

Asia-Pacific City Informatization BULLETIN

The Second Quarter 2025



UNPAN-AP
Editorial Department,
Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences





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United Nations
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Asia-Pacific

WIC Releases Report on Global Cross-Border Data Flow Policies

The report on *Comparative Study on Global Cross-Border Data Flow Policies* was released at the World Internet Conference (WIC) Asia-Pacific Summit in Hong Kong on April 14. The report was presented by Liang Hao, Executive Deputy Secretary-General and Chair of the Data Working Group, WIC, who introduced the background to, as well as key findings and recommendations from the study. The report provides a comprehensive analysis of 194 policy documents related to global cross-border data flows issued by 136 countries and regions, as well as multilateral and bilateral mechanisms, by the end of 2024. By comparing policies related to data possession, exchange, and reception, the research team categorizes global approaches into three main policy paradigms: the Framework-based Facilitation Approach, the Prudent and Flexible Approach, and the Restrictive Approach. Each paradigm is examined in terms of its characteristics, use cases, and representative examples. Further analysis reveals that nearly 60 percent of national and regional policies fall under the Prudent and Flexible Approach. Since 2018, there has been a noticeable increase in the Restrictive Approach, with some countries reinforcing security-driven regulations, according to the study. In contrast, multilateral mechanisms and trade agreements tend to adopt more the Framework-based Facilitation Approach or the Prudent and Flexible Approach, reflecting the need for flexible, adaptive policies amid growing global digital interdependence, the study finds. Based on these findings, the report offers four recommendations to foster open, collaborative, and mutually beneficial international cooperation on data governance. It calls for reducing policy barriers to enable smoother cross-border data flows, and adapting regulation to diverse cross-border data requirements. It also stresses the need to strengthen data subject rights to build a trustworthy data-sharing environment, and drive technological innovation to strengthen governance capabilities.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 04/15/2025

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WIC Hosts Open Forum on Bridging Digital Divide During 2025 IGF

On June 24, the World Internet Conference (WIC) hosted an open forum on "Bridging the Digital Divide: Focusing on the Global South" during the 2025 United Nations Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Lillestrom, Norway. The forum addressed the growing risk of digital inequality, especially in developing countries, as emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence continue to advance. High deployment

costs and limited access to digital skills have made it difficult for many communities in the Global South to benefit from digital advancements. Participants emphasized the need to strengthen capacity building, create innovative governance models, and deepen international cooperation, so as to build a digital future that is inclusive, fair, and accessible to all. The IGF is one of the main platforms under the UN framework for global discussions on internet governance. The 20th edition of the IGF was held under the theme "Building Digital Governance Together." It brought together representatives from governments, international organizations, academia, the private sector, and civil society. Through open dialogue, the forum aimed to identify collaborative solutions for building a more inclusive, secure, and sustainable digital environment. Among the speakers at the WIC forum were Li Junhua, United Nations under-secretary-general for economic and social affairs; Francis Gurry, vice-chair of the WIC and former director general of the World Intellectual Property Organization; Tripti Sinha, chair of the Board of Directors at the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers; Ren Xianliang, secretary-general of the WIC; Qi Xiaoxia, director-general of the Bureau of International Cooperation at the Cyberspace Administration of China; Nii Narku Quaynor, chairman of Ghana Dot Com who is widely recognized as the Father of the Internet in Africa; and Chern Choong Thum, WIC global youth leader and special functional officer at Malaysia's Ministry of Communications. The forum was hosted by Zhang Hui, deputy secretary-general of the WIC.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 06/25/2025

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East Asia

CHINA: Unveiling New Regulations on Government Data Sharing

China on Tuesday unveiled a document to further regulate the sharing of government data to enhance the country's digital governance capabilities and the effectiveness of public services. Premier Li Qiang has signed a State Council decree to promulgate the new regulations, which are set to take effect on Aug. 1. The new regulations set clear requirements for the use of shared government data, stipulating that if government duties can be fulfilled by accessing shared data, government departments shall not duplicate data collection. An integrated national government affairs big data system will be established, requiring existing government data platforms to be incorporated into this system, according to the document. It states that, in principle, no new government data sharing and exchange systems should be established. The regulations also emphasize that in the process of using legally shared government data, the responsibility for security management falls on the government departments that demand data. Government departments and entrusted parties are obliged to protect government data security, says the document.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 06/03/2025

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East China's Hangzhou Unveils Plan to Build AI Innovation Hub

The eastern Chinese tech city of Hangzhou, home to AI startup DeepSeek and humanoid robotics firm Unitree Robotics, has recently unveiled its 2025 action plan to further elevate its status as an AI innovation center. According to the plan, by the end of this year, Hangzhou aims to expand its intelligent computing power from 25 to 50 EFLOPS, cultivate two world-class AI foundation models and more than 25 industry-specific large models, and raise the annual revenue of its core AI industry to over 390 billion yuan (about 54.43 billion U.S. dollars). The city is also seeking to achieve major technological breakthroughs in terms of AI chips and further promote the application of AI in various fields such as manufacturing, healthcare, finance, transportation, education, science and governance. To achieve these ambitions, Hangzhou has introduced a 1-billion-yuan computing power voucher program spanning four years to help local firms access computing resources at lower costs. This program will offer subsidies to cover up to 60 percent of the costs of firms in purchasing computing power and models for AI development. The city has also pledged in the action plan to offer subsidies to attract global AI talent and incentivize innovation. Hangzhou, capital of the economic powerhouse Zhejiang Province, has emerged as a leading AI hub in China's tech landscape. By 2024, the city had hosted more than 500 AI companies, whose combined profits last year accounted for over 70 percent of Zhejiang's provincial total, an industry report showed.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 06/24/2025

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JAPAN: LDP Lawmakers to Hold Policy Study Session on AI in Healthcare

A group of Liberal Democratic Party lawmakers, including Finance Minister Kato, is preparing to hold a policy study session as early as next week to support the research and development of artificial intelligence in healthcare, according to TV Tokyo. The session is expected to bring together around 20 lawmakers, including Kato, former Foreign Minister Kamikawa, and former Health Minister Tamura. Following the political fundraising scandal that led to the dissolution of all LDP factions except the Aso faction, the party has seen a rise in alternative groupings. Chief Cabinet Secretary Hayashi and former Secretary-General Motegi, for example, have each launched study groups or parliamentary associations, signaling growing activity aimed at building influence ahead of the next party leadership race.

From <https://newsonjapan.com> 04/07/2025

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Japanese Govt, Firms Plan to Develop Next-Generation Geothermal System; Public-Private Sector Council Launched

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry has established a liaison council of both the public and private sectors to accelerate the development of technologies for a next-generation geothermal power system. Japan has numerous volcanoes and thus abundant geothermal heat. Therefore, there are high expectations for this promising source of renewable energy. The government plans to encourage private-sector companies to invest more in the field, with the aim of a new system being put into practical use in the early 2030s. More than 70 companies, including ones in the fields of electric power, construction and finance, attended the first meeting of the liaison council on April 14. Together, the members of the council aim to create a road map by the end of this year for the commercialization of next-generation technologies including closed-loop systems, which have been attracting attention worldwide. The government is also considering measures to assist companies in fostering human resources and lowering costs. In closed-loop systems, pipes are laid like a web and pass through underground layers of rock where temperatures are high.

Water circulates inside the pipes and is converted into steam, which then rotates turbines and generates electrical power. Because closed-loop systems do not require an underground reservoir of hot water or steam to generate electric power, there are more locations where development is possible. Chubu Electric Power Co. contributed capital to a startup in Canada and aims to begin the world's first commercial operation of a closed-loop system in Germany. Japan's potential capacity of geothermal power is estimated to be the third largest in the world. However, conventional methods of geothermal power generation pose high risks for companies starting such businesses, because it would be difficult for them to turn a profit if their drilling efforts at underground reservoirs produced insufficient quantities of heated water or steam. In addition, there have been many cases of candidate development sites in areas with hot spring resorts have faced opposition from local residents and entities over concerns that such development may adversely affect the quantity or quality of the hot spring waters. The amount of time needed to address this opposition has been an issue.

The public-private sector council will also discuss development of supercritical geothermal power generation, which utilizes heat sources located near magma at depths of 3,000 meters to 6,000 meters. If next-generation geothermal power systems are realized, the amount of available geothermal resources could be increased by four times or more. Geothermal heat is a power source which can stably generate electric power irrespective of weather conditions. However, it only accounted for 0.3% of the nation's total in fiscal 2023, less than solar power and wind power. In the basic energy plan, which the Cabinet approved in February, the government presented an estimate of the expansion of renewable energy sources. In this, the government set a target of raising the proportion of geothermal power output to between 1% and 2% by fiscal 2040.

From <https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp> 04/20/2025

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Japan Lower House Passes AI Promotion Bill

Japan's House of Representatives, the lower chamber of parliament, passed a bill on Thursday to promote the development of artificial intelligence technology and take steps to mitigate its risks. The legislation is expected to be enacted during the current parliamentary session set to end in June after deliberations at the House of Councillors, the upper chamber. The bill calls for setting up a task force, to be led by the prime minister, to craft a basic plan to promote AI development. The government will be required to investigate AI-related cases such as human rights violations and provide instruction and advice to serious violators.

From <https://www.nippon.com> 04/24/2025

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Japan Upper House Panel Passes Active Cyberdefense Bill

Japan's House of Councillors Cabinet Committee on Thursday approved by a majority vote an active cyberdefense bill to allow the government to monitor communications in peacetime to prevent cyberattacks. The bill was supported mainly by the ruling bloc of the Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito, the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan and Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Innovation Party), also an opposition party. The bill is expected to be passed into law at a plenary meeting of the upper chamber of the Diet, the country's parliament, on Friday. At Thursday's meeting of the committee, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba emphasized that in conducting cyberdefense, the government will adhere to legal provisions to avoid violating the secrecy of communication, guaranteed by the Constitution. He also said that the government will design the actual cyberdefense system while paying deep respect to the secrecy of communication.

From <https://www.nippon.com> 05/15/2025

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Japan's 1st Law to Promote Safe AI Use, Development Enacted

Japan's parliament on Wednesday enacted its first legislation to promote the safe use and development of artificial intelligence technology to address concerns over risks such as the spread of misinformation and disinformation. The legislation allows the government to require businesses to cooperate in investigations into the misuse of AI but does not stipulate any penalties. Under the new law, the government will be able to advise businesses about AI misuse and warn the public when cases are identified. The legislation reflects global AI rulemaking efforts, with the European Union having enacted a comprehensive law in 2024. A task force led by Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba will be established to decide Japan's AI policy with guidelines to be compiled for companies and users.

From <https://japantoday.com> 05/29/2025

SOUTH KOREA: Acting President Stresses Goal of Making S. Korea 'Top 3 AI Power'

Acting President Han Duck-soo on Monday highlighted the government's goal of making South Korea a top three nation in artificial intelligence (AI) technology. Han underscored the goal during a ceremony marking Science, Information and Communication Day, describing the world as being engaged in an "infinite competition" to secure advanced science and digital technologies. "The key is becoming to secure the three game-changer technologies of artificial intelligence, bio and quantum technology," he said during the ceremony in southern Seoul. "Above all, becoming a top three AI power is a goal that we must achieve at all costs." Han said the government is working to actively invest in these sectors while establishing the legal and institutional infrastructure to support them. In its recent extra budget proposal, the government allocated 1.8 trillion won (US\$1.27 billion) for the AI sector to expand AI computing infrastructure, develop homegrown AI models and nurture AI startups through an innovation fund, the acting president noted. "This is because AI is the key engine that will accelerate innovation across all industries and lead future growth in combination with various advanced technologies," he said.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/21/2025

S. Korea Newly Adds Robotics, Defense on List of Nat'l Strategic Technologies

South Korea has newly designated robotics and defense technologies as part of its portfolio of advanced technologies the country aims to strategically develop as new economic growth engines, the industry ministry said Monday. The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy posted a notification of designation of the two new national strategic technologies on the official gazette, bringing the total number of such technologies to 19. Before the addition of robotics and defense, South Korea's list of national strategic technologies comprised eight semiconductor-related technologies, four related to displays, three concerning rechargeable batteries and two in biotechnology. In the robotics sector, the government picked the design, manufacturing and processing technology for humanoid robots capable of moving at speeds of at least 3.3 meters per second and carrying loads exceeding 20 kilograms. Last year, the government announced a plan to integrate artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics technologies to boost the competitiveness of the Korean humanoid robot technologies to a global top tier level by 2027. In the defense sector, core materials and components technologies for advanced aircraft engines with a thrust of 15,000 pounds-force or more have been newly listed as strategic technology. The advanced engines are considered core technology needed to develop next-generation fighter jets and unmanned aerial vehicles. "To support the

development of such technologies, the government plans to provide comprehensive support, including the establishment of specialized graduate schools, tax incentives to promote investment, and the development of necessary infrastructure," an official at the ministry said.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 05/12/2025

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MONGOLIA: Children's Participation in Social Networks to Be Regulated by Law

Minister of Education of Mongolia Naranbayar Purevsuren announced today that the Government of Mongolia is working to submit the first draft Law on Regulating the Participation of Children Under the Age of 16 on Social Media to the Parliament of Mongolia. The Minister said, "A Working Group comprising representatives from four ministries has been established to develop the concept for the draft Law. The draft Law was presented to the National Council for Children of Mongolia, which convened yesterday. The Cabinet of Mongolia will soon discuss the draft Law." Citizens will be able to submit their suggestions on the draft Law. Additionally, the draft Law will be made available on the D-Parliament website of the State Great Khural of Mongolia.

From <https://www.montsame.mn> 05/07/2025

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South-East Asia

VIETNAM: Prioritises Science, Technology, Digital Transformation to Drive Development

Việt Nam has identified the advancement of science-technology, innovation, and digital transformation as top national priorities, considering them as vital tools to avoid the middle-income trap and to usher the country into a new phase of development, said Vietnamese Ambassador to Thailand Phạm Việt Hùng. Delivering a speech at the 81st session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), held at the UN Conference Centre in Bangkok on Thursday, Hùng, who also serves as Việt Nam's Permanent Representative to ESCAP, affirmed the country's support for the UN's efforts to strengthen global governance of technology in line with its charter and international law. He called on ESCAP to facilitate the implementation of the global digital compact in the region and to step up initiatives surrounding emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI). The diplomat further stressed the importance of equitable access to technologies, urging developed nations to share knowledge and transfer technologies to developing countries. Hùng also advocated for enhanced capacity building and the promotion of innovative financial mechanisms to support digital transformation efforts.

On the sidelines of the session, which runs from April 21 to 25, the Vietnamese diplomat also addressed a special event discussing measures to advance inclusive and sustainable urban development, where he highlighted infrastructure development as one of Việt Nam's three strategic breakthroughs. Hùng identified transit-oriented urban development as a key element in improving the quality of urban planning, stimulating economic growth, and fostering sustainable cities. He also cited efforts to implement related models in both Hà Nội and HCM City - the two largest cities of Việt Nam. Expressing his appreciation for international partners' cooperation with Việt Nam in urban development, Hùng called for strengthened partnerships to promote smart technologies and innovative initiatives for sustainable urbanisation in the nation. The 81st ESCAP session has gathered some 650 delegates from over 52 member states and territories, along with representatives from international organisations. It is expected to conclude on Friday with the adoption of a series of regional resolutions on collaboration regarding climate-water interlinkages, sustainable urban development, and the growth of middle-income countries.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 04/25/2025

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Master Plan for National E-Commerce Development Approved

The Ministry of Industry and Trade (MoIT) has officially issued Decision No. 1568/QĐ-BCT, approving the master plan for national e-commerce development for the 2026–30 period. The plan positions e-commerce as a pioneering sector of the digital economy, playing a key role in transforming the country's growth model, boosting competitiveness, and promoting sustainable development. It is closely aligned with national strategic initiatives, including those on digital transformation, digital economy and digital society, and sector-specific programmes led by the MoIT. The overarching aim is to optimise the entire value chain from production to consumption through advanced technological solutions, while ensuring a balance between economic progress, social equity, and environmental protection. A notable feature of the plan is the emphasis on developing a unified and efficient e-commerce ecosystem across the country. This includes efforts to strengthen regional and international linkages, ensuring that resources are mobilised and utilised effectively. The plan also highlights the importance of coordinated action by political bodies and local authorities.

One of the core objectives is to enhance the value and global competitiveness of Việt Nam's e-commerce industry, securing its position among the world's fastest-growing digital economies. In addition, the plan sets out a number of priorities for expanding the online market for Vietnamese products both domestically and internationally. It seeks to close the development gap between urban and rural areas and to promote a shift toward a greener, circular e-commerce model that contributes to a fair and sustainable society. The government is targeting an increase in the proportion of

adults shopping online to 70 per cent. It also aims to boost the annual growth rate of e-commerce retail sales to between 20 per cent and 30 per cent, with the sector accounting for 20 per cent of the country's total retail turnover. Furthermore, efforts will be made to reduce the proportion of websites violating consumer rights to between 5-10 per cent. In terms of enterprise development, the plan outlines a series of targets. By 2030, 70 per cent of businesses in Việt Nam are expected to adopt e-commerce in their operations. All commercial transactions are to be accompanied by electronic invoices, and 80 per cent of payment transactions are to be conducted without the use of cash. The government also expects that 60 per cent of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will be operating on e-commerce platforms.

Regional equality in e-commerce development is also a priority. The plan seeks to ensure that at least half of all business-to-consumer (B2C) transactions take place outside of Hà Nội and HCM City. In addition, it aims for 60 per cent of communes and equivalent local administrative units to have online sellers. It also encourages leveraging the unique advantages of different regions, such as raw materials, production capabilities, logistics networks, and local talent, to promote regionally integrated e-commerce systems. Sustainability forms a cornerstone of the strategy, with specific environmental targets. The plan sets a goal to reduce the use of plastic packaging to no more than 45 per cent and to increase the share of recycled packaging to 50 per cent. It also aims for at least 40 per cent of e-commerce logistics businesses to use clean energy in their operations. Additionally, 50 per cent of enterprises will be required to adopt green packaging standards. Human resources development is also a vital component of the strategy. The Government aims for 60 per cent of higher education and vocational training institutions to offer programmes related to e-commerce, along with 1 million participants across various training initiatives. To deliver on these ambitions, the master plan outlines six focus areas - developing and refining regulatory frameworks and market policies for e-commerce; strengthening digital, logistics, and cashless payment systems to support sustainable growth; building digital platforms for both state management and a green, resilient e-commerce market; leveraging local advantages in resources and talent for integrated e-commerce ecosystems; improving e-commerce adoption among businesses, households, and individuals; and expanding global partnerships to adopt advanced standards, access new technologies, and enter international markets.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 06/10/2025

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Việt Nam Targets Universal Cloud Computing Adoption by 2030

A new action plan has been approved to boost the development and transition to cloud computing platforms. The national programme was agreed by Deputy Prime Minister Nguyễn Chí Dũng on June 11 to cover the next five years. Decision No. 1121/QĐ-TTg was signed by the Deputy PM to prioritise resources, gradually master

technology, foster innovation, and vigorously develop and apply cloud computing. Through this, Việt Nam aims to build a modern, synchronised, safe and sustainable digital infrastructure capable of delivering high-performance computing resources, thereby enhancing national competitiveness, driving digital economic growth and realising its ambition to become a high-income developed country by 2045. One of the key targets is that by 2030, all government agencies and state-owned enterprises, 70 per cent of private businesses and over 50 per cent of the population will be using cloud computing services provided by domestic enterprises. Việt Nam also aims to develop at least three 'Make in Vietnam' cloud platforms that meet international standards, support artificial intelligence (AI) applications, and are competitive in the regional market.

The programme also aspires to place Việt Nam among the top three ASEAN nations in terms of data centre scale and quality. A domestic network of interconnected data centres using cloud technology will be developed to enable data sharing and enhance processing capacity in support of e-government and comprehensive digital transformation. On infrastructure, the plan includes developing national data centres and multi-purpose regional and national centres that are internationally standardised, safe and sustainable. These centres will deliver cloud computing services to both public agencies and enterprises. By 2030, all government agencies will prioritise deploying new IT systems and services on cloud platforms where feasible, while at least 70 per cent of existing systems will be migrated to the cloud. To achieve these goals, the programme outlines a series of solutions, beginning with institutional improvements. These include detailed implementation plans, new legal frameworks governing government cloud platforms and incentive policies to promote cloud service adoption among state agencies, private businesses and individuals.

Preferential support will also be provided for tech start-ups developing 'Make in Vietnam' cloud solutions. On the technical side, the programme will focus on infrastructure upgrades, rolling out national databases on cloud platforms in line with the Data Law 2024 and other regulations. Digital businesses, telecom providers, and leading players in key industries will be encouraged to transition their systems to the cloud to improve efficiency, reduce costs and enhance competitiveness. A critical pillar of the programme is ensuring cybersecurity and data safety. The programme sets out policies and standards for data governance, independent audits, disaster recovery and platform interoperability. Compliance with safety standards will be assessed regularly before any system is integrated into national platforms. In addition, international cooperation will be promoted to facilitate knowledge exchange and technology transfer. Collaboration between government agencies, universities, research institutions and digital enterprises will help train and develop a workforce of cloud computing engineers and experts through workshops, training sessions and specialised conferences.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 06/13/2025

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Vietnam Passes Law Banning Personal Data Trade

Vietnam's National Assembly on Thursday passed a law on personal data protection, which prohibits activities such as buying or selling personal data, the local daily Nhan Dan reported. Specifically, violators may face fines up to 10 times the revenue gained from personal data trading, while breaches of cross-border data transfer regulations could result in penalties of up to 5 percent of the violator's revenue from the previous year, according to the report. The law also bans the misuse of personal data to undermine national security or public order, obstruct data protection efforts, exploit data protection for illegal purposes, unlawfully collect or share data, allow others to misuse one's data, or deliberately leak, lose, or seize personal data, the report added. The Personal Data Protection Law will take effect on Jan. 1, 2026.

From <https://english.news.cn> 06/26/2025

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South Asia

INDIA: OpenAI Expands AI for Impact Initiative

OpenAI launches next phase of 'AI for Impact Accelerator' in India, awarding \$150K in API credits to 11 nonprofits. Indian NGOs using AI for healthcare, education, agriculture & inclusion under OpenAI Academy's support ecosystem. Initiative aligns with India AI Mission, promoting scalable, empathetic, and impactful tech solutions for real-world challenges. OpenAI, maker of ChatGPT, on Tuesday announced the latest phase of its international 'AI for Impact Accelerator Programme' in India, marking a year of backing mission-oriented organizations that are employing artificial intelligence to address real-world social issues. Under this program, 11 nonprofits will be awarded fresh API credits, taking the aggregate worth of technical grants under this program to \$150,000. OpenAI API credits are a prepaid payment system, meaning rather than being billed on a monthly basis via credit card, the users can buy credits upfront and spend them as required. This initiative is now part of the larger 'OpenAI Academy', which seeks to make AI more accessible, beneficial, and rooted in addressing real problems. Over the past year, Indian nonprofits supported through the programme have developed and deployed AI tools in critical sectors like healthcare, education, agriculture, disability inclusion, and gender equity making a visible impact in underserved communities, according to the company. The programme is delivered in partnership with The Agency Fund, Tech4Dev, and Turn.io. It includes hands-on technical guidance, shared learning within a cohort, and early access to OpenAI's tools. It also reflects OpenAI's broader commitment to ensuring that AI benefits everyone, especially those in regions with fewer resources.

As part of its support, OpenAI also hosted a workshop in India to showcase the capabilities of its latest AI models, helping these organisations design large-scale

solutions. The project aligns well with the 'India AI Mission', which seeks to democratise access to AI, build a robust ecosystem, and create tech solutions that cater to India's specific social and economic requirements. The Indian cohort consists of institutions working on big-ticket challenges with the assistance of AI. Pragya Misra, Policy and Partnerships Lead for OpenAI India, lauded the Indian cohort for applying AI in reflective and meaningful ways. She stated the organizations represent the values of the India AI Mission and demonstrate how cutting-edge technology could be employed with empathy and imagination to fix difficult challenges. OpenAI is going to continue expanding this initiative even further in India, with fresh organizations set to add themselves to the programme sometime later this year. As it extends its reach, OpenAI is transitioning from merely granting access to creating genuine, in-the-field impact backing applied, scalable, and human-friendly AI solutions.

From <https://news.siliconindia.com/> 06/03/2025

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Baku's Digital Twin Project Sets New Standard in Smart Mobility

Transport is far more than the movement of people and goods—it is a foundation of national development, a catalyst for trade and innovation, and a key to regional stability and global integration. In today's world, resilient, efficient, and sustainable transport systems are essential to withstand the growing threats posed by natural disasters, pandemics, cyberattacks, and geopolitical tensions. It was against this backdrop that the International Transport Forum (ITF) Summit convened in Leipzig, Germany, from May 21–23, 2025, bringing together more than 1,200 representatives from over 80 countries to explore the future of transport under the theme “Transport Sustainability Against Global Shocks.” This year's summit marked a historic milestone for Azerbaijan, as the presidency of the ITF was officially transferred from Chile to Azerbaijan for the 2025–2026 term. This prestigious appointment is more than ceremonial. It places Azerbaijan at the centre of global discussions on transport resilience, innovation, and sustainability. As a full member of the ITF since 1998, Azerbaijan's elevation to the presidency reflects the country's growing influence and achievements in regional and international logistics.

Transport systems are not just about moving people or goods—they are fundamental to a nation's economic growth, regional integration, and social cohesion. Efficient transport infrastructure reduces trade costs, enhances access to markets, creates jobs, and facilitates emergency response in times of crisis. In a globalised world, countries that can move faster—literally and figuratively—tend to grow faster. Azerbaijan's geographical position as a crossroads between Europe and Asia gives it natural strategic value. But geography alone is not enough. Through extensive

investment in roads, railways, ports, and digital infrastructure, Azerbaijan has actively transformed itself into a pivotal transport hub, defying the conventional wisdom that only coastal nations can dominate regional logistics. President Ilham Aliyev: “Azerbaijan is indispensable to Eurasian transport” In a speech dedicated to Azerbaijan’s transport policy, President Ilham Aliyev emphasised that today’s Eurasian transport map is incomplete without Azerbaijan. With both the East-West and North-South corridors traversing its territory, Azerbaijan is a linchpin for trade routes connecting China to Europe and Russia to the Middle East. President Aliyev highlighted that, despite lacking access to open seas, Azerbaijan has created one of the most efficient transport infrastructures in the region.

Projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and the planned Zangazur Corridor, which gained international attention following Azerbaijan’s victory in the Second Garabagh War, illustrate the country’s determination to create lasting transport solutions with regional impact. “Infrastructure is not only concrete and steel,” the President said. “It is a tool for economic development, regional cooperation, and social inclusion.” President Aliyev also detailed Azerbaijan’s achievements over the last two decades: more than 21,000 kilometres of highways constructed or upgraded, 335 bridges, 45 tunnels, and over 3,000 kilometres of railway lines built or modernised. The Absheron Circular Line and the acquisition of new rolling stock reflect the country’s commitment to modernisation. Digital transformation: Baku’s “Digital Twin” leads the way Azerbaijan’s approach to transport goes beyond traditional infrastructure. At the ITF Summit, Deputy Minister of Digital Development and Transport Rahman Hummatov highlighted the country’s bold steps in urban digitalisation, particularly the development of a “Digital Twin” for Baku. This cutting-edge project creates a virtual replica of the city, using data collected from mobile operators, navigation systems, and public transport networks, amounting to hundreds of terabytes. It simulates movement patterns, identifies congestion hotspots, and tests the impact of future infrastructure projects before they are built. The result is a scientifically grounded, cost-effective, and strategic approach to urban planning. Already, over 20 major infrastructure projects have been modelled using the digital twin, enabling evidence-based prioritisation. This forward-looking methodology underscores Baku’s ambition to join the ranks of global smart cities.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 05/25/2025

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Azerbaijan Adopts New National Standards for Artificial Intelligence

The Azerbaijan Standardization Institute (AZSTAND), under the State Agency for Anti-Monopoly and Consumer Market Control of the President of Azerbaijan, has adopted new state standards for Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems, Trend reports. The standards, including AZS ISO/IEC 23894:2025 "Information Technology – Artificial Intelligence – Risk Management Guidelines", AZS ISO/IEC 23053:2025

"Framework for Artificial Intelligence Systems Using Machine Learning", and AZS ISO/IEC 24029-2 2025 "Artificial Intelligence – Evaluation of Neural Network Resilience", were introduced to enhance the reliability of AI systems. AZSTAND announced that these new standards define the key computational characteristics, essential algorithms, and approaches used in AI systems. The goal of these standards is to establish universal guidelines and instructions for the proper functioning of AI systems across various platforms and sectors, ensuring interoperability. These standards were discussed within the "Information and Communication Technology" Technical Committee (AZSTAND/TK 05), approved by the Institute, and added to the State Fund of Normative Documents for Standardization. The new standards are part of the Action Plan for the implementation of the "Artificial Intelligence Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2025-2028", approved by the President of Azerbaijan on March 19, 2025.

From <https://www.trend.az/> 06/05/2025

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KYRGYZSTAN: Post Plans to Launch National E-Commerce Marketplace

Kyrgyz Post national company plans to launch a national e-commerce marketplace in Kyrgyzstan, the company's General Director Marat Cherikchiev announced during the "Kyrgyzstan 2025" National Marketplaces Forum, Trend reports. According to Cherikchiev, the project will be implemented in partnership with Eldik Bank, with support from the Ministry of Digital Development and Innovative Technologies, which is the main shareholder of Kyrgyz Post. The initiative aims to enhance logistics infrastructure and improve international delivery services, particularly within the framework of cross-border trade. Cherikchiev noted that the platform is designed to expand opportunities for Kyrgyz producers and increase the country's export potential. Kyrgyz Post, in cooperation with the Association of Cross-Border E-Commerce and Logistics, is hosting the first national marketplaces forum, bringing together entrepreneurs, manufacturers, logistics specialists, and e-commerce stakeholders. It is worth noting that on December 26, 2024, Kyrgyzstan announced the launch of its first domestic online marketplace — Lemon Shopping, a unique platform that combines the functions of a marketplace, streaming service, and social network.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 05/23/2025

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KAZAKHSTAN: President Pushes for Nuclear Science and AI Dev'T in National Strategy

On the eve of Science Workers' Day in Kazakhstan, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev participated in a ceremony honoring scientists and met with local researchers to congratulate them on their professional holiday, Trend reports. In his

address, Tokayev emphasized that one of Kazakhstan's key strategic goals is the advancement of nuclear science and technology. He also highlighted the key challenges facing the scientific community. "One of our strategic priorities is the development of nuclear science and technology. Kazakhstan has significant potential in this field. Leading institutions like the Institute of Nuclear Physics in Almaty and the National Nuclear Center in Kurchatov are conducting both fundamental and applied research while training experts for the industry. Nuclear energy is not just a stable energy source, but also a foundation for the development of new sectors in both the economy and science, such as nuclear medicine, hydrogen energy, water desalination, synthetic fuel production, and small modular reactors. To make breakthroughs in these areas, we must strengthen research infrastructure, improve scientific work, and modernize engineering education. The issue of nuclear energy development should be a top priority at the next meeting of the National Council for Science and Technology under the President," said Tokayev. He also noted the rapid global advancements in artificial intelligence and pointed out that Kazakhstan has the potential to take a leading role in this area. "Our success in this field will depend on human capital - talented and educated citizens. As a result, we will increase training for IT specialists and teach artificial intelligence skills to schoolchildren and students. There are many promising areas in our national science. For the continued development of science, it is crucial for the government, business, universities, and research centers to work together," he added. At the conclusion of the event, President Tokayev awarded state honors to a group of citizens.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/10/2025

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: First NSW Digital Inclusion Strategy to Help Bridge Digital Divide

A device bank repurposing government laptops and more support to protect vulnerable people from cyber risks are two key initiatives to be delivered through the NSW Government's first Digital Inclusion Strategy. The Minns Labor Government's strategy aims to bridge the digital divide for people living in NSW by addressing challenges faced by vulnerable and disadvantaged communities when engaging online. The new strategy will support the digital economy and people in NSW who are struggling to afford or access the internet or who lack the skills or confidence to interact online safely, and launches a series of transformative initiatives.

The all-of-government approach is built around five pillars – digital ability, affordability, accessibility, connectivity, and trust and safety – helping people to gain the access, tools and confidence to thrive in a modern digital world, while maintaining offline options for essential services. According to ScamWatch, Australians reported losing more than \$2 billion to scams last year, with more than 67,000 scams reported by

NSW residents alone. Vulnerable groups who can least afford to be targeted are at significant risk, whether they are retirees or low-income earners. Consultation on the strategy revealed more than 80 per cent of respondents had experienced online scams, privacy breaches or harassment, with at-risk groups disproportionately affected. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, those who are culturally and linguistically diverse, people in the LGBTIQ+ community and people living with disability.

As part of the strategy, ID Support NSW will build on their work to assist vulnerable communities through workshops and tools to help people protect themselves from hackers and scammers, strengthen password security, spot a scam or safeguard against digital threats. To provide more equitable access to digital services, the NSW Government will work with industry to pilot a NSW Device Bank to refurbish government laptops for disadvantaged families and individuals to connect, learn, work and access vital information. Each year, the NSW Government retires around 2,300 laptops, which can be given a new lease on life. A key deliverable under the NSW Digital Strategy, the NSW Digital Inclusion Strategy will also help drive broader economic benefits including improved access to education, employment and healthcare.

The digital inclusion strategy builds on research and consultation with the public, community organisations, government agencies and the technology sector. More than 1,630 submissions were received, highlighting barriers to digital inclusion. Findings show more than one in five people (22 per cent) feel they lack skills for using the internet for everyday tasks, with older people and people living in public housing the most affected. The NSW Digital Inclusion Strategy has been developed by the NSW Telco Authority and can be viewed at nsw.gov.au/digital-inclusion-strategy. Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government Jihad Dib said: “The NSW Digital Inclusion Strategy is about giving people a fair go in the digital world and helping to bridge the digital divide.

“Whether you’re in social housing, a remote community, living with disability or struggling with the cost of staying connected, we are looking at ways Government can help and make life easier for communities. “Through these initiatives we can make a real difference for those who most need support. As the first strategy of its kind in NSW it gives us a great launchpad to work with industry, not-for-profits and our communities to all play a role in lifting digital access. “We know prioritising digital inclusion isn’t just the right thing to do, it’s the smart thing to do. By making strides to close the digital divide in NSW, we can help boost productivity and our economy through increased education, jobs and opportunities for people to reach their full potential.”

Minister for Disability Inclusion Kate Washington said: “The pandemic and recent

disasters have shown us digital access isn't a luxury, it's a lifeline. It's how we work, learn, connect with loved ones, access healthcare and stay informed during emergencies. "When people are excluded from digital spaces, they're excluded from essential parts of modern life. That's why the NSW Digital Inclusion Strategy is so important. "By listening to people with disability, carers and advocates, this Strategy takes an important step toward a more inclusive NSW—helping more people access digital services, stay connected, and participate safely and confidently in everyday life." Chair of the Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance David Spriggs said: "The launch of the NSW Digital Inclusion Strategy marks a critical step forward in closing the digital divide across the state. In today's world, digital participation is not a luxury – it is essential for accessing education, employment, healthcare, community services, and government support.

"Digital inclusion is about more than just access to technology. It is about empowering people to fully participate in society and the economy. The NSW Digital Inclusion Strategy provides a clear roadmap for building a digitally capable, connected, and resilient community. We look forward to supporting the NSW Government to implement the strategy and making digital inclusion a reality for all." NSW Telco Authority Managing Director Kylie De Courteney said: "We understand how critical connectivity is, whether it's supporting emergency services and communities in remote areas, or helping families stay online during challenging times. We're committed to working with our partners to deliver this strategy and provide practical solutions that make a real difference in people's lives."

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 05/20/2025

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Stronger Safeguards for Identity Security in ID Support Bill

People at risk of identity fraud because their documents have been breached or stolen will benefit from stronger protections and support under new laws introduced into the NSW Parliament. The legislation will establish a new fraud check service, allowing government agencies and other accredited organisations to confirm whether identity document (ID) details have been compromised or stolen, to stop criminals misusing people's details to apply for grants or credit. The Identity Protection and Recovery Bill will also underpin ongoing NSW Government efforts to help residents secure their identity and avoid theft and scams through the work of ID Support NSW. According to ScamWatch, Australians reported losing more than \$2 billion to scams last year, with more than 67,000 scams reported by NSW residents alone.

ID Support provides a lifeline for people caught up in a data breach by notifying them when a breach has occurred and helping them replace government documents and guard against cyber criminals. In 2023–24, it supported more than 40,000 customers impacted by identity misuse and data compromises. ID

Support also provides community outreach and education, delivering almost 200 interactive events last year on identity, privacy and cyber security resilience. Under the Bill, ID Support will operate as the core government provider of identity protection and recovery services, including setting up a secure Compromised Credential Register to provide a fraud check service for IDs such as NSW driver licences and photo cards.

Once it is known an ID document is potentially compromised – for example, because an individual's personal details, driver licence and card number have been exposed in a data breach or found on the dark web – it can be added to the Register. ID Support will then notify the individual and the issuing authority so the document can be replaced. Authorised fraud check users such as government agencies, banks and credit card providers, who currently use document verification services, will be able to check the Register to ensure compromised identity documents are not being used fraudulently. The Bill also allows NSW Government agencies to share relevant information to ID Support so they can alert affected individuals quickly and take immediate steps to reduce their risk of harm.

The new laws are a key action under the NSW Digital Strategy which aims to build secure, reliable and inclusive digital services and enhance cyber resilience and public trust. The Minns Labor Government has secured the future of ID Support with a four-year, \$22.7 million funding commitment through the 2024-25 Budget, after funding was set to expire under the previous government. Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government Jihad Dib said: "These new laws will help safeguard NSW residents against cyber criminals and the scourge of identity theft, especially when it targets our most vulnerable citizens who can least afford it. "By alerting people quickly and supporting them to secure their identity and replace compromised ID documents, NSW residents will be better protected from impersonation, scams and fraud.

"The new Compromised Credential Register will enable these early notifications to both individuals and agencies, and will send up a red flag when someone tries to use an ID document that has been stolen or compromised. "The bill also ensures ID Support can provide ongoing support, advice and education to NSW communities to help build cyber security awareness and resilience. "We are introducing this legislation to ensure ID Support NSW can work closely with police, victims and government agencies to help us prevent identity crime."

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 05/20/2025

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NEW ZEALAND: Building Amendment Bill Targets Costs, Innovation, and Supply Woes

New Zealand's building sector is poised for growth as the Government is set to pass legislation to open the door to thousands of overseas-certified construction products, aiming to slash building costs, boost innovation, and address long-standing supply issues. At the centre of the reform is the Building (Overseas Building Products, Standards, and Certification Schemes) Amendment Bill, which will allow products approved in "trusted jurisdictions" to be used in New Zealand without lengthy approval delays. The move is expected to cut the product certification timeline from up to two years down to as little as three months. "This is a major shakeup that will drive down the cost of building without compromising on quality," said Building and Construction Minister Chris Penk last year, introducing the Bill alongside Prime Minister Christopher Luxon. "[It will] make it easier and more affordable for people to build or renovate a home."

The changes come amid a backdrop of surging construction costs—up 41% since 2019 (as of April 2024)—and widespread frustration over the dominance of a few key players in the building materials market. A 2022 Commerce Commission study highlighted the industry's vulnerability, citing limited competition and the infamous GIB plasterboard shortage as symptoms of a fragile supply chain. Under the new regime, internationally certified materials—starting with high-impact products like plasterboard, insulation, and concrete—will be approved en masse. More than 12,000 products are expected to be cleared by July, with up to 250,000 available by the end of 2025. One example is Australia's WaterMark plumbing certification, which alone could open New Zealand's market to around 200,000 new products.

Penk stressed that product safety and suitability will remain paramount. Materials must meet "equivalent or higher" standards and be appropriate for New Zealand's unique conditions, such as seismic resilience and weather resistance. "There is no lessening in quality, or the safety, or the sustainability of those products," he said. Local councils and Building Consent Authorities (BCAs) will continue to assess how products are used in specific projects. However, the Bill mandates that BCAs must accept internationally certified products once they've been recognised by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), streamlining what has historically been a cumbersome and inconsistent approval process. Industry players have responded with cautious optimism. Mike Fox, director of Easy Build Homes, welcomed the added competition but noted that firms will still need to do their own checks.

"We want to be sure that anything that comes into the market is actually being checked and that there hasn't been problems with it overseas." The legislation is part of a broader suite of building reforms aimed at improving productivity, reducing regulatory complexity, and easing the housing crisis. Other measures include consent exemptions for small projects, streamlined multi-proof designs, and a review of building code provisions to balance energy efficiency with affordability. While the reforms have been largely welcomed, questions remain over long-term oversight and

the impact on domestic manufacturers. Officials say safeguards are in place, but some warn of the risks of over-reliance on imported products if global supply chains falter again. Still, the Government insists the reforms are a necessary step toward a smarter, more resilient construction sector. “We are not lowering standards,” said Perk, “instead we are removing unjustifiable regulations that are not adding value and enabling trusted qualified individuals with a proven track record of delivery to do the job.” The Bill is expected to pass under urgency, with implementation beginning mid-year.

From <https://b2bnews.co.nz> 04/02/2025

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Government Launches Regulatory Review into Telecommunications

Minister for Regulation David Seymour and Media and Communications Minister Paul Goldsmith have today announced that the Ministry for Regulation's fourth sector review will be into the telecommunications sector. “Telecommunications touch almost every part of modern life. With 7.22 million active connections—around 1.4 per New Zealander—this sector is as essential as electricity and water,” Says Mr Seymour. “From education and healthcare to e-commerce and entertainment, reliable digital infrastructure powers economic growth and daily life. But when regulation falls behind, innovation slows and costs rise. “In a high-cost economy like ours, regulation isn’t neutral—it’s a tax on growth. That’s why it’s time to take a fresh look. “The Ministry for Regulation and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment will work closely with industry leaders, consumer groups, and regulators to develop terms of reference for Cabinet consideration. Hearing from everyday New Zealanders will be a cornerstone of the review process.” The Ministers have decided to implement the review on the back of concerns raised with them by the sector. “Telecommunications are used by almost every New Zealander every day. It’s a multibillion-dollar industry contributing to around 2.5 per cent of New Zealand’s GDP,” Mr Goldsmith says. “We want to ensure we have the right regulatory settings in place for this important market, to support competition, foster innovation and help stimulate economic growth. “Better connectivity means improved reliability for businesses, people accessing digital healthcare, and remote learning for kids. Reliable and high-quality digital connectivity networks improve productivity and are essential to growing our economy and easing the cost of living.”

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New Health Research and Innovation Strategy to Drive NSW's Health and Economic Prosperity

The NSW Government has today released the NSW Health Research and Innovation Strategy 2025 to 2030 – a 5-year blueprint to improve health outcomes for

the people of NSW and cement the state as the nation's innovation and investment powerhouse for health and medical research and innovation. The new Strategy will target research and innovation efforts across NSW Health to where it is needed the most to move innovation from benchtop to bedside for best health outcomes for NSW patients. It will drive collaboration across NSW Government, health, academia and industry, pulling the various research and innovation strands into one cohesive, streamlined direction for maximum gain for NSW.

The Strategy will build on the major investments the NSW Government has made over the past two years to support medical research, commercialisation and infrastructure in the state, including:

- Establishment of Australia's first Viral Vector Manufacturing Facility (\$58.2 million)

- Investing \$96 million into a RNA research manufacturing facility that will change the way NSW tackles its future health challenges, under construction at Macquarie University
- Targeted call for research in Aboriginal cardiovascular health (\$5 million)
- Replacing Animals in Medical Research program (\$4.5 million). These investments are securing NSW as a major international hub for advanced manufacturing.

According to a report by KPMG Economic Impact of Medical Research in Australia, every \$1 invested in Australian medical research returns \$3.90 in economic benefit.

NSW's globally recognised research and innovation network is home to 55% of Australia's life science companies and 44% of start-ups. The State is a premier destination for high-quality, efficient, and cost-effective clinical trials, and leads the nation with 31% of national trial activity. Collaboration is key to achieving the Strategy's ambitious goals for the State, and one of the first steps is to establish a NSW Health Research and Innovation Council to drive the Strategy's vision. The Council will comprise key stakeholders across the research and innovation ecosystem to work in partnership with Government to supercharge medical research and innovation in NSW to better attract and retain the globe's best and brightest health researchers and boost the economy.

The Strategy will:

- Drive clinical trials across NSW to discover life-saving treatments for rare diseases and cancers
- Leverage NSW's significant and world leading physical and data assets, including new infrastructure such as the RNA Pilot Facility and Viral Vector Manufacturing Facility, as well as the NSW Biobank
- Harness the enormous potential of AI to deliver better health care, building on projects such as Royal Prince Alfred Hospital's Emergency Department pioneering new AI tools to streamline analysis of x-rays and CT scans to boost clinician decision-making
- Prioritise and focus on women's health in medical research by supporting women to participate in the many areas of research they are under-represented
- Build partnerships to help close the gap in the health outcomes of Aboriginal people
- Boost health outcomes in rural and regional communities.

