI can significantly enhance productivity, with 73% affirming that conversational data search capabilities would boost operational efficiency. Additionally, 49% anticipate substantial time savings per week per employee through streamlined data search functionalities. In terms of future investments, the report reveals optimistic trends, with 94% of Indian respondents anticipating increased budget allocations towards GenAI initiatives in the next 12-24 months. Moreover, 93% expect this investment trend to continue over the next 24-36 months. The research, conducted in collaboration with independent market research specialist Vanson Bourne, surveyed 3,200 IT decision-makers and influencers across the U.S., Europe, and Asia-Pacific, with 300 respondents from India. Elastic (NYSE: ESTC), the leading search analytics company, leverages search-powered AI to enable real-time data analysis at scale. Built on the Elasticsearch platform, Elastic's solutions cater to security, observability, and search needs, serving thousands of companies globally, including over 50% of the Fortune 500.

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SJVN Inaugurates India's First Multi-purpose Green Hydrogen Pilot Project

In a significant move towards sustainable energy solutions, SJVN Limited has inaugurated India's premier Multi-purpose Green Hydrogen Pilot Project at the Nathpa Jhakri Hydro Power Station (NJHPS) in Jhakri, Himachal Pradesh. Spearheaded by Chairperson and Managing Director Geeta Kapur, the project ushers in a new era of clean energy infrastructure. The innovative initiative inaugurated today aligns closely with the National Green Hydrogen Mission of the Government of India, signaling a proactive stance towards green energy adoption in the power sector. The state-of-the-art Green Hydrogen Pilot Project is set to produce 14 kilograms of Green Hydrogen daily during 8 hours of operation, storing it at a pressure of 30 bars across six storage tanks. Powered by a 20 Nm³/hour capacity alkaline electrolyzer, the project harnesses renewable energy from SJVN's 1.31 MW Solar Power Plant in Wadhal, Shimla. Apart from electricity generation, the green hydrogen will also serve the High-Velocity Oxygen Fuel Coating needs of turbine underwater parts, enhancing operational efficiency and sustainability. During the inauguration, Ms Kapur also unveiled the Centralized Operation system for the 1,500 MW Nathpa Jhakri Hydro Power Station (NJHPS) and 412 MW Rampur Hydro Power Station (Rampur HPS), remotely operating Unit-2 of Rampur HPS from NJHPS Control Room. This achievement underscores SJVN's commitment to technological advancement and operational excellence. Acknowledging the dedicated efforts of the teams involved, She urged continued diligence in realizing the goal of complete operational integration between NJHPS and Rampur HPS. The event witnessed the presence of key figures, including Manoj Kumar (Head of Project, NJHPS), Vikas Marwah (Head of Project, Rampur HPS), Harish Kumar Sharma (Head of Department, Electrical Design), and senior officials from NJHPS,

Rampur HPS, and Corporate Headquarters.

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IREDA Chief Emphasises Innovative Funding for Renewable Tech by Elets News Network

Pradip Kumar Das, the Chairperson and Managing Director of the Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Ltd. (IREDA), highlighted the need for Innovative Financing Solutions for New and Emerging Renewable Energy Technologies at the 26th edition of the World Energy Congress in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Participating in a panel discussion titled “The New Interdependencies: Trust, Security, and Climate Resilience,” Pradip Kumar Das illuminated India's strides in energy transition and underscored IREDA's pivotal role in fostering renewable energy adoption within the nation. In his discourse, the IREDA CMD delineated India's ambitious objective of attaining 500 GW of non-fossil-fuel energy capacity by 2030, positioning the nation as a beacon of hope in combating climate change globally. Furthermore, he accentuated India's commitment to achieving Net Zero emissions by 2070, highlighting the country's ascent to the fourth position globally in renewable energy installed capacity, propelled by rapid progress in the renewable energy sector. As the foremost pure-play green financing Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC) in India, IREDA assumes a critical role in expediting the energy transition. The CMD underscored IREDA's endeavors in facilitating financing for energy transition projects, leveraging innovative financial instruments to mitigate risks, and fostering private sector participation in the renewable energy domain. The panel discussion also delved into the ongoing global energy crisis, with Pradip Kumar Das emphasising the imperatives of diversification and robust infrastructure to ensure energy security. He advocated for the integration of regional markets through robust power networks. He proposed allocating 4%-5% of Assets Under Management (AUM) from domestic pension/insurance funds into renewable energy bonds to deepen the bond market and attract additional global and local investments. In his closing remarks, the CMD reaffirmed IREDA's unwavering commitment to a green economy, attracting investments, spearheading technological advancements, and advocating for policy reforms. As India strides towards achieving Net Zero emissions by 2070, IREDA stands steadfast at the forefront, guiding the trajectory towards a sustainable and secure energy future.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Students from Regions Enroll in IT Hub-Framed Training

The IT Hub Azerbaijan project has taught around 100 students from various regions in Azerbaijan, Executive Director of the Center for Analysis and Coordination of the IV Industrial Revolution (4SIM) Fariz Jafarov said, Trend reports. He made a remark during the closing ceremony of the IT Hub Azerbaijan project. "Within the framework of the IT Hub Azerbaijan project, 100 students from the country's regions, including the cities of Ganja, Sumgayit, Lankaran, Mingachevir, Shirvan, and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic were trained," he said. To note, the project IT Hub: Attracting Foreign Direct Investments in Azerbaijan's Information and Communication Sector (IT Hub Azerbaijan) is being carried out in collaboration with the Center for Analysis and Coordination of the IV Industrial Revolution (4SIM) of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy, StrategEast Company, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). It aims to promote the development of ICT in Azerbaijan by training and employing qualified professionals.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/02/2024

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Azerbaijan Develops E-Map for Water Resources Assessment

The Azerbaijan State Water Resources Agency has produced an e-map to estimate Azerbaijan's water resources, Advisor to Chairman of the agency Asad Shirinov said this at the "Climate Change View from Space" event held in Baku, Trend reports. He noted that e-water maps reflecting the hydro-geological-ameliorative condition of irrigated lands have been developed for territories of separate administrative districts of Azerbaijan, and an information service on the unified network has been established. "The agency has developed an e-map to evaluate water resources, containing comprehensive details. In the last two years, 150 state-of-the-art water meters have been installed nationwide, with preparations ongoing for an additional 40 installations. The data gathered from these measurements will be seamlessly integrated into the "Electronic Water Management" information system in real-time," he said. According to him, on the one hand, we are witnessing more and more severe floods, especially in the summer. On the other hand, prolonged droughts due to increased temperatures continue to strain our water resources greatly. "These occurrences not only endanger agricultural endeavors but also directly impact food security, economic sectors, and the social welfare of the populace. Space observation stations and satellites play a vital role in monitoring sea levels, ice caps, and the increasing carbon footprint of human activities in our atmosphere, providing insights into Earth that would otherwise be inaccessible," he added. To note, a new electronic platform, which consists of five sections in two languages, was launched to the public on 5 April. The information published here, based on Azersky satellite data, will contribute to raising awareness of climate change.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/05/2024

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Azerbaijan Prioritizes Investing in Green Projects

Finance is a key requirement for tripling the use of renewable energy by 2030, Azerbaijani Minister of Energy Parviz Shahbazov said, Trend reports. He made the remark at the high-level plenary session themed Tripling Renewable Energy, hosted by the 14th Assembly of the International Renewable Energy Agency's (IRENA) in Abu Dhabi. "Investments should be aimed toward the building of production capacities, integration with the energy system, boosting and modernizing power grid capacity, the installation of interconnectors, and energy storage systems," the minister noted. He assessed Azerbaijan's accession to the Global Promises on Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency as evidence of its commitment to the green energy shift. The minister once again emphasized that the opportunity to host COP29 in Azerbaijan provides the country with a chance to enhance achievements in renewable energy development. "COP29 will become an important platform for mobilizing efforts to adopt new global collective financial goals," he added. This November, Azerbaijan will host COP29. This decision was made at the COP28 plenary meeting held in Dubai on December 11 last year. Baku will become the center of the world and will receive about 70,000–80,000 foreign guests. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is an agreement signed at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 to prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system. The COP—the Conference of the Parties—is the highest legislative body overseeing the implementation of the Framework Convention on Climate Change. There are 198 countries that are parties to the Convention. Unless the parties agree otherwise, the COP is held annually. The first COP event took place in March 1995 in Germany's Berlin, and its secretariat is located in Bonn.

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KYRGYZSTAN: To Restrict Access to TikTok

Kyrgyzstan will restrict access to TikTok, the Ministry of Digital Development of Kyrgyzstan told Trend. As per the ministry's statement, prompted by a letter from the State Committee for National Security of Kyrgyzstan, the Service for Regulation and Supervision of the Communications Industry under the Ministry of Digital Development has issued a directive to telecom operators urging them to implement measures to restrict access to the service. "The decision was grounded on the service's failure to adhere to Article 2-1 of Kyrgyzstan's Law "On Measures to Prevent Harm to Children's Health and Physical, Intellectual, Mental, Spiritual, and Moral Development," which outlines the types of information deemed detrimental to children's health and development," the statement reads. To note, this is not the first attempt to block TikTok in Kyrgyzstan. In August 2023, the Ministry of Culture announced its intention to ban TikTok in the country; however, no consequences followed.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/17/2024

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: NSW Government to Support Early Childhood Services to Trial Longer Hours and Expanded Care

Working families across NSW are set to benefit from more access to early childhood education and care, including new programs, longer hours, weekend operating hours and additional places, as part of a new \$20 million program. The Flexible Initiatives Trial (FIT) aims to address parents' barriers to workforce participation, particularly for women, by supporting early childhood services to adapt their offerings and hours where a local community need is identified. Some 16 early childhood education and care (ECEC) services across metropolitan and regional NSW will receive more than \$2.8 million in funding as the first round of successful applicants is announced.

Examples of the family-friendly benefits can include: •extending hours of operation beyond traditional working hours •providing flexible pick-up and drop-off times •giving families the ability to make occasional or ad hoc care arrangements •establishing new family day care services in rural and remote areas •partnerships between two different service types to provide extended or wraparound care Successful applicants through this round include Plumpton Long Day Care & Preschool, where an early intervention preschool program is now being developed and the number of licensed places is being increased by 10. According to data from the Australia Early Development Census, there is a large number of high needs children in the Plumpton area, and the service is developing an early intervention program that will complement its existing preschool program.

Other successful applicants include Possum Early Childhood Centre in Hazelbrook extending their operating hours by three hours each day, Clarence Community Preschool in Grafton who will begin offering services on Saturday and Sunday, and The Yarm Gwanga Preschool and Early Education Centre in Armidale, which will expand their service by 50 new places to provide University of New England staff, students and members of the public with increased work and study options. A full list of successful Round 1 trial applicants is below. This is just part of the NSW Labor Government's long-term commitment to support children and young families in the early years, which includes an historic \$769 million investment to build 100 new public preschools in NSW, which is the largest investment in public preschools in the state's history.

We have also committed \$60 million to build and upgrade preschools at 50 non-government schools in areas where they are needed most, and \$17 million to support capital works for early childhood services. The NSW Government is also growing the number of early childhood workers through a major scholarship program,

which continues to see a record number of applicants. Deputy Premier and Minister for Education and Early Learning Prue Car said: “Every child in NSW deserves to start school with strong educational foundations, and we know early childhood education is vital in setting young children up for success. “This trial is supporting existing services to expand their offerings and respond to the needs of their local communities. “This will look different in different areas across the state, with more flexibility and expanded offerings, which is a great outcome for parents and our youngest learners.”

The 16 services to receive grants are: •Little Genius Cottage, Chifley •Possum Early Childhood Centre, Hazelbrook •Nurture and Grow Early Learning Centre, Miranda •Dee Why Children’s Centre, Dee Why •Plumpton Long Day Care and Preschool, Plumpton •Tyndale Early Learning Centre, Blacktown •Diocese of Broken Bay Early Learning Centre, Forestville •Bundgeam Preschool, Kyogle •Bowral Street Childcare, Bowral •Denison Street Early Learning Centre, Tamworth •Menindee Children’s Centre, Menindee •Federal Community Children’s Centre, Federal •Yarm Gwanga Preschool and Early Education Centre, Armidale •Clarence Community Preschool, Grafton •Yamba Early Learning Centre, Yamba •A new family day care service, to be run by Bega Valley Family Day Care

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 04/29/2024

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NEW ZEALAND: Government Creates Establishment Board for Charter Schools

Associate Education Minister David Seymour has announced the Charter School | Kura Hourua Establishment Board to guide the formation of the charter school model, so that the first schools can open in 2025. “Charter schools will provide educators with greater autonomy, create diversity in New Zealand’s education system, free educators from state and union interference, and raise overall educational achievement, especially for students who are underachieving or disengaged from the current system,” says Mr Seymour. The Charter School | Kura Hourua Establishment Board will provide strategic oversight and advice on the implementation of the Charter School | Kura Hourua model. The Board will work with the Ministry of Education on key decisions relating to the initial establishment of the charter school model and ongoing functions and management of the model.

“I’m very pleased to announce the appointment of leading educator Justine Mahon as Chair of the Establishment Board. Justine has considerable experience as a teacher and principal at all levels of the education system, from primary schooling through to tertiary, including in teacher training and development,” says Mr Seymour. “Justine will be joined by a further seven members who bring deep knowledge and expertise from across the education sector and other key areas that are important for the model’s success, including commercial, property and private sector expertise.

Members possess knowledge of what has worked well in overseas models of charter schools, as well as the interests of Māori and Pacific communities. “The pilot run by the previous government that ACT was part of is informing the revised charter school model.

Notably, charter schools were subject to high levels of monitoring and accountability and were shut down when they did not achieve the outcomes they were funded to achieve. State schools don’t have this accountability. “I hope and intend to see many new charter schools opening, and state and state-integrated schools converting to become charter schools. I will have more announcements on the charter school model in due course.” Members appointed to the Charter School | Kura Hourua Establishment Board are: – Justine Mahon (Chair) – Glen Denham – John Fiso ONZM – Dr Nina Hood – Neil Paviour-Smith – Rōpata Taylor – Doran Wyatt – Professor Elizabeth Rata

From <https://voxy.co.nz> 04/02/2024

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Government Urged to Be Proactive in Protecting Aid Workers in Gaza

PSNA has written to the government urging it to be pro-active in protecting aid workers in Gaza. This week six international aid workers were killed by an Israeli Defence Force drone attack (three British, one Canadian, one Polish and one Australian) “These killings were 100% predictable”, says PSNA National Chair John Minto. “If the government had spoken out condemning Israel for the prior killing of 196 Palestinian aid workers over the past few months Israel would not be continuing to target those providing humanitarian aid.” “It’s our failure to hold Israel to account for its slaughter of Palestinians, including Palestinian aid workers, which is the reason for this latest tragedy” “Our government has taken a blatantly pro-Israel/US stance on the war and has refused at any point to condemn any of Israel’s genocidal actions in Gaza – including the wholesale killing of Palestinian aid workers. Anyone paying attention knows that Israel has been targeting aid workers and has killed hundreds in recent weeks. It is part of Israeli plans to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from Gaza. “The most important thing New Zealand can do is use a clear moral voice to call out Israel’s war crimes and in this case Israel’s actions to create a human-induced famine for Palestinians”

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CCC Issues Warning over Further Climate Delay

Today’s advice from the Climate Change Commission paints a sobering reality of the challenge we face in combating climate change, especially in light of recent Government policy announcements. “We once were proud to punch above our

weight on the world stage but today's draft advice from the Climate Change Commission tells us there's a lot of work to do if we hope to live up to that legacy," says Green Party co-leader Chlöe Swarbrick. "Science has evolved on the inconvenient non-negotiables for a liveable planet and it says we must do more, faster, across every sector from transport to farming. "Today the Government re-committed to existing targets two hours before new independent, expert advice said those targets needed strengthening in light of developing science and experience – least of all the memories of many New Zealanders hit with devastating climate-change-charged weather these past few years. "In our strong Green tradition, we are ready and willing to reach across the aisle here and do the work necessary to secure all of our futures. This work is bigger than any politician or political party. "We're calling on the Government to take this draft advice seriously and act accordingly. We will relentlessly hold them to account to the action necessary for life on earth as we know it. "Today the Prime Minister made a lot of noise about ambition. Updating these emissions targets in line with the science isn't ambitious. It's baseline decency required of all world leaders," says Chlöe Swarbrick.

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Fire and Emergency Levy Increase Unjustified, Performance Review Needed

The Taxpayers' Union is today releasing a report highlighting the significant failure of Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) to realise the expected efficiency gains following the 2017 mega-merger of fire services. The report concludes that the Minister of Internal Affairs should stop the 1 July levy increase and perform an independent examination into the operation, management and governance of FENZ. The full report, *Up in Smoke: Is There a Failure of Governance by the Board of Fire & Emergency New Zealand and the Department of Internal Affairs?*, can be read [here](#). Key findings of the report include: The efficiency gains, expected by the 2016 Cabinet, have not materialised; Expenses have continued to increase very significantly; and Spending on consultants and professional fees have grown substantially.

The report's author, Ray Deacon, said: "It has become clear across multiple Taxpayers' Union reports that Fire and Emergency has failed to deliver on its promises and extracting an additional \$85 million in levies from the domestic and commercial sectors of the economy across each of the next two years is simply unjustified, as this report explains. "A demand for a further 5.2% increase lacks credibility. Minister van Velden is right to question the need for this. But the Minister needs to go much further. The 12.8% levy increase from 1 July 2024 needs to be stopped. A full and comprehensive independent post-implementation review of the actual costs and benefits of the merger needs to be undertaken. "It is difficult to believe that Cabinet would have approved the merger if the actual expenditure was

known.”

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Lack of Political Will to Improve Lives of Disabled People in New Zealand

Once again, the one in four New Zealanders with a disability are not a priority for this Government, says IHC New Zealand. This is despite it being over 20 years since the National Health Committee’s report ‘To Have An Ordinary Life’ that asked that Government ensure that intellectually disabled people have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else, including in decisions about where and how they live. That report also called for the Government to urgently address the systemic neglect of the health of intellectually disabled people, something on which there has been no action in the following 20 years. Last year, IHC conducted its own research that showed intellectually disabled people still die up to 20 years earlier than everyone else.

IHC Director of Advocacy Tania Thomas says the data also showed significant disparities in healthcare, with intellectually disabled people continuing to be treated at much higher rates for most major mental and physical health conditions. “We also found intellectually disabled people experience significant socioeconomic challenges, including less education, limited employment opportunities and a persistent income gap, especially in older age groups,” says Tania. “Using Government data, we were able to shed light on the living conditions and experiences of intellectually disabled people, revealing issues such as limited internet access, infrequent travel overseas and frequent residential moves. “Intellectually disabled children were found to face more housing challenges, higher rates of parental separation, and increased vulnerability to crime and domestic violence.

“The report highlighted the overrepresentation of intellectually disabled people in the justice system, with higher rates of criminal convictions and incarceration compared to the general population. “The report enhances our understanding of the lives that intellectually disabled people lead and is a valuable resource for policymakers, healthcare professionals, advocates, and researchers striving to promote inclusivity, equity and improved quality of life for intellectually disabled individuals worldwide.

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Govt Forces DOC to Shed 130 Jobs Despite Fragile State of Natural Environment

The reckless nature of the Government’s cost cutting drive has again been exposed

with DOC forced to make big cuts at a time when it is struggling to protect the conservation estate – the jewel in our tourism crown. DOC told staff today the Government had ordered it to cut spending by 6.5%. It proposes cutting 130 positions. On top of this, DOC must find another \$7.2million to meet cost pressures now and faces increasing costs such as repairing damage from more frequent storm events. “This Government’s short sighted cost cutting drive is putting at risk the valuable work of an agency which safeguards our national identity and the jewel in our tourism crown,” said Duane Leo, National Secretary for the Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi. “Nobody wants to see DOC’s tracks and huts run down, or don’t want to hear the call of the bellbird and kiwi in the bush, yet we are now seeing cuts that could impact all this. “DOC warned the new Conservation Minister that ‘the state of nature in New Zealand is in decline and significant habitats and species are at risk’.

From <https://voxy.co.nz> 04/10/2024

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Navigating an Unstable Global Environment

New Zealand is renewing its connections with a world facing urgent challenges by pursuing an active, energetic foreign policy, Foreign Minister Winston Peters says. “Our country faces the most unstable global environment in decades,” Mr Peters says at the conclusion of two weeks of engagements in Egypt, Europe and the United States. “We cannot afford to sit back in splendid isolation in the South Pacific, pontificate smugly, and talk exclusively to those countries we agree with. It is critical that we show up, listen to all perspectives, and enhance partnerships with our traditional friends, so that we can adapt to the complex global environment and protect and advance New Zealand’s security and prosperity.

“New Zealand needs to engage with our international partners, listen carefully, make sound judgments about our national interest, and contribute credibly. That is precisely what we are doing, at the same time as urgently addressing the issues that matter to New Zealanders at home,” Mr Peters says. “It is the New Zealand Government’s job to engage with the world as it is, not as we wish it to be, and to understand how other nations view the major issues of our times. This has been a major focus of the Coalition Government’s first four-and-a-half months, so we can repair the damage done to our international reputation by the last three years of inaction and neglect.”

During his current period of travel, Minister Peters held official talks with Foreign Ministers from Belgium, Egypt, the European Union, Netherlands, Poland, South Korea, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as the leadership of the United Nations, NATO and the Arab League. “The conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine are two preoccupying crises facing the world today, and New Zealand is doing its part to play a constructive role and make a credible contribution. At the

same time, the primary focus of our international agenda must be closer to home – and we must contribute to bringing about a freer, more prosperous and more secure Indo-Pacific region. “This visit has reinforced the Coalition Government’s view that New Zealand has an important role to play in our region and indeed the world, and the best way to have the most impact is to work together intensively with other countries that share our values and strategic interests.”

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Removing Red Tape to Help Early Learners Thrive

The Government is making legislative changes to make it easier for new early learning services to be established, and for existing services to operate, Associate Education Minister David Seymour says. The changes involve repealing the network approval provisions that apply when someone wants to establish a new early learning service, and stopping the introduction of new person responsible requirements that were taking effect in August of this year. “Providers and parents are best placed to decide where early learning services should be established. Where there’s demand from parents providers will follow,” says Mr Seymour. “Current network approval provisions introduced by Labour give government the right to decide where services should be. They also make setting up new services complex and inhibit competition.

“This gets in the way of early childhood professionals delivering effective, affordable and accessible services to parents and their children. We have to understand what the purpose of regulation is, and ensure whether, on balance, regulation is the appropriate tool to use. Mr Seymour is also proposing to revoke the National Statement on the Network of Licensed Early Childhood Services as soon as possible, to make granting approvals for new services faster, while the legislation is repealed. Consultation on this proposal opens today and runs until 5 May 2024. The Government also intends to make it easier for service providers to ensure key supervisory roles are filled. Removing the new requirement for a higher level of certification will mean that persons responsible will not need to obtain a Full (Category One or Two) Practising Certificate.

“The requirement had the potential to result in increased fees, reduced operating hours, or even closure for some services, due to a lack of fully certificated teachers,” says Mr Seymour. “Services in rural areas and lower socio-economic areas were most likely to suffer due to staffing and funding challenges.” Teachers will still need a recognised teaching qualification and a practicing certificate, and all early learning services will still need to comply with current licencing requirements including all relevant health and safety regulations. Implementation of the requirements for changing the identity of the service provider on the service licence are also on hold following concerns raised by the sector. “Early learning centres are a key part of our

education system and are important for working parents who need somewhere to affordably send their children,” says Mr Seymour. The Government has also signalled its intention to review all regulations governing the early childhood education sector, with the newly created Ministry for Regulation conducting a regulatory review. “We need to strip unnecessary compliance and cost so our early learning professionals can be focussed on education and care of children. After all, costs cannot all be absorbed – they eventually land on the parents.”

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Govt Cuts Doctors and Nurses in Hiring Freeze

Cuts to frontline hospital staff are not only a broken election promise, it shows the reckless tax cuts have well and truly hit the frontline of the health system, says Labour Health spokesperson Ayesha Verrall. “Hospitals are being blocked from appointing doctors to vacant roles as Health New Zealand chiefs have called for a nationwide hiring freeze this week, including for roles that were so close to being filled the candidates had completed the interview progress,” said Ayesha Verrall. “Te Whatu Ora are turning doctors and nurses away from jobs. Managers have been told that all vacant positions are being reviewed and potentially cut. “Minister of Health Shane Reti campaigned on a health workforce crisis in New Zealand, but now he is blocking Te Whatu Ora from hiring the clinicians needed. “The Finance Minister has insisted frontline services like health will not be impacted by public service cuts, but that is exactly what is happening in Te Whatu Ora now. Fewer doctors and nurses are the price of National’s tax cuts. “Labour built a surgical hospital on Auckland’s North Shore but it is lying idle because this government is blocking clinician recruitment. “Under Labour almost 2000 nurses were hired in the year to September, but it hasn’t taken long for National to undo that progress. This Government is taking New Zealand backwards,” said Ayesha Verrall.

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Govt Cuts Unbelievably Target Child Exploitation, Violent Extremism, Ports and Airports

Some of our country’s most important work, stopping the sexual exploitation of children and violent extremism could go along with staff on the frontline at ports and airports. “Today we’ve learned that 79 positions are on the chopping block at Customs and 41 at the Department of Internal Affairs,” Labour Leader Chris Hipkins said. “It includes staff in the child exploitation team, as well as roles combatting violent extremism and money laundering at the Department of Internal Affairs. Frontline staff at ports and airports have also been confirmed, including more than halving Auckland’s detector dog trainers. “This shows nothing is safe from the National Government’s cuts. “Today’s job losses are not only an appalling lack of

judgement by a Government that claims its serious about cracking down on crime, it shows they also aren't serious about tackling the tobacco black market as they claimed during the roll-back of the tobacco legislation.

"It brings the total job cuts to about 3150. That's over 3000 households affected by a Government desperately scrambling to pay for irresponsible tax cuts with frontline jobs. This is a choice and the choice is not worth it. "The digital child exploitation team leads important work cracking down on criminals and is New Zealand's bridge to international law enforcement agencies. It identified more than 90,000 online accounts that traded or possessed child sexual abuse material in a single mission in 2022 and 46 people based in New Zealand were arrested as a result. "The idea that roles of this kind should be scrapped is not only bizarre, it's frankly appalling. National is going too far, placing huge risk back on children and young people not just on our shores but further afield. "We have heard time and time again that frontline services will not be cut, but now we have a hiring freeze imposed on already short-staffed hospitals, children are being forgotten as Oranga Tamariki shrinks, and education outcomes will be kicked to the curb along with roles working on the school lunch programme and in the school property team. "This National Government's choices are taking New Zealand backwards," Chris Hipkins said.

From <https://voxy.co.nz> 04/22/2024

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Further Environmental Mismanagement on the Cards

The Government's resource management reforms will add to the heavy and ever-growing burden this Government is loading on to our environment. "This legislation will accelerate the decline of our natural world and add fuel to the climate crisis fire in what is another classic case of environmental mismanagement from this Government," says Green Party environment spokesperson Lan Pham. "This is an absurd dereliction of duty that will do nothing to build the infrastructure New Zealand needs, and will instead accelerate environmental decline. "The Government is hellbent on pushing our natural environment to the brink, exploiting everything it can for any profit that can be squeezed out of it. "Halting work to protect significant natural areas will harm indigenous biodiversity, destroying the plants and animals that set Aotearoa apart from the rest of the world.

"The repeal of winter grazing regulations will worsen the pollution in our waterways and increase the level of harm our animals are exposed to. For decades, successive governments have allowed farms to be run like factories, with a profit-at-any-cost approach. This represents another step in the wrong direction. "Easing the consenting process for coal mining is as unscientific as it is dangerous for both people and planet. If anyone needed one basic rule for dealing with the climate crisis it would be to stop burning fossil fuels. "The actions of this Government will go down in history as the most anti-environment we have ever seen. "Winding back

freshwater protections will accelerate the demise of one of our most precious natural resources. Due to decades of neglect, many of our rivers and lakes are unsafe to swim in, whilst native freshwater species that depend upon the health of our water face extinction. This situation is urgent, something the Government is choosing to ignore. “Nearly half (45 per cent) of New Zealand’s total river length was not suitable for activities like swimming between 2016 and 2020 based on Campylobacter infection risk. A shocking 68 per cent of indigenous freshwater birds were threatened with extinction or at risk of becoming threatened in 2021. It is now also estimated that only 10 percent of our historic wetlands remain, despite these being vital for the survival of many threatened plants and animals.

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Ministry of Social Development Sheds 200 Workers, More Cuts to Come

The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) has told staff today there will be further job cuts after accepting voluntary redundancy applications from 200 workers. Earlier this month MSD called for voluntary redundancies across parts of its Service Delivery teams at national and regional offices, its Māori Communities and Partnerships team, and its People and Capability, Policy, Strategy and Insights, Organisational Assurance and Communication functions as well as its Transformation group. “As we said then, and as we say firmly now, reducing MSD’s workforce at a time of rising need as job losses are increasing and people are struggling with the cost of living and as our ageing population grows, is simply a reckless move,” said Kerry Davies National Secretary for the Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi.

Today, MSD told staff to prepare for further job cuts in a proposal to be announced during the week of 20 May. “Further downsizing of this important Ministry does not make sense. These are the very people who make the system work effectively for the hundreds of thousands of New Zealanders who need the support that MSD provides. “MSD is also targeting the Transformation Group for change, the team tasked with simplifying processes for New Zealanders accessing services they need to get by. Isn’t that the efficiency the Government wants? “What the Government is forcing MSD and many other ministries to do, is to drain the oil out of the engine, and somehow still expect the machinery of government to run smoothly. This really is dumb stuff. “Today, the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance reacted to proposed cuts at the Customs Service frontline and to teams at Internal Affairs dealing with child exploitation and online scams and claimed frontline services will not be impacted. “Frontline jobs going means frontline services will be impacted. “Likewise, forcing MSD to shed 200 jobs, and make further cuts, will also impact the very real and much needed support MSD workers provide New Zealanders up and down the country.

4、 Economic and Social Development and ICT

Asia-Pacific

The Blue Dot Network Begins Global Certification Framework for Quality Infrastructure, Hosted by the OECD

The Blue Dot Network (BDN), the first global certification framework for quality infrastructure projects, will begin certifying projects and be hosted at the OECD. The BDN will now oversee the global roll-out of a certification framework which aims to help mobilise investment into projects that maximise the positive economic, social, environmental and development impact of infrastructure. Certifications will be awarded by independent, third-party certification bodies, which will be responsible for ensuring the credibility of sustainability commitments through evidence and data. While hosted at the OECD, the BDN will be an independent entity overseen by the initiative's member governments: Australia, Japan, Spain, Switzerland, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In addition to the governing members, the BDN is supported by the governments of Canada and Czechia. "Infrastructure investment is a key enabler of growth, facilitating business opportunities, opening up new markets for trade, and enhancing productivity. To fully realise these significant potential benefits, we need to scale up both the quality and quantity of investment," **OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann** said. "Today marks a key milestone for the Blue Dot Network. The Network will work together with independent, third-party certification bodies, to make the Blue Dot Network certification available to quality projects worldwide – with Blue Dot Network certifications providing a powerful tool to attract critical infrastructure finance."

BDN certification sends a clear signal to investors and other stakeholders of the robustness, resilience, and positive impact of infrastructure projects. This mark of quality is aligned with 10 elements, based on existing international standards:

1. Promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth and development.
2. Promote market-driven and private sector-led investment, supported by judicious use of public funds.
3. Support sound public financial management, debt transparency, and project-level and country-level debt sustainability.
4. Build projects that are resilient to climate change, disasters, and other risks, and aligned with the pathways towards 2050 net-zero emissions needed to keep global temperature change of 1.5 degrees Celsius within reach.
5. Ensure value-for-money over an asset's full life-cycle cost.

6. Build local capacity, with a focus on local skills transfer and local capital markets.
7. Promote protections against corruption, while encouraging transparent procurement and consultation processes.
8. Uphold international best practices of environmental and social safeguards, including respect for labour and human rights.
9. Promote the non-discriminatory use of infrastructure services.
10. Advance inclusion for women, people with disabilities, and underrepresented and marginalised groups.

The Executive Consultation Group, a global community of executives and leaders across the infrastructure sector, including financing institutions, developers, civil society and trade unions, have supported the development of the BDN to ensure the certification responds to global demand with credibility and efficiency. The Group has provided extensive feedback on the certification framework and put forward pilot projects that have demonstrated the operability of the certification in promoting sustainable and responsible infrastructure development. *For more information about the Blue Dot Network and its certification framework, please visit the [BDN website](#) or contact [Edwin Lau](#), Head of the Blue Dot Network (ai) and [Juan Garin](#), Policy Advisor for Sustainable Finance and Infrastructure. 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/> 04/09/2024

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World Bank Raises Polish Growth Forecast to 3% in 2024 Sluggish Growth Delays Economic Recovery in Emerging Europe and Central Asia

The World Bank increased its annual GDP growth forecast for Poland to 3.0% in 2024, primarily on the back of the recovery in private consumption, but economic activity in the emerging and developing economies of the [Europe and Central Asia](#) region is likely to slow this year as a weaker global economy, tight monetary policy, slowdown in China and lower commodity prices weigh on the region's growth outlook, according to the Economic Update for the region. The GDP growth forecast for Poland was increased by 0.4 ppt compared to the Bank's October projections. Stronger growth is expected mainly thanks to factors that support consumption: decelerating inflation, real wage growth, tight labor markets, as well as higher social transfers and benefits. The 2025 growth forecast for Poland remained unchanged at 3.4% compared to the Bank's previous projections. Investment growth, driven by structural reforms and unlocked EU funds, will additionally support Polish growth in 2025. Regional growth is likely to slow to 2.8% this year, following substantial strengthening to 3.3% in 2023 as the economies of both Russia and war-hit Ukraine returned to growth and because of a more robust recovery in Central Asia. Regional

output growth is likely to remain broadly unchanged in 2025. Headwinds to the outlook are multiple. A slower-than-expected recovery in key trading partners, especially in the euro area, restrictive monetary policies, and an exacerbation of geopolitical developments could further dampen growth across the region.