The Strategy aligns with recent NSW Government measures to optimise innovation and education, including the NSW Innovation Blueprint, the NSW Industry policy, and the NSW High Education Strategy 2025-2029. More than 400 stakeholders across the research and innovation sector were consulted to inform the development of the Strategy and ensure it is best placed to shape the future of NSW's health and medical research and innovation. The Strategy is available here: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/research/Pages/research-and-innovation-strategy.aspx> Minister for Health Ryan Park said: "This Strategy charts a path for NSW to become Australia's leading state for medical research and innovation. "Building on our already strong health and medical research system, this strategy will foster collaboration which will better bring together our healthcare and biomedical research sector.

"I have no doubt this strategy will lead to health innovations which will boost the health of the people in NSW." Minister for Medical Research David Harris said: "The NSW Health Research and Innovation Strategy will enable NSW to realise its great potential for research and innovation to transform healthcare in our state. "Partnerships are at the heart of this wide-ranging blueprint to improve the delivery of care, reduce health and social inequities, and contribute substantial economic benefits to NSW. "I am particularly proud of the strategy's focus on increasing collaboration with Aboriginal people to Close the Gap for better outcomes for our First Nations peoples. "This Strategy will also help drive more research for historically under-studied groups, including in women's health, to improve outcomes for women across NSW.

"Tomorrow's medical breakthrough will be the result of a well-connected and supported research sector which this strategy is building today." Minister for Innovation, Science and Technology Anoulack Chanthivong said: "This Strategy is an important step from the NSW Government bringing to life our Innovation Blueprint. "NSW is the home of many of Australia's greatest innovation success stories – from established world leaders such as Cochlear and ResMed, to future titans like Harrison AI and Nanosonics. "The Minns Government is setting the stage for more of our health start-ups and scale-ups to join these companies as global ambassadors for the life changing innovation our state is capable of."

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 05/20/2025

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2、 e-Governance

Asia-Pacific

City Officials Looking for DeepSeek Help

As the world is wowed by the meteoric rise of DeepSeek, a Chinese private artificial intelligence startup, cities in China are moving quickly to integrate its large language model into government services, offering a peek into the potential of AI to revolutionize public administration duties and responsibilities. A batch of DeepSeek-powered "AI civil servants" recently rolled up their virtual sleeves and got to work in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. According to the city's Futian district, the 70 intelligent government "digital employees" are responsible for 11 major tasks, covering 240 government service scenarios, including document processing, emergency management and investment promotion. Their efficiency is remarkable, document format correction accuracy exceeds 95 percent and review time is reduced by 90 percent, the local government said, adding that the AI assistants can instantly draft initial versions of law enforcement documents. Shenzhen is not alone. Since the beginning of the year, Beijing and provincial authorities in Guangdong, Jiangsu, Liaoning and Jiangxi have scrambled to embrace DeepSeek. Wang Lei, chairman of Beijing Wenge Technology Co Ltd, a Chinese AI startup, said: "DeepSeek performs exceptionally well in Chinese language processing, excelling in writing, conducting written dialogues and handling simple administrative tasks. Deploying DeepSeek marks the first step in promoting the wide adoption of AI in government services."

Wang said: "However, the real efficiency gains in government services are not achieved by merely deploying the model. Instead, they require a deeper integration of the model with local policies and measures. This involves creating an intermediate application layer that aligns with specific government needs, followed by extensive testing and feedback mechanisms to ensure high accuracy and reliability." For example, in Beijing's Zhongguancun high-tech zone, Beijing Wenge Tech has developed such an intermediate application layer that helps the local government create a customized AI assistant named "Guanxin" to streamline administrative tasks. Guanxin primarily helps government staff with community inspections, administrative document drafting and meeting minutes. It also assists citizens and businesses with government-related inquiries and provides service guidelines. Meanwhile, the integration of DeepSeek into the 12345 public service hotline has brought significant improvements. Previously, citizens often complained about busy lines, slow processing and lack of feedback.

With DeepSeek, the 12345 hotline system in Liaoning province has seen a 20-fold increase in data processing efficiency, automatically generating high-frequency questions and response strategies to improve call handling speed and accuracy, the local government said.

Zhang Shijia, head of the technical department of Liaoning's 12345 Hotline Platform, said DeepSeek has significantly enhanced work efficiency. "For instance, when a citizen raises an issue that spans multiple departments, the first step is to identify which department should take primary responsibility. In the past, this identification process was done manually, with an accuracy rate of only about 85 percent. However, with DeepSeek, the accuracy has improved to over 95 percent based on

its analysis of previous data," Zhang said. But can "AI civil servants" replace human workers? Gao Zeng, deputy head of the government services and data management bureau in Futian district, Shenzhen, said AI cannot make independent decisions and may sometimes produce biased results based on training data. To mitigate ethical risks, each of Futian's 70 digital employees has a "human guardian" to ensure accountability, even if the AI makes a mistake. So, for grassroots civil servants, AI assistance is like having an "electronic pen" and "electronic assistant", significantly improving work efficiency, experts said.

Wang Peng, associate researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said: "Futian district's move is a proactive attempt at intelligent government transformation, with significant innovative and practical value. In the future, more government departments and institutions will introduce AI technology to achieve intelligent and automated public services, improving work efficiency and service quality." Wang from Beijing Wenge Tech said while AI models like DeepSeek offer significant potential, their deployment in government services faces challenges. For instance, traditional AI models are static knowledge bases, meaning they cannot automatically incorporate new or dynamic data. There is a need to establish data engineering processes to integrate real-time and dynamic data with the model's capabilities. Meanwhile, deploying AI large language models requires significant computational resources, which can be expensive. For example, deploying models like DeepSeek can cost millions of yuan, making it a high-barrier investment for some local governments or small and medium-sized enterprises. To solve these problems, Beijing Wenge Tech is working to develop a better application powered by Deep-Seek. "Directly deploying DeepSeek is like having a Windows system. We still need applications such as WeChat and Word to connect with friends and to write documents." A bigger industry challenge is that AI models can sometimes produce inaccurate or misleading results, known as "AI hallucinations". Additionally, opening the AI model to public use raises security concerns, especially when handling sensitive government data, experts said. Despite these challenges, the integration of DeepSeek into government systems offers a potential for true "human-machine collaboration", bringing public services closer to the needs of the people and ensuring that government responses align with public needs, said Wang, the associate researcher.

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Global South and Developing Countries Urged to Be Included in AI Governance Discussion

On April 25, during the Shanghai Forum 2025, global experts convened to address governance challenges posed by rapidly advancing AI technologies. "Not every country is going to be a military superpower or an AI superpower, but every country needs to be an AI governance superpower," said Eric Richardson, president of INHR.

Global Digital Forum in Nizhny Novgorod Has Become a New Platform for Knowledge-Sharing in the Field of E-Governance

From **June 5 to 6, 2025**, experts and partners of the **HSE Center for African Studies** participated in the **Global Digital Forum** in Nizhny Novgorod. **Andrey Maslov**, Director of the Center, moderated the session “Russia-Africa: Cooperation for Digital Sovereignty”. Among the speakers were participants and partners of the **e-Governance Knowledge Sharing Programme**, including officials from Tanzania, the Republic of the Congo, the Comoros, representatives of Rostelecom and Sberbank. The session participants discussed common approaches and solutions to ensure the digital sovereignty of African countries, as well as elaborated on the prospects for cooperation. The African Ministers expressed gratitude to the Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation, as well as to Russian Government for organizing the forum. In addition, the African delegates highly appreciated the role of the **HSE Center for African Studies** in organizing the session on digital sovereignty and noted the contribution of the **e-Governance Knowledge Sharing Programme** for African officials to the development and strengthening of the Russian-African digital partnership.

“This Forum will undoubtedly strengthen the friendly relations between the leaders of our countries, Presidents Vladimir Putin and Denis Sassou Nguesso. I also believe that it will deepen our cooperation with Russian scientific and educational institutions, such as the HSE University and the **Center for African Studies**”, – admitted **Leon Juste Ibombo**, Honorable Minister of Posts, Telecommunications, and the Digital Economy of the Republic of Congo. Recently, the Ministry has become one of the partners of the Center: in April 2025, on the sidelines of the GITEX Africa 2025 exhibition in Morocco, **Leon Juste Ibombo** and Andrey Maslov **exchanged copies of the signed agreement** on cooperation between the Ministry and the Higher School of Economics. The agreement consolidated the Ministry’s participation in the **e-Governance Knowledge Sharing Programme** for African officials, which has been implemented since 2022 with the support of the Russian Government, Administration of the Russian Federation, and **Innopraktika** company. During the session, **Andrey Maslov** spoke about plans to develop the **Programme**, highlighting its key goals: strengthening African digital sovereignty, promoting capacity building and human capital development. Together with digital infrastructure development, these are the most crucial challenges faced by African countries in digital field.

The topic of digital sovereignty was further developed by **Muguti Tafadzwa**, Permanent Secretary in the Office of the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe: “One of the challenges we have to face is our lack of information sovereignty. The stories of many African countries are told instead of us, with many distortions. It is a

practical issue that needs to be addressed in a complex way, by intergovernmental communication and data-investments as well, and I am happy that we are now working very closely on it at the presidential and intergovernmental levels". "Most African countries' data (on mining resources, for example) is foreign one", – **Muguti Tafadzwa** continues. "It is used mainly by Western countries and other powerful nations that come and explore their vast natural resources. But as for Zimbabwe, we want our country to transform, leveraging our data-sovereignty. We've developed our National Digitalization Strategy that aims to audit ourselves and identify what are the things that we've done wrong in the last decades. We are now striving to implement it on a national level".

As **Andrey Maslov** noted, government institutions are playing a leading role when it comes to data sovereignty. And African countries demonstrate this quite clearly: "In Tanzania, the role of the government is predominant when we talk about our digital transformation, but it tightly aligns with other stakeholders as well (private sector, civil society, international and local organizations)", – said **Jerry William Silaa**, Honorable Minister of Communication and Information Technology of Tanzania. Another question that can't be ignored is digital education. "In Comoros, for example, the government has done a great work: the country has its own fiber optic factories, and is has also opened its first 5G platform, as well as the first center on ruling in this sphere. The next step is providing digital literacy and skills to the youth since without talented people, data centers won't be operable enough. In this sense, the Comoros hopes to get Russian experience in digital development since it will make a significant contribution to the country's development", – commented **Oumouri Mmadi Hassani**, Minister of Post, Communications, Digital Economy, and Transparency of Comoros, who is also a graduate of **Saint Petersburg Electrotechnical University "LETI"**.

As for Russian private enterprises, their interest in African region is growing. For example, **PJSC Rostelecom**, the leader of the Russian telecommunications industry, is opened to cooperation and is ready to share its ICT developments with African partners. **Alexey Sapunov**, Deputy President and Chairman of the Management Board of Rostelecom, underlined that "the company is interested in eliminating digital inequality and providing high-speed Internet in remote and sparsely populated African regions. Other prospective areas for cooperation include staff training and strengthening information security. Rostelecom is open to cooperation and ready to share its developments with other countries". "There are lots of prospects for cooperation between us. From the Russian side, I can say that we are ready to share our experience with African countries in such fields as financial technology, biometrics, and data protection (after all, data in the modern world has become the "new oil," a critically important resource). The construction of data centers and GigaChat also deserve special mention. We are open to cooperate both in terms of selling our solutions, discussing financing options and creating IT infrastructure directly in African countries", – summarized **Vladimir Ilyanin**, Managing Director for

Business Development in Sub-Saharan Africa, Sberbank.

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WIC Releases Report on AI Governance

The report on *Governing AI for Good and for All—Empowering Global Sustainable Development* was released at the World Internet Conference (WIC) Asia-Pacific Summit in Hong Kong on April 14. The report is an important outcome of the AI Safety and Governance Program under the WIC Specialized Committee on AI. Zeng Yi, chair of the WIC Specialized Committee on AI and head of the AI Safety and Governance Program, presented the main findings from the program and key recommendations proposed in the report. Focusing on AI governance and sustainable development, the report presents the global progress, current developments, and existing issues in AI for sustainable development, with a particular emphasis on how inclusive and equitable AI development and governance can help bridge the digital divide and strengthen global AI capacity-building. The report proposes a series of actions to accelerate AI-driven global sustainable development, aimed at deepening international cooperation in this regard. It also outlines a collection of applications and practical case studies that demonstrate AI governance's contributions to sustainable development across various sectors. The report aims to serve as a reference for governments, enterprises, and academia, contributing insights and solutions to advancing the use of AI in achieving global sustainable development goals. According to the report, the rapid evolution of AI has shifted global concerns from a “digital divide” to an emerging “intelligence divide,” posing new challenges to sustainable development. It stresses the urgency of enhancing global AI capacities and calls for greater international cooperation in AI-enabled global sustainable development. The report calls for promoting the inclusiveness of and equitable access to AI in supporting sustainable development, partnering with low-and-middle-income countries to develop affordable, sustainable AI capacity-building models, and leveraging multilateral cooperation mechanisms in this area. The full report is now available on the official website of the World Internet Conference.

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Digital Government Meets Smart Life at WIC Asia-Pacific Summit

The Digital Government and Smart Life sub-forum of the 2025 World Internet Conference (WIC) Asia-Pacific Summit was held in Hong Kong on April 15. Under the theme "Empowering Good Governance with Digital Intelligence, Co-creating a Brighter Smart Life," keynote speeches were delivered by Ren Xianliang, secretary-general of the WIC; Nahima Janett Díaz Flores, general director of the Nicaraguan Institute of Telecommunications and Postal Services; Paula Piveni

Piukala, minister for ministry of Public Enterprises of Tonga; Eugenia Villar, deputy minister of ministry of Industry, Energy, and Mining of Uruguay; Suleiman Hassan Serelela, ministry of Industry and Trade of The United Republic of Tanzania; Donald Mak, deputy commissioner for Digital Policy (Data Governance) of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of People's Republic of China; and Shi Xiaoping, director and CEO of China Mobile Hong Kong Co Ltd. Speakers explored strategies for enhancing governance capabilities amid digital and intelligent transformation. On the topic of "Digital-Real Integration for a Smarter Life," insights were shared by Zhang Lianye, chairman of the Board and Director-General of Shaanxi Radio and Television Converged Media Group (TV Station); Loo Kar Pui Paul, Lalamove chief operating officer; Zhao Hejuan, founder, chairperson and CEO of TMTPOST Group and publisher of Barron's China; Quan Xiaowen, chairman of WebRAY Tech Group; Steven Choi, general manager of Tencent Cloud Hong Kong and Macao; and Annie Wang, general manager of Alibaba Cloud Intelligence Hong Kong. Speakers offered industry perspectives on the development of a vibrant digital ecosystem to optimize smart life. As a result of the WIC Think Tank Cooperation Program, two reports were officially released at the forum: "Innovative Applications of AI in the Residential Sector" by BEKE BrainLink and "Educational Transformation in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Integrating Generative AI and Human Intelligence to Enhance Educational Quality" by the Macao Association for Internet Research. A panel discussion on "Holistic Synergy in Digital Society Development" brought together leading experts, scholars, and industry pioneers from the fields of artificial intelligence and smart governance. The forum was hosted by the WIC, attracting over 100 participants from government departments, international organizations, enterprises, universities, and research institutions from around the world.

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East Asia

CHINA: 346 Generative AI Services Filed with Cyberspace Administration

A total of 346 generative artificial intelligence (AI) services had been filed with the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) as of March 31, according to a statement released by the Chinese internet regulator on Tuesday. According to the CAC, providers of generative AI services that possess attributes of public opinion influence or the capacity for social mobilization may complete filing or registration procedures through their local cyberspace authorities. The generative AI services that have completed filing include DeepSeek and Baidu's Ernie Bot, as shown on the CAC's website. The CAC requires that generative AI applications or features that have already been launched must indicate the AI model names and their filing numbers or launch registration numbers in a prominent location or on the product details page. The CAC and several other authorities jointly released the Interim Measures for the

Management of Generative AI Services in July 2023 to promote the regulation of the application of generative AI. The measures came into effect on August 15, 2023.

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JAPAN: Enjoyable Japan to Be Realized Thru SDGs Govt

Japan will make nationwide efforts to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, so that it will also realize Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's "enjoyable Japan" vision, the government said Tuesday. The government disclosed the policy in a voluntary national review to be submitted to the United Nations to report Japan's progress in its SDG efforts. The review was adopted at the day's meeting of the government task force on SDGs, headed by Ishiba. Ishiba has defined an "enjoyable Japan" as a sustainable economic society in which everyone can feel that "tomorrow will be brighter than today." "Although the international community is facing a complex crisis, we will unwaveringly promote SDG efforts," Ishiba stressed at the meeting. The review, compiled every four years, mentioned positive factors such as a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

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SOUTH KOREA: Launching Integrated Info System for Power Generation

South Korea has launched an integrated system that provides real-time information on power generation and consumption, enabling swift adjustments to how much power should be generated, as well as where the power would come from, the industry ministry said Wednesday. Information on power grids, which had been dispersed across the state-run Korea Electric Power Corp. (KEPCO), the Korea Power Exchange and other institutions, has now been integrated and interconnected in real time, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. The ministry said it has established the integrated system to better monitor and control the output of renewable energy sources, such as solar power, which constantly changes based on real-time grid and weather conditions. "Enhancing the integrated power control system is crucial to the continued expansion of renewable energy and the stable operation of the power grid," Second Vice Industry Minister Choi Nam-ho said. Choi said the ministry will also work to develop a power grid system based on artificial intelligence (AI) to respond to the increasing use of renewable energy. The installed capacity of renewable energy generators, which are highly sensitive to weather conditions, has surged more than fourfold over the past decade, reaching 36.4 gigawatts in 2025, according to the ministry. This represents 23.5 percent of the total capacity of commercial power generators.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 06/25/2025

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South-East Asia

SINGAPORE: Healthtech Agency to Enhance Data and AI Platforms

Singapore's national healthtech agency, Synapxe, has partnered with Google Cloud to strengthen its data and AI platforms - HEALIX and Tandem. It will be done using Google Cloud's AI and data services. Announced during the agency's inaugural AI conference "AI Accelerate," the partnership aims to scale AI integration across healthcare delivery. The aim is to improve outcomes through predictive and personalised care solutions. As part of the collaboration, at least 300 healthcare technology professionals will be trained and certified in applying Google Cloud's enterprise AI tools. The agreement also includes co-organising biannual workshops focused on generative AI and data analytics to promote continuous learning and innovation across Singapore's healthcare ecosystem. Synapxe's CEO, Ngiam Siew Ying, said, "AI holds immense promise for transforming healthcare through innovation. By harnessing its capabilities, we are developing solutions that enhance predictive and personalised care and improve health outcomes for everyone." "At Synapxe, we build a bridge to AI-ready healthcare, anchored on empowering people, fostering a vibrant ecosystem, establishing infrastructure, and enabling responsible innovation. Together with our partners, we transform data into vision, ensuring that the human experience remains at the heart of healthcare," she added. Google Cloud's AI capabilities may support initiatives such as ambient documentation, semantic search in electronic health records, and multimodal data analysis for diagnostics.

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Singapore Sets Up New Body to Govern Fragmented Payment Schemes

Singapore has established a new company to administer its national payment schemes, aiming to streamline governance and accelerate innovation across the payments sector, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) and the Association of Banks in Singapore (ABS) said on Wednesday. The new not-for-profit entity, Singapore Payments Network Limited (SPaN), is scheduled to become operationally ready by the end of 2026. The MAS and seven banks will serve as its initial members, with more participants expected to join in due course. Currently, the country's eight key payment systems, including PayNow, the Singapore Quick Response Code (SGQR), and the Inter-bank GIRO system, are managed by different administrators. SPaN aims to provide strong governance over national and cross-border payment schemes, promote continuous payments innovation and encourage active collaboration among key industry players, the authorities said in a joint statement. A

board of directors will steer the next phase of development, which includes bringing additional stakeholders on board and transitioning oversight of the existing systems to the new entity. ABS chairman Helen Wong said streamlined governance of payment schemes will enable financial institutions to respond swiftly and innovate effectively to meet the evolving digital payment needs of consumers and businesses. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong called the formation of SPaN "a timely move to strengthen our national payments infrastructure and drive further innovation within our payments sector."

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THAILAND: Conducting Large-Scale Test for Mobile Emergency Alert

Thailand successfully conducted a large-scale test of its new mobile emergency alert system using cell broadcast technology on Tuesday, with full implementation expected by July, authorities said. According to the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM), the public trial took place at 1:00 p.m. local time when a single "National Alert" message was sent through all mobile network providers to users in the designated areas, including the capital Bangkok and four major provinces. Results from the test were satisfactory, DDPM director-general Phasakorn Boonyalak said. "Officials and media in the command center received alerts swiftly and residents in all test areas heard the alarm and saw the warning message on their phones." For users of older 2G and 3G devices, which do not support cell broadcast technology, alerts would be sent via the Short Message Service (SMS) in real scenarios, with mobile operators confirming delivery within 10 minutes, Phasakorn said. He noted that the provincial-level test followed successful smaller drills in government buildings and select urban districts earlier this month, which demonstrated rapid and wide-reaching delivery of alerts, along with high public awareness and responsiveness to early warnings. The department also plans to perform a full-scale nationwide test in July to enhance public and tourist confidence in the Southeast Asian country's alert system, ensuring that warnings reach all at-risk populations effectively.

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VIETNAM: National Public Service Portal Must Become One-Stop Digital Gateway from June 27

Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính has demanded the urgent upgrade and development of information systems to support streamlined, efficient, and uninterrupted public service delivery during the administrative transition. The upgrade aims to establish the National Public Service Portal as the sole centralised gateway for all digital public services starting 6pm on Friday. He made the request in

Dispatch No 96/CD-TTg, issued on June 26, as in line with the roadmap outlined in Plan No 02-KH/BCDTW, issued on June 19, 2025 by the Central Steering Committee for science-technology development, innovation and digital transformation. As part of efforts to implement the plan, several provinces and cities have reported notable progress. Five provinces have completed configuration of administrative procedures on provincial-level service systems, while eight have successfully integrated with national databases and sectoral information systems. Six provinces are now fully connected to the National Public Service Portal, and eight localities have published information about public service centres and the places assisting citizens with online public services. Despite these advancements, the Ministry of Science and Technology reported that as of Wednesday, many localities have yet to meet technical and operational requirements, posing risks to continuity and efficiency during the administrative unit reorganisation and the implementation of the two-tier local government model.

Given this, the PM has outlined several priority areas for immediate implementation. He directed that by Friday, all provincial and municipal authorities must publish a comprehensive and updated list of administrative procedures on the National Administrative Procedure Database. They were requested to adjust digital workflows and internal processes to ensure uninterrupted service delivery starting July 1, with all technical configurations completed by June 30. By June 27, the integration of provinces' and cities' public services into the National Public Service Portal must be completed, ensuring 100 per cent of online public services are operational. Notably, localities were told to coordinate with the Government Office to implement the two-tier local government model on the National Public Service Portal on a trial basis, and establish the National Public Service Portal as the sole centralised "single-window" digital gateway starting 6pm on Friday. That will serve as the basis for seamless, efficient, and uninterrupted service delivery from July 1. In the dispatch, the PM also required swift infrastructure and personnel readiness for provincial- and communal-level public service centres, asking for completion by Sunday. IT service providers, including VNPT, Viettel, MobiFone, FPT, and Tan Dan, were required to complete system upgrades, data migration, and configurations by Saturday.

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South Asia

INDIA: Maharashtra Government Collaborates with Microsoft to Establish AI Centres of Excellence

In a significant move toward digital governance, the Maharashtra government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Microsoft to set up three Artificial Intelligence (AI) Centres of Excellence in Mumbai, Pune, and Nagpur. The initiative is designed to enhance transparency, efficiency, and innovation in

governance while training government employees in AI technology. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis underscored the transformative role of AI in governance, stating that the partnership aligns with Maharashtra's vision of 'Digital India, Self-Reliant Maharashtra.' The AI centres will be dedicated to specific domains, each focusing on leveraging AI for governance and public service enhancement. AI Centres and Their Focus Areas: Nagpur – MARVEL Centre: This centre, known as the Maharashtra Advanced Research and Vigilance for Enforcement of Reformed Laws Limited (MARVEL), will integrate AI for law enforcement, anti-corruption measures, and regulatory oversight. The centre will also collaborate with IIM-Nagpur for AI-driven capacity building. Mumbai – Geospatial Analytics Centre: Based in the Chief Secretary's office, this centre will employ AI-powered geospatial analytics to improve disaster management, urban planning, and satellite imagery analysis. It will provide policymakers with data-driven insights to enhance decision-making. Pune – Forensic Research & AI Centre: The Pune centre will focus on integrating AI into forensic research and criminal investigations. AI-driven tools will aid in evidence analysis, crime detection, and forensic data management, strengthening law enforcement processes.

AI-Driven Governance and Capacity Building. As part of this collaboration, Microsoft will provide training and certification to government employees through its MS Learn platform, ensuring that state personnel are equipped with AI expertise. The initiative aims to modernize public administration by streamlining processes, improving transparency, and enhancing service delivery. To oversee the implementation, a high-powered AI governance committee will be established under the Chief Secretary. This committee will supervise AI integration in various government and semi-government offices, ensuring that AI-powered solutions are effectively utilized across multiple sectors. The Maharashtra government is also expanding the scope of MARVEL, initially created in 2024 for AI-driven policing, to include broader governance applications. This move is expected to bolster AI adoption across various departments while maintaining stringent data security and confidentiality protocols. Positioning Maharashtra as an AI Leader. With Microsoft's advanced AI tools, including Microsoft Copilot, aiding administrative operations, Maharashtra is poised to emerge as a frontrunner in AI-driven governance. The collaboration is set to create new opportunities in AI, IT, and digital governance, reinforcing Maharashtra's position as a hub for AI innovation. By embracing AI, the Maharashtra government is taking a strategic step toward modernizing public services, strengthening governance, and fostering a more efficient and citizen-friendly administration. The initiative is expected to pave the way for future AI-driven reforms, enhancing the state's digital infrastructure and governance capabilities.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 04/02/2025

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Maharashtra Signs Landmark Agreement with IBM to Boost AI in Governance

The Government of Maharashtra has embarked on a major initiative to modernise governance and technical education by signing multiple Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with global technology leader IBM and key social sector organisations. These agreements, formalised in the presence of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Ministers Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar, mark a strategic push towards administrative transformation and inclusive skill development. In a significant development, the state government has entered into a partnership with IBM Technology (India) to leverage Artificial Intelligence (AI) and emerging digital technologies for enhanced public service delivery and administrative efficiency. Under the agreement, three AI centres will be established in Mumbai, Pune, and Nagpur. These centres will serve as hubs for training government employees and students in AI, cloud computing, and cybersecurity using IBM's advanced educational platforms. The initiative aims to equip Maharashtra's workforce with future-ready skills while promoting the integration of AI, hybrid cloud, and data analytics into public administration. The project is expected to drive efficiency, transparency, and innovation in governance. "We are proud to work with the Government of Maharashtra to support their digital transformation ambitions. IBM has been a trusted partner for central and state governments in India for decades, innovating and co-creating solutions to solve public sector challenges using AI and hybrid cloud. This MoU marks a significant step towards accelerating the transformation of citizen services in Maharashtra through digitally enabled government departments that are more productive, data driven and cyber secure by responsibly adopting technologies like AI powered automation and agents," said Sandip Patel, Managing Director, IBM India & South Asia.

Simultaneously, the Maharashtra Government has launched a transformative skilling programme for youth, with a special focus on differently-abled individuals. The Department of Skill, Employment, Entrepreneurship and Innovation has signed MoUs with prominent organisations, including the Sri Sri Rural Development Programme Trust, Schneider Electric India Foundation, DeAsra Foundation, and Project Mumbai. These partnerships will lead to the modernisation of 20 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) across the state. Plans include upgrading existing electrical workshops and establishing state-of-the-art laboratories specialising in solar technology and industrial automation. Over a span of three years, the initiative aims to impart advanced technical training and create robust employment opportunities. As part of this programme, select students from the electrician trade will undergo a 15-day training module in Bengaluru, focusing on new technologies and soft skills. Approximately 9,750 youth across key urban centres such as Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Nashik, and Amravati are expected to benefit over the next four years. In addition, the Maharashtra Innovation Society has collaborated with DeAsra Foundation to train and mentor 5,000 micro and small entrepreneurs, providing critical support in business development and sustainability. Project Mumbai's MoU focuses on inclusivity by offering sign language-based education and tailored employment

training for differently-abled ITI students. The MoU signing ceremony, held at Mantralaya following a state cabinet meeting, was attended by senior officials, including Skill Development Minister Mangal Prabhat Lodha, Chief Secretary Sujata Saunik, and Additional Chief Secretary Manisha Verma. The programme underscores Maharashtra's commitment to building a digitally empowered and socially inclusive economy.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 04/16/2025

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Karnataka to Use AI for Easy Access to Government Documents

In a landmark initiative, the Karnataka government is set to revolutionise access to public documents by leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI). The Centre for e-Governance (CeG) is spearheading a project to make Government Orders (GOs), circulars, and notifications easily accessible to both government employees and citizens through a centralised digital platform. This move aims to eliminate the confusion and delays often faced while searching for official information across multiple department websites. To begin with, the AI-enabled system will be implemented in four to five key departments, including Revenue, Rural Development, and Panchayat Raj—departments known for frequent citizen interactions. The goal is to simplify the process of retrieving relevant documents through a user-friendly interface. Dr. Dileesh Sasi, Chief Executive Officer of the CeG, emphasised the magnitude of the task. “We are focusing on department-specific implementation. Each department will need to identify and share relevant documents with us. Some departments even have legacy documents dating back to the British era. We aim to bring all GOs, circulars, and notifications onto a single platform,” he stated. The AI platform is designed to allow users to search documents using specific keywords. Each government website will soon include a pop-up window where users can pose queries and receive the necessary documents in response. This development marks a significant step toward transparency, efficiency, and digital transformation in governance.

Shreevyas H M, Project Director of the AI Cell at CeG, further elaborated on the system's utility. He noted that even government officials often struggle to locate accurate and updated documents. Currently, there is no unified system that can fetch all relevant documents across departments. Our AI initiative aims to bridge this gap by allowing users to search and retrieve documents efficiently,” he said. Initially, the system will be rolled out for use by government staff. This phased approach will enable the team to test the functionality, gather feedback, and refine the platform before making it available to the general public. “The project is in the development phase, and we expect to launch it in the next couple of months,” Shreevyas added. Once fully operational, the AI-powered system will not only enhance internal administrative efficiency but also empower citizens by providing them with direct access to official information. Users will be able to pose specific questions related to

departments, locations, or issues, and receive relevant documents instantly.

From <https://egov.iletsonline.com/> 04/18/2025

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: SOCAR Migrated Its IT Systems to the "Government Cloud"

The implementation of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev No. 718 dated June 3, 2019, on the creation of the Government Cloud (G-cloud) and the provision of “cloud” services, continues. State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic was the next state institution to transfer its information systems and resources to the "Government Cloud." The information systems and resources of SOCAR have been partially migrated to the Data Center of "AzInTelecom" LLC, located in Baku. "AzInTelecom" LLC provided the State Oil Company of the Republic of Azerbaijan with cloud-based solutions, including virtual servers (IaaS — Infrastructure-as-a-Service) and data backup (BaaS — Backup-as-a-Service). As a result, the institution has ensured high availability of its critical systems. It should be noted that the organization responsible for the "Government Cloud" project, implemented by the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport, is "AzInTelecom" LLC, operating under the ministry. Within the framework of the project, the IT systems of state institutions are fully or partially migrated to AzInTelecom's data centers in Baku and Yevlakh. The migration of government agencies to the "Government Cloud" leads to a reduction in current IT costs and an increase in the productivity of information systems. This process facilitates enhanced security of information systems, the establishment of a stable and sustainable IT infrastructure, and high-quality services with prompt coordination and 24/7 monitoring. "AzInTelecom" LLC is the first organization in Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus region to obtain the international compliance certificate "TIER III."

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/15/2025

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Government Cloud Expansion Continues with AzerGold Migration

The implementation of Decree No. 718 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, dated June 3, 2019, titled “On Measures to Establish the Government Cloud (G-Cloud) and Provide Cloud Services,” is ongoing, Azernews reports. As part of this initiative, another state institution—AzerGold Closed Joint Stock Company (CJSC)—has migrated its information systems and digital resources to the Government Cloud. The company's core digital infrastructure has been fully transferred to the Baku Data Centre, operated by AzInTelecom LLC, a subsidiary of AZCON Holding. AzInTelecom has provided AzerGold with “Virtual Server – IaaS” (Infrastructure-as-a-Service) and “Backup – BaaS” (Backup-as-a-Service) cloud

services, ensuring high availability of critical systems. It is worth noting that under the Government Cloud project, state institutions are partially or fully migrating their IT systems to the Baku Main and Yevlakh Backup Data Centres, both managed by AzInTelecom. These migrations lead to reduced IT costs and enhanced system performance. Additionally, institutions benefit from improved information security, stable IT infrastructure, high-quality service delivery, and 24/7 monitoring. AzInTelecom LLC is the first organisation in the South Caucasus to obtain the internationally recognised “TIER III” certification for cloud services.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 05/30/2025

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KYRGYZSTAN: Establishing National Council for Virtual Assets, Blockchain Technologies' Development

The President of Kyrgyzstan, Sadyr Zhaparov, has signed a decree to establish the National Council for the Development of Virtual Assets and Blockchain Technologies, Trend reports via the administration of the president. The council aims to formulate and implement a unified state policy in the field of virtual assets and blockchain technologies, foster innovative projects, and attract investments while considering national interests and international standards. Key tasks of the Council include coordinating the development of state policy, improving the investment climate, refining the regulatory framework, supporting foreign companies, integrating the Kyrgyz economy into global processes, and executing innovation programs in the blockchain and virtual assets sector. A secretariat has been established as the executive body to implement the Council's decisions. The director of the National Investment Agency will head the secretariat.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 05/03/2025

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KAZAKHSTAN: Refutes Claims of ChatGPT Ban in State-Run Institutions

The Ministry of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan has denied rumors about a ban on the use of ChatGPT in government agencies, Trend reports. In response to widespread reports, the ministry clarified that while it is indeed working on protecting sensitive data in government structures, the document approved in 2024 does not impose a ban on using foreign AI services, including ChatGPT. According to the official explanation, the approved Guideline for the Use of AI in the Public Sector is advisory and aims to enhance cybersecurity when working with AI technologies. “The document warns about potential risks related to the processing of personal data and official information, but does not restrict the use of foreign platforms,” the statement said. At the same time, the ministry is actively developing domestic IT solutions. For example, in the closed network of government agencies (ETS), key tools are already available on the

National AI Platform, which operates in a secure environment, including a translator for Kazakh and Russian languages, an AI assistant for legislation, and a language model (LLM) capable of generating responses and analytical materials upon request. Earlier information about the official ban on the use of the ChatGPT system by civil servants appeared in Kazakhstani social networks.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: ASD Signs \$70 Million AWS Cloud Contract

The Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) has signed a \$70-million deal with Amazon Web Services, bringing the cloud provider's renegotiated government-wide deal to around \$364 million in total value. The new contract dwarfs the \$6.3 million combined value of ASD's previous 13 contracts with AWS, which date back to 2017, and come as AWS develops a Top Secret (TS) Cloud for ASD's national security applications. The three-year contract was signed via the Digital Transformation Agency's recently renewed whole-of-government agreement with AWS for public cloud services. While ASD declined to comment on the specifics of the contract when approached by iTnews, the broader TS Cloud initiative is expected to cost at least \$2 billion over the next decade and is projected to significantly enhance Australia's cyber defence capabilities. AWS, which recently flagged plans to expand its data centres in Sydney and Melbourne, first signed a government-wide agreement in 2019 with an initial value of \$39 million, which climbed to \$390.8 million within three years. The government renewed the agreement in 2022 for another three years at a value of \$174.1 million. However, a review of contracts published on AusTender since the latest renewal — which took effect on April 1 2025 — reveals that federal agencies have signed deals amounting to a total of \$364 million in just over two months. The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) accounted for the largest share with a \$147 million deal. Other major AWS contracts awarded since April 1 include the Digital Transformation Agency — \$64.7 million; Australian Securities and Investments Commission — \$23 million; Australian Bureau of Statistics — \$19.2 million; and the Department of Home Affairs — \$14 million. Meanwhile, the Department of Health and Aged Care also handed AWS a \$22.9 million contract in April, but under a separate DTA standing arrangement.

From <https://www.itnews.com.au> 06/19/2025

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NEW ZEALAND: Police's Move to the Cloud

NZ Police's ambitious shift to cloud computing marks a crucial chapter in the modernisation of public services, but it is one fraught with significant risks. The move, part of a wider government push toward digital transformation, aims to alleviate

frontline pressures and replace ageing 2013-era IT systems. Yet, as the first stages roll out in Wellington, urgent warnings about privacy breaches, legal exposure, and operational vulnerabilities cast a long shadow over the project. Push for Modernisation Meets Old and New Challenges The Wellington pilot, which has seen five of 32 workgroups transition so far, is the first tangible step in a broader migration to Microsoft's cloud services. The shift is designed to ease the unsustainable pressures on frontline officers and meet government mandates to modernise IT infrastructure across the public sector.

It also seeks to address compliance demands, following previous controversies such as the illegal retention of thousands of youth photos exposed in 2020. Despite technical delivery proceeding relatively smoothly, official assessments reveal a precarious path. A May 2022 Privacy Impact Assessment, obtained by RNZ under the Official Information Act, starkly warned that mishandling sensitive data could lead to "death of individuals, extensive injury and hospitalisation," alongside catastrophic damage to public trust in the police brand. Grave Privacy Risks and Public Trust at Stake The data being transferred to the cloud is classified up to the "RESTRICTED" level, encompassing highly sensitive personal information. Any breach could severely impact police operations and reputation. The Privacy Impact Assessment rated the risk level as "Very High," identifying 12 distinct privacy risks—one deemed Very High and eight High.

If these risks are not appropriately managed, the police would face "Very High health & safety impacts and reputational damage." Thirty-one mitigation strategies were outlined, including stringent staff training and access controls. However, it remains unclear how many of these measures have been fully implemented during the Wellington trial phase. Police did not formally consult the Privacy Commissioner about the cloud migration, a notable omission given the scale of potential privacy implications. Exposure to Foreign Control and Cloud Law Entanglements The reliance on US-based Microsoft introduces another layer of risk. The US Cloud Act permits American authorities to demand access to data held by US companies, even if stored abroad. Though there's no public record that such powers have been exercised over New Zealand Police data, the possibility remains concerning.

The assessment also flagged Microsoft and Spark's operational roles as additional vulnerabilities, particularly around jurisdictional risk and lack of direct oversight. Past experiences have already exposed cracks: a 2020 incident saw sensitive police video evidence quietly moved between Amazon and Microsoft servers without police knowledge, raising concerns about evidence admissibility in court. Historical Breaches Highlight Systemic Dangers The hazards of cloud reliance are not hypothetical. In 2019, a significant breach involving SAP allowed unauthorised access to firearms registry data, taking up to 10 hours to fully shut down. This highlighted the intrinsic opacity of cloud services and the dangers of insufficient monitoring.

Such incidents reinforce the warnings about “orphan” servers—untended systems prone to security gaps—and the critical need for exit strategies to maintain control over essential services. Risk Mitigation Efforts Underway, But Uncertainty Persists While the police have emphasised that the transition framework is being “fine-tuned,” they have yet to produce a formal evaluation of the Wellington pilot’s outcomes. They insist that technical aspects are performing well, but the absence of a completed review leaves questions about the effectiveness of risk mitigation strategies. The upgrade has been executed largely in-house, with just a single external contractor engaged for \$288,000. A separate digital notebook upgrade, also flagged with high privacy risks, has similarly proceeded under internal management with recommended safeguards in place.

The Broader Government and Global Context The Police’s cloud migration aligns with a nationwide “cloud-first” directive, which has spurred massive investments from Microsoft, Amazon, and Google, including the construction of new data centres in New Zealand. Yet the experience of the Environmental Protection Authority, where cloud costs ballooned from \$2.1 million to \$3.38 million annually, illustrates the financial pitfalls of cloud dependency. Internationally, major US cloud providers like Microsoft have faced fierce criticism for security failures, including a Russian intelligence breach that exploited vulnerabilities in Microsoft’s Azure system. These global developments add urgency to calls for tighter governance and transparency as New Zealand agencies deepen their reliance on foreign tech giants. Looking Ahead The New Zealand Police’s cloud journey stands at a critical juncture. While modernisation offers clear operational benefits, the stakes for privacy, security, and public trust could not be higher. The coming evaluations will determine whether this move becomes a benchmark for responsible digital transformation or a cautionary tale of risks underestimated and controls insufficiently applied.

From <https://b2bnews.co.nz> 04/29/2025

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Government Data Centre Officially Opened

The government’s secure digital storage capability has been significantly boosted with the opening of the new all-of-government data centre, the Minister Responsible for the GCSB and Minister of Defence Judith Collins says. “This facility will provide a safe, secure storage capability for New Zealand agencies to process and store some of the government’s most sensitive information for the next quarter of a century,” says Ms Collins. “Today we conduct the vast majority of our business digitally, and the amount of government data that requires safe and secure storage is only going to increase. This is an essential piece of government infrastructure.” The Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) will operate the \$326 million facility located at Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) Base Auckland (Whenuapai). Minister Collins, who is also Minister Responsible for the NZSIS and Minister for

Digitising Government, said the data centre will store information from a range of New Zealand agencies. "We recognise the importance of data sovereignty which is why we have built this facility to process and store our most sensitive government information over other options such as cloud storage. "Security has been a big feature of this project, which includes the facility being hosted on a New Zealand Defence Force base." Construction on the data centre began in September 2022. Careful planning and attention to detail has ensured that it was completed on schedule and within budget.

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 06/27/2025

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3、e-Society

Asia-Pacific

AI Tech Set to Reshape Consumer Experience

The boundaries between technology and daily life fade visibly at a rapid pace as I strolled through the exhibition halls of the China International Consumer Products Expo 2025. From the "air taxis" in the low-altitude economy zone to the "tech powered deep sleep cabins" at the health tech pavilion, from AI facial diagnosis robots to smart bionic hands, this global showcase of consumer excellence is not only a visual feast, but also a profound preview of future living. As a journalist, I navigated between booths, witnessing how AI technology is reshaping every aspect of human life, from health management and transportation to industrial economics. At the low-altitude economy zone, unmanned drones and flying cars hovered in midair, resembling scenes from a sci-fi movie. The low-altitude economy, by the way, refers to economic activities conducted within an airspace below 1,000 meters. Among the products that were exhibited, the EH216-L unmanned aerial vehicle by EHang took the spotlight. It's a fully certified eVTOL (electric vertical takeoff and landing aircraft) that can vertically take off and land without a runway, carrying up to two passengers with a range of tens of kilometers — one that is designed for short trips in urban areas. EHang COO Wang Zhao mentioned its applications in tourism, emergency medical transport, and potentially as a solution for urban traffic congestion, dubbed the "air taxis" of the future.

"While the low-altitude economy is in its initial phases with a primary focus on tourist attractions, its future potential lies in urban and intercity transportation. Aircraft could eventually access urban locales such as rooftops, residential areas, bus depots, schools and factories, requiring minimal takeoff space," Wang said. At the United Aircraft booth, the TD550 unmanned helicopter attracted logistics companies with its long endurance and high payload capacity. Staff members revealed that this model can be widely used in logistics distribution in remote areas, agricultural and forestry

protection, and emergency rescue operations. The rise of the low-altitude economy symbolizes not only technological breakthroughs, but also a glimpse of the new quality productive forces that will further drive economic transformation. At the health consumer zone, the fusion of technology and wellness was truly awe-inspiring. The line for NutriSleep 6s, a tech-embedded sleep aid device developed by Air Nutri, stretched long. Participants lay inside a cabin to experience a state of deep relaxation within just 15 minutes. The tentacles of AI health management extend to every detail of daily life. OSIM's massage chair interactive area captivated visitors, offering a chance to experience AI stress-monitoring technology, showcasing the charm of health technology, from stress management to deep sleep.

On the other side, the AI facial diagnosis robot integrates traditional Chinese face reading theory with machine vision and AI big data technology, scanning over 300 facial images in 15 seconds, combining pulse diagnosis data to generate a comprehensive health report, leaving viewers in awe of its accuracy. In the face of the challenges posed by an aging society, AI's application in elder care is particularly heartwarming. China Mobile's quadruped robot dog roamed the exhibition area, equipped with AI visual algorithms to monitor activities of elderly individuals living alone. In case of anomalies like falls, it triggers alerts and contacts family members, creating a safety net for home-based elderly care. Keenon's service robot has already made its way into the catering and medical fields, with its humanoid robot capable of autonomously carrying out tasks like meal delivery and guidance. One of the exhibitors in the robotic area said: "Our goal is to use technology to fill the void of companionship." As the sun set, casting a warm glow over the dome of the exhibition center, I felt that this expo is not just a tech showcase, but also a prism reflecting the future. When AI evolves from a tool to a "companion", and concepts like air taxis and service robots become part of our daily lives, we will witness not only a transformation in consumer habits, but the emergence of a more inclusive and innovative economic ecosystem. The future is already here.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 04/28/2025

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In the Era of AI, Smart Tech Dismantles Language Barriers

Some 22 years ago, I worked part-time as an interpreter, accompanying an Indian businessman visiting the Canton Fair, then a must-attend event for global buyers that only highlighted exports of Chinese companies. Additionally, I needed to accompany the businessman to visit factories in Dongguan and Foshan, two manufacturing and trade cities in Guangdong province, frequently switching languages between Chinese and English to help him better communicate with his Chinese business partners. In a time when there were no intelligent translation devices, many college students like myself who majored in foreign languages often worked as translators during the fair, helping facilitate communication between overseas buyers and Chinese exporters. Things have changed a lot — smart translators have become a

boon for overseas buyers and Chinese exporters during the 137th session of the fair, as demands for cross-language communications services have increased. "After using the artificial intelligence translation device, I have more Chinese friends than Turkish friends," said Cemil Cihan, a Turkish horticultural equipment merchant visiting the fair's first phase themed with advanced manufacturing in mid-April. Visiting an exhibition booth of Chinese artificial intelligence company iFlytek, the Turkish businessman bought a dual-screen translation machine as a gift to his friend. "The AI translation assistant has become one of the important tools for me to talk to Chinese business representatives, helping greatly to enhance business efficiency," he said.

iFlytek's dual-screen translation machine can translate 85 languages online, covering over 200 countries and regions, earning it the position as the designated translation device for the fair, seen as a barometer of China's foreign trade. The translator also supports offline translation in 17 languages, serving over 800,000 users, with translation instances exceeding one billion, according to the company. During the fair, I also met Zhang Mingyue, a Chinese businesswoman engaged in selling made-in-China goods to overseas markets for more than 20 years. "In the past, speaking English was enough to solve communication problems in business, but now the environment has changed significantly," said Zhang. In Zhang's eyes, the foreign trade environment, along with language communications, has changed dramatically as more Chinese goods have been shipped to emerging markets. "To expand the market to countries and regions in the Middle East, South America and Africa, I hope to communicate directly with customers in their mother tongue from these countries, so as to build trust more effectively," she said. Over 20 years ago, Zhang, a native of Guangzhou, Guangdong's provincial capital, moved to North America with her family, promoting electrical appliances and lighting fixtures from Guangdong to overseas markets. With the changing foreign trade environment, Zhang's goals have become more ambitious — to promote competitive products from Guangdong to more emerging overseas markets.

She did. After years of trading in the North American market, Zhang successfully expanded her business to the Middle East and South America, among other places. Knowing that only English is no longer enough, Zhang needs to be able to communicate directly with customers speaking in languages such as Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese. "By using translation devices that can speak the local languages, business discussions become smoother and trust is easier to establish," she said. At iFlytek's exhibition booth, Zhang also bought a dual-screen translation machine, at a cost of about 4,000 yuan (\$550). "Compared to mobile translation apps, this AI translation device remains reliable in noisy environments and can complete translations in less than one second with rapid responses," said Zhang. After scanning a QR code to enter a WeChat mini-program and paying a deposit, exhibitors and buyers were also able to rent smart translation devices during the fair. The popularity of the AI translator was not accomplished overnight — iFlytek's AI

translation devices are based on completely domestically produced technologies with over 1,000 translation patents. In addition to offering the AI translation service during the fair, iFlytek displayed a series of products and technologies based on its large-scale deep reasoning model trained on a national computing power platform. "Booming technologies like AI and big data will greatly help build an efficient bridge between Chinese advanced manufacturing products and overseas markets," said Zhang.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 05/12/2025

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Baidu AI Drive to Boost Jobs: Tech Giant to Open 21,000 AI Internship Positions over the Next Three Years

Chinese tech heavyweight Baidu Inc will scale up efforts to cultivate an additional 10 million artificial intelligence experts over the next five years to benefit society and create more employment opportunities, as it aims to create a well-rounded tech labor force and empower AI growth. In a significant move to nurture future tech talent, Baidu announced that it will offer 21,000 internship positions for outstanding campus candidates over the next three years, and continue to strengthen the training of interns to further improve the intern-to-full-time employee conversion rate. The initiative underscores the company's commitment to fostering young professionals and enhancing its internship program's quality and impact. By opening up these internship positions, Baidu hopes to provide hands-on experience and career growth opportunities for students across various disciplines. In March, Baidu took an active step by offering more than 3,000 summer internship positions to students, with 87 percent of these positions centered around AI-related fields, including large language models, machine learning and autonomous driving. It will allow interns to participate in technological innovation as well as the research and development of core products. This move ensures that interns not only gain valuable experience, but also have a clear pathway of long-term career opportunities within the company.

Baidu will also start its management trainee program and AIDU initiative this year, aiming to recruit top campus talent in the AI field, and cultivate future leaders in the AI era. At present, dozens of outstanding management trainees are deeply involved in the company's core business and innovative development of AI, and over 100 doctoral degree holders have participated in the innovation research in fields such as robotics, autonomous driving, deep learning and large models. Creating jobs and maintaining stable employment are government priorities amid a complicated international environment, with 13 million urban jobs needing to be created each year on average. Baidu's campus recruitment for 2026 will kick off soon. In addition to campus recruitment, it is actively recruiting talent from society. Looking ahead, the company will offer new vocational skills training to practitioners in traditional industries, and spare no effort to help them expand their employment paths. Over the next five years, it plans to cultivate 5 million experts engaged in large language

models and 1 million autonomous driving talent from over 700 universities and research institutions nationwide. The company is leveraging AI to empower employment. Lu Jian, head of Baidu's corporate social responsibility department, said it has collaborated with local labor unions to launch a learning platform for workers to master new skills nationwide, as well as stepped up the push to help people with disabilities find jobs.

The learning platform offers a wealth of courses taught by industry experts from various fields of AI. It is now available in Wuhan, Hubei province; Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Dongguan, Guangdong province; and Beijing, promoting the transformation of society toward AI. Baidu's intelligent coding assistants are able to help visually impaired programmers develop software independently, opening up more job opportunities for them. Jiang Han, a senior analyst at market consultancy Pangoal, said Chinese tech companies have played a vital role in expanding employment and bolstering technological innovation, especially in AI, which will be conducive to enhancing production efficiency and bolstering industrial upgrading, thus driving economic growth. Along with the emergence of new business models and evolving consumption patterns, new types of occupations related to AI have kept emerging in China and have become key sources of job creation, Jiang said, adding that these companies should seize the opportunities presented by a new round of scientific and technological revolution and strengthen talent cultivation. They should strive harder to equip the next generation of tech leaders with the skills and experience needed to drive innovation in rapidly evolving AI field, he added.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 05/22/2025

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Beauty Products Embrace Smart Tech

Huaxizi, also known as Florasis, a Chinese beauty brand with cultural and aesthetic attributes, continues to increase research and development and smart manufacturing efforts, as the domestic cosmetics sector becomes more high-end and technology-driven. Like many other industries, expanding research and development while embracing the application of innovative technologies have become important foundations on which Chinese cosmetics brands can enhance their international competitiveness. The Zhejiang province-based company built a smart factory in its home city of Hangzhou and put it into operation last year. With seven digital production lines, the annual production capacity of the plant is about 50 million pieces of makeup products, including skincare products and powder makeup. "Intelligent manufacturing has become the core engine that drives high-quality development. The factory helps promote the transformation and upgrading of the domestic cosmetics manufacturing industry toward more high-end, intelligent and green growth," said Zhang Dayong, vice-president of EastGarden Cosmetics Group, the parent company of Florasis. Florasis said smart manufacturing mainly relies on the collaborative application of digital management, emerging artificial intelligence

technologies and automated equipment. For the application of AI technologies, Florasis connects to the Deep-Seek model to achieve process simulation. With intelligent vision technologies, the factory's production lines have achieved automatic recognition and elimination of defective products.

In addition, the smart factory uses renewable energy and has a paperless production system in place to achieve sustainable green production. For example, the distributed photovoltaic power system on the rooftop of the factory utilizes solar energy to generate power and can effectively reduce carbon dioxide emissions by approximately 2,500 metric tons a year, Florasis said. Domestic beauty brands have been focusing on technological research and development and exploring the unique value of Chinese ingredients. Those brands are increasingly moving toward the mid-to high-end of the value chain. "Fueled by the advancement of science and technologies, China's cosmetics sector is rapidly adapting to new trends, reshaping itself and seizing new business opportunities," said Yan Jiangying, chairman of the China Association of Fragrance Flavor and Cosmetic Industries. In the past few years, an increasing number of Chinese brands with local cultural attributes and innovative vibes have expanded their presence overseas, including domestic beauty brands Proya, Judydoll and Perfect Diary. Florasis launched a new flagship store in Tokyo in January, following the company's opening of a counter at a department store in Paris late last year. The counter made it the only Chinese beauty brand to operate a physical shop in Europe. Meanwhile, driven by the booming growth of cross-border e-commerce, domestic beauty products have gained a broader share of the international market via exports. In 2024, the total export value of Chinese cosmetics reached 36.91 billion yuan (\$5.12 billion), growing 14.11 percent year-on-year, according to data from the General Administration of Customs. The main recipient countries of China's exported beauty products were the United States, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, the Netherlands and South Korea. The US was the largest export market for Chinese cosmetics, with the export value reaching 7.9 billion yuan last year.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 05/23/2025

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Optics Valley Rides Rising Wave of Tech Tourism

The unique sensation of gliding above the city with a 270-degree panoramic view while experiencing the Optics Valley Photon suspended monorail in the city of Wuhan, Central China's Hubei province, deeply impressed Mahdi Hameed. "It's more than just a means of transportation, but also a genuinely enjoyable experience. I'm particularly impressed by the technological innovations behind Wuhan's sky rail," said the Iraqi reporter from the Rudaw Media Network. Hameed was part of a group visit organized by the State Council Information Office to Wuhan from May 22 to 23, designed to showcase the high-quality development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt. During the tour, he visited the Optics Valley of China, where he gained deeper

insights into the city's rapidly growing high-tech cluster and its increasingly popular tech-driven tourism. As China's first operational suspended monorail line, the Optics Valley Photon has attracted widespread attention since its launch in 2023. The train features fully automated driving and incorporates a range of low-carbon technologies, including energy-efficient permanent magnet motors, a lightweight body and variable-frequency air conditioning. Transparent floor panels in the carriages offer passengers a unique and immersive viewing experience, said Hu Huoli, deputy director of the suspended monorail division under Optics Valley Traffic Co.

"The 10.5-kilometer-long sky rail passes through both high-tech industrial parks and forest parks, blending technology with nature and adding to the appeal of this new mode of transport," Hu added. "So far, it has attracted nearly 2.6 million visits. For many visitors to Wuhan, the Optics Valley Photon has become a must-see attraction alongside traditional landmarks like the Yellow Crane Tower." As a national innovation hub, the Optics Valley leads in optical fiber production and serves as a key base for optoelectronic components, display panels and laser technologies. Over the past 30 years, the area has achieved a series of breakthroughs in core technologies, establishing a strong presence in the optoelectronics industry. From suspended monorail rides and autonomous robotaxi trips to 3D light shows and cyber-themed night markets, cutting-edge technologies are deeply integrated into everyday life. These immersive experiences are attracting visitors from around the globe, offering a vivid glimpse into the future of smart living. The recent 20th Optics Valley of China International Optoelectronic Exposition in Wuhan attracted nearly 70,000 visitors, including many families. Beyond industry professionals, curious parents brought their children to explore the latest advancements in humanoid robots, infrared telescopes and drones, turning the expo into an educational outing. High-tech tourism is gaining popularity as visitors increasingly seek novel and distinctive experiences. During the peak cherry blossom season in March, Wuhan introduced six themed routes that blend scenic spring landscapes with smart transportation, digital innovation and futuristic design. Wuhan recently introduced an action plan to build itself into a world-class cultural and tourism destination. A key focus is strengthening tech-driven tourism by promoting innovations like the Optics Valley Photon monorail and developing landmark projects such as metaverse-themed districts.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 06/04/2025

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How Science Is Embracing Online World to Thrive

It all started online. A glowing sunflower, which produces light through bioluminescent genes to make it a self-luminous plant, went viral online through a short video, attracting millions of views. Netizens marveled. Comments poured in. More importantly, investors were attracted. "Before the online buzz, we were chasing investors. After going viral, they started finding us," said Li Renhan, founder of

Magicpen Bio, a Hefei, Anhui province-based startup and developer of the self-luminous plant. In much of the world, the internet is an escape from real life. But in Hefei, the story is about the compounding power of attention — how every click, every comment, every "like" adds velocity to scientific development. Across this inland city of 10 million, a new development model is taking root — one where frontier science, civic engagement and viral media are fused into a larger force the city calls "network civilization". Here, lab-born innovations are introduced to the public through livestreams and comment sections, where everyday users influence the trajectory of R&D, and where the machinery of high technology is backed not only by government funding, but also by online attention. The implications are significant for China's economy at a time when traditional engines like real estate and infrastructure are experiencing slowing momentum. Hefei's experiment suggests that the next phase of growth might not come from new roads or factories, but from what happens when people and pixels start building things together.

According to Li, among the online comments was some notable help from people suffering from electromagnetic hypersensitivity — a condition that can have a wide range of symptoms that are believed to be caused by exposure to electromagnetic fields, such as those often found in conventional light sources. They saw in the soft glow of Magicpen's creation something deeply personal: a way back to comfort, to normalcy. "A lot of people think our story started with that glowing plant. But really, our business started with an online message," he recalled. Li, a then 28-year-old doctoral student at China Agricultural University, wanted to launch a biotech startup in March 2023. He sent just a few paragraphs into the online box of the Grand Union of Innovation, a high-tech incubator like Silicon Valley in the United States. Two days later, his phone rang. With the help of GUI, Li set up his company in Hefei, relocated, and secured venture capital funding from Plum Ventures, a partner fund of GUI. Today, Magicpen Bio has more than 1,000 square meters of lab space and over a dozen researchers. Much of that transformation is centered in GUI. Tucked inside Hefei high-tech zone, GUI occupies just 1 percent of the city's developed area, but has helped launch over 2,200 science and tech companies since 2022.

It's not a typical business park. Inside, there are startup prototype medical robots, launch AI-powered biotech platforms and trial industrial automation tools. Just as striking, they also operate livestream studios, hold product demo nights and receive coaching from influencers on how to translate hard science into audience-friendly content. "Visibility is no longer optional," said Wu Dan, who manages GUI service platform company's branding center. "It's essential to funding, to hiring, to public trust. You can have the best product in the world — but if no one sees it, it doesn't exist." "It means putting cutting-edge products in front of the public. We're not just creating a network of startups — we're building a network civilization," he said. To that end, GUI isn't just a hardware incubator. It's also a media engine. Startups are encouraged to share development updates online, test their ideas through community voting campaigns and gather feedback from audiences before going to market. Some even

run mini-documentaries about their origin stories, blending science communication with personal narrative. The results speak for themselves. Some firms have gone from lab bench to pre-order in under six months, thanks in part to the digital exposure. But GUI isn't just about making science sexy. It's also about capital and who's willing to risk it. The park is embedded in a dense web of investment institutions known locally as the "fund jungle". The system includes municipal VC funds, State-backed angel capital and a rare category in China: funds willing to accept a 50 percent failure rate in exchange for long-term breakthroughs. GUI has already linked up with over 300 investment institutions. Its overseas innovation centers in Silicon Valley, Tokyo, Cambridge and Lyon function like international satellites, feeding ideas, partnerships and entrepreneurs back into Hefei's gravitational pull. "We set out to create a jungle of funds," said Wu Hailong, chairman of GUI service platform company. "It's not just about who gets investment. It's about whether they get the right kind — early-stage, patient and hard-tech focused." That civilization isn't theoretical. GUI doesn't just hatch biotech companies or AI tools — it also backs the infrastructure that makes China's digital life possible. Several of its firms focus on future internet architectures, smarter services and next-generation content delivery. But tech isn't just being seen and shared in Hefei — it's being powered here. And that brings us to a place called Chaohu Mingyue.

The name sounds poetic — Moonlight over Chaohu, a reference to the city's scenic lake — but this is no quiet vista, it's one of China's most advanced computing hubs: a next-generation supercomputing cluster built by Hefei Big Data Asset Operation Co Ltd. The facility includes the country's first practically deployed quantum computer. It powers some of China's most complex AI models, including the iFlytek Spark X1 — China's first domestically trained large language model with reasoning capabilities on fully homegrown hardware. "Think of it like this," said Wang Guyue, deputy director of the big data company's project management team. "A single computing unit here can process three billion images simultaneously." That capacity is already reshaping fields from pharmaceutical R&D to smart city planning, and it keeps on growing. In February, the center successfully adapted DeepSeek-R1, one of China's most advanced open-source AI models, for efficient operation across the entire domestically produced server ecosystem. It was a landmark for China's AI independence, and a signal of what's to come. "We think of internet civilization not just in terms of content, but infrastructure. If a retiree avoids a scam because our model flagged it, that's a win. That's civilization," Wang said. "In addition, we want it to be affordable and effective. That's what drives digital civilization — putting these tools into people's hands." It's working. Biotech startups are using the cluster to simulate gene interactions. Manufacturing firms are optimizing workflows with predictive models. Public sector agencies are using it to identify fraud, improve traffic flow and even offer elderly residents more personalized medical consultations. In Hefei, it's not just about technology or traffic or teraflops, it's about the stories — how a glowing plant became a viral beacon, how a student's message becomes a funded

startup, and how a computing cluster becomes a city's strongest brain. In this city, that's enough to start a future.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 06/10/2025

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AI Digital Employees Set to Compete on the Global Stage

AI digital employees are defined as the fourth employment model, representing a new form of practice of new quality productive forces, said Hu Wei, founder and CEO of Shenzhen Talent Today Information Technology Co Ltd, during the Vibrant China research and visit tour. With the help of the Huawei platform, Shenzhen, as a window to the world and the current national policies supporting enterprises going global, the company has established connections in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Next, the company will develop more intelligent and advanced digital employees to compete on the world stage.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 06/30/2025

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Digitalization Reduces Persistent Inequality in Asia-Pacific, Says ADB

Digitalization can be a powerful tool to help reduce persistent economic inequality in Asia and the Pacific, but to harness its potential, governments need to narrow "digital gaps," the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said in a report on Tuesday. According to the Asian Development Policy Report 2025: Harnessing Digital Transformation for Good, developing Asia and the Pacific has outpaced other regions in digital development in recent decades, but the benefits have not been shared equally. For instance, across the region the percentage of residents using the internet is 13 percentage points higher in urban areas than in rural areas, said the report, noting that mobile internet download speeds are also 38 percent faster in urban areas than in rural areas. Previous studies have also found that many of Asia and the Pacific's developing economies lag in terms of digital inclusion and have generally low digital skill levels, the report said. "Developing Asia and the Pacific's rapid digital transformation puts the region in a position to reap significant benefits," said ADB Chief Economist Albert Park. "Governments that promote inclusive, sustainable digitalization have an opportunity to not only boost overall productivity and innovation but also reduce economic inequality at the same time," said Park. Digitalization can alleviate inequality by widening access to basic services such as personal finance and education, or by helping small business owners overcome barriers such as lack of access to financing or business networks, the report added. The bank recommended that governments in developing Asia and the Pacific adopt national digital strategies that integrate inclusion and sustainability objectives, and enact locally tailored policies that promote these objectives.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 05/07/2025

East Asia

CHINA: Scientists Use AI Model in Colorectal Cancer Treatment

Chinese researchers have used artificial intelligence (AI) to reduce unnecessary surgical resection in colorectal cancer patients after local excision, the South China University of Technology (SCUT), located in Guangdong Province in south China, said on Wednesday. The team developed and validated an AI prediction model to assess the risk of recurrence following local excision of colorectal cancer, using pathological images of endoscopically or transanal surgically resected T1 rectal cancer (RC) specimens. Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer worldwide, accounting for around 10 percent of all cancer cases. For patients with early-stage colorectal cancer, local resection serves as the primary treatment. However, some high-risk patients still require additional surgeries to prevent recurrence, which not only increases the physical burden but also significantly diminishes their quality of life. Researchers from the SCUT and Guangdong Provincial People's Hospital developed an artificial neural network model to predict recurrence risk in T1 RC patients -- thereby providing physicians and patients with guidance for post-excision decision-making. The AI-based prediction model has helped reduce unnecessary additional surgeries by about 34.9 percent in all enrolled patients, compared with the current U.S. guideline in this regard. The model not only aids physicians in decision-making but also demonstrates the remarkable performance and potential of histopathology image-based AI in predicting tumor behavior, researchers said. The study has been published in the European Journal of Surgical Oncology.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/03/2025

As AI Reshapes Chinese Cinema, Filmmakers Race to Adapt

As China cements its place as the world's second-largest film market, bolstered by global hits like "Ne Zha 2," a new force is rapidly altering the creative and industrial landscape: artificial intelligence (AI). AI dominated the conversation at this year's Beijing International Film Festival. For filmmakers, the question is no longer whether AI will reshape Chinese cinema, but how to keep up with it. Forums and project showcases revealed an industry scrambling to adapt -- embracing AI's possibilities while confronting its challenges. One of the festival's key early discussions on AI came in a forum titled "AI Film and Television Creation: Opportunity or Trap?" Screenwriter Liu Yi, best known for co-writing the "Wolf Warrior" blockbuster series, described AI as a "ping-pong partner" of creativity, using tools like DeepSeek and Doubao to generate posters, character designs and script prompts.

Yet, he cautioned, "The real torment of creation -- the inception of core ideas -- still rests on human shoulders." AI, he argued, boosts efficiency but still falls short of revolutionizing the creative process. Director Yu Baimei, co-director of 2020 comedy "My People, My Homeland," experimented with video generator Kling for a short film last year. He likened AI to a "superhuman library" which excels in research but requires human curation. Yet he predicted that within years, AI could evolve beyond being a mere tool to automating higher-level creative decisions -- a prospect both thrilling and unnerving. This tension between opportunity and disruption resurfaced at the festival's Technology Forum. "AI lacks consciousness but brims with creative potential," said Huang Tiejun, a professor at the School of Computer Science at Peking University, emphasizing AI's role as a collaborative partner rather than a replacement for human creators.

The AI researcher envisions AI as a new productive tool, one that expands artists' creative boundaries without encroaching on their creative sovereignty. Director Lu Yang, whose 2021 fantasy film "A Writer's Odyssey" merged a story-within-a-story structure with visual spectacle, shares this vision. He acknowledged AI's efficiency gains in specific production workflows but stressed that achieving a true qualitative transformation in cinematic art will take time. "Technology has always been a means to a creative end, never an end in itself," he said, urging filmmakers to adapt narratives to meet evolving audience tastes shaped by short videos and gaming. Voices from the animation sector offered a nuanced perspective. Yu Zhou, co-founder of Light Chaser Animation -- the studio responsible for visually sumptuous hits "White Snake" and "Chang An" -- also underscored the primacy of content and audience connection over technological fanfare.

"AI is still taking its first steps on a long journey," he said. "The real competitive edge is in how studios build and develop their own internal knowledge systems." AI's practical applications dazzled at the festival's project showcases. Bona Film Group unveiled an AI-powered sci-fi micro-series based on the Sanxingdui archaeological site, using generative tools for script writing, visuals and virtual reality. Meanwhile, tech firm Kunlun Tech introduced Mureka, an AI music model that composed a festival theme song in just five minutes. Yet beneath the optimism, concerns loomed, particularly over job losses. While some believe AI will democratize creativity, others warn of widespread disruption. "All industries are sunset industries now," Yu Baimei quipped. AI's voracious use of existing works also raises thorny copyright issues.

"AI is the ultimate plagiarist," the director said, noting how AI-generated content, like dinosaur imagery drawn from Jurassic Park, blurs ownership lines. Current laws, which were designed for a pre-AI era, struggle to address this. Veteran director Jia Zhangke, known for his gritty realism, offered a measured take. While open to AI's potential, he questioned its reliance on "secondhand" visual data. "We should explore AI, not prejudge it," he said, though noting that he still prefers capturing the real world through his lens. As China's film industry navigates this AI-driven upheaval,

its global ascent hangs in the balance. Chen Xuguang, director of the Institute of Film, Television and Theatre at Peking University, framed the challenge as a cultural mandate: "Chinese filmmakers must not only adopt AI -- they must define new industrial and aesthetic paradigms." This vision, in his opinion, represents not just China's response to the AI wave, but also the necessary path to the center stage of global cinematic storytelling.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/25/2025

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China to Strengthen Financial Support for Sci-tech Innovation

China will increase its financial support for sci-tech innovation to improve the country's self-reliance and strength in science and technology, according to a set of guidelines issued by seven authorities on Wednesday. The document -- issued by the Ministry of Science and Technology, the People's Bank of China, the National Development and Reform Commission, and other authorities -- proposes 15 concrete measures to promote financial services for sci-tech innovation, including those to boost venture investment, credit supply and insurance support. Among efforts to serve the country's key strategies in the field of science and technology, China will scale up financial support for enterprises that undertake major national sci-tech tasks, and for sci-tech-oriented small and medium-sized enterprises, according to the guidelines. China will leverage the role of its national venture capital guidance fund, encourage the development of secondary-market private equity funds, and optimize structural monetary policy tools such as re-lending loans for sci-tech innovation, per the document. The country will take advantage of the capital market in serving sci-tech innovation, and prioritize the public offerings of enterprises that achieve breakthroughs in critical core technologies. In terms of enhancing fiscal policies, the guidelines call for the full use of fiscal tools such as loan interest subsidies and risk compensation to support enterprises in sci-tech innovation, and for the effective implementation of related tax policies for angel investment and venture capital.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 05/14/2025

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World's First Open-Pit Mine with 5G-A Network Established in China

A fleet of 100 unmanned electric mining trucks began group operations at the Yimin Open-Pit Coal Mine in north China's Inner Mongolia this week. This marks the first global application of large-scale "vehicle-cloud-network" collaboration in open-pit mining under a 5G-A network, improving safety and productivity through technological innovation and setting a new benchmark for smart mining. 5G-A is short for 5G-Advanced, which is a transitional phase between current 5G networks

and future 6G technologies. It can deliver faster speeds, lower latency and greater reliability compared to the current 5G network, enabling applications like extended reality (XR) and cloud gaming on the go. Notably, this project is China's first to eliminate driver cabins entirely, isolating workers from hazardous environments and significantly lowering safety risks. Such innovation demands robust data processing and system coordination to ensure safety and productivity in harsh conditions like blizzards, dust storms and freezing climates. Each unmanned electric truck boasts a 90-tonne payload capacity, with overall transport efficiency surpassing manual operations by 120 percent, even in extreme temperatures as low as minus 40 degrees Celsius. Huawei Cloud's specialized solution enhances fleet coordination by updating real-time operational maps and optimizing routes via crowdsourced data, reducing idle time and boosting efficiency. Zhang Ping'an, executive director of Huawei and CEO of the company's cloud computing branch, said that Huawei's AI algorithms empower precise vehicle perception and cloud-based coordination, accelerating the shift from "human-controlled" to "smart-controlled" mining. The project exemplifies China's capability in integrating 5G, cloud computing, AI and green energy technologies while demonstrating AI's potential to tackle industry challenges. To enable seamless vehicle-cloud synergy, the Yimin Mine deployed a 5G-A network – the world's first in open-pit mining – delivering 500-megabit-per-second uplink speeds and 20-millisecond ultra-low latency. This infrastructure supports real-time high definition video transmission and cloud dispatching. Future plans aim to scale operations to over 300 unmanned trucks for 24/7 production, further enhancing safety and efficiency.

From <https://news.cqtn.com/> 05/16/2025

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China Reports Strong Increase in Online Sales of Digital Products

Online sales of digital products in China increased 8.4 percent year on year in the first four months of 2025, according to data released by the Ministry of Commerce on Friday. Sales of smart robots and smart home systems rose by 87.6 percent and 16 percent year on year respectively, the data showed. An official of the ministry's e-commerce department attributed the growth to the e-commerce sector's sound integration between domestic and foreign trade, as well as its strong global industrial and supply chain coordination capacity. From January to April, online sales of 15 categories of home appliances and digital products covered by trade-in programs rose 11.5 percent year on year. Services consumption also saw a notable increase, with online entertainment and travel sales rising 31.9 percent and 25.4 percent year on year.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 05/23/2025

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Chinese Rocket Delivers E-commerce Packages in Sea Recovery Test

A Chinese private rocket firm has successfully tested transporting packages from Taobao, one of the country's largest e-commerce platforms, using a reusable rocket. The rocket was later recovered from the sea, marking a significant advancement in commercial space logistics. SEPOCH, a Beijing-based startup, completed its inaugural "rocket delivery" experiment on May 29 when its XZY-1 verification rocket carried over 20 kilograms of packages during a test flight off China's eastern coast. The 26.8-meter stainless steel rocket, weighing 57 tonnes, flew for 125 seconds and reached an altitude of 2.5 kilometers before successfully landing vertically on the sea surface near Shandong Province. Following an 18-hour recovery operation, the rocket was retrieved intact and returned to the facility in excellent condition, according to SEPOCH. The rocket's cargo bay, measuring 120 cubic meters, is designed to carry up to 10 tonnes of goods and could theoretically transport cars and small trucks.

The experimental cargo in the recent testing launch included items from two Taobao marketplace stores, including products from the National Library's official flagship store, as well as commemorative postcards created specifically for the test. "Package delivered, please check!" SEPOCH founder Wei Yi messaged friends immediately after the test. "The experimental parameters show that the express delivery warehouse meets the expected standards in fire resistance, moisture resistance and shock absorption," he added. The rocket company's collaboration with Alibaba's Taobao signified China's exploration into the burgeoning field of point-to-point rocket transport. This technology promises to revolutionize global logistics by reducing intercontinental delivery times from days to minutes. Wei admitted that the current costs are still too high for regular consumer deliveries, and the initial applications will focus on emergency deliveries, disaster relief and supplying remote areas.

"With the routine use of reusable rockets and the engineering application of stainless steel, rocket delivery costs are expected to drop significantly," said Wei. Aerospace expert Cao Meng said that rocket delivery is a long-term plan, though it could one day enable true global "flash delivery." "It needs multiple tests to verify the reusable rocket recovery technology and the rocket body's strength and durability," said Cao. After the sea recovery, the XYZ-1 stainless steel rocket body showed no signs of damage or leakage, and the engines and electrical products in the tail compartment were in good condition, according to SEPOCH. The rocket company said it is capable of implementing its first orbital flight and recovery mission by the end of 2025. The rocket is designed to deliver goods weighing seven tonnes to a 1,100-kilometer orbit using liquid oxygen and methane propulsion. Next, the rocket's delivery warehouse layout will be optimized, allowing the types of goods transported to be expanded to include fresh produce and fragile items. Also, an escape system will be developed to ensure cargo safety.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 06/09/2025

China's Online Literature Draws 575 Million Readers, Fueled by Post-2000 Fans

China's online literature readership has swelled to 575 million, underscoring the growing dominance of digital storytelling in the country's cultural landscape. The 2024 China Online Literature Blue Book found that readers aged 26 to 45 make up about half of the total audience. But those born after 2000 are fueling much of the recent growth, accounting for nearly a quarter of all readers, according to a report released Tuesday by the China Writers Association. The report, based on data from 50 leading online literature platforms across China, estimated that the industry generated around 44 billion yuan (approximately 6.1 billion U.S. dollars) in revenue in 2024. By the end of 2024, China's online literature catalog had grown to more than 33 million works, with 2 million new titles added that year, a 7 percent increase from 2023. High-quality online works continue to emerge across a variety of genres like realism, science fiction and historical fiction, enriching the fabric of contemporary Chinese literature. Science fiction, in particular, is shining brilliantly as a standout genre. In 2024 alone, 180,000 new sci-fi titles were published, as the genre continues to gain traction and moves closer to the cultural mainstream. The creative boom is largely driven by a new generation of young writers. In 2024, roughly 2.8 million authors registered on online platforms, including 350,000 who signed professional contracts. Nearly 40 percent of them belong to Gen-Z.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 06/17/2025

AI Helps Detect Early Stomach Cancer in CT Scans in China

Chinese researchers have developed an AI model that can spot early signs of stomach cancer in routine CT scans, helping doctors identify cases earlier. The DAMO GRAPE model, co-developed by the Zhejiang Cancer Hospital and Alibaba's DAMO Academy in east China's Zhejiang Province, was tested on more than 70,000 patients, yielding promising results. The study was published in the journal Nature Medicine on Tuesday. "This is an interesting finding as such a tool may be able to identify more patients with earlier stage gastric cancer in the future," commented a reviewer of the journal. Stomach cancer results in 260,000 deaths every year in China. While early detection can increase five-year survival rates from under 30 percent to over 90 percent, many patients avoid invasive endoscopy, and the quality of screening varies among hospitals, said Cheng Xiangdong, Party chief of the hospital.

Zhang Ling, the corresponding author and a senior algorithm expert at DAMO Academy, said that non-contrast CT is a common non-invasive examination used for checkups and outpatient care, as it is both cost-effective and efficient. However, it is

traditionally considered unsuitable for scanning hollow organs like the stomach. The team challenged this conventional belief by building the world's largest multicenter dataset of gastric non-contrast CT images, overcoming difficulties such as the stomach's variable shape, internal content interference and early-stage cancer cells limited to the mucosal layer. "The model achieved 85.1 percent sensitivity and 96.8 percent specificity, outperforming radiologists by 21.8 percent and 14 percent, respectively," said Zhang. "This marks the first time non-contrast CT can detect early gastric cancer."

At two regional hospitals, the model detected cancer in 17.7 percent and 24.5 percent of scanned patients at high risk, including many without symptoms. The DAMO GRAPE model could fill the gap in opportunistic detection of early gastric cancer during imaging examinations, said Hu Can, the leading author and a gastric surgeon at Zhejiang Cancer Hospital. During the study, the team reviewed earlier CT scans from 11 patients diagnosed with stomach cancer and found that the AI model detected abnormalities in scans taken two to 10 months before their diagnosis. One notable case involved a 45-year-old patient diagnosed with late-stage stomach cancer. The AI successfully identified cancerous markers when reanalyzing a CT scan that she had received for another condition six months prior to diagnosis. "If this tool had been available earlier, the patient could have received treatment much sooner," said Hu. Cheng said that the AI model has been deployed in high-risk areas for gastric cancer in China, with plans for further expansion at home and abroad.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 06/26/2025

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New Battery Innovation Boosts Humanoid Robot Performance in China

With China's humanoid robot industry booming, battery technology has emerged as a limiting factor in performance, prompting some tech companies to develop more advanced batteries tailored to robotic needs. Humanoid robots are venturing into diverse areas of our lives, from transporting parts in factories and participating in marathons to playing football and even boxing in the ring. However, with a current endurance of just around two hours, humanoid robots fall significantly short of meeting the demands of more complex future tasks. According to the Institute of Physics under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the energy consumption of robots mainly comes from mechanical movement, especially the lifting in the vertical direction and the rapid acceleration movements. For example, when a robot performs a backflip, it may appear effortless, but it actually demands exceptionally high battery performance. The instantaneous discharge rate required can exceed 100 times that of ordinary batteries in daily use.

An insufficient discharge rate affects the robot's performance, while a heavy battery reduces its flexibility, and low capacity limits its practical use. These issues have

become significant challenges for robotics companies. EngineAI Robotics Technology Co., Ltd., located in south China's tech hub Shenzhen, released an impressive robot dance video in March this year. In the video, the company's PM01 robot flawlessly performed the Axe Gang Dance from Stephen Chow's classic film "Kung Fu," capturing the dance's spirit with remarkable accuracy. Zhang Nan, a hardware engineer at EngineAI, said that ternary lithium batteries are currently widely used in humanoid robots, and several existing products of EngineAI robots are also equipped with such batteries. However, such lithium batteries have poor performance in thermal stability. With the development of humanoid robots, solid-state batteries with higher energy density, smaller size and better safety may be the future. "EngineAI is currently in contact with solid-state battery manufacturers for preliminary research," Zhang said. X Square Robot also faces similar challenges.

Wang Qian, founder of the company, said that the company's goal is to have robots take over simple and tedious physical tasks, from electronic assembly work in factories and restaurant service to everyday household chores, making general-purpose robots an indispensable part of people's lives. The batteries currently used by X Square Robot include ternary lithium batteries and lithium iron phosphate batteries. Their common problem is the low energy density, which affects the overall endurance of the robots. For robots to enter homes and other future application scenarios with high activity levels, they need batteries with higher energy density and, most importantly, maximum safety, Wang explained. This year's government work report outlined plans to develop future industries like embodied intelligence, highlighting the humanoid robot sector as a key focus. According to the Chinese Institute of Electronics, by 2030, the market size of China's humanoid robots is expected to reach about 870 billion yuan (about 121 billion U.S. dollars). The swift response has come from tech companies, which are becoming the driving force behind innovation in the country.

Some battery manufacturers have recognized this emerging demand and have already partnered with humanoid robot companies for research and development. For instance, in June, battery giant CATL invested in Beijing-based Galbot, aiming to develop batteries for humanoid robots and to introduce robots into its production lines to achieve factory production automation. BTR New Material Group, a Shenzhen-based battery supplier, in May launched the FLEX semi-solid and GUARD all-solid-state batteries tailored for humanoid robots. The company has achieved a balance between high performance and lightweight design through two major strategies: material innovation and structural optimization. For instance, the FLEX series' high-nickel ternary cathodes use molecular-level in-situ coating technology, which can effectively increase the energy density. The GUARD series uses a lithium-rich manganese-based cathode and a lithium metal anode design, which significantly increases the energy density of the individual cell.

According to Li Zikun, director of the company's research institute, the mainstream ternary lithium batteries have shortcomings in terms of energy density, safety and stability, and high-rate discharge performance for humanoid robots. Solid-state batteries can better meet these needs. Li believes that batteries for future humanoid robots should meet three key requirements: a balance between high energy density and safety, optimized fast charging and discharging efficiency, and stability and reliability under special working conditions. The all-solid-state battery eliminates the risk of leakage and fire associated with traditional liquid electrolytes, providing a safety guarantee for use under extreme conditions, he said. These high-energy-density designs can not only support the long-endurance needs of humanoid robots, but are also particularly suitable for increasing the payload in special application scenarios such as aerospace, Li added.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 06/30/2025

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JAPAN: AI Search Changing How People Shop Online

AI-based search is rapidly transforming online shopping behavior, with users—especially younger generations—shifting away from traditional web searches and turning to tools like ChatGPT to find and purchase products. This trend is particularly evident in Japan and the U.S., where major e-commerce platforms like Rakuten and Amazon are seeing a dramatic increase in traffic originating from AI searches. According to a nationwide survey of men and women in their 20s to 60s, more than half still search for products on Rakuten or Amazon, while Google remains strong. However, the number of users who use AI tools like ChatGPT for product searches has reached 7%, with one in five people in their 20s using AI—a notable increase. AI researcher and EC consultant Tomoyuki Mochizuki, who participated in the survey analysis, pointed out that AI search offers unique advantages when product requirements are more abstract or nuanced—such as looking for a "stylish" portable power supply.

In one year, the number of users accessing Amazon via AI search grew 13-fold, while traffic to Rakuten rose 69-fold. The surge began around October last year, possibly coinciding with the adoption of newer AI models and enterprise use. On April 28th, OpenAI announced it would implement a shopping feature within ChatGPT, allowing users to browse product images, prices, and reviews in a tiled layout, similar to traditional e-commerce sites. In the U.S., users will soon be able to complete purchases directly through the interface, using linked accounts like Amazon. This development has drawn significant attention from companies. While concerns remain about personal data and security, current implementations do not store credit card information within ChatGPT itself. Instead, they rely on external services like Amazon accounts. The AI system's memory function, which recalls a user's preferences and behavior, enables increasingly personalized product recommendations, encouraging users to "teach" the AI over time.

OpenAI's strategy appears to be moving toward a broader platform model. Unlike conventional IT services that become more profitable as users increase, ChatGPT currently incurs massive electricity costs for each use due to its large neural network, reportedly running in hydro-powered data centers. This has led to unsustainable deficits, prompting OpenAI to monetize through e-commerce commissions and potentially future advertising. While Google also integrates AI-generated overviews into its search results—implemented in Japan since August—these summaries do not yet appear for most shopping-related queries, likely to protect its advertising business. AI overviews have already led to reduced visibility for lower-ranked websites, raising alarm among businesses reliant on search exposure. AI search also poses challenges in accuracy. There have been instances of incorrect information, such as misidentifying the current Japanese era, and researchers caution that AI-generated summaries cannot fully replace validated sources. University professors, for example, have noted a rise in students copying AI-overview text directly into assignments, sparking criticism of misuse.

Despite these flaws, AI search provides strong advantages in product discovery—especially for complex, time-consuming purchases or health-related queries. Its ability to interpret vague or abstract descriptions and filter through massive amounts of data in minutes makes it an efficient tool for shoppers seeking tailored results. That said, physical products like books still present limitations. As Mochizuki noted, he prefers to buy books in brick-and-mortar stores where he can preview content directly—something AI search cannot replicate due to copyright restrictions. Ultimately, AI search is expected to coexist with other shopping tools such as social media platforms and video-based reviews, with different demographics and products favoring different discovery channels. Consumers are advised to use AI search tools regularly to build more personalized experiences while remaining cautious about sharing sensitive personal data. As the technology evolves, companies and consumers alike will need to adapt to a new retail landscape shaped increasingly by AI.

From <https://newsonjapan.com> 05/15/2025

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Japan's My Number Card Functions to Be Available on iPhones

Japan will allow major functions of the My Number personal identification card to be available on iPhone smartphones from June 24, digital transformation minister Masaaki Taira said Friday. Users of Apple Inc.'s smartphones will be able to access the Mynportal website for My Number-related administrative tasks and get copies of their public certificates at local convenience stores via iPhone-based biometric authentication. There will be no need to carry a physical My Number card. It is already possible to add a digital certificate function to identify an individual to smartphones using Google's Android operating system. On iPhones, users will be

able to mount the function to confirm the basic personal information written on the My Number card, including the name and the date of birth, as well as install the digital certificate function. Some 98 million My Number cards had been issued by the end of May. The Digital Agency plans to improve the convenience of the card further by gradually enhancing its digital functions, including the My Number health insurance card, that can be added to smartphones.

From <https://www.nippon.com> 06/06/2025

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Japan Eyes Registration System for Rural Areas' Connected Population

The Japanese government plans to create a registration system linking local governments with the so-called connected population, or nonresidents who steadily interact with regional areas, as part of efforts to revitalize rural communities. The system, under which people will register their links to municipalities using a smartphone app, is aimed at encouraging people living in urban areas to play active roles in rural communities amid the shrinking population. Japan launched regional revitalization efforts in 2014 under then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to halt its population decline, as well as promote migration to rural areas in order to address the overconcentration of people in the Tokyo area. But getting people to move has proven difficult, so some local governments have taken measures aimed at increasing the number of people who do not migrate but are more deeply involved in areas than tourists. Hida, Gifu Prefecture, central Japan, launched a fan club for the city in 2017. Members receive discounts at local stores and hotels.

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Japan FSA & Headlands Tech, Led by Hideo Amamiya, Propel AI-Powered Trading into Japan's Market

Hideo Amamiya, a prominent Japanese investment educator and seasoned market practitioner, representing global quantitative trading firm Headlands Tech, officially announced a strategic collaboration with the Japan Financial Services Agency (FSA) to fully integrate AI trading systems into institutional accounts. Live deployment has already been completed. This move not only marks a significant upgrade in institutional trading methodology, but is also seen as a potential turning point in the evolution of retail trading in Japan. This initiative was actively supported by Japan's Financial Services Agency. As one of the country's first regulatory bodies to examine the feasibility of AI-based live trading, the FSA dispatched officials to accompany international research missions and provided detailed guidance on model applicability, system compliance, and risk management frameworks. Aligning Japan with Global AI Trading Standards. With this deployment, AI-powered trading in Japan transitions from theory to practice, marking the first time Japanese markets have

truly aligned with global standards in automated investment.

Amamiya, having recently completed research visits to funds in Singapore, brokers in Australia, HFT teams in Shanghai, and hedge funds in New York, commented: "In major global markets, AI is no longer a lab toy — it's the main execution engine used daily." Market Reactions & Industry Perspectives. The announcement has drawn widespread attention in the investment community. Several industry analysts noted: "This collaboration could trigger a wave of interest in AI trading models among Japanese investors." "Without toolset modernization, Japan's traders risk marginalization in the next market cycle." "Headlands Tech's initiative reflects a renewed institutional interest in Japan's market and willingness to bring in advanced technologies." Amid ongoing consolidation in the Nikkei, intensified stock differentiation, and rising demand for speed and discipline in intraday trading, this AI deployment is being viewed as a milestone for Japan's equity trading ecosystem. The system is expected to enter a limited internal testing phase first, followed by a phased rollout for select user trials and co-development of real-time strategies.

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SOUTH KOREA: Retail Sales Up over 9 Pct in March on Strong Performance of E-Commerce

South Korean retailers saw their sales gain more than 9 percent from a year earlier in March on robust online demand for food and daily necessities, data showed Tuesday. Last month, the combined revenue of major retail companies rose 9.2 percent from a year ago, according to data compiled by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. The ministry said the increase is mainly attributable to strong demand for e-commerce deliveries in food and daily shopping sectors and other services. Sales from the online sector increased 19 percent on-year as revenue from the food sector rose 19.4 percent and revenue from the daily necessities sector expanded 7.5 percent. Sales from online services, such as food delivery and e-coupons, spiked 78.3 percent. On the other hand, offline platforms saw their revenue decrease 0.2 percent on-year in March, affected by weak consumer sentiment. In particular, supermarket sales went down 0.2 percent, and sales from department stores dropped 2.1 percent.