“Countries of Europe and Central Asia continue to confront multiple crises, exacerbated by a challenging global growth environment,” said **Antonella Bassani, World Bank Vice President for the Europe and Central Asia** region. *“Reviving productivity growth by stimulating business dynamism and improving resilience against the risks from climate change can help protect the region’s people and accelerate economic growth.”* Sluggish growth will further delay the region’s recovery from recent shocks, including Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which remains ongoing, the pandemic, and the 2022 cost-of-living crisis. Inflation has fallen faster than expected in the emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs) of Europe and Central Asia, largely due to steep declines in global energy and food prices. The median annual consumer price inflation in the region fell to 4.2% by February 2024 from 15% at the start of 2023. Nevertheless, the 2022 cost-of-living crisis continues to affect households despite increases in real incomes last year. In Ukraine, the pace of recovery is projected to slow to 3.2% this year from 4.8% in 2023, reflecting a smaller harvest and persistent labor shortage. The country’s economic outlook remains conditional on donor support and the duration of Russia’s invasion. According to recent estimates by the World Bank and partner institutions, the cost of reconstruction and recovery in Ukraine has grown to \$486 billion, which is more than two times the size of Ukraine’s pre-war economy in 2021.

Growth in Türkiye is also likely to weaken to 3% this year – its lowest since 2009, except for the pandemic-affected years – as macroeconomic consolidation efforts are expected to restrain domestic demand. Subdued global oil prices will dampen prospects across Central Asia, with growth slowing to 4.1% this year from an estimated 5.5% in 2023. The report includes a special focus chapter on unleashing the power of the private sector. It notes that economic development in the region has been a story of transition from plan to market economies, broad and deep structural reforms, and the emergence of private initiative, the main driver of growth and prosperity. In less than three decades, 12 of the countries in the region joined the European Union (EU). The transition of these countries to EU-integrated market economies with robust institutions and production structures illustrates the success of the deep reforms of some of the countries, which have also achieved high-income status.

“The private sector in several countries in the region faces barriers, which hamper its ability to expand and innovate,” said **Ivailo Izvorski, World Bank Chief Economist for Europe and Central Asia** region. *“Boosting business dynamism will require addressing several challenges, including upgrading the competition environment, reducing state involvement in the economy, improving the quality of education, and*

strengthening the availability of finance for firms.” Efforts to foster competition and free markets should focus on reducing barriers to entry and facilitate exit for unproductive firms. The substantial presence of state-owned enterprises is also a major constraint to levelling the playing field for private enterprises. Private firms are also faced with an inadequately educated workforce and large skills gaps, which are major constraints to growth. High emigration rates of young and skilled workers do not help in the short term. A better educated workforce is associated with higher productivity and can lead to more innovation. Bank lending to the private sector is relatively low and has not increased in the past decade. The lending also tends to be more short-term. To improve productivity growth and innovation, firms need access to long-term finance.

GDP Growth Summary 2020-25

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
ECA	-1.7	7.3	1.5	3.3	2.8
ECA excl. the Russian Federation and Ukraine	-1.0	8.5	4.8	3.1	3.1
ECA excl. the Russian Federation, Türkiye, and Ukraine	-2.7	6.6	4.4	2.2	3.2
Central Europe	-3.0	7.1	5.0	0.9	3.0
Western Balkans	-3.0	7.9	3.4	2.6	3.2
Eastern Europe excl. Ukraine	-1.8	4.0	-4.7	3.4	1.3
South Caucasus	-5.2	6.7	7.2	3.8	3.5

Central Asia	-1.3	5.3	4.2	5.5	4.1
Russian Federation	-2.7	5.9	-1.2	3.6	2.2
Türkiye	1.9	11.4	5.5	4.5	3.0
Poland	-2.0	6.9	5.3	0.2	3.0

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Despite High Potential, 75 Vulnerable Economies Face ‘Historic Reversal’

Despite their high potential to advance global prosperity, one-half of the world’s 75 most vulnerable countries are facing a widening income gap with the wealthiest economies for the first time in this century, a new World Bank report has found. Taking full advantage of their younger populations, their rich natural resources, and their abundant solar-energy potential can help them overcome the setback. The report, *The Great Reversal: Prospects, Risks, and Policies in International Development Association Countries*, offers the first comprehensive look at the opportunities and risks confronting the 75 countries eligible for grants and zero to low-interest loans from the World Bank’s International Development Association (IDA). These countries are home to a quarter of humanity—1.9 billion people. At a time when populations are aging nearly everywhere else, IDA countries will enjoy a growing share of young workers through 2070—a huge potential “demographic dividend.” These countries are also rich in natural resources, enjoy high potential for solar-energy generation, and boast a large reservoir of mineral deposits that could be crucial for the world’s transition to clean energy.

Yet a historic reversal is underway for them. Over 2020-24, average per capita incomes in half of IDA countries—the largest share since the start of this century—have been growing more slowly than those of wealthy economies. This is widening the income gap between these two groups of countries. One out of three IDA countries is poorer, on average, than it was on the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic. The extreme-poverty rate is more than eight times the average in the rest of the world: one in four people in IDA countries struggles on less than \$2.15 a day. These countries now account for 90% of all people facing hunger or malnutrition. Half of these countries are either in debt distress or at high risk of it. Still, except for the World Bank Group and other multilateral development donors, foreign lenders—private as well as government creditors—have been backing away from them. “The world cannot afford to turn its back on IDA countries,” said Indermit Gill, the World Bank Group’s Chief Economist and Senior Vice President. “The welfare of

these countries has always been crucial to the long-term outlook for global prosperity. Three of the world's economic powerhouses today—China, India, and South Korea—were all once IDA borrowers. All three prospered in ways that whittled down extreme poverty and raised living standards. With help from abroad, today's batch of IDA countries has the potential to do the same.”

More than half of all IDA countries—39 in all—are in Sub-Saharan Africa. Fourteen of them—mainly small island states—are in East Asia, and eight are in Latin America and the Caribbean. In South Asia, all countries except for India are IDA countries. Thirty-one IDA countries have per capita incomes of less than \$1,315 a year. Thirty-three are fragile and conflict-affected states. IDA countries share similar opportunities. The “demographic dividend”—a deep and growing reserve of young workers—is one of them. Abundant natural resources is another. These countries account for about 20% of global production of tin, copper, and gold. In addition, some IDA countries possess critical mineral deposits essential for the global energy transition. Because of their abundant sunshine, most IDA countries are well situated to take advantage of solar energy. On average, their long-term daily solar-electricity generation potential is among the highest in the world.

This potential, however, comes with risks that must be managed. To reap the demographic dividend, IDA governments will need to undertake policies to improve education and health outcomes and make sure that jobs are available for the rising number of young people who will enter the workforce in the coming decades. To seize the full potential of their natural-resource wealth, IDA countries will need to improve policy frameworks and build stronger institutions capable of better economic management. All of this will require ambitious domestic policy reforms—and significant financial support from the international community. “IDA countries have incredible potential to deliver strong, sustainable, and inclusive growth. Realizing this potential will require them to implement an ambitious set of policies centered on boosting investment,” said Ayhan Kose, the World Bank's Deputy Chief Economist and Director of the Prospects Group. “This means improving fiscal, monetary, and financial policy frameworks and advancing an array of structural reforms to strengthen institutions and enhance human capital.”

IDA countries today have large investment needs. In the poorest of them, closing existing development and infrastructure gaps and building resilience to climate change will require investment that amounts to nearly 10% of GDP. The costs of climate disasters have doubled in IDA countries over the past decade: Economic losses from natural disasters average 1.3% of GDP a year—four times the average of other emerging market and developing economies. Such needs will require IDA countries to generate sustained investment booms—the type that boosts productivity and incomes and reduces poverty. Historically, such investment booms have often been sparked by a comprehensive package of policy measures—to bolster fiscal and monetary frameworks, ramp up cross-border trade and financial flows, and improve

the quality of institutions. Such reforms are never easy, the report notes. They need careful sequencing and implementation. But previous IDA countries have shown they are possible. IDA countries will need significant international financial support to make progress and lower the risk of “protracted stagnation,” the report notes. Stronger cooperation on global policy issues—including fighting climate change, facilitating more timely and effective debt restructurings, and supporting cross-border trade and investment—will also be crucial to help IDA countries avert a lost decade in development.

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OECD to Release Taxing Wages 2024 on Thursday 25 April

Taxing Wages 2024, the OECD’s annual flagship publication on the various taxes levied on wages and salaries in OECD countries, will be released on Thursday 25 April at 11:00 CEST (09:00 GMT). Taxing Wages 2024 provides unique cross-country comparative data on income tax paid by employees, cash benefits received by in-work families and the associated social security and payroll tax contributions made by employees and employers across the OECD, all of which are key factors when individuals consider their employment options and businesses make hiring decisions. The report illustrates how these taxes are calculated and examines the impact on household incomes. It enables cross-country comparisons of labour costs and the overall tax and benefit position for eight different household types, varying by income level and household composition (single persons, single parents, one or two-earner households, with or without children). This year’s report includes a Special Feature that examines how the tax wedge differs between first and second earners. Specifically, the report analyses the tax rates on second earners in married couples, more than 75% of whom are women in almost all OECD countries. Journalists will be allowed advance access to the electronic version of Taxing Wages 2024, by e-mail and under embargo, the day before the release. The report will be sent by e-mail on request only. In asking to receive the report under embargo, journalists undertake to respect the OECD’s embargo procedures. Requests to receive the report should be sent to embargo@oecd.org. For further information on Taxing Wages 2024, contact Lawrence Speer (+33 1 45 24 79 70) in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 45 24 97 00). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

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World Bank Group Aims to Expand Health Services to 1.5 Billion People

The World Bank Group today announced an ambitious plan to support countries in delivering quality, affordable health services to 1.5 billion people by 2030. This is part of a larger global effort to provide a basic standard of care through every stage of a person's life—infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. For decades, the World Bank Group has helped provide health services for women and children in more than 100 countries. A focused effort to become faster, work better with partners, and bring in the private sector has enabled the 80-year-old institution to pursue greater scale and impact.

The strategy to reach 1.5 billion people is focused on three core elements:

- Expanding focus from maternal and child health to include coverage throughout a person's lifetime, including non-communicable diseases.
- Expanding operations to hard-to-reach areas, including remote villages, cities, and countries.
- Working with governments to cut unnecessary fees and other financial barriers to health care.

To be counted toward this goal, a person must be seen and treated by a health-care worker via an in-person visit or telehealth. *“Providing a basic standard of care for people throughout their lives is critical for development,”* said **Ajay Banga, World Bank Group President**. *“This ambition won't be realized with a solo effort. It will require partners, a coalition of public and private sector, working together to expand access to health care services.”* Today, around 2 billion people face severe financial hardship when paying for health services. Intertwined challenges, such as climate change, pandemics, conflicts, societal aging, and a projected shortfall of 10 million health-care workers by 2030, exacerbate the cycle of poverty and inequality. The World Bank Group will combine financing, knowledge, and partnerships to address this challenge.

All elements of the Bank's financing capabilities are positioned to be called upon depending on a country's unique need and stage of development to reach 1.5 billion people. For countries most in need, IDA financing will make it possible to bring health-care workers into communities where people may otherwise have no access to services. In middle-income countries, IBRD will deploy financing to incentivize government investments in health and regulations that move a country forward. With regulatory certainty and reliable governance in place, it opens the door for more private sector investments, especially in local production of medications and protective gear. Strong partnerships will be critical for the World Bank Group to achieve results in health. The World Bank Group will fall short if it does not work hand-in-hand—faster and better—with non-government organizations, the private sector, and civil society. The World Bank Group welcomes Japan's announcement to launch a Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Knowledge Hub to enhance health and finance ministries' capacity, an initiative supported by the Bank and the World Health Organization. The goal to deliver quality, affordable health services to 1.5 billion people by 2030 is one of the more recent examples of the World Bank Group's

commitment to become more impact-oriented and is the byproduct of a concerted effort to build a better bank.

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A Crucial Player in the Evolving Global Aid Landscape

With its global footprint and convening power, IDA provides a lifeline for the 1.3 billion people living in the world's poorest countries. Today the International Development Association (IDA) launched the report “[Financing the Future: IDA's Role in the Evolving Global Aid Architecture.](#)” The report describes the increasingly complex relationship between donors and recipient countries and lays out a strong rationale for investing in IDA's next funding round for better financial and development outcomes. In the context of interlocking crises and growing demand for development finance, the global aid architecture faces significant challenges. Official financial flows to developing countries have increased over the past two decades, reaching \$1 trillion in 2021. Yet they fall well short of the escalating need for financing to address climate change, conflict, and pandemics, estimated at \$2.4 trillion per year between 2023 and 2030. Broad development aid trends complicate this challenge. Over the last 20 years, there has been significant circumvention of recipient government budgets, with only 40 percent of official financial flows being channeled through recipient governments. By contrast, the vast majority of IDA funding goes through recipients' national budgets, building capacity in the process. There has also been an expansion of earmarked aid unsupported by financial leverage and a multiplication of donor channels, contributing to further fragmentation of aid transactions—countries like Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Nepal deal with more than 170 donor agencies, each with its own rules and requirements. In combination, these trends have resulted in a large increase in transaction costs to recipient countries and raise concerns about how to collectively achieve better development outcomes with existing resources.

In this changing landscape, IDA stands out among multilateral development banks in addressing these challenges due to its unique value proposition. **First**, IDA's role as a catalyst allows it to address recipient country priorities, build country governments' capacity and help them deal with proliferation and fragmentation. Drawing on its presence on the ground, ability to source knowledge globally IDA tailors interventions to address specific regional and global priorities. **Second**, IDA serves as a global forum for governments, civil society organizations, and development agencies to coordinate and align their efforts, helping to reduce fragmentation in the global aid architecture. **Third**, IDA's unique hybrid financial model, which combines partner contributions with capital market borrowing at low interest rates, allows it to leverage additional resources for the poorest countries. This model has significantly expanded IDA's financial capacity, enabling it to mobilize about \$3.50 in IDA commitments for

every dollar of partner contributions. To respond to the needs of the present and future, IDA needs to expand its financial firepower. With its global footprint and convening power, ability to generate knowledge, policy access, and financial leverage, IDA provides a lifeline for the 1.3 billion people living in the world's poorest countries. The forthcoming IDA21 replenishment needs to match global ambitions with the necessary commitment to end poverty on a livable planet.

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6G to Be Commercially Available by About 2030

By about 2030, 6G will be commercially available in areas where infrastructure conditions are met, including China, according to panelists at a Saturday forum on 6G innovation and development, which ran parallel to the ongoing 2024 Beijing Zhongguancun Forum. Dai Xiaohui, secretary-general of the China Communications Standards Association, said that 6G has higher speeds, extremely low latency and greater connection density, and can realize the deep integration of artificial intelligence, intelligent perception and other technologies. Huang Yuhong, general manager of the China Mobile Research Institute, said that 6G provides not only communication services but also services such as perception and computing, expanding the mobile communication network into a mobile information network. Gao Tongqing, deputy general manager of China Mobile Communications Group, said that "6G will promote changes in lifestyles, production methods, and innovations in social governance." "Beijing has taken the lead in building a public test platform and has started constructing a 6G open test network," said Xu Xinchao, deputy secretary-general of the Beijing municipal government.

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ADB Forecasts 4.9 Pct Growth for Developing Asia and Pacific in 2024, 2025

Asia and the Pacific's economy remains strong, with growth rate in region's developing economies projected at 4.9 percent in 2024 and 2025, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Thursday said in its latest outlook report. Despite uncertainties in the external environment, including escalating geopolitical tensions, the outlook "is broadly positive," said ADB in the annual flagship outlook report. The end of interest rate hiking cycles in most economies, as well as continued recovery in goods exports from an upturn in the semiconductor cycle, will support growth, ADB Chief Economist Albert Park said in the report. Stronger growth in South Asia and Southeast Asia will lead the region's performance, said the report, urging policymakers to promote resilience by continuing to enhance trade, cross-border investment, and commodity supply networks. The report also forecast that inflation in the region's developing economies is projected to continue to gradually decline, from

3.3 percent in 2023 to 3.2 percent in 2024, further to 3 percent in 2025. Meanwhile, the report warned of multiple challenges to the region, highlighting the region's vulnerability to geopolitical tensions and conflict which could disrupt supply chains and reignite inflationary pressures. Public debt has stabilized in many economies following pandemic-related stimulus, but debt levels remain higher than before the pandemic, the report added. "Elevated interest rates and slow revenue continue to pose a challenge to public finances throughout the region," ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa said.

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ADB Forecasts Developing Asia's Economy to Grow 4.9% in 2024

Developing economies in Asia and the Pacific are forecast to expand by 4.9% on average this year as the region continues its resilient growth amid robust domestic demand, improving semiconductor exports, and recovering tourism. Growth will continue at the same rate next year, according to the *Asian Development Outlook (ADO) April 2024*, released today by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Inflation is expected to moderate in 2024 and 2025, after being pushed up by higher food prices in many economies over the past 2 years. Stronger growth in South and Southeast Asia—fueled by both domestic demand and exports—is offsetting a slowdown in the People's Republic of China (PRC) caused by weakness in the property market and subdued consumption. India is expected to remain a major growth engine in Asia and the Pacific, with a 7.0% expansion this year and 7.2% next year. The PRC's growth is forecast to slow to 4.8% this year and 4.5% next year, from 5.2% last year. "We see strong, stable growth for the majority of economies in developing Asia this year and next," said ADB Chief Economist Albert Park. "Consumer confidence is improving, and investment is resilient overall. External demand also appears to be turning a corner, particularly with regard to semiconductors."

Policy makers should remain vigilant, however, as there are a number of risks. These include supply chain disruptions, uncertainty about US monetary policy, the effects of extreme weather, and further property market weakness in the PRC. Inflation in developing Asia and the Pacific is expected to decline to 3.2% this year and 3.0% next year, as global price pressures ease and as monetary policy remains tight in many economies. However, for the region excluding the PRC, inflation is still higher than before the COVID-19 pandemic. Rice prices have contributed to higher food inflation, especially for import-reliant economies. Prices for rice are likely to stay elevated this year, according to *ADO April 2024*. Reasons include crop losses due to adverse weather and India's restrictions on rice exports. Increased global shipping costs, due to attacks against ships in the Red Sea and drought in the Panama Canal, may also add to inflation in Asia, according to the report.

To tackle surging rice prices and protect food security, governments can give targeted subsidies to vulnerable populations and enhance market transparency and monitoring to prevent price manipulation and hoarding. In the medium to longer term, policy should focus on establishing strategic rice reserves to stabilize prices, promoting sustainable farming and crop diversification, and investing in agricultural technology and infrastructure to raise productivity. Regional cooperation can also help manage rice prices and their impact, the report says.

GDP Growth Rate and Inflation, % per year

	GDP Growth				Inflation			
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2022	2023	2024	2025
Developing Asia	4.3	5.0	4.9	4.9	4.4	3.3	3.2	3.0
Developing Asia excluding the PRC	5.5	4.8	5.0	5.3	6.8	6.3	5.1	4.4
Caucasus and Central Asia	5.2	5.3	4.3	5.0	12.9	10.5	7.9	7.0
Armenia	12.6	8.7	5.7	6.0	8.6	2.0	3.0	3.5
Azerbaijan	4.6	1.1	1.2	1.6	13.9	8.8	5.5	6.5
Georgia	10.4	7.0	5.0	5.5	11.9	2.5	3.5	4.0
Kazakhstan	3.2	5.1	3.8	5.3	15.0	14.5	8.7	6.3
Kyrgyz Republic	9.0	6.2	5.0	4.5	13.9	10.8	7.0	6.5
Tajikistan	8.0	8.3	6.5	6.5	4.2	3.8	5.5	6.5
Turkmenistan	6.2	6.3	6.5	6.0	11.2	5.9	8.0	8.0
Uzbekistan	5.7	6.0	5.5	5.6	11.4	10.0	10.0	9.5
East Asia	2.9	4.7	4.5	4.2	2.3	0.6	1.3	1.6
Hong Kong, China	-3.7	3.2	2.8	3.0	1.9	2.1	2.3	2.3
Mongolia	5.0	7.0	4.1	6.0	15.2	10.4	7.0	6.8
People's Republic of China	3.0	5.2	4.8	4.5	2.0	0.2	1.1	1.5
Republic of Korea	2.6	1.4	2.2	2.3	5.1	3.6	2.5	2.0
Taipei, China	2.6	1.3	3.0	2.7	2.9	2.5	2.3	2.0
South Asia	6.6	6.4	6.3	6.6	8.0	8.4	7.0	5.8
Afghanistan	-20.7	-6.2	...	...	7.8	10.8	...	...
Bangladesh	7.1	5.8	6.1	6.6	6.2	9.0	8.4	7.0
Bhutan	5.2	4.0	4.4	7.0	5.6	4.2	4.5	4.2
India	7.0	7.6	7.0	7.2	6.7	5.5	4.6	4.5
Maldives	13.9	4.4	5.4	6.0	2.3	2.9	3.2	2.5
Nepal	5.6	1.9	3.6	4.8	6.3	7.7	6.5	6.0
Pakistan	6.2	-0.2	1.9	2.8	12.2	29.2	25.0	15.0
Sri Lanka	-7.3	-2.3	1.9	2.5	46.4	17.4	7.5	5.5
Southeast Asia	5.7	4.1	4.6	4.7	5.3	4.1	3.2	3.0
Brunei Darussalam	-1.6	1.4	3.7	2.8	3.7	0.4	1.1	1.0
Cambodia	5.2	5.0	5.8	6.0	5.3	2.1	2.0	2.0
Indonesia	5.3	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.1	3.7	2.8	2.8
Lao People's Democratic Republic	2.5	3.7	4.0	4.0	23.0	31.2	20.0	7.0
Malaysia	8.7	3.7	4.5	4.6	3.4	2.5	2.6	2.6
Myanmar	2.4	0.8	1.2	2.2	27.2	22.0	15.5	10.2
Philippines	7.6	5.6	6.0	6.2	5.8	6.0	3.8	3.4
Singapore	3.8	1.1	2.4	2.6	6.1	4.8	3.0	2.2
Thailand	2.5	1.9	2.6	3.0	6.1	1.2	1.0	1.5
Timor-Leste	4.0	1.9	3.4	4.1	7.0	8.4	3.5	2.9
Viet Nam	8.0	5.0	6.0	6.2	3.2	3.3	4.0	4.0
The Pacific	7.9	3.5	3.3	4.0	5.2	3.0	4.3	4.1
Cook Islands	10.5	13.3	9.1	5.2	3.6	13.2	2.3	2.3
Federated States of Micronesia	-0.6	2.6	3.1	2.8	5.0	5.3	4.1	3.5
Fiji	20.0	7.8	3.0	2.7	4.3	2.4	3.7	2.6
Kiribati	3.9	4.2	5.3	3.5	5.3	9.7	4.0	3.0
Marshall Islands	-0.7	2.5	2.7	1.7	3.2	6.5	5.5	3.7
Nauru	2.8	1.6	1.8	2.0	1.5	5.2	10.3	3.5
Niue	...	...	...	...	3.1	8.6	...	...
Palau	-1.7	-0.2	6.5	8.0	13.2	12.4	5.5	1.0
Papua New Guinea	5.2	2.0	3.3	4.6	5.3	2.3	4.5	4.8
Samoa	-5.3	8.0	4.2	4.0	8.8	12.0	4.5	4.3
Solomon Islands	-4.2	2.5	2.2	2.2	5.4	4.6	3.2	2.7
Tonga	-2.2	2.8	2.6	2.3	8.2	9.7	4.5	4.2
Tuvalu	0.7	3.9	3.5	2.4	12.2	7.2	3.0	3.0
Vanuatu	2.0	1.0	3.1	3.6	6.7	13.5	4.8	2.9

... = not available, GDP = gross domestic product, PRC = People's Republic of China.

Notes: The current uncertain situation permits no forecasts for Afghanistan. ADB placed on hold its regular assistance in Afghanistan effective 15 August 2021. Effective 1 February 2021, ADB placed a temporary hold on sovereign project disbursements and new contracts in Myanmar. All data in *Asian Development Outlook April 2024* were accessed from 1 February–31 March 2024.

Source: Asian Development Outlook database.

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ADB, Global Fund Join Forces to Strengthen Health Systems and Advance Universal Health Coverage

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (the Global Fund) have signed a memorandum of understanding to form transformative partnerships that strengthen health systems and promote universal health coverage (UHC). The cooperation arrangement will develop various financing to boost on-budget domestic resources and crowd in additional financing for increased concessionality, additional technical assistance, and robust monitoring of health programs delivery. This includes opportunities to collaborate on joint investments through loan buy-downs or cofinancing of existing or new health-focused projects. The partnership will leverage the Global Fund's expertise and inclusive country-led models to improve access to primary health care services and control of infectious diseases like malaria and tuberculosis for the most vulnerable in Asia and the Pacific. "To support a planned, phased transition away from Global Fund grants toward sustainable domestic health financing, ADB can strengthen policy and financial capacity to achieve UHC, which will ensure primary health service provision and build increased country capacity for efficient use of scarce domestic resources for health," said ADB Human Social Development Sectors Group Senior Director Ayako Inagaki.

"Development finance institutions like ADB can enhance the impact of Global Fund grants by leveraging additional investments, strengthening health systems, and building financial sustainability," said Global Fund Executive Director Peter Sands. "We must further develop and deploy innovative financing mechanisms to help the most vulnerable countries access the resources they need to tackle health inequities and accelerate the fight to end the epidemics for good." The two organizations will also build the capacity of countries for more efficient and sustainable financing across health systems, in order to make better use of limited domestic and international health resources. The Global Fund is a worldwide partnership to defeat HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria and ensure a healthier, safer, more equitable future for all. The partnership raises and invests more than \$5 billion a year to fight the deadliest infectious diseases, challenge the injustice that fuels them, and strengthen health systems and pandemic preparedness in more than 100 of the hardest hit countries. Since 2002, the Global Fund has saved 59 million lives.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 04/17/2024

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Asia-Pacific Representatives Call for Renewed Efforts on SDGs

Representatives from Asia-Pacific countries gathered here on Wednesday to share their views and actions on how to accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) during a dialogue on the margins of the 80th session of the United Nations

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Co-hosted by China International Development Cooperation Agency, the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the ESCAP and the UN in China, the dialogue entitled "Renewed Efforts to Deliver on the SDGs: working towards the Summit of the Future" focused on issues including food systems, energy access and affordability, digital connectivity and education, among others. Zhao Fengtao, deputy head of China International Development Cooperation Agency, said that the Global Development Initiative is the catalyst and accelerator for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With response and support from more than 100 countries and international organizations, it has moved from laying the groundwork to bearing fruit.

Han Zhiqiang, Chinese Ambassador to Thailand, shared stories of China and Thailand working together to promote sustainable development, including Chinese and Thai companies jointly operating waste-to-energy projects in Bangkok, Chinese car manufacturers helping Thailand's new energy industry development and green economic transformation, and deepening China-Thailand digital cooperation forwarding the "digital dividend" to benefit more and more people. In her speech via a video message, Arunee Hiam, deputy director-general of Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA) stressed that SDG 17 has been given top priority in Thailand. "Regarding the policy of international development cooperation, Thailand focuses on the four areas of human security that directly affect the well-being of the people, namely employment, food, health, and energy and environment," Arunee noted. "Malaysia is deeply confident that the Global Development Initiative is a more open and innovative solution," said Bong Yik Jui, deputy chief of Mission and Permanent Representative of Malaysia to UNESCAP, adding that it is instrumental in enhancing the synergy among a group of friends, and it provides better impetus towards accelerating the SDGs. Li Yutong, head of the Center for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization of the ESCAP, noted that achieving food security for all is at the forefront of the global development agenda, and food systems are deeply intertwined with all the SDGs. "Perhaps the only North Star that we have in front of us is the Sustainable Development Goals," concluded Siddharth Chatterjee, the UN resident coordinator in China. "That is why UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is pushing for the Summit of the Future. It is frankly a moment to try and see if they can resurrect multilateralism in its true sense."

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/25/2024

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East Asia

CHINA: ADB Forecasts Economy to Grow 4.8% this Year

The People's Republic of China's (PRC) economy is forecast to grow 4.8% this year, amid a recovery of household consumption, ongoing property market adjustment, and weak external demand, according to the [Asian Development Outlook April 2024](#),

released today by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Growth is projected to moderate from a 5.2% expansion last year. An uncertain external macroeconomic environment, together with trade tensions, may affect demand for the PRC's exports. Growth will further moderate to 4.5% next year. "An increase in household consumption should help drive economic growth this year, as the labor market and household income improve," said ADB Country Director for the PRC Safdar Parvez. "Effective measures to resolve property sector problems and strengthen private investment and household consumption should be enhanced this year to support growth momentum." Investment is expected to be supported by strong public infrastructure spending, boosted by fiscal expansion, while high-tech and other manufacturing investments should continue to grow solidly on the back of policy support. However, subdued consumer and investor sentiment in the property sector are expected to persist.

Inflation is forecast to rise to 1.1% in 2024, as the economy continues to recover. With food prices—particularly for pork—bottoming out and energy prices increasing, overall price movements should steer away from deflation. Inflation should increase further to 1.5% in 2025, assuming domestic demand continues to recover. Risks to the outlook include further deterioration in the property market, which could undermine financial stability. Recurrent financial market turbulence can also dampen consumer sentiment. External risks include increased trade tensions with the United States and European Union weakening the PRC's exports; escalated geopolitical tensions that may disrupt supply chains; renewed energy challenges triggered by geopolitical conflict; and fragmentation of the global economy.

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Chinese Vice Premier Stresses Industrial Chains' High-quality Development

Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing has said that the high-quality development of key industrial chains is important for strengthening the resilience and safety of the nation's industrial and supply chains, as well as enhancing the core competitiveness of the manufacturing industry. Great efforts must be made to promote the high-quality development of key industrial chains in order to better support new industrialization, build a modern industrial system, and develop new quality productive forces, Zhang said. He made the remarks during a work trip to gain knowledge of local industrial chains in east China's Anhui Province, on Monday and Tuesday. He stressed innovation-driven development in strengthening the scientific and technological foundation of industrial chains, the development of intelligent products and equipment, the integration of AI technologies with the manufacturing sector, as well as the optimization of technological standards for key industrial chains. On the issue of workplace safety, Zhang said that it is necessary to harness modern

information technologies to provide technological support for the prevention and control of risks in production, and improve efficiency in safe production supervision.

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China's Development of Rural E-commerce Boosts Rural Revitalization

Lu Zhankai, 35, has filmed and posted over 3,000 video clips of villagers picking edible mountain products in the deep mountains of China's northernmost Heilongjiang Province. His clips not only present the bountiful resources in the forest areas of northeast China but also promote the local specialties to customers across the country. Located in the core area of Sanjiang Plain, Lu's hometown, Raohe County, boasts fertile land. Its mountain products, such as black bee honey and pine nuts, are of high quality at a reasonable price. However, the remote mountainous location hinders the products' sales. "I want to take agricultural products from my hometown out of the mountain with the help of the internet," said Lu. At the end of 2018, he started sharing video clips on the media platform by the name of "Lu Xiaokai." The real and vivid content soon garnered considerable attention from netizens.

To date, he has amassed more than seven million followers on Douyin, the Chinese equivalent of TikTok. Equipped with popularity and internet experience, Lu signed contracts with more than 300 farmers to procure honey, wild vegetables and mushrooms, among other agricultural products, and started selling them through e-commerce. Since 2021, he has founded two local companies specializing in agricultural products procurement and e-commerce sales, with the total sales volume so far topping 70 million yuan (about 9.86 million U.S. dollars). Lu's booming e-commerce business is attributable to Raohe County's efforts to develop its e-commerce industry. By adopting measures such as market cultivation and building regional brands, the county saw its e-commerce transaction volume reach 1.03 billion yuan in 2023, a 297 percent year-on-year increase.

Raohe County is not alone. With a population of just 143,000 in central China's Hunan Province, Guzhang County has boasted a number of rural influencers with more than one million followers on the internet, thanks to the local efforts to improve e-commerce continuously. In 2023, Guzhang County's e-commerce transaction volume was about 1.93 billion yuan, with the e-commerce sales of agricultural products reaching 225.3 million yuan. Regarding the province, data shows that in 2023, its rural online retail sales rose 16.9 percent year on year, while its online retail sales of agricultural products increased by 14.48 percent year on year. In recent years, China's rural e-commerce has gradually embraced high-quality development, thanks to the efforts of people from all walks of life across the country. As a new

engine for economic development, rural e-commerce is playing a key role in promoting the country's rural revitalization.

In March, China rolled out a guideline to advance the high-quality development of e-commerce in its rural areas, aiming to ride the emerging digital economy wave to establish a new development pattern and improve rural consumption and the income of rural residents. The guideline proposes 14 detailed policies in six aspects, including building a multi-level rural e-commerce comprehensive service platform, accelerating the construction of a modern logistics and distribution system, and fostering diversified new e-commerce entities in rural areas. According to Sun Haojin, director of the economic research institute with the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences, the imbalance between urban and rural areas in China has decided the high-quality development of its rural e-commerce, and the guidelines have tried to tackle the issues such as constraints of brands, logistics, and talent in a targeted manner.

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China's Major Industrial Companies Upbeat About Business Prospects

China's major industrial companies are optimistic about their business prospects with a continuous increase in their profits, Shan Zhongde, vice minister of industry and information technology, said on Thursday. Private investment in the manufacturing sector grew 11.9 percent year on year during the first quarter of this year, Shan told a press conference. According to a survey of 36,000 key manufacturing enterprises, 76 percent expect their industrial output to grow or remain flat in the second quarter of this year compared with one year earlier, he said. At the end of February, the number of major industrial enterprises rose to 501,000, up 19,000 from the end of 2023, Shan added. From January to February this year, major industrial enterprises nationwide realized total profits of 914.1 billion yuan (about 128.7 billion U.S. dollars), up 10.2 percent year on year, the National Bureau of Statistics said earlier this week.

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Foreign Businessmen Seek New Opportunities at Canton Fair

In 1954, Jack Perry, founder of the London Export Corporation, led a group of 48 British businessmen on a historic trade mission to Beijing. Seventy years later, his grandson, Jack Perry Junior, as the new chairman of the 48 Group Club, which was founded by those 48 businessmen, came to the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou to attend the 135th Canton Fair. This marks his first time at the fair. "My first impression of the Canton Fair is the excitement here. I see a lot of faces here trying

to learn, listen, and understand. The 48 Group Club has members from around the world, and they come here to understand what Chinese manufacturing is about," he said. More than six decades on, the Canton Fair's attraction still remains. The ongoing session of Canton Fair, held from April 15 to May 5, has attracted approximately 149,000 purchasers from 215 countries and regions for pre-registration, marking a notable 17.4 percent increase compared to the previous session.

Marios Theodoulou, a buyer from Cyprus, is overwhelmed by the hospitality and positive energy on his first visit to the fair. "Our expectations are to bring a part of China's export to Cyprus and create a trading portal for all of these products," Theodoulou said. He also plans to establish new connections for future collaboration at the fair. Angelo, a Brazilian buyer, plans to purchase some mechanical equipment. He said it is his first time at the fair, as he usually makes purchases in Europe. "This time I will stay in China for about 40 days, the first 15 days being at the fair, and then a month to visit companies in the country and start doing business," he said. With a total exhibition area of 1.55 million square meters, the 135th Canton Fair has around 74,000 booths, and 4,300 new exhibitors, with an emphasis on high-quality development. A cross-border e-commerce pilot zone and overseas warehouse zone were set up for the first time.

Many "old friends" of the fair have witnessed the changes and improvements. Amanbayev Gani, an official with the Chamber of International Commerce of Kazakhstan, said that the scale of the Canton Fair has increased greatly over the past years. "The first time we came, there were three pavilions A, B, and C. This year I see the new pavilion D, and also new buildings around the venue. There are a lot of new brands and companies this year," he said. Benjamin King came to the fair for the first time in 2018 as a buyer. While at the fair, he observed that more companies needed supply chain support on the ground in China, and this eventually led him to set up Kinyu SCM, a supply chain consultancy based in Guangzhou, capital of south China's Guangdong Province, where the Canton Fair is held. The company has assisted its customers in purchasing goods from China worth over 140 million U.S. dollars over the last five years. Last year, he became an exhibitor in the trade in services section of the fair.

Over the past 10 years, Chinese merchants have become more professional in their approach, with increased knowledge of international market trends and improved negotiation skills, said Giselle Bonet, director of Pinchili China Service Limited. She believed that all businessmen should take advantage of this fair's opportunity to connect with China's best factories and suppliers. The 135th Canton Fair has seen an intensified eagerness of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) participating countries. The number of buyers from those countries has increased by 45.9 percent compared with the previous session. Bekar Mikaberidze, founder of One Belt One Road Georgian Business House, first attended the fair in 2006. He said that the Canton Fair is not

just an exhibition, but an experience that leaves a lasting impact. "From clothing and furniture to solar batteries and electric cars, the fair represents the ever-evolving landscape of global trade and technology."

Noushad Mohamed, brand manager of Ikon under UAE's Lulu Group International, a frequenter of the event, put more focus on intelligent products at the fair. "Everybody's eyes are on China, trying to find out what they are doing next in the field of AI. We have also selected a lot of products that are related to AI, like cameras and tablets. There are huge markets and opportunities," Mohamed said. Around 64 percent of the exhibitors in the international pavilion at the fair, a platform for companies outside China, come from the BRI participating countries. Sersim, a Turkish company mainly focusing on export, exhibited at the international pavilion. Cagri Yazar, area sales manager of the company, said that they have been at the fair for about 20 years. "Canton Fair is growing every day, contributing more to the international business environment. It's really effective for us."

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China's Jilin Strives for High-quality Development amid Revitalization Drive

Northeast China's Jilin Province, one of the country's breadbasket provinces and old industrial bases, is optimistic about its future prospects thanks to its revitalization efforts centered on high-quality development. Hu Yuting, governor of the province, told a press briefing in Beijing that Jilin has been in the "fast lane" of revitalization and high-quality development, resolutely shouldering the mission of safeguarding food security, industrial security, energy security, ecological security and national defense security of the country. In the new era, Jilin boasts great potential for comprehensive revitalization, with a focus on achieving breakthroughs in five key areas: industrial and scientific innovation, agricultural modernization, green development, further opening up and strengthened talent support. The fundamental approach for Jilin to safeguard national food security is to nurture new quality productive forces in agriculture sectors, according to the governor.

In 2023, Jilin's grain output reached approximately 41.87 billion kg, ranking fourth nationwide in total output and ranking first among major grain-producing provinces in terms of yield per unit area. As part of the national grain production expansion efforts, Jilin will undertake one-fifth of the national target, aiming to increase production by 10 billion kg, said Hu, adding that the province's expected grain output in 2024 is 44 billion kg, and that of 2030 is anticipated to exceed 50 billion kg. Jilin has been striving to upgrade its industries by fostering innovation and shed its image of an old-fashioned heavy-industry base. According to Li Guoqiang, vice governor of Jilin, the province is assisting traditional industries to go digital and smarter, and develop an array of emerging and future-oriented industries. "Our goal is to complete a round

of digital transformation of industrial enterprises above the designated scale in about three years," Li said.

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China's Environment Improves Steadily

China saw its environment steadily improve in 2023, with all the annual targets for environmental indicators achieved, according to an official report. This progress also met the deadlines set by the country's 14th Five-Year Plan which was formulated in 2021, says the State Council report on environmental conditions and completion of environmental protection targets for the year 2023, which was submitted to the top legislature for review on Tuesday. The report points out that in 2023, China's air quality maintained a long-term positive trend, with improvements in key areas. The average concentration of PM2.5 in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and its surrounding areas had decreased by 2.3 percent compared to the previous year. The overall quality of seawater in China's jurisdictional waters remained stable with positive trends last year.

National soil environment risks were under basic control, and the worsening trend of soil pollution had been initially curbed, the report states. The report indicates that in 2023, China's surface water environment quality continued to improve, with significant improvements in key river basins. For the first time, the water quality in the Yellow River basin had improved from good to excellent. The report also highlights some challenges China faces in terms of its ecological environment, including the persistent characteristics of high energy consumption and high carbon emissions in the industrial structure, as well as a coal-centric energy structure. The report has set a target of reducing carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by about 3.9 percent in 2024, and emphasizes the need to strengthen environmental legislation and law enforcement to ensure the achievement of green goals.

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Silver Economy Sees More Talent, Infrastructure Support

After learning about an automatic pill dispenser in class, Tang Shijie, 20, recommended the machine to his mother who operates a nursing home in the city of Changzhou, east China's Jiangsu Province. "Pills can be distributed precisely and delivered on time," said Tang. As a child, Tang often played and did homework at the nursing home, and he views many of the old people there as friends. He hopes to improve the quality of their lives through the knowledge he has acquired. Tang is a student at the School of Elderly Care Services and Management of Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine, which started recruiting undergraduate students in

2021. He takes classes in medicine, management and elderly care, and in his free time, he looks after elderly people on a voluntary basis.

"The silver economy has huge development potential in tackling the challenges of an aging population. This is the reason why I chose to study here," said Tang. The school has designed multidisciplinary curriculums and provides extracurricular activities, such as visiting and doing internships in elderly care enterprises and service rating institutions, to build students' skills in policy research, management and medical care, according to the school's associate professor Peng Xiang. Peng said there is greater awareness within society about the elderly care industry these days, and this is reflected in the school's enrollment process. "During consultations, fewer parents and students ask simple questions such as what elderly care is and whether it is easy to find a job by studying the subject. They are more concerned about course content and career development paths," said Peng.

He said that the stereotype of low education levels and low salaries of practitioners in the industry has been changing. This March, 168 elderly care practitioners in Jiangsu were accredited with professional titles, among the earliest in the country. Lin Li, an official in the civil affairs department of Jiangsu, said the establishment of a professional title system will increase the social recognition of elderly care practitioners and give them a sense of achievement, thus attracting more talent to the industry. Official data shows that China's population aged 60 and above had reached 297 million by the end of 2023, accounting for 21.1 percent of the country's total population. Against the backdrop of a rapidly aging society, China released a guideline earlier this year to strengthen the silver economy, with promoting talents and building infrastructure emphasized in the document.

In Nanhai District in the city of Foshan, south China's Guangdong Province, a smart senior care service platform provides emergency support for elderly people, with eight staff on duty 24 hours. A 77-year-old resident surnamed He recalled the time she used the emergency service to call for help during a medical emergency. As she tried to get out of bed, her vision went black and she slumped down on her side. Her relatives were living far away, so she pressed the emergency button on a device connected to the platform. "In less than 10 seconds, a voice from the device told me that an ambulance had been arranged, and I was later sent to a hospital," she said. The platform also gathers enterprises through establishing an online shop, providing over 140 services, including daily care, meal preparation and assistance with bathing. In March, an industrial park focusing on the silver economy was established in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong, providing financial support to accredited enterprises.

The first batch of companies in fields such as biotechnology, medical equipment and livestreaming have signed agreements and settled in the park. The scale of China's silver economy is estimated at about 7 trillion yuan (about 985 billion U.S. dollars)

currently and it is expected to reach about 30 trillion yuan by 2035. Han Ruidong, a researcher with the State Information Center, said that during the initial stage of developing the silver economy, which has certain public welfare attributes, policy support and guidance are needed to support the private sector.

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Chinese Premier Stresses Consolidating Achievements in Poverty Alleviation

Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Wednesday stressed action to effectively consolidate and expand achievements in poverty alleviation. Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during a research trip in southwest China's Guizhou Province. Li visited a local residential community in Kaili City, an industrial demonstration park in Majiang County, and a vocational school in Taijiang County during the trip. He called for continuous government support in order to prevent a large-scale return to poverty. Li also underlined measures to nurture new drivers for economic growth in rural areas and to cultivate an increased number of skilled workers that cater to market demands. The premier affirmed Guizhou's economic and social progress, urging the province to make greater contributions to the development of the country's western region.

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China, Germany Shore Up Synergy of Green Development

Hundreds of hydrogen fuel cell-powered vehicles are currently operational along the "hydrogen corridor" spanning southwest China's Chongqing Municipality to Chengdu City in neighboring Sichuan Province. Among the vehicles, those manufactured by Qingling Group are particularly eye-catching, as a symbol of the successful collaboration between the commercial vehicle manufacturer and its German partner, Bosch Group. For industry insiders, this collaboration between these prominent trendsetters also signifies the flourishing and strengthening of green development ties between the two countries. Early in March 2021, Bosch and Qingling jointly established Bosch Hydrogen Powertrain Systems (Chongqing) Co., Ltd., which is committed to bringing leading fuel cell powertrain solutions to the Chinese market and this commitment aligns with the automotive industry's goals of carbon neutrality in China.

According to the Energy Saving and New Energy Vehicle Technology Roadmap 2.0, released by the China Society of Automotive Engineers, the number of fuel cell-powered vehicles in China is projected to reach about one million by 2035. China

is one of the biggest markets for hydrogen energy and the related technology is rapidly developing, according to Andre Posch, production manager for fuel cell power module at Bosch Hydrogen Powertrain Systems (Chongqing) Co., Ltd. "The establishment of the joint venture was based on the long-history cooperation between Qingling and Bosch, as they had a customer and supplier relationship in the past and hence knew each other very well," said Posch. He added that for the commercialization of fuel cell systems, Qingling has a wide range of commercial vehicle applications, all developed and manufactured in-house.

At present, Bosch Hydrogen Powertrain Systems (Chongqing) Co., Ltd. has introduced 76kW, 134kW, and 190kW fuel cell power modules to the market, catering to various classic commercial vehicle applications such as cold-chain logistics, sanitation, and heavy-duty long-haul transportation. Additionally, the latest platform 300kW fuel cell power module is under road test with customer vehicles. Posch noted that fuel cell electric vehicles (FCEVs) offer the advantages of both combustion engine vehicles and pure-battery electric vehicles. FCEVs can travel long distances and refuel quickly, similar to combustion engine vehicles. They also provide excellent driving dynamics and have a less complex layout, making maintenance easier, akin to pure-battery vehicles. "Most importantly, FCEVs are emission-free." The city of Chongqing where Qingling is situated also provides a favorable environment for bilateral cooperation.

"Chongqing features an important geographic location as it is at the intersection of the Belt and Road, the Yangtze River economic zones, the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor, and Chengdu-Chongqing economic zone," said Posch, adding that that's why there are a lot of nationwide-level logistics centers, offering operation scenarios for commercial vehicles. Additionally, Chongqing boasts an abundance of hydrogen resources. "The hydrogen available here is of high quality and competitively priced," he said. A case in point is a major hydrogen supply center for vehicles in southwest China which went operational in Changshou District, Chongqing in December 2023. The center can supply 6,400 kg of high-purity hydrogen per day at full capacity, enough to meet the hydrogen consumption needs of 260 hydrogen-fueled heavy-duty trucks, said Liu Huabin, deputy general manager of the Chongqing Petrochemical Sales Company of Sinopec, China's main oil refiner. The program is expected to help reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 27,000 tonnes per year, according to Liu.

Chongqing welcomed the Federal Chancellor of Germany Olaf Scholz on April 14 this year. During his visit, Scholz toured this Sino-German joint venture and learned about hydrogen powertrain products and fuel cell powertrain solutions, and experienced the assembly of hydrogen fuel cell power modules. Scholz said he is impressed by the cooperation between German and Chinese enterprises in the field of hydrogen technology, and Germany is willing to continue to deepen friendly exchanges with China and push bilateral cooperation to a new level. Another

company spearheading the Sino-German cooperative trend in green development is Covestro, a renowned German materials manufacturer. "Covestro has built its first dedicated mechanical recycling compounding line for polycarbonates in Shanghai, which began production last year with an annual capacity of 25,000 tonnes. Germany leads in technologies for circular economy, and China has many application scenarios," said Holly Lei, President of Covestro China.

Highlighting the company's confidence in China's promising market, the senior executive said that by the end of 2023, Covestro's cumulative investment in the Chinese market has exceeded 4 billion euros (about 4.3 billion U.S. dollars). "The Chinese market contributes 20 percent of Covestro's global sales. These figures have already told us that the Chinese market cannot be ignored." "Bosch has always been confident in the Chinese market. Over the past 10 years, our annual investment in China has averaged nearly 5 billion yuan," said Xu Daquan, Bosch China President. "At the same time, we are also increasing our investments in new fields in China. For example, the completion of our hydrogen fuel cell factory in Chongqing signifies our commitment to further investment in hydrogen fuel cells."

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China's Job Market Stable, Aided by Policy Measures, Emerging Careers

China continues to demonstrate its economic vitality, but any assessment of overall economic health cannot ignore the employment figures. So how is the country's labor market faring these days? China created a total of 3.03 million new urban jobs in the first quarter of the year, official data showed Tuesday. The surveyed urban unemployment rate on average in China stood at 5.2 percent in the first quarter of this year, down 0.3 percentage points from the same period last year, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Calling it "a good start" for the year, Chen Yongjia, an official with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, told a press conference on Tuesday that the employment situation has remained generally stable, with the main employment indicators staying steady in the first quarter.

Data covering 38 major cities from online recruitment platform Zhaopin revealed that job market demand has surged following the Spring Festival as businesses resume operations. The scale of recruitment has increased week by week, significantly heating up the employment market. Industries related to service consumption, such as transportation, logistics, catering and tourism, are leading the growth in recruitment. However, some industries and small and medium-sized enterprises are still in the process of recovery. Additionally, the number of new workers needing urban employment has reached a historical high this year, which means that certain groups will continue to face employment pressures. This year, China aims to create over 12 million jobs in urban areas and keep the surveyed urban unemployment rate

at about 5.5 percent. The goal "indicates a stronger commitment to ensuring employment," said Chang Hee Lee, director of the International Labor Organization Country Office for China and Mongolia.

POLICIES TARGETING KEY GROUPS

The estimated number of university graduates across China in 2024 is expected to reach 11.79 million, an increase of 210,000 compared to the previous year. According to this year's government report, China will strengthen measures to promote the employment of young people, and improve guidance for them in finding jobs or starting businesses. China has improved access to labor market information through online platforms and career-guidance services to enable young people to make informed decisions about their career paths and increase their chances of finding suitable employment. In addition, in recent years, China's public employment services have made even more comprehensive measures to reach out to the campuses and provide on-site career guidance and employment services to university students, said Chang Hee Lee.

Northeast China's Liaoning Province recently hosted campus job fairs at four universities and a convention and exhibition center. According to statistics, these five events brought together nearly 500 employers, offering 13,000 job opportunities. At the venues, over 4,600 resumes were collected, with 1,300 preliminary employment agreements being reached. More than 2,000 university graduates received policy consultation services. On April 10, the local authorities in Baoan District of Shenzhen held a job fair featuring 83 companies offering over 2,600 positions for university students. The event attracted nearly 1,000 graduates. Many of them traveled from Henan, Shaanxi, Shandong and other regions to apply for jobs. "Finding a job is still not easy, as employers generally require internship experience or practical experience," said Li Jiacheng, a bachelor's graduate in software engineering from Xi'an Fanyi University.

"However, there have been quite a few companies recruiting recently, and there are a few positions that match my major. I plan to apply to several more companies." Authorities have beefed up efforts to provide new employment opportunities for rural workers with aspirations for employment and entrepreneurship, especially those who had been lifted out of poverty, another key group in China's job market. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and eight other government departments jointly launched a special campaign with a string of online and offline activities from Jan. 25 to April 8, with the aim of providing some 30 million job opportunities. Li Peng, 52, who was lifted out of poverty, has found employment with his sister at a local blueberry farm in Yongren County of the Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture, southwest China's Yunnan Province.

Each earning approximately 150 yuan (about 21 U.S. dollars) per day, their employment is secured with the help of an employment service station set up by the

local human resources department relying on local industrial clusters. "Thanks to the employment service station, our food and accommodation are covered, and staff from the station assisted us in matching with job positions. We are very satisfied with our work and life here," said Li. China aims to accelerate the development of a cohesive grassroots employment service framework that integrates top-down alignment, business connectivity and data integration, which will enhance the uniformity and accessibility of public employment services, Chen told the press conference.

EMERGING CAREERS

China is accelerating the development of a modern industrial system anchored by advanced manufacturing, which in turn is rapidly driving up the demand for skilled personnel. According to a report issued by the Social Science Academic Press in April, China faces an overall shortage of about 25 to 30 million digital talents. Yun Donglai, an official with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, said that the trend reflects the ongoing transformation and upgrading of traditional industries, as well as new trends and opportunities in the development of new quality productive forces. In BYD, China's leading electric vehicle (EV) manufacturer, for instance, there is a high demand for system architects, software professionals and artificial intelligence experts, according to Xun Meng, deputy general manager of the human resources department at BYD. Over the past three years, Qingdao University has suspended enrollment in four majors, including digital media technology and educational technology, while adding new programs like robotics engineering and intelligent manufacturing engineering, with a gradual increase in the enrollment plans for majors in science, engineering and medicine.

"In response to the uneven demand across different fields, we are flexibly adjusting program offerings based on job-market feedback," said Chen Tao, vice president of Qingdao University. In the latest edition of China's National Occupation Classification Code, 97 digital occupations have been identified for the first time, such as internet marketing specialists, fintech professionals and e-sports personnel. Also added was a new sub-category of "digital technology engineering personnel." The graduates of the class of 2024 majoring in mechatronics integration technology have all been recruited by enterprises and thus secured their jobs, said Peng Ying, vice president of Shenzhen Institute of Technology. "Next year, we will launch a major in the application of intelligent connected vehicles technology."

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/24/2024

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China Embraces AI Boom, Diverse Application Scenarios

Wearing a pink hairpin, white T-shirt and pink shorts, a "girl" who looks three or four years old has grabbed the spotlight at the exhibition of the ongoing 2024 Zhongguancun Forum in Beijing. The "girl," named Tong Tong, or Little Girl in

English, is an advanced virtual artificial intelligence (AI) avatar based on artificial general intelligence, according to Zhu Songchun, director of the Beijing Institute for General Artificial Intelligence, the developer of the product. In a video demonstration, after being programmed to a preference for liking things tidy, Tong Tong independently fetched a towel to mop up spilled milk when she noticed it on the table -- the behavior came from her autonomous decision made based on a guide of value, rather than a pre-set program. "Unlike the conventional AI, she can understand your words, interpret your intentions and proactively offer assistance," said Zhu, adding that Tong Tong is expected to be applied in various scenarios and empower industries covering six fields, including emergency, transportation, education and healthcare sectors.

Boasting plentiful AI innovations like Tong Tong, China has seen its AI industry in the fast lane. According to data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the total scale of China's core AI industry has reached 500 billion yuan (about 70.37 billion U.S. dollars), and the number of related enterprises has exceeded 4,400. Featuring diverse application scenarios, AI technology has been permeating every aspect of society. In the realm of autonomous driving, driverless vehicles with AI technology can automatically choose the optimal route, maintain a proper speed and smoothly pass through complex road sections. In the medical sector, surgical robots equipped with AI systems can help increase the precision and accuracy of the operation, which contributes to reducing post-surgery pain and shortening hospital stays. Regarding the large language model (LLM), which has become a mainstream of AI development, official data shows that China's number of self-developed LLMs ranks second in the world, and over 100 LLMs with more than one billion parameters each have been launched in the country.

According to Wang Haifeng, chief technology officer of China's tech giant Baidu, the user base of its LLM and ChatGPT-like product dubbed Ernie Bot has exceeded 200 million. It provides a wide range of services, such as drafting speeches, business plans and instructions, as well as drawing flow charts and mind maps, covering many aspects of work and life. "At present, China is making efforts in mastering advanced LLM algorithms, in promoting the deep integration of computing software and hardware, and in accelerating technology transformation to applications in various sectors," said Liu Qingfeng, chairman of iFlytek, one of China's leading AI companies. In Liu's eyes, China has formed a comparative advantage in the fields of voice LLM and medical LLM. "More and more innovative AI application scenarios and product forms are expected to be seen in 2024," said Wu Hequan, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering. "China is a leading country in the internet field, and will also be a leading country in AI application."

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/28/2024

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China's Energy Storage Capacity Expands to Support Low-carbon Goals

China's energy storage capacity has further expanded in the first quarter amid the country's efforts to advance its green energy transition. By the end of March, China's installed new-type energy storage capacity had reached 35.3 gigawatts, soaring 2.1 times over the figure achieved during the same period last year, the National Energy Administration (NEA) said on Monday. In breakdown, the northwestern parts of the country have seen the fastest development of the new-type energy storage facilities, with 10.3 gigawatts of such capacity having been installed and put into operation, accounting for 29.2 percent of the country's total, said Bian Guangqi, an NEA official, at a press conference. At the beginning of this year, the NEA has released a list of 56 new-type energy storage pilot demonstration projects, including 17 lithium-ion battery projects and 11 compressed air energy storage projects, among others. Some of these projects have been connected to the grid, effectively promoting the application of new technologies, Bian said. The NEA will continue to encourage technological innovation to support the development of the new-type energy system, Bian said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/29/2024

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Hainan's Low-altitude Economy Soaring High

As a strategic industry, the low-altitude economy is emerging as a forerunner in developing new quality productive forces across China, including the southern island province of Hainan. On April 24, a remarkable show unfolded as a drone departed from an airport in the provincial capital Haikou and embarked on a three-hour flight to transport a batch of shrimp seedlings from the province's Wenchang City to an airport in Zhuhai, located in the neighboring Guangdong Province, marking the first cross-sea public cargo transport through drone from Hainan to Zhuhai. "This drone transport will greatly reduce transportation time and enhance the survival rate of aquatic seedlings, thereby playing a crucial role in cost reduction and efficiency improvement," said Yun Yongchao, general manager of a local marine biotechnology company in Wenchang. He added that aquatic products were previously transported by land and ferry to Guangdong, taking about 13 hours, leading to high losses.

"This cross-sea drone flight is a new model that provides us with a new transportation choice." This cross-sea drone transportation exemplifies the advancement of new quality productive forces in Hainan, greatly improving the transportation efficiency of agricultural products between Hainan and Guangdong. It also contributes to the reduction of logistics costs and injects fresh vitality into the development of the low-altitude economy in both provinces. As the only tropical island province in China, Hainan has over 300 days available for flights annually, which offers unique environmental advantages for developing the low-altitude economy. In 2010, Hainan became one of the first pilot regions for low-altitude

airspace management reform in the country. The province released a map for unmanned aircraft in 2023, demonstrating early and ongoing efforts to open up low-altitude airspace in the country.

According to Hu Qingqun, deputy general manager of China General Aviation Co., Ltd., as one of the first regions in the country to carry out low-altitude airspace management reform, Hainan has continuously strengthened the foundation for the development of the low-altitude economy by constructing general aviation airports throughout the province. He noted that Hainan has established a relatively complete low-altitude management system and an efficient infrastructure service system. In recent years, Hainan has developed its low-altitude economy according to local conditions, leading the country in low-altitude tourism, aviation sports, emergency rescue and other fields. In 2023, Hainan ranked first in the country in terms of aerial tours and skydiving flights, with about 13,700 hours of flight time, 152,000 takeoffs and landings, and 364,800 passengers, accounting for approximately 45.9 percent, 63.2 percent and 61.1 percent of the national total, respectively, making Hainan the leading province in China's low-altitude tourism, according to official data.

"As a free trade port, Hainan enjoys more preferential policies. Key technologies such as drones and electric aircraft capable of vertical take-off and landing are developing rapidly. At the same time, people's demand for convenient travel and leisure tourism is increasing, and so is the market," said Li Yan, general manager of Sanya Base of China Southern Airlines General Aviation Co., Ltd. At present, Hainan has more than 160 locally registered general aviation companies and nearly 50 non-local general aviation companies. Guo Yao, an official of the Hainan Provincial Development and Reform Commission, said that in the future, Hainan will harness its natural resource advantages to focus on commercial short-haul transportation, low-altitude tourism consumption, and marine economic development. This strategic focus aims to establish the province as a pilot demonstration area for the low-altitude economy and to inject new momentum into the high-quality development of the Hainan Free Trade Port.

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JAPAN: The AI Revolution in Creative Industries

As generative AI continues its rapid evolution, figuring out how to harness its potential in daily work has become a critical question. A small company with just six employees has embarked on an ambitious challenge to answer this question. Using generative AI, they've managed to transform their colleague Watanabe into an anime character in merely 10 minutes, showcasing a novel solution to the pressing issue of labor shortages in the production industry. The process begins with selecting a video and feeding it to the AI, along with specific instructions like the inclusion of a single girl character, hair color, and clothing details. The AI then creates the animation,

allowing for choices in anime style and video length. Remarkably, the animation is completed in just 10 minutes, capturing nuances like the sway of hair in the wind and the detailed background scenery with impressive accuracy.

Despite the advancements, the AI-generated animation still requires human refinement to enhance realism and adhere to the stylistic expectations of traditional Japanese animation. This process includes adjusting the timing and intensity of movements to add a characteristic anime feel. This endeavor, led by a small production team in Nagoya, represents a significant stride in using generative AI to mitigate industry-wide staffing shortages. While relying on AI for the bulk of the animation process, the necessity of a human creator's touch remains paramount, ensuring that the final product retains the essence and quality expected of Japanese anime.

From <https://newsonjapan.com> 04/01/2024

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The Future of Logistics Is Self-Loading

Amid the escalating 'Logistics 2024 problem,' the previously challenging task of automating truck loading has begun to see light. This technology involves the installation of multiple sensors in facilities and forklifts, allowing two unmanned forklifts to recognize the truck bed's position and height and automatically load the cargo. This innovation shifts part of the workload from manned to unmanned forklift operations. Konoike Transport and the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Group have been co-developing this technology for the past two years, achieving operational levels that allow a large truck to be loaded in under 15 minutes. Yoshito Horiuchi, Manager of the East Japan Branch at Konoike Transport, remarked, "This automation allows for a consistent increase in work capacity, which naturally leads to a reduction in vehicle detention by increasing hourly processing capabilities." The logistics industry faces a deepening labor shortage due to the 2024 problem, prompting a series of initiatives to alleviate workforce deficiencies. A representative from the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Group expressed the desire to further minimize technical constraints and facilitate easier system implementation in the future.

From <https://newsonjapan.com> 04/09/2024

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Japan to Provide 72.5 B. Yen for Supercomputers for AI

Japan's industry ministry said Friday that it will provide up to 72.5 billion yen in subsidies for five projects to build supercomputers for use in developing artificial intelligence technology. The ministry aims to promote the domestic development of generative AI systems by improving computing infrastructure at home. Specifically, the ministry will provide 10.2 billion yen to telecommunications carrier KDDI Corp. and 50.1 billion yen to Sakura Internet Inc. The ministry will also subsidize GMO

Internet Group Inc. and startups. The recipient companies will be required to allow generative AI developers to use the supercomputers for at least three years. This will be the first time for KDDI to establish large-scale computing infrastructure for AI development.

From <https://www.nippon.com> 04/19/2024

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New AI Tool Predicts Turnover Risk Among New Hires

Japanese businesses are facing a growing problem of new recruits who quit shortly after they join their companies in April, which is at the start of a new business year. To address the problem, Professor Shiratori Naruhiko of the Tokyo City University and a start-up firm have jointly developed an artificial intelligence tool to predict what kinds of new employees could resign. The AI tool is based on a study about the AI prediction of characteristics of university students who will likely drop out and measures to prevent their departures. The newly-developed AI is fed with data on attendance records of all employees at a company, genders, characteristics and personnel affairs, as well as data on employees who left the company or took an extended leave of absence. Then, the AI tool creates a turnover model for each company. The AI tool also predicts who has a risk of quitting and quantifies the risk if attendance data on new recruits are input.

The developers plan to upgrade the AI so that it can predict appropriate assignments of jobs for new employees by adding information from job interviews, characteristics and personal histories about them. Shiratori said that AI's strength is that it is based on objective data not on subjective views of people working in human resources. He said that it will help find employees who are discontent with their bosses or positions, and suggest providing intensive care for them. Shiratori added that the AI tool can determine the turnover risk, but it is only humans that can analyze the risks behind the data and their causes, and then take measures to address them.

From <https://newsonjapan.com> 04/19/2024

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Japan's Population Crisis 744 Municipalities Could Disappear by 2050

A private organization has revealed that approximately 40% of the national municipalities, totaling 744, could potentially disappear by 2050 due to declining populations. The expert-led private group, "Population Strategy Council," defines municipalities where the population of young women falls below half as "municipalities at risk of extinction." It has announced that 744 municipalities nationwide fall into this category. A decade ago, the number of such municipalities was 896, but this figure has decreased thanks to an increase in foreign residents. Despite this slight improvement, the fundamental issue of low birth rates remains

unchanged. The council is calling on local governments to implement measures to improve birth rates. Regionally, the Tohoku area has the highest number and proportion of "municipalities at risk of extinction," with 165 municipalities falling into this category.

From <https://newsonjapan.com> 04/25/2024

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SOUTH KOREA: To Spend W710.2b to Expand AI in Everyday Life

South Korea will funnel 710.2 billion won (\$526.9 million) into the government's projects to integrate artificial intelligence into everyday life, the science ministry said Thursday. The AI Strategy High-Level Consultative Council, a government-civilian panel for shaping AI policies, convened its inaugural meeting and approved the investment plan to proceed with 69 AI projects aimed at helping the people feel the benefits of AI across all sectors, according to the Ministry of Science and ICT. Some 75.5 billion won is earmarked for 18 programs geared toward enhancing daily life, 288.1 billion won is designated for 24 workplace-related projects and 115.7 billion won is allocated to 14 public administration initiatives. Additionally, 230.9 billion won is set aside for AI education and ethics programs. The ministry said the projects include the development of AI-powered software tailored for diagnosing and managing nine pediatric rare diseases, as well as aiding in the diagnosis of 12 serious medical conditions.

They also support the creation of AI-based digital medical devices for early prediction and management of those on the autism spectrum. The ministry said it also has plans to leverage AI in public services, including the distribution of information and communication aids for individuals with disabilities, provision of health care services for vulnerable populations, such as elderly individuals living alone, and assistance for households in welfare blind spots. The government also aims to deploy AI across diverse industries by developing specialized AI services tailored for sectors such as law, medicine, and psychological counseling. In the public sector, AI technologies will bolster disaster response capabilities for scenarios like fires, floods and infectious disease outbreaks, the ministry added.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 04/22/2024

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S. Korean Exports Grow Rapidly amid Lagging Domestic Recovery KDI

South Korea's exports have grown rapidly, driven by the strong rebound in the semiconductor sector, though private consumption and investment remain weak, a state-run think tank said Sunday. "The Korean economy is experiencing a moderate downturn, buoyed by rapid growth in exports, particularly from the IT sector," the Korea Development Institute (KDI) said in a monthly economic assessment report.

"But consumption remains weak, particularly in goods consumption, as financing conditions are not improving due to persistent high interest rates. Though equipment investment exhibited some positive signs, construction investment is now experiencing a slight moderation," the report read. The latest assessment about exports was more positive than that made last month, but the institute pointed to weak domestic demand for five months in a row.