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Developing AI-Based System to Detect Malaria Parasites

Indonesia has been developing an artificial intelligence (AI)-based malaria detection

system that will use data from various places around the country to recognize distinct malaria parasite species, according to the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN). "This technology utilizes morpho-geometric feature extraction to identify the size and shape of infected blood cells," said Anto Satriyo Nugroho, head of BRIN's Research Center for Artificial Intelligence and Cybersecurity, in a press release on Wednesday. The AI system is designed to detect a patient's malaria infection status automatically by analyzing blood smear microphotographs. Although one of the most difficult aspects of building the system is the parasite's changing morphology throughout the mosquito's life cycle, BRIN is optimistic that the technology will make a substantial contribution to malaria eradication efforts in Indonesia. BRIN has also encouraged collaboration among scholars, industry, and government to create AI that is relevant to local requirements.

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Indonesian Research Agency Launches Digital Prehistoric Rock Art Platform

Indonesia's National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) has launched a digital platform showcasing the country's prehistoric rock art, in collaboration with Google Arts & Culture, Griffith University, the Ministry of Culture, and several academic institutions. Titled Kanvas Purbakala, the digital platform offers immersive 360-degree virtual tours of 24 significant cave sites across the archipelago. "Kanvas Purbakala is a starting point for the preservation and utilization of our nation's cultural heritage," said Laksana Tri Handoko, head of BRIN, on Tuesday. Arianne Santoso, representative of Google Indonesia, said the project has documented over 500 archaeological elements from more than 100 caves stretching from Sumatra to Papua, making it the world's largest digital rock art collection accessible via Google Arts & Culture. Major discoveries from the project include the world's oldest known narrative cave art at Leang Karampuang in Maros, the earliest prehistoric hunting scene at Leang Bulu Sipong in Pangkep, and evidence of 31,000-year-old human surgery at Liang Tebo in East Kalimantan.

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PHILIPPINES: Easing Entry of Digital Nomads to Boost Tourism

The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) has been authorized to issue digital nomad visas for foreign nationals seeking to temporarily reside and work remotely in the country, the Presidential Communications Office said Friday. To further boost Philippine tourism and economy, President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos has issued an executive order, "establishing a legal framework to facilitate the entry of digital nomads," the office said in a press release. Foreigners applying for the digital nomad visas must be at least 18 years old, show proof of remote work

using digital technology and sufficient income generated outside the Philippines, and have an unblemished criminal record, said the office. Often relying on the Internet and mobile devices for connectivity, a digital nomad is described as a person who works remotely using technology. They travel and live in various locations while working. Because of the country's relatively lower cost of living and its scenic spots, the Philippines is becoming a "haven" for digital nomads, the office said. The World Economic Forum ranked the Philippines as the seventh fastest-growing remote work hub country in the world in 2023, it added.

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SINGAPORE: To Trial AI System for Faster Heart Disease Diagnosis in Public Hospitals

The National Heart Center Singapore (NHCS) will pilot an artificial intelligence (AI) system across three public hospitals, aimed at significantly reducing the time required for cardiac scan analysis and enabling faster diagnosis of coronary artery disease. With the AI system, the interpretation of cardiac imaging scans and assessment of coronary artery disease risk will take less than 10 minutes, a process that currently takes two to four hours by radiographers and cardiologists, Lohendran Baskaran, a senior consultant at NHCS, told media on Tuesday. In controlled settings, the AI has demonstrated an accuracy range of 85 to 99 percent, he said, noting that the upcoming year-long trial will assess how well the system performs in real-world clinical environments. Named the Singapore heart lesion analyzer, the system is scheduled to begin trials in the third quarter of 2025. Coronary artery disease is the leading cause of cardiovascular-related deaths in Singapore. In 2023, 8,311 people in the country died from cardiovascular disease, making up nearly 30 percent of all deaths that year, according to local media.

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THAILAND: To Roll Out Digital Arrival Card for Foreign Visitors on May 1

Thailand is set to roll out its new arrival card system on May 1, requiring all foreign nationals to submit their personal and travel information online up to three days prior to entering the country, authorities said on Friday. According to the Immigration Bureau, completion of the Thailand Digital Arrival Card (TDAC) will be mandatory for all foreign passport holders, including tourists, business visitors, and long-term residents, whether arriving by air, land, or sea. Exceptions apply only to travelers in transit who do not pass through immigration control and those entering the Southeast Asian nation using border passes, the bureau said. According to authorities, travelers can submit the TDAC individually or as part of a group via the online portal, and required information, such as intended accommodation and a brief

health declaration, can be updated before travel if necessary. The TDAC system will replace a long-standing paper-based form as part of the Thai government's broader digital transformation of immigration procedures, aiming to streamline entry processes, minimize paperwork, and enhance traveler convenience.

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VIETNAM: State Enhances Digital Tax Management for Business Households and Individuals

Digital transformation in tax management is being promoted for business households and individuals in order to streamline their processes and reduce management costs. The Ministry of Finance's General Department of Taxation has emphasised the importance of improving data systems to ensure comprehensive and accurate tax management. Tax authorities are tasked with completing the database system for business households and individuals by the end of this month. Additionally, efforts are underway to clean up and update the personal tax code database to ensure more effective tax collection and monitoring. A critical aspect of the tax authorities' strategy is using big data to detect and address potential tax evasion. This approach is especially important in sectors such as service industries and digital platform businesses, which have been identified as having higher rates of tax evasion. The Deputy Director of the department, Mai Sơn, highlighted the importance of a scientific, data-driven approach in managing taxes for business households and individuals. The tax sector is focusing on improving its tax management systems with greater efficiency and precision by using artificial intelligence (AI), big data and other technology innovations.

One of the key initiatives in this transformation is the development and expansion of the eTaxMobile application, which aims to make tax filing and management more accessible and efficient for taxpayers. In addition to technology integration, the General Department of Taxation is committed to working closely with the business licensing authorities to address cases where business households and individuals fail to register their businesses, as they are required to by law. Regular communication between the tax and licence authorities ensures timely implementation of tax management and registration requirements for businesses. In particular, the tax authority is looking to collaborate more closely with freight forwarders and businesses providing ancillary services. This coordination will help to better understand the true scope of business activities and improve tax management for various sectors. By embracing technological advancements and refining policies, the department aims to create a more equitable and efficient tax system for business households and individuals, ultimately safeguarding State revenue and fostering a transparent business environment.

The current tax policies for business households and individual businesses is

presumptive tax. It is a fixed tax for each month/quarter for individual business households. These policies have been effective in supporting small-scale production and businesses, allowing individuals to prosper, reduce unemployment and create job stability. However, with the rise of digital platforms and e-commerce, the need for more adaptive tax policies has become clear. The rapid growth of digital commerce, services, and platform-based businesses—many of which are operated by business households and individuals—has highlighted the challenges faced by tax authorities. These new forms of business have created disparities in tax management. The evolving market has made it essential for tax authorities to adjust their approaches to ensure a fair and transparent business environment, preventing tax policies from creating unequal conditions for different sectors of the economy. The department's leadership has acknowledged the progress made in managing business household taxes, particularly through the use of big data. In 2024, the revenue from business households and individual businesses reached VNĐ25.95 trillion (over US\$1 billion), 20 per cent higher than the revenue collected in 2023. However, the current tax management practices for business households and individual businesses still fall short of meeting the goals set by the Government. As such, the department is calling for more innovative tax management policies. Particularly, there is an urgent need for breakthrough policies to address tax management challenges in sectors such as digital platforms, hospitality (restaurants and hotels) and service industries. The rise of these sectors has led to an increase in tax evasion tactics, where individuals and businesses attempt to circumvent tax regulations, leading to significant revenue losses for the State. In response, tax authorities are working on strategies to tighten enforcement, reduce evasion and ensure that all sectors contribute fairly to the national revenue.

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HCM City Launches E-Ticketing and MultiPass Card for Public Transport

The HCM City Department of Transport on Friday officially launched its Open-Loop electronic ticketing system for buses and introduced MultiPass card, a unified payment solution for public transport across the city. The Open-Loop cashless payment system enables commuters to pay for bus fares using a wide range of options, including credit cards, debit cards, EMV prepaid cards, e-wallets, and smart devices. Meanwhile, the newly introduced MultiPass is a unified transport card designed for frequent commuters, such as students and office workers, offering features and transport-related benefits. The card is compatible with public transport vehicles equipped with POS (point-of-sale) devices. Alongside Metro Line No. 1 (Bến Thành - Suối Tiên), the city's public bus network currently consists of 138 routes operated by over 2,200 vehicles. These buses make nearly 13,000 trips daily, transporting an average of over 350,000 passengers and meeting a large share of the city's commuting needs. At present, the Open-Loop cashless payment system

has been installed on several key bus routes, covering more than 500 vehicles. The rollout is continuing and is expected to reach over 2,000 buses by the end of May. The department has also launched the MultiGO mobile app, which enables users to check public transport routes and schedules, purchase tickets, and register for a MultiPass card directly through the platform. According to the department, the simultaneous rollout of the Open-Loop payment system, MultiPass card, and MultiGO app marks a major milestone in modernising HCM City's public transport network. These advancements are expected to significantly improve the daily commuting experience and pave the way for a smarter, more accessible urban transport system.

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Foreigners Can Apply for E-Identification Accounts Starting July 1

Foreigners residing in Việt Nam can apply for an account on the national identification app VNeID under a pilot programme starting July 1 this year, according to an officer from the Ministry of Public Security's National Data Centre. The centre, also known as C06, has issued more than 62 million individual accounts and 292 million accounts for organisations, which are used for online public services. Speaking at a seminar on ensuring safe and convenient use of VNeID, the centre's deputy director, Major Trần Duy Hiễn, said that VNeID is a nationwide application, which means data safety and maintaining uninterrupted system operations are of utmost importance. To ensure the safe and convenient operation of VNeID, authorities have implemented key requirements on legal frameworks, data, security and safety, infrastructure and resources. In addition to the basic information automatically updated to the app by C06, citizens have control over whether they want to integrate their other documents into the app, such as their social insurance certificate or driver's licence. The crucial factor is ensuring information security by giving the individual's consent when they upload additional data to the app, said Hiễn. They also have the right to cancel data integration requests and must be informed about the purpose of the data usage, he added. C06 has also formed data connections with 12 banks, but the agency does not deliberately extract and share data with these financial institutions, Hiễn noted. Instead, a bank can issue a request, and C06 must obtain the citizen's consent on VNeID before the individual's data can be shared. This is a mandatory safety measure that must be followed when implementing any services on VNeID, the officer said. In addition to active research and development on VNeID features, C06 has also set up information channels on popular social media platforms, such as Facebook and Zalo, to collect public feedback, aiming to make VNeID as convenient as possible for the people.

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E-Commerce to Support Farmers with Market Access

HÀ NỘI The Ministry of Industry and Trade's Centre for E-commerce and Digital Technology (eComDX) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with leading e-commerce enterprises, including Shopee and TikTok Việt Nam, along with departments of industry and trade from Lai Châu, Thái Nguyên, Lạng Sơn, Yên Bái and Điện Biên provinces. The agreement marks a significant step towards strengthening cooperation between government authorities and digital platforms. Its objectives include supporting digital skills training, improving e-commerce infrastructure, and expanding the promotion and distribution of local products via digital platforms. The initiative is expected to accelerate digital transformation and boost online business capacity in these underdeveloped areas. The activities under the memorandum aim to build a competitive e-commerce environment and expand market access for local businesses. In addition to providing essential knowledge and tools for digital commerce, the programme seeks to help bring regional speciality products to national consumers. According to the Vietnam E-commerce and Digital Economy Agency (IDEA), developing a sustainable regional e-commerce ecosystem requires four strategic pillars: improving policies to support e-commerce in highland areas aligned with national digital economy and transformation strategies; applying digital technology in product development, traceability and brand protection; strengthening digital logistics and distribution infrastructure in remote areas; and enhancing digital capabilities at the local level through training and technical assistance for businesses, households and public officials. Despite growing awareness, digital adoption in the midland and mountainous regions remains limited due to constraints in infrastructure, workforce availability, and traditional business practices. Lê Hoàng Oanh, Director General of IDEA, noted that digital transformation is no longer optional but an essential requirement. She said that e-commerce is one of the core pillars driving comprehensive digitalisation at the local level, particularly in areas facing socioeconomic challenges. Improving digital business capacity is fundamental to give each speciality product a digital brand, enabling e-commerce to become a viable tool for livelihoods, value creation, and the promotion of regional cultural identity.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 05/27/2025

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E-Commerce Tax Revenue Rises 55%

Tax revenue collected from organisations and individuals engaged in e-commerce and other digital economy activities reached VNĐ74.4 trillion (nearly US\$3 billion) in the first five months of this year, a year-on-year increase of 55 per cent, the Ministry of Finance reported on Wednesday. Accordingly, 158 foreign suppliers have registered, declared and paid taxes via the electronic portal, contributing VNĐ5.7 trillion, up 41 per cent year-on-year. In addition, 100,000 household and individual businesses have registered, declared and paid taxes via the electronic tax portal for

individuals, with tax payments totaling nearly VNĐ 1.1 trillion. Furthermore, nearly 93,000 organisations and individuals involved in e-commerce contributed VNĐ67.6 trillion in tax payments. Regarding tax enforcement in the e-commerce sector, the tax authority has reviewed 164,661 taxpayers, including enterprises subject to retroactive tax collection totalling over VNĐ416 billion, and 25,201 individual and household businesses, with retroactive taxes over VNĐ331 billion. In recent time, the tax sector has accelerated digital transformation in the management of business household and individual taxpayers. Efforts include guiding users in registering e-tax accounts, installing the eTax Mobile application, and facilitating electronic tax payments. Local tax departments have also stepped up enforcement, tightening control over tax calculation, declaration, payment and invoicing to ensure accurate, timely and collection in full in accordance with tax regulations.

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Tax Department to Hold Online Programme for Digital Sellers

The General Department of Taxation has said it will organise an online programme on June 17 for household and individual businesses that sell products via livestream, e-commerce platforms and other digital channels to assist them in tax registration, declaration and payment. The programme starts at 8.30am and will last one day. It will be livestreamed on the Tax department's official web portal at gdt.gov.vn and its official Facebook page at facebook.com/nganhthuevietnam. According to the department, in the first five months of 2025, tax authorities collected VNĐ74.4 trillion (US\$2.9 billion) from organisations and individuals engaged in e-commerce and other digital economy activities, marking a 55 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2024. Over 100,000 household and individual businesses completed tax registration, declaration and payment via the online portal dedicated to small business taxpayers, contributing nearly VNĐ1.1 trillion to the State budget in the first five months of the year. As for tax enforcement in the digital business sector, the tax authority reviewed 164,661 taxpayers. It collected over VNĐ416 billion in arrears from enterprises and an additional VNĐ331 billion from 25,201 individual and household businesses.

Previously, the department held a nationwide virtual conference with tax authorities and household businesses to provide guidance and resolve difficulties related to e-invoices generated from cash registers. The department's Deputy Director Mai Sơn said the agency understands the challenges, especially in the early stages. He confirmed that the Tax Department is committed to providing timely and practical support, continuously innovating and improving procedures, applying technology and accelerating the digital transformation, with the ultimate goal of serving taxpayers. These efforts aim to create favourable conditions for household businesses to comply with tax laws. He added that household businesses and taxpayers across the country have cooperated well with tax authorities and fulfilled their tax obligations,

helping the department meet revenue targets and contributing significantly to local and national socio-economic development. Following the recent conference, the department has instructed local tax offices to continue organising dialogue sessions, support activities and Q&A programmes for household businesses. It also encourages close coordination with e-invoice solution providers to offer on-site assistance, helping businesses gradually familiarise themselves with using e-invoices generated from cash registers. June has been designated as a peak month for supporting the nationwide implementation of this new invoicing method.

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Việt Nam Enhances Regulatory Framework to Promote Cashless Payments

Việt Nam is strengthening its regulatory framework and policies to promote cashless payments as part of its broader strategy to develop a more digital economy. Speaking at a seminar in HCM City on Saturday, Deputy Prime Minister Hồ Đức Phớc emphasised the growing role of cashless transactions in everyday life — from paying for tuition and medical care to shopping. “Cashless transactions are essential for the growth of e-commerce, enabling faster payments and enhancing transparency in financial dealings,” he said. “They not only improve financial management transparency but also support online shopping and public services, boost productivity, and help reduce costs for society overall.” However, the Deputy PM also acknowledged several ongoing challenges, including cybersecurity risks, online payment fraud, and disparities in digital infrastructure between regions. “The security of transactions is a key issue that we must address,” he noted. In response, he urged the State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) to work closely with relevant ministries to refine the regulatory framework and foster innovation in payment systems, while also effectively managing associated risks. He called on banks, payment service providers, and technology firms to improve their offerings and prioritise the protection of consumer information. He also directed the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Industry and Trade to collaborate in promoting cashless payments for public services, thereby enhancing the efficiency and accessibility of online service delivery. In addition, local governments were encouraged to develop practical solutions to ensure broader access to financial services, especially in rural and remote areas, making cashless payment options more widely available in small businesses and traditional markets.

Payment security: a top priority

Lê Anh Dũng, Deputy Director of the State Bank of Vietnam’s (SBV) Payment Department, highlighted the rapid growth of cashless transactions in Việt Nam in recent years and the urgent need to strengthen payment security. “The SBV is committed to improving the legal framework and infrastructure for cashless payments,” he said. He stressed the importance of raising public awareness about

cybercrime tactics as a key measure to ensure secure digital transactions. The SBV plans to work closely with commercial banks and payment intermediaries to implement technological solutions to combat cybercrime. One key initiative includes developing a system to detect fake accounts and alert customers before they make potentially fraudulent transfers. Phan Thị Thắng, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade, said the rapid development of Việt Nam's digital payment market is largely attributed to the diverse and robust expansion of various payment channels that meet the growing demands of both consumers and businesses. Today, citizens enjoy the convenience of 24/7 money transfers, mobile payments, and QR code transactions, she noted. "The growing variety of payment methods reflects the maturity of Việt Nam's digital payment ecosystem, which is transforming the national economy," she said.

Lê Hoàng Oanh, Director of the Department of E-commerce and Digital Economy, added that digital payments are a key driver of e-commerce development, contributing significantly to the digital economy. Việt Nam is also emerging as a regional leader in e-commerce, with an average annual growth rate of 16 to 30 per cent, and the digital economy now contributing 18.7 per cent to the country's GDP. According to an SBV report, the interbank electronic payment system currently processes an average of VNĐ820 trillion daily, handling about 26 million transactions. Việt Nam has continuously upgraded its national credit information infrastructure, achieving an impressive 98 per cent data update success rate across credit institutions. There are now over 204.5 million payment accounts and 154.1 million active bank cards in the country, with nearly 87 per cent of adults holding bank accounts. A recent survey revealed that 59 per cent of daily transactions are cashless, rising to 72 per cent among those aged 25 to 44. Việt Nam is also advancing cross-border retail payments via QR codes with neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, with plans to expand further into Asia. The seminar was held as part of the annual Cashless Day 2025 programme, themed "Cashless Payments – A Driving Force for Digital Economic Growth." Cashless Day, celebrated annually on June 16, was first launched in 2019 and is organised by the SBV's Payment Department in collaboration with Tuổi Trẻ (Youth) newspaper.

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South Asia

INDIA: TCS Prepares for BSNL's 5G Upgrade amid Nationwide 4G Rollout

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) will upgrade Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd's fourth-generation network to 5G once the state-run telecom operator finalizes site locations and frequency bands, said NG Subramaniam, advisor for telecom strategic initiatives at TCS. The upgrade will be done by a software upgrade using the radio

equipment already put in place by TCS. BSNL is presently deploying its 4G network across India with spectrum holdings in the 700 MHz, 900 MHz, 2,100 MHz, 2,500 MHz, and 3,500 MHz bands. The Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DoT), which implements BSNL's core network, has already ensured support for 5G Non-Standalone (NSA) technology. Once BSNL identifies the specific sites for 5G deployment, TCS will initiate the required upgrades. A TCS-led consortium, which comprises C-DoT and Tejas Networks, is leading the pan-India 4G network deployment for BSNL, covering 100,000 sites. So far, 65,000 sites have been made operational. Tata Sons holds a 54% stake in Tejas Networks, which is contributing telecom gear for BSNL's network expansion. "We are handing over sites to BSNL as and when the installation, commissioning, and optimization are complete. This process will continue until the network rollout is finished in the next few months", said Subramaniam, who also serves as Chairman of Tejas Networks. To this end, it is also expecting a follow-on order from BSNL in respect of strengthening its 4G infrastructure, which will be required to ensure seamless connectivity as well as future 5G services. "The tender allows BSNL to exercise the option to place an additional order under the same terms, and we expect BSNL to do just that for the required quantities", Subramaniam adds.

In June 2023, BSNL issued a purchase order to TCS and state-run ITI Ltd. for the procurement of telecom equipment, including a 10-year AMC covering 100,000 sites for its commercial 4G rollout. ITI, through its reservation quota, is tasked with deploying 23,633 sites and is procuring some equipment from Tejas Networks. Tejas Networks is also manufacturing some radio components at an ITI facility. According to BSNL Chairman Robert J Ravi, the 100,000 4G sites rollout will be enough to cover the entire country. "With these one lakh sites, we will have enough coverage across the country. We will soon introduce another plan to further expand our network capacity", Ravi said. BSNL, which is also in charge of the Delhi and Mumbai circles of MTNL, will upgrade capacity and build out the network using 700 MHz and 2,100 MHz spectrum bands. BSNL will also introduce 5G Network-as-a-Service, or 5G NaaS, where Tejas Networks bid for 1,876 sites in the Delhi telecom circle. The winner of this revenue-sharing model will be the owner of the network infrastructure throughout its life cycle. "TCS will continue to work closely with Tejas Networks for implementation and integration services. The 5G upgrade will take advantage of the existing 4G infrastructure, but it will integrate with legacy systems", said Subramaniam. BSNL plans to extend 5G NaaS deployments after a successful rollout in Delhi and stabilization of its 4G network. Last month, telecom minister Jyotiraditya Scindia announced that BSNL's 4G network, which is upgradable to 5G, is expected to be fully deployed by May 2025.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com/> 04/01/2025

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India Leads as Fastest Growing ChatGPT Market, Says OpenAI COO

OpenAI COO Brad Lightcap says it has been a "very crazy first week for images in ChatGPT". He says that since last Tuesday, 130 million users have created more than 700 million images on ChatGPT. Lightcap also gave some special attention to the Indian market. He says that India is their fastest growing ChatGPT market. "The range of visual creativity has been extremely inspiring", he stated. This is just one day after Sam Altman shared posts on X admiring AI adoption in India. He described it as 'amazing'. "India is beating the world", he stated. He even posted an AI-created anime photo of himself as a cricket player playing in the Team India jersey. He employed Cricket Indian sports fandom holy grail - to make Indian users take notice. Meanwhile, Kunal Shah, the founder of CRED, was quick to cut through the noise, responding with a simple but biting observation: 'India is the MAU farm of the world'. This could simply be OpenAI's way of attracting more users from India. For those who don't know, MAU refers to monthly active users - a key metric that indicates higher engagement, more data, and ultimately, greater monetisation potential. With more than a billion individuals and accelerating smartphone usage, India offers an enormous prospect for business firms seeking to capitalize on a large and active user base. Simply put, it's goldmine for business firms such as OpenAI, which depend on user interaction and data.

The firm has also been routinely emphasizing the adversity its teams are experiencing as a result of the sudden and untimely fame of the new image generation functionality. "We thank you for your patience while we attempt to serve everyone, the team remains working around the clock", Lightcap further mentioned. Last week, OpenAI introduced a new image-generation feature for GPT-4o, enabling users to create AI-generated images directly within the chatbot. However, the tools unexpected surge in popularity especially for its ability to mimic the iconic Studio Ghibli art style quickly overwhelmed the company's servers. From profile pictures to wedding portraits, social media exploded with 'Ghibli-style' creations, putting immense strain on OpenAI's infrastructure. The demand was so great that Altman himself joked their GPUs were 'melting'. A week on, the craze hasn't abated, and OpenAI is still fighting to keep things going. Earlier this week, Altman warned users to anticipate delays, glitches, and slower performance as the company scrambles to cope with the load.

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Keysight Technologies and MeitY's SAMEER Collaborate on Healthcare and 6G R&D

Keysight Technologies entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Society for Applied Microwave Electronics Engineering and Research (SAMEER) to cooperate in Research and Development (R&D) in the areas of healthcare and 6G network technology. Keysight is a network testing, measurement, and assurance

solutions provider, whereas SAMEER is a leading R&D centre under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) in India. As part of the partnership, Keysight and SAMEER have suggested setting up a Healthcare Centre of Excellence (CoE), as well as a research laboratory to drive 6G communication research. As per the agreement, Keysight will facilitate SAMEER in establishing and showcasing fully functional labs supporting 6G research and development in multiple Indian institutions. The two companies also plan to set up a Centre of Excellence (CoE) in healthcare with an aim to develop magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) technologies, as per an ET Telecom report. "We are spearheading 6G research in India following the successful demonstration of our end to end 5G stack and IIT Madras. The proposed collaboration with Keysight will further augment this and allow Indian research and academic institutions to have access to next-generation technologies", says P Hanumantha Rao, Director-General at SAMEER, according to the report. "Creating a center of excellence and establishing 6G research domains is an important step in propelling innovation in India. This collaboration will be proud to offer the much-needed technology and infrastructure that will power future research in healthcare and other industries", says Sudhir Tangri, Vice President of Asia Pacific Sales and Country General Manager of India at Keysight. SAMEER's contributions to healthcare include the development of a fully indigenous Linear Accelerator (LINAC) for cancer therapy and an affordable, fully functional 1.5T MRI system. The agreement will enable Keysight to help democratize these innovations across India by leveraging SAMEER's products, while both organizations continue collaborative research by complementing each other's strengths.

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Vodafone Idea and Cisco Partner to Enhance 4G and 5G Network Infrastructure Across India

Vodafone Idea (Vi), one of India's leading telecom service providers, has partnered strategically with global networking giant Cisco to upgrade and expand its 4G and 5G network capabilities. This initiative aims to meet the rising demand for high-speed, reliable digital connectivity in India, both for individual consumers and enterprises. The partnership focuses on deploying a Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS)-based transport network, powered by Cisco's advanced IP/MPLS solutions. This technology will enable Vodafone Idea to significantly enhance the performance and scalability of its existing infrastructure. It is expected to bring about notable improvements in operational efficiency, network automation, and traffic management. Jagbir Singh, Chief Technology Officer at Vi, emphasised the significance of the collaboration, stating, "Cisco's expertise in MPLS solutions will help us automate critical network functions, optimise traffic flows, and respond swiftly to evolving customer needs. This robust transport network is tailored to meet the complex challenges of today's digital landscape." With India witnessing a surge in data consumption driven by remote work, online education, entertainment streaming, and

digital commerce, Vi's network upgrade comes at a crucial time. The enhancements are designed to offer smoother experiences for data-intensive applications such as HD video streaming, online gaming, and virtual conferencing. Additionally, enterprise users will benefit from greater network stability and security, essential for supporting a digital-first business environment.

From Cisco's perspective, the initiative reflects a commitment to enabling future-ready digital ecosystems. Gordon Thomson, Vice President for Service Provider Sales in the EMEA region at Cisco, remarked, "Our collaboration with Vi demonstrates how Cisco's IP/MPLS technologies can help deliver scalable, secure, and consistent digital experiences. This partnership is not just about immediate performance gains but also about preparing the network for future innovations." The implementation of Cisco's MPLS-based network architecture is expected to reduce operational complexities and lower long-term costs for Vi. By leveraging software-defined tools and advanced automation, Vi aims to streamline service delivery, improve network reliability, and accelerate time-to-market for new offerings. Both companies have underlined the broader impact of this initiative on India's digital transformation. The upgraded network infrastructure is being positioned as a foundational investment to support emerging technologies and next-generation services, including the nationwide rollout of 5G. Vodafone Idea, a joint venture between the Aditya Birla Group and Vodafone Group, possesses extensive spectrum holdings across India, including significant allocations in the 5G band. Meanwhile, Cisco brings decades of global experience in networking technology and infrastructure to this collaborative venture. The phased rollout of the upgraded network will take place over the coming months. It is aligned with India's growing dependence on digital connectivity and the government's push toward building a digitally empowered society. As the telecom sector continues to evolve rapidly, such partnerships are expected to play a pivotal role in shaping the country's digital future.

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Vedanta Integrates AI and Smart Technology to Improve Workplace Safety

Vedanta Aluminium has introduced a revolutionary AI-based drone system at its Jamkhani coal mine in Odisha, a significant leap in industrial safety and operational efficiency. The drone, under Vedanta's Spark initiative, aims to improve safety in blasting operations by providing real-time aerial monitoring of a 500-meter area. The system can automatically sense the movement of humans, animals, and cars, so that authorities can track operations from distance and receive immediate notification via live streaming. One of the most impressive aspects of the system is its capacity to enable voice communication among the blasting officer, the remote pilot of the drone, and the officials in charge of the operation. This means there is a direct line of

communication, which prevents delays and ensures a prompt and co-ordinated response in case of a safety risk, enabling quick corrective measures to forestall possible hazards. This insertion of AI technology in Vedanta's mining activities reflects the commitment of the company to safety and operational excellence. The application of drones and AI serves to improve monitoring, minimizing the risks involved with manual surveillance methods. The inclusion of cutting-edge technology enables more accurate observation, which could result in fewer safety issues and more effective mining processes. Jamkhani coal mine, which is the fuel source for Vedanta's Jharsuguda plant, is a valuable asset for the company. Being its first greenfield coal mine in Odisha, it has now achieved full production capacity. This advanced safety technology will be essential in sustaining the high safety levels of the mine while guaranteeing sustained operational success. With this technology-driven drone system, Vedanta Aluminium is making a bold move towards harnessing technology to make industrial processes safer and more efficient, establishing a new benchmark for safety procedures in the mining sector.

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IEPFA Signs MoU with Kotak Mahindra Bank to Strengthen Investor Education Through Digital Outreach

In a significant step towards promoting financial literacy and safeguarding investor interests, the Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority (IEPFA), operating under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India, has formalised a strategic partnership with Kotak Mahindra Bank Limited (KMBL). A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the two institutions with the objective of expanding the reach of investor education initiatives across the nation through digital means. Under this partnership, IEPFA's curated content related to investor awareness will be disseminated through Kotak Mahindra Bank's expansive digital and physical platforms. These include ATMs, self-service kiosks, websites, mobile applications, and various social media channels. Materials such as digital banners, educational videos, and short films produced by IEPFA will be displayed, aiming to educate the public on responsible investment practices, the prevention of financial fraud, and the protection of investor rights. This initiative is scheduled for rollout during the financial year 2025-2026 and notably does not entail any financial burden on IEPFA. By utilising Kotak Mahindra Bank's wide-reaching network of over 2,000 branches and more than 3,000 ATMs across India, the collaboration is expected to deliver impactful investor education to a broad and diverse demographic. The MoU was formally exchanged by Smt. Samiksha Lamba, Deputy General Manager at IEPFA, and Mr. Vishal Agarwal, Senior Vice President and Head at Kotak Mahindra Bank, in the presence of Smt. Anita Shah Akella, CEO of IEPFA and Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. Speaking on the occasion, officials emphasized that the partnership not only enhances the outreach capabilities of IEPFA but also reinforces public trust in the financial system by equipping investors with essential

knowledge.

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Uttar Pradesh to Launch AI Upskilling Drive to Train 1.5 Lakh People Monthly

In a strategic push to position Uttar Pradesh as a national leader in artificial intelligence (AI), the state government is rolling out an expansive AI upskilling initiative aimed at building a future-ready workforce. This initiative—among the flagship projects of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath—will be a collaborative mission involving six key government departments to foster sector-specific AI capabilities across the state. Officials said that the initiative, designed by the Department of IT and Electronics, will be executed through coordinated efforts by the Departments of Education, Health, Agriculture, Rural Development, Revenue, and Secretariat Administration. Each department will run customised AI training programmes aligned with its operational needs, embedding AI into the core of public service delivery, governance, and administrative functions. The multi-departmental initiative is expected to generate a large pool of AI-skilled professionals and create a standardised framework for AI adoption across various sectors. A key highlight of the plan is the establishment of state and district-level committees to ensure real-time monitoring and timely execution. These committees are being constituted and will be responsible for tracking monthly progress, reviewing departmental performance, and ranking districts to promote accountability and effective implementation. As per the action plan drafted by the Department of IT and Electronics, targeted AI training modules will be tailored for each participating department.

The Education Department will launch AI-based courses across schools, colleges, and universities, enhancing the skills of faculty, staff, and students. The Health Department will upskill doctors, medical staff, and allied professionals in AI-powered healthcare solutions. In agriculture, training will focus on staff, NGOs, progressive farmers, and rural women in agri-tech and AI-driven rural MSME practices. The Rural Development Department will engage rural women, self-help groups, and NGOs in AI training programmes. The Revenue and Secretariat Administration departments will focus primarily on internal staff training to enhance governance and service delivery. The programme sets an ambitious target: to train 1.5 lakh individuals each month in AI technologies. Over the next 4 to 6 months, the initiative aims to equip at least 1.5 lakh individuals with essential AI skills across multiple domains. To ensure streamlined execution and inter-departmental coordination, the Centre for e-Governance (CeG) under the Department of IT and Electronics will serve as the nodal agency, responsible for submitting monthly performance reports at both state and district levels. A state-level steering committee led by the Chief Secretary will oversee the programme, while district-level implementation will be monitored by committees headed by the District Magistrate and Chief Development Officer. These

institutional mechanisms are designed to ensure effective implementation, real-time tracking, and transparent evaluation of the initiative across Uttar Pradesh.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 05/05/2025

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India Champions Cultural Justice and Ethical AI at BRICS Summit

India urged BRICS to adopt ethical AI that respects cultural diversity and creators' rights. Called for stronger global laws to combat illicit trafficking of cultural property, especially online. Advocated cultural cooperation rooted in shared values, heritage restitution, and indigenous knowledge for climate resilience. India has called on BRICS nations to not only lead geopolitically but also civilisationally, by fostering a global cultural ecosystem rooted in shared values, ethical innovation, and heritage preservation. Addressing the 10th BRICS Culture Ministers' Meeting in Brazil, Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat emphasized the importance of strengthening legal frameworks to combat illicit trafficking of cultural property and advocated for the integration of ethical artificial intelligence (AI) that upholds cultural diversity and fairness. Hosted at the iconic Itamaraty Palace in Brasilia, the ministerial-level dialogue brought together cultural leaders from Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The meeting culminated in the adoption of a Joint Declaration outlining four strategic cultural priorities: "Culture, Creative Economy, and Artificial Intelligence (AI); Culture, Climate Change, and the Post-2030 Development Agenda; Return and Safeguarding of Cultural Property; and BRICS Cultural Festivals and Alliances". In a statement issued late Monday night, the Indian Ministry of Culture said the declaration reflects the collective vision of BRICS for inclusive, rights-based, and innovation-driven cultural development.

"It recognises culture and creative industries as key drivers of sustainable growth, calls for the ethical use of AI, and stresses the need to protect traditional knowledge systems," the statement read. Minister Shekhawat, in his remarks, reinforced India's commitment to cultural cooperation rooted in justice, innovation, and heritage. "From championing the creative economy as a driver of inclusive growth to advocating for ethical AI and stronger digital safeguards, India places culture at the heart of sustainable development", he posted on social media platform X, along with photos from the event. He further called upon BRICS to lead civilisationally by forging a cultural ecosystem that celebrates diversity, deepens humanity, and anchors development in shared values. "Vikas bhi, Virasat bhi development and heritage must walk together", Shekhawat asserted, adding that India is ready to walk this path with its BRICS partners. Highlighting India's achievements under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, Shekhawat noted that 642 heritage artifacts have been reclaimed since 2014. "These are not merely returns but acts of justice that restore memory, dignity, and multilateral trust", he said. The minister also raised concern over the illicit online trade of cultural property and welcomed Brazil's focus on restitution a cause he described as being close to the 'civilisational soul of the Global

South'. He emphasized the need for digital safeguards and international legal cooperation to ensure cultural assets are protected from online trafficking. Shekhawat also called for integrating indigenous knowledge systems into climate adaptation strategies, underlining the synergy between culture and climate resilience.

"Traditional wisdom is vital in our collective response to climate change", he said. According to the Culture Ministry, India advocated for multilateral and bilateral cooperation in various fields such as museums, heritage conservation, performing arts, literature, and traditional crafts. The meeting's theme Strengthening Global South Cooperation for More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance reflected a shared BRICS ambition to use cultural diplomacy as a means for global development. On the sidelines of the forum, Minister Shekhawat held bilateral discussions with his counterparts from Brazil, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates to explore partnerships in the creative economy, digital innovation, and cultural exchange. The Culture Ministry noted that this year's meeting placed a strong emphasis on enhancing institutional collaboration and developing joint cultural projects aimed at preserving the rich cultural diversity of BRICS nations. Earlier, a BRICS Culture Working Group meeting was convened from May 22-23, setting the stage for the ministerial dialogue. Brazil currently holds the BRICS presidency and played a central role in shaping the cultural agenda for this year's meeting. India's participation in the BRICS cultural forum reflects its broader foreign policy focus on multilateralism, cultural diplomacy, and inclusive growth. As the world navigates rapid technological changes, India's call for ethical AI and the protection of cultural heritage resonated strongly with the event's overarching goals.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com/> 05/27/2025

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Quantum 5G Unveiled by BSNL with Fixed Wireless Access in Hyderabad

Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), the state-owned telecommunications company, has officially rebranded its 5G services as Quantum 5G (Q-5G). Although the company has made notable progress in trials and pilot deployments, a nationwide commercial rollout remains pending. The name Quantum 5G was selected through a crowdsourcing initiative, as confirmed by BSNL on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter). In a post, the company stated, "Because of you, we now have a name that reflects the power, speed, and future of BSNL's 5G network. Together, we've not just launched a service – we've made history." The rebranding marks a significant milestone, although it has not yet translated into a full-fledged consumer launch. BSNL's Quantum 5G is positioned as a 100% indigenous telecommunications solution, developed under the government's Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative. The technology stack is being built in collaboration with a consortium led by Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), with contributions from Tejas

Networks, Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT), and Indian Telephone Industries (ITI). Notably, no foreign vendors are involved in the project. The telecom operator has been allotted spectrum in the 700 MHz and 3.3 GHz bands, enabling robust 5G performance. The company plans to leverage its existing and upcoming 4G infrastructure, which is already equipped for 5G deployment. With over 50,000 of the proposed 100,000 towers already in place, BSNL is poised for a rapid scale-up once the service is fully operational.

In a significant step forward, BSNL has soft-launched its Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) services under the Quantum 5G branding. This SIM-less, high-speed internet service is currently being piloted for enterprise users in select cities, including Hyderabad. Speaking at the launch event at Ameerpet Exchange in Hyderabad, BSNL Chairman and Managing Director A. Robert J. Ravi said, “Hyderabad’s tech-savvy ecosystem makes it the perfect launchpad for our next-generation access portfolio.” The FWA solution offers gigabit-class speeds and is suited for ultra-high-definition streaming, cloud-based gaming, and remote work environments. It is designed for quick and easy self-installation without the need for trenching or fibre-optic infrastructure, reaching 85% of households in Hyderabad through BSNL’s existing tower grid. Pilot deployments of the Quantum 5G FWA service are expected to expand to Bengaluru, Visakhapatnam, Pondicherry, Pune, Chandigarh, and Gwalior by September 2025. Initial tariff plans are priced at ₹999 and ₹1,499 per month for 100 Mbps and 300 Mbps speeds, respectively. Alongside the FWA rollout, BSNL also unveiled its Micro Data Centre solution and an International Gateway in Hyderabad. These developments aim to strengthen BSNL’s enterprise offerings and international connectivity. Mr. Ravi further noted that BSNL is engaged in exploratory work on 6G technologies, where mobile phones could function as active antennas. While the full consumer rollout of BSNL’s Quantum 5G remains awaited, these initiatives signal a strong push toward indigenous, next-generation telecom solutions.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 06/19/2025

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: High-speed Internet, Digital Infrastructure Boosting

Azerbaijan has made significant progress in the development of information and communication technologies in recent years, said Deputy Minister of Digital Development and Transport Sameddin Asadov at the Space Technology Conference (STC2025) in Baku, Trend reports. Asadov announced the successful completion of the "Online Azerbaijan" project, implemented through a public-private partnership model. "The entire country is now covered with stable broadband internet. Over the past few years, the number of households with access to fixed high-speed broadband internet has increased manyfold. This development has also been

reflected in international rankings on infrastructure progress. Azerbaijan's cybersecurity index has shown notable improvement in the Global Cybersecurity Index published by the International Telecommunication Union [ITU]. Our country scored 94 points out of a possible 100, positioning us among the top-ranked nations globally. We place special focus on cultivating talent across the technology spectrum and have achieved substantial results in building professional capacity in the ICT sector. Over the past few years, 10,000 ICT specialists have graduated under the National Scholarship Program, ensuring a workforce that meets the needs of the labor market. Today, these professionals play a key role in the advancement of ICT in our country. From space technologies to digital infrastructure, from cybersecurity to artificial intelligence—these interconnected domains are shaping Azerbaijan's technological ecosystem and its contribution to global innovation," Asadov said.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/26/2025

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Azerbaijan's Internet Speed Hikes by 7 Times in Five Years

Azerbaijan has witnessed a dramatic leap in internet performance over the past five years. While the country's average internet speed stood at just 10 Mbps in 2020, it reached 73 Mbps by early 2025—an impressive 7.3-fold increase, Azernews reports. In addition to faster speeds, nearly the entire country is now covered by fiber-optic internet. Back in 2020, fiber-optic networks covered only 9% of the country; by the end of 2024, coverage had risen to nearly 100%. This expansion has played a crucial role in narrowing the digital divide, particularly in rural areas. Much of this progress stems from the "Online Azerbaijan" initiative, launched in 2021. Over a four-year span, the project successfully extended high-speed internet access to virtually all homes and businesses across the nation, significantly improving network performance. The initiative was implemented by the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport as part of the "Strategic Roadmap for the Development of Telecommunications and Information Technologies." Its goal is to deliver average internet speeds of at least 50 Mbps to 95% of the population—including remote regions—while maintaining affordable pricing. Beyond connectivity, the project is seen as a key driver for the country's digital economy, aiming to attract foreign investment and promote technological innovation across all sectors.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 05/14/2025

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Average Fixed Broadband Internet Speed in Azerbaijan Doubles

The average speed of fixed broadband internet in Azerbaijan has doubled over the past year, Trend reports. This was said during a meeting between Minister Rashad Nabiyeu and Ookla President and CEO Stephen Bay, who was visiting Baku, Trend reports with reference to the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport. The meeting convened to deliberate on the synergies in the ICT domain and the

operationalization of collaborative initiatives. Stephen Bay observed that, within the preceding quadrennium, the penetration of broadband Internet in Azerbaijan has escalated by a factor of four, representing a noteworthy metric. Ookla's executive team underscored that the assessment of internet service quality in Azerbaijan is conducted by operators and providers utilizing the Speedtest platform. Based on the empirical data, the mean velocity of fixed broadband connectivity has experienced a twofold increase over the preceding annum.

From <https://www.trend.az/> 06/24/2025

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KYRGYZSTAN: Bishkek Sparks Tech Revolution with Launch of New IT Hub

A new IT hub, "Technopark," has officially opened in Kyrgyzstan's Bishkek, Trend reports citing the country's presidential administration. At the opening ceremony, Kyrgyz President Sadyr Zhaparov emphasized the government's commitment to creating conditions for the establishment of similar centers and enterprises across the country. He also highlighted the recent law on voluntary asset legalization, which has spurred entrepreneurs to invest more actively in the nation's economy. The IT hub, with a total area of 14,000 square meters, is designed to accommodate up to 1,500 jobs. The project has attracted significant investment, totaling 2 billion soms (over \$22 million). President Zhaparov further affirmed his support for initiatives from the IT community, reminding attendees of recent changes to the law on the High-Tech Park that grant indefinite tax benefits to its residents.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/10/2025

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Kyrgyzstan to Enable Tax Payments Via QR Codes

Kyrgyzstan will enable tax payments via QR codes and payment codes starting July 1, 2025, Trend reports via the State Tax Service under the Ministry of Finance. This initiative was discussed during a working meeting with representatives of commercial banks, attended by the Deputy Chairman of the State Tax Service, Mirlan Rakhmanov. In addition to taxes, non-tax revenues administered by tax authorities and insurance contributions paid through bank cash desks will also be processed exclusively using payment codes or QR codes. The introduction of tax payments via QR and payment codes is expected to ensure that tax amounts paid by taxpayers are credited to the budget online in real time, eliminate errors caused by manual entry of payment details at bank cash desks, and provide faster, more efficient service—reducing long queues and saving taxpayers' time. According to the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan, 5.8 million payments totaling 2.6 billion soms (\$29.7 million) were made for government services via QR codes during the first quarter of 2025. This is 284 times more payments and 45.5 times more money compared to the same period in 2024.