In March, exports, a key economic growth engine, rose 3.1 percent on-year on the back of strong chip sales, marking the sixth consecutive monthly increase. Industrial output rose for the fourth consecutive month by going up 1.3 percent on-month in February thanks to increasing semiconductor production. In an on-year term, the mining and manufacturing production rose 4.8 percent in February, as the output of semiconductors soared 65.3 percent from the previous year. But construction orders received and building permit area, two leading indicators of the industry circumstances, continued to slide by a large margin, which indicates "a potential continuation of the slowdown in construction investment going forward," the KDI noted. "External risk factors persist, such as the escalating international oil prices and transportation disruptions precipitated by geopolitical tensions," the report showed.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/07/2024

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IMF Maintains 2024 Growth Outlook for S. Korea at 2.3 Pct

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said Tuesday it held steady the 2024 growth outlook for South Korea at 2.3 percent on the back of great resilience in major global economies. The latest projection is the same as its forecast made in January when it raised this year's growth outlook for South Korea by 0.1 percentage point, citing "surprisingly resilient" global economic activity. It is rosier than a 2.2 percent growth forecast by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and by the South Korean government. The Bank of Korea (BOK) has set its outlook at 2.1 percent. The IMF also kept its growth forecast for South Korea in 2025 unchanged at 2.3 percent. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said Tuesday it held steady the 2024 growth outlook for South Korea at 2.3 percent on the back of great resilience in major global economies. The latest projection is the same as its forecast made in January when it raised this year's growth outlook for South Korea by 0.1 percentage point, citing "surprisingly resilient" global economic activity. It is rosier than a 2.2 percent growth forecast by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and by the South Korean government. The Bank of Korea (BOK) has set its outlook at 2.1 percent. The IMF also kept its growth forecast for South Korea in 2025 unchanged at 2.3 percent.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/16/2024

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S. Korea's Internet Industry Surpasses 600 TIn Won in Sales in 2022 Data

South Korea's internet industry saw its revenue surpass 600 trillion won (US\$435.5 billion) for the first time in 2022, data showed Monday. The total sales of the local internet industry reached 622.1 trillion won in 2022, up 16.6 percent from 533.7 billion won a year ago, according to data compiled by the Korea Internet Corporations Association (KICA). The internet industry accounted for 13.5 percent of the country's total industry sales of 4.6 quadrillion won for the year. The industry's annual growth pace of 16.6 percent outpaced other key sectors of Asia's fourth-largest economy, such as the manufacturing sector, which posted 16.4 percent, and the wholesale and retail industry with 12.9 percent. The KICA data also showed that 1.87 million people worked for internet corporations in 2022, up 16.8 percent on-year from 1.6 million. Its on-year growth outnumbered the average growth rate of 1.1 percent across all industries.

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Speeding Up Transformation to Digital Economy

The Indonesian government is accelerating its transformation target to the digital economy by focusing on empowering small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and tech startups, a minister said on Tuesday. At the 80th session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the country's Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Airlangga Hartarto said that Indonesia is currently focusing more on strengthening comprehensive research and development as well as technological innovation in a bid to create an advanced and high value-added business ecosystem through digitalization. "Digitalization has become the priority of the economic sectors. This includes a special focus on empowering SMEs and technology startups as well as stronger cyber security," Hartarto said. He added that the government has been working to build financial inclusion through partnerships with relevant authorities to provide better access to financial services to all levels of society. "And to support these efforts, we are also refining our regulations, policies and governance to ensure a healthy and fair digital economy, with consumer protection and national security measures," he said.

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CAMBODIA: On Right Track to Achieving Malaria-Free Goal by 2025

Cambodia is making significant progress towards achieving its self-imposed

malaria-free goal by 2025, the country's Prime Minister Hun Manet said on Thursday. In a message on National Malaria Day, Hun Manet said although malaria still plagues lives and has caused severe loss of productivity, adversely affecting public health and the social economies of the world and Cambodia, the kingdom has been on the right track to achieving its malaria-free goal by 2025. "Cambodia recorded only 1,384 malaria cases in 2023, and no deaths from malaria have been reported since 2018," he said. "In the context of peace, political stability, freedom, unity, and development throughout the country, we are moving closer to eradicating all forms of malaria by 2025," he added. Hun Manet also appealed to the international community, donors, and people from all walks of life to continue assisting the Southeast Asian country to realize this malaria-free target. Malaria is a mosquito-borne infectious disease typically found in forest and mountainous provinces, especially during rainy seasons. Huy Rekol, director of the National Center for Parasitology, Entomology and Malaria Control, said malaria diagnostic tests and treatments have been highly effective in Cambodia, with Artesunate-Mefloquine, or ASMQ, being 100 percent safe and efficacious against malaria.

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MYANMAR: 25,000 Houses Damaged by Disasters in FY 2023-24

Disasters that occurred in fiscal year 2023-24 through the end of March damaged 25,460 houses in Myanmar, affecting 76,601 households, a government official said Tuesday. Myanmar recorded 2,016 disasters in number over the last fiscal year, including 452 incidents related to fire, 144 related to water, 661 related to wind and 759 others, Daw Lay Shwe Sin Oo, a director at the Department of Disaster Management under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, told Xinhua. The most common disaster in Myanmar was the strong wind, and the areas worst hit by various disasters included Ayeyarwady region, Magway region and Shan state, the official added. In response to these disasters, the disaster management department had provided over 2.9 billion kyats (1.38 million U.S. dollars) in relief aid to the affected people, according to the official.

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Myanmar Plans to Cultivate 15 Million Acres of Monsoon Paddy in FY 2024-25

Myanmar plans to cultivate over 15 million acres of monsoon paddy in fiscal year 2024-25, with an increase of over 8,000 acres from the previous year, a Department of Agriculture official said on Tuesday. Of the total, 700,000 acres will be cultivated with support from the state economic promotion fund, the official told Xinhua. In the previous fiscal year, nearly 15 million acres of monsoon paddy were successfully cultivated. The monsoon paddy cultivation season in Myanmar typically runs from

May to October. To meet the new target, trainings on paddy cultivation and harvest techniques are being provided across regions and states of the Southeast Asian country, according to the official. Additionally, Myanmar aims to cultivate 2.6 million acres of summer paddy in fiscal year 2024-25, following the monsoon season, the official said.

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Myanmar Plans to Export 2,000 Tons of Coffee in 2024-25 Fiscal Year

Myanmar has planned to export about 2,000 tons of coffee during the 2024-25 fiscal year, the official television channel MRTV, citing the Myanmar Coffee Association, reported on Friday. According to the media report, Chairman of the Myanmar Coffee Association U Myo Aye said that the majority of Myanmar's coffee exports went to China and Thailand. The report also said that most of the country's coffee exports are transported via sea routes, with some also being shipped through land borders. The Myanmar Coffee Association, grouping coffee farmers, producers, technicians and shop owners, was actively working on improving the quality of Myanmar coffee and increasing its market share. Myanmar has approximately 40,000 acres of coffee plantations across the country, and most of them are in Shan State and Mandalay Region, the report said. The Southeast Asian country has mainly cultivated Arabica coffee and also grown Robusta coffee, the report said.

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PHILIPPINES: Digital Economy Contributes 8.4 Pct to Economy in 2023

The digital economy amounted to 2.05 trillion pesos (35.396 billion U.S. dollars) in 2023, contributing 8.4 percent to the country's gross domestic product (GDP), the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said Thursday. "This resulted in a 7.7 percent growth from the 1.90 trillion pesos (32.8 billion dollars) gross value added of the digital economy in 2022," the agency said. The digital economy comprises digital transactions covering digital-enabling infrastructure, e-commerce, digital media/content, and government digital services. The government digital service is a newly added component to support the government services directly supporting the digital economy. Of the digital subcomponents, digital-enabling infrastructure comprises the bulk of the digital economy, amounting to 1.70 trillion pesos (29.36 billion dollars). The top three biggest shares under this component come from telecommunication services, professional and business services, and computer, electronic and optical products, with 32.9 percent, 30.1 percent, and 17.1 percent shares in the digital economy, respectively. Moreover, e-commerce had a share of 14 percent, digital media/content had 2.9 percent, and government digital services had

a share of 0.2 percent. In 2023, the PSA said there were 9.68 million persons employed in the digital economy. E-commerce had the highest share in employment with 87.3 percent, followed by digital-enabling infrastructure, digital media/content, and government digital services with 11.5 percent, 1.1 percent, and 0.1 percent shares, respectively.

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SINGAPORE: Startup Investment Exceeds 6 Bln USD in 2023

The total startup investment in Singapore reached 6.1 billion U.S. dollars across 522 deals in 2023, making it the top startup investment destination in Southeast Asia, according to the latest report issued by government agency Enterprise Singapore. The share of early-stage funding accounted for 94 percent of the deal volume and nearly half of the total deal value last year, up from 90 percent and 44 percent in 2022, respectively, according to the report issued on Wednesday. Meanwhile, global early-stage funding for startups dropped 40 percent year-on-year in 2023. The contrast indicated that startups in Singapore can better weather the funding winter compared to their counterparts, the report noted. The funding results conveyed investors' confidence in Singapore as the destination for funding and startup development in the region, said Cindy Ngiam, director for startup ecosystem of Enterprise Singapore.

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Education Leaders to Discuss Improving Teaching at Singapore Summit

Senior education officials and representatives of teachers will expound on ways to strengthen the teaching profession and raise student achievement at a global summit in Singapore from Monday to Wednesday. Fundamental shifts, including technological innovation and the need for lifelong learning, will shape education in years to come, said Singapore's Education Minister Chan Chun Sing, at the opening ceremony of the 14th International Summit on the Teaching Profession. Given the changes, Chan called on the education sector to embrace the science of learning, build robust social and family environments for learning, and identify the future skills needed to match demand. Themed "Reimagining Education, Realising Potential," the event features discussions including the future of learning, the role of technology in transforming education and vocational training, and the importance of partnerships to support learning for life. The summit involves education officials, heads of teacher unions and teacher leaders from 18 delegations across Asia, Europe, North America and Oceania. The delegates will visit Singapore's primary and secondary schools, institutes of higher learning and other training institutions during the event.

<https://english.news.cn/> 04/22/2024

THAILAND: Government's Digital Wallet Handouts to Jumpstart Economy

The Thai government's digital wallet scheme, which is set to spend 500 billion baht (13.68 billion U.S. dollars) in cash handouts, is seen as a key tool to jumpstart the Southeast Asian country's sluggish economy, analysts at state-owned Krungthai Bank said. Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin said on Wednesday that the ruling Pheu Thai Party's flagship policy will be rolled out in the final quarter of this year. About 50 million Thais are eligible to receive 10,000 baht (around 275 dollars) each via a digital wallet to spend in their neighborhood within six months. According to the Krungthai Compass Research Center, the Thai economy has been experiencing consistently lower-than-potential growth rates, attributed to the sluggish recovery of trading partner economies and domestic purchasing power. To support the recovery of vulnerable domestic sectors, the digital wallet scheme is viewed as a "quick-win" measure to broadly facilitate domestic recovery and enhance confidence in Thailand's economic expansion, the analysts said in a statement. The handout scheme could further integrate the informal economy into the formal sector. Given that the kingdom's informal economy accounts for a significant 48.4 percent of the gross domestic product, expanding towards a data-driven and digital economy is increasingly crucial, the statement said. Srettha, who doubles as finance minister, told the Wednesday press briefing that the policy would boost the nation's growth by 1.2 to 1.6 percentage points. Thailand's economy contracted 0.6 percent in the final quarter of last year compared to the third quarter. In 2023, the Thai economy grew by 1.9 percent, decelerating from 2.5-percent growth in 2022.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/12/2024

VIETNAM: Projects GDP Growth Scenarios in Next Quarters

Vietnam's Ministry of Planning and Investment has put forward two scenarios of gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the next quarters to achieve the 2024 target of 6-6.5 percent, the local newspaper VnExpress reported Thursday. For 6 percent growth, the economy needs to expand 5.85 percent, 6.22 percent and 6.28 percent in the second, third and fourth quarters, said Minister of Planning and Investment Nguyen Chi Dung. For 6.5 percent, they have to go up to 6.32 percent, 6.79 percent and 7.08 percent. He said the scenarios were predicated on the first-quarter growth of 5.66 percent, the highest rate since 2020, and a steady inflation rate of 3.77 percent. While the ministry tends to expect the latter scenario, it acknowledges that the economy still faces certain problems and challenges, he said. The World Bank has forecast that Vietnam's economy is likely to grow 5.5 percent this year while the International Monetary Fund predicted its 2024 growth at 5.8 percent.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/04/2024

Vietnamese Employees' Average Monthly Income Reaches 304 USD in Q1

The per capita monthly income of Vietnamese people in the first quarter of this year was averaged at 7.6 million Vietnamese dong (304 U.S. dollars), up 549,000 dong (22 dollars) year-on-year, according to the General Statistics Office in its latest labor market report. The average income of laborers increased in most of the economic sectors compared to the same period last year, Vietnam News Agency cited the report on Friday. The average income of a real estate sector employee was 12.1 million dong (485 dollars) per month while those working in finance, banking and insurance sectors have an average monthly income of 13.1 million dong (524 dollars) each. Vietnam has 51.3 million employed workers in Q1, increasing by 174,100 people compared to the previous year. Among those, 33.3 million are informal workers, according to the office.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/05/2024

Building New Rural Programme to Further Pushed Up to Improve Economic Development

Hà Nội on Thursday by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. VNS Photo Tố Như

HÀ NỘI The One Commune One Product Programme (OCOP) has taken significant steps in development, contributing to awakening the potential, advantages, and indigenous values of regions and localities in recent years," said Ngô Trường Sơn, chief of the Central Coordinating Office for New Rural Development. The programme has also fostered creative and innovative thinking, conveying traditional cultural values and the soul of the nation in each product, and contributing to promoting rural economic development in the direction of "multi-value integration", Sơn said at the National Conference of Coordinating Offices for New Rural Development at all levels held in Hà Nội on Thursday by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Currently, the whole country has more than 12,000 OCOP products achieving 3 stars or higher, with over 6,500 OCOP producers and about 78 per cent of communes meeting new rural standards, an increase of nearly five per cent compared to the end of 2022. Of these, more than 1,800 communes met advanced new rural standards, marking an increase of nearly 900 communes compared to the end of 2022, and 340 communes were recognised as model new countryside, an increase of nearly 230 communes.

Sơn emphasised that as OCOP products have increased rapidly in quantity in recent years, attention is needed to address several raised issues to improve quality in all aspects, ensuring sustainable development and truly promoting the potentials and

advantages of localities and regions associated with preserving and promoting traditional cultural values and rural economic development. Along with enhancing OCOP, the agricultural sector also focuses on rural tourism development. To date, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has approved 20 models of agricultural and rural tourism associated with agricultural production, craft villages, preserving cultural values, and protecting environmental and rural landscapes in 20 provinces. The conference served as a platform for participants to propose tasks and solutions to continue to maintain and improve the quality of the new rural development programme. Speaking at the conference, Trần Thanh Nam, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, a member of the Central Steering Committee for National Target Programs for the period 2021-2025, said that the remaining time of the period 2021-2025 was not much, while the number of goals and tasks that needed to be completed was very large. "Therefore, in 2024 - the year of acceleration, we need to carry out more drastic and effective solutions," Nam said.

"We affirm that the National Target Programme on Building New Rural Areas continues to be the goal and driving force for socio-economic development in rural areas to improve the quality of life, material and spiritual life of rural people and step by step build 'Ecological Agriculture, Modern Countryside, Civilised Farmers'," said the deputy minister. According to the deputy minister, with the goal of further improving the quality of material and spiritual life of rural people, the National Assembly and the Government have approved the National Target Programme on Building New Rural Areas for the period 2021-2025. After 3 years of implementation, the programme has continued to achieve important results creating significant changes with further investment into socio-economic infrastructure helping improve the rural environment and people's lives. By April this year, a series of policies, mechanisms, and documents guiding the implementation of the programme has been issued and fully adjusted, ensuring unity, synchronisation, and suitability better with the actual conditions of regions, which will basically remove difficulties and obstacles and create more favourable conditions for localities.

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E-commerce Contributes \$7 Million in Taxes During 2022-23

A total of VNĐ180 trillion (US\$7.2 million) was collected from e-commerce business in 2022 and 2023, according to updates of the General Department of Taxation at a conference on Thursday in Hà Nội. Specifically, the tax collection amounted to VNĐ83 trillion on revenues of VNĐ3.1 quadrillion in 2022 and VNĐ97 trillion on revenues of VNĐ3.5 quadrillion in 2023. To date, 94 foreign services providers including Facebook and Google have declared and paid taxes worth totally VNĐ14.5 trillion. Mai Sơn, Deputy Director of the General Department of Taxation, said that a number of solutions have been implemented to enhance the tax management on e-commerce, including the development of a database on e-commerce. The Ministry

of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Information and Communication and the State Bank of Vietnam have basically completed the sharing of database to the General Department of Taxation, including the data of 929 websites providing e-commerce services, 130 organisations operating in the fields of telecommunications, advertising, broadcasting and payment accounts of more than nine million organisations and 121 individuals at 96 commercial banks. Sơn said that the tax watchdog will continue to improve the policies to enhance the management on e-commerce business as well as creating favourable conditions for tax declaration and payment and using e-invoices. The focus will be on upgrading the database and applying machine learning and artificial intelligence in analysing.

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South Asia

INDIA: Government e-Marketplace Achieves ₹4 Lakh Crore GMV, Doubles Business in a Year

Government e-Marketplace (GeM) has closed this financial year with ₹ 4 lakh crore in Gross Merchandise value (GMV) – doubling its GMV clocked at the end of the previous Fiscal Year. This achievement highlights the distinctive digital capabilities and functionalities of the portal, which have enabled increased efficiency, transparency, and smoothness in public procurement processes. The procurement of services through the GeM portal has emerged as a driving force behind this remarkable GMV surge. Approximately 50% of this GMV is attributed to service procurement, showcasing a remarkable 205% increase compared to the previous fiscal year. GeM's role in providing access to markets has notably disrupted the dominance of established service providers, empowering small domestic entrepreneurs to participate in government tenders effortlessly. The platform's extensive array of services has enabled states to procure innovative solutions tailored to their evolving needs. Increased participation from states has significantly contributed to this exceptional GMV growth. States like Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi have surpassed their designated public procurement targets, with central entities such as ministries and CPSEs contributing to nearly 85% of the ₹4 lakh crore milestone. Ministries of Coal, Power, Petroleum & Natural Gas and their subsidiaries have emerged as the top procuring entities at the central level.

GeM's expansive network, comprising over 1.5 lakh government buyers and 21 lakh sellers and service providers, has been instrumental in achieving this feat. By integrating Panchayats and cooperatives into its procurement ecosystem, GeM has facilitated sustainable procurement practices while optimizing public spending at the grassroots level. Shri PK Singh, CEO of GeM, emphasised the platform's inclusive initiatives, such as 'Vocal for Local', 'One District, One Product', and 'Womaniya', which have leveled the playing field for domestic businesses. Nearly 50% of the

GMV has been awarded to marginalized seller segments, including artisans, weavers, women-led enterprises, and startups. GeM's collaboration with Common Service Centers (CSCs) and India Post offices has further expanded its outreach, fostering job creation and economic growth. Earlier this fiscal year, GeM partnered with Tata Consultancy Services to enhance its technological infrastructure to improve user experience, transparency, and inclusivity. The platform, offering over 12,070 product categories and 320 service categories, has become a one-stop solution for seamless public procurement, providing opportunities for sellers and service providers nationwide to participate in government tenders transparently. GeM embarked on its journey to the ₹4 lakh crore landmark with a GMV of ₹422 crore in 2016, rapidly ascending to become one of the leading public procurement platforms globally. Committed to enhancing efficiency, transparency, and inclusivity, GeM continues to disrupt the public procurement domain.

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Telecom Industry Growth Driven by Bharti Airtel, Reliance Jio

The Indian telecom industry saw a 1.88% sequential growth in adjusted gross revenue (AGR) to Rs 67,835 crore in the October-December quarter, primarily driven by expansion of 5G services by Bharti Airtel and Reliance Jio. State-run Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (BSNL) also experienced growth in its AGR for mobile services, while Vodafone Idea continued to face challenges with a decline in AGR. Data released by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) indicated that access or mobile services contributed 82.07% of the total AGR, amounting to Rs 55,669.76 crore. National long-distance (NLD) AGR stood at Rs 6,523.30 crore, while internet service provider (ISP) AGR reached Rs 3,881.79 crore. In the mobile services sector, Bharti Airtel's quarterly AGR rose 3.22% sequentially to Rs 20,480.58 crore, while Jio experienced an increase of 2.67% to Rs 24,862.85 crore. In contrast, Vodafone Idea's AGR declined by 0.65% to Rs 7,459.08 crore. BSNL's AGR for access services grew by 2.31% to Rs 2,011.84 crore as the company works on rolling out 4G services through a locally developed telecom stack by TCS. The higher quarterly AGR resulted in increased licence fee and spectrum usage charge (SUC) collections for the Department of Telecommunications (DoT). The licence fee increased 2.01% sequentially to Rs 5,433 crore, while SUC collections rose 1.06% quarter-on-quarter to Rs 845 crore. Telcos are required to pay 8% of AGR as licence fees and a SUC payout below 1% of AGR after the government announced that airwaves acquired from the last 5G auction onwards would not incur any SUC.

In terms of subscribers, broadband subscribers (wireline and wireless) in India grew by 2.21% to 904.54 million by the end of December. The monthly average revenue per user (ARPU) for wireless services was Rs 152.55 at the end of December, compared to Rs 149.66 in the previous quarter. The total number of telephone subscribers in the country rose to 1,190.33 million at the end of December 2023,

registering a growth rate of 0.78% over the previous quarter. The total wireless subscriber base increased by 8.34 million during the quarter to reach 1,158.49 million by the end of December. Wireless tele-density also improved, rising to 82.95% at the end of December 2023.

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91% of Indian Firms to Use Majority of Data for AI Training in 2024

About 91 percent of Indian companies will use half or more of their data to train artificial intelligence (AI) models in 2024. According to the intelligent data infrastructure company NetApp, India leads in AI and cloud innovation compared to its global counterparts. India leads the way as an AI leader, with 70 percent of enterprises having AI projects up and running or in progress. This stands in stark contrast to the global average of 49 percent. "India is a country of humungous data sets. No surprise then, that India leads the world, and corporations are embracing AI to further their IT agenda", said Puneet Gupta, VP & MD, NetApp India/SAARC. The report surveyed 1,300 IT executives from key markets globally, including the US, the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore, and India. According to the report, 60 percent of AI-leading countries such as India, Singapore, the UK, and the US have AI projects up and running or in the pilot, compared to 36 percent in AI-lagging countries, including Spain, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, and Japan. About 87 percent of Indian companies have optimised IT environments for AI, and some AI-lagging countries also have AI-ready IT environments, which includes Germany (67 percent) and Spain (59 percent). "Data-ready enterprises that connect and unify broad structured and unstructured data sets into an intelligent data infrastructure are best positioned to win in the age of AI", said Gabie Boko, Chief Marketing Officer at NetApp. In addition, 53 percent of India-based companies reported being more likely to scale back or cut other parts of IT operations to make room for AI projects.

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India to Become Major Chip Hub in 5 Years

India is rapidly advancing its position in the global semiconductor industry, with the commissioning of four new semiconductor manufacturing units and plans to become one of the world's largest semiconductor hubs within the next five years. Union Railways and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw highlighted the country's significant strides in a recent interview with IANS, emphasizing the role of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in driving this growth and creating thousands of new jobs. According to Vaishnaw, India now has a clear policy aimed at bringing state-of-the-art technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Electric Vehicles, and semiconductors to the country. This approach aims to create more employment opportunities for the

country's youth and boost domestic startups. The realization of these initiatives marks a milestone in India's semiconductor journey, which had been envisioned since the 1960s but only recently gained momentum under PM Modi's leadership. Vaishnav revealed that four semiconductor units have been commissioned, with technology rapidly developing and construction moving forward at a fast pace. One of the highlights is the Sanand plant in Gujarat, where Micron Technology is constructing a chip fabrication facility with an investment of Rs 22,500 crore. The first 'Make in India' chip is expected to be produced at this plant by December of this year. Furthermore, Tata Electronics Private Limited (TEPL) is setting up a chip fabrication facility in the Dholera Special Investment Region (DSIR) in Gujarat, with an investment of over Rs 91,000 crore. This facility is part of PM Modi's foundation stone-laying ceremony for three major semiconductor projects worth Rs 1.25 lakh crore in March.

Additionally, TEPL is investing Rs 27,000 crore in an Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test (OSAT) facility in Morigaon, Assam. This facility will focus on Semiconductor Assembly, Testing, Marking, and Packaging (ATMP). In Sanand, Gujarat, CG Power and Industrial Solutions Limited is establishing another OSAT facility with an investment of Rs 7,500 crore. The Minister noted that the plant in Assam will utilize the chips made there in the world's largest Electric Vehicles, demonstrating India's expanding role in global EV manufacturing. Vaishnav reiterated India's strong foundation in semiconductor design and emphasized the Prime Minister's commitment to bringing semiconductor manufacturing to India. He believes that these efforts will enable India to become one of the world's leading semiconductor hubs in the next five years. This ambitious push into the semiconductor industry showcases India's commitment to becoming a global leader in technology and innovation. The development of these semiconductor facilities will play a pivotal role in driving the country's growth, providing opportunities for its youth, and strengthening its position on the world stage.

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Advantages and Disadvantages of Custom Software Development

The Fourth Industrial Revolution arrived, marking the phase of digital transformation and advanced technologies where software solutions are essential for modern businesses' success. With the climbing demand for software applications across industries, the question arises - should businesses opt for off-the-shelf or custom software development? For those who may not be familiar with these terms, off-the-shelf or bespoke software are solutions designed and made for a wider audience with generic features, while custom software is tailored to meet a specific business's unique needs and requirements. That's the overview. Now, further in this article, let's dive into the pros and cons of custom development. What Is

Custom-made Software Development? Also known as tailor-made software development, it is a term referring to the entire process of ideating, designing, creating, deploying, and maintaining a software product for a predefined set of users, functions, or organizations. In contrast to off-the-shelf solutions that are mass-produced and designed for a broad audience with varying requirements, custom ones are made to address the unique needs of their intended users, providing a more precise solution to specific problems or tasks. In this bespoke approach, the software development cycle involves several stages, from meticulous planning and designing to development and deployment. Through all phases, the final product is guaranteed to closely align with the client's initial requirements and objectives. Custom software can range from specialized applications for managing business processes, tools for data analysis, and customer relationship management systems to educational platforms, among others.

There are 6 types of business software: Custom-Made Software: Tailored to meet a business's unique needs, offering flexibility and competitive advantages by enhancing productivity and performance with unique functionalities. Packaged Software: Off-the-shelf solutions designed for general use across various industries, such as QuickBooks for accounting or Salesforce for CRM, offering cost-effectiveness and easy implementation for basic organizational needs. Open-Source Software: Community-driven software that allows for free use, modification, and distribution, like Linux or Apache, fostering innovation and customization at a lower cost. Web Applications: Platform-independent applications accessed via web browsers, like Google Docs or Slack, are ideal for remote access and offer scalable solutions without local installation. Enterprise Software: Comprehensive systems like ERP, CRM, and SCM are designed to streamline operations, improve decision-making, and enhance collaboration in large organizations. Game Development Software: Tools for creating video games and interactive media, providing features for graphics, animation, and artificial intelligence, with platforms like Unity and Unreal Engine catering to both the entertainment industry and indie developers. Custom development enables a range of advantages that can significantly benefit businesses and organizations. Here are some of the key advantages: Tailored Solutions: Tailor-made software is designed specifically to meet the precise needs of your business so that you can ensure that all functionalities are aligned with your operational processes and objectives with tiny to no adjustments required. This level of customization enhances efficiency and effectiveness in meeting business goals. Scalability: As your business grows or evolves, custom software can be adapted and scaled accordingly to accommodate new business requirements, changes in scale, or additional functionalities without the need to purchase new off-the-shelf products. Integration Capabilities: Custom solutions can be built to integrate seamlessly with existing systems and software used by your business. This reduces redundancy and ensures smooth interoperability between different processes or departments within an organization. Competitive Advantage: Having software that is uniquely designed for your company

can provide a competitive edge by enabling unique functionalities, improving customer experience, or streamlining operations in ways that off-the-shelf software cannot.

Cost-Effectiveness Over Time: While the initial investment in custom software solution development might be higher than purchasing ready-made solutions, it can prove to be more cost-effective in the long run. Custom software does not require continuous license fees, and it can reduce operational costs by automating and optimizing various business processes. **Security:** Custom software can be developed with specific security features tailored to your business's unique threats and vulnerabilities. This can provide stronger protection against cyber threats compared to generic software solutions that might have widely known vulnerabilities. **Ownership and Control:** With custom software, your business retains full ownership and control over the software and its source code. This means you are not dependent on the software vendor for updates or changes, and you can modify the software as needed to suit changing business needs. **Support and Maintenance:** Custom software developers can provide dedicated support and maintenance tailored to your specific needs, ensuring that any issues are promptly addressed and the software remains operational and up-to-date. **Alignment with Business Workflow:** Custom software can be designed to align perfectly with your business's workflow, minimizing the learning curve for employees and reducing resistance to new system implementations. Anything that brings benefits may also imply difficulties and obstacles, and custom software development is the same. **High Initial Investment:** The custom development process often requires a substantial upfront investment for design, development, and implementation. This can be a barrier for small to medium-sized businesses or startups with limited budgets.

Time-Consuming Process: Developing software tailored to specific business needs can be time-consuming. The process involves detailed planning, design, development, testing, and deployment stages, which can extend project timelines. **Complexity in Requirement Gathering:** Accurately capturing and defining the unique requirements of a business can be challenging. Miscommunication or changes in requirements during the development cycle can lead to delays and increased costs. **Finding the Right Development Partner:** Identifying and selecting a reliable software development partner who understands your business needs and can deliver high-quality custom software is crucial but can be difficult. The project's success greatly depends on the expertise and reliability of the development team. **Maintenance and Support:** Custom software requires ongoing maintenance and support to address any issues, incorporate new features, and ensure compatibility with evolving technologies. This ongoing commitment can be costly and resource-intensive. **Scalability Concerns:** As businesses continue to grow, their software needs may change. Ensuring that custom software can scale to accommodate growth and new requirements is essential but can be challenging to plan for during the initial development phases. **Technical Debt:** Over time, custom

software may accumulate technical debt if quick fixes are applied or if the software is not regularly updated. Managing technical debt is crucial to prevent the software from becoming obsolete or inefficient. Integration Challenges: Integrating custom software with existing systems and third-party applications can be complex and require additional customization or development work. Security Risks: Custom software must be designed with robust security practices to fight against cyber threats. Ensuring the software is secure and compliant with relevant regulations requires expertise and ongoing vigilance. Dependency on Developers: Relying on a specific development team for updates, maintenance, and support can pose risks if the relationship ends or if the developers are no longer available.

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Compliance Checklist for Foreign Investments in India 2024: Things You Need

Foreign investments are highly welcomed in almost every country, as this flow of money represents the engine of the world economy. Of course, foreign investment laws and regulations differ from one country to another, which is why it is extremely important to learn more about how to properly invest in some countries before making any decision. India is not different, as it has a vast selection of rules and regulations for foreign investments, and these are some of the most important things you need to know regarding that topic. The first thing to know about investments in India is that Foreign Direct Investment regulations and policies are there to support and encourage the economic growth of this country. Of course, the primary role and goal are to protect national interests, which is why these regulations are set so that with thorough revision by the government, the national growth of the country rises while it will not affect the national interests. There are two routes through how Foreign Direct Investment is executed - automatic and government route. Each has certain benefits and downsides, which is why learning more about sectors in which foreign companies can invest so that they can speed up the entire paperwork process is of vast importance, and also where LEI.net - Official Registration Agent can be of much help with. Okay, this is one of the aspects that every business that plans to invest in India should carefully study. Namely, every investor must comprehend the tax implications of their investments. Tax evasion is not an option, and there are strict rules and regulations that prevent such malicious actions. On the other hand, this also means that one needs to work within the regulations of the country, including tax rates, fees, and proper paperwork. Avoiding any possible error and mistake in this area is a must, as even a small misstep can have huge repercussions, and you can only do so by working within the law of this country.

Many people are unaware of the employment and labor laws in this country, which are in certain aspects much different. The minimum wage is just the first step, and everything else, from how one must treat their employees to the rules and

employees' behavior and working assignments, is strictly regulated. All of this means that every investor must adhere to these laws to ensure fair treatment of employees and avoid any possible legal problems. There are also rules regarding how employees are paid, meaning that investors must ensure compliance with the anti-money laundering and corruption laws. There is also a segment dedicated to health insurance for workers, as this is a huge aspect of the social security framework of this country. Much has changed in the past couple of years in India, and foreign investors must learn more about the legal side of how to invest in this country but also work within the laws and regulations and provide sufficient working conditions for their employees.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Eyes to Stretch Out Radio Broadcast Network

The Radio and TV Broadcasting and Satellite Communications Production Association (Teleradio PA), under the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport of Azerbaijan, is preparing to expand the radio broadcasting network, Trend reports. The association noted that all radio and television stations in the country will be outfitted with the required information technology equipment for this purpose. To note, Teleradio PA, founded on the Radio and Television Center and the Radio Center, offers terrestrial radio and television broadcasting, radio communications (operation of a network of radio relay lines), satellite radio and television broadcasting, and other services.