TAJIKISTAN: Rolling Out Its Inaugural National Internet Exchange Point

Tajikistan has launched its first national Internet Exchange Point (IXP), named TJ-IX (Tajikistan Internet Exchange), located at the facilities of Tojiktelecom, the country's telecommunications operator, with the support of the Communications Service, Trend reports via the service. TJ-IX serves as a technological platform that enables direct traffic exchange among internet service providers and other organizations. The initiative aims to improve internet speed and service quality, reduce data transfer latency, minimize dependence on international routing, and strengthen the country's digital autonomy. Key objectives of the exchange include lower latency, reduced international traffic costs, enhanced cybersecurity, and the creation of a unified digital ecosystem for provider collaboration. Participants benefit from direct traffic peering, decreased load on external channels, improved connectivity quality, simplified connection procedures, and full IPv4/IPv6 support. The network showcases a throughput capability reaching 500 Gbps, coupled with a SLA commitment of 99.99 percent uptime, underpinned by robust surveillance and cybersecurity frameworks. Ingress to the Internet Exchange Point (IXP) is extended to Internet Service Providers (ISPs), governmental entities, commercial enterprises, academic institutions, data aggregation facilities, and content distribution networks (CDNs). Strategic initiatives encompass the proliferation of access nodes nationwide, synergizing with global platforms, and interlinking scholarly networks.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 05/23/2025

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Clean Energy Regulator Puts APIs at Centre of Core Tech Rebuild

The Clean Energy Regulator (CER) is undertaking a multi-year transformation of its core technology and data repositories, following an API-first strategy to modernise its operations. The government regulator is progressively re-building all its core platforms and will deliver a new guarantee of origin scheme and an emissions and energy reporting system in the next stage of the program. CER, which administers laws related to carbon emissions, renewable energy, and energy efficiency, is now looking for a permanent general manager transformation and chief data officer to lead the program. The role, which is held on an interim basis by Leigh McFarlane [pdf], will work alongside CER CIO Simon Marsden and report to scheme support division executive general manager Mark Williamson. CER brought together the management of its transformation program and data functions into one role in 2023,

which appears to have been held by McFarlane in an acting position since then. According to CER, the transformation program has already led to the regulator migrating off old registries which hold various carbon and renewable energy certificates. The next stage, a spokesperson told iTnews, will see CER “progressively bringing new and existing units and certificates into the new registry”. “During this multi-year [program] it is critical that we can prioritise business needs and deliverables, manage scope and ensure we harvest common synergies/functionality and manage all critical interdependencies – and deliver efficiently in our agile build,” the spokesperson added.

From <https://www.itnews.com.au> 04/03/2025

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Coalition Will Match Labor’s \$200 Million Expansion of Telehealth Services

The Coalition has pledged to match Labor's promise to launch a 24-hour '1800MEDICARE' service, allowing patients to access free after-hours general practice telehealth consultations. However, it has also criticised it as a "rebadging" of existing services and said Prime Minister Anthony Albanese is "playing political games". Labor has pledged \$204.5 million over four years to revamp the existing Healthdirect service, operated in conjunction with the states and territories. Labor's promised telehealth overhaul, which it says would be in place by 1 January 2026, would ensure patients requiring urgent care between 6pm and 8am on weeknights or during weekends had access to a bulk-billed consultation with an after-hours GP via phone or video. Registered nurses would staff the line 24 hours a day on weekdays and weekends to provide immediate advice and refer patients to local GPs, hospitals or Medicare Urgent Care Clinics.

The '1800Medicare' GP would have capacity to advise treatment of short-term illness injury or illness, and provide emergency prescriptions, with every consultation recorded under the MyHealth Record scheme. Healthdirect currently operates a 24-hour advice line, but does not offer integrated 24/7 telehealth GP consultations across all jurisdictions. "At this election, Australia faces a clear choice: a stronger Medicare with more bulk billing and more free urgent care under Labor, or more cuts to Medicare under [Opposition leader] Peter Dutton's Liberals," Albanese said. Dutton has said at various points throughout the campaign that Labor's claims that he would cut Medicare if elected are a baseless scare campaign. Coalition will match plan but says PM is 'misleading' voters On Sunday, the Coalition said it would match Labor's plan but added that it was "misleading for the prime minister to claim this is a new measure".

"This is a rebadging of the existing Healthdirect service," a media statement from Opposition health spokesperson Anne Ruston said. "The prime minister should stop playing political games and focus on Australians' health." Ruston also referenced the

Coalition's 2021 move to make telehealth an universal, permanent healthcare option, calling it the "single biggest reform to Medicare in recent history". Labor expects the rebranded program to reduce pressure on public hospitals across the country, particularly Queensland and Tasmania, where not all existing Healthdirect services are uniformly available. "Around 250,000 Australians will avoid an unnecessary trip to a hospital emergency department, because of the free urgent GP care provided by 1800MEDICARE," Health Minister Mark Butler said.

The policy capitalises on the booming popularity of telehealth consultations after the pandemic, and will also combat an increase in online-only GP services, which are not integrated with the Medicare system. According to the Medicare Benefits Schedule Review Advisory Committee, such services, which offer quick access to prescriptions and medical certificates, "do not support integrated, safe and high-quality care". On Saturday, Butler appeared in Launceston with Albanese, where the government in February unveiled an \$8.5 billion funding injection to lift Medicare bulk billing rates and increase healthcare staff. At the time, the Coalition was quick to match the promise "dollar for dollar". RACGP welcomes proposal The Royal Australian College of GPs (RACGP) has welcomed the proposed telehealth expansion, saying it would be "a positive step forward".

The president of the RACGP, Dr Michael Wright, said: "After-hours care is a key part of what GPs do in communities nation-wide every day, and this announcement recognises that." He also urged the government to work with GPs in implementing the plan. "We look forward to understanding the detail of this program, and working with the government to make sure that general practice is consulted every step of the way. It is essential that this service integrates with existing general practice care." Dutton set to embark on cross-country push Meanwhile, the Opposition leader has begun the final week of campaigning in Melbourne, flagging an intention to showcase Coalition momentum by visiting 28 key seats — around four a day — before polls close on Saturday.

Needing to win 21 seats to form a majority government, Dutton is embarking on a cross-country trip seeking to tap into lingering cost-of-living anger. In the coming days, Dutton is expected to campaign in a number of seats held by teal independents for the first time since the writs were issued. Kooyong, Goldstein and Mackellar are among the seats the Opposition Leader is yet to visit, having made a brief appearance in teal-held Curtin in the campaign's second week. Gilmore, Aston and Gorton and Bennelong are among the Labor seats Dutton is looking to flip, with liberal figures dismissive of published polling suggesting their primary vote has experienced a steady decline over recent weeks. The prime minister was also urging Labor faithful not to be complacent, telling party volunteers in Bass to not "leave anything in the tank" in the run-up to 3 May.

From <https://www.sbs.com.au> 04/26/2025

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NEW ZEALAND: Data Centres Go Green with Solar Energy

The expansion of data centres, driven by the increasing demand for artificial intelligence (AI) and cloud computing, has led to a surge in power requirements. By 2029, the sector's power demand is anticipated to double, according to forecasts by JLL, which stresses the urgency for sustainable energy practices. In this context, solar power has emerged as a leading choice for powering these facilities, thanks to its proven technology, deployment capabilities, and cost-effectiveness. Solar energy offers several benefits that make it an attractive option for data centres. Despite its intermittency, which means it only generates electricity when sunlight is available, solar power is a proven technology with a relatively short deployment time—typically around 18 months. Unlike nuclear reactors, which are still in the experimental phase for commercial use, and new natural gas plants, which require years to construct, solar farms can be completed quickly. Moreover, solar power is one of the most cost-effective forms of new generating capacity, often surpassing other sources except for onshore wind. In recent months, several major tech companies have signed significant solar deals. For instance, Meta has secured multiple agreements for solar farms in Texas and other locations. Microsoft and Amazon have also made substantial investments in solar energy, aligning with their commitments to power operations using zero-carbon energy. Beyond the U.S., data centre operators in regions like India and South America are also embracing solar power. In India, CtrlS has developed a 125-megawatt solar facility, while Telecom Argentina has agreed to purchase electricity from a 130-megawatt solar farm in South America. With AI continuing to drive data centre growth, solar power is expected to play a crucial role in meeting the sector's energy demands. Its integration with advanced cooling systems and energy storage technologies will further enhance its appeal. Moreover, emerging trends such as microgrids and modular designs could transform how data centres manage power, ensuring a sustainable and efficient future for the industry. Solar power is not only a viable solution for data centres but a necessary one, given the sector's quick expansion and the imperative for sustainability.

From <https://b2bnews.co.nz> 04/02/2025

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Top Digital Marketplaces for B2B Expansion

B2B leaders today are juggling the challenges of scaling their businesses internationally, maintaining competitive pricing, and delivering top-tier customer experiences—all while managing digital product sales like software and eBooks. Achieving success requires more than just a great product—it requires the right platform. Digital marketplaces have become the go-to solution, providing everything from automated processes to global reach. You don't need a custom platform when you have these options at your fingertips. Whether you're based in New Zealand or elsewhere, these marketplaces help businesses like yours expand quickly and

efficiently. Here are top-tier marketplaces that offer invaluable tools and insights for success.

Gumroad Gumroad has built a reputation for making digital sales almost frictionless. It's especially useful for SMEs, SaaS startups, and consultants who want to avoid the overhead of setting up a custom e-commerce site. With built-in features like pre-orders, recurring subscriptions, and lightweight analytics, it's a one-stop shop for digital delivery. Gumroad is popular with Kiwi creators, coaches, and small B2B vendors. It would be best to take advantage of Gumroad's subscription and licensing options to create bundled offerings. For example, package digital tools with access to premium support or updates—recurring value boosts retention.

Amazon Amazon isn't just for physical goods. Its digital marketplace for software, eBooks, and multimedia gives B2B sellers enterprise-level exposure. Features like business pricing tiers and bulk digital licensing make it a strong contender for those targeting corporate or institutional clients. Your marketing teams should maximise your discoverability by optimising metadata and tags. Think like your B2B buyer—what keywords or search phrases would they use? Tailor listings around those. **eBay** While traditionally thought of as a consumer platform, eBay is also a powerful tool for B2B resellers, digital licensing, and bulk software deals. Its global user base and strong auction features provide flexibility not found on most platforms. Use eBay's auction format strategically—test pricing elasticity on new product bundles or use it to quickly offload inventory that's nearing obsolescence.

Envato Envato is a favourite among creative professionals for a reason. With marketplaces like ThemeForest and CodeCanyon, it caters to those selling website themes, plugins, design assets, and templates. Envato is both a storefront and a network for B2B marketing agencies, web developers, or SaaS businesses with frontend assets. Your digital team should not just list products, it's also important for your brand to participate. Join Envato's affiliate and community programmes to increase visibility, grow your network, and establish credibility within your niche. **Sellfy** Sellfy strikes a balance between sales functionality and marketing automation. Designed for digital creators and coaches, it supports a range of products including digital downloads, white-label software, and subscriptions. B2B vendors who offer online courses, licences, or branded assets will find its built-in tools especially helpful.

Your marketing team must build out email sequences using Sellfy's built-in marketing tools. Onboarding series, upsell campaigns, and loyalty emails can turn one-time buyers into long-term clients. **Payhip** Payhip offers an intuitive, no-code solution for consultants and B2B sellers of digital guides. It handles everything from secure delivery and VAT to affiliate programme tracking, which makes it ideal for partnership-driven sales growth. Launching an affiliate programme through Payhip is a great way to boost brand awareness because it allows your customers, business

partners, or influencers to earn rewards by referring new clients to your products. This means they help spread the word about your offerings, and you reward them for bringing in new business.

SendOwl SendOwl is a flexible and reliable platform built with subscriptions, gated content, and software licensing in mind. It's perfect for B2B leaders who want to offer seamless experiences without losing control of the branding or process. Customise the checkout process to match the buyer's journey. If your product serves different business segments, tailor flows based on use case—consulting buyers versus IT managers, for example. Conclusion Digital marketplaces are indispensable tools for New Zealand's B2B leaders looking to expand globally. Platforms like Gumroad, Envato, Amazon, and Payhip offer the scalability and reliability you need to reach new clients, no matter where they're based. The secret is choosing the right marketplace for your product and business model, then supercharging your efforts with smart strategies like metadata, affiliate programmes, and email campaigns. With this approach, your digital product won't just be sold—it will thrive on a global scale.

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AI-Generated Fake Job Postings Flood the Market, Confusing Job Seekers

Artificial intelligence is being used to create highly realistic but deceptive job postings, complicating the job search process for many individuals. Microsoft's Australia and New Zealand chief security officer Mark Anderson said besides fake job ads, AI also enables sophisticated scams such as deepfake video interviews, which can mislead job seekers and increase the risk of fraud. Anderson explained that scammers create fake profiles using stolen credentials, fabricate job postings with automatically generated descriptions, and launch AI-powered email campaigns—all with the goal of tricking job seekers into revealing their personal information. "For Kiwi job seekers, the risks are no less significant than anywhere else in the world."

Anderson encourages people to never share personal or financial details with employers who have not been verified. He also said it is important to assess an employer's legitimacy by checking their official website or using reputable platforms like LinkedIn or Glassdoor. "Watch for red flags, such as upfront payment requests or communication via free email domains, which are often signs of fraud." Anderson also advised job seekers to be wary if a remote video interview feels unnatural, noting that unusual facial expressions or noticeable delays in speech could be signs that AI is being used to mislead them. eCommerce Scams Using AI Scammers can now use AI to set up fraudulent e-commerce websites in just minutes. One victim of this trend is Kathmandu, a well-known New Zealand clothing and outdoor brand, which was recently impersonated by a fake shop on Facebook.

Anderson advised Kiwis to resist impulse purchases by verifying deals carefully and double-checking domain names and customer reviews before clicking on social media advertisements. He also recommended using secure payment methods that offer fraud protection rather than opting for direct bank transfers or cryptocurrency payments. Combatting Scams To address scams, Microsoft stated that it has implemented new in-product safety controls called the “Fraud-resistant by Design” policy. Introduced in January, the policy requires Microsoft product teams to conduct fraud prevention assessments and integrate fraud controls during the product design phase. Microsoft reported that in the year leading up to April, it prevented approximately US\$4 billion (NZ\$6.74 billion) in global fraud attempts. The company also blocked an average of 1.6 million bot-driven sign-up attempts every hour during this period. “The battle against scams will continue, and we remain committed to empowering consumers to protect themselves and their data,” Anderson added.

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NZ Pine Exporter Invests \$481K in AI Tech to Boost Workplace Safety

Claymark, New Zealand’s largest manufacturer and exporter of premium pine products, is making a move to improve workplace safety by investing \$481,000 in artificial intelligence-driven hazard detection and related safety initiatives. This investment follows a serious workplace incident in February 2023, when a worker at Claymark’s Rotorua factory suffered the amputation of two fingers due to an unguarded machine and ineffective maintenance and supervision system. Under an enforceable undertaking (EU) with WorkSafe New Zealand, Claymark has committed to a series of comprehensive health and safety improvements, including: Installation of CCTV systems equipped with AI technology to provide real-time risk detection and alerts for workers’ health and safety.

Up to 15 trials of the AI hazard detection technology will be offered to other businesses in the wood manufacturing sector, aiming to spread the benefits industry-wide. Introduction of microlearning modules and interactive displays in break rooms to upskill workers on health and safety practices. Direct support and reparation for the affected worker. “We are looking forward to seeing Claymark pioneer its AI innovation to benefit the timber processing sector more broadly. Agreements like this are all about enacting positive improvements from an adverse event,” WorkSafe Head of Regulatory Services, Tracey Conlon, said. “The initiatives align with WorkSafe’s priority plan for manufacturing, which is one of the most high-risk sectors for workers in Aotearoa. Unsafe machinery is a persistent problem in the sector, which businesses cannot overlook.”

Claymark’s executive director Paul Pedersen emphasised that the wellbeing, safety, and health of their staff are the company’s top priority. “An incident involving one of

our team members has had a significant impact – both physically and emotionally. We acknowledge the effect this has had on the individual, their whānau, and our wider community, and we are committed to learning from this experience to ensure safer outcomes for everyone.” Pedersen described Claymark’s EU with WorkSafe “as a valuable opportunity to drive meaningful, people-focused change – both within Claymark and across the wood manufacturing sector.” Meanwhile, the injured worker expressed his appreciation for Claymark’s safety efforts: “I’m deeply appreciative of Claymark’s commitment to workplace safety improvements outlined in this agreement, many of which I’ve witnessed firsthand.” “While my path forward looks different than I once imagined, I’m determined to adapt and keep moving ahead, one day at a time,” the worker said.

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Bots Now Dominate E-Commerce Traffic, Report Shows

Radware’s 2025 E-commerce Bot Threat Report revealed that automated bots accounted for 57% of all traffic to e-commerce websites during the 2024 holiday season. This marks the first time that bots – computer programs designed to imitate human behaviour online – have surpassed actual shoppers on e-commerce platforms. Although not all bots are harmful, such as search engine crawlers, the report cautions that many bots are created to perform malicious actions. These activities include scraping prices, hoarding inventory, committing fraud, and launching attacks on online retailers. Many malicious bots now mimic real shoppers by employing tactics like switching IP addresses, rotating identities, and solving CAPTCHAs to evade detection. “Today’s bots are powered by artificial intelligence and are much harder to detect,” Radware Vice President of Cyber Threat Intelligence Ron Meyran said. “Retailers who rely on outdated security measures could be leaving themselves wide open to attacks, not just at Christmas, but all year round.” The increasing prevalence of bots can impact various aspects, including product availability, website performance, and the prices consumers ultimately pay. Businesses are encouraged to find ways to block malicious bots without hindering genuine shoppers while also staying ahead of attackers who continually evolve their tactics.

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Fast Delivery Fuels Woolworth’s E-Commerce Growth

Fast-paced grocery delivery is experiencing growth, with Woolworths New Zealand’s leader identifying it as the fastest-expanding segment of the business. The Australian grocery retailer reported a 23.7% increase in third-quarter e-commerce sales for its New Zealand business last week, which contributed to a 4.8% rise in total sales for the three-month period, reaching \$2.19 billion. “[Fast delivery] would be the

fastest-growing part of the e-commerce business, but it comes off a much fuller base,” Woolworths NZ’s interim managing director, Pieter de Wet, told BusinessDesk. E-commerce sales at the retailer consist of a range of services that differ by store and brand. Woolworths stores provide several click-and-collect options, including direct-to-boot pickup, eLockers, and Express Pick Up. Milkrun, a Woolworths subsidiary, enables customers to order over 10,000 grocery items for home delivery from selected Woolworths and Countdown stores across New Zealand. Customers outside Milkrun’s delivery areas can use other Woolworths delivery options, typically at a higher cost. Woolworths acquired Milkrun in 2023, launching the rapid delivery service in New Zealand soon after. Orders are picked and packed in-store, with delivery times averaging under an hour. “Direct to Boot is now available in 52 stores with Milkrun available in 77 stores,” De Wet said. “Nearly 30% of all delivery sales are now delivered within two hours, and about 80% are delivered within 24 hours. If you think back, even three years ago, very little would have been delivered within 24 hours.” De Wet said the company has surpassed its delivery targets and expects continued growth but does not foresee e-commerce sales overtaking in-store sales. Woolworths reported an improvement in its approval rating among customers to shareholders. The company operates 185 supermarkets in New Zealand, along with 66 FreshChoice and 12 SuperValue franchise stores.

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F-Bike Upgrades for New Zealand Cycle Trails

The Government is boosting economic growth in the regions by supporting Hawke’s Bay Trails and the Remutaka Cycle Trail to set up e-bike charging stations with more regions set to benefit from a second funding round, Tourism and Hospitality Minister Louise Upston says. “We launched the \$3 million Electrifying the Great Rides Fund last year to make our cycle trails more accessible and appealing, both to international tourists and kiwis looking to explore more of their backyard,” Louise Upston says. “They play an absolutely crucial role in attracting visitors to our regions, supporting our local businesses, jobs and communities. “We’re pleased to be supporting investment in our Great Rides and hope more trails will take up the opportunity with the second round of funding opening shortly.”

The first round of the Electrifying the Great Rides Fund approved \$478,750 of co-funding to install 10 e-bike charging stations on two Great Rides. Hawke’s Bay Trails will install e-bike charging stations at six locations outside adjacent business premises and i-SITEs, as will the Remutaka Cycle Trail at four popular business premises along that trail. “In the second round of funding, we’ve expanded the eligibility criteria to include not only the Great Rides but the Heartland and Connector Rides which are part of the wider Ngā Haerenga, New Zealand Cycle Trail network,” Louise Upston says. “By opening up the criteria, we’re able to make our rural and remote trails much more accessible to visitors wanting to see more of our beautiful

country.”

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment is also working with sector partners to refresh the broader New Zealand Cycle Trail programme. “Demand for nature-based tourism experiences is only increasing – which means our cycle trails are even more important as people seek out more environmentally friendly experiences,” Louise Upston says. “By investing in our cycle trails we are directly supporting our local tourism operators and driving economic growth in our regions.” The second round will open on 1 August 2025 for one month. Applicants will be able to find more information on the MBIE website from 30 June 2025. Opening up the fund to Heartland and Connector Rides means that territorial authorities and community groups supported by their local council will be eligible to apply.

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New Digital Platform to Help Women Detect Breast Cancer Earlier

Around 135,000 women across New Zealand who are eligible but not currently enrolled for breast cancer screening will benefit from the successful national rollout of a new digital platform, Health Minister Simeon Brown says. “The launch of Te Puna across the country is a major step forward for delivering faster and smarter screening services,” Mr Brown says. “Te Puna replaces an outdated legacy system with a modern, streamlined platform that makes it easier for women to enrol, book, and manage their breast screening appointments – helping more women get screened earlier.” The new system, which began rolling out in February, is now live nationwide. It introduces a more proactive approach to screening, with women now automatically identified when they become eligible and invited to book a mammogram – shifting from an opt-in to an opt-out model.

“This change will significantly boost participation and help close the gap for the 135,000 eligible women who aren’t currently getting screened. “Early detection through regular mammograms is critical. Women diagnosed through screening are about 34 per cent less likely to die from breast cancer. This new system will make it easier for more women to get the checks they need, when they need them.” Te Puna significantly enhances data tracking, accuracy, and reporting – helping providers identify and reach women who have never screened or don’t screen regularly. It also improves convenience for patients, allowing women to book or change appointments using a secure personalised link or QR code sent via text, email, or letter. “This Government is focused on lifting screening rates to save more lives and improve treatment outcomes. Te Puna will play a vital role in achieving that. “We’re also delivering on our commitment to extend breast screening to women aged 70 to 74, with rollout of the expansion beginning later this year. “Every woman deserves the chance for early detection and timely treatment. Te Puna is about putting the right tools in place to deliver better care, faster – and ultimately, to save lives,” Mr Brown

says.

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4、 Digital Transformation

Asia-Pacific

CreateAI CEO: AI Revolutionizing Digital Entertainment Industry

The revolution of artificial intelligence in digital entertainment content is a once in a life time opportunity, said Cheng Lu, president and CEO of Chinese artificial intelligence technology company CreateAI, adding that AI will reshape the industry landscape of video games and anime. "In Hollywood and Japan, top-tier studios are drowning from rising production costs, labor shortage and long development cycles," Lu said, highlighting that generative AI isn't here to replace artists—it's here to empower them. CreateAI has launched an AI video generation tool for anime, comics and gaming called Animon.ai, which has gained popularity in Japan. Lu said anime production is a 14-step marathon — scriptwriting, storyboarding, keyframes, coloring — all by hand. "With our technology, we can generate layouts, design characters, and generate key frame and in between frames with a click of a button. Directors gain time to experiment, innovate, and make the stories really come to life." For games, AI transforms all steps in the production process, while video models vastly accelerate environment and character design, Lu said. He is confident that the company can cut current game development costs by more than 50 percent within five years with its technology and tools. Lu stated that the company is developing the underlying AI technology and infrastructure, which includes its proprietary video generation large models Ruyi, as well as fine-tuning other industry leading models. "We will leverage our proprietary AI simulation systems for video game development. Building on top of the foundational technologies are customized software tools that assist human creators in the development of various anime and gaming content," he said. This year, the company will launch a series of AI generation tools and user generated content platform for anime fans and creators around the world. In addition, he mentioned that CreateAI has a two-pillar revenue model. The first is self-developed content leveraging major IPs to develop blockbuster digital entertainment content, while the second is operating AI tools and user generated content platform to allow fans to become professional creators, building a more vibrant community.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 05/26/2025

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Firms Urged to Up AI, Digital Investments

Chinese companies should scale up investments in fast-evolving artificial intelligence technology and push forward digital transformation as part of a broader push to accelerate the shift toward an innovation-led and quality-driven growth model, and navigate an increasingly complex global landscape, industry experts said. Coupled with geopolitical tensions and macroeconomic fluctuations, an increasing number of enterprises are reviewing their traditional growth models, and need to adopt more flexible strategies to cope with supply chain restructuring and changes in export control measures, said a report by global consultancy Accenture. The report said in recent years that Chinese enterprises have gradually moved away from a reliance on scale-driven growth toward high-quality growth, mainly driven by increased investment in technological innovation, accelerated global expansion and continued capital input in digitalization. Their breakthroughs in AI, robotics and biomedicine highlight China's growing innovation capability in critical technologies that underpin long-term competitiveness, it stated. The consultancy estimates that adopting a holistic approach to productivity, with generative AI acting as a multiplier, could boost productivity growth from 1.9 percent to 15.9 percent. Generative AI refers to computer algorithms trained with huge amounts of data capable of generating content such as images, text, audio and video in a human-like fashion. It is the key technology underpinning United States-based research company OpenAI's ChatGPT.

"Chinese companies must strengthen foundational R&D, pursue long-term innovation and embed new technologies into core business scenarios," said Samantha Zhu, chairperson of Accenture Greater China, adding that they should foster agile, cross-functional talent with upskilling and rotation mechanisms, and leverage generative AI to boost productivity. The country's spending on research and development has maintained rapid growth thanks to efforts to support technological innovation. The National Bureau of Statistics said China's R&D expenditure exceeded 3.6 trillion yuan (\$501.2 billion) in 2024, up 8.3 percent year-on-year, ranking second globally. Moreover, a rising number of Chinese companies are pursuing international growth, expanding into new markets, building global supply chains and strengthening localizing operations, reflecting a proactive approach to navigate global complexities and diversify revenue sources, the report stated. Zhu said that in the process of globalization, these companies must strengthen localized operation capabilities and build global brands, highlighting that digital technologies represented by generative AI can not only help enterprises enhance response capabilities in overseas markets, but also deepen customer insights and elevate operational efficiency on the global stage. The nation's AI sector will make great strides in the next 10 to 15 years, with its market size reaching 1.73 trillion yuan by 2035, accounting for 30.6 percent of the global total, said market research firm CCID Consulting.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Zhongguancun Modern Information Consumer Application Industry Technology Alliance — a telecom industry association — underscored the significance of developing digital technologies such as AI, which will inject fresh impetus into the country's economic growth and promote the digital transformation and upgrades of traditional industries. Noting that some Chinese enterprises are facing mounting difficulties in digital transformation, including budgetary shortfalls and inadequate skills training, Xiang said these companies should devise long-term plans and continuously pour money into this field. Chinese companies are becoming more active in investing in advanced digital technologies and bolstering technological innovation, while generative AI is increasingly perceived as a key driver to build resilient supply chains and help companies adapt more quickly to sudden changes and take data-driven and real-time actions, said Pan Helin, a member of the Expert Committee for Information and Communication Economy, which is part of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 06/17/2025

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Nation Leading in 5G Connections, Application

Chinese companies are accelerating the adoption of 5G-advanced — which plays a key role in bridging from 5G to 6G with new features — and artificial intelligence technologies to power cutting-edge applications, from humanoid robots to smart connected vehicles, as the nation solidifies its leadership in next-generation digital infrastructure. The move also comes as global 5G connections surpassed 2 billion by the end of 2024, with China accounting for over half at 1 billion — the world's first market to hit this milestone, said the GSMA, an industry group representing the world's largest mobile phone operators. By 2030, 5G is projected to comprise 57 percent of total mobile connections globally, with China's robust network laying the foundation for industrial digitization, the GSMA said. Yang Jie, chairman of China Mobile, the world's largest telecom carrier, highlighted the dawn of the "AI plus era", in which AI outperforms humans in tasks like image recognition and complex reasoning. "Silicon-based lifeforms, such as AI terminals, connected vehicles and robots, will soon outnumber humans," Yang said at the Mobile World Congress Shanghai conference, which opened on Wednesday. To harness this shift, Yang outlined a carbon-silicon fusion strategy, including accelerating AI's evolution to handle sophisticated tasks, building next-generation networks to bridge silicon and carbon-based systems, and driving collaborative innovation to redefine lifestyles, production and governance. "AI presents unprecedented opportunities. China Mobile aims to be a provider, aggregator and operator in this new era," he added.

According to the latest data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, China's 5G infrastructure has made significant progress. 5G stations now account for 33 percent of all mobile base stations in the country. Xu Zhijun, rotating chairman of Huawei, said the telecom market has entered a mature phase, yet change is

omnipresent. By identifying shifts and capturing growth-driven demand, the industry can fuel further expansion. Xu said more efforts can be made to boost the supply and consumption of high-definition videos through coordinated efforts across the entire ecosystem, and to bring 5G to every car for new growth in intelligent connected vehicles. According to a forecast by the China Industry Innovation Alliance for the Intelligent and Connected Vehicles, 5G-connected vehicles will account for 30 percent of all cars sold in China in 2025, with penetration expected to rise steadily to 95 percent between 2026 and 2030. Xu said autonomous vehicles must be capable of independent perception and decision-making during self-driving operations. While both the vehicle cabin and the car itself require network connectivity, their needs differ, as do their business models. Therefore, these systems should operate independently, each maintaining its own connection. "The industry must seize this growth opportunity in intelligent connected vehicles," Xu added.

Qiu Heng, chief marketing officer at AgiBot, a Shanghai-based AI and robotics startup, said the company's robots can serve as guides for telecom companies, supporting multi-round voice conversations in both Chinese and English with real-time listening and speaking capabilities. Powered by a specialized large language model, they can deliver accurate explanations and marketing dialogues, ensuring precise and efficient information delivery. Meanwhile, the robots excel in moving about in complex environments, with autonomous path planning, navigation and obstacle avoidance. They can accurately identify facility alerts such as alarm lights and obstacles such as temperature and humidity sensors, significantly improving operational efficiency and safety while reducing labor costs and risks, Qiu said. Currently, the company's robots have been deployed in large-scale interactive service scenarios, including telecom carriers' service halls, corporate showrooms, financial companies' exhibition spaces and automotive display booths, he added.

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2025 WIC Asia-Pacific Summit to Boost Digital Economy Globalization

2025 World Internet Conference (WIC) Asia-Pacific Summit is expected to herald a new chapter of boosting regional digital economy cooperation, said Sun Dong, secretary for innovation, technology and industry of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government, at a news conference held in Beijing on Monday. The summit will be held in Hong Kong on April 14-15, with a main forum and three sub-forums, featuring integration of artificial intelligence and digital technologies shaping the future – jointly building a community with a shared future in cyberspace. Ministerial officials and high-level representatives of industry institutions at home and abroad will have in-depth exchange meetings on promoting economic development with innovation and technology, and helping enterprises develop overseas markets during the summit. As a financial, trade and shipment center,

Hong Kong provides an ideal platform based on its geographical advantages and high-level open-up business environment for enterprises to expand overseas markets. With the launch of innovation and technology development blueprint at the end of 2022, Hong Kong aims to build an international center for innovation and technology. Hong Kong has focused on competitive industries including AI, data science and robotics to boost digital economy, added Sun. Despite the rapid development of the internet in the Asia-Pacific, there are still significant differences in the level of development. Therefore, building an exchange and cooperation platform for digital and intelligent transformation is in line with this summit, according to Ren Xianliang, secretary-general of the WIC.

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WIC Asia-Pacific Summit Spotlights Digital Intelligence Future

The Main Forum on the Digital Intelligence Future at the 2025 World Internet Conference (WIC) Asia-Pacific Summit was held in Hong Kong on April 14. Francis Gurry, vice-chair of the WIC; Paul Chan Mo-po, financial secretary of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR); and Sun Weimin, chief engineer of the Cyberspace Administration of China, attended the forum and delivered speeches. Distinguished guests included Zhao Houlin, former secretary-general of the International Telecommunication Union; Sun Dong, secretary for innovation, technology and industry, the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China; Nahima Janett Díaz Flores, general director of the Nicaraguan Institute of Telecommunications and Postal Services; Hun Kim, acting vice-president, investment solutions and director general, AIIB; Veni Markovski, vice-president of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers; Zhang Donggang, chair of the University Council, Renmin University of China; Wu Jianping, academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and professor at Tsinghua University; Hans Dekkers, general manager of IBM Asia Pacific; Chen Feng, CEO of Arm China; and Zhu Hao, co-founder and CTO of Manycore Tech.

Speakers shared insights on key topics such as building a solid foundation for a smart and digital future, the integration of AI across industries, and security and governance in the digital era. Two major reports were released during the forum: *Comparative Study on Global Cross-Border Data Flow Policies*, compiled by the WIC's Data Working Group, and *Governing AI for Good and for All — Empowering Global Sustainable Development*, an important outcome of the AI Security and Governance Program under the WIC Specialized Committee on AI. The forum was hosted by the WIC and organized by the HKSAR Government, co-organized by the HKSAR Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau, and supported by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council and Phoenix Satellite Television. The event brought together nearly 1,000 participants from government

departments, academic institutions, internet enterprises, and media organizations from around the world.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 04/14/2025

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Sound Design, Robust Monitoring, and Digital Innovation Can Spur Better Development Effectiveness: ADB's Independent Evaluation Report

Sound project design, robust monitoring systems, and strategic digital innovation are crucial to enhance the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) development effectiveness, according to the [2025 Annual Evaluation Review \(AER\)](#). Published by the Independent Evaluation Department (IED), the AER provides an independent, high-level summary of ADB's operational performance and development effectiveness. From 2016 to 2024, challenges with infrastructure and financial sector projects, especially older ones, hindered improvements in ADB's public and private sector operations, the report noted. The report underscores the need to maximize midstream learning and corrections to improve project effectiveness. "Infrastructure performance challenges, particularly in complex financing structures, have led to a slight decline in results over the past year. This is largely due to projects dealing with more complex problems, emphasizing the need for better monitoring and evaluation practices," said IED Director General Emmanuel Jimenez. Technical assistance projects saw a rebound in performance as they optimized the benefits of digital innovation.

"ADB remains focused on leveraging its strengths for greater development effectiveness. The use of digital technology, for instance, has led to improvements in the delivery and reach of capacity building interventions," said evaluation team leader Hyun Son. Each year, the AER focuses on a special theme. This year's report examines ADB's support for regional cooperation and integration (RCI). "While ADB has made notable progress in developing regional infrastructure connectivity, significant obstacles remain in enhancing regional competitiveness and delivering public goods. Cross-country collaboration is complex, requiring intensive knowledge work, policy dialogue, consensus-building, and innovative project design," said evaluation co-leader Houqi Hong. The report adds that leveraging sectoral and thematic expertise, addressing strategy and management gaps, and refining RCI project classification and results monitoring will help ADB advance its RCI agenda.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 04/16/2025

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Digitalization Can Reduce Persistent Inequality in Asia and the Pacific

Digitalization can be a powerful tool to help reduce persistent economic inequality in Asia and the Pacific—but to harness its potential, governments need to narrow “digital gaps,” including gaps in infrastructure, access, and skills, according to a new report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Although developing Asia and the Pacific has outpaced other regions in digital development in recent decades, the benefits haven’t been shared equally. For instance, across the region the percentage of residents using the internet is 13 percentage points higher in urban areas than in rural areas, according to [Asian Development Policy Report 2025: Harnessing Digital Transformation for Good](#), released today. Mobile internet download speeds are also 38% faster in urban areas than in rural areas. Previous studies have also found that many of Asia and the Pacific’s developing economies lag in terms of digital inclusion and have generally low digital skill levels. At the same time, despite rapid development and growth, economic inequality persists in the region. Developing Asia’s population-weighted average Gini coefficient—a measure of domestic inequality—was 6% higher in 2022 than in 1990. As of last year, 18.9% of the region’s population was classified as poor, defined as living on less than \$3.65 a day.

“Developing Asia and the Pacific’s rapid digital transformation puts the region in a position to reap significant benefits,” said ADB Chief Economist Albert Park. “Governments that promote inclusive, sustainable digitalization have an opportunity to not only boost overall productivity and innovation but also reduce economic inequality at the same time.” Digitalization can alleviate inequality by widening access to basic services such as personal finance and education, or by helping small business owners overcome barriers such as lack of access to financing or business networks. Digital transformation can also help accelerate the shift to low-carbon development and make communities in the region more resilient to extreme weather and disasters, for example by supporting modeling and analytics to improve disaster risk management and forecast climate patterns to identify solutions such as climate-resistant crops. The report recommends that governments in developing Asia and the Pacific adopt national digital strategies that integrate inclusion and sustainability objectives, and enact locally tailored policies that promote these objectives. Governments should also engage with the private sector, civil society organizations, and local and international communities. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting inclusive, resilient, and sustainable growth across Asia and the Pacific. Working with its members and partners to solve complex challenges together, ADB harnesses innovative financial tools and strategic partnerships to transform lives, build quality infrastructure, and safeguard our planet.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 05/06/2025

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East Asia

CHINA: 86 Pct in Global Survey Praise Digital Innovation

Eighty-six percent of respondents praised China's advancements in digital technology, according to a report released Wednesday by Renmin University of China (RUC) in Beijing. The 2025 Global Public Digital Technology Perception Report, conducted by the university's Global Opinion Research Center, surveyed 7,599 participants from 38 countries through an international online sample pool. The report covers five key areas, including improvements in daily life brought by digital technologies, expectations and concerns about artificial intelligence (AI), and growing recognition of China's digital tech in the Global South. Regional analysis shows the highest approval rates for Chinese digital technology -- Africa at 94.3 percent, South America at 93 percent, Southeast Asia at 91.1 percent, South Asia and Central Asia at 90.7 percent, and the Middle East at 88.1 percent. More than half the respondents consider AI and e-commerce as China's leading digital sectors, according to the report. E-commerce platforms like Temu and SHEIN have rapidly grown globally through competitive pricing and efficient supply chains. Meanwhile, Chinese AI firms are advancing quickly with open, fast-paced development strategies. In regions such as Africa, Chinese AI is increasingly viewed as a driver of smart infrastructure and digital governance.

"Chinese tech companies are widely seen as leaders in digital innovation. Earlier this year, DeepSeek's R1 model delivered strong performance with minimal computing resources. Tencent's Hunyuan and Alibaba's Qwen large language models also ranked among top performers in benchmarks. Meanwhile, Alipay and WeChat Pay continue expanding globally, providing users with convenient payment solutions," said Zhang Di, professor at the School of Journalism and Communication, RUC. The report also notes that 83.6 percent of the Global South respondents see Chinese digital technology as a positive force in their countries. Cooperation in technology, infrastructure, and talent development is strengthening, supporting both the internationalization of Chinese tech companies and digital growth in these countries. Worldwide, attitudes toward innovation vary significantly between developing and developed nations, with 74.2 percent from developing countries closely following global tech trends, compared to just 50.5 percent in developed countries. The survey indicates that 62.7 percent believe AI positively impacts work efficiency, while 64.9 percent see benefits for student learning. However, only 34.9 percent expressed optimism about AI's effects on employment opportunities.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 05/07/2025

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China Promotes Digital Transformation of Electronic Information Manufacturing

China has released an implementation plan for the digital transformation of the electronic information manufacturing industry, setting a goal for major enterprises to achieve a numerical control rate of over 85 percent in key production processes by 2027. Released by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology along with

other government organs, the plan underscores the electronic information manufacturing industry as a strategic, fundamental, and pioneering sector of the national economy. With a large overall scale, long industrial chains, and broad coverage, it plays a key role in integrating the real and digital economies, advancing new industrialization and fostering new quality productive forces, according to the plan. The plan further outlines that by 2027, new information infrastructure will be largely established to support the digital transformation and intelligent upgrading of the electronic information manufacturing industry. This infrastructure will see advanced computing and artificial intelligence deeply integrated into industry development. It envisions that by 2030, a relatively sound data infrastructure system for the electronic information manufacturing industry will be in place, and an industrial database will be largely completed. By then, a number of flagship smart products will be developed, and a digital ecosystem will take shape. The efficiency and quality of the digital transformation will see significant improvements, and new breakthroughs in moving up towards the top end of the global value chain are expected to be achieved by 2030. Efforts will be made to promote digital transformation across the entire industrial chain and speed up the trial and adoption of innovative products such as smart wearable devices and intelligent robots, according to the plan.

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China Launches Major Herb Component Database to Boost TCM Innovation

China has officially launched a major medical herb component database in central China's Hubei Province, which marked significant progress in technological innovation in the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) sector. Developed by the Hubei Shizhen Laboratory-led team, the pan-Shennongjia Herbs Multi-Omics Components Database (SHMC) is the largest of its kind in central China. The SHMC transitioned herb studies "from experience-driven practice to science-led innovation" by creating a precise "digital portrait" for central China's medicinal resources, said Wang Qi, director of Hubei Shizhen Laboratory, at the launch event on Sunday in Wuhan, provincial capital of Hubei. The project fills regional research gaps while "injecting new momentum into global TCM advancement," he added. Liu Yifei, head of the SHMC development team at Hubei Shizhen Laboratory, detailed the database's scale and capabilities. The SHMC, containing over 20 million entries, integrates information from ancient texts such as Shennong's Classic of Materia Medica and Compendium of Materia Medica, as well as current authoritative compendiums of traditional Chinese medicine, incorporating multi-omics data encompassing genomics, transcriptomics, metabolomics, and proteomics, said Liu. It systematically catalogs commonly used medicinal resources in central China, compiling a comprehensive collection of species' natural components. "This

establishes a foundation for developing new TCM drugs and health products," Liu said.

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China Intensifies Anti-drug Campaign with Digital Technology

In a dim karaoke room, lights flicker to a thumping beat. Drugs sit openly on the table, untouched. This isn't real -- it's virtual reality (VR), designed to trigger the cravings addicts fight against every day. At the Tiantanghe Drug Rehabilitation Center on the southern outskirts of Beijing, this high-tech form of therapy plunges recovering addicts into virtual recreations of the places they find most tempting -- KTV lounges and hotels. Across the country, many drug rehabilitation centers have, like Tiantanghe, introduced this innovative therapy as part of a broader initiative to enhance their rehabilitation efforts. "Some may think they've overcome their addiction," said Wen Xinhua, a rehabilitation officer at the center. "Others might not even recognize the deep triggers buried within them. But once they put on the VR headset and face real-world temptations, their brainwave data reveals the truth." This data helps gauge the severity of addiction and acts as a crucial checkpoint for those who believe they've overcome their struggles.

It's the ultimate test, proving whether they're truly prepared to re-enter society without relapsing. Wen introduced this concept as he led recent visitors from all walks of life around the center during its weeklong Open Day event. The event was held in conjunction with International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, which was on Thursday. The United Nations designated the day as June 26, one day after the anniversary of Qing Dynasty official Lin Zexu's destruction of about 1,400 tonnes of foreign-smuggled opium in south China in 1839. Lin's move is regarded as a milestone chapter of China's battle against opium, and the Chinese people's resolve to eliminate drugs has never wavered. Since 1949, the Chinese government has worked tirelessly to control drugs. For example, cultivating and using marijuana are strictly forbidden, with traffickers facing the death penalty in extreme cases.

In 2024, Chinese authorities concluded 37,000 drug-related criminal cases, making 62,000 related arrests and seizing 26.7 tonnes of narcotics nationwide, according to the Ministry of Public Security. The majority of drugs seized in China originated from abroad, according to a report from the Office of China National Narcotics Control Commission. Throughout 2024, China seized 16.3 tonnes of narcotics from overseas sources, representing a 20 percent year-on-year decrease. The Golden Triangle region remained China's primary drug source, accounting for 76 percent of all seized foreign narcotics. Li Xiaoguang, a senior judge of the Supreme People's Court, highlighted the rise of new types of drugs in China, which he said are outpacing traditional drug offenses in number, at a recent news conference. They come in

various forms -- often disguised as candy, stamps or cigarettes, making them deceptive and difficult to detect, Li said.

He also noted a troubling trend of younger individuals becoming increasingly involved, both as victims and as offenders. Strengthening education on drug prevention for young people -- particularly students in elementary and secondary schools -- is a key component of China's drug control efforts. In a recent anti-drug educational seminar at a primary school in Linfen, north China's Shanxi Province, VR technology was used to simulate the uncomfortable effects of drug use. Students wore VR headsets to experience the physical toll of addiction, dangerous behaviors resulting from hallucinations, and the emotional devastation drugs can bring to families. The immersive experience gave them a stark, firsthand look at the destructive impact drugs can have on both the body and the mind. "Putting on the VR glasses was like seeing what happens when people take drugs for real. It was really scary! I'll definitely stay away from drugs," one student said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 06/26/2025

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JAPAN: Urged to Stop Falling Behind as AI Transforms Global Business

Following the explosive rise of generative AI tools like ChatGPT since their debut in 2022, the global business world is rapidly transforming. Yet, while companies in the United States and China rush to adopt these technologies, Japan is still lagging behind. In a recent international webcast titled "World Economy," experts discussed how Japanese businesses can better embrace AI to improve productivity, especially among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that account for 99.7% of the country's corporate landscape. Generative AI, unlike previous forms of automation, can create text, images, and more with minimal human input. According to a 2023 Bloomberg forecast, the global market for generative AI is expected to grow by 42% annually, reaching 1.3 trillion dollars by 2032. Major corporations such as Coca-Cola are already leveraging these tools to analyze customer behavior and develop targeted products and marketing strategies.