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Azerbaijan Sees Remarkable Growth in IT Sector in Recent Years

Azerbaijan has seen a notable increase in the field of information technology in recent years, especially with ambitious projects like IT Hub Azerbaijan, the President of StrategEast Anatoly Motkin said, Trend reports. He made a remark during the closing ceremony of the IT Hub Azerbaijan project. "This project stands out for its one-of-a-kind mission: to democratize access to IT opportunities by expanding beyond Baku and into the country's regions. The program focuses on growing the professional community and creating equitable opportunities for all people who want to enter the realm of technology," Motkin said. According to him, the distinctive feature of the IT Hub Azerbaijan project is its contribution to job opportunities not only in the IT sector but also in many other areas. "Statistics indicate that each IT professional indirectly contributes four to five additional jobs in unrelated IT sectors such as transportation, construction, service, and hospitality. This emphasizes the

importance of the technology sector as an engine of economic growth and innovation. Moreover, the project highlights the global ambitions of Azerbaijani IT professionals.

In the era of digitalization, geographical boundaries are being erased, allowing local talents to act on the international stage without leaving their homeland," StrategEast President said. He noted that IT Hub Azerbaijan and similar initiatives create the basis for global achievements, inspiring young professionals and entrepreneurs to realize their dreams and projects. "The project not only highlights Azerbaijan as a growing center of IT innovation but also actively engages international talent and technology leaders at events like InMerge, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experience. This dynamic strengthens the country's position on the global stage and helps attract foreign investment in the technology sector. Finally, deep gratitude is addressed to the government and parliament of Azerbaijan for their support and assistance in the implementation of the project. Such cooperation between the state, international organizations, and the private sector creates a synergy that can radically change the economic landscape of the country, basing it on knowledge and innovation. "IT Hub Azerbaijan is only the beginning of the road to an innovative and prosperous future for Azerbaijan in the digital era," Motkin added.

To note, the project IT Hub: Attracting Foreign Direct Investments in the Information and Communication Sector of Azerbaijan (IT Hub Azerbaijan) is implemented with the cooperation of the Center for Analysis and Coordination of the IV Industrial Revolution (4SIM) under the Ministry of Economy of Azerbaijan, StrategEast Company, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The project's goal is to assist in the development of ICT in Azerbaijan's provinces by training and employing qualified professionals in this field.

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Azerbaijan Sees Nearly Doubling of Total E-Procurement Value

Azerbaijan's total value of electronic purchases has amounted to 294.2 manat or \$173.06 million, from January through February this year, Head of the State Service for Antimonopoly and Consumer Market Control Mammad Abbasbeyli said on X, Trend reports. "Digitized public procurement contributes to the implementation of a competitive and reliable procurement process and the enhancement of business participation levels in procurement activities. In the initial two months of 2024, electronic procurement accounted for 294.2 million manat (\$173.06 million) of total procurement. Compared to the corresponding period in 2023, this indicator increased by 97.3 percent," the publication says. The State Service for Antimonopoly and Consumer Market Control is responsible for shaping and executing state policies related to antimonopoly measures, public procurement, technical regulations, standardization, metrology, and consumer protection. Its primary objective is to foster an environment conducive to free competition and provide robust support for

entrepreneurship, thereby promoting the sustainable growth of the national economy. The service was established by the decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated October 23, 2019.

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Azerbaijan's Satellite Serves as Key Data Source for Climate Change from Space

The Climate Change from Space e-platform relies heavily on data from the Azersky-2 satellite, Chairman of the Board of Azercosmos OJSC Samaddin Asadov said on the sidelines of the event "Climate Change View from Space" held in Baku on Friday, Trend reports. "Space technologies have emerged as critical tools for monitoring climate change, and we are pleased to announce the public launch of our e-platform, Climate Change from Space. Over 160 spacecraft worldwide are outfitted with instruments to measure climate change, with space accounting for more than 60 percent of all climate change data. Notably, the Azersky-2 satellite is the key information source for our e-platform," he said. Asadov noted that the advantage of space technologies lies in the fact that satellites observing the Earth's surface are an actual and optimal way to study the dynamics of changes in the current situation and processes. "The advantage of space technologies lies in the capability of satellites observing the Earth's surface to provide an accurate and efficient method for studying the dynamics of ongoing changes and processes. Leveraging satellite resources proves optimal in terms of material costs and resources for effectively assessing large, remote areas," he added. The chairman reminded that Azerbaijan will launch its next satellite in 2026. On April 5, a new e-platform was presented to the public, which consists of five sections in two languages. The information based on Azersky satellite data published here will contribute to raising awareness of climate change.

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Azerbaijan Counts Households, Businesses Provided with Access to Broadband Internet

A total of 74 percent of existing households and businesses have been provided access to broadband internet in Azerbaijan, Trend reports via the country's Ministry of Digital Development and Transport. Thus, 251,000 households and businesses in the country gained access to broadband internet as part of the ministry's Online Azerbaijan project in the first quarter of 2024. Overall, approximately 2.16 million households are covered by broadband internet, making up 74 percent of the total number of households and enterprises in the country. The ministry also noted that, according to the project, in the mentioned period, 79,000 households and businesses in Baku gained access to broadband internet. Overall, in the capital,

about 950,000 households have been provided with the opportunity to connect to high-speed internet using GPON (Gigabit Passive Optical Networks) technology, representing 86.5 percent of the existing households and businesses in Baku. The project envisages the buildup of a broadband network with internet speeds of at least 25 Mbps in the country through a public-private partnership model involving several telecommunications operators. "Active work is underway to provide cities and villages with high-speed and broadband internet based on GPON technology. Thanks to this technology, citizens can either connect to telephone services only or receive packages such as 'internet + telephone,' 'internet + television (two in one),' and 'internet + telephone + television (three in one).' Payments are calculated according to the services to which subscribers are connected. The work on this project is planned to be completed by the end of 2024," the ministry added. To note, within the framework of the project, more than 1.1 million households and business entities in Azerbaijan received access to broadband internet in 2023.

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Azerbaijan's AzInTelecom to Raise Awareness of Sustainable Dev't, Green Technologies

AzInTelecom LLC (Azerbaijan International Telecom), operating under the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport of Azerbaijan, has joined the UN Global Compact on Sustainable Development, said Chairman of the Board of Directors at AzInTelecom Elkhan Azizov, Trend reports. "We endorse the advancement of sustainable development across environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) realms. Our commitment aligns with the ten principles of the UN Global Compact on Sustainable Development, which include upholding human rights, combating corruption, promoting gender equality, and safeguarding the environment," he emphasized. According to him, the LLC will increase its focus on the popularization of green technologies in its activities. "Considering that 2024 has been designated as the "Green World Solidarity Year" in Azerbaijan and COP29 is to be held in Baku, our LLC will significantly prioritize environmental concerns and the advancement of green technological solutions," he said. AzInTelecom LLC's activities include the provision of cloud solutions, the transmission of international voice traffic between Azerbaijan and other countries, information security services, and the operation of the SIMA digital solutions platform. "The company's strategy is built on such basic characteristics as human value, reliability, innovation, adaptability, transparency, and confidentiality," the head of AzInTelecom LLC added.

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KYRGYZSTAN: Opens IT Hub in Its Jalal-Abad

Sadyr Zhaparov, Kyrgyzstan's president, cut the red ribbon at the opening ceremony of a new IT center in Jalal-Abad, Trend reported. According to the presidential press office, the center, built through a public-private collaboration, is a three-story IT hub with a total project cost of 65.363 million soms (\$733,426). Construction began in May 2023. The IT-RUN company carried out the project with assistance from the state and the municipality of Jalal-Abad. The center provides programming education for both youngsters and adults. The municipality's commission selects 10 free IT school places each year for individuals aged 7 and up. President Zhaparov inaugurated the center, emphasizing the development of the IT industry as one of the state's key strategic goals. He stressed Kyrgyzstan's potential to become a regional leader in information technology, citing public-private partnerships as an efficient way to attain this aim. Zhaparov emphasized the significance of developing the IT business not only in the capital but throughout the country. He urged regional authorities to provide extensive assistance to young people and investors interested in expanding Kyrgyzstan's information technology infrastructure.

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Kyrgyzstan Highlights Its Potential for Green Energy Development in Talks with EIB

Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan, Akylbek Japarov, highlighted the country's potential in the field of green energy during a meeting with Marcus Berndt, Acting Managing Director of the European Investment Bank (EIB), Trend reports. According to the cabinet, Japarov made these remarks on the sidelines of the spring meetings of the boards of governors of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group in Washington. "Kyrgyzstan is extremely interested in cooperation in the field of clean energy. Currently, Kyrgyzstan utilizes only about 13 percent of its hydroelectric potential. Meanwhile, the most ambitious and flagship project in the energy sector is the construction of the Kambarata-1 hydropower plant with a capacity of 1,860 megawatts," he said. Japarov emphasized that the EIB is one of the leading international financial partners of Kyrgyzstan and underscored the interest in strengthening cooperation in the energy sector. Since beginning operations in Kyrgyzstan in 2014, the EIB has supported projects in key sectors of the Kyrgyz economy, including agriculture, fisheries, forestry, solid waste management, water and sewage infrastructure, and energy. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), Kyrgyzstan's renewable energy capacity reached 3,210 MW in 2023.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/18/2024

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Head of Kyrgyz National Bank Discusses Country's Economics as Part of IMF Spring Meeting

From April 15 to 20, the Chairman of Kyrgyzstan's National Bank Kubanychbek Bokontaev took part in the spring meeting of the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) group in Washington, the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan says, Trend reports. According to the information, as part of this event, there were held meetings with Deputy Managing Director of the IMF Bo Li and Director of the IMF's Middle East and Central Asia Department Jihad Azur. At the meetings, the economic situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the country's macroeconomic policy measures were discussed. It is reported that there were also discussions and exchanges of views between the heads of central banks, including participation in the Swiss group of countries of the IMF, on the development of the world economy and trends in global inflation.

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Kyrgyzstan Gives Push to IT Development

The Cabinet of the Ministers of Kyrgyzstan is ready to support IT initiatives in the country, the Chairman of the Cabinet, Akylbek Japarov, said at the Intellectual Property and Innovations for Development of the Regions of the Country: Together towards a Successful Future national forum, Trend reports. "Intellectual property and innovation are major drivers of national economic progress. The development and implementation of new technologies, including artificial intelligence, quantum computing, robotics, and others, present significant difficulties for future generations of our country," Japarov said. He stated that in today's innovation-driven economy, intellectual property acts as a driver for socioeconomic growth and investor attraction. Japarov emphasized the need for creating an intellectual property ecosystem, comprising market infrastructure and processes for commercializing intellectual property, in order to deploy new ideas in the actual economy and highlighted the necessity of innovation infrastructure components such as the 40 Districts, 40 Initiatives project, which not only stimulates but also supports critical regional innovative projects and entrepreneurs. To note, during the IMF Spring Meetings in Washington, it was announced that a Google School pilot project will be launched in Kyrgyzstan's Bishkek, integrating Google tools into education.

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Tajikistan, ITU Mull Over Cooperation in Digitalization of Economic Sectors

Tajikistan and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) discussed cooperation in the digitalization of economic sectors, Trend reports. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, the issue was addressed during a meeting between Permanent Representative of Tajikistan to the UN Office and other international organizations in Geneva Sharaf Sheralizoda and the ITU

Secretary-General Doreen Bogdan-Martin. The discussion also covered innovation, digital technologies, and other areas of collaboration. ITU is an international organization that sets recommendations in the field of telecommunications and radio, and regulates issues related to the international use of radio frequencies. To note, in October 2023, Tajikistan hosted the ITU forum titled "Launching Next Generation Mobile Networks" for the first time. One of the main focuses was on exploring opportunities to enhance the quality and accessibility of mobile internet, as well as global practices in deploying 5G networks.

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Tajikistan, IFC Discuss Advancing Digital Financial Services

Tajikistan and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) engaged in discussions regarding the development of modern digital financial services, Trend reports. According to the National Bank of Tajikistan, the topic was deliberated during a meeting between Tajikistan's delegation, including the First Deputy Prime Minister of Tajikistan, Hokim Kholiqzoda, and IFC Managing Director Makhtar Diop, along with IFC Regional Vice President Hela Cheikhrouhou. The meeting took place on the sidelines of the spring meetings of the boards of governors of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group in Washington. Throughout the negotiations, the parties discussed direct lending and investments in the commercial and private sectors, green financing, and meeting climate change mitigation targets. Technical support to improve corporate governance in the banking sector, consumer rights protection, and legal changes in the sector were all discussed. Highlighting the existing relations between the two institutions, it was said that the IFC will continue to support the implementation of Tajikistan's prioritized reforms. Moreover, on the sidelines of the spring meetings, Hokim Kholiqzoda, Tajikistan's Finance Minister Faiziddin Qahhorzoda, and Economic Adviser to the President Negmatullo Hikmatullozoda met to discuss the partnership supporting economic policies and promoting inclusive growth with the Managing Director of the IMF, Kristalina Georgieva.

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IMF Raises Expectations for Tajikistan's Real GDP Growth

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects Tajikistan's real GDP growth to reach 6.5 percent in 2024, Trend reports. This amount has risen from 5 percent expected in the IMF's October economic estimate. However, GDP is expected to fall to 4.5 percent by 2025. Meanwhile, the World Bank (WB) predicts Tajikistan's GDP to expand by 6.5 percent in 2024. The bank expects Tajikistan's economic growth to decline to 4.5 percent in both 2025 and 2026. Similarly, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) expects Tajikistan's GDP to rise by 6.5 percent this year and next. In addition,

Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon highlighted the country's economic progress in his address to the Supreme Assembly at the end of 2023. He noted that Tajikistan's GDP increased by 8.3 percent in 2023 compared to the previous year, reaching over 130 billion somoni (\$11 billion).

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TURKMENISTAN: Encouraging Overseas Investors to Widen Modernization Linkup

Turkmenistan's Turkmennebit State Concern is open to cooperation with foreign investors and companies in the field of oil refining and petrochemistry, Trend reports. Guvanch Agadzhanov, Chairman of Turkmennebit State Concern, made this statement at the International Forum to Attract Foreign Investments in Turkmenistan's Energy Sector, which is now taking place in Paris. "The state concern is prepared to examine proposals from international firms to modernize the above-mentioned industries aimed at enhancing the quality of petroleum products, introducing a new product range, and improving and installing equipment for environmental protection," he said. Meanwhile, the purpose of this event is to increase the chances of attracting foreign direct investment in all segments of the energy sector of Turkmenistan and improve the regional debate on the future sustainable development of energy. Data from the Turkmengaz State Concern shows that the country's hydrocarbon resources are estimated at more than 71 billion tons of oil equivalent. This volume includes more than 20 billion tons of oil and more than 50 trillion cubic meters of natural gas. Turkmennebit is Turkmenistan's national oil corporation. It was founded in July 1996 by a presidential decree that reorganized sections of the former Ministry of Oil and Gas, and its headquarters are in Ashgabat. The Concern is responsible for the industrial development of oil and gas fields, as well as the production of oil, gas, gas condensate, and valuable components from byproducts obtained from them. It also undertakes search, extraction, concentrated accumulation, preparation, transportation, and processing.

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UZBEKISTAN: Emerging as New IT Hub for US Businesses

Uzbekistan has become an IT hub for US businesses, Ambassador of Uzbekistan to the US Furqat Sidiqov said, Trend reports. He spoke at the Caspian Policy Center (CPC) event held in Washington, DC. "Uzbekistan has become an IT hub for US businesses. We have the most developed IT parks in Central Asia. Now a lot of sourcing companies and center calls are working for US businesses. Right now, we have more than 100,000 young Uzbeks engaged in IT services," the ambassador said. According to him, Uzbekistan's IT exports amounted to more than \$500 million last year. A total of 70 percent of it went to the US market. "More than 100,000 people

are working full-time in IT parks. But because of US companies, Uzbek students have so-called half-time work. Because of that, they have incomes in the amount of \$1,000 per month," Furqat Sidiqov added. Meanwhile, the volume of mutual trade turnover between both countries grew by 30 percent by the end of 2023. The number of successfully operating US companies in the Uzbek market is also growing.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Gov Asked to Explain Automated Decision Plans in Migration, Biosecurity

Government ministers in migration and biosecurity are facing scrutiny over their ability to outsource some decisions, or aspects of decisions, to automated tools. A senate committee report [pdf], published late last week, criticised the lack of transparency around the technology's proposed use. Generally, an "explanatory memorandum" that accompanies changes to laws provides some level of detail about why a change is needed. The committee raised concerns that automated tools could be used in migration and biosecurity decision-making by ministers, with little justification or public-facing explanation. In migration, the tooling could be used to determine whether a visa holder should be blocked "from undertaking critical technology-related study" to prevent IP transfer.

The committee sought assurances from Home Affairs minister Clare O'Neil that a tool would not be used to completely automate "discretionary decisions". "The committee considers that the use of an automated decision-making process may operate as a fetter on discretionary power by inflexibly applying predetermined criteria to decisions that should be made on the merits of each individual case," it said. Additional information was also sought about the nature of tooling under consideration, given the lack of public-facing detail. "The explanatory statement ... does not provide any justification as to why it is necessary and appropriate to use automated decision-making in this circumstance and what safeguards are applicable to discretionary decisions made by a computer program, such as the application of merits review, the correction of errors, and sufficient oversight of the automated decision-making process," the committee said.

The committee added it was unclear if automated decisions would be "routinely audited" or if the accuracy of the tool would be cross-checked against what the minister would have independently determined. The committee similarly scrutinised the allowable use of automated decision-making tools in biosecurity, though in this case it was able to get detailed responses around safeguards from the responsible minister. The tools are intended to automatically determine if

vessels entering Australian waters need to file additional paperwork such as seasonal pest or human health questionnaires. Advice to the committee was that efforts had been made “to ensure electronic decisions are consistent with the Act’s objectives and based on the grounds on which a biosecurity officer could have made the decision.”

Still, the committee noted that transparency in the proposed use of automated decision-making tools should be made upfront, rather than having to be asked for. The government last year flagged potential laws around the use of automated decision-making tools, and a statutory body to audit automated decision-making, as part of its response to the Robodebt scandal of the previous government. Tool audits have already been conducted in NSW, with 275 tools uncovered that are now being scrutinised. Western Australia has similarly committed to reviewing existing and proposed uses of automated decision-making tools.

From <https://www.itnews.com.au> 04/03/2024

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New Diploma Gives the Future of Planning a Strong Start

In a first for NSW, budding planners will soon have a TAFE pathway into the planning profession with a new diploma open for enrolments. The brand-new Diploma of Local Government (Planning) will support school leavers and future planners on their way into paraplanning, a role that manages a lot of the initial assessment, research and review to provide valuable support to planners. Through a collaboration between the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, TAFE NSW, Local Government NSW and the Planning Institute of Australia, the Diploma has been adapted from TAFE SA’s curriculum to reflect planning practices in NSW. The Australian National Skills Commission has identified planning as a skills shortage area with a strong future demand, with strong demand for a diploma of this nature.

In a recent survey, more than 85 per cent of council respondents indicated they would consider upskilling existing staff with the qualification or employing planning cadets currently enrolled in the diploma. Between 2021-22 and 2022-23, shortages of planners contributed to a 28 per cent increase in the average number of days taken to determine local development applications in NSW. A recent Productivity Commission report found that between 2016 and 2021, Sydney lost twice as many people aged 30 to 40 as it gained. 35,000 came to Sydney, but 70,000 left. While we have a whole generation of people who can’t afford to rent or buy a home in NSW, we can’t afford to be slowing down housing approvals. In addition to the TAFE Diploma, the Strong Start Mentoring Program which began in February with 60 mentors continues, and registrations are now open for up to 250 planning mentors and mentees.

Planning students and recent graduates working in councils across the state are

invited to register to be paired with experienced planners for professional coaching and support. This year, senior planners in local government are also invited to register as mentors. Last year's inaugural program was an overwhelming success, with all participants reporting improved wellbeing, job satisfaction, career development and personal growth. One mentee from Shoalhaven City Council described their greatest takeaway as "the ability to feel confident in prioritising my career needs and then working out ways to achieve them. "My mentor helped me identify strategies to build my confidence and encouraged me to improve communication lines with my supervisor around my needs," they said.

Mentees receive ongoing professional development with quarterly check-ins and workshops run by professional facilitators. Group sessions will be available for participants to engage in peer-to-peer mentoring. For more information about the Diploma or Strong Start visit NSW Planning Minister for Planning and Public Spaces Paul Scully said: "Our role is to create capacity in the planning system for industry to deliver more homes, services and jobs. "Addressing the planning skills shortage through TAFE and the Strong Start mentoring program will play a critical role in delivering better and more timely outcomes for communities. "Planners do work that benefits everyone. I'm pleased that the NSW Government is continuing to support this vital profession with this new pathway and by connecting existing talent with emerging talent." Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education Steven Whan said: "This new Diploma will help deliver a strong pipeline of skilled workers to the planning industry. "Planners are a key part of alleviating the NSW housing crisis and I'm glad TAFE can play a role in training the next generation."

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 04/29/2024

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NSW Government Zeroes in on Road Safety

The NSW Government is doubling roadside enforcement sites used for mobile speed cameras and unveiling more measures to counter the rising number of deaths on our roads, with actions at state and federal level. There will be no increase in mobile speed camera enforcement hours, but cameras will be able to be deployed in 2,700 new sites across the state to reduce speeding more widely across the network. The number of enforcement hours will remain at around 21,000 hours per month across NSW regardless of the new sites where cameras can operate. The expansion is necessary in response to the increase in fatalities post-COVID. So far in 2024, 109 people have lost their lives on NSW roads – 13 higher than the same point in 2023.

New enforcement sites, which will be scoped over the next 12 months, are the latest road safety measure introduced by the NSW Labor Government, including:

- Removing a loophole to force all motorists driving on a foreign licence to convert to a NSW licence within six months
- The introduction of seatbelt enforcement by existing mobile phone detection cameras commencing on July 1
- The demerit point

trial that earlier this month saw 1.1 million drivers get a demerit point wiped from their licence for maintaining a spotless record over 12 months •Hosting the state's first road safety forum, bringing together more than 150 local and international experts

The NSW Government today announces the actions that have been taken out of the February Road Safety Forum, with Transport for NSW to immediately begin work on:

- Partnering with up to ten regional councils to fast-track the implementation of safer speed limits, particularly in areas of high pedestrian activity
- A new look road safety communications strategy aimed at, and designed with, young people
- Reviewing up to 35 school precincts across the state for improved safety on key routes to school
- Supporting safer speeds through better lighting, placemaking and streetscape improvements for areas that have, or are introducing, permanent 40kmh and 30kmh speed zones

On Friday, NSW is joining other states at the Road Safety Ministers' Meeting hosted by the Australian Government in Melbourne.

NSW has joined national and state road agencies in the signing of a formal data-sharing agreement which will help form a clearer picture of road safety across Australia, and inform strategies designed to increase safety. Data around the causes of crashes, including speeding, fatigue and seatbelt-use, crash locations, speed limits and types of vehicles involved will all be shared to help design initiatives to lower road trauma nation-wide. The National Road Safety Data Agreement will extend data sharing to state jurisdictions and non-government researchers, meaning the NSW Government will now be able to utilise information from across the country. Highlighting the importance of using data to develop road safety strategies, Transport will today launch the Towards Zero Collaboration Hub, consolidating road safety information, data access and resources into a single, accessible platform.

The Hub will build road safety knowledge and empower local councils, community organisations and other road safety stakeholders to work together and share strategies to help prevent deaths and serious injuries on our roads. Following the NSW Road Safety Forum, Transport will also explore ways with Corrective Services to enhance behaviour change programs for high-risk drink and drug driving offenders, and to implement stronger post-crash drug and alcohol testing after serious crashes. Transport for NSW will also examine the benefits and challenges of using average speed cameras to enforce speeding for light vehicles. Minister for Roads John Graham said: "Reducing the predictability of where roadside cameras are set up was recommended by the NSW Auditor-General."

"Like all other states around Australia, NSW has experienced an unwelcome rise in road fatalities since the COVID era, and we're taking action to prevent these tragedies on the road. "The Road Safety Forum was an extremely valuable opportunity to draw on the expertise and experience of over 150 international and Australian experts and the NSW Government is committed to building upon its recommendations. "Finalising the National Road Safety Data Sharing Agreement will

help form a clearer picture of vital information such as upgrades to roads and driver behaviour trends across Australia, as we work toward lowering road trauma nation-wide.”

Minister for Regional Transport and Roads Jenny Aitchison said: “The rollout of 2,700 new mobile speed camera enforcement sites across NSW will predominantly occur in regional NSW where 1,650 new sites will be eligible once the scoping period is completed over the coming 12 months. “This is entirely appropriate considering regional NSW represents a third of the NSW population but two-thirds of deaths on our roads. “We want the public along for the ride on this and urge anyone with a suggested site in mind where safety would be enhanced by a roadside mobile camera to tell Transport for NSW. “We can do more to help save lives on our roads in regional NSW – and I’m pleased to announce we are actioning initiatives from the Road Safety Forum immediately.” “We are partnering with up to ten regional councils over the next 18 months to accelerate safer speed reviews in towns, villages and on high-risk routes, which will make our towns and country roads safer.”

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 04/29/2024

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NEW ZEALAND: Enhanced Partnership to Reduce Agricultural Emissions

The Government and four further companies are together committing an additional \$18 million towards AgriZeroNZ to boost New Zealand’s efforts to reduce agricultural emissions. Agriculture Minister Todd McClay says the strength of the New Zealand economy relies on us getting effective and affordable emission reduction solutions for New Zealand. “The AgriZeroNZ public-private joint venture is accelerating the development, commercialisation and adoption of practical tools and solutions for our farmers to meet our international climate change obligations. “I am pleased to welcome The a2 Milk Company, ANZ Bank New Zealand, and ASB Bank as new shareholders of AgriZeroNZ. “Collectively they’ll contribute \$9 million over three years, matched by the Government, to help drive product development and commercialisation of new tools and technologies to reduce on-farm emissions.

“These new shareholders join the founding shareholders of ANZCO, Fonterra, Rabobank, Ravensdown, Silver Fern Farms and Synlait, alongside the Crown. “This will take the overall investment in AgriZeroNZ to \$183 million over the joint venture’s first four years. Fifty percent of this funding is Crown investment. Todd McClay says investment from the new shareholders shows the increasing commitment of New Zealand businesses to help get emission reduction tools into the hands of farmers sooner. “With the backing of both Government and private sector companies, New Zealand will be a global leader in developing the tools, technologies, and practices to drive down agricultural emissions while maintaining the productivity and profitability of our food and fibre sector. “Meeting our climate change obligations and

encouraging a booming agricultural sector are not mutually exclusive. Collaborations such as AgriZeroNZ will ensure that New Zealand's economy and climate are well served," says Mr McClay.

From <https://voxy.co.nz> 04/09/2024

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Roads of National Significance Planning Underway

The NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) has signalled their proposed delivery approach for the Government's 15 Roads of National Significance (RoNS), with the release of the State Highway Investment Proposal (SHIP) today, Transport Minister Simeon Brown says. "Boosting economic growth and productivity is a key part of the Government's plan to rebuild the economy, and I'm pleased to see NZTA moving at pace in putting forward their proposed approach to deliver on the 15 RoNS," Mr Brown says. The Government Policy Statement on Land Transport (GPS) prioritises economic growth and productivity, maintenance and resilience, safety, and value for money. "The SHIP outlines NZTA's proposal for how to deliver the projects detailed in the Government's recently released draft Government Policy Statement on Land Transport.

"Over the next three years NZTA plans to begin construction on a number of the RoNS and establish a 10-year construction pipeline. NZTA will also look to accelerate project development through fast-track legislation, as well as seek new sources of funding and financing to ensure timely delivery. "In addition to the RoNS, the SHIP also includes other key commitments like the additional Waitemata Harbour Crossing, Northwest Rapid Transit Corridor, and increased investment in road maintenance and renewals. "To rebuild our economy and ensure people and freight can get to where they need to go quickly and safely, we need to move at pace to deliver the infrastructure our country needs." The NZTA Board must adopt a new NLTP before 1 September 2024 which will confirm which activities (including any RoNS projects) may be funded by the National Land Transport Fund over the 2024-2027 period.

From <https://voxy.co.nz> 04/12/2024

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Public Transport Costs to Double as National Looks at Unaffordable Roading Project Instead

Cancelling urgently needed new Cook Strait ferries and hiking the cost of public transport for many Kiwis so that National can announce the prospect of another tunnel for Wellington is not making good choices, Labour Transport Spokesperson Tangi Utikere said. "Nicola Willis and Simeon Brown keep telling people there is no money for ferries or public transport, and yet they seem to have no problem exploring another tunnel under Wellington," Tangi Utikere said. "National is cutting half-price public transport for under 25s and cancelling free travel for under 13s at the end of

this month, which will hit people's back pocket right in the middle of a cost of living crisis. "The Cook Strait ferries have been canned, despite the urgent need for replacements to secure the future of our vital North-South Island link for passengers and freight.

"National has repealed plans to help councils dig up old and faulty pipes and fix their water infrastructure, despite huge ongoing infrastructure issues in Wellington and around the country. "And they're ignoring the need for better transport corridors above ground so that people can live further out, and more houses can be built to reduce costs of rent and travel in the capital. "Yet there's enough money for a business case on another tunnel, which was ruled out under Let's Get Wellington Moving for the cost being "eye watering". The government also have promised Wellingtonians construction will start on a second Mt Victoria tunnel before the next election. "This announcement is a diversion from the important investments that need to be made today, by a Government that desperately wants to look like it is investing in tomorrow. National already has big holes in its Budget, so they're now looking to add costs for future Governments instead of dealing with the infrastructure needs of today. "It is irresponsible. If National was truly focused on improving productivity, helping people get around and transporting freight, they would not be making these decisions," said Tangi Utikere.

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Environmental Protection Vital, Not 'Onerous'

The Government's Fast Track Approvals Bill will give projects such as new coal mines a 'get out of jail free' card to wreak havoc on the environment, Labour Leader Chris Hipkins said today. The Bill gives Ministers the final sign off on large projects, instead of an independent panel. It will allow three Ministers the power to override advice if they consider the conditions too 'onerous' for business. "It's worrying that Chris Bishop calls environmental protections 'onerous'. Protecting land, people and native species is not onerous but in all of our interests. "It's also worrying that on the Government's list of those they're inviting to apply are companies that have donated recently to National and ACT. Directors and shareholders of Winton and Carter Group have made substantial donations in recent years, and are among those Chris Bishop has written to detailing how to apply for approval. "Ministers shouldn't be taking donations from business with one hand, and making decisions about their projects on the other. "The Bill clearly enables private profit to trump our environmental protections, which will ultimately be detrimental to everyone," Labour environment spokesperson Rachel Brooking said. "If Ministers are making the decision to push go on a project the door is open to lobbying from companies and interests here and offshore."

From <https://voxy.co.nz> 04/21/2024

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Minister Welcomes Hydrogen Milestone

Energy Minister Simeon Brown has welcomed an important milestone in New Zealand's hydrogen future, with the opening of the country's first network of hydrogen refuelling stations in Wiri. "I want to congratulate the team at Hiringa Energy and its partners K one W one (K1W1), Mitsui & Co New Zealand Limited, and Green Impact Partners for reaching this important milestone," Mr Brown says. "Hydrogen can play an important role in decarbonising a number of industries and sectors, such as fertiliser and methanol production, and potentially steel production. "Hydrogen could also have great potential for decarbonising heavy road transport. Road transport carries over 90% of our domestic goods by weight and is a crucial sector for our economy and exports. "Our Government plans to double the supply of renewable energy which will play an important role in supporting the development of the hydrogen sector. "As a country with one of the most highly renewable electricity systems in the world already, and significant potential to generate new renewable electricity, we have a clear opportunity for green hydrogen production," Mr Brown says.

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5、 Public Finance

Asia-Pacific

The World Bank Demonstrates Depth of its Capital Markets Investor Base with Dual Tranche USD 6 Billion Sustainable Development Bond Transaction

The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD, Aaa/AAA) today priced two Sustainable Development Bonds, raising a total of USD 6 billion from a USD 3 billion 2-year bond maturing in April 2026 and a USD 3 billion 7-year bond maturing in April 2031. The transactions attracted over 260 orders totaling more than USD 12.7 billion. The dual tranche format, with points on the short and longer end of the yield curve, drew a globally diverse and broad base of fixed income investors and their investment strategies. As is common with World Bank benchmark transactions, leading investor groups included central banks and official institutions, including sub-national and municipal entities, as well private sector investors including bank treasuries, pension funds, insurance companies and asset managers. HSBC Bank plc, J.P. Morgan Securities plc, Merrill Lynch International, Wells Fargo Securities, LLC are the lead managers for both transactions. The bonds will be listed on the Luxembourg Stock Exchange. The 2-year tranche priced at a spread versus the reference US Treasury of +8.5 basis points, resulting in a

semi-annual yield of 4.764%, and the 7-year tranche priced at a spread versus the reference US Treasury of +15.3 basis points, resulting in a semi-annual yield of 4.521%. *“This dual tranche transaction mobilized over 260 investor orders, demonstrating the wide breadth and depth of support that we enjoy from capital markets investors”* said **Jorge Familiar Vice President and Treasurer, World Bank**. *“This globally diverse stakeholder group is very important to the World Bank by providing financial support for its efforts to end extreme poverty and boost prosperity on a livable planet.”*

Investor Breakdown by Type

	2-year	7-year
Central Banks/Official Institutions	70%	23%
Banks/Bank Treasuries/Corporates	20%	68%
Asset Managers/Insurance/Pension Funds	10%	9%

Investor Breakdown by Geography

	2-year	7-year
Europe / Middle East/ Africa (EMEA)	37%	59%
Americas	34%	30%
Asia	29%	11%

Lead Manager Quotes

“Congratulations to the World Bank team, returning to the bond market with a dual-tranche transaction and printing an impressive USD 3 billion 2-year and USD 3 billion 7-year bond on the back of a combined orderbook over USD 12.7 billion. This high-quality investor support allowed for their largest issuance since April 2021 and the largest USD dual tranche to date,” said **Adrien de Naurois, Head of EMEA IG Syndicate, BofA Securities / Merrill Lynch International**.

“Today’s US dollar dual-tranche transaction was a great result for the World Bank team. The trade highlights the quality and global appeal of the World Bank name and its Sustainable Development Bond format, taking a combined issue size of USD 6 billion and attracting a strong and diverse orderbook on both the 2-year and 7-year tranche. HBSC was delighted to be a part of the transaction,” said **Asif Sherani, EMEA Head of Syndicate and Head of Public Sector DCM, HSBC**.

“The World Bank was quick to take advantage of the constructive market tone following the holiday break, moving ahead with the first Sovereign, Supranational and Agency (SSA) US dollar new issue of the quarter. With this well-timed transaction, the World Bank was able to achieve the largest US dollar outing of the year in the SSA market, choosing two under-supplied tenors and launching a USD 6

billion combined size across the two maturities. Congratulations to the World Bank team for this impressive transaction,” said **Sarah Lovedee, Head of Supranational DCM, J.P. Morgan.**

“Utilizing good timing sense, the World Bank issued their first dual-tranche USD benchmark since March 2022. Robust demand allowed issuer to garner an orderbook more than USD 12.7 billion to price a combined USD 6 billion 2 & 7-year transaction. This issue becomes, the largest USD SSA transaction priced this year, an impressive result. Wells Fargo is delighted to be part of this trade,” said **Carlos Perezgrovas, Head SSA Origination, Wells Fargo Securities.**

Transaction Summary

	2-Year Bond	7-Year Bond
Issuer:	World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD)	
Issuer rating:	Aaa /AAA	
Amount:	USD 3 billion	USD 3 billion
Settlement date:	April 10, 2024	
Maturity date:	April 10, 2026	April 10, 2031
Issue price:	99.974%	99.875%
Issue yield:	4.764% semi-annual	4.521% semi-annual
Denomination:	USD 1,000	USD 1,000
Coupon:	4.75% p.a., payable semi-annually in arrear	4.5% p.a., payable semi-annually in arrear
ISIN:	US459058LE18	US459058LF82
Listing:	Luxembourg Stock Exchange	
Clearing system:	Fedwire, Clearstream, Euroclear	
Lead managers:	Merrill Lynch International, HSBC Bank plc, J.P. Morgan Securities plc, Wells Fargo Securities, LLC	

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/03/2024

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OECD Headline Inflation Stable at 5.7% in February 2024, Food Inflation Continues to Slow

Year-on-year inflation in the OECD as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was stable in February 2024 at 5.7%, having hovered around 6.0% since May 2023 (Figures 1 and 2). Headline inflation fell in three-quarters of OECD countries, with the largest monthly declines recorded in Poland and Sweden and the largest rise in Türkiye. Headline inflation was below 2.0% in seven OECD countries and remained negative in Costa Rica. **Food inflation continued to decline for the 15th consecutive month, reaching 5.3% in February after 6.3% in January**, and increasing in only four OECD countries. OECD food inflation was lower than headline inflation for the first time since November 2021. OECD energy inflation increased but remained moderately negative at minus 0.5% in February, despite strong energy inflation in Türkiye and Colombia. OECD core inflation (inflation less food and energy) continued to decline but remained high at 6.4%, reflecting sticky services prices. **Year-on-year inflation was also stable in the G7 at 2.9% in February, its lowest level since April 2021**. It increased in Japan, reflecting a base effect, as energy prices had declined significantly in February 2023 with the introduction of energy subsidies. By contrast, the United Kingdom and Germany registered the strongest declines in headline inflation in February 2024. Core inflation was the main contributor to headline inflation in most G7 countries (Figure 3).

In the euro area, year-on-year inflation as measured by the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) declined to 2.6% in February compared to 2.8% in January. The decline in food inflation was about twice as large as that of the OECD, while core inflation declined at a similar pace to that of the OECD. In March 2024, Eurostat's [flash estimate](#) pointed to another decline in euro area headline (to 2.4%) and core inflation (to 2.9% after 3.1% in February), with a slowing decline in energy prices. **In the G20, year-on-year inflation rose to 6.9% in February compared to 6.4% in January, reaching its highest level since March 2023**. This rise was driven partly by an increase in headline inflation in China, which turned positive for the first time since August 2023. Headline inflation also increased in Saudi Arabia and Indonesia and jumped even further in Argentina (Table 2). It was broadly stable in Brazil and South Africa.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 04/08/2024

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World Bank Report Provides More Clarity on Callable Capital

The World Bank published a [report](#) on Friday that reviews the procedures and governance of callable capital, providing more clarity and transparency on the value of this financial commitment from the institution's shareholders. This information will help rating agencies to better assess the value of callable capital to Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs). It responds to requests from the rating agencies for more information on how shareholders would respond to a call. Additional recognition by rating agencies of the value of callable capital could potentially allow the World Bank and other MDBs to expand financial capacity to tackle growing

development needs and improve the lives of millions. Callable capital is a commitment from World Bank shareholders to step in with new funds to help the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) meet its bond and guarantee obligations under extreme circumstances. IBRD's strong financial framework, including callable capital, align with its Triple-A credit rating.

The World Bank report examines when callable capital could be called, how a call could be made, and how shareholders could respond. The analysis:

- Confirms through a reverse stress testing exercise that the likelihood of a call on capital is extremely remote.
- Includes detailed information on some member country processes to respond to a call on callable capital.
- Highlights shareholder country commitments to callable capital which are legally binding and backed by member countries.

As of June 30, 2023, IBRD had a total of \$296 billion in callable capital, accounting for 93 percent of its \$318 billion total subscribed capital, with the remaining 7%, or \$22 billion, in paid-in capital, according to the report. The report comprises efforts by the World Bank and other MDBs to implement recommendations from the G20-sponsored Independent Review of MDB Capital Adequacy Frameworks. Similar reports on callable capital are being published by the African Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/12/2024

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New Partnership Aims to Connect 300 Million to Electricity by 2030

The World Bank Group and African Development Bank Group are partnering on an ambitious effort to provide at least 300 million people in Africa with electricity access by 2030. The World Bank Group will work to connect 250 million people to electricity through distributed renewable energy systems or the distribution grid while the African Development Bank Group will support an additional 50 million people. Access to electricity is a fundamental human right and is foundational to any successful development effort. Currently, 600 million Africans lack access to electricity, creating significant barriers to health care, education, productivity, digital inclusivity, and ultimately job creation. *"Electricity access is the bedrock of all development. It is a critical ingredient for economic growth and essential for job creation at scale. Our aspiration will only be realized with partnership and ambition. We will need policy action from governments, financing from multilateral development banks, and private sector investment to see this through,"* said **Ajay Banga, World Bank Group President.**

This partnership is a demonstration of the determination of the World Bank Group and the African Development Bank Group to be bolder, bigger, and better in tackling one of the most pressing challenges in Africa. The initiative is the most recent manifestation of the World Bank Group's commitment to become more impact-oriented and is the byproduct of a concerted workplan to build a better bank. It is aided by a constellation of regional energy programs that will now be aligned toward this common goal. For the World Bank Group to connect 250 million people, \$30 billion of public sector investment will be needed, of which IDA, the World Bank's concessional arm for low-income countries, will be critical. In addition, governments will need to put in place policies to attract private investment, and reform their utilities so they are financially sound and efficient with tariff mechanisms that protect the poor. Connecting 250 million people to electricity would open private sector investment opportunities in distributed renewable energy alone worth \$9 billion. Beyond that, there would be substantial opportunities for private investments in grid-connected renewable energy needed to power economies for growth.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/17/2024

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World Bank Prices a NOK 3 Billion Floating Rate Sustainable Development Bond

The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD, Aaa/AAA) today priced a 3 billion Norwegian krone-denominated floating rate Sustainable Development Bond that matures on October 26, 2029. The bond offers a quarterly coupon of 3-month NIBOR + 19 bps and was priced at 100%. Nordea acted as sole lead manager for the transaction. The bonds were placed with Norwegian investors, with banks representing the majority share of allocations at 74%, followed by central banks and official institutions at 24%. The remainder was placed with insurance companies, pension funds and others. **Andrea Dore, Head of Funding, World Bank Treasury**, said, "*The impressive size of this Sustainable Development Bond underscores the Norwegian investor community's interest in a liquid, highly rated product as well as the continued support for the World Bank's mission to end poverty on a livable planet.*" **Kamal Grossard-Amin, Head of SSA Origination, Nordea**, said, "*We want to congratulate IBRD for their first NOK transaction in 2024. Parring the tightest NOK SSA transaction in the 5.5-year tenor year to date, despite recent geopolitical uncertainty, is a true testament of IBRD's reputation among the Norwegian investor community.*"

Transaction Summary

Issuer:	World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD)
Issuer rating:	Aaa/AAA (Moody's/S&P)

Currency:	NOK
Amount:	NOK 3,000,000,000
Settlement date:	April 26, 2024
Maturity date:	October 26, 2029
Issue price:	100%
Issue yield:	3-month NIBOR + 19 bps
Denomination:	NOK 10,000
Coupon:	3-month NIBOR + 19 bps
Listing:	Luxembourg Stock Exchange
ISIN:	XS2809237378
Clearing system:	Euroclear/Clearstream
Lead manager:	Nordea

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/17/2024

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New Financing Tools Receive Major Funding Boost

New financial instruments designed to boost lending capacity and enable the World Bank Group to take on more risk for shared global challenges have received a significant endorsement. A set of 11 countries announced commitments today for the Portfolio Guarantee Platform, hybrid capital mechanism, and new Livable Planet Fund totaling \$11 billion. The World Bank Group's unique leveraging capability enables the resources pledged to hybrid capital and the Portfolio Guarantee Platform to be multiplied six to eight times over 10 years. Under certain conditions, the leverage amount could reach tenfold. The resources pledged today could provide up to \$70 billion in urgently needed funds, which can be deployed to address cross-border challenges and advance development goals. *"We worked hard to develop these new financial instruments that boost our lending capacity, multiply donor funds, and ultimately allow us to improve the lives of more people,"* said **Ajay Banga, World Bank Group President**. *"The generosity of these countries is both an endorsement of the progress we have made to reform the Bank, and a sign of their shared commitment to development globally."* Belgium, France, Japan, and the United States pledged to the Portfolio Guarantee Platform, while Denmark, Germany, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom made commitments to hybrid capital.

Japan is committed to providing the first contribution to the new Livable Planet Fund.

The World Bank Group has implemented a series of reforms and developed innovative financial instruments as part of the Capital Adequacy Framework review, which was recommended by the G20 Expert Group. These reforms include:

- Adjusting the loan-to-equity ratio to secure \$40 billion over 10 years from the IBRD's balance sheet.
- Increasing the bilateral guarantee limit by \$10 billion.
- Working to maximize callable capital benefits by publishing a detailed report for rating agencies to better assess its potential value and the Bank's financial capacity
- Introducing hybrid capital, giving shareholders and partners an opportunity to invest in bonds with special leveraging potential.
- Developing the Portfolio Guarantee Platform that provides a shared approach to risk that will make World Bank financing more widely available.
- Launching a Livable Planet Fund that enables governments', philanthropies' and other partners' contributions to incentivize cooperation across borders and tackle shared challenges.

The World Bank Group has taken the additional steps to develop IBRD 50-year loans at no additional cost for borrowers. These loans will be utilized for projects that provide cross-border benefits. Additionally, we created a system to reduce interest rates for projects that address global challenges, which will be partially funded through the Livable Planet Fund.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/19/2024

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Tax Inspectors Without Borders to Release Annual Report on Monday, 29 April 2024

Citizens across the world are paying ever closer attention to their countries' ability to tax the profits of Multinational Enterprises (MNEs). In 2024, Tax Inspectors Without Borders (TIWB) – a joint initiative of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) - is celebrating its ninth year working with developing country tax authorities to improve tax audits and compliance by MNEs. To commemorate this milestone, TIWB will release its Annual Report 2024 on Monday, 29 April at 11:00 CEST, during its annual Stakeholders Workshop in Paris. The report will look back on the initiative's activities during the period from July 2022 to December 2023, including impressive results in the number of programmes completed, those currently underway and additional tax collected and assessed. Beyond details about TIWB work on international audit, criminal tax investigations, and effective use of automatically exchanged information, the annual report describes the continuing expansion of TIWB technical assistance to tax administrations tackling frontier issues, including practical implementation and

effective use of country-by- country reporting data, conducting audits of VAT on digital trade and facilitating the implementation of the global minimum tax. Journalists can request an advance copy of TIWB's Annual Report 2024 under embargo, a day before its release, by emailing the TIWB Secretariat. The full report will be available in English, French, and Spanish. In asking to receive the report under embargo, journalists undertake to respect the OECD's embargo procedures*. Interview requests may be sent to Lawrence Speer in the OECD Media Office at +33 1 45 24 79 70 or Camilla Bianchini at UNDP (+39 34 68 83 73 32). For further information, please contact the TIWB Secretariat. More information can be found on www.tiwb.org Follow TIWB on Twitter: @TIWB_News 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/> 04/22/2024

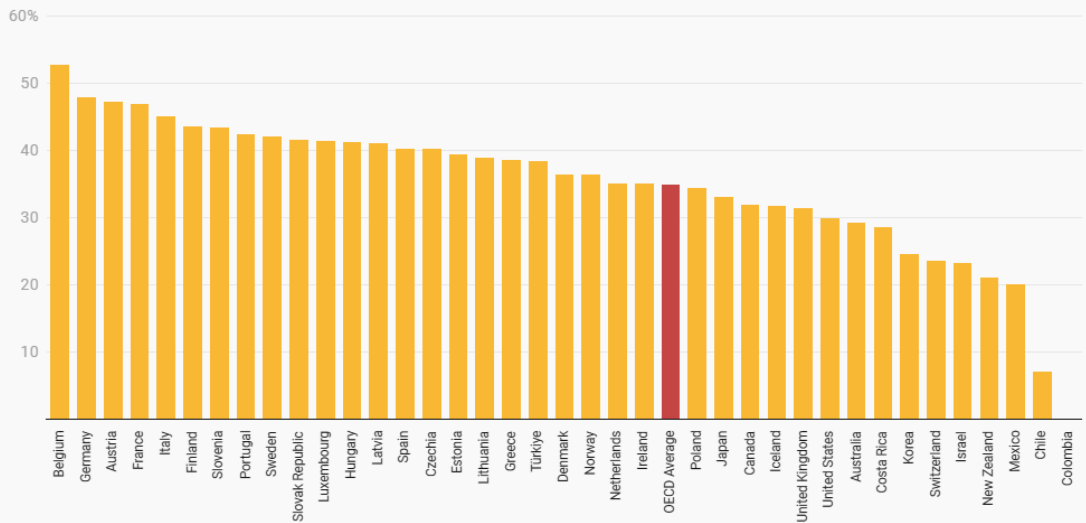
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Labour Taxes Rise Across OECD Countries amid Persistent Inflation

A second consecutive year of high inflation pushed up labour taxes across OECD countries in 2023, according to a new OECD report. Taxing Wages 2024 reveals that effective tax rates on labour incomes rose in a majority of OECD countries with the post-tax income of single workers earning the average wage declining in 21 out of 38 OECD countries. In a majority of countries, the increase in labour taxation was primarily driven by increases in personal income tax. While real wages declined in 18 OECD countries, nominal wages increased in 37 out of 38 OECD countries, as inflation remained above historic levels. In the absence of automatic indexation of tax systems in many OECD countries, high inflation tends to increase workers' tax liabilities by pushing them into higher tax brackets and erodes the value of the tax reliefs and cash benefits they receive. The new OECD analysis focuses on cross-country comparison of the labour tax wedge – defined as total taxes on labour paid by both employees and employers, minus family benefits, as a percentage of labour costs. It looks at eight different household types, varying by income level and household composition. For a single worker earning the average wage, the average tax wedge across OECD countries was 34.8%, ranging from 53% in Belgium to 0% in Colombia in 2023. The average tax wedge for this household type increased by 0.13 percentage points from 2022, marking an increase for the second consecutive year.

Tax wedge for the average single worker in OECD countries (2023)

Income tax plus employee and employer social security contributions, minus cash benefits, as % of labour costs



Source: OECD (2024), Taxing Wages 2024: Tax and Gender through the Lens of the Second Earner, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dbcbac85-en>.
Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

This year's edition of Taxing Wages includes a special feature that examines how the tax wedge differs between first and second earners. Specifically, the report analyses the tax rates on second earners in married couples, more than 75% of whom are women in almost all OECD countries. It finds that second earners face higher effective tax rates than single workers when they take up work at the same wage level in the majority of OECD countries, although the difference has narrowed in recent years. On average in the OECD, a second earner in a couple without children who takes up work at 67% of the average wage faces a tax wedge of 34.0%, versus 31.0% for a single worker earning 67% of the average wage. Fiscal disincentives for second earners are larger in countries where taxation occurs at the household level or in countries with individual-level taxation where tax reliefs are considered at the household level. Taxing Wages 2024 enables cross-country comparisons of labour costs and the overall tax and benefit position across the OECD. It analyses income tax paid by employees, cash benefits received by in-work families and the associated social security contributions and payroll taxes made by employees and employers, which are key factors affecting the workforce participation and hiring decisions of individuals and businesses respectively. Further information and individual country notes are available at: <https://oe.cd/taxingwages>. Media enquiries should be directed to Kurt van Dender, Acting Head of the OECD's Tax Policy and Statistics division (+33 1 45 24 88 66) or to Lawrence Speer (+33 1 45 24 79 70) in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 45 24 97 00). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 04/25/2024

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ADB Passes Half-Way Mark in \$14 Billion Food Security Commitment

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is on schedule to deliver its commitment to invest \$14 billion by 2025 to improve food security and support measures to ease the food crisis in Asia and the Pacific. As of the end of 2023, ADB had already committed \$7.6 billion, or about 52%, of the total allocation. In response to food security challenges brought by climate change and biodiversity loss in the region, ADB announced this funding commitment in September 2022 over a 4-year period. “Food insecurity is causing tremendous suffering and undermining the prospects for development. The world needs to act urgently to address this crisis exacerbated by extreme weather events and geopolitical conflicts,” said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa at the Asia and the Pacific Food Security Forum 2024 in Manila. “We need to accelerate food systems transformation by safeguarding and reinvesting in the region’s natural capital and ecosystems, bolstering support for farmers and agribusinesses, and facilitating open trade for efficient food distribution.” ADB is supporting efforts to safeguard food security in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the People’s Republic of China, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, and other members.

Following the call for stronger partnerships for food systems transformation, ADB signed a cooperation agreement with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the world’s largest publicly funded group of agri-food systems research centers. The agreement will help ADB scale up proven innovative technologies developed by CGIAR centers to address food and water security, climate, and nutrition challenges. A letter of intent has also been signed between ADB and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) of India, which is a financial organization specializing in uplifting the agricultural sector and fostering rural progress. The agreement will guide ADB–NABARD cooperation to extend loans and credit for farming, small industries, and various rural enterprises. The Asia and the Pacific Food Security Forum 2024 is expected to be attended by about 500 onsite and over 1,000 online participants from ADB members to discuss solutions that can help ease the worsening food crisis and enhance the resilience of food systems in the region.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 04/09/2024

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Multilateral Development Banks Deepen Collaboration to Deliver as a System

The leaders of 10 multilateral development banks (MDBs) today announced joint steps to work more effectively as a system and increase the impact and scale of their work to tackle urgent development challenges. In a [Viewpoint Note](#), the leaders

outlined key deliverables for joint and coordinated action in 2024 and beyond building on the progress since their Marrakesh [statement](#) in 2023, as their institutions work to accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to better support clients in addressing regional and global challenges. Published at the conclusion of a retreat hosted by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which holds the rotating chair of the MDB Heads Group, the actions represent the strengthened collaboration among MDBs. The Note will also serve as a valuable contribution for the forthcoming G20 Roadmap to evolve MDBs into a “better, bigger and more effective” system and in other fora.

The MDB Heads committed to concrete and actionable deliverables in five critical areas:

1. **Scaling up MDB financing capacity.** MDBs expect to generate additional lending headroom in the order of \$300 billion–400 billion over the next decade, with the support of shareholders and partners. Actions include:

- Offering a diverse set of innovative financial instruments to shareholders, development partners and capital markets, including hybrid-capital and risk-transfer instruments, and promoting the channeling of the IMF's Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) through MDBs.
- Providing more clarity on callable capital which would help rating agencies better assess the value of callable capital.
- Continuing to implement and report on the G20 Capital Adequacy Framework (CAF) Review recommendations and related reforms.

2. **Boosting joint action on climate change.** MDBs are increasing their common engagement on climate. Actions include:

- Delivering the [first common approach to measuring climate results on adaptation and mitigation](#).
- Continuing to align operations to the goals of the Paris Agreement and to jointly report on climate financing, as well as engaging in the UN-led process toward a new collective goal on climate finance.
- Continuing to support and improve early-warning systems for natural disasters.

3. **Strengthening country-level collaboration and cofinancing.** MDBs are engaged in discussions and supporting country-owned and country-led platforms to make it easier for countries to work with the banks. Actions include:

- Assessing proposals on country-led and country-owned platforms, towards a common understanding and next steps, including for some MDBs to implement platforms.
- Continue harmonizing procurement practices, including by relying on each other's procurement policies to reduce transaction costs and increase efficiency and sustainability.
- Accelerating cofinancing of public sector projects through the newly launched [Collaborative Co-Financing Portal](#).

4. **Catalyzing private sector mobilization.** MDBs are committed to scaling up private sector financing for development goals, including by pursuing innovative approaches and financial instruments. Actions include:

- Scaling up local currency lending and foreign exchange hedging solutions to boost private investment. MDBs are working to identify scalable approaches.
- Expanding the type and disaggregation of the statistics that MDBs and Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) release through [the Global Emerging Markets Risk Database](#) (GEMs) Consortium, supporting investors to better assess investment risks and opportunities.

5. **Enhancing development effectiveness and impact.** MDBs agreed to heighten the focus on the impact of their work. Actions include:

- Increasing collaboration on joint impact evaluations, including by sharing approaches to monitoring and assessing impact, and pursuing harmonization initiatives where useful.
- Taking stock of the key performance indicators (KPIs) on nature and biodiversity that are currently in use and explore the feasibility of alignment of some indicators ahead of COP30 in 2025.

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For more details see the [Viewpoint Note](#).

The Note was endorsed by the heads of the following multilateral development banks: African Development Bank (AfDB); Asian Development Bank (ADB); Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB); Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB); European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD); European Investment Bank (EIB); Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); Islamic Development Bank (IsDB); New Development Bank (NDB); and World Bank Group (WBG).

From <https://www.adb.org/> 04/20/2024

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ADB Operations Reach \$23.6 Billion in 2023, Achieve Record Climate Finance

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) committed \$23.6 billion from its own resources in 2023, including [\\$9.8 billion](#) for climate action, to help Asia and the Pacific progress on sustainable development. These figures are among the financial and operational results published today in ADB's [Annual Report 2023](#). The report summarizes how ADB supported its developing member countries (DMCs) to address the worsening climate crisis as well as the impacts of conflicts, food insecurity, and increased debt burdens, among other challenges. "ADB continued to step up as the climate bank for Asia and the Pacific, reaching our highest-ever annual financing for climate action," said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa. "Our investments in adaptation and mitigation had a strong focus on climate-resilient agriculture, renewable energy, and low-carbon transport." The \$23.6 billion comprised loans, grants, equity investments, guarantees, and technical assistance provided to governments and the private

sector. Supplementing its own resources, ADB mobilized an additional \$16.4 billion in cofinancing through its strong partnerships.

ADB invested heavily in building high-quality energy, transport, and other infrastructure essential for sustainable development. It further strengthened the region's human capital through increased support for education and health. Addressing gender inequality continued to be a cornerstone of the bank's work, with almost all its 2023 operations contributing to reduce remaining imbalances, including support to mitigate the disproportionate gender impacts of climate change. The report explains how ADB is evolving so it can help accelerate the region's progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals. Major capital management reforms introduced in 2023 will bolster the bank's future lending operations by unlocking up to [\\$100 billion in new lending capacity](#) over the next decade. ADB also began rolling out its new operating model in 2023, a generational transformation to improve the way the bank serves its clients. "Our new operating model has enabled ADB to make the key shifts needed to deliver better, faster, and more tailored support to our DMCs," said Mr. Asakawa.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 04/25/2024

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ADB Operations Reach 23.6 Bln USD in 2023

The Asian Development Bank (ADB)'s financial and operational expenses reached 23.6 billion U.S. dollars from its own resources in 2023, including 9.8 billion dollars for climate action, to help Asia and the Pacific progress on sustainable development, according to a new ADB report released Thursday. The Annual Report 2023 summarizes how the ADB supported its developing member countries to address the worsening climate crisis and the impacts of conflicts, food insecurity, and increased debt burdens, among other challenges. The 23.6 billion dollars comprised loans, grants, equity investments, guarantees, and technical assistance provided to governments and the private sector. In addition to its resources, the ADB mobilized an additional 16.4 billion dollars in co-financing through partnerships. The ADB invested heavily in building high-quality energy, transport, and other infrastructure essential for sustainable development. It further strengthened the region's human capital through increased support for education and health. Addressing gender inequality continued to be a cornerstone of the bank's work, with almost all its 2023 operations contributing to reducing remaining imbalances, including support to mitigate the disproportionate gender impacts of climate change. The report explains how ADB is evolving so it can help accelerate the region's progress toward sustainable development goals. Major capital management reforms introduced in 2023 will bolster the bank's future lending operations by unlocking up to 100 billion dollars in new lending capacity over the next decade.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/25/2024

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East Asia

CHINA: Grants over 200 Bln Yuan from Central Budget for Investment

More than 200 billion yuan (about 28.16 billion U.S. dollars) worth of central budget funds have been granted to expand effective investment so far this year, an official with the country's top economic planner said on Wednesday. The earmarked funds accounted for more than 30 percent of the annual planned amount, Liu Sushe, deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission told a press conference, adding that the commission will accelerate the allocation of relevant funds, strengthen project supervision, and improve the efficiency of the use of central budget funds. A total of 700 billion yuan will be earmarked from the central government budget for investment in 2024, according to this year's government work report.

Apart from central budget funds, China also plans to issue 3.9 trillion yuan of special-purpose bonds for local governments, an increase of 100 billion yuan over last year. The commission has completed the preliminary selection of local government special-purpose bond projects, Liu said, adding that this batch has ample projects and huge capital needs, laying a solid foundation for the issuance and use of local government bonds. Efforts have also been made to promote the implementation of projects supported by an additional 1 trillion yuan worth of treasury bonds allocated in 2023, Liu said. The commission has allocated the funds to 15,000 projects and will promote these projects to start construction before the end of June.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/17/2024

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JAPAN: IMF Official Urges to Pursue Fiscal Consolidation

An International Monetary Fund economist has urged Japan to start the process of fiscal consolidation as the normalization of its monetary policy is underway. In Japan, "economic activity is running close to potential," Vitor Gaspar, director of the IMF's Fiscal Affairs Department, said in a recent interview. The country's monetary policy is also "becoming more normal," with its inflation largely in line with the Bank of Japan's 2 pct inflation target, Gaspar said. As part of its monetary policy normalization, the BOJ scrapped its negative interest rate policy last month. "From that viewpoint, it also makes sense to think about what kind of fiscal policy Japan should pursue so as to build the foundations for market confidence and macroeconomic stability," Gaspar said.

From <https://www.nippon.com> 04/18/2024

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BOJ Chief Points to Hiking Interest Rates If Inflation Keeps Rising

Bank of Japan chief Kazuo Ueda said Friday the central bank will "very likely" raise interest rates if underlying inflation continues to increase, stressing future decisions will be data dependent. After its first interest rate hike in 17 years at its previous policy meeting in March, Ueda acknowledged Japan's experience with zero interest rates over a long period means determining how high rates should go is a "challenge." For now, however, the governor underscored the need to maintain accommodative financial conditions as underlying inflation is still "somewhat below" the BOJ's target of 2 percent, adding the central bank is watching wage growth and service price inflation to ensure stable inflation. "If underlying inflation continues to go up, we will be very likely raising interest rates," Ueda said, describing such a situation as "healthy."

"We have bought more flexibility in terms of what we will be doing with our policy. So depending on incoming data...we may change the short-term policy rate," the governor told an event hosted by the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington. The BOJ currently keeps short-term interest rates within a range between zero and 0.1 percent, as decided in March when it departed from unorthodox monetary easing. It also ended its program to keep borrowing costs extremely low by controlling Japanese government bond yields, though it has vowed to continue buying long-term bonds to prevent a sudden spike in yields that will hurt the economy. Ueda said long-term interest rates should be determined by market forces, adding the BOJ will "take time to consider and determine at what timing and what speed we will be reducing the amount of JGB (Japanese government bond) purchases." The BOJ is scheduled to hold a two-day policy-setting meeting from Thursday, with financial markets expecting no change.

But the central bank is expected to raise its inflation forecasts for the current fiscal year ending March and the following year, anticipating around 2 percent inflation in fiscal 2026, the final year covered in its upcoming outlook report. The governor said earlier this week that the BOJ would make a policy change if the impact of a weaker yen on inflation becomes pronounced, with the currency's sharp depreciation increasing import costs for resource-scarce Japan in recent years. Ueda said the BOJ needs to have a "rough idea" of how the economy and inflation would respond when determining how much interest rates should be raised. "We don't have a period of rising interest rates over a sustained period of time, as far as the last three decades go. So it's very hard to estimate this elasticity using past data," he said. Ueda, an academic who as a BOJ board member played an instrumental role in introducing what is now known as "forward guidance," added, "I think this is going to be a challenge for us."

From <https://japantoday.com> 04/20/2024

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Bank of Japan Keeps Interest Rates Unchanged Despite Pressure over Weak Yen

The Bank of Japan kept its ultra-low interest rates unchanged Friday but analysts say the tumbling yen is putting pressure on officials to act. With the currency at three-decade lows against the dollar, speculation has grown that authorities could intervene in forex markets to provide support for the first time since 2022. A weaker yen pushes up the price of imported goods, so the BOJ could lift its inflation forecasts and potentially move away from its ultra-loose policies more quickly, according to analysts. On Friday morning, the dollar bought 156.10-11 yen, having touched 155.75 the previous day -- its highest since 1990. If the falling yen creates "an impact too big to be ignored, it means that in some cases a change in monetary policy will become possible", BOJ Governor Kazuo Ueda said last week. Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki warned Friday the government was "concerned" about the negative aspects of the weak yen, repeating that authorities will take "all possible measures" if necessary, Japanese media said.

The central bank ditched its negative interest rate policy in March as it announced its first hike in 17 years, giving a brief lift to the yen. But officials also suggested there were no more increases on the immediate horizon, tempering the yen's gains. The currency is among other global units that have fallen against the dollar as a series of above-forecast U.S. inflation data dim hopes for Federal Reserve rate cuts. This leaves a big differential between the policies of the central banks as the Fed holds rates at two-decade highs while the BoJ continues with its extreme easing. So even if the BOJ holds steady, any tweaks to its easing program and the tone of comments from Ueda will be scrutinised for hints on future moves. Ueda might want to take a long-term view, but "he may not be able to avoid the forex factor", said Hideo Kumano, chief economist of Dai-ichi Life Research Institute.

"Amidst the ongoing yen depreciation against the U.S. dollar, the pressure intensifies on Japanese policymakers to translate their verbal assurances into concrete measures," said Luca Santos, currency analyst ACY Securities. The BOJ has spent vast amounts on bonds and other assets to pump liquidity into the Japanese economy, targeting inflation of two percent that policymakers hoped would fuel growth. In March, inflation stood at 2.6 percent. Jiji Press cited sources Friday as saying BOJ policymakers would discuss ways to reduce the bank's purchases of Japanese government bonds. The institution currently holds 592 trillion yen in JGBs, an amount equivalent to the size of the country's gross domestic product in 2023.

From <https://japantoday.com> 04/26/2024

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Yen Fluctuates Wildly; BOJ Intervention Suspected

The yen swung up and down wildly against the dollar Monday, prompting some

strategists to suspect that Japanese authorities had intervened in the market to stem a slide in their battered currency. In the day's Asian trading, the dollar briefly surged above 160 yen for the first time since April 1990, before diving below 155 yen. In New York trading at 9 a.m., the U.S. currency stood at 156.40-50 yen, down by 1.92 yen from 5 p.m. Friday. "It's difficult to overlook the negative impact that the violent and unusual (exchange rate) fluctuations caused by speculation have on the national economy," Japanese Vice Finance Minister for International Affairs Masato Kanda told reporters in Tokyo Monday evening. "We hope to continue to respond appropriately as needed," Kanda said, while noting that he cannot say whether the Japanese government and the Bank of Japan carried out a market intervention. A major Japanese bank official said, "Considering the size of the yen's rise, chances are high that an intervention took place." Meanwhile, some others said there may have been purchases of the yen aimed at prompting Japanese authorities to step into the market when currency trading was thinned by a national holiday in Japan on Monday.

From <https://www.nippon.com> 04/30/2024

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SOUTH KOREA: To Invest \$7 Billion in AI by 2027

South Korea will invest almost \$7 billion in artificial intelligence by 2027 in an effort to become a global leader in cutting-edge semiconductors, President Yoon Suk Yeol said Tuesday. The country is home to Samsung and SK Hynix -- the world's top two makers of memory chips, including the premium high-bandwidth memory (HBM) used in the hardware that powers AI. The semiconductor industry is a crucial pillar of South Korea's export-driven economy, and Yoon told a high-powered meeting of officials and tech sector executives that his administration wants the country to lead the world in AI chips. "It is no exaggeration to say that the future of the semiconductor industry depends on AI," Yoon said, according to his office. "We will invest 9.4 trillion won (\$6.94 billion) in the AI and AI semiconductor fields by 2027," and set up a separate 1.4 trillion won (\$1 billion) fund "to help the growth of innovative AI semiconductor companies", he added.