However, a Ministry of Internal Affairs survey found that only 9.1% of Japanese individuals had experience using generative AI, compared to 46.3% in the U.S. and 56.3% in China. Experts say this hesitancy stems from cultural attitudes that demand perfection. In Japan, some companies initially banned the use of AI on corporate devices out of fear of errors or data security breaches. "There's a tendency in Japan to avoid new technologies unless they work 100% as expected," said Makoto Akai, CEO of MKT International. He noted that businesses in the U.S. are more likely to try out tools early, claim successes, and use them for career advancement. Akai emphasized that AI does not have to revolutionize every business model overnight. Instead, it can start small, with routine tasks such as writing customer emails,

summarizing documents, or comparing versions of contracts.

These time-consuming but structured tasks are where AI offers immediate value. "It's about improving the day-to-day work employees already do," Akai said. Joining him was Futoshi Motohima, who handles product planning at Lenovo Japan. He argued that one of the best places to start is with individual workflows, particularly through prompt engineering—writing clear and detailed instructions for AI tools. "When you clearly define the context and the goal, the AI response improves significantly," said Motohima. Tools like Microsoft's Copilot are making these capabilities more accessible. Bundled with the latest Windows 11 PCs, Copilot can transcribe meetings, retrieve files via natural language queries, and even summarize YouTube content. These features not only save time but also open up new possibilities for older or understaffed organizations.

Motohima noted that companies upgrading from Windows 10—whose support ends in October—will benefit from built-in AI tools without incurring additional costs. Both experts underlined the importance of learning by doing. "The key is to stop making excuses, stop putting it off, and just start," said Motohima. He pointed out that even failed attempts to use AI can yield valuable insights. For companies hesitant about where to begin, identifying areas where employees spend the most time—such as meetings or responding to emails—is a practical starting point. The panel concluded that early adoption of generative AI is not just about productivity gains but also about attracting younger workers, improving job satisfaction, and enhancing a company's reputation as forward-thinking. As Japan continues to face demographic challenges, experts say that using AI not as a replacement but as an assistant could be vital to sustaining business competitiveness.

From <https://www.newsonjapan.com/> 05/21/2025

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Japan Post Launches “Digital Address” System

Japan Post Co. said Monday that it has launched a “digital address” system that links seven-digit combinations of numbers and letters to physical addresses. Under the system, users can input these seven-digit codes on online shopping and other websites, and their addresses will automatically appear on the sites. People can obtain digital addresses by registering with Japan Post's Yu ID membership service. Their digital addresses will not change even if their physical addresses change. Their new addresses will be linked to the codes if they submit notices of address changes. With Japan Post opening up a system for obtaining address information using the codes, e-commerce giant Rakuten Group Inc. and others are considering adopting it. Japan Post plans to spend about a decade making the new system widely used.

From <https://www.nippon.com> 05/26/2025

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MONGOLIA: Experiences Shared on International Approaches to Digital Reporting of Political Party Financing

Mongolia has become the first country in Asia to join the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Challenge, started in 2024, on ensuring transparency in political party financing. By joining this initiative, Mongolia has undertaken an international commitment to ensure the implementation of the Law on Political Parties, and to make political party financing subject to public oversight. In this context, the General Election Commission of Mongolia (GEC), the Open Government Partnership, the Open Society Forum, Transparency International, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) are jointly organizing a seminar, "International Experience in Defining Digital Reporting System Requirements for the Implementation of the Law on Political Parties," on April 8-9, 2025.

During the session on April 8, 2025, participants shared the experiences of countries such as Latvia, Armenia, and the United Kingdom. For instance, Member of the OSCE and former Member of the Latvian Parliament (Saeima) Lolita Čigāne provided insights on the digital solutions used for political party financing reports and responded to participant questions. Latvia uses the EDIS digital system for reporting political party financing. This system not only acts as a bridge between political parties and state authorities but is also designed at a technical level to minimize politicization risks. It allows for standardized reporting across all participants and enables efficient data processing and monitoring.

The financial reporting input system provides real-time public access to both monetary and non-monetary donations as soon as they are recorded. Income and expenditures are automatically registered and consolidated. The system enables the public to track how state-allocated funding is utilized. All information in the reporting system is open to the public, allowing for data analysis and enabling donors to track their own contributions. For example, private contributions are summarized by amount, frequency, donor engagement level, and the sectors in which they work. A searchable database has also been developed, allowing queries of political parties, donation category, donor information, and time period. In addition to the digital system, a reporting application has also been introduced for broader accessibility.

Lecturer Dr. Sam Power of the School of Sociology, Politics, and International Studies at the University of Bristol, United Kingdom, delivered a presentation on the opportunities and challenges of ensuring transparency in political party financing through artificial intelligence (AI). Dr. Sam Power emphasized the necessity of using AI due to limited resources and time constraints of election management bodies, and highlighted its potential to build public trust when used appropriately. AI enables the processing of large volumes of data quickly and cost-effectively. Its implementation can help improve oversight, prevent corruption, and facilitate the use of anti-corruption tools such as the "Flagging" system. It also contributes to the

standardization of accounting practices and promotes transparency and openness of information. However, he also noted the challenges, including the need for a solid legal framework, capacity building among officials, and the establishment of trust.

From <https://www.montsame.mn> 04/09/2025

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Encouraging Firms to Adopt Eco-Friendly Technologies

Companies operating in Indonesia are encouraged to develop and implement technologies that align with measures to maintain environmental sustainability, an official said on Tuesday. A university collaborating with four ministries launched an award on Tuesday to recognize and appreciate firms that comply with efforts to sustain environmental preservation in their business activities, said Jamaluddin Jompa, rector of Hasanuddin University. The university is collaborating with the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Home Affairs, the official said. "This is an innovative initiative to give special recognition to companies that have introduced environmentally friendly technological innovations," he said. The rector said that Hasanuddin University is committed to contributing to environmental protection, emphasizing that business and sustainability programs must go hand in hand. "We aim to expand the economy, which is crucial for people's welfare, while continuously advancing technology development," he said. The award, called the InTechSEA Award, focuses on several key areas including renewable energy, waste management, disaster response, environmental conservation, and biodiversity.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 06/10/2025

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Indonesia Secures 2.3 Bln USD Foreign Investment for Data Center Development

Indonesia has secured an investment worth 2.3 billion U.S. dollars from the Dubai-based digital infrastructure company EDGNEX for data center development, Minister of Communication and Digital Affairs Meutya Hafid said on Thursday. Meutya said that the investment would be used to build modern data center infrastructure on a 12-hectare site in the Cikarang industrial area, West Java province. The initial phase of the project is targeted for completion by 2026 and will continue to develop through 2028. "The data center is part of the backbone of Indonesia's digital transformation. The presence of EDGNEX is seen as a positive signal of the increasing trust from global investors in our country's digital ecosystem," Meutya said in an official release. According to data from the ministry, Indonesia's data center capacity has increased to 290 megawatts (MW) since last October. The

national capacity is projected to soar to 900 MW by the end of 2025. "The rapid increase in capacity indicates that Indonesia is pursuing a strategic position in the region. The government will continue to open up extensive opportunities for new investments. Indonesia has great potential to become a major digital data hub in the Southeast Asian region," Meutya said.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 06/19/2025

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VIETNAM: PM Urges SOEs to Lead Digital Transformation and Technological Innovation

State-owned enterprises (SOEs) should continuously grow and take the lead in driving digital transformation, technological innovation and creativity, said Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính. Charing a meeting with representatives from SOEs pioneering in digital transformation in Hà Nội on Tuesday, PM Chính called on SOEs to show stronger resolve, enhance efforts, and take more decisive action to overcome current challenges and drive rapid, sustainable development. The PM reaffirmed the Government's full support for their initiatives. Highlighting Việt Nam's limited resilience to external shocks, PM Chính stressed the importance of remaining calm and vigilant while fostering greater self-reliance and adaptability amid global uncertainties. He acknowledged a range of existing challenges, including lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts disrupting supply and production chains, monetary policy shifts in major economies, and ongoing difficulties in Việt Nam's stock, real estate and corporate bond markets. Natural disasters have also added to the complexity of the current economic landscape. In response, the Government is pursuing strategic breakthroughs in science and technology, innovation and national digital transformation.

Efforts are also underway to streamline the political apparatus and restructure local administrative units, boost the development of the private economic sector, and strengthen international integration. The Prime Minister emphasised three core pillars for national advancement, including improving and finalising institutional frameworks, developing strategic infrastructure, and building a highly skilled workforce. "The world appears to be facing a trade war," the Prime Minister warned, stressing that Việt Nam must not rely on a single market or a single growth driver such as exports. Instead, he urged diversification in products, production, and supply chains to ensure sustainable growth. Delegates at the meeting were encouraged to thoroughly assess the current situation and propose breakthrough solutions. The PM emphasised the importance of implementing decisive, harmonised policies to meet the country's ambitious 2024 growth target of at least 8 per cent, while also ensuring macroeconomic stability, controlling inflation, maintaining key economic balances, and improving both material and spiritual well-being for the people.

Making significant contributions but shortcomings persist

According to the Ministry of Finance, as of 2024, Việt Nam had 671 SOEs with total assets exceeding VNĐ5.6 quadrillion (over US\$216 billion). These enterprises held nearly VNĐ3 quadrillion in equity, generated nearly VNĐ3.3 quadrillion in revenue, and recorded a pre-tax profit of more than VNĐ227 trillion. SOEs' projects are concentrated in key sectors and areas of the economy, contributing to implementing the country's socio-economic development goals. Despite notable contributions, Deputy Minister of Finance Nguyễn Đức Tâm acknowledged that SOEs still face significant shortcomings in implementing digital transformation and innovation. Operational efficiency remains below expectations relative to the vast resources they control, Tâm said, adding that limitations persist in competitiveness, science and technology capacity, and the pace of innovation in business management tools. Many SOEs have yet to master core technologies essential to digital transformation, highlighting the urgent need for greater adaptability and strategic investment in modern capabilities. Moving forward, SOEs need to prioritise capital allocation for digital transformation with clear, measurable progress, Tâm said. He urged enterprises to strengthen collaboration with domestic digital technology firms to increase the localisation of platform technologies and solutions, particularly in areas such as cloud computing, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and big data. The deputy minister also called for greater investment in emerging technologies and services like 5G and AI, as well as a sustained focus on fortifying network infrastructure and disaster prevention. In addition, he encouraged SOEs to expand infrastructure for manufacturing and high-tech industries and to continue executing large-scale construction projects to support production and business operations.

Suggestions from businesses

During the conference, Huỳnh Quang Liêm, General Director of VNPT, emphasised that digital transformation in business operations, management, and administration is essential in today's evolving landscape. He noted that this is particularly crucial for service providers like VNPT, where digitalisation plays a central role in maintaining competitiveness and meeting modern customer demands. As a pioneer in digital transformation, VNPT is leveraging its operational capacity and a customer base of hundreds of thousands to drive practical digital solutions, Liêm said, expressing the group's desire to partner with the Government to implement these solutions nationwide, positioning digital transformation as a powerful lever to boost labour productivity, enhance operational efficiency and unlock new growth opportunities for enterprises across all sectors. He noted that with the evolution of digital transformation, driven by big data, artificial intelligence, and locally developed applications, VNPT is committed to supporting Vietnamese businesses in harnessing digital tools for smarter management and governance. Liêm said VNPT aims to accompany more enterprises in replicating successful models, helping them apply digital transformation effectively for sustainable development.

While emphasising the need to prioritise digital transformation opportunities for SOEs, Lưu Trung Thái, Chairman of the Board of Directors of MB, proposed that the

Government focus on supporting large-scale technology and new platform projects to reinforce the leadership role of SOEs in driving national innovation. Additionally, Thái suggested allowing SOEs to adopt salary payment mechanisms similar to those of private enterprises. This, he argued, would enable SOEs to align compensation with performance, drawing from their revenue and profit to reinvest in digital transformation initiatives. Chairman of Petrovietnam's Board of Directors Lê Mạnh Hùng presented three key recommendations to the Government aimed at accelerating large-scale energy projects. He proposed restructuring the resource tax policy, particularly for gas resources, to better incentivise the development of major energy projects. Additionally, he urged the Government to allow Petrovietnam to directly assign tasks within its internal ecosystem, noting that the current mandatory bidding process for intra-group projects significantly delays implementation. Hùng also recommended leveraging the capacity of domestic commercial banks to finance large-scale projects involving foreign technology. Specifically, he called for the State's approval to enable Vietnamese banks, including PetroVietnam's own Petrocombank, to provide financial support for such strategic initiatives.

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Government Proposes Land Rent Exemptions and Reductions to Boost the Digital Technology Industry

On the morning of April 26, during a session of the National Assembly Standing Committee (NASC), the Government presented a proposal to exempt and reduce land rent for projects involved in the production of key digital technology products, software, semiconductors, artificial intelligence (AI), concentrated digital technology zones, and the National Innovation Centres. According to Minister of Finance Nguyễn Văn Thắng, the Government proposed a total of 13 policy groups concerning exemptions and reductions in land use fees and land rent to support key economic sectors. In particular, the exemption of land rent for research units, innovation centres, and research facilities operated by science and technology enterprises is expected to provide strong momentum for the development of the digital technology industry in the coming period. Minister Thắng said that the draft Law on the Digital Technology Industry was currently being developed, featuring several preferential provisions aimed at accelerating growth in the sector. Expanding the scope of land rent exemptions and reductions would help lower investment costs, enabling digital technology businesses to expand production and hasten the national digital transformation process.

Additionally, the Government proposed a 30 per cent reduction in land rent payable in 2025, with broader application than in 2024. The aim was to support citizens and businesses in developing production and business activities, striving to achieve an economic growth target of 8 per cent in 2025. After hearing the report, the NASC agreed in principle to allow the Government to issue a decree stipulating additional

cases eligible for land use and land rent exemptions and reductions in 2024, and to expand the scope further in 2025. Deputy Chairman of the National Assembly Vũ Hồng Thanh emphasised that the Government must be responsible for the accuracy of information and data provided and ensure the state budget remains balanced within the approved deficit limits. The adoption of these land rent exemption and reduction policies is expected to provide significant support for enterprises amid current challenges, while laying a foundation for promoting the digital economy, high-tech industries, and contributing to the sustainable growth of the national economy.

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Banking Industry Accelerates Towards Smart Digital Ecosystem

The State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) on Monday held a press conference to announce the 2025 Banking Sector Digital Transformation with the theme 'Smart Digital Ecosystem in the New Era'. At the event, Director of the SBV's Payment Department Phạm Anh Tuấn said that, after four years of implementation, the digital transformation of the banking sector has achieved encouraging results, contributing to the overall development of the economy. "Essential banking services such as savings, opening and using payment accounts, bank cards and e-wallets, money transfers and loans have been completely digitised. The rate of transactions via digital channels at many credit institutions has so far exceeded 90 per cent. More than 87 per cent of adults now have a bank account. Cashless payments continue to grow strongly in both volume and value, with more than 5.2 billion transactions made in the first quarter of 2025 alone," Tuấn said. According to the director, the SBV has identified digital transformation as not only a trend but also a strategic task. Technology infrastructure is focused on investment, legal regulations are constantly updated and amended to facilitate innovation in banking activities. Cyber security and safety work is also enhanced, in parallel with promoting communication and financial education to the people. "In particular, the SBV is actively coordinating with the Ministry of Public Security in implementing Project 06 on applying population data in national digital transformation. This is considered an important foundation to help banks integrate inter-sectoral data, improve service efficiency and make data-based decisions," Tuấn said.

The Editor-in-Chief of Banking Times, Lê Thị Thúy Sen, said that the banking industry has always played a pioneering role in the digitalisation process, not only applying technology to improve customer experience but also contributing to promoting the development of the digital economy. This year's theme reflects the banking industry's goal of building a connected and secure digital ecosystem that focuses on people and businesses as the centre of service to promote the application of innovative products and services, towards the goal of comprehensive digital transformation to break through the development of the digital economy. The

2025 Banking Sector Digital Transformation event will be held at the Government Office on May 29 with the participation of Government leaders, representatives of ministries, Hà Nội People's Committee, credit institutions, professional associations, international organisations and experts in the field of digital transformation.

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Banking Industry Promotes Digital Transformation for Smart Digital Ecosystem

The digital transformation of the banking industry must be further promoted to better the connection between commercial banks with people, enterprises and the State, Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính said at a banking event on Thursday. Addressing the 'Digital Transformation of the Banking Industry in 2025' event with the theme 'Smart Digital Ecosystem in the New Era' held in Hà Nội by the State Bank of Vietnam (SBV), the PM Chính, who is also head of the Government's Steering Committee on Science and Technology, Innovation and Digital Transformation, said the digital transformation of the banking industry has made progress. It has so far gained certain achievements on data, non-cash payments and implementation of practical digital utilities and technology solutions such as online account opening, digital signatures on the VNeID platform and cross-border payments using QR codes. However, there are still many limitations and challenges in the digital transformation of the banking industry related the legal corridor, including development of digital infrastructure and digital platforms, a shortage of high-quality employees and concerns about information security and safety.

Therefore, the PM directed: "The banking sector must complete the legal framework and policies in line with reality. It needs to urgently implement the sandbox in the banking sector and promptly submit to the Government for promulgation of the Decree on Mobile Money besides reviewing legal regulations to amend and supplement the existing regulations to ensure consistency and compliance with the provisions of the Law on Credit Institutions, the Law on Data and the Law on Electronic Transactions." In addition it is necessary to develop modern digital infrastructure and platforms with high interoperability, and ensure security and safety. The banking sector must comprehensively digitise traditional banking processes and products, develop new digital financial products and services to meet the increasingly high and diverse needs of customers. "Notably, banks must expand access to financial services for disadvantaged groups, remote areas, border areas and islands," the PM said, adding digital data, combined with Project 06, need to be developed. Besides prioritising human resource development to meet the transformation requirements of the banking industry, the PM said that it is necessary to enhance dissemination about the benefits of digital transformation in the banking sector to each citizen and business, helping them understand the benefits and effectiveness of the work.

At the event, SBV Governor Nguyễn Thị Hồng said: “This is an important annual event, showing the high determination and strong commitment of the entire banking industry in implementing Resolution 57-NQ/TW on breakthroughs in science, technology, innovation and national digital transformation, and the National Digital Transformation Programme to 2025, with a vision to 2030.” According to Hồng, the theme ‘Smart digital ecosystem in the new era’ of the event shows the determination of the banking industry in realising the Party’s and Government’s directions on breakthroughs in science and technology development, innovation and national digital transformation. They include the National Digital Transformation Programme to 2025, with a vision to 2030; and the Project on Developing Non-cash Payments for the 2021-25 Period, which aim towards creating a digital ecosystem interconnected with other economic sectors to create momentum for the development of the digital economy. After constantly improving the legal framework to promote digital transformation activities in banking and promoting investment and upgrade in infrastructure serving digital transformation, the banking sector has so far achieved many outstanding achievements in digital transformation, contributing to the overall development of the economy. Hồng reports that the interbank electronic payment system processes an average of VNĐ820 trillion per day, while the financial switching and electronic clearing system processes 26 million transactions per day. More than 113 million individual customer profiles and more than 711,000 corporate customer profiles have been cross-checked with biometric information. Many credit institutions in Việt Nam have achieved a digital transaction rate of more than 95 per cent. Nearly 87 per cent of Vietnamese adults have bank accounts. “Việt Nam is also a pioneer in connecting cross-border retail payments via QR codes with Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, aiming to expand in the Asian region,” Hồng said. At the event, participants also experienced direct services at 19 booths that displayed digital banking products and services of commercial banks, payment intermediaries and technology solution providers.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 05/29/2025

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Ministry of Industry and Trade Guides Traditional Traders in Digital Transformation

The Ministry of Industry and Trade has officially launched the ‘Digital Transformation Handbook for Traditional Market Vendors’. According to the Vietnam E-commerce and Digital Economy Agency, under the Ministry of Industry and Trade, digital transformation has become an inevitable trend across all areas of life. However, traders in traditional markets, considered a vulnerable group in the digital ecosystem, face numerous challenges in adapting and thriving in this new environment. The handbook is developed to equip traditional market vendors with essential knowledge of digital transformation. It shares practical tips for online selling from successful merchants and guides modern sales techniques to help increase revenue. It is

expected to be a powerful support tool that helps small-scale market businesses avoid being left behind in the digital economy's development. Lê Hoàng Oanh, director of the Vietnam E-commerce and Digital Economy Agency, said that, unlike academic materials, the handbook is written in an accessible way and illustrated with real-life stories.

Readers will see themselves in examples and specific guidance, such as 'How to livestream effectively?', 'Why is careful packaging important?' or 'How to use e-wallets for fast and secure money transfers?' Everything is presented step-by-step with vivid visual aids. The handbook guides how to use platforms like TikTok Shop, Shopee, Zalo OA, auto chatbots or QR code scanning. It also broadens vendors' knowledge of budgeting, tracking profits and losses, and building a personal brand in the digital environment. "These solutions help vendors save time, reduce costs and improve customer service quality, expanding their customer base and profits," Oanh said. The programme also aims to enhance digital awareness and break the psychological barrier of 'not knowing technology'. It will empower small market vendors to reach broader markets and keep pace with modern business practices, such as livestream sales, QR code payments and chatbot customer support. Oanh added that this handbook will not be a one-time publication. The Ministry of Industry and Trade will update it to keep pace with evolving technologies and changing consumer behaviour. The handbook is available online at <https://sotay.tieuthuongvietnam.vn>.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 06/18/2025

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South Asia

INDIA: Mukhyamantri Abhyudaya Yojana Gets Smarter with AI-Powered Portal Integration in UP

Inspired by the vision of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the Mukhyamantri Abhyudaya Yojana continues to empower economically weaker students in Uttar Pradesh, having provided free coaching to more than 82,000 aspirants since its inception in 2021. Administered by the Social Welfare Department, the scheme is now undergoing a transformative upgrade with the integration of artificial intelligence tools, launch of an AI-enabled Abhyudaya portal, and strategic involvement of retired officials and academic experts. This multi-faceted approach aims to widen the scheme's reach and enhance the quality of mentorship provided to students preparing for competitive exams. In a significant technological leap, an online application process has been launched through the Abhyudaya portal. This move simplifies access to the scheme for students across both rural and urban regions of the state. In its initial phase, the portal is accepting applications from aspirants of the UPSC and UPPCS exams, setting the stage for a streamlined and transparent registration process. Further strengthening the scheme, plans are underway to

expand the Mukhyamantri Abhyudaya Yojana to the block level from this academic session. This expansion will allow students in remote areas to avail quality training at centers located closer to their homes. At present, 166 training centers are fully operational across all 75 districts, with the number expected to increase in the upcoming sessions to meet rising demand.

To provide more structured and expert guidance, retired civil servants and university professors are being systematically brought on board. In the past, administrative officers and subject experts have played a key role in mentoring students and conducting mock interviews. Going forward, under direct guidance from the Chief Minister, this process will be institutionalized to ensure consistent and high-quality engagement. Currently, over 500 IAS, 450 IPS, and approximately 300 IFS officers are extending their support through the Abhyudaya portal by offering both virtual and in-person mentorship. In addition, domain experts from various sectors are conducting specialized training sessions. So far, ten mock interview sessions have been held for candidates appearing in UPSC and PCS interviews. These efforts have borne fruit, with over 743 students successfully clearing prestigious competitive examinations. In the academic year 2024-25 alone, 23,017 underprivileged students across the state have already benefited from the Mukhyamantri Abhyudaya Yojana. As the program continues to evolve with AI integration and broader accessibility, it stands as a model of inclusive and innovative governance in the education sector.

List of various Exams and Successful students: UPSC - 46 UPPCS - 121
NEET - 86 JEE - 35
Other recruitment exams - more than 455

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 04/07/2025

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Kerala Achieves Statewide Digital Milestone, K-SMART Now Available Across All Panchayats

In a significant stride towards e-governance, the Kerala government has extended its flagship digital platform, K-SMART (Kerala Solutions for Managing Administrative Reformation and Transformation), to all rural local bodies, making a wide range of public services accessible online to citizens across the state. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan inaugurated the state-wide rural expansion of the platform in Thiruvananthapuram, emphasizing that “governance becomes meaningful only when everyone gets to experience its benefits.” He called K-SMART a transformative initiative aimed at ensuring inclusive and transparent administration. The platform, previously successful in urban local bodies, now covers all 941 grama panchayats, 152 block panchayats, and 14 district panchayats. Citizens can now access services like birth, death, and marriage registrations, building permits, property tax payments, grievance redressal, and business licensing via a mobile app or website—without visiting government offices. Local Self Government Minister MB Rajesh hailed K-SMART as a “technological leap,” stating, “The phrase ‘running around offices

wearing out your sandals' will soon be a thing of the past." He added that the platform would enhance efficiency, reduce red tape, and curb corruption. Developed in-house by the Information Kerala Mission (IKM), the platform has already proven its effectiveness in urban settings—processing over 35 lakh files digitally between January 2024 and March 2025, with 76% resolved swiftly, some within minutes. A birth certificate was issued in just 6.45 minutes, while marriage certificates were granted through India's first video KYC facility. New features include: 'Know Your Land': Offers zoning data for proposed constructions. 'My Building': Provides comprehensive property information. Mass Petition Filing: Citizens can now submit collective grievances online. Special Marriage Act Registration: Available online globally. KEFT System: Enables e-bill submission and payments to contractors within an hour. Santhosh Babu, Director of IKM, noted that 100 developers worked for two years to build K-SMART, overcoming challenges like digitizing old records. KP Noufal, Deputy Director, said the new version was shaped by public feedback and aims for peak transparency. The transition is being closely monitored by a rapid response team to ensure a smooth rollout and resolve early technical challenges.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 04/20/2025

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IBM Joins Forces with EkStep to Empower India's Digital Future

In a landmark development to accelerate India's digital transformation journey, the EkStep Foundation and global technology giant IBM have formalised a strategic collaboration focused on leveraging Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Responsible Artificial Intelligence (AI). The partnership, announced on May 14, 2025, is poised to foster inclusive, population-scale digital advancement across critical sectors. This collaboration underscores the mutual commitment of both organisations to harness technological innovation for societal benefit. The initial focus areas of this engagement will be digital transformation in agriculture and the development of frameworks for the responsible use of AI in India. Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) refers to the foundational digital systems and platforms, such as identity, payments, and data exchange, that serve as enablers for scalable and inclusive service delivery across various sectors. DPI has gained prominence as a model that fosters transparency, efficiency, and accessibility in public services. EkStep Foundation, known for its contributions to DPI through initiatives such as the Sunbird open-source platform, brings a wealth of expertise in building public-good digital systems. IBM, on the other hand, contributes its deep technological capabilities, particularly in AI and cloud services. By working together, EkStep and IBM aim to build scalable solutions that address pressing challenges in Indian agriculture—a sector that employs nearly half of the country's workforce. The partnership will explore how DPI and AI technologies can improve access to information, market linkages, and climate-resilient practices for farmers. This could lead to better yield prediction, efficient resource use, and reduced risk for stakeholders in the agricultural value chain. A key component of this collaboration is

the emphasis on Responsible AI. Responsible AI refers to the design, development, and deployment of AI systems in ways that are ethical, transparent, and aligned with societal values. It promotes accountability in AI decision-making, safeguards privacy, and mitigates bias and unintended consequences. Through this alliance, IBM and EkStep aim to co-create frameworks and practices that reflect India's unique socio-economic context while upholding global best practices.

The initiative will also serve as a platform for open dialogue and cross-sectoral collaboration, engaging stakeholders from government, industry, academia, and civil society. By combining domain expertise, technological innovation, and a commitment to ethical AI, the collaboration seeks to catalyse systemic impact at scale. "We are proud to partner with EkStep Foundation to drive inclusive, at-scale digital transformation in India," IBM stated. "Together, we will explore how Digital Public Infrastructure and AI can be applied to solve challenges in agriculture and scale Responsible AI for the nation." This partnership comes at a time when the Government of India is actively promoting digital transformation through initiatives such as Digital India and IndiaAI. The EkStep-IBM collaboration aligns with national goals of achieving equitable growth, enhancing productivity, and ensuring digital inclusion across all strata of society. As the collaboration progresses, it is expected to yield replicable models and toolkits that can be adopted across sectors and geographies. Both organisations have reaffirmed their commitment to working in the spirit of public good, ensuring that the benefits of digital transformation are accessible to all. With this alliance, India takes a significant step toward embedding ethical principles in technological progress while unlocking new avenues for innovation, empowerment, and sustainability.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 05/19/2025

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India Leads Capacity Building Initiative on Digital Transformation in BRICS

Capacity Building Sessions convened by DoT showcase India's leadership in citizen-centric ICT. India has taken a leadership role in driving digital transformation across BRICS nations by convening a Virtual Capacity Building Session organised by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) through the National Communications Academy – Technology (NCA-T), Ghaziabad. Held under the BRICS ICT Working Group framework, the event served as a collaborative forum for exchanging best practices, addressing shared challenges, and reinforcing ICT partnerships among member countries. The session featured inaugural addresses by Daniel Cavalcanti, BRICS Chair, and Atul Sinha, Director General of NCA-T. Cavalcanti commended India's efforts, emphasizing the event's contribution to advancing cooperation in areas such as mobile security, cyber resilience, digital infrastructure, and digital twin technologies. Atul Sinha highlighted the importance of capacity building through co-created, secure, and scalable technologies that

empower citizens across the BRICS bloc. India's pioneering initiatives—Sanchar Saathi, AADHAAR, and Sangam Digital Twin—emerged as exemplary models of innovation in citizen services and digital governance. Key Thematic Sessions:

Session I: Empowering Mobile Users

India showcased Sanchar Saathi, a flagship program designed to protect users from mobile fraud and promote transparency. The initiative highlighted the value of citizen-centric regulatory frameworks that foster trust and accessibility in mobile communications.

Session II: Cyber Resilience for the 21st Century

India and Brazil led discussions on national strategies for cyber resilience, emphasising preparedness, agile response, and international collaboration to counter evolving cyber threats.

Session III: Foundations of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)

India presented AADHAAR as a transformative DPI tool enabling identity-driven public service delivery. China shared its experiences in building secure and interoperable platforms, underscoring DPI's role in inclusive governance.

Session IV: Digital Twin – Revolutionising Public Infrastructure

India introduced the Sangam Digital Twin project, which leverages AI-native, federated platforms for real-time infrastructure planning and predictive governance. China also contributed its insights, emphasising the transformative power of data-driven simulations.

Also Read: BHEL Set to Lead National EV Charging Infrastructure Rollout and Demand Mapping

In closing remarks, Avinash Agarwal, Deputy Director General, International Relations Division, DoT, and Daniel Cavalcanti reaffirmed the commitment to sustained digital collaboration among BRICS members. The sessions provided a platform for sharing success stories, identifying scalable innovations, and shaping future-ready digital societies. The outcomes are expected to deepen strategic alliances and lay a resilient, inclusive, and innovation-driven foundation for digital development across BRICS nations.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 05/24/2025

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Starlink to Boost Digital Inclusion in India with High-Speed Satellite Internet

Starlink to launch in India within two months, offering satellite internet via low Earth orbit. Device priced at Rs 33,000 with a Rs 3,000 monthly plan and a one-month free trial. Aims to boost connectivity in remote areas, supporting digital inclusion and rural internet access. Elon Musk's satellite internet venture, Starlink, is gearing up to begin operations in India within the next two months, following the recent receipt of its operational license, sources confirmed. As part of its rollout plan, Starlink has reportedly finalised its pricing for the Indian market. The satellite dish device required

to access the service will be priced at approximately Rs 33,000, while the unlimited monthly data plan is expected to cost Rs 3,000. In a move aimed at encouraging adoption, the company will offer a one-month free trial with each device purchase, allowing users to experience the service before committing to recurring charges. Starlink's arrival is poised to revolutionise internet access in remote and underserved regions across India, where conventional broadband infrastructure remains limited or nonexistent. The company's low Earth orbit (LEO) satellite network is designed to deliver high-speed internet even in the most isolated areas, bridging the digital divide that has long hindered connectivity for millions. The pricing strategy reflects Starlink's regional alignment, with similar equipment costs observed in nearby countries both Bangladesh and Bhutan also see the device priced at around Rs 33,000. Industry analysts suggest that Starlink's entry into the Indian telecom landscape could trigger increased competition, especially in the rural broadband segment. The service is expected to benefit educational institutions, small businesses, and households in areas where traditional ISPs have been unable to provide stable internet. Starlink's imminent launch aligns with India's broader vision for digital inclusion and nationwide internet access, reinforcing the government's ongoing efforts to strengthen connectivity infrastructure in rural and remote regions.

From <https://news.siliconindia.com/> 06/09/2025

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SRI LANKA: Navigating Digital Future - A Conversation with Dr. Hans Wijayasuriya

Sri Lanka is entering a defining chapter in its digital journey—one that could reshape how citizens live, work, and connect. As global economies accelerate toward smarter governance, inclusive connectivity, and resilient digital infrastructure, Sri Lanka is laying the groundwork to leapfrog into a digitally empowered future. Leading this transformation is Dr. Hans Wijayasuriya, Chief Advisor to the President on Digital Economy and Chairman of the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA). A respected business leader with deep roots in technology and telecommunications, Dr. Wijayasuriya brings a unique blend of private sector agility and public sector vision to the country's digital agenda. What sets this initiative apart is not just the ambition—but the extraordinary coalition of volunteer experts powering it. Many of the officials driving key elements of the national digital strategy, including ICTA board members, technical advisors, and working group leaders, have offered their services on a pro bono basis. United by a shared commitment to national progress, this diverse group of professionals from across the public sector, private industry, and the Sri Lankan diaspora is helping the government navigate complex reforms with limited fiscal space but boundless resolve. In this exclusive interview with Lanka Business Online, Dr. Wijayasuriya shares the milestones achieved in the first six months of the new administration, unpacks the structural reforms ahead, and explains how Sri Lanka is building a digital economy that is inclusive, trusted, and future ready.

Q: With the new government now six months into its term, what concrete steps have been taken to advance Sri Lanka's digital economy?

A: One of the most important early steps was to reframe the digital economy—not as a narrow Technology challenge, but as a national economic imperative. That mindset shift was foundational. Instead of focusing only on tech platforms or automation, we recognized and positioned digital transformation as a means of driving GDP growth, improving citizen services, and enhancing competitiveness across all sectors. This led to the establishment of a dedicated Ministry for the Digital Economy, which brings together all the institutions critical to this agenda under one roof. These include the ICTA, the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC), the Department for Registration of Persons, the Data Protection Authority, and SLCERT- Sri Lanka's Cybersecurity Agency and SLT among others. We've also set ourselves a bold and measurable target—to grow the digital economy from approximately USD 3-4 Billion today to USD 15 billion in five years. That's an audacious fivefold increase, moving the contribution of the digital economy from 3% to 12–15% of GDP. This ambitious vision obviously requires a leapfrog strategy. If we don't establish robust foundations and architectures, and equally, move with agility and speed, we risk falling behind regional countries that are already aiming for a 20%+ Digital Economy component over the next 5 years.. We're not chasing vanity metrics— there is a direct correlation between Digital Economy Percentage and Penetration, and the potential uplift to GDP growth itself. Actions and achievements during the first 6 months feature a mix of foundational work alongside the unlocking of quick-win opportunities. Foundational outcomes include the design of the Digital Economy Blueprint for Sri Lanka, an Enterprise Architecture for Government, an AI strategy and the kick-off of several foundational projects including the Sri Lanka Unique Digital Identity and AI based automation of Government Services. In parallel with this foundational work which will deliver transformative outcomes in due course, we have also focused on unlocking immediate opportunities – an example of the latter is the digitization of Payments to Government via the GovPay platform.

Q: What are the foundational pillars driving this transformation?

A: The Digital Economy Blueprint that I mentioned earlier comprises of multiple layers – starting with Physical Digital Infrastructure which encompasses Fibre and Wireless 5G/4G Broadband Infrastructure as well as Cloud and Data Infrastructure, and importantly the Sri Lanka Government Cloud to support all Public Sector Applications. The next, and I would say, transformative layer is the Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) which includes the Digital ID, National Data Exchange, Digital Signatures, Digital Certificates and very importantly National Payment Infrastructure, among others. These infrastructure layers of the Digital Economy will enable the spawning of an Application Service Creation Layer which will enable Developers and Stakeholders across the Public and Private Sector to develop Digital Transformation Solutions using the capabilities and APIs (Application Programming Interfaces) from the underlying layers. Applications and Services will then be presented to Citizens

and Businesses via an Access layer which will feature Mobile Apps, Web Interfaces, AI Bots and other access interfaces. The Digital ID project which is underway now is a very critical DPI within this framework and will feature biometric authentication and a unique digital credential for citizens. A sandbox phase will begin in the next 3–6 months, but full population coverage will take about two years.

Q: What immediate wins are being pursued alongside long-term reforms?

A: We've made it a priority to deliver visible, meaningful wins in parallel with laying the long-term foundations. One of the standout examples is GovPay, our integrated government payment platform built in collaboration with LankaPay and the Central Bank. Today, it enables digital payments across over 30 government institutions, including departments like the Motor Traffic Department – a number which will soon exceed 50. GovPay is set to transform citizen convenience – Digital payment of Traffic fines now in the pilot phase, is an example. Card based payments for highway tolls is also being piloted by the Ministry of Transport & Highways. We also have in place an Industry Working Group focused on enabling the wider adoption of QR payments and other digital payments. This is all a part of a broader push to proliferate digital payments across sectors and socio-economic segments. The Government's goal is to build a cashless, paperless, presence-less government service model, and payments are a critical enabler of that vision. The application of AI also presents several quick win opportunities - our Advisory Committee on AI is currently in the process of implementing an AI-First Government Information Centre. Of course, technology alone will not deliver a leap-frog transformation. Parallel focus is being applied to on process innovation, mindset and behavioral change, citizen centricity, trust-building, and incentivizing adoption.

Q: How is ICTA collaborating with other ministries to drive digital integration?

A: The Ministry of Digital Economy and its institutions including the ICTA, play an enabling as well as guiding role. We will focus on building the foundational layers of the Blueprint and on defining architectures, interoperability frameworks, standards and operating guidelines. This approach will enable Ministries and Institutions as well as the Private Sector to drive their respective digital transformation programmes on top of shared infrastructure and in line with defined standards with respect to inter-operability, data sharing and cross-system integration. Take the traffic fines payment solution for example. This initiative is driven by the Ministry of Transport and involves several stakeholders including Sri Lanka Police. The ICTA played the role of an integrator and facilitator - enabling the backend payment integration and assisting with operationalizing the service via GovPay which is a shared platform. This operating model is scalable and sustainable and will apply broadly to address opportunities as well as pain points brought to us by institutions across government. To add a few other examples we are also working with the Ministry of Industries to accelerate e-commerce readiness, and with Provincial and local government bodies across Sri Lanka, who are eager to digitise the payment of rates and levies as well as various other citizen services. The interest digitization is very organic, which is

heartening. On a broader canvas, there are a host of digitization initiatives, too many to mention, delivered by a wide spectrum of institutions which have significant impact on specific citizen segments – just for example, the Digitisation and decentralization of the application process for President's Fund donations. Also, early this year Stationary distribution to school children was implemented via a QR code voucher. It is this momentum and enthusiasm from across the public and private sectors which will lift the tide and deliver a digitized nation. To support this momentum, the capacity at the Ministry and ICTA has been augmented through a Programme Management Unit at the Ministry and the contribution of an expanded team of volunteer experts which allows us to handle multiple partnerships simultaneously and avoid execution bottlenecks.

Q: There's talk of restructuring ICTA. What's the plan?

A: ICTA will eventually be succeeded by two new institutions:

The Digital Economy Authority – which will lead and oversee the National Digital Economy policy and execution strategy, performance management and standard setting.

GovTech – which will be the principal execution agency for digital economy acceleration, and which will execute major projects like the Digital ID and national data exchange.

The Digital Economy Blue Print as well as the supporting institutional model has been derived following a close examination of Global Benchmarks and Case Studies such as those from India, Singapore and Estonia. The transition from the present to future institutional architecture is being carefully managed to avoid disruption to ongoing work.

Q: How are you addressing the digital divide in rural and underserved areas?

A: Inclusion isn't an afterthought—it's core to our Digital Economy Strategy and blueprint. Every initiative is evaluated against two questions: How do we bridge existing gaps and asymmetries through digital means? And are we assured that new gaps aren't being created? At a fundamental level, the development of Broadband infrastructure, with specific focus on equal access to high-speed broadband across Sri Lanka will be a key focus. TRCSL leads this subject and is currently executing a project to accelerate the development of infrastructure through the utilization of the Telecom Development Charge Fund. Furthermore, the TRCSL in collaboration with the ICTA is driving the expansion of the Lanka Government Network and the provision of connectivity to Schools, Hospitals and a wide spectrum of Government institutions. This initiative has a knock-on effect as well – since for example, once a school is fibre-connected, nearby communities benefit too, unlocking local digital ecosystems. We're also working on device access strategies and boosting digital literacy across all segments of society. In addition, we're promoting cybersecurity awareness to ensure that citizens are equipped with the knowledge required to engage safely with the internet. Our broader ambition is to level the access to

opportunity - and to eliminate existing asymmetries with respect to the access to education, health, commerce, and public services.

Q: Is there sufficient funding to support these initiatives?

A: Yes. The 2025 budget allocates LKR 24 billion in total for Digital Economy Acceleration:

LKR 3 billion for the execution of the Digital Economy Blueprint and the development of new digital public infrastructure

LKR 7 billion for Projects and initiatives of the Digital Ministry and its institutions

LKR 14 billion allocated to other Ministries and institutions to support their digitization initiatives.

Beyond direct funding, our approach emphasizes on ensuring that the projects deliver acceptable Returns on Investment and Financial sustainability. We are also focusing on investment modalities which will serve to moderate Government Investment and Maximise Private Sector Opportunities – these modalities include Public Private Partnerships, Licensing of Digital Services and the Operation of open digital platforms where private sector innovation can thrive.

Q: What safeguards are in place to protect citizen data and digital rights?

A: Trust and privacy need to be embedded by design. For example, the National Data Exchange will include a consent platform ensuring that citizens have control over access to their data. We're also applying principles related to processing personal data, like data minimization and proportionality across all platforms. Key legal frameworks which underly digital trust include the Personal Data Protection Act (which will come into effect in phases commencing October 2025), forthcoming Cybersecurity Legislation Bill, and overarching (new) legislation which will establish and govern the Digital Economy Authority and overall governance of Digital Economy Development. Digital Trust and Governance will be further ensured via the strengthening of Independent regulators such as the Data Protection Authority, the TRCSL and the upcoming Cyber Security Authority.

Q: What's the latest on the Cybersecurity Bill and Sri Lanka's readiness?

A: Legislation pertaining to Cybersecurity Governance and Assurance is in its final phase of drafting and is envisaged to lead to the establishment of an independent Cybersecurity Authority to regulate civilian cybersecurity, which will be distinct from the subject of Military Cyber Security Operations. The establishment of a regulatory framework specific to the Civilian Dimension aligns with global best practice and provides for ensuring transparency, accountability and public trust. On the operational side, the National Cybersecurity Operations Centre (NCSOC) at SLCERT is currently being established, and will be capable of monitoring threats and coordinating responses in real-time. Sri Lanka is currently ranked alongside several advanced nations as a Tier 2 country with respect to cybersecurity readiness. This is a strong foundation, and our goal is to maintain and improve our ranking as the prevalence and impact of Cyber Security threats continues to increase. Sri Lanka

is also an active contributor to the Asia Pacific-CERT network, having hosted several AP-CERT Cybersecurity drills in the past.

Q: Any new digital services the public can expect soon?

A: Definitely. As I mentioned earlier – the ambition is future state that is cashless, paperless, and presence-less. In line with the roll-out of the Digital Public Infrastructure, Citizens will see a wide range of Digital Services, and accompanying conveniences being made available by Public and Private sector institutions. In the very short term, it is our ambition that by year-end, most government payments should be facilitated digitally, and QR and other Digital payments widely adopted. AI is an all-new frontier – as I mentioned earlier, We're exploring its use in delivering government information—enabling citizens to interact with government 24/7 through AI-powered interfaces. It's a sustainable and low-risk application that could significantly improve service delivery. Digital Transformation is for and by the Citizens of Sri Lanka – we are all stakeholders in delivering the change we want to see - contributing ideas, demanding efficiency, convenience and transparency, and embracing change ourselves is something we all need to commit to.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 05/13/2025

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: AIFC Focuses on Digitalization as Catalyst for Economic Development and Investment

Digitalization and investment attraction are crucial for economic growth, said Renat Bekturov, managing director of the Astana International Financial Centre (AIFC), Trend reports. Speaking at the 7th ADA University Policy Forum in Khankendi, Bekturov highlighted the achievements of the MFC and its role in the economic development of Kazakhstan and the broader region. He pointed out that the MFC serves as a unique economic zone with its own jurisdiction, designed to attract investors. Nearly 4,000 companies are registered with the MFC, and the center houses a stock exchange and various financial institutions. Collaboration with ADA University has been a significant step in researching economic and financial processes. The AIFC manager underscored the criticality of equitable asset allocation within the financial ecosystem. "Our objective is to optimize the distribution of economic expansion to ensure equitable advantages for the entire populace," he stated. He also discussed the significance of capital investments and proposed the optimal balance between risk and return. Digitalization, he noted, plays a critical role in accelerating processes and enhancing transparency. Bekturov further touched on the role of Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) as a tool for financing state projects and ensuring transparency. "Digitalization accelerates reforms but can also create additional volatility in the market," he concluded.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/08/2025

Conference in Azerbaijan's Baku Examines Impact of Digitalization and AI on Employment

A conference on "Impact of Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence on Employment" is being held at the Gulustan Palace in Azerbaijan's Baku, dedicated to International Workers' Protection Day and the 120th anniversary of the first collective agreement, Trend reports. The event is attended by Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population Anar Aliyev, President of the National Confederation of Employers' Organizations of Azerbaijan Mammad Musayev, Chairman of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Azerbaijan Sahib Mammadov, and representatives from various state and private organizations.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/28/2025

Modern Demands Push Youth to Expand Knowledge in Digitalization and AI

With organizational support from the Youth Development and Career Center, the Youth Foundation of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the Azerbaijan Innovation Center, Baku is hosting its first large-scale Youth Artificial Intelligence Forum, Azer Aliyev, Director General of the Youth Development and Career Center, told reporters, Trend reports. Speaking to local media, Aliyev noted that the main goal of the event is to enhance young people's knowledge and skills in modern technologies, especially artificial intelligence (AI). Highlighting the significance of the event, Aliyev noted that the forum serves as a development platform for young people and is being held at this scale for the first time. "The demands of the modern era are pushing young people to adapt to current trends and expand their knowledge in areas such as digitalization and artificial intelligence. Under the leadership of President Ilham Aliyev, important strategies are being implemented in our country for digital development and the promotion of AI. By supporting these initiatives, we aim to equip young people with the necessary skills in this field," Aliyev said. According to him, more than 150 young people participated in the event. The forum featured panel discussions involving representatives from both the public and private sectors. Speakers shared valuable insights on the use of AI in various fields, career opportunities, and future prospects in the sector. In alignment with the State Program of the Republic of Azerbaijan and pursuant to a decree from the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated December 19, 2011, the Youth Foundation was instituted under the auspices of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The foundation aims to enhance the framework for executing youth policy, which encompasses the upgrade of the material and technical resources of youth organizations and youth centers.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 05/03/2025

Azerbaijan Highlights Digital Economy Progress at Dubai FinTech Summit 2025

Fariz Jafarov, Executive Director of the Center for Analysis and Coordination of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4SIM) under the Ministry of Economy of Azerbaijan, participated in the Dubai FinTech Summit 2025 held in Dubai, Azernews reports. According to 4SIM, Jafarov spoke at the panel session titled "Companies, Financial Systems and the General Economy: Transformation of Global Digital Innovation Systems," where he shared insights on Azerbaijan's advancements in the digital economy, the country's innovation initiatives, and the integration of financial technologies. The Dubai FinTech Summit 2025, organized by the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), is a globally recognized event that convenes policymakers, innovators, and leaders to shape the future of financial technologies. The summit focuses on enabling more inclusive and accessible financial services through digital transformation. This year's event brought together more than 8,000 participants from over 100 countries, including 300 speakers and over 1,000 investors, reflecting its growing importance on the global FinTech stage.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 05/15/2025

Azerbaijan Expands Digital Transformation Through 'Green Corridor'

Azerbaijan is moving forward with its "Green Digital Corridor" project, strengthening regional connectivity, said Samir Mammadov, Deputy Minister of Digital Development and Transport of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Trend reports. Speaking at the Baku Energy Forum, Mammadov noted that the development of the Green Digital Corridor creates favorable conditions for closer regional cooperation, faster digital integration, and stronger synergy between energy and digital infrastructure. "Fiber-optic infrastructure lays a solid foundation for green corridors, enabling not only the transmission of energy but also of data. This opens up new opportunities for freelancing, startups, and digital services, contributing to economic growth and improved quality of life in the region," Mammadov noted. He also highlighted that Azerbaijan has already achieved full fiber-optic coverage, including in its most remote areas, and continues to invest in data center development and green energy, all of which will further reinforce the country's national and regional digital infrastructure.

From <https://www.trend.az/> 06/03/2025

Visa's Senior Shines Light on Bright Prospects of Azerbaijan's E-Commerce Landscape

Effective development of e-commerce requires a developed infrastructure, Senior Director of Visa and Head of Strategic Partnerships, Fintech, and Ventures in CIS and Southeast Europe Yevgen Lisnyak said during the FINTEX SUMMIT 2025—Finance and Technology Exhibition in Baku, Trend reports. "When referring to infrastructure, I delineate two critical components: firstly, the availability of internet connectivity, and secondly, the efficiency of logistical frameworks." For instance, when a nation establishes a robust logistical framework that facilitates expedited distribution, it effectively addresses a primary 'pain point' for the consumer. What distinguishes the paradigms of offline shopping from their online counterparts? Even at this juncture, during the e-commerce transaction process, I find myself subjected to a latency period. In a non-digital environment, I obtain the merchandise instantaneously. Lisnyak articulated that this is the juncture at which the nation must enhance its performance. In his assessment, the operational parameters in Baku are optimal—the infrastructural framework is indeed robust.

Nevertheless, the rural sectors remain inadequately serviced regarding both digital connectivity and logistical frameworks. "The enterprise capable of optimizing rapid logistics and enhancing user engagement will unequivocally emerge as a frontrunner," he emphasized. Moreover, as articulated by Lisnyak, the e-commerce landscape in Azerbaijan remains in a nascent stage of development; however, it concurrently possesses substantial latent potential for exponential growth trajectories. "The demographic exhibits a robust digital fluency, coupled with elevated consumer anticipations regarding service excellence. Nevertheless, a substantial proportion of liquidity persists within the economic framework, coupled with a diminished confidence quotient in digital service platforms," he articulated. Lisnyak articulated that the nation can leverage the paradigms of digital commerce evolution observed in jurisdictions like China or the UK, where the e-commerce segment constitutes a substantial 35-40 percent of the aggregate trade equilibrium.

From <https://www.trend.az/> 06/24/2025

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KYRGYZSTAN: Declaring Start Date for Testing Program of Digital Currencies

Testing of the digital som in Kyrgyzstan will begin in mid-April 2025, Trend reports via the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan. The testing process will be conducted in several stages, covering key scenarios such as issuance, transfers between digital wallets, government payments, and offline transactions. The digital som will be Kyrgyzstan's national currency in digital form, alongside cash and non-cash payment methods. All forms of currency will be equivalent, allowing users to freely convert between different forms, whether cash, non-cash, or digital. One of the key innovations is the ability to make offline payments. These payments and transfers between digital wallet users will be possible even in the absence of the internet or in case of poor

network connectivity. In addition, smart contracts will be developed for the digital som, allowing users to enter into digital agreements on the platform.

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Kyrgyz Official Spotlights Key Challenges in Digital Transformation

One of the serious problems of digital transformation of the insurance system in Kyrgyzstan is the limited access of part of the population to digital technologies, Head of the Human Resources Department of the Social Fund of Kyrgyzstan Aynura Orozova said, Trend reports. She made the remark during an international conference on "Harmonization of social protection systems in the context of challenges of the modern world" in Baku. "A significant portion of recipients of social benefits are elderly people and residents of remote regions where access to the internet is limited and digital skills are low. Therefore, it's important not only to digitalize, but also to maintain the availability of traditional channels, as well as to develop digital literacy," she said. Orozova noted that one of the key problems remains integration with outdated systems. Existing information platforms in various departments were created at different times and based on different requirements. This complicates the exchange of data and hinders the construction of automated processes," she emphasized. According to her, another serious challenge in the digitalization process is ensuring information security and protecting personal data, especially when processing sensitive information, for example, data on pensions, disabilities, and incomes of citizens. "It's necessary to ensure a high level of cybersecurity, strictly controlled access to data, as well as compliance with the provisions of the new law on personal data," Orozova mentioned. The official also emphasized the importance of systematic work to inform and involve specialists in digital transformation. "Limited resources are holding back full digitalization - there is often a lack of funding, qualified IT specialists, and there is also a pressing need to update the republic's legislation," added Orozova.

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KAZAKHSTAN: Igniting Digital Revolution with Launch of Most Powerful Supercomputer

Kazakhstan is launching the most powerful supercomputer, which has already been delivered to the country, said Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev during a plenary session of the Astana International Forum, Trend reports. President Tokayev noted that Kazakhstan has made significant progress in digital transformation, which reflects our aspiration to become a Eurasian IT hub. "We pay special attention to artificial intelligence. Our goal is to become an academic and innovation hub, where several branches of foreign universities will operate, and

partnerships in research and development will be established,” President Tokayev said. According to Tokayev, Kazakhstan is investing in human capital and expanding opportunities for young professionals. “Our top priority is to reduce regional disparities and strengthen the middle class. That is why we continue to strengthen our potential in key sectors—from digital technologies and artificial intelligence to clean energy and high-value-added manufacturing,” Tokayev added. A few days ago, the most powerful supercomputer in Central Asia arrived in Kazakhstan. Its performance is about 2 exaflops. This is the first supercomputer cluster in the history of the Central Asian region. It is built on the latest NVIDIA H200 graphics chips, specially designed for artificial intelligence tasks and high-performance computing. The launch and installation of the supercomputer will be carried out in the new MCRIAP data center with a Tier III reliability level to ensure uninterrupted and stable operation. The project is an important element in the practical implementation of the Artificial Intelligence Development Concept until 2029 and one of the key stages in forming Kazakhstan’s modern IT infrastructure. Today, the Astana International Forum is taking place in Kazakhstan’s capital. The event is attended by: President of Rwanda Paul Kagame, President of North Macedonia Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, Secretary General of the Council of Europe Alen Berse, former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, heads of UN system organizations, and other respected participants.

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TAJIKISTAN: Keen on Full Integration with eTIR International System

Tajikistan is committed to fully integrating into the international eTIR system (electronic exchange of data between customs authorities), Deputy Minister of Transport Shoista Saidmurodzoda said during a working seminar on implementing the eTIR procedure, Trend reports via the ministry. The seminar was held within the framework of the 2nd High-Level Working Group meeting on the development of the Tajikistan–Uzbekistan–Turkmenistan–Iran–Türkiye (TUTIT) + China multimodal transport corridor, which took place in Dushanbe. According to Saidmurodzoda, Tajikistan recognizes the potential of eTIR as a tool to ensure greater transparency and traceability in the movement of goods, while accelerating customs procedures, facilitating data exchange between customs authorities, and reducing the administrative burden on both carriers and border control agencies. The seminar aimed to establish a unified digital customs transit system based on solutions developed by the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

Participants included representatives from Tajikistan’s Ministry of Transport and Customs Service, UNECE’s Transport Division, the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), the International Road Transport Union (IRU), as well as the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in

Europe (OSCE). Key topics discussed included a practical introduction to eTIR (with presentations by UNECE and IRU), Central Asian countries' experiences with customs transit, data requirements for electronic transit declarations, integration of national systems with the international eTIR platform, and pilot testing of eTIR-based transport. Meanwhile, the importance of implementing eTIR was highlighted in the Roadmap on the Digitalisation of Multimodal Data and Document Exchange along the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor, adopted at the 2023 Baku Summit of the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA). Tajikistan is already a party to the TIR Convention and has also acceded to the eCMR system—part of the Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road (CMR)—further underscoring its commitment to modernizing transit and trade logistics in the region.

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TURKMENISTAN: Expanding Digital Frontier with 5G Launch in Its Arkadag

Turkmenistan has officially rolled out a 5G mobile communication network in the city of Arkadag, taking a giant leap forward in its digital infrastructure and opening the floodgates to high-speed connectivity for residents and businesses alike, Trend reports. The infrastructure was deployed in collaboration with the Chinese tech conglomerate Huawei, signifying a pivotal advancement following the prior rollout of 4G+ capabilities in February 2025. The evolution to fifth-generation wireless technology facilitates data throughput velocities ranging from 500 megabits to 1 gigabit per second—significantly eclipsing the 200 to 250 megabits per second benchmark of fourth-generation systems—while guaranteeing uninterrupted operational efficiency even amidst a plethora of concurrently linked devices. Authorities emphasized that the next-gen infrastructure will facilitate paradigm shifts in various domains, encompassing educational ecosystems, healthcare frameworks, media landscapes, and industrial automation processes. Specifically, the advent of 5G technology will facilitate the optimization of remote educational frameworks, enhance telehealth capabilities, enable instantaneous oversight of manufacturing processes, and support ultra-high-definition media transmission, alongside the remote operation of automated robotic systems within industrial ecosystems. Arkadag, launched in 2023 as Turkmenistan's inaugural “smart city,” was conceptualized with an emphasis on cutting-edge digital frameworks and eco-friendly technological solutions at its foundation. The deployment of 5G synergizes with the overarching paradigm of revolutionizing urban landscapes into exemplars of digital administration and intelligent city evolution.

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UZBEKISTAN: SITA Discuss Creation of Digital Travel Biometric Ecosystem

Uzbekistan and SITA Europe discussed the creation of the Digital Travel biometric ecosystem for automated passenger and baggage services, Trend reports. The matter was reviewed at a meeting between Uzbekistan's Minister of Transport Ilkhom Makhkamov and SITA Europe President Sergio Colella. During the discussions, the parties explored opportunities for cooperation in digitizing the country's air transport sector, implementing digital technologies, and expanding automated management systems for transport infrastructure. Moreover, the sides exchanged views on developing a comprehensive airport management concept and creating a platform for collecting and processing passenger and baggage data. SITA Europe is a leading provider of IT and telecommunications solutions for the air transport industry. The company offers a wide range of services, including passenger processing, baggage management, and air traffic control systems, aimed at enhancing operational efficiency and improving customer experience. As part of the global SITA network, it connects airlines, airports, and other stakeholders in the aviation ecosystem to deliver innovative, sustainable solutions for the future of air travel.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/02/2025

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NEW ZEALAND: Top Mistakes in B2B Digital Course Creation and How to Avoid Them

Creating digital courses for B2B audiences isn't just about delivering content—it's about aligning learning experiences with business objectives. B2B learners expect relevance, efficiency, and measurable outcomes unlike B2C, where individual interests drive engagement. If your digital course offerings doesn't address a real business problem or keep professionals engaged, it's unlikely to deliver value. Here are common pitfalls to avoid, along with strategies to build more impactful, results-driven B2B digital learning experiences. Overloading the Course with Information One frequent mistake is trying to cover too much at once. Overloaded courses overwhelm learners, hindering retention. You content team should focus on outcome-driven learning. Break complex topics into digestible modules, separating "must-know" from "nice-to-know" content. Offer additional resources for deeper exploration, but keep the core curriculum targeted toward specific objectives.

Skipping Market Research Courses that don't resonate often suffer from a lack of research. Without understanding your target audience's pain points, it's hard to deliver value. Use surveys, polls, and focus groups to learn about your B2B clients' challenges. It would be best to tailor course content around these insights to ensure it's both relevant and practical for your audience. **Neglecting Course Structure and**

Flow Even great content falls flat without structure. Learners need a logical progression to build knowledge incrementally. Map your course from start to finish, defining a flow that builds on previous lessons. Plan transitions, checkpoints, and ensure each section leads naturally into the next. A clear structure keeps learners engaged and helps them absorb information effectively. Forgetting to Focus on Engagement Uploading videos and slides isn't enough to keep B2B learners engaged.

Professionals need more than passive content consumption—they need interaction. Incorporate worksheets, quizzes, gamified challenges, and live Q&A sessions. Engaging with your audience is essential for effective digital learning since it makes the learning experience more effective. Underestimating the Power of Marketing Even a well-designed course won't succeed without visibility. Many creators assume their content will "sell itself," but without a strong marketing plan, it might never reach the right audience. Promote your course early—build an email list, generate buzz on social media, and use testimonials to create anticipation. Position your course as a direct solution to business challenges. Not Positioning the Course Correctly Messaging matters if your brand is selling digital courses. If your course title, description, or pricing doesn't clearly communicate value, your audience may overlook it.

Focus on showcasing benefits and value, avoiding technical jargon that could alienate decision-makers. Use benefit-driven language, clarify the outcomes your course enables, and price it competitively to help your offering stand out. Ignoring Professional Design and Quality Presentation impacts perception. Poor visuals or audio can damage your credibility. Invest in professional design elements, such as high-quality visuals and audio. Design tools like Canva and Fiverr can help you create polished visuals and better audio without a large budget. Prioritise clean, consistent branding and user-friendly design to enhance professionalism and trust. Not Diversifying Testing Methods Assessment should reflect different learning styles. A mix of testing methods, such as practical exercises, short-answer questions, peer reviews, and project-based assessments, provides a deeper evaluation of knowledge and skill application. This approach accommodates different learners and increases the overall effectiveness of your course. Conclusion Creating a successful B2B digital course requires strategic thinking—that requires more than just content creation. Market relevance, engagement, and quality, you set your course up for long-term success by avoiding these mistakes and focusing on clear outcomes. Align your efforts with your audience's needs and business goals, and your course won't just inform—it will transform.

From <https://b2bnews.co.nz> 04/09/2025

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Matched Funding Expands Offering of Digital Mental Health Provider

Minister for Mental Health Matt Doocey says people in hard-to-reach and remote communities stand to benefit from an expanded offering of online support following the latest Mental Health and Addiction Innovation Fund announcement. “Today I’m delighted to announce that matched funding has been awarded to digital provider Just a Thought to expand and enhance their online courses to support people facing mental health and addiction challenges,” Mr Doocey says. “Just a Thought offer 17 digitally delivered, evidence-based therapy courses and have supported over 75,000 New Zealanders since they launched in 2019. These online courses offer free and quick access to anyone seeking mental health and addiction support, providing an additional support option alongside face-to-face services.

“Hard-to-reach and remote communities can face barriers accessing the help they need and have unmet need. Initiatives like this are exactly what the Innovation Fund was designed to support, and I look forward to seeing this service scale-up and reach more Kiwis in their time of need.” The funding will allow Just a Thought to develop new wellbeing courses helping with things like manage stress, wellbeing and promoting mindfulness. The courses are free and available to anyone. While round one of the fund has almost wrapped up, round two with a Request for Proposal is scheduled to be released soon. “For round two applications, we’ve lowered the minimum matched investment from \$250,000 to \$100,000 to open access to a wider range of providers. This is another example of the Government’s commitment to exploring new ways to fund and grow mental health support, including through coinvestment,” Mr Doocey says. “As Minister for Mental Health, I am focused on increasing access to mental health and addiction support. The Innovation Fund is one of the ways we are partnering with Non-Government Organisations to deliver innovative projects and initiatives that bring faster access to better mental health and addiction support for communities right across the country.”

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 05/09/2025

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Top Digital Solutions Addressing Burnout in NZ Workplaces

New Zealand businesses are turning to digital tools as stress and burnout levels surge across workplaces. Companies are deploying tech to sharpen focus, lift productivity, and build resilience, from AI-powered platforms to neurofeedback apps. Current State of Brain Health Support in NZ Workplaces: New Zealand workplaces are grappling with increasing levels of stress and burnout. The adoption of digital wellness tools in the corporate sector is rising, but gaps in access and utilisation remain. B2B leaders can bridge these gaps and provide targeted support for their workforce by integrating advanced cognitive health tools. Key Digital Brain Health Tools: 1. Eearable® Neuroscience’s FRENZ Brainband The FRENZ Brainband by Eearable Neuroscience is an EEG-based wearable device designed to monitor brain activity and provide neurofeedback for focus, sleep, and stress management.

This digital tool offers real-time insights into cognitive load, making it particularly valuable for high-stress roles. Benefits for B2B: Cognitive Load Monitoring: Enables leaders to assess employee stress levels during peak work periods. Personalised Interventions: Data-driven insights can inform targeted interventions to reduce burnout. Sleep and CBT-I Therapies: Supports mental recovery through clinically validated cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia (CBT-I). Implementation Strategies: Integrate FRENZ Brainband into wellness programmes, focusing on employees in high-stakes roles. Use cognitive data to design personalised mental health interventions and monitor progress.

2. Neurocast's Neurokeys App Neurocast Neurokeys App uses AI to analyse typing patterns and detect subtle cognitive changes without disrupting daily routines. This monitoring tool provides continuous brain health insights, making it a low-barrier solution for B2B environments. Benefits for B2B: Continuous, Unobtrusive Monitoring: Detects early signs of cognitive decline without employee input. Organisational Insights: Aggregated data reveals cognitive health trends across teams. Proactive Support: Early detection enables timely interventions and stress reduction initiatives. Implementation Strategies: Deploy Neurokeys across teams with strict data privacy protocols. Integrate findings with mental health support services to provide targeted assistance.

3. Groov Groov app, formerly known as Mentemia, is a mental wellbeing platform designed in New Zealand, offering tools for mood tracking, breath training, and stress management. Its cultural relevance and localised design make it an accessible tool for diverse workforces. Benefits for B2B: Culturally Relevant Resource: Tailored to the NZ context, fostering greater engagement. Accessible for All Employees: Free to use, lowering barriers to entry. Data Analytics: Provides anonymous organisational insights for strategic wellbeing planning. Implementation Strategies: Promote Groov as a daily mental health check-in tool, encouraging consistent use. Integrate Groov data into broader wellness programmes to assess and address workforce stress levels.

4. HABITs Messenger HABITs Messenger is an AI-driven chatbot offering interactive mental health support, specifically targeting younger employees and those in early career stages. This scalable, low-barrier tool helps users build coping skills and emotional regulation. Benefits for B2B: Youth-Focused Support: Tailored to younger staff experiencing high stress or career transitions. Emotional Regulation Training: Provides brief, interactive sessions to develop coping strategies. Scalable and Accessible: Low-cost entry point to mental health resources. Implementation Strategies: Integrate HABITs Messenger into internship programmes and graduate development schemes. Position the tool as a proactive support mechanism during high-stress periods, such as project deadlines.

5. Headspace and Calm Headspace and Calm are widely recognised mindfulness apps offering guided meditation, sleep aids, and stress management resources. Both platforms provide corporate plans with scalable access to mental health tools. Benefits for B2B: Scalable Solutions: Accessible to large teams, promoting consistent use. User-Friendly Platforms: Proven tools that are easy to integrate into daily routines. Analytics for Insights: Track employee engagement and tailor wellness initiatives accordingly. Implementation Strategies: Provide free corporate subscriptions to employees as part of mental health benefits. Launch mindfulness campaigns encouraging daily practice to foster a culture of mental wellness.

6. Te Whatu Ora's Zero Data Programme Te Whatu Ora's Zero Data Programme in New Zealand offers free mobile data access to essential health and wellbeing apps, reducing cost barriers for employees in remote or lower-income areas. Benefits for B2B: Increased Accessibility: Ensures equitable access to digital brain health tools. Wider Reach: Extends support to remote and low-income employees. Partnership Opportunities: Collaborate with health providers to promote free access initiatives. Implementation Strategies: Educate employees about the Zero Data Programme to drive adoption of digital wellness tools. Partner with local health services to expand the availability of mental health resources.

7. Virtual Consultations and Telepsychiatry Telepsychiatry services provide remote access to mental health specialists, ensuring timely support without the stigma associated with in-person consultations. Benefits for B2B: Confidential Access: Reduces stigma and logistical barriers to seeking help. Specialised Support: Ensures rapid access to qualified mental health professionals. Integration Potential: Can be seamlessly linked to existing mental health benefits. Implementation Strategies: Promote telepsychiatry as a confidential support option within employee wellness programmes. Offer subsidised or free consultations to employees experiencing high stress or burnout. Conclusion New Zealand companies are embracing digital brain health tools to stay ahead of growing mental wellness challenges from Auckland boardrooms to remote regional offices, devices like the FRENZ Brainband and Neurokeys are delivering real-time insights, while platforms such as Groov and HABITs Messenger are embedding psychological care into daily work life.

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New Verifier App Signals Step Toward Modern Digital Identity System

The Government has today released an app to verify international digital credentials, Digitising Government Minister Judith Collins and Tourism and Hospitality Minister Louise Upston say. "NZ Verify/Whakatūtu App will initially be used to verify select international mobile drivers' licences, meaning visitors can rent a car or check in to a hotel with just their phone," Ms Collins says. From today, it will be able to verify

mobile drivers' licenses from Queensland, Australia, and the US states of California, New York, Ohio, Georgia, Virginia, Arizona, Maryland, Colorado, Utah, Puerto Rico, Iowa, New Mexico, Hawai'i, Alaska "The NZ Verify app can be tailored to suit different needs, such as showing only confirmation of age and a photo when proof of age is required, ensuring that other personal details remain private. This marks a significant step forward for the privacy of digital credential holders, and improves trust and user safety." "Anything that makes it easier for tourists to visit New Zealand is always welcome," Ms Upston says. "Visitors with a mobile driver licence will now be able to use it here just as easily as they do at home, without the hassle of bringing a physical copy. "Encouraging more tourists means more people staying in our hotels, eating in our cafés, spending in our shops and visiting our attractions, creating jobs and driving economic growth. "I encourage every business who needs to verify visitors' identities to download this app." Ms Collins says international mobile drivers' licences are just the beginning, and additional credentials will be supported by NZ Verify in the future. NZ Verify is now available for download via the New Zealand Apple Store and will be coming soon on the Google Play Store.

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 05/13/2025

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NZ Grocery Wholesalers Builds Nationwide Network

New Zealand Grocery Wholesalers has built a distribution network across the country in just three years. The Woolworths New Zealand division now delivers to more than 100 retail locations and supports a growing base of over 60 independent retail customers. Retail Demand Driving Volume Growth Retailers including Circle K, Mad Butcher, and MetroMart are tapping into the wholesaler's growing supply network. Over the past year, wholesale volumes have climbed 105%, with an additional 100,000 cartons moved nationwide. Strong Emphasis on Direct Supplier Relationships One of the defining aspects of New Zealand Grocery Wholesalers' strategy is its focus on direct supplier relationships. The business has bypassed traditional market systems to negotiate directly with fruit and vegetable growers, as well as livestock farmers.

"If we don't get it right with our suppliers, we can't get it right for our customers either," a spokesperson said. "There's always room for improvement, and we're talking to our suppliers all the time so we can keep doing better." The company works with more than 1,400 local and international suppliers to ensure a consistent supply of quality products at competitive prices. It also supports the Commerce Commission's Grocery Supply Code, aimed at ensuring fair trading conditions across the retail industry. "We supported the introduction of the grocery supply code to ensure all retailers are held to the same standard," the company said. Industry Recognition and Export Support for Kiwi Suppliers The wholesaler's commitment to supplier relationships is reflected in its industry ranking. "Suppliers have independently ranked us as the best grocery retailer to do business with for five running years," the

company stated.

This strong reputation is further strengthened by its efforts to support Kiwi suppliers internationally, using its connection with Woolworths Australia. “We’re proud to support many Kiwi suppliers to succeed on the world stage, through our relationship with Woolworths in Australia,” it said. **Maintaining Affordability Amid Economic Challenges** The wholesaler has maintained a focus on affordability and quality amid rising living costs in New Zealand. We know New Zealanders are facing cost of living pressures and our absolute priority is delivering great products, great prices and a fantastic shopping experience for our customers as well as building a meaningful wholesale business,” the company explained. The combination of supplier partnerships and direct sourcing enables the business to offer competitive pricing while maintaining high standards.

Commitment to Regulatory Engagement and Long-Term Growth The wholesaler has also publicly committed to constructive engagement with regulatory processes. “We support the Grocery Supply Code because we feel that consistent rules hold everyone to the same high standard and help businesses of all sizes to grow and succeed,” the company said. “We’ll now take the time to read the draft documents issued by the Commerce Commission in detail and will work constructively with the Commission through the submission process.” The company acknowledges it is still in the early stages but remains ambitious. “Wholesale is a new and fast-evolving area for us. We’re building the best offering possible for the wider grocery industry and Kiwi shoppers,” the business concluded.

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NZBN Registration Hits One Million, a Major Step in New Zealand’s Digital Economy

New Zealand has reached a remarkable milestone in its journey toward a more connected digital economy, with over one million businesses now registered with the New Zealand Business Number (NZBN). “The NZBN is a simple idea with a big impact. It gives each business a unique identifier that makes it easier to work with government, other businesses and suppliers – saving time, cutting duplication and reducing admin,” Small Business and Manufacturing Minister Chris Penk said in a media release. Penk describes the NZBN as a single, reliable source of business information that government agencies can access instantly. The NZBN can also be used by businesses and individuals to verify the authenticity of the company they are engaging with. According to Penk, the milestone includes “nearly 200,000 sole traders and unincorporated businesses, which aren’t legally required to register but are choosing to.” “That shows they see real, practical value in it – especially smaller operators who may not have large digital systems and need tools that help them get on with the job.” Launched in 2016, the NZBN has become a fundamental part of

New Zealand's digital infrastructure, facilitating processes such as invoicing, procurement, compliance, and emergency response. With an increasing number of businesses registering and regularly updating their information, the NZBN becomes progressively more valuable, allowing for smoother digital transactions and enabling more effective use of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. With stronger data sharing among agencies, the government can provide businesses with quicker and more customised services. "This government is committed to backing businesses and driving economic growth. Modernisation like this is key to helping Kiwi businesses thrive and compete globally." Small Business and Manufacturing Minister Penk urges businesses that have not yet registered for a New Zealand Business Number to complete their registration promptly.

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Asia-Pacific

Cybersecurity Defenses Urged to Evolve

As artificial intelligence technologies become more deeply integrated into business operations, new cybersecurity risks are prompting companies to strengthen protective measures around AI-driven operations, said a senior executive. "The rapid adoption of large language models (LLMs) and their privatized deployment across diverse industries and individual users are creating both new cybersecurity opportunities and challenges," said Adrian Chan, vice-president of Palo Alto Networks Greater China. Chan said the wide applications of emerging LLMs such as Deep-Seek are expected to further fuel demand for the cybersecurity sector, where risks primarily involve data leakage prevention, infrastructure protection and vulnerabilities within the LLMs themselves. "Many LLMs have open ports, which make them susceptible to cyberattacks," said Chan, "Hackers can easily infiltrate these models to steal sensitive data or carry out data poisoning." Chan noted that certain industries, due to their relatively heavy reliance on data, are particularly vulnerable to cyberattacks. The financial sector is one of the most targeted, as financial institutions store vast amounts of account information and personal data — making them attractive to profit-driven attackers. The healthcare industry is another high-risk sector, Chan said, largely because of the vast data generated by IoT-enabled medical devices. "Hospitals and healthcare providers are often exposed to security breaches due to their extensive use of connected technologies," he said.

Manufacturing is also frequently targeted, due to its complex and extended supply chains, which can be exploited for ransomware attacks, Chan added. In addition to the industry-specific risks, the rise of AI agents — autonomous systems that can

make decisions and execute tasks — has also introduced a new layer of cybersecurity concern, the executive said. "Before trusting AI agents for everything, it is critical to make sure that their training data, model development and deployment processes are safe," he said. As AI technology advances, cybersecurity defenses must also evolve, Chan said. "In the AI era, companies need to leverage AI-powered solutions to combat AI-driven threats," he said, adding that while business operators are using AI to improve efficiency, cyber attackers are also adopting cutting-edge AI techniques to launch sophisticated attacks. "We believe AI will fundamentally reshape the cybersecurity landscape in the future," Chan said. To address the emerging risks, Chan emphasized the importance of AI-driven and integrated cybersecurity platforms that accomplish real-time responses to threats. "Many Chinese enterprises now use a bunch of fragmented security tools, which not only increases costs and reduces efficiency, but also makes it difficult to achieve real-time protection against cybersecurity threats," Chan said. According to a recent IBM report, 52 percent of surveyed executives said complexity is the biggest impediment to security operations. In this regard, an integrated platform can enable users to connect and visualize data across networks, clouds and endpoints, allowing for faster and more effective responses to threats in the AI age, Chan said.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 04/10/2025

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WICDA Cybersecurity Training Program Officially Kicked Off

On April 15, the WIC Digital Academy Cybersecurity Emergency Response Advanced Training Program (hereinafter referred to as Program) officially launched under the theme "AI for Good, Coordinated Responses". The program brought together senior experts from leading cybersecurity institutions and firms from both China and abroad to form a distinguished teaching team. Together, they guided senior government and enterprise representatives from across Asia through intensive training and discussions. Topics covered included cybersecurity awareness enhancement, frameworks for AI safety governance, new paradigms in cybersecurity for the digital intelligent era, security and intelligence integration, AI-powered offensive and defensive simulations, GenAI applications for cybersecurity, and practical insights into cybersecurity empowered by AI strategy. Based on responses to a cybersecurity survey before the program, the WIC Digital Academy has worked closely with the teaching team to tailor the curriculum to address common challenges and key concerns shared by Asian countries and regions. Participants engaged in proactive, solution-oriented exchanges with instructors, sharing local challenges and urgent cybersecurity needs. Many praised the training for its depth and forward-looking perspective, calling it highly professional and thought-provoking. They noted that it offered new directions and pathways for advancing cybersecurity collaboration. Looking ahead, WIC will continue to uphold the principle of maintaining cybersecurity and promoting orderly development. More training programs are planned to strengthen the front line of cyber defense in the intelligent era. The WIC

Digital Academy, together with its partners and a broad network of experts and scholars, remains committed to exploring innovative approaches to technological empowerment and collaborative governance—especially with developing countries—while enhancing global cyber threat response capabilities, building a more influential cybersecurity exchange platform, and creating a safer, more stable, and prosperous cyberspace.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 04/16/2025

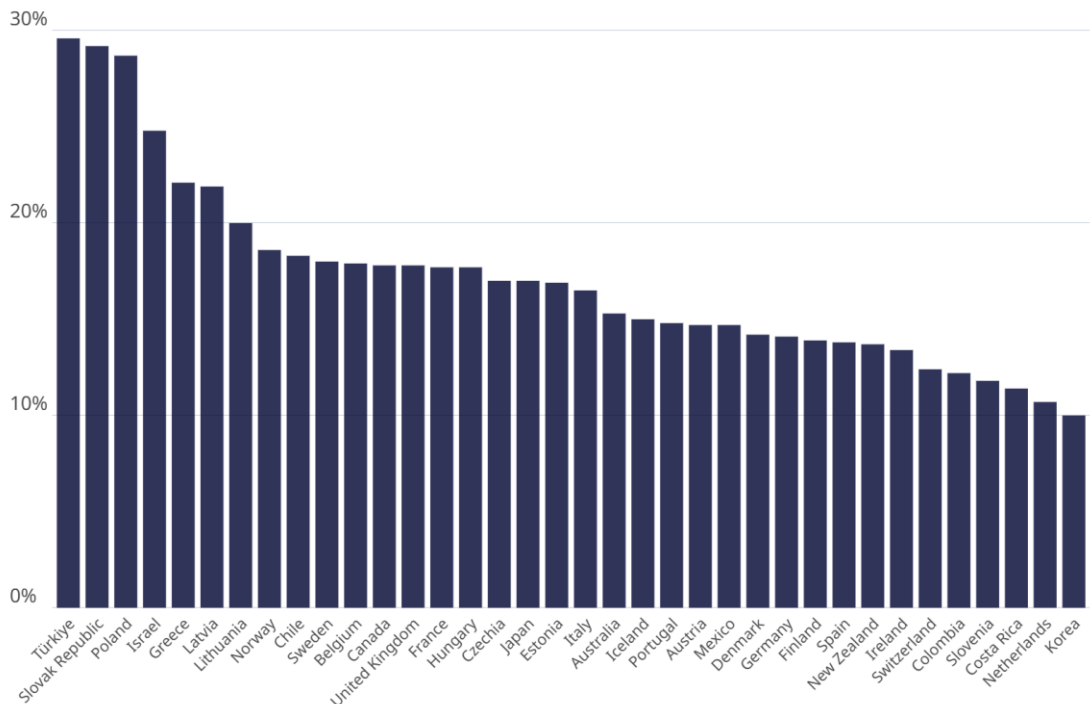
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OECD Calls for an Ambitious Approach to Protect and Empower Children Online

In today's digital world, where 98% of 15-year-olds in OECD countries have a smartphone, children enjoy unprecedented opportunities for learning, entertainment, and connecting with peers. However, early and excessive exposure to an online environment also creates risks. According to a new OECD report, a comprehensive approach to address children's digital lives must encompass evidence-based public policies, safety features in digital services, and clear guidance and support to educators and caregivers in helping children manage their engagement with digital technologies. [How's Life for Children in the Digital Age?](#) provides an overview of the current state of children's digital lives across OECD countries. It presents internationally comparable indicators on digital use and experiences and makes recommendations to ensure that children are both protected and empowered to use digital media in a beneficial way while managing potential risks. Informed by the most recent international data available[1] the report includes 45 internationally comparable indicators related to children's access and use of digital technologies, online social interactions, negative experiences, and practices that increase or reduce risk. For example, while 51% of 15-year-old students in OECD countries report being able to easily adjust digital settings to protect their privacy, 27.6% report sharing made-up information on social networks and 17% report feeling nervous or anxious without their digital devices. The indicators covered in the Report refer to specific, measurable behaviours, providing a new practical resource to guide policy decisions related to children's well-being.

Children who report feeling nervous/anxious without their digital devices

% of children, 2022



Source: [OECD \(2025\), How's Life for Children in the Digital Age?](#)

The data also shows that cyberbullying is on the rise across all OECD countries and a significant minority of children report problematic social media use. In addition, extended periods of time spent online are found to crowd out other valuable and enriching activities such as reading, physical exercise, or in-person socialising with friends, which are widely recognised as essential for children's cognitive and socio-emotional development. "It is key for all stakeholders to work together to protect and support children as they navigate the digital world, also considering their offline situation as risks to children's well-being in both worlds often reinforce one another," **OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann** said. "Strengthening regulation and other policy tools, enhancing children's digital literacy and skills, providing guidance for parents and caregivers, expanding the evidence base on children's digital activities and their impacts and incorporating children's perspectives into policy design can all help to improve safety, well-being and opportunities in the online world."

Encouragingly, the collection of data on children's activities and engagement in digital spaces is increasing in many countries. However, the indicators also reveal important gaps. For example, many countries still lack comprehensive data on the amount of time children spend on screens and digital activities, the nature of those activities, and the impacts of screen exposure and use on children of *all* ages. Addressing these gaps would enhance countries' monitoring capacities, understanding, and ability to mitigate the risks to children's well-being. The report provides guidance on how existing data sources could be leveraged to address data gaps and highlights the importance of capturing the perspectives of stakeholders including parents, children, educators, digital service providers, health professionals and

experts to inform the development of effective policies and supports. Journalists are invited to contact [Johanna Gleeson](#) in the [OECD Media Office](#) (+33 1 45 24 97 00) for further information or to request interviews. For more information on well-being visit the OECD's [Centre on Well-Being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity](#) (WISE).

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Build Solid Technology Barriers to Eliminate Risks

A leading Chinese expert has noted the importance of implementing innovative digital assessment and monitoring systems to improve the precision of anti-corruption and anti-commercial bribery compliance, and build a solid technology barrier. Liu Mingjuan, former Tesco senior legal counsel, deputy director of compliance in the Chinese region of global biopharmaceutical company Bristol-Myers Squibb, and the deputy director of compliance in the Chinese region of world leading transnational pharmaceutical enterprise UCB, said integrating big data analysis and AI technology can help identify possible risks, and automatically form risk assessment reports and risk management plans. Liu, who has a solid legal foundation and profound theoretician knowledge, is a graduate of Hunan University and East China University of Political Science and Law with a bachelor's degree in international economic law and a master's degree in economic law. As the global operation of a multinational company faces compliance challenges from both countries where the headquarters and branches are located, she said, it is necessary for the company to abide by laws and regulations in different countries to ensure compliance operation under different legal systems, as well as respect and balance the differences between different cultures. It is a must to formulate a regular risk assessment system to perform the systematic review of each business risk of the company in combination with changes in internal and external environments, she said in an interview.

"Such sustainable risk scanning and improvement enables a company to timely identify potential problems and challenges and avoid accumulation and outbreak of risks," she said. In keeping pace with the times, it is also vital to launch compliance innovation practices, based on the business partner anti-corruption due diligence procedures, Liu stressed. "We have successfully launched a Channel Partner Management Platform, helping a company assess the background, credit condition, and potential contact with the government authorities, historical corruption situation and the corporate reputation of each partner, guaranteeing that the company's partners also conform to the requirements of anti-corruption laws and fit the company's values and standards." Together, Liu and her team have implemented a set of comprehensive and efficient compliance plans for the top-level architecture of the company, successfully realizing conversion of international and local anti-corruption and anti-commercial bribery code of conduct into practice within the company. In 2018, Liu reached the peak of her career and joined a Fortune Global

500 life science company headquartered in the United States. To date, she has served as the compliance leader of the company overseeing the Chinese and Indian region.

At an international anti-corruption compliance summit in Shanghai in 2024, Liu called on enterprises to establish an effective risk management mechanism in the global environment and use intelligent tools to make the risk management system more effective. She made a key-note speech at the Thirteenth China International Anti-corruption Compliance Summit, which was held on May 28-29, 2024, and drew legal and compliance experts from top law firms, world top 100 enterprises and key government institutions in different countries and regions. Liu's compliance plans specifically include: Building a compliance management organization; establishing a compliance management system; establishing a risk prevention system; building a supervision, inspection and continuous improvement system, in a bid to provide a warning function for compliance risks and improving the enterprise's compliance control ability. In addition, Liu has innovatively integrated corruption perception index (CPI), a tool with certain public credibility and reference value around the world, into the intelligent risk identification and assessment model, ensuring that the matrix of the annual income and risks in different countries and regions can be seen intuitively. "On the risk management level, we have introduced an advanced warning system that can monitor in real time abnormal behaviors in the business flow through data mining and analysis," she claimed. Currently, it is vital to display how technologies can make compliance management more efficient and precise, she said, adding that digital compliance innovation can provide a company with strong compliance risk monitoring and management tools, as well as anti-corruption and anti-commercial bribery risk control of global transnational companies.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 06/06/2025

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East Asia

CHINA: Millions Use Cyberspace IDs to Protect Online Privacy

Chinese citizens are able to avoid providing explicit personal information to internet service providers by using cyberspace IDs -- a move China has taken to strengthen online privacy protection. The number of Chinese citizens who have applied for and activated cyberspace IDs has reached 6 million, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) announced on Friday. Cyberspace IDs take two forms: one is a series of letters and numbers, and the other is an online credential. Both correspond to an individual's real-life identity but exclude any plaintext information. In June 2023, Chinese authorities established a national service platform that issues digital identities by verifying legal, real-life identity documents such as resident ID cards. Citizens will no longer have to provide personal information such as ID numbers or real names to internet service providers when they register for services or verify their identities.

Regulations on the public service related to cyberspace IDs were on Friday published by six government departments, including the MPS and the Cyberspace Administration of China, and will take effect on July 15.

According to the regulations, if an internet user chooses to use a cyberspace ID to register and verify their identity, the relevant internet service provider should not require them to provide additional plaintext information unless otherwise stipulated by laws and administrative regulations, or with the user's consent. The national cyberspace ID authentication service platform will only collect personal information that is strictly necessary for authentication purposes, the regulations stipulate. Under a "minimum and necessary" standard, the platform will only provide verification results to internet service providers. In cases where retaining a user's real-life identity information is legally required, the platform should only do so with that user's explicit consent. According to the MPS, the official app used to issue and authenticate cyberspace IDs has been downloaded over 16 million times. An MPS official emphasized that obtaining a cyberspace ID is voluntary. "This service not only ensures secure and convenient identity verification for citizens but also supports the growth of China's digital economy."

From <http://www.news.cn/> 05/23/2025

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Old Industry Heartland Enhances IP Protection for Emerging Sectors

China is enhancing intellectual property (IP) protection in emerging industries within its traditional industrial hubs to foster innovation and revitalization, according to the country's top IP regulator on Friday. Once the backbone of the country's heavy industry, the northeastern provinces of Jilin, Liaoning and Heilongjiang, along with the neighboring Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, have been focusing on IP development in high-end equipment manufacturing, new-generation information technology, biomedicine, new materials and modern agriculture. By the end of 2024, the number of valid invention patents in these strategic emerging industries had reached 46,000, according to the China National Intellectual Property Administration (CNIPA). The achievement is part of the region's broader IP growth: by the end of April 2025, the four provincial-level regions have owned a total of 195,000 valid invention patents, marking a 10.2 percent year-on-year increase; the number of valid registered trademarks has reached 2.16 million, up 7.7 percent year-on-year. This region has long been a vital industrial and agricultural base for China, making significant industrial and economic contributions in the early decades following the founding of New China in 1949. It continues to play a key role in safeguarding national security in defense, food, ecology, energy and industry.

Amid a key national strategy to revitalize the northeast China, the CNIPA has offered professional IP support to the region's cutting-edge research in fields, such as

robotics, new energy, coal chemical industry, and aerospace equipment manufacturing, leveraging the region's rich scientific institutions and top universities. Local IP agencies across the region have also explored numerous ways to boost IP growth. Liaoning Province has established national-level centers to provide training for enterprises facing foreign-related IP disputes; Heilongjiang has introduced financial policies to encourage laboratory researchers to commercialize their invention patents; and Jilin has built IP-favored industrial zones for modern agriculture and photo-electronic information enterprises. Moreover, Inner Mongolia offers local enterprises expedited IP services for patent applications in biology and new materials sectors, ensuring timely protection of their innovations and preventing imitation or infringement by competitors. "We will continue efforts to turn IP -- the intangible assets -- into the tangible forces driving high-quality development," said Yang Zhihong, deputy head of the Inner Mongolia's IP agency.