Representatives from Samsung, SK Hynix, tech giant Naver and AI chip startup SAPEON attended the meeting, Yoon's office said. Semiconductors are the lifeblood of the global economy, used in everything from kitchen appliances and mobile phones to cars and weapons. And demand for the advanced chips that power AI systems has skyrocketed thanks to the success of ChatGPT and other generative AI products. Motivated by geopolitical concerns surrounding Taiwan and the larger U.S.-China rivalry, Seoul and Tokyo are vying with Washington and major European nations to boost domestic chip production with massive investment and subsidies. Currently, the AI chip market is dominated by Silicon Valley titan Nvidia, to which SK Hynix supplies HBM chips. South Korea aims to become a world leader "in AI technology and go beyond memory chips to conquer the future AI chip market", Yoon

said at the Tuesday meeting.

"The semiconductor competition taking place now is an industrial war and an all-out war between nations." Yoon's remarks came a day after Washington unveiled up to \$6.6 billion in subsidies to Taiwanese giant TSMC as part of a drive to encourage chip firms to manufacture their most advanced products in the United States. Earlier this month, Japan also announced up to \$3.9 billion in subsidies to a chip venture as part of a plan to revive its semiconductor industry. And China has been encouraging its domestic chip industry for years to reduce its reliance on Western technology, especially in response to US restrictions on the most advanced chips. Semiconductors are South Korea's leading export. Semiconductor exports in March hit \$11.7 billion, their highest level in almost two years and a fifth of South Korea's total exports, according to figures released by the trade ministry.

From <https://japantoday.com> 04/10/2024

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S. Korea's National Debt Hits Record High in 2023

South Korea's national debt reached a fresh high last year, and the debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) surpassed 50 percent for the first time ever, the finance ministry said Thursday. The sovereign debt, which covers bond sales and financial borrowing by central and provincial governments, amounted to 1,126.7 trillion won (US\$826.63 billion) in 2023, up 59.4 trillion won from a year earlier, according to the report on the national settlement for last year presented by the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Of the total, debt incurred by the central government went up 59.1 trillion won to 1,092.5 trillion won, while that of provincial governments was presumed to have increased 300 billion won to 34.2 trillion won. The record amount came despite the government's belt-tightening policy measures following expansionary fiscal spending over the past several years amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The amount of debt has risen at a fast pace recently, from around 723.2 trillion won in 2019 to 846.6 trillion won in 2020, 970.7 trillion won in 2021 and further to 1,067.4 trillion won in 2022. The debt-to-GDP ratio also rose to an all-time high of 50.4 percent in 2023, up from 49.4 percent in 2022. It was the first time that the ratio hovered over 50 percent since the government began compiling relevant data in 1982. The settlement report, approved by the Cabinet on Thursday, will be submitted to the National Assembly after a review by the state audit agency. In 2023, total revenue sank 13.4 percent on-year in 2023 to come to 497 trillion won due mainly to a 51.9 trillion-won decline in tax revenue amid an economic slowdown. Expenditures also fell 12.4 percent to 490.4 trillion won. The consolidated fiscal balance, a key gauge of fiscal health, logged a deficit of 36.8 trillion won last year, narrowing from a shortfall of 64.6 trillion won in 2022.

The managed fiscal balance, a measure of fiscal soundness calculated after excluding the balance of social safety funds, also posted a deficit of 87 trillion won in 2023. Last year's figure was improved from a shortfall of 117 trillion won in 2022, but the deficit in the managed fiscal balance came to 3.9 percent of the GDP in 2023, higher than the 2.6 percent forecast in the yearly budget bill. "Despite the sharp decline in tax revenue, the government actively used financial tools to help people's livelihoods recover and to boost economic momentum," a ministry official said. The Yoon Suk Yeol administration has vowed to maintain the managed fiscal deficit within 3 percent of GDP and curtail it to within 2 percent if the government debt-to-GDP ratio surpasses 60 percent. But experts say it seems far from easy for the government to achieve the goal at an early date as the country has seen weak domestic demand amid high inflation, as well as such longer-term challenges as the low birth rate and population aging that require budget spending.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/11/2024

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Uneven Pace of Economic Recovery Among Sectors Continues in S. Korea Finance Ministry

The South Korean economy has largely been on a recovery track on the back of robust growth of exports and manufacturing production, but domestic demand remains weak and uncertainties have grown over global prices of raw materials, the finance ministry said Friday. "Our economy has seen an economic recovery centering on manufacturing output and exports while reporting a high level of employment," the Ministry of Economy and Finance said in the Green Book, its monthly economic assessment report. "But the pace of recovery among sectors remains different as private consumption and indicators on the construction field remain sluggish, in particular," the report read. Exports, a key economic growth engine, logged the sixth consecutive monthly gain in March after a yearlong downturn on the back of rising global demand for semiconductors. Chip exports reached a record high since June 2022, according to government data.

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From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 04/12/2024

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S. Korea to Create VC Funds of 23 Tln Won for Green Growth Finance Chief

South Korea will create venture capital funds of 23 trillion won (US\$16.57 billion) in the clean energy fields to promote investment in green growth, the top economic policymaker has said. Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok announced the plan during a meeting of finance ministers and central bank deputies of the Group of 20 nations held in Washington on Wednesday and Thursday (U.S. time), according to the Ministry of Economy and Finance. The funds will be designed to support and encourage private entities' investment in green technology development and other projects in the clean energy sector, as governments should motivate private companies to raise the necessary financial resources for dealing with climate challenges by giving them financial incentives, Choi said during a G-20 session. Choi also stressed South Korea's commitment to the continued contribution to multilateral climate funds. Last year, the Seoul government pledged an additional \$300 million to the Green Climate Fund.

During a separate session on the global financial system, Choi called for policy coordination between G-20 nations to minimize possible negative economic impacts of geopolitical uncertainties and interest rate differentials between major economies. He also stressed the importance of the role of Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), and urged the G-20 nations to work together to draw up a road map for their reform. MDBs, which include the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and Inter-American Development Bank, provide financial and technical support to developing countries to help them strengthen economic management and reduce poverty. On the sidelines of the G-20 meeting, Choi held separate talks with his Italian counterpart, Giancarlo Giorgetti, in Washington, during which Giorgetti officially invited Choi to the upcoming G-7 Finance Ministers' Meeting slated for May in Italy and Choi vowed active cooperation, the ministry said.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/19/2024

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S&P Keeps 'AA' Rating on S. Korea with Stable Outlook

Global credit appraiser S&P Global Ratings has maintained its credit rating on South Korea at "AA," with a stable outlook, Seoul's finance ministry said Tuesday. S&P has kept South Korea's long-term sovereign credit rating at the third-highest level on the company's table of "AA" since August 2016, when it upgraded the rating by one notch from "AA-."

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/30/2024

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South-East Asia

CAMBODIA: Approving Investment Projects Worth 2.2 Bln USD in Q1

Cambodia attracted fixed-asset investment of 2.2 billion U.S. dollars in the first quarter (Q1) of 2024, a sharp rise of 649 percent compared to the same period last year, said a Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC)'s report released on Friday. The Southeast Asian nation approved 106 investment projects during the January-March period this year, significantly up from only 39 projects over the same period last year, generating approximately 107,000 jobs, the CDC said. Those new investment projects were mainly focused on industries, infrastructure, hydroelectric power, agriculture, agro-industry, and tourism, it added. Top five foreign investors in the kingdom are from China, Singapore, Vietnam, South Korea and the United States, the CDC said, adding that investment from China accounted for 777 million dollars, or 35 percent, of the total investment. The Cambodian Ministry of Commerce's Secretary of State and Spokesperson Penn Sovicheat said the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement, the Cambodia-China Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA), and Cambodia's new law on investment, are key factors to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) to the kingdom. "Both RCEP and CCFTA are magnets to attract foreign investors to Cambodia," he told Xinhua. "FDI, especially from China, is crucial to help boost Cambodia's economic and trade growth." The official said new FDI would bring new capital, technologies and employment opportunities for Cambodian people.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/05/2024

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PHILIPPINES: Central Bank Keeps Key Interest Rates Unchanged

The Philippine central bank opted Monday to keep the bank's target reverse repurchase rate at 6.5 percent, and the interest rates on the overnight deposit and lending facilities at 6 percent and 7 percent respectively. In a press conference, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Governor Eli Remolona said the latest inflation path has shifted slightly higher but still remains within target. Remolona said the risk-adjusted inflation forecast for 2024 has risen to 4 percent from 3.9 percent in the previous meeting. For 2025, the risk-adjusted inflation forecast remains unchanged at 3.5 percent. "The risks to the inflation outlook continue to lean toward the upside. Possible further price pressures are linked mainly to higher transport charges, elevated food prices, higher electricity rates, and global oil prices," Remolona said, adding potential minimum wage adjustments could also give rise to second-round effects. Meanwhile, the central banker said the latest demand indicators suggest that domestic growth prospects remain largely intact over the medium term, even as overall activity gradually responds to tighter financial conditions. Given these

considerations, the Monetary Board deems it appropriate to maintain the BSP's tight monetary policy settings, Remolona said. The BSP will continue to support the national government's policies and programs to address supply-side pressures on the prices of key food commodities, he added.

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SINGAPORE: Maintaining Currency Appreciation

The Singapore dollar will maintain appreciation as inflation is likely to continue rising, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) announced in its Monetary Policy Statement on Friday. The MAS estimated that core inflation will remain elevated in the earlier part of this year but should step down in the fourth quarter before falling further into 2025. "The prevailing rate of appreciation will keep a restraining effect on imported inflation and domestic cost pressures," said the MAS, noting that current monetary policy settings remain appropriate under such conditions. Both core inflation and all-items inflation are projected to come between 2.5 percent and 3.5 percent in 2024, according to the MAS.

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THAILAND: Central Bank Keeps Policy Rate Unchanged at 2.5 Pct

Thailand's central bank kept its key interest rate unchanged on Wednesday, extending the pause for the third consecutive meeting despite calls from the government to lower borrowing costs to shore up the economy. The Bank of Thailand (BOT) monetary policy committee voted 5-2 to maintain the policy rate steady at 2.50 percent, the highest level since October 2013. "The majority of the committee deems that the current policy interest rate is conducive to safeguarding macro-financial stability and that the effectiveness of monetary policy on resolving structural impediments is limited," the BOT said in a statement. Two committee members voted to reduce the policy rate by 0.25 percentage points to reflect the kingdom's lowered potential growth due to structural challenges and to partially alleviate borrowers' debt-servicing burden, the BOT said. Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin has repeatedly called on the central bank to ease monetary policy to boost the economy and alleviate the burden on the people. The Thai economy is projected to expand in 2024 at a higher rate than the previous year, driven by private consumption and tourism, along with public expenditure, which is expected to accelerate in the remainder of the year, said Committee Secretary Piti Disyatat. The BOT revised its gross domestic product growth forecast to 2.6 percent this year, from the range of 2.5 percent to 3.0 percent expected in February. The Southeast Asian country's headline inflation in March was below the BOT target range of 1-3 percent for the 11th month. Inflation remains subdued owing to supply factors and government subsidies, but it is expected to gradually rise towards the target range by the end of 2024, Piti told a

news conference. The central bank expects headline inflation to come in at 0.6 percent this year, compared to a February forecast of nearly 1 percent.

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AZERBAIJAN: Average Annual Inflation Slows Down

Azerbaijan's consumer price index (CPI) rose by one percent from January through March 2024 compared to the same period last year, Trend reports. CPI amounted to 1.3 percent at the end of February. According to the State Statistics Committee of Azerbaijan, non-food products rose in price by 1.1 percent and fee-based services to the population by 2.2 percent. In March 2024, the consumer price index in Azerbaijan increased by 0.2 percent compared to the previous month.

	March 2024 against February 2024 (%)	March 2024 against March 2023 (%)	January through March 2024 against January through March 2023 (%)
Total products and services	100.2	100.4	101
Consumables	100.4	98.9	99.7
Food	100.5	98.4	99.3
Alcoholic beverages	100	101.6	101.8
Tobacco products	100	111.7	11.7
Non-food products	100	101.1	101.4
Paid services	100.1	102.2	102.5

In general, Azerbaijan's consumer price index rose 8.8 percent year on year in 2023. Food, beverage, and tobacco product prices rose by 9.6 percent year-on-year. Non-food prices increased by 8.4 percent, while paid services to the people increased by 8.2 percent. In December 2023, the CPI in Azerbaijan climbed by 0.5 percent over the previous month and by 2.1 percent year-on-year.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/09/2024

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TAJKISTAN: EBRD Approves Loan to Enhance Green Economy

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has approved a provision of a \$5 million loan for Tajikistan's Arvand Bank, Trend reports. According to the EBRD, the loan is provided under the GCF-Green Economy Financing Facility Regional Framework (GCF-GEFF Programme in Tajikistan II). Out of the total amount, up to \$3.75 million is to be provided by the EBRD and up to \$1.25 million by the GCF. The funds from the loan will be directed towards climate change mitigation and adaptation technologies. This transaction will aid in expanding Arvand's range of products by introducing green lending options, with a focus on gender responsiveness. Meanwhile, the current loan portfolio of the EBRD in Tajikistan amounted to 482 million euros for 69 active projects as of January 31, 2024. As of the reporting date, the EBRD's cumulative investments in Tajikistan totaled 919 million euros, spread across 165 projects, with the private sector's share in the portfolio amounting to 13 percent. Arvand Bank provides a comprehensive suite of banking services, focusing mainly on the retail and MSME sectors in Tajikistan. As of the end of 2023, Arvand ranks as the ninth-largest bank by assets and the fourth-largest by loan book among banks in Tajikistan.

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UZBEKISTAN: Central Bank Discloses Level of Policy Rate

The Central Bank of Uzbekistan (CBU) decided to keep the policy rate unchanged at 14 percent per year, Trend reports. According to the CBU, the current monetary conditions are forming in a relatively tight phase in comparison to the upper boundary of the updated forecast inflation corridor. The bank notes that the inflation expectations of the population and entrepreneurs remain above the current and projected inflation rate. At the same time, under the influence of the adjustment of regulated prices and the introduction of VAT on a number of goods and services in April, the dynamics of inflation expectations may increase. The CBU expects core inflation to remain on a steady downward trajectory and projects it to be around 7-8 percent by the end of the year. At the same time, the bank raises the forecast of headline inflation under the main scenario to 9–11 percent in 2024. Earlier, the bank kept the level of the policy rate in Uzbekistan unchanged (14 percent per year) and projected the inflation to amount to 8–9 percent by the end of the year.

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Oceania

NEW ZEALAND: Minister Van Velden Seeks Alternatives to Ease Financial Burden on FENZ Levy Payers

“I am seeking a commitment from Fire and Emergency NZ (FENZ) to cost savings where appropriate to keep levies affordable for New Zealand households and businesses,” Internal Affairs Minister Hon Brooke van Velden says. Today FENZ released its consultation document and recommended an increase to the fire insurance levy. In response to FENZ’s recommendation, the Minister wrote to FENZ seeking a solution that will ensure continuity of services, that costs are fairly apportioned, and that levy revenue will be managed responsibly. “I recognise Fire and Emergency carries out critical frontline services and needs enough funding to do so. However, I also consider it important that FENZ demonstrates a high level of accountability. I also acknowledge that it is levy payers – individuals, households, and businesses – who will pay for any increase.”

“I am not yet convinced that such an increase is justified, and have asked FENZ for the following information: Evidence of FENZ’s need for a 5.2% levy revenue increase for 2026-2029, especially given the already substantial 12.8% increase that will apply from July 2024; A description of the key outcomes that this increase would achieve, and that FENZ would be held accountable for achieving; An analysis of options for lesser levy revenue increases that FENZ could operate under, that minimise the financial burden on levy payers while still allowing the organisation to provide the required services and invest in future needs; and The impacts of those lesser options on FENZ and the services it provides. “I encourage the public to provide feedback during consultation as this will be an important consideration when the Government makes its final decision on the levy. I am interested in the impacts the levy will have on those who it applies to, and how it could affect behaviour.” “This coalition Government is focused on making fiscal decisions that will drive greater value from spending, so that we can deliver better public services for all New Zealanders.” The Minister will provide recommendations to Cabinet following a public consultation process held by FENZ.

From <https://voxy.co.nz> 04/07/2024

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Now Tax Cuts Put Ahead of Climate – Jobs to Go at Environment Ministry

Job losses at the Ministry for the Environment to meet the Government’s cost cutting drive risks New Zealand’s ability to manage our many environmental challenges. Today the Ministry for the Environment called for voluntary redundancies across the Ministry. These along with vacancies not being filled and possible forced redundancies in the future could see hundreds of workers leave the Ministry with the Government requiring it to cut spending by 7.5%. “Every day the Government’s priorities are becoming clearer and clearer – today it’s decided to put tax cuts ahead of the environment,” said Duane Leo National Secretary for the Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi. “Climate change is with us; our freshwater is being degraded and our unique biodiversity is under threat, yet the

Government thinks it makes sense to cut jobs and funding for this Ministry?

“The PSA supports voluntary redundancies as it allows members to control their own futures and leave if it suits. Our members asked for this knowing cuts were coming and we are pleased the Ministry’s agreed that it be available for all permanent employees. “But we do not support this cost cutting drive. At a time of unprecedented environmental challenges, it should be a priority to keep investing in the very agency dealing with these. “The Ministry provides advice on environmental and climate issues, ensures policies and regulations are fit for purpose and monitors and reports on the state of the environment. “This is a vitally important role – particularly as extreme storm events become more frequent. In 2002 there were just two local states of emergencies declared – in 2023 this had soared to 18.

For example, in the aftermath of Cyclone Gabrielle, the Ministry provided important advice on dealing with storm waste, on contamination from flooding and how regions can prepare to adapt to future events. “The Government is well aware of its critical role. In the official briefing to the new Minister, the Ministry warned that the environment was ‘under significant pressure’ and that effort was needed to ‘if the prosperity and wellbeing of New Zealanders is to be maintained’. “This is just another example of the short sighted and shallow thinking of this Government, again showing how poorly it is grappling with the serious and complex challenges we face. “This random and rushed cost cutting crusade will have very real consequences for the environment we all love, and for future generations of Kiwis who are relying on us to wisely manage our environment today,” said Duane Leo.

From <https://voxy.co.nz> 04/08/2024

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Supporting Better Financial Outcomes for Kiwis

The Government is reforming financial services to improve access to home loans and other lending, and strengthen customer protections, Commerce and Consumer Affairs Minister Andrew Bayly and Housing Minister Chris Bishop announced today. “Our coalition Government is committed to rebuilding the economy and making life simpler by cutting red tape. We are revoking 11 pages of overly prescriptive affordability regulations, introduced by the last government, to enable Kiwis to access finance with confidence,” Mr Bayly says. “These regulations created unnecessary compliance costs and are an excessive barrier for lending. And worse, the regulations failed to protect the most vulnerable Kiwis – the very people they were intended to safeguard.

“When the affordability regulations were introduced into the Credit Contracts and Consumer Finance Act 2003 (CCCFA) in December 2021 it threw a bucket of cold ice over banks and financial providers by prescribing minimum steps to assess the affordability of a loan. The overly arduous checks meant the time it took to process

loans dramatically increased. Lenders told me that a small loan that used to take two hours to process suddenly took up to eight hours. “This meant it was no longer affordable for many providers to offer small loans. It became very difficult for everyday Kiwis, who need \$500 to fix their broken-down car, to access a safe line of credit. They were effectively frozen out of the market and many vulnerable Kiwis were instead forced to borrow from high-interest loan sharks,” Mr Bayly says.

Housing Minister Chris Bishop says the time it took to process a home loan increased substantially and thousands of Kiwi families, who would have previously qualified, were locked out of the market. “The changes announced today will make the home loan application process simpler for hardworking Kiwis who have diligently saved to buy a house. “Home buyers have had it hard enough over the past six years under Labour, what with extraordinary house price inflation, interest rates that went through the roof causing untold pain, and these ridiculous CCCFA changes making it much harder to get a mortgage,” Mr Bishop says. “The previous government tried to amend the regulations, but they failed to fully address these unintended, bad outcomes. Lenders are still required to treat all borrowers with the same amount of risk regardless of whether they want a \$1,000 overdraft or \$1 million home loan.

Today’s changes will still require lenders to act responsibly and ensure lending will not cause hardship, but lenders will not have to follow a prescriptive, one-size-fits-all process,” Mr Bayly says. This announcement is part of the National-ACT coalition agreement to update the CCCFA to protect vulnerable consumers. Revoking the affordability regulations is accompanied by a package of reforms also announced today. The government has made Regulations that: – Improve dispute resolution to better protect consumers. (See attached fact sheet for further information.) – Exempt councils from the CCCFA so they can offer low-risk financial products to help households improve their energy efficiency by installing heat pumps and insulation. – Remove duplicate reporting requirements. “This is only the first phase of financial reforms. We will open public consultation on a range of matters in the coming weeks, including other known pain points,” Mr Bayly says. “Kiwis must be able to access financial services safely without unnecessary hurdles. These reforms reinforce our government’s commitment to provide regulatory clarity, protect vulnerable consumers, and grow the economy.”

From <https://voxy.co.nz> 04/21/2024

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Budget Blunder Shows Nicola Willis Could Cut Recovery Funding

It appears Nicola Willis is about to pull the rug out from under the feet of local communities still dealing with the aftermath of last year’s severe weather, and local councils relying on funding to build back from these disasters. It’s been revealed that Treasury produced a report for Nicola Willis earlier this year titled ‘Discontinuation of the National Resilience Plan’. This is the \$6 billion fund that was put in place to

support local communities and councils after Cyclone Gabrielle, the Auckland floods and other severe weather. "Local communities are relying on this funding to protect them from future events," Labour finance and infrastructure spokesperson Barbara Edmonds. "The Finance Minister now appears to be removing that certainty, meaning future proofing road, rail, and local infrastructure wiped out by the extreme weather, as well as telecommunications and electricity transmission infrastructure could all be at risk.

"This is the complete opposite of what a responsible Government should be doing. "Christopher Luxon stood alongside communities in Hawkes' Bay during the election campaign telling them the National Party was committed to rebuilding and that momentum would continue. They must explain to councils and to ratepayers where the money will come from, if not from Government. "It'd be another blow for local councils, and mean ratepayers would have to foot the bill yet again. First it was water services thrown back onto councils that can't afford it, now they might have to pay to prepare for severe weather, and for recovery after it hits. It shows a Government that is not serious about the big challenges and would rather pass the buck onto local councils. "Nicola Willis should front up about the 'range of advice' the Government is considering. It creates huge uncertainty for New Zealand's infrastructure pipeline and shows a worrying lack of commitment to New Zealand's future resilience. "On the day a report is released into failures in the system during these severe weather events, it's revealed the Government could be sacrificing the recovery, most likely to pay for their hugely expensive and irresponsible tax cuts," Barbara Edmonds said.

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6、 Private Sector

Asia-Pacific

Carbon Goals Bring New Boon to Energy Firms

China's carbon neutrality plan is significant for building a green future, and will lay a solid foundation for the success of multinational energy companies in the country, a top executive said. "As China intensifies its exploration in energy transition, our cooperation with Chinese partners continues to deepen, expanding from the local market to the global market and extending from traditional industries to cover new energy fields," said TotalEnergies China Country Chair Yu Yongjian. Amid China's efforts to transition toward cleaner energy sources, the company has been exploring and promoting cooperation with the country in various clean energy businesses and technologies, which include green electricity, biofuel hydrogen energy, and carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS).It also eyes further expansion locally. China has begun to turn policies into actions, formulating dynamic and pragmatic road

maps, and TotalEnergies is committed to deepening its partnerships with Chinese companies to achieve the common goal of net-zero emissions, Yu said. As part of the company's efforts to increase its footprint to cover more of the renewables business in China, it has already developed more than 500 megawatts of rooftop solar projects in the country, through its joint venture TotalEnergies Envision Energy Services & Solutions Co, contributing to China's renewable energy capacity.

The company is also trying to engage in China's offshore wind power market, taking advantage of its experience in offshore and deep-sea operations to harness the vast potential of wind power to meet China's increasing demand for cleaner and sustainable energy, it said. Yu said the company is looking forward to cooperating with Chinese partners to further advance the development of China's offshore wind power industry. Multinational energy firms' burgeoning expansion within China's renewable energy sector is poised to bolster their position as key catalysts in the nation's eco-friendly evolution, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute. These companies' strategic expansion further underscores the global energy sector's acknowledgment of the imperative for collective action in combating climate change, Luo said. The company is also actively pursuing projects in onshore renewables, e-mobility, biofuels as well as hydrogen energy to support China's progressive shift toward net-zero.

In March, the company signed an agreement with China Petroleum & Chemical Corp, or Sinopec, to jointly build a production line with an annual capacity of 230,000 metric tons of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) to help the nation's aviation industry reduce its carbon footprint. The planned unit will produce SAF and will process local waste or residues from the circular economy, including cooking oils and animal fats. TotalEnergies has set itself a target of 1.5 million tons of annual SAF production by 2030. Ma Yongsheng, chairman of Sinopec, said the collaboration with TotalEnergies is in line with Sinopec's strategy for the development of low-carbon solutions for China and the world. As the world's third-largest LNG player, TotalEnergies has also supplied more than 5 million tons per annum of liquefied natural gas to the country in 2023. The company will further develop its LNG business in China and contribute to China's energy transition.

According to Yu, energy storage is an indispensable technology for developing renewable energy. The company has expanded its business into various industries and plays an increasingly important role in the country. "As one of the first international energy companies to enter China's offshore oil and gas exploration and refining business following the country's reform and opening-up policy, we have been present in China for over 40 years, actively engaged in the entire energy industry chain," said Yu. "We are committed to continuing sharing experiences, technologies and expertise with Chinese partners to establish mutually beneficial cooperation as we jointly develop energy businesses at home and abroad."

Asia-Pacific Business Leaders Rally for Robust Global Trade amid Rising Protectionism

This week in Hong Kong, China, the APEC Business Advisory Council ([ABAC](#)) voiced serious concerns regarding the global shift towards protectionism and regional fragmentation, risking decades of economic progress. ABAC Chair for 2024, Julia Torreblanca of Peru, emphasized that continued commitment to collaboration, open markets and non-discrimination is crucial to the region's prosperity. "These policies have driven the success of our economies. APEC must stay the course on deeper economic integration to avoid undermining inclusive and sustainable growth," she stated. "Guided by our theme of "People. Business. Prosperity", we have developed a set of recommendations to address these urgent issues," said Torreblanca. "These recommendations cover the strengthening the WTO, revitalizing the strategy for the Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP), advancing digital trade, bolstering the resilience of global supply chain, establishing a greener trade policy framework to tackle the climate crisis and empowering women in trade." "We will present these recommendations to Ministers Responsible for Trade when they meet next month in Arequipa, Peru."

The ABAC Chair noted that a delegation met WTO's Director General in a recent ABAC visit to Geneva to convey its support for the WTO and ambitious reforms. "We are particularly worried at the prospect of WTO Members agreeing to end the e-commerce moratorium and tariffs on digital trade," Torreblanca added. "This will hugely increase uncertainty and costs, which will hit small businesses the hardest." On women's economic empowerment, ABAC has developed recommendations that include promoting women's transition to the formal economy, unlocking women's access to venture capital and promoting STEM careers and digital skills, including to boost women's participation in green trade. ABAC applauded the first joint meeting between APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade and Ministers for Women that will take place in May. "We are deeply grateful to the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for their support in hosting this meeting. We were honored by the presence of Chief Executive John Lee who expressed his support for the work of ABAC during his speech at the welcome dinner. We specially thank Financial Secretary Paul Chan, Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Algernon Yau, Hong Kong Monetary Authority Chief Executive Eddie Yue, and Under Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry Lillian Cheong for sharing with us their valuable insights." ABAC will convene its next meeting in early August in Tokyo, Japan as it works to finalize its recommendations for presentation to APEC leaders during the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in November.

East Asia

CHINA: Top Procuratorate Releases Typical Private Sector Oversight Cases

China's Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP) has issued a series of typical cases of civil procuratorial work in promoting the development of the private sector, providing guidance for procuratorates on their work in this regard. To facilitate and ensure the development of private enterprises, the SPP launched a special campaign in February to strengthen procuratorial oversight over cases involving private enterprises. The campaign will continue through December. "The typical cases are published to provide guidance for local procuratorates in handling relevant cases with high quality and efficiency," said Feng Xiaoguang, a prosecutor of the SPP. Ten cases were released and they involved procuratorial supervision over rulings and enforcement activities against private companies, as well as over false charges that have harmed the legal rights and interests of private companies, according to Feng.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/01/2024

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Chinese Vice Premier Calls for Deepened SOE Reform, Support for "Little Giant" Firms

Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing has called for continuous efforts to deepen the reform of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and vigorously promote the development of "little giant" firms. Zhang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during an investigation and research tour in north China's Tianjin Municipality on Monday and Tuesday. He urged central SOEs to improve their mechanisms for scientific and technological innovation, strengthen work to build up their technological capacities, strive to strengthen their main businesses, actively develop emerging and future industries, and constantly optimize the structure and allocation efficiency of state-owned capital. Efforts should be made to guide small and medium-sized enterprises to accelerate their breakthroughs in key technologies and improve their core competitiveness continuously, while supporting their promotion of digital transformation. He also stressed the importance of promoting the joint development of large, small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as the need to promote mutually beneficial cooperation between these enterprises.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/02/2024

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Chinese Vice Premier Stresses Speeding Up Sci-tech Progress in Seed Industry

Chinese Vice Premier Liu Guozhong has stressed the importance of accelerating efforts to achieve breakthroughs on core agricultural technologies in key areas and boosting self-reliance and strength within the seed industry. Liu, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during a research trip in south China's island province of Hainan from Monday to Wednesday. During his trip, Liu inspected a national seed breeding base and a laboratory, among other sites, to learn about the conservation and utilization of germplasm resources, as well as the promotion and application of new varieties. He chaired a symposium and listened to the opinions and suggestions from government departments, localities and experts on the scientific and technological innovation within the seed industry. Liu underscored the need to enhance the protection of germplasm resources, boost the strategic scientific and technological strength of the seed industry, strengthen the principal position of seed enterprises in technological innovation, and increase international exchanges in this area. Liu also called for efforts to enhance the development of natural rubber production and the ability to secure the supply of natural rubber, as well as to advance the reform of agricultural reclamation.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/17/2024

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China Introduces Measures to Support Overseas Investment in Domestic Sci-tech Firms

Chinese authorities released a document Friday introducing new measures to encourage overseas institutions to invest in China's domestic sci-tech enterprises. The document, jointly unveiled by the Ministry of Commerce and nine other government departments, includes 16 measures that aim to optimize management services, enhance financing support, strengthen exchanges and cooperation, and improve exit mechanisms. China will work to efficiently approve the qualification applications for the dollar-denominated qualified foreign institutional investor scheme (QFII) and its yuan-denominated sibling, RQFII, in accordance with the law, it said. Overseas institutions will also be supported to invest in domestic sci-tech enterprises through the Qualified Foreign Limited Partner (QFLP) scheme. Domestic venture capital funds established by overseas institutions will enjoy equal treatment with those established by domestic investors, according to the document. Eligible overseas institutions will be encouraged to issue yuan-denominated bonds in China and invest in the sci-tech field, and the pilot projects that facilitate cross-border financing will be expanded nationwide. Domestic banks will be encouraged to enhance cooperation with overseas institutions, it said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/19/2024

Beijing Accelerates Development of Information Software Industry

Beijing has recently unveiled an action plan aimed at propelling its information software industry to new heights, with a target of pushing the sector's revenue to 4.8 trillion yuan (about 675.65 billion U.S. dollars) by 2027. The city will explore cutting-edge technologies in artificial general intelligence, support the development of large language model (LLM) tool software, and establish native software application stores and secure testing grounds for LLM, according to the action plan released by Beijing Municipal Bureau of Economy and Information Technology. Efforts will also be made to create artificial intelligence (AI) scene application laboratories in fields such as education, healthcare, culture, and industry to develop demonstrative projects, showcasing the practical implementation of AI scenarios, it noted.

Beijing's vision for its information software sector signals a proactive stance towards technological innovation and economic development. You Jing, an official with Beijing Municipal Bureau of Economy and Information Technology, said the city will further support domestically produced software to expand globally and foster open-source software enterprises, in alignment with broader industry trends. In 2023, the revenue scale of Beijing's information software industry approached 3 trillion yuan, maintaining double-digit growth for several consecutive years. The robust performance of Beijing's information software industry in the first quarter of this year underscores its resilience and growth trajectory, with an added value of 237.92 billion yuan, marking a year-on-year growth of 13.7 percent.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/22/2024

How Do Private Enterprises Tackle Challenges with Innovation?

In a plant the size of a football stadium, 416 weaving looms, attended by a dozen workers or so, are rapidly turning out woven fabric. The fabric, as soft as regular cloth, is heat-resistant, insulating E-cloth eventually used in circuit boards, woven with fiberglass yarns. The E-cloth producer, Huangshi Grace Fabric Technology Co., Ltd., situated in Huangshi of central China's Hubei Province, is among the innovation-driven private enterprises that are relatively well-positioned amid economic challenges and external uncertainties. These enterprises, high-tech or traditional, all strive to stay ahead of the curve, by constantly innovating their technologies, shifting lanes in prompt response to market demand and seizing new opportunities created by future industries. These enterprises are optimistic about their business prospects, which are in alignment with the general landscape as

reflected in the latest data. Statistics showed private investment in the manufacturing sector grew 11.9 percent year on year during the first quarter of this year.

NEW TECH

Grace Fabric, the parent company of Huangshi Grace Fabric Technology Co., Ltd., started in Shanghai manufacturing E-cloth exclusively. Around 2016 and 2017, the company invested two years in developing super-thin fiberglass yarns with diameters measuring 4 to 5 microns, freeing itself from reliance on imported yarns and, in hindsight, ensuring uninterrupted production during the pandemic. The company set up its Huangshi branch in 2018. Today, Huangshi Grace Fabric Technology Co., Ltd. gains a competitive advantage in fierce competition with its E-fiberglass yarns of 3.5 microns. Yadea Technology Group Co., Ltd., a manufacturer of electric motorcycles, scooters and bicycles based in Wuxi, east China's Jiangsu Province, is seeking new sources of growth from cutting-edge power batteries, such as graphene batteries and sodium-iron batteries.

Sodium-iron batteries promise a gigantic market in the future for their superb safety performance, said Zhou Chaoyang, senior vice president of the group, adding the company this year will boost its investment in sodium-iron batteries, including in the research and development of the batteries, expanding its manufacturing capacity and upgrading related production equipment. Boasting growth in both total revenue and profit in 2023 -- a total revenue of over 34.76 billion yuan (about 4.89 billion U.S. dollars) and a total profit of 2.64 billion yuan, Yadea holds bullish views on its business prospect. It has just acquired a controller factory and plans to launch 2,000 to 3,000 new retail stores across China this year, among other expansion schemes. Also in Wuxi, HOdo Group, a private enterprise in the apparel, tire, and pharmaceutical industries, has upgraded its production lines for smarter manufacturing.

Hung on the wall at the entrance of HOdo's suit processing plant is a huge dark-blue screen displaying a wide array of data concerning the 5G intelligent factory, such as real-time order analysis, on-the-ground production progress, inventory turnover, and a layout of all the working stations. Each working station is marked with a green, yellow or red dot, signifying the degrees of workload pile-up. The production manager could pinpoint the worker in need of help and come to his or her aid. In the suit plant, hundreds of thousands of pieces of clothing hung on automatically-moving and chip-implanted hangers "fly" around along the overhead tracks, each worker takes down several pieces commensurate with their capacity. Each procedure is traceable.

With the smart retrofitting of the production lines, the overall efficiency of production in the suit plant has been boosted by 32 percent, relieving pile-up pressure of semi-finished products and shortening the product turnover cycle, according to Wang Zhuqian, chairman of the board of supervisors of HOdo. HOdo will expand its retail

sales presence across the country this year, by adding about 600 new retail stores, which could bring 2,500 new jobs, said Wang.

NEW "LANES"

Chuzhou KingMould Equipment & Mould Manufacturing, based in Chuzhou City of Anhui Province, originally a refrigerator mould manufacturer, opened a new horizon by beginning to produce automobile mould in 2021. Since the new plant for automobile mould was launched, the annual sales revenue has almost doubled that of the previous years. "We have touched the ceiling in the home appliance sector and experienced a decline in revenue growth in recent years. We decided to shift into a new 'racing lane' while capitalizing on existing technical strengths, and that's how the burgeoning new energy vehicle sector has come to our mind," said Wang Luohai, general manager of KingMould. The KingMould planned to invest 20 million yuan this year into equipment upgrading to keep up with the rising demand. It took KingMould's home appliance plant 20 years to hit the 100 million yuan mark in terms of industrial output, but three years for its automobile mould plant to generate over 10 million yuan. Wang expected the industrial output of the new plant to break the 100 million mark in five years.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

China's efforts to foster new quality productive forces, for instance, developing strategic emerging industries and future industries, create new opportunities for businesses. Eying a swelling market for circuit boards used in artificial intelligence (AI) and robotic industries, Grace Fabric plans to manufacture a special kind of E-cloth used in AI circuit boards. "Robots and AI servers require faster signal transmission and no signal loss, hence a special kind of fiberglass cloth, different from what we currently produce in Huangshi," said Ma Zhanyong, assistant to the general manager of Huangshi Grace Fabric Technology Co., Ltd. Walking into the industrial park of the Zerog Aircraft Industry (Hefei) Co., Ltd. based in Hefei of Anhui Province, one feels impressed by a futuristic scene featuring aircraft of various sizes and shapes.

"We are committed to developing manned electric vertical take-off and landing aircraft (eVTOL) with a flight altitude range of 300 to 3,000 meters, to achieve short to medium-range and low-altitude commuting within and between cities. A two-hour drive now may only take 10 minutes by flight in the future," said Jia Siyuan, co-founder of the company. As one of the emblems of new quality productive forces, the low-altitude economy enjoys broad prospects for development. This year's government work report proposes to actively create new growth engines such as biomanufacturing, commercial aerospace, and low-altitude economy.

ENABLING INNOVATION

Local authorities are increasingly playing a service role to create an enabling environment for innovation. Wuhan East-Lake National Innovation Demonstration

Zone, also known as the optics valley of China, has created a science and technology innovation platform, bridging research institutes with state-of-the-art technologies and enterprises needing their technologies. Wuhan Sunhy Biology Co., Ltd., a biotech firm developing enzyme and probiotic products, is a recent beneficiary of the platform. It typed in a technological assistance request on Oct. 23 last year on the platform and received a response from a research institute a couple of days later. This March, the project jointly carried out by the company and the research institute was inaugurated.

Since the platform was launched, 142 requests for research and development cooperation lodged by enterprises have been responded to. "The platform has turned authorities from overseeing enterprises to sharing risks with enterprises," said Li Jiang, an official in charge of scientific innovation affairs with the optics valley. When asked about the source of resilience for private enterprises, Wang Zhuqian said, "I've been working for HODO Group for 31 years and have seen so many enterprises closed in each tide of market turbulence. I believe the key to the survival of an enterprise is constant innovation."

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/22/2024

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JAPAN: Naver Cloud to Cooperate with Intel to Create AI Chip Ecosystem in S. Korea

Naver Cloud Corp., the cloud computing arm of South Korea's tech giant Naver Corp., said Thursday it will join hands with U.S. chipmaker Intel Corp. to create an artificial intelligence (AI) chip software ecosystem in South Korea. The two companies have agreed to provide IT infrastructure based on Intel's AI accelerator, Gaudi, to help South Korean startups and universities conduct AI research projects and develop various software, according to Naver Cloud. They will also set up a joint research center called Naver Cloud · Intel · Co-Lab (NICL), where Naver Cloud will collaborate with startups and university labs. Expected to launch later this year, the NICL will involve teams from approximately 20 universities and startups, including prestigious institutions like the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology and Seoul National University. Naver Cloud said it also plans to test Intel's Gaudi 2 AI accelerator and work with the U.S. chip giant to develop a commercial cloud system. It said the partnership with Intel aims to expand an AI ecosystem centered around Naver's AI model, HyperClova X, using Intel's AI chips. "There aren't many companies worldwide that have developed and are operating a large language model from scratch like Naver Cloud," its CEO Kim Yu-won said. "Naver has provided alternative options for search engines, cloud and generative AI in the market dominated by global tech giants for the past 25 years, and such diversity is one of the core values Naver has sought," Kim added, explaining the reason his company is trying to build an AI chip ecosystem here.

SOUTH KOREA: Urged to Step Up Incentives for Chipmakers

As governments around the world fiercely compete to boost their semiconductor industries by distributing large subsidies, South Korea is pointed out as falling behind other chip powerhouses, raising concerns about the gap widening in the future. On Tuesday, the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry approved subsidies of up to 590 billion yen (\$3.9 billion) for chip foundry venture Rapidus, adding to its promise earlier to provide funds worth some 330 billion yen into the chip project. Japan has also announced support programs to provide subsidies for foreign firms building chip facilities on its land with the intention to revive its domestic industry, joining other chip powerhouses in the subsidy war. The US announced the Chips and Science Act to allocate some \$52 billion in subsidies over five years, while the member nations of the European Union are gearing up to invest 43 billion euros through 2030.

On the other hand, South Korea, home to the world's two largest memory chipmakers Samsung Electronics and SK hynix, has been pointed out as lacking such direct support programs. The biggest benefit the country provides chipmakers is a corporate tax break for facility investment of 15 percent for large corporations like Samsung and SK. The maximum tax deduction rate of 25 percent is given to small- and mid-sized enterprises. "One of the biggest hurdles is that such subsidy plans are met with strong oppositions, arguing it is unfair to offer large subsidies to one single industry," an industry official said under the condition of anonymity.

Instead of providing direct funding, government support in Korea leans more towards granting permits for smooth operation and loosening regulations, the official explained. "The global trend is now in support of subsidies to boost domestic industries, but Korea is slow in embracing the new trend." Amid rising concerns over Korea losing its edge in the critical chip market, the Korean government said March 27 it will review plans to offer subsidies and incentives for chip firms. "The subsidy competition is intensifying among rival countries. Aside from the existing support measures, we will review ways to strengthen incentive programs to support investments," Prime Minister Han Duck-soo said at a meeting. Government subsidies appear to be effective in attracting major chipmakers to move their operations to new countries, boosting local production and securing chip supply chains.

The world's leading chip giants Samsung Electronics, Intel and TSMC are all building chip facilities in the US and Japan, spending billions of dollars and receiving subsidies from the respective governments. Samsung, for instance, is spending 40 billion yen to build a chip development facility near Tokyo, and is expected to receive

up to half of the cost from the Japanese government. It is also investing \$17 billion in building a chip fabrication plant in Taylor, Texas, and the US government is reportedly preparing to offer a subsidy of about \$6 billion. TSMC, the world's top foundry firm, is opening the first manufacturing plant in Kumamoto, Japan and is expected to receive more than 632 billion yen from the Japanese government. "Semiconductors have become strategic arsenals, and government subsidies are now seen as critical for not only strengthening the domestic edge but also in establishing cooperative business ties," an industry official said.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 04/02/2024

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Big Companies Increase R&D Investment in 2023

Big companies in South Korea increased their investments in research and development (R&D) activities last year despite decreased earnings, a corporate data tracker said Tuesday. Their combined R&D investments rose 9.4 percent to 73.42 trillion won (US\$54 billion) in 2023 from 67.14 trillion won a year earlier, according to a recent survey of 224 firms by the data tracker CEO Score. They suffered declines in sales and operating profit due to an economic slowdown but they executed their planned R&D spending for future growth, the survey showed. Samsung Electronics topped others in terms of the value of R&D investments. It spent 28.35 trillion won last year, up 14 percent from a year ago. The country's top 10 conglomerates, including LG Electronics Inc., SK hynix Inc., Hyundai Motor Co., LG Chem Ltd., Hyundai Mobis Co. and Kakao Corp. were among the 224 companies. They accounted for more than 70 percent of the overall R&D investments by the surveyed firms, CEO Score said.

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: TikTok-Tokopedia Widens Opportunities to MSMEs

In just four months after merging with Indonesia's giant e-commerce Tokopedia, Chinese social media platform TikTok has presented better online business opportunities for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the Southeast Asian country. As of April 25, Tokopedia, whose majority stake is now controlled by TikTok, reported to have more than 21 million active registered sellers in the platform, a significant increase compared to only 6 million in 2019, with only one to two million increase every year. Vice President of Corporate Communications of Tokopedia Nuraini Razak said recently that the integration between Tokopedia and TikTok has posed significant positive results, particularly during Ramadan session, and those who benefited a lot were the local products by MSMEs. "Fashion, skincare, and snacks are the three most-wanted products for our consumers. The sales across

the platform have increased up to three to nine times," she said. Even so, she said Tokopedia did not have any target about the number of sellers they had. "We only focus on providing opportunities for local businesses to sell their goods in easy ways, without needing to rent physical stores," Razak said. Akram Amrullah Rajab, the owner of Hijrahfood Meatshop, one of the sellers in Tokopedia, said that during Ramadan season, his sales of meat jumped up to 10 times compared to normal days. "I sell my products on Tokopedia, then I use TikTok social media to promote them and gain exposure to attract customers," he said.

Indonesia's Ministry of Communication and Informatics expected that the integration of the two digital platforms would protect local MSMEs and benefit the development of the digital industry in Indonesia. The Ministry's Director General of Public Information and Communication Usman Kansong said that the merging also showed that TikTok complied with Indonesian government's regulations. He also said that TikTok was a popular social media platform with a huge number of users, while Tokopedia is a big e-commerce platform in this country. Thus, the completion of the integration of both platforms will surely protect MSMEs in Indonesia and increase the sales of MSMEs and domestic products. Based on data from PT GoTo Gojek Tokopedia, as of February 2024, TikTok had around 125 million monthly active users in Indonesia, while Tokopedia users reached more than 100 million users. "The collaboration between TikTok and Tokopedia will also benefit the digital industry in the country and spur the development of start-ups in Indonesia as well as encourage the country's young generation to develop the digital industry," Kansong said.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/30/2024

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CAMBODIA: Garment, Footwear, Travel Goods Export Up 20 Pct in Q1

Cambodia exported 2,941 million U.S. dollars worth of garment, footwear and travel products (GFTs) to international markets in the first quarter of 2024, up 20 percent from 2,449 million dollars over the same period last year, said a report released by the Ministry of Commerce on Friday. Apparel and textiles accounted for 2,167 million dollars during the January-March period this year, marking an increase of 23 percent from 1,759 million dollars over the same period last year, the report said. Footwear represented 346.3 million dollars, up 6.9 percent from 323.7 million dollars, while travel goods absorbed 427.9 million dollars, up 16.6 percent from 366.7 million dollars, the report added. Speaking at a press conference on Cambodia's economic outlook for 2024 on Thursday, Poullang Doung, Asian Development Bank-Cambodia's senior economics officer, said the GFT sector will partly contribute to Cambodia's economic growth this year, which was projected at 5.8 percent. He said the outlook for the GFT exports is "positive" and that the GFT exports have gained momentum since the last quarter of 2023. The GFT industry is the biggest foreign exchange earner for the Southeast Asian country. The sector currently

consists of roughly 1,680 factories and branches, employing some 918,000 workers, mostly female, according to the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training.

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MYANMAR: To Provide Loans to MSME Entrepreneurs at Low Interest Rates

Myanmar's government is working to provide loans to micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) at low interest rates through the MSME development fund, according to the Department of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development under the Ministry of Industry on Monday. The loans will be given to businesses engaged in value-added manufacturing, those capable of increasing the country's export earnings, using locally sourced raw materials, creating job opportunities, producing goods instead of importing, saving energy, focusing on environmental conservation and wastewater management, and promoting public health. Micro businesses can get loans up to 10 million kyats (about 4,761 U.S. dollars), small businesses up to 50 million kyats (about 23,809 dollars), and medium-sized businesses up to 100 million kyats (about 47,619 dollars). Entrepreneurs can achieve their goals with the help of these loans, an official from the department said, adding that MSME entrepreneurs who need loans can apply by submitting their applications to branch offices of the MSME development agency.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/01/2024

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SINGAPORE: SMEs Face Contraction for 5 Straight Quarters

Singapore's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) were in a contract mood for the fifth consecutive quarter, according to a report released by the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC) Tuesday. The bank's latest SME index registered at 49.7 in the first quarter this year, edging up by 0.2 from the previous quarter but remaining contractionary. The SME index is based on transaction data of over 100,000 OCBC SME customers in Singapore. A reading above 50 signifies improved health, while a score of below 50 shows deterioration. SME collections and payments grew by 1.4 percent and 1.9 percent year-on-year against bumpy disinflation trends and elevated cost pressures, the bank noted. The SME index will remain flat before a gradual upturn towards the second half of this year, according to OCBC. Up to 51 percent of the 1,200 SME business owners surveyed in the OCBC SME Business Outlook poll in the first quarter expected better performance over the next six months. The turnaround in global electronics and a positive outlook for the ASEAN economies is expected to be positive on the outward-oriented sectors in Singapore, the bank said.

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THAILAND: Business Sentiment Improves in March

Thailand's business sentiment rose slightly in March due to improved confidence primarily in manufacturing across various sectors, data released by the central bank showed on Monday. According to the Bank of Thailand (BOT), the Southeast Asian country's business sentiment index (BSI) was recorded at 49.6 last month, up from 48.8 in February, attributed to improvements in both manufacturing and non-manufacturing sectors. The manufacturing index increased across several sectors, particularly in the rubber and plastic industries, thanks to China's restocking of rubber products and rising demand for packaging products for consumer goods, the BOT said in a statement. Meanwhile, the non-manufacturing index marginally improved, mainly driven by the wholesale trade sector's performance sub-index. The three-month expected BSI came in at 51.9 in March, down from 53.5 a month earlier, on the back of worsening confidence in production, total order books, and performance, the BOT said. The reading was based on a survey of 765 respondents from large and medium-sized firms, the central bank said.

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VIETNAM: Urged to Build Legal Corridor for AI Industry

Việt Nam needs a policy on artificial intelligence (AI) to help this industry develop strongly, while minimising risks, according to insiders. In the Prime Minister's Decision No. 127/QĐ-TTg dated January 26, 2021 promulgating the national strategy on research, development and application of AI by 2030, the building of a legal system and corridor related to AI is one of the highlights. Deputy Minister of Science and Technology Nguyễn Hoàng Giang affirmed that Việt Nam cannot stay out of the game, but must ensure two factors. On the one hand, the country needs to build an open environment meeting practical needs in research and development and socio-economic development. But on the other hand, due to the downside of AI, it must be developed responsibly, in accordance with Vietnamese practice and culture. Digital technology development must go hand in hand with responsibility and ethics, he stressed. The ministry is also reporting to the Government on the need to propose the promulgation of a law on digital technology industry to the National Assembly, in order to create new development space for digital technology, and turn it into a new production force, resource and factor, and a new driving force of the country.

Nguyễn Phú Tiến, Deputy Director of the National Digital Transformation Department under the Ministry of Information and Communications, said that the ministry is tasked with developing and completing additional legal documents on establishing and sharing data about the testing framework (sandbox), thus creating a favourable space with specifically designed legal policy framework to conduct AI testing in

potential fields. The ministry has also assigned the department to preside over the pilot implementation of large language models and virtual assistants, and build a Benchmark set (a strategic tool used to compare the performance of processes, products and services of a business with the performance of the best companies inside and outside the industry) to evaluate the quality of large language models. It is expected to be issued in 2024. The Ministry of Science and Technology has proposed the Government approve a national strategy on AI research, development and application by 2030. The move is to create a boost for Việt Nam's AI industry, turning the country into a bright spot in this regard, said deputy chief of the MoST's Department of High Technology Trần Anh Tú at the ministry's quarterly press conference in Hà Nội on April 10.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 04/24/2024

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Hà Nội Promotes Development of Private Economic Sector

Hà Nội is striving to develop many private economic models by the end of 2025, and improve business quality and efficiency of innovative enterprises. Growth rate of Hà Nội's private economic sector is also set to be higher than the overall growth rate of the municipal economy. This is part of a plan issued by the Hà Nội People's Committee to implement the Government's Action Programme on private economic development for the period 2023-25. It aims to create favourable conditions for the private economy to have quick and sustainable development with growth in quantity, scale and quality of private firms. Those contribute to the gross regional domestic products (GRDP), create jobs and improve income of the people in the city. The city also strives to have more than 439,000 enterprises by 2025 and 600,000 units by 2030. Of which, it will have 152,700 newly established enterprises in the period 2021-25. To complete these targets, the municipal people's committee has deployed some key tasks and solutions. It continues to improve mechanisms and policies with synchronous and consistent manners, creating a favourable investment and business environment for development and participation in market of the private economic sector; and promoting fair competition. The city will develop infrastructure and increase ability approaching to resources of the private economy. It focuses on supporting the private economy to innovate technology, develop human resources and improve productivity. In addition, it is necessary to improve the efficiency of State management for private economic development.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 04/25/2024

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South Asia

INDIA: Space Innovation Firm SatSure Secures Investment Boost

Spacetech firm SatSure has successfully secured an undisclosed amount of funding

in its Series A round, with notable participation from Promus Ventures and Baring Private Equity Partners (BPEP), India. TransUnion also contributed to the funding round, further bolstering the startup's financial standing. The infusion of funds is set to propel SatSure's innovative product development initiatives, enhancing its capabilities to leverage technology for the agriculture finance landscape. Mr. Prateep Basu, Founder & CEO of SatSure, expressed his enthusiasm regarding TransUnion's investment, highlighting the shared commitment to driving financial inclusion in agriculture finance. The collaboration between TransUnion CIBIL and SatSure dates back to 2022 when they introduced the CIBIL Credit & Farm Report (CCFR), aimed at providing credit institutions with comprehensive access to credit data, crop insights, and land information for farmers. Mr. Rajesh Kumar, MD and CEO of TransUnion CIBIL emphasized the significance of the investment in SatSure, stressing the potential to leverage combined expertise to facilitate financial access for millions of farmers and professionals in the agricultural sector. SatSure, headquartered in Bangalore, India, with additional offices in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Liverpool, United Kingdom, specializes in decision analytics, utilizing big data analytics, machine learning, and satellite technology to address challenges related to climate change, infrastructure, and agriculture sustainability.

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Cognizant and Microsoft Collaborate to Expand GenAI in Enterprise

Cognizant and Microsoft have announced an expanded partnership aimed at bringing Microsoft's generative AI (GenAI) and Copilots to millions of users. The collaboration is set to transform enterprise business operations, enhance employee experiences, and drive cross-industry innovation. As part of the agreement, Cognizant purchased 25,000 Microsoft 365 Copilot seats for its associates, along with 500 Sales Copilot and 500 Services Copilot seats. These will help improve productivity, streamline workflows, and elevate customer experiences. Ravi Kumar S., CEO of Cognizant, highlighted the transformative potential of generative AI, calling it "a game-changer for virtually every business in every industry". Cognizant is investing \$1 billion in GenAI over the next three years, with plans to deploy Microsoft 365 Copilot to a million users across its global client base, spanning 11 industries. Judson Althoff, executive VP and chief commercial officer at Microsoft, noted the complementary strengths of the partnership, saying, "By combining Cognizant's industry expertise with Microsoft's Copilot capabilities, we will help drive AI adoption and innovation for millions of users across its network". The collaboration could significantly accelerate AI adoption and innovation in India, where AI is projected to add \$450 to \$500 billion to the country's GDP by 2025, accounting for 10% of its \$5 trillion GDP target. The partnership underscores both companies' commitment to harnessing AI's potential to fuel growth and innovation in various sectors.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com> 04/23/2024

Ohmium and Tata Projects Partners for Green Hydrogen Drive in India

Ohmium International, a prominent provider of green hydrogen solutions specializing in the design, production, and implementation of cutting-edge Proton Exchange Membrane (PEM) electrolyzers, is delighted to unveil a strategic alliance with Tata Projects, a distinguished sustainable technology-driven Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) firm based in India. This partnership endeavors to strengthen green hydrogen initiatives across India by merging pioneering technology with established engineering excellence. Ohmium will supply PEM electrolyzers, while Tata Projects will oversee the complete EPC process, encompassing engineering, design, integration, and optimization. Through this collaborative endeavor, the aim is to achieve seamless project implementation and offer an inclusive and economical solution for green hydrogen production in India. “Ohmium is excited to bring our PEM electrolyzer technology together with Tata Projects’ EPC expertise to promote green hydrogen production and global sustainability”, said Ohmium CEO Arne Ballantine. “With collaborative partners like Tata Projects, Ohmium is poised to be a leading provider of PEM electrolyzer technology in India. Together, we share the goal of driving the adoption of green hydrogen in India and accelerating the country’s transition towards a sustainable energy future”. “With the goal to support India’s transition to clean energy, Tata Projects, a technology-led EPC company, is pleased to be partnering with Ohmium to bring to market best-in-class solutions for green hydrogen. We look forward to a fruitful collaboration”, said Vinayak Pai, MD and CEO of Tata Projects.

Ohmium specializes in the design, production, and installation of modular and scalable proton exchange membrane (PEM) electrolyzers, facilitating cost-effective green hydrogen generation. With a range of electrochemical solutions, the company aids clients in realizing their sustainability objectives across industrial, transportation, and energy ventures. Headquartered in the United States, with manufacturing hubs in India and a global operational footprint, Ohmium boasts a diverse green hydrogen project portfolio exceeding 2 GW across multiple continents. In 2023, Ohmium secured \$250 million in Series C funding, spearheaded by TPG Rise Climate. Ohmium produces modular interlocking PEM electrolyzers, incorporating cutting-edge power electronics to enhance value across various commercial and industrial applications. These advancements enhance safety, reduce installation costs, expedite setup, increase energy density, enable scalability, and improve ramp rates. Each compact electrolyzer can be stacked effortlessly, leading to substantial savings in installation and upkeep expenses. Additionally, the standardized design facilitates swift scalability from megawatt to gigawatt levels. Ohmium’s patented electrolyzer technology, with its dynamic ramping capabilities, is ideally suited for integration with renewable electricity sources.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: ICT Proves Nation's Fastest-Growing Profit-Wise Non-Oil Sector, EBRD Says

The ICT sector in Azerbaijan is the fastest growing non-oil sector in terms of revenue, Head of the EBRD in the country Nataly Mouravidze said during the closing ceremony of the IT Hub Azerbaijan project, Trend reports. “I'm delighted the IT Hub Azerbaijan project is addressing one of the most well-known issues: talent development. This initiative has the potential to promote inclusive regional economic development, technological advancement, and worldwide competitiveness. It also promotes innovation, creates jobs, and establishes Azerbaijan as a key player in the digital economy. I am proud that the project not only assists Azerbaijan's IT sector and promotes innovation in the country, but it also contributes to the development of rural areas and regions, thereby reducing digital inequality between regions and cities. Azerbaijan's ICT business is the fastest-growing non-oil sector in terms of income, and the number of customers is rapidly increasing," she added. To note, the project IT Hub: Attracting Foreign Direct Investments in Azerbaijan's Information and Communication Sector (IT Hub Azerbaijan) is being carried out in collaboration with the Center for Analysis and Coordination of the IV Industrial Revolution (C4IR) under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy, StrategEast Company, and the EBRD. It aims to promote the development of ICT in Azerbaijan by training and employing qualified professionals.

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Azerbaijan Greenlights Privatization of Satellite Communications in Geostationary Orbits

The privatization of satellite communications in geostationary orbits has been allowed in Azerbaijan, Trend reports. This is reflected in the amendment to the law “On the privatization of state property”, approved by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. Satellite communications facilities in geostationary orbits, the privatization of which is prohibited, have been removed from the list of state property.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Supermarkets, Transport Next for Cyber Exercises

Food and grocery, finance, and transport will be the next three industries to have their cyber security tested under the government's National Cyber Security Exercise program. New national cyber security coordinator Lieutenant General Michelle McGuinness revealed the sectors next up for stress testing in a Senate hearing last night, adding that previous exercises led by her staff were in the education and resources sectors. The aviation sector led its own exercise this year, McGuinness said. The food and grocery sector – which struggled with unexpected traffic early in the Covid era – will be watched closely along with transport, since this will be those sectors' first security exercise. Previously, cyber security minister Clare O'Neil had outlined exercises in the aviation, financial services, and telecommunications industries.

McGuinness also highlighted the activity of the National Cyber Intel Partnership (NCIP), which was formed in response to last year's cyber security action plan. She said the first "exploratory meeting with the minister" took place in September 2023. The NCIP establishes two-way threat sharing and threat blocking between industry and government, McGuinness explained. Hamish Hansford, deputy secretary of cyber and infrastructure security, told the hearing that the rollout of the critical infrastructure risk management program is also a current focus in the Department of Home Affairs. Companies and government agencies regulated by the Security of Critical Infrastructure Act (SoCI) are due to make their first risk management reports between July and September this year. Hansford also told the committee his SoCI compliance activity is moving from education towards compliance audits. "We have in the last couple of weeks changed our compliance posture ... announcing that we'll start an audit and compliance program."

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WorldFirst Expands Digital E-Commerce Solutions to Simplify Global Procurement for Australian Businesses

WorldFirst, a one-stop digital payment and financial services platform for global businesses, especially SMEs in international trade, has expanded its digital e-commerce solutions in Australia to streamline global procurement processes for domestic businesses, helping to protect their bottom line and drive growth amid rising costs of business operations. WorldFirst has launched a global sourcing payment solution Cross-border Pay in partnership with 1688, a major global wholesale e-marketplace under Alibaba Group, to enable Australian businesses to access a vast array of competitively-priced quality products from over 10 million manufacturers in China. Cross-border Pay offers Australian buyers an option to make payments to 1688 sellers without the need to set up an onshore bank account in China.

•Easy set-up: With Alipay integration into 1688 buyers can connect and start sourcing within minutes. •Direct and fast payment: Buyers can make payments directly from their World Account to 1688 suppliers. Payments typically arrive in seconds. •Cost-saving: Save costs by sourcing direct from the factory and paying in foreign currency with highly competitive foreign exchange rates. Whilst the Australian economy is seeing signs of cooling inflation, costs of business in Australia continue to rise. Coupled with higher interest rates weighing on consumer confidence and disposable incomes and eroded purchasing power, it is increasingly hard for Australian businesses to plan and invest, according to the Reserve Bank of Australia. As a result, Australian businesses are searching for global sourcing opportunities which can provide a diversity on product and cost, while protecting against the impact of supply chain disruption.

1688 leverages its vast supplier and partnership networks to significantly enhance the cost-performance ratio for overseas merchants. •Average product price on 1688 is 15% lower than other B2B marketplaces. •Direct contracts with manufacturers drive down costs. •Partnership with logistic companies support international shipping. Jim Vrondas, Country Manager at WorldFirst Australia, said “Global sourcing allows Australian companies to increase the amount of prospective suppliers available to them which in turn provides a greater sourcing pool for quality control, rerouting opportunities to circumvent short term supply chain delays and compare costs across locations to ensure lowest cost, highest quality product.”

WorldFirst is the first official cross-border payment partner with 1688. Transaction volume of the solution grew at an annual average rate of over 70% from 2019 and 2023 on the back of robust international demand. In addition to global sourcing, Jim also highlighted the opportunity for Australian businesses to benefit from selling their goods in foreign e-commerce sites through WorldFirst digital e-commerce solutions: “1688 is good for online sellers, drop shippers, wholesalers, retailers and used by sourcing agents from around the globe. By reducing the cost of sourcing and shipping direct from the Chinese factory to an overseas warehouse, businesses can improve operating efficiency, increase profit margins and deliver faster fulfilment times to their consumers.”

In addition to digital e-commerce solutions, WorldFirst also provides a way to for SMEs to open a multi-currency World Account within minutes to open more than 10 local currency accounts, empowering them to seamlessly receive cross-border payments and manage funds across more than 100 global marketplaces through a single online portal. The World Account is a single sign on user-friendly portal for sellers to manage their growing operations across borders and marketplaces. WorldFirst has a strong track record in driving growth for e-commerce SMEs. WorldFirst is the top payment service firm by transaction volume for China-based e-commerce businesses which sell on international e-marketplaces.

In January 2024, new customer acquisition of WorldFirst in South-east Asia increased 16 times and the overall transaction volume of its customers in the region grew by 90 per cent on year.

About WorldFirst WorldFirst is meeting the needs of SMEs engaged in international trade to expand globally. This includes global collection, making payments, currency conversion, risk management, and supply chain financing to help SMEs reduce costs and improve turnover efficiency to generate more revenue, and quickly capture global business opportunities. WorldFirst, which employs AI and other cutting-edge technologies for risk control, prioritizes the safety and security of client funds above all else and has a leading fraud-prevention track record in the industry. WorldFirst has served one million customers worldwide and is connected to over 120 marketplaces.

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NEW ZEALAND: Fast Track Invite List Includes Most Destructive Industries

The government's list of companies invited to apply through the Fast Track process includes the most environmentally destructive industries in New Zealand, says Greenpeace. On Friday afternoon, just hours before the closing deadline for submissions on the Fast Track Approvals Bill, the government released a list of all so-called 'stakeholders' sent invitations to apply for the Fast Track – a process which has been slammed for its potential to bypass environmental protections and normal democratic process. This list includes environmental destroyers Fonterra, Talley's, and wannabe seabed miners Trans-Tasman Resources (TTR), says Greenpeace. TTR has failed time and time again to prove that seabed mining won't cause harm to the biodiversity of the South Taranaki Bight including blue pygmy whales, the critically endangered Māui dolphins, and seabirds like kororā.

Mega dairy company Fonterra also received an invitation to the Fast Track. Giving New Zealand's biggest climate and freshwater polluter a free pass to run roughshod over environmental laws is the last thing we should be doing in a climate and biodiversity crisis. Commercial fishing company Talley's was also on the invite list, a company with a long history of destructive fishing, and multiple incidents of trawling in closed areas. The new 'Fast-track Approvals Bill' would give just three Ministers the power to approve or deny development projects. They would avoid the usual checks and balances that are in place to protect rivers, land, the ocean, and communities. Greenpeace says the Luxon government has displayed a lack of transparency over the whole process. It won't release the list to be included in the Bill until after the select committee considers it.

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Mark Patterson Reopens World's Largest Wool Scouring Facility

Associate Agriculture Minister, Mark Patterson, formally reopened the world's largest wool processing facility today in Awatoto, Napier, following a \$50 million rebuild and refurbishment project. "The reopening of this facility will significantly lift the economic opportunities available to New Zealand's wool sector, which already accounts for 20 per cent of global strong wool production," Mr Patterson says. "The refurbished facility will bolster New Zealand's wool scouring capacity and capability, contributing to the local and wider economy and growing our wool sector. "Woolworks' Awatoto scouring facility is the largest of its kind in the world. Woolworks scours 80 per cent or 100 million kilograms of New Zealand's wool each year. The Awatoto facility scours more than half of New Zealand's wool.

"Throughout today, I am hosting key industry leaders from our largest export markets, including delegates from International Wool Textile Organisation Congress. This presents an opportunity to build and strengthen connections across the global wool supply chain, promote our incredible, natural fibre, and help open doors for New Zealand wool businesses. "This, along with the woolshed meetings we're holding across New Zealand, are part of the Government's commitment towards supporting the success of the food and fibre sector, including New Zealand wool businesses." The \$50 million rebuild follows extensive damage to the site from flooding and silt caused by Cyclone Gabrielle in early 2023.

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