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China Cracks 294,000 Telecom Fraud Cases in Sweeping Campaign

In a sweeping nationwide campaign against telecom and online fraud, Chinese police cracked 294,000 cases in 2024, apprehending a large number of suspects, including more than 570 ringleaders, financiers, and key operatives behind the schemes. Police targeted criminal networks providing illicit support to overseas scam operations. According to the Ministry of Public Security, these groups offered a range of services, including online promotion, money laundering, technical development, and facilitation of illegal border crossings. Since the start of 2024, China's national anti-fraud center has intensified efforts in early warnings and technical countermeasures, issuing 1.8 million alerts. In coordination with other agencies, the center intercepted nearly 4.7 billion scam calls and 3.4 billion fraudulent text messages, while blocking 315 billion yuan (about 43.9 billion U.S. dollars) in suspected illicit funds. Simultaneously, the government has intensified public awareness efforts by launching themed initiatives and broadcasting television programs on fraud prevention, aiming to boost public vigilance and strengthen the ability to guard against scams.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 06/16/2025

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Chinese Prosecutors Warn of Rising Online Crimes Targeting Minors

Online crimes committed by adults against minors are on the rise in China, prompting calls for stronger safeguards and stricter enforcement, according to a white paper released by the country's top procuratorate. More adults are using

telecommunications and online platforms to cause harm to minors, said the white paper released Monday by the Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP). In 2024, prosecutors across China filed charges against 3,347 individuals for such crimes -- a 14.1 percent increase from the previous year. These offenses accounted for 7.3 percent of all adult-perpetrated crimes against minors in 2024, up from 6.9 percent in 2023, the white paper notes. As underscored in the white paper, Chinese prosecutors have worked closely with cyberspace regulators and police to address crimes that target minors such as cyberbullying and online sexual harassment.

Efforts have also been intensified to punish those exploiting minors in telecom and internet-based fraud schemes. Authorities have expanded legal protections for minors, the white paper says. That includes providing legal consultations, pressuring guardians to fulfill their responsibilities, and offering civil litigation support to help minors defend their rights. The white paper calls for broader efforts to improve the overall digital environment for young people. Prosecutors have assisted in enforcing national regulations on the protection of minors and have pushed internet platforms to take more responsibility. In Shanghai, for example, prosecutors have teamed up with the internet, police and cultural authorities to launch a coordinated cleanup campaign. Over the past three years, the initiative has removed nearly 6 million pieces of harmful or illegal content related to minors and introduced local and industry standards to improve online safety.

The white paper also reveals an increase in overall crimes against minors. In 2024, prosecutors approved more than 57,000 arrests -- up 7.3 percent from the previous year -- and filed charges against over 74,000 individuals, an 11 percent year-on-year rise. Cases of rape, molest, robbery, picking quarrels and provoking troubles, as well as forced sexual abuse and humiliation accounted for 67 percent of all prosecutions involving crimes against minors, according to the white paper. The SPP emphasized its collaboration with the Supreme People's Court and the Ministry of Public Security in tackling sexual crimes against children and offenses like organizing adolescents to engage in illegal paid companionship in entertainment venues. In 2024 alone, more than 45,000 people were prosecuted for sexually abusing minors. To ensure consistency in handling sensitive cases, the three institutions also jointly launched training programs focused on criminal cases involving women and children.

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

While the number of juvenile suspects submitted for arrest review fell in 2024, both arrests and prosecutions of minors increased, according to the white paper. Among those aged 14 to 16, prosecutors handled more than 9,300 cases last year, a 7.4 percent decrease from 2023. Five offenses -- theft, fraud, group fighting, rape, and robbery -- accounted for 69.4 percent of all juvenile prosecutions last year, the white paper notes. Notably, the SPP approved prosecution for 34 minors involved in serious violent crimes. Citing several high-profile cases that drew widespread attention, the SPP reaffirms that minors who commit crimes with malicious intent or

particularly cruel methods will face appropriate legal consequences, with no tolerance for leniency. Commenting on the rise in juvenile rape cases, Zhong Hua, a sociology professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, said the trend may be partly linked to earlier sexual development and adolescent curiosity. Zhong also noted the possibility that more victims are coming forward due to improved sex education, legal awareness, and stricter enforcement.

Meanwhile, conditional non-prosecution -- a measure giving minor offenders a second chance rather than immediate punishment under certain conditions -- was applied to nearly 21,000 juvenile suspects in 2024, accounting for 21.5 percent of all juvenile cases, according to the white paper. Before granting this status, prosecutors consulted the police and victims, educated the eligible offenders and monitored compliance during their probation period. However, prosecutors revoked conditional non-prosecution for 1,104 repeat offenders with a history of previously uncharged crimes or repeated violation of supervisory conditions. In the white paper, the SPP pledged to safeguard the healthy development of minors with enhanced judicial protection. "Procuratorates across the country will make sustained efforts to prevent and control juvenile delinquency, alongside rigorous enforcement against crimes targeting minors in accordance with the law," the SPP noted.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 06/17/2025

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China Launches Campaign to Protect Adolescents from Online Drug Risks

A nationwide campaign has been launched to protect young Chinese from the growing threat of drug-related online content and criminal activities involving addictive substances such as narcotic and psychotropic drugs, according to the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) on Friday. The campaign, jointly initiated by seven government departments including the CAC, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Security, will run from June to December this year. A joint initiative released by these authorities highlights the risks of misusing medically regulated substances such as dextromethorphan, etomidate and tramadol. It warns teenagers not to fall for misleading narratives that downplay the dangers of such substances -- and calls on families and the society to share responsibility in the fight against drugs. In recent years, the pattern of drug abuse in China has shifted significantly, with the misuse of narcotic and psychotropic drugs growing rapidly in the country, posing a serious risk to public health, particularly among adolescents.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 06/20/2025

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China Mulls Measures to Identify Harmful Online Content for Minors

The Cyberspace Administration of China on Friday released a set of draft measures for identifying online information that may affect the physical and mental health of minors. According to the draft, now open for soliciting public feedback, such information includes content that may trigger or induce minors to "imitate unsafe behaviors, commit acts violating social ethics, develop extreme emotions, or form harmful habits." Specifically, this may refer to content containing sexual innuendo or teasing that easily triggers sexual associations, content involving online abuse, and content that incites discrimination against specific groups or regions, among over 30 other types of information listed in the draft. The draft also states that providers of internet products and services must not display such potentially harmful content in prominent areas likely to draw user attention, such as homepages, pop-ups and trending search lists.

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JAPAN: Eyeing Increasing Cybersecurity Experts to 50,000 by 2030

Japan's industry ministry on Wednesday released a report by an expert panel featuring a target of increasing the number of cybersecurity experts to 50,000 by 2030. Specifically, Japan hopes to double the number of people with the Registered Information Security Specialist national license established in 2016. As of last month, about 24,000 people had obtained the qualification. As experts with cybersecurity knowledge, license holders are tasked with crafting cybersecurity measures and tackling cyberattacks at companies. A private survey has shown that Japan faces a cybersecurity expert shortage of about 110,000 people, highlighting an urgent need to nurture such professionals. Registered Information Security Specialist license holders are required to pay a fee of over 100,000 yen every three years to take courses to renew their license.

From <https://www.nippon.com> 05/14/2025

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Japan to Compile New Cybersecurity Strategy by Year-End

The Japanese government on Thursday decided to draw up a new cybersecurity strategy by the end of this year, following the recent enactment of a law to introduce active cyberdefense aimed at preventing serious cyberattacks. The new strategy will set a direction for securing experts and developing an active cyberdefense system, such as ways for the government to acquire and analyze communications and take measures to neutralize threats. The strategy will also feature a program to introduce encryption methods that cannot be broken by quantum computers with high-speed computing capability. At the day's meeting of the government's Cybersecurity Strategic Headquarters, participants confirmed urgent matters to be addressed in

areas other than active cyberdefense. They decided on a plan to compile a basic policy for a public-private action plan by summer next year to promote a method called "threat hunting," a proactive cybersecurity process focused on detecting advanced threats.

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Personal Info Leak Cases Hit Record High in Japan in FY 2024

The number of personal information breach cases hit a record high of 19,056 in Japan in fiscal 2024 through March this year, according to the Personal Information Protection Commission's report adopted by the cabinet Tuesday. The number, based on reports from business operators under the personal information protection law, increased 57 pct from the previous year. Personal data leaks involving My Number personal identification numbers reported under the My Number law climbed to 2,052 cases from 334 in fiscal 2023. The report said that unauthorized access to the server of MKSystem Corp., which operates systems to support personnel and labor affairs management, led to the increases. Of the cases reported under the personal information protection law, the government commission gave advice and guidance in 395 cases and issued a directive for corrective action in one case.

From <https://www.nippon.com> 06/10/2025

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SOUTH KOREA: Gov't to Bolster IP Protection Efforts amid Global Tech War

The government will strengthen its cooperation with related authorities to better protect industrial technologies and intellectual properties (IPs) amid fierce global competition in advanced technologies, the industry ministry said Thursday. The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy discussed joining hands with the Korean Intellectual Property Office to strengthen their capabilities in IP protection in a joint forum on economic security, according to ministry officials. The move comes amid a continued increase in technology leak cases, the ministry said. Over the past five years, South Korea identified some 100 technology leakage cases, which are estimated to have led to a combined financial damage of 23 trillion won (US\$16.2 billion), according to data compiled by the National Intelligence Service. "Robust protection of technologies and IPs is crucial to strengthening economic security," Trade Minister Cheong In-kyo said. The government will put in "all-out efforts" to advance core national strategies and enhance capabilities to protect them by actively utilizing patent information, Cheong added.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/17/2025

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Acting President Instructs Gov't to Check SK Telecom's

Response Measures over Data Leak

Acting President Han Duck-soo on Sunday instructed the government to check the adequacy of SK Telecom Co.'s response measures for a potential major leak of universal subscriber identity module (USIM) data. On April 18, SK Telecom detected signs of a massive leak of customers' USIM data due to a cyberattack, prompting the company last week to announce it would replace the USIMs of all of its 23 million users for free. Han instructed the Ministry of Science and ICT to "closely" inspect the company's response measures, which include recommending that users sign up for a USIM protection service, according to his office. He also called on the government to "thoroughly" analyze the cause of the incident while instructing the National Intelligence Service and other relevant agencies to inspect the country's data protection system against cyberattacks, it said. SK Telecom has announced it will offer free USIM replacements to its 23 million subscribers upon request, a move expected to cost the company 177.1 billion won (US\$122.9 million). ICT Minister Yoo Sang-im said Thursday a joint civilian and government probe into the data breach is currently under way and is expected to take about one to two months.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/27/2025

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SK Group Launches Data Protection Committee to Bolster Group-Wide Cybersecurity

SK Group said Wednesday it has launched a special committee on data protection as part of its efforts to improve cybersecurity across its affiliates, following a large-scale data breach at SK Telecom Co. The Information Security Innovation Committee was formed under the SUPEX Council, SK Group's top decision-making advisory body, to proactively identify and block security risks and strengthen security capabilities of affiliates within the group, according to SK Group. Chey Chang-won, chairman of the SUPEX Council, will head the new committee, with key SK Group affiliates, including SK Corp., SK Innovation Co., SK hynix Inc. and SK Telecom, participating. To ensure expertise and objectivity, SK Group has appointed external cybersecurity experts from academia and industry as official members. They include professor Choi Kyoung-jin of Gachon University, professor Lee Byung-young from Seoul National University and professor Kim Yong-dae, former director of the Cyber Security Research Center at the Korea Advanced Institute of Science & Technology (KAIST).

"With the establishment of the Information Security Innovation Committee, we aim to enhance the security posture of all SK Group companies and implement systematic information protection activities that build trust with stakeholders," an SK Group official said. "We will hold regular monthly meetings and technical working sessions to ensure effective execution." The launch of the committee is part of a promise made by SK Group Chairman Chey Tae-won during a media briefing last week, in

which he publicly apologized for the data breach that may have exposed the personal information of approximately 25 million SK Telecom users. The breach was first detected on April 18, involving a significant leak of universal subscriber identity module (USIM) data. In response, the company has offered to replace the USIM of all 25 million subscribers, including 2 million budget phone users, free of charge to prevent identity theft or financial fraud. The company has also enrolled all users in its USIM protection service, which, it says, offers the same level of protection against unauthorized financial activities as a physical USIM replacement.

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USIM, Private Info of All 25 Mln SK Telecom Subscribers Leaked in Cyberattack

Personal information and universal subscriber identity module (USIM) data of all subscribers of SK Telecom Co., South Korea's leading mobile carrier, have been leaked in a large-scale cyberattack detected last month, a government-private investigation team said Monday. In its interim findings, the breach dates back to June 15, 2022, when the unidentified perpetrators are believed to have planted malware on the company's servers, compromising a total of 23 SK Telecom servers that store four types of USIM data, including international mobile subscriber identity (IMSI) information. Among the compromised servers, two had been used as temporary storage for personal data, such as names, birthdates, phone numbers and email addresses. Investigators said they are still working to determine the exact scope of data stored on those two servers. SK Telecom detected the breach on April 18.

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Major S. Korean Firms Spend Annual Average of 2.9 Bln Won on Cybersecurity

South Korea's major companies spent an average of 2.9 billion won (US\$2.1 million) per year on information protection, industry data showed Monday. According to data from the Korea Internet & Security Agency (KISA) and other sources, 10 local companies each invested over 100 billion won in cybersecurity over the past three years. Samsung Electronics Co. topped the list, spending a total of 712.6 billion won from 2021-2023, followed by telecom giant KT Corp., which invested 327.4 billion won during the same period. SK Telecom Co., the country's largest mobile carrier that recently suffered a large-scale data breach, came in third with 251.5 billion won in spending. Other companies in the top 10 include Coupang Inc., SK hynix Inc., LG Uplus Corp., Samsung SDS Co., Woori Bank, Naver Corp. and LG Electronics Inc.

In 2022, the South Korean government mandated that companies operating network infrastructure or generating over 300 billion won in annual sales disclose their

cybersecurity investment. A total of 746 companies reported their spending on information protection for 2023, investing a combined 2.1 trillion won, up from 1.5 trillion won by 658 firms in 2021. The average annual spending per company increased 24.5 percent from 2.3 billion won in 2021 to 2.9 billion won in 2023. However, experts warn that many South Korean firms remain highly vulnerable to cyberattacks due to relatively weak security capabilities. "In terms of investment, most companies in Korea have far lower security capabilities than SK Telecom, which was the latest victim of a cyberattack," one industry insider said. "Many are more vulnerable to advanced hacking techniques, and some may have already been breached without even knowing it. Companies need to stay alert and undergo thorough security checks."

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MONGOLIA: In the Age of Advancing AI, Safeguarding Personal Security Is Crucial

State Secretary of the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Protection of Mongolia L. Munkhzul met with United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy Ana Brian Nougères on April 11, 2025. At the meeting, the officials discussed key issues concerning personal data protection in the digital era, including the right to privacy, the cross-border transfer of data, cybersecurity, monitoring on social media platforms, the confidentiality of sensitive personal data for vulnerable groups, and the use of biometric and AI-based information systems. Special Rapporteur Ana Brian Nougères emphasized that as artificial intelligence continues to advance, it is essential for governments to ensure the protection of personal data and maintain the security of centralized information databases. Mongolia is working to protect personal information through legislation such as the Law on the Protection of Personal Data, the Law on Public Information Transparency, and the Law on Cybersecurity.

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State Great Khural to Prioritize Strengthening Legislation Against Cybercrime

Chairman of the State Great Khural (Parliament) of Mongolia Amarbayasgalan Dashzegve, Member of Parliament and Head of the Mongolian People's Party Group in Parliament Munkhbaatar Lkhagva, and Secretary-General of the State Great Khural Baasandorj Barsuren participated in the 10th Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Conference of the International Association of Prosecutors, being held in Ulaanbaatar. The Conference is taking place under the theme "Evolving Role of Prosecutors: Challenges and Best Practices in Tackling Cybercrime." The Chairman of the State Great Khural expressed confidence that the Conference will have a

notable impact on combating various crimes that violate the rights and freedoms of others and inflict serious harm through the misuse of digital platforms and social media. According to the Media and Public Relations Department of the State Great Khural, the Chairman also emphasized that preventing and effectively combating the dangers of cybercrime aligns fully with the new Parliament's policy, which promotes pluralism and has initiated people-centered legal and judicial reforms. Chairman Amarbayasgalan underlined the importance of ensuring that laws keep pace and improve with the changing times, adding that the State Great Khural is open to productive initiatives resulting from the Conference aimed at improving legislation to combat cybercrime.

From <https://www.montsame.mn> 06/06/2025

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South-East Asia

BRUNEI: Cyber Revolution Summit 2025 - Strengthening Digital Defenses

As Brunei accelerates its digital transformation, the nation faces escalating cybersecurity threats. In response, TraiCon Events is proud to announce of the Cyber Revolution Summit – Brunei, scheduled for June 17, 2025, at The Centrepont Hotel, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei. This premier event aims to unite over 200 pre-qualified delegates, including CISOs, CIOs, IT Security Heads, Risk Managers, and Government Officials, to address the pressing challenges in the cybersecurity domain.

Our Esteemed Sponsors:

- TIER ONE: Qualys
- TIER TWO: Cybersafe, Fortinet

Key Highlights:

- Visionary Keynotes from national cyber authorities and global tech leaders
- Panel Discussions on topics such as cyber resilience, risk management, AI in security, threat intelligence, and data privacy
- Live Technology Demonstrations showcasing innovations from leading cybersecurity solution providers
- High-Impact Networking opportunities with over 10 hours of face-to-face interactions, B2B meetings, and closed-door briefings
- Exhibition Zone featuring cutting-edge products, services, and digital security tools

Why Attend? The summit serves as a strategic platform for fostering collaborative cybersecurity frameworks, public-private partnerships, and policy innovation. In an era where digital trust is paramount, the event emphasizes the importance of national cyber readiness.

Who Should Attend:

- Chief Information Officers (CIOs), CISOs, CTOs
- Chief Financial Officers (CFOs)
- Heads of IT and Cybersecurity
- VPs and Directors of Information Security
- Governance, Risk & Compliance Leaders
- Digital Transformation and Innovation Heads
- Security Architects & Analysts
- Public Sector Cyber Experts & Policy Makers

From <https://www.siliconindia.com/> 05/22/2025

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INDONESIA: Blocking over 1.3 Mln Online Gambling Contents in Crackdown

Indonesian authorities blocked more than 1.3 million online gambling-related contents from October 2024 to mid-May 2025 across various platforms, a government official said here on Thursday. "Out of the 1.3 million contents, 1.2 million came from online gambling sites, while the rest were gambling advertisements spread across online platforms," Alexander Sabar, director general of digital space supervision at the Ministry of Communication and Digital, told reporters. Indonesia has been intensifying efforts to eradicate online gambling in recent years. Sabar stated that the blocking was another measure taken to combat the rampant spread of online gambling in the country's digital space. "This online gambling practice has eroded productivity, devastated family finances, and harmed the future of the younger generation. Based on government data, without intervention, potential losses from online gambling could reach around 1,000 trillion rupiahs by the end of 2025," he noted. (1 U.S. dollar equals 16,510 rupiahs)

From <https://english.news.cn/> 05/15/2025

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Indonesia Blocks 225 Illegal Commodity Futures Trading Websites in 5 Months

The Indonesian government has blocked 225 illegal commodity futures trading (PBK) websites between January and May 2025, according to the Commodity Futures Trading Supervisory Agency (Bappebti) on Friday. "This step aims to protect the public from potential losses caused by illegal activities in the commodity futures trading sector," said the head of Bappebti, Tirta Karma Senjaya, in a statement. He explained that these illegal entities use online platforms to promote their services, create trading-related content, and recruit investors by introducing foreign futures brokerage firms. Tirta noted that all businesses operating in Indonesia must obtain a license from Bappebti and comply with regulations. "These illegal entities must

register with Bappebti and operate in accordance with the law," he added. Meanwhile, Bappebti's head of the bureau of supervision and enforcement, Matheus Hendro Purnomo, warned that many fraudulent investment schemes are disguised as PBK, promising high returns and fixed income. "Futures trading is high-risk and high-reward. Investors could gain significant profits but also face substantial losses," he said.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 05/23/2025

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MYANMAR: Stepping Up Fight Against Money Laundering Related to Online Financial Fraud

The Central Bank of Myanmar has held a workshop to combat money laundering associated with online financial fraud, the state-owned newspaper The Mirror reported on Sunday. According to the report, the workshop was attended by the central bank's governor and deputy governor, officials from relevant ministries, and representatives from banks, mobile financial service providers, and payment clearing services. Speaking at the event, the central bank's governor, Daw Than Than Swe, said the workshop was organized to raise public awareness about the links between online financial fraud, money laundering and terrorism financing. It also aimed to support reporting entities such as banks and financial institutions in developing effective prevention strategies, and to enhance cooperation and information sharing among stakeholders. She added that the workshop further aimed to discuss and identify solutions to the challenges encountered in AML/CFT (Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism) efforts related to online financial fraud, based on real-life criminal cases. She also said that the central bank was working to strengthen AML/CFT regulations to prevent banks and financial institutions from being exploited as intermediaries in online fraud schemes. The workshop also included discussions on the difficulties faced in combating online fraud-related money laundering, as well as a panel discussion featuring senior bankers, according to the media report. Additionally, the role of AI technology in combating online financial fraud and money laundering was explored, alongside ongoing initiatives and collaborative efforts to address these issues, the report added.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 06/15/2025

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VIETNAM: PM Orders Reviewing Bank Accounts, SIM Cards to Combat Online Fraud

Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh on Saturday called for the launch of a nationwide campaign to thoroughly review all bank accounts and mobile SIM cards in an effort to prevent online fraud and scams, according to the Vietnam News Agency. He was speaking while chairing a meeting of the government steering committee on

science, technology, innovation and digital transformation. The prime minister urged the allocation of sufficient funds to meet the target of dedicating 3 percent of the annual state budget expenditure to science, technology, innovation, digital transformation and administrative reform. He emphasized the urgent need to develop a modern and comprehensive digital infrastructure, with key priorities including the deployment of telecommunications satellites and broader 5G coverage.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 05/18/2025

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South Asia

INDIA: KOGO AI and Qualcomm Join Forces to Pioneer Private AI Solutions

KOGO AI, a market-defining vendor of Agentic AI infrastructure, and Qualcomm Technologies, Inc., the world leader in AI compute and edge processing, today jointly announced their intent to partner to bring an enterprise-grade, end-to-end private AI stack specifically optimized for secure, compliant, and high-performance deployment. This collaboration brings together KOGO AI's modular Agentic Platform that enables enterprises to deploy intelligent agents, fine-tuned models, and compliance-ready workflows all within private or hybrid environments utilizing Qualcomm Cloud AI 100 Ultra accelerators along with Qualcomm AI Inference Suite. "Private AI is not just a trend it is a paradigm shift in how businesses approach deploying and managing intelligence", noted Raj K Gopalakrishnan, Co-Founder & CEO at KOGO AI. "Our platform on Qualcomm AI inference accelerators provides organizations with full control over the creation, deployment, and management of AI agents and models without compromising innovation or velocity". Qualcomm Cloud AI 100 Ultra. The Qualcomm Cloud AI 100 Ultra and Qualcomm AI Inference Suite provide the perfect platform for high-performance, scalable large language models (LLMs) and generative AI deployments. "This partnership meets the increasing need for AI solutions that merge intelligence with autonomy", stated Savi Soin, Senior Vice President and President of Qualcomm India. "Together, we are enabling businesses to build strong AI systems that prioritize data privacy while achieving unparalleled performance at scale on the cloud or on device. With Qualcomm's wide portfolio of products ranging from edge AI to the cloud, we believe the future is private AI", said Savi Soin, Senior Vice President and President, Qualcomm India.

This partnership provides a single stack that encompasses: AI Agents as a Service: More than 60 pre-trained, no-code agents for use cases such as customer service, claims handling, and research, deployable on APIs, chat platforms, and enterprise applications. Models as a Service (MaaS): No-code fine-tuning and deployment of base and specialized models (such as Llama, Claude, Gemini, and others), with complete observability and version control. Hardware-Accelerated Inference: Qualcomm Cloud AI 100 Ultra is built to accommodate large language models (LLMs)

and generative AI. With 128 GB of memory, a single Ultra accelerator accommodates models with up to 70 billion parameters, all in a power-efficient 150W package. Red Teaming & Compliance: Multi-turn adversarial testing, vulnerability scanning, and regulatory testing to guarantee production-grade resilience and compliance with standards like HIPAA, PCI-DSS, and GDPR. Targeted Use Cases Across Regulated Industries. The combined stack is designed for scenarios where legacy cloud AI poses risk or latency. Initial deployments target: Real-time fraud detection in banking. Claims automation and risk scoring in insurance. Clinical decision support and patient engagement in healthcare. Citizen service portals and policy analytics in government. With deployment options that range from 100% on-prem to hybrid cloud and edge intelligence, the solution guarantees that AI capabilities can be securely extended to field units, embedded systems, and private data centers as well. Launch and Availability. The private AI platform will be available today to strategic enterprise and public sector partners in an early access program. General availability will be in Q3 2025, with phased rollouts and quarterly feature additions.

From <https://news.siliconindia.com/> 04/17/2025

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Cybersecurity Senior Shows Cyber Diplomacy's Ram on E-System Stability

Cyber diplomacy could serve as a crucial mediator in addressing challenges such as technological dependence, supply chain risks, cyberattacks, and other threats, thus helping to ensure stability in increasingly digital systems, said Tural Mammadov, Chief Information Security Officer of the Azerbaijani State Service for Special Communication and Information Security (SSSCIS), Trend reports. Speaking during a panel discussion on the cybersecurity of energy infrastructure at the Bucharest Digital Innovations Summit held in Romania, Mammadov pointed out the hurdles thrown in by digitalization and underscored the importance of cyber diplomacy in tackling these challenges head-on. Besides him, General-Major Azer Ahadov, head of the SSSCIS, addressed the summit's opening ceremony, discussing the opportunities and cyber risks created by digital innovations, as well as the importance of international partnerships and strategic approaches. He also shared details about the international cyber diplomacy conference and training sessions organized in Azerbaijan under the Memorandum of Understanding between the SSSCIS and "ICI Bucharest." The Bucharest Digital Innovations Summit, taking place from April 8-11, has drawn a crowd of representatives from the SSSCIS, all eager to throw their hats in the ring. The event was organized by the Romanian government, the Chamber of Deputies, and "ICI Bucharest.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/10/2025

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Azerbaijan Accelerates Internet Rollout in Its Liberated Territories

Around 4,000 households in Azerbaijan's liberated territories have now been connected to broadband internet, Aztelecom LLC told Trend. The company noted that work in these areas is ongoing. "At present, trunk cable installation is underway," Aztelecom representatives stated. Aztelecom LLC, which operates under the Azerbaijan Transport and Communications Holding (AZCON Holding), is currently undergoing reorganization. This process involves the merger of several entities, including Baku Telephone Communications LLC, Az-Euro Tel, the Production Union of the International Automatic Telephone Station Aztelecom, the Ganja Telecommunications Department, AzerRabitaLayihya LLC, and the Sumgayit Telecommunications Hub. Aztelecom is the main operator behind the completed "Online Azerbaijan" megaproject. The company has received two prestigious international awards: the Speedtest Award for Fastest Fixed Network from global broadband and mobile network analytics firm Ookla, and the Best Practice of Home Broadband Development Award from IDATE, a well-known organization with 45 years of experience in digital transformation. These are the first-ever international awards presented to a fixed-line internet provider in Azerbaijan's history.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/26/2025

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Azerbaijan Partners with World Bank to Future-Proof Cities and Fight Cyber Threats

Azerbaijan has agreed to take joint steps with the World Bank in the fields of cybersecurity and urban mobility, the country's Minister of Digital Development and Transport, Rashad Nabiyev, said in a post on his official Facebook page, Trend reports. "We met with Rolande Pryce, the World Bank Regional Director for the South Caucasus. We discussed cooperation on joint projects with institutions operating under the Azerbaijan Transport and Communications Holding (AZCON), including the development of the Middle Corridor and enhancing transit potential. We also reached an agreement on taking joint steps regarding cybersecurity and urban mobility," the post reads.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 05/14/2025

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Azerbaijan Continues Crackdown on Terrorist Groups Linked to International Networks

Complex operational-investigative measures are ongoing in criminal cases launched by the State Security Service (SSS) concerning the formation of armed criminal groups comprised of Azerbaijani citizens linked to international terrorist organizations, Azernews reports citing the SSS press service. According to the statement, these groups were engaged in plotting terrorist acts in Azerbaijan's northern forested

regions, where they established clandestine shelters and stockpiled weapons, ammunition, explosives, and technical equipment. Investigations uncovered that gang members Vugar Najafli, Jamal Gozalov, Tofiq Yusifli, and Dadash Hashimov had left Azerbaijan in 2024 and took refuge in mountainous areas along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. There, they reportedly joined an international terrorist organization, received combat training, and participated in armed conflicts abroad. Through coordinated efforts with foreign intelligence and law enforcement partners, the SSS succeeded in capturing the suspects abroad and returning them to Azerbaijan to face justice. Further inquiries revealed that the terrorist activities of Yusifli and Hashimov were financed by Azerbaijani citizens Mir Javad Huseynli and Tural Agayev. Additional criminal acts by these individuals are also under investigation. All six individuals—Najafli, Gozalov, Yusifli, Hashimov, Huseynli, and Agayev—have been charged under multiple articles of the Azerbaijani Criminal Code, including Article 214-1 (financing of terrorism) and Article 283-1.3 (propagating religious extremism and participating in conflicts abroad under the guise of religious rites), among others. A court has ordered their pretrial detention. The SSS confirmed that investigative and operational measures on the case remain in progress.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 05/19/2025

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Azerbaijani Information Resources and Government Websites Face Cyberattacks

The 'Arabian Ghost' hacker group has thrown down the gauntlet, launching cyberattacks on a slew of information resources, including the state websites of Azerbaijan, Trend reports via the State Service of Special Communication and Information Security. "Cyberattacks against state institutions are monitored 24/7 by the State Service for Special Communications and Information Security (SCIS) and are prevented as a result of the measures taken by us. Despite that cyberattacks continue to this day, no interruptions or interference in the information resources of state institutions have been recorded," the service said. "We call on citizens and government agencies to be vigilant in the field of cybersecurity, to immediately report suspicious activities, and to boost security measures. The official website of the Computer Emergency Response Center of the State Service of Special Communication and Information Security (<https://www.cert.gov.az>) contains information and recommendations on cybersecurity," added the service.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 05/21/2025

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: NSW Electoral Commission Asks for Cyber Security Top-up

NSW Electoral Commission's IT wishlist for the state budget includes a \$12.6 million request for cyber security operating costs, and permission to redirect \$8.3 million into "critical systems" maintenance ahead of the next state election. The commission provided an update of its IT priorities, both in the lead-up to the 2027 state election and beyond, following an appearance at NSW budget estimates in late February. For the next state budget in June, a key request is for costs to cover "ongoing maintenance" of cyber security posture, following an earlier "uplift". "The commission is seeking ongoing funding to maintain its uplift in its cyber security posture," it said [pdf] in written responses to questions on notice. "Funding to implement the uplift was previously received through the Digital Restart Fund but ongoing operating funding is required. Total operating expenditure in the first 5 years would be \$12.6 million."

The commission won the uplift funding back in 2022, after several unsuccessful attempts. The uplift was intended to deliver urgent "fixes" to around 50 electoral systems. In addition to seeking cyber security operational funding, the commission intends to ask the government for permission to reallocate some unspent funding allocated for "recent local government elections" into urgent IT systems works. Electoral commissioner Rachel McCallum flagged this possibility [pdf] back in February, noting the money could be repurposed to "maintain our rather old legacy systems so that they are functioning as well as they can in the 2027 election." "The Electoral Commission has ... recently re-assessed the urgent maintenance needs of its existing legacy systems ahead of the 2027 state election and is separately seeking approval to re-purpose other underspent but protected budget funding towards this work," the commission said [pdf] in response to questions raised at the hearing.

"These critical systems include the count system, the nomination system, the ballot paper production system, election staffing systems, and the online funding and disclosure system." The commission was previously unsuccessful in getting funding for this work from the previous state budget. Contingent on whether funding is forthcoming or not, the commission intends to make some additional limited digital investments in ballot scanning and electronic election-day mark-off of voters, the latter of which was recently trialled at last month's byelection in Port Macquarie. However, "broader improvements" would need to be pushed back to 2031 or 2032 "at the earliest". These improvements could include the adoption of "single sign-on for Electoral Commission systems used by candidates and other regulated participants"; and "consideration of artificial intelligence tools in the electoral context, to augment and improve the Electoral Commission's service delivery and compliance activities."

From <https://www.itnews.com.au> 04/08/2025

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TPG Telecom Restructure Brings Cloud and Security Together

TPG Telecom has brought its internal security and cloud capabilities together under a single function, with general manager of technology security Lee Barney's role impacted by the restructure. Barney revealed his departure from TPG Telecom on LinkedIn after almost three years in the role. "This week marks the end of my time at TPG Telecom," Barney wrote. "As the business reshapes its leadership priorities, I leave knowing the team is well-placed for what comes next." iNews understands that Barney's departure is the result of a restructure that has led to the formation of a new function called Technology Security, Cloud & End to End Architecture. The purpose of the restructure is to create better clarity and alignment between TPG's security and cloud development teams.

"We are bringing security and cloud together to design and build security-native cloud solutions and boost the security capability adoption across the business," a TPG Telecom spokesperson confirmed to iNews. Secure-by-design is a key principle of the government's current cyber security strategy, which organisations - particularly those in critical infrastructure sectors - are being asked to adopt. It's not clear who is leading the new function; TPG's spokesperson declined to comment. It's understood there are no immediate plans to recruit a replacement for Barney. Barney was instrumental in the telco standing up a cyber centre of excellence or CCoE, which came online at the end of last year. The Sydney-based facility focuses on finding vulnerabilities in telco and IT equipment, developing exploits and applying mitigations. It is home to TPG's red and blue teams, representatives from Ericsson, Nokia and TCS on 90-day rotations, and researchers from UNSW. Barney is also credited with leading an uplift in TPG's security posture during his time with the telco.

From <https://www.itnews.com.au> 05/20/2025

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NEW ZEALAND: Oracle Faces Backlash over Cybersecurity Failures

Oracle faces escalating scrutiny over two major security incidents, with evidence contradicting the company's denials and raising questions about its transparency and vulnerability management practices. The subsidiary, formed after Oracle's \$28 billion acquisition of Cerner in 2022, notified clients in March 2025 about a breach involving legacy servers containing patient data. Hackers exploited compromised customer credentials to access systems between January 22 and February 20, 2025, exfiltrating data to a remote server. "We are writing to inform you that, on or around February 20, 2025, we became aware of a cybersecurity event involving unauthorized access to some amount of your Cerner data that was on an old legacy server not yet migrated to the Oracle Cloud," a notification to affected healthcare providers stated.

While Oracle claims the breach may have included patient information, internal sources confirm sensitive data was stolen, including electronic health records

(EHRs). The company has shifted responsibility to clients, advising them to determine whether the breach triggers HIPAA notification requirements and offering templates for patient alerts. A separate incident involving Oracle Cloud's authentication systems has drawn criticism after threat actor "rose87168" claimed to have stolen 6 million records, including encrypted SSO passwords, LDAP credentials, and security certificates. The attacker allegedly exploited CVE-2021-35587, a vulnerability patched in 2022 but left unaddressed on Oracle's SSO servers. "There has been no breach of Oracle Cloud. The published credentials are not for the Oracle Cloud. No Oracle Cloud customers experienced a breach or lost any data," said a spokesperson from Oracle.

However, cybersecurity researchers and affected clients dispute this. CloudSEK confirmed the stolen data's legitimacy, while Hudson Rock's Alon Gal verified samples with Oracle customers. The breaches show systemic issues in Oracle's patch management and communication. CVE-2021-35587, a known vulnerability in Oracle Access Manager, was exploited via the login endpoint login.us2.oraclecloud.com, which remained unpatched despite being flagged in 2021. Researchers suspect the attacker leveraged either a zero-day flaw or misconfiguration in OAuth2 authentication. The incidents have eroded trust, with experts urging Oracle to adopt clearer disclosure protocols. While the company maintains its systems are secure, independent analyses and customer confirmations suggest otherwise.

From <https://b2bnews.co.nz> 04/01/2025

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OpenAI Makes First Cybersecurity Investment in Adaptive Security

OpenAI has made a notable entry into the cybersecurity sector by investing in Adaptive Security, a New York-based startup that specialises in simulating AI-powered cyberattacks to train employees against social engineering threats. The investment signifies OpenAI's first foray into cybersecurity, with Adaptive Security securing \$43 million in a Series A funding round co-led by OpenAI's startup fund and Andreessen Horowitz. The advent of generative AI has dramatically expanded the toolkit available to hackers, enabling sophisticated attacks such as deepfaking and creating fake documents. These technologies have made it increasingly feasible to deceive individuals and organisations by mimicking voices, emails, and other forms of communication. For instance, AI can now generate highly realistic audio or video content, which makes it challenging to distinguish between authentic and artificially generated media. Adaptive Security's platform is designed to simulate AI-generated attacks across various communication channels, including phone calls, texts, and emails. This approach helps identify vulnerable areas within companies and trains staff to recognise and respond to social engineering threats. These threats often exploit human vulnerabilities, such as clicking on malicious links, which have led to

substantial financial losses for some companies. CEO Brian Long, a seasoned entrepreneur with previous successes in mobile ad startup TapCommerce and ad-tech firm Attentive, highlights the importance of staying ahead in the AI “arms race” against cyber threats. Long added that AI tools have made social engineering hacks easier than ever, emphasising the need for proactive measures to counter these threats. Adaptive Security is part of a growing list of cybersecurity firms addressing AI-related threats. Other notable companies include Cyberhaven, which recently raised \$100 million to prevent sensitive information from being shared through tools like ChatGPT, and Snyk, which credits the rise of insecure AI-generated code for its revenue growth. Additionally, deepfake detection startup GetReal secured \$17.5 million in funding last month. OpenAI’s investment in Adaptive Security symbolises a collaborative effort in the battle against digital deception. By combining Adaptive Security’s expertise with OpenAI’s extensive resources, the partnership aims to develop robust measures to counteract the malicious use of AI.

From <https://b2bnews.co.nz> 04/04/2025

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Why Businesses Still Fail to Meet Cybersecurity Standards

While protecting your most important company data and reputation is beyond question, why do many organisations still struggle to meet cybersecurity standards? There are multiple reasons behind this issue – let’s explore some of the most common ones.

Reasons Businesses Fall Short on Cybersecurity

Underestimating cyber threats Many organisations underestimate the severity and complexity of cyber threats, often believing they are unlikely targets or that basic measures are enough for protection. This misjudgment leads to insufficient investment in advanced security technologies and expertise, leaving vulnerabilities exposed.

Inconsistent prioritisation Some companies fail to recognise cybersecurity as a strategic necessity, often treating it as a secondary concern rather than integrating it into core business operations. This oversight stems from competing priorities, limited budgets, and an underestimation of cyber risks. As a result, critical systems remain underprotected, and resources are misallocated.

Insufficient employee training Human error is a leading cause of cybersecurity incidents, with untrained employees being particularly vulnerable to phishing scams, weak password practices, and mishandling sensitive data. Studies show that 95% of cybersecurity threats are linked to human error. Despite this, many businesses neglect to provide regular training or awareness programmes for employees, leaving them ill-equipped to recognise and respond to cyber threats effectively.

Outdated software and systems Failure to update software regularly creates exploitable vulnerabilities that hackers actively target, posing risks to organisations. Unpatched software contains known security weaknesses that attackers can use to gain unauthorised access, execute malicious code, or disrupt operations.

Preparing Against Cyber Threats The SME Cyber Security Behaviour Tracker 2024 found that

while most small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in New Zealand recognise the importance of cybersecurity, many remain inadequately equipped to handle cyber threats. Here are practical measures that any organisation can implement to enhance cybersecurity defences and safeguard critical data and systems against cyberattacks.

Implement Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) Multi-factor authentication adds an additional layer of security by requiring users to provide two or more forms of identification before accessing systems or data. This reduces the risk of unauthorised access, even if passwords are compromised, and is particularly effective against phishing attempts.

Encrypt sensitive data Data encryption ensures that sensitive information remains secure, even if it is intercepted during transmission or accessed during a breach. Encryption converts data into unreadable formats unless accessed with specific decryption keys, safeguarding critical financial, personal, and organisational information.

Backup your data Daily backups of important business data are vital for recovery in case of ransomware attacks or system failures. Storing these backups offsite or in secure cloud environments ensures accessibility even during catastrophic events.

Adopt Perimeter Defences Firewalls and antivirus software help block malicious domains and detect malware before it infiltrates systems. These tools act as the first line of defence against external threats, reducing the likelihood of successful attacks. Underestimating the importance of cybersecurity invites severe repercussions. While the chance of an attack may appear remote, compromising sensitive customer information could irreparably damage credibility and stability.

From <https://b2bnews.co.nz> 04/08/2025

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Crypto ATM Surge in NZ Raises Both Convenience and Security Concerns

The use of cryptocurrency ATMs is rapidly expanding in New Zealand, with over 200 machines now operating nationwide. These ATMs can be found in a variety of locations, including dairies, shopping malls, and petrol stations. However, law enforcement agencies are closely monitoring these machines, as criminals are taking advantage of the expanding technology for illicit activities. Daniel Frost from the police's financial intelligence unit stated that cryptocurrency ATMs are susceptible to criminal misuse. Financing terrorism, facilitating illegal firearms purchases, and money laundering are among the risks associated with these systems. The financial intelligence unit reported that some of these threats have already been identified and prevented within the country. "We're starting to see evidence of these types of activities occurring close to New Zealand, if not even on New Zealand shores," Frost said. Police stated that stricter regulations in the sector may be necessary, but for the time being, they are making full use of the resources available to them and collaborating closely with international agencies experienced in handling criminal cryptocurrency transactions. Meanwhile, a spokesperson for FlipCoin, which owns over half of New Zealand's crypto ATM machines, has

expressed perspectives and stated that the company is firmly committed to preventing scams targeting its clients and actively collaborates with law enforcement and regulatory authorities. The spokesperson said the company has implemented various user protection measures designed to detect and prevent criminal activity. “We invest heavily in compliance and customer protections such as blockchain analytics to stop fraud and intercept attempted transactions to known high-risk wallets, display relevant consumer warnings on our ATMs, and provide 24/7 customer support. Tools like blockchain analytics go beyond what is even available for traditional finance transaction monitoring.” “We have a comprehensive onboarding process in place: our ATMs are subject to the same anti-money laundering and know your customer regulations as traditional financial institutions, as well as other virtual asset service providers operating lawfully in New Zealand.”

From <https://b2bnews.co.nz> 04/29/2025

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Cybersecurity Basics Every Business Needs to Get Right

In today's hyper-connected world, cybersecurity isn't a technical luxury—it's a business imperative. With ransomware gangs targeting everything from multinational firms to local retailers, and phishing emails becoming increasingly convincing, the cost of neglecting security isn't just measured in dollars; it's measured in trust lost, operations halted, and in some cases, businesses shuttered for good. The reality is stark: more than 60% of small businesses don't survive six months after a serious cyberattack. In this climate, cybersecurity is not optional—it's existential. Why Employees Are the Front Line While it's easy to imagine cybersecurity as a matter of firewalls and antivirus software, the most common breaches begin with something far less technical: human error. Clicking a malicious link. Using the same password across multiple accounts.

Leaving a device unlocked. These are the everyday actions that open the door to attackers. The solution isn't just better software—it's smarter people. Training should go beyond the annual “click-through” compliance module. Phishing simulations, red team exercises, and integrating cybersecurity awareness into onboarding and team meetings can transform employees from potential liabilities into active defenders. Clear, accessible security policies also help—employees are far more likely to follow procedures when they're straightforward and reinforced regularly. Passwords and MFA Password fatigue is real. People are juggling dozens of accounts and understandably fall into bad habits—reusing passwords, storing them in browsers, or defaulting to weak, memorable phrases. But weak credentials are still one of the most common ways attackers gain access.

Rather than relying on users to remember complex strings, businesses should lean on password managers and enforce policies that mandate complexity and regular changes. Multi-factor authentication (MFA) is the second lock on the door, and one of

the most effective. Whether it's a one-time code, biometric scan, or hardware token, MFA drastically reduces the chance that stolen credentials alone will compromise your systems. It's a simple step that, time and again, has thwarted potential breaches before they could escalate. Update or Invite Risk: Patch Management Many high-profile breaches trace back to one root cause: unpatched software. Cybercriminals don't need to discover new vulnerabilities when old ones are still wide open. Yet many businesses delay updates because they fear disrupting operations.

That's where automated patch management can help—set schedules that align with your business's rhythm and review critical updates for high-risk systems. But automation isn't a set-it-and-forget-it solution. There must be oversight to catch edge cases, particularly with older hardware or unsupported applications. And don't forget shadow IT—unauthorised tools or apps employees use to “get things done” can quickly become hidden liabilities. When All Else Fails: Bulletproof Backup Strategies Even with strong defences, breaches can still occur. That's why backup and recovery are your business's digital lifeboat. The 3-2-1 rule remains golden: keep three copies of your data, on two different types of media, with one offsite or offline. This ensures you're not left helpless if ransomware hits or a system meltdown occurs.

But having backups isn't enough—you need to test them. Schedule simulation drills that mimic real-world disaster scenarios. Can your team restore operations in hours, not days? Have you accounted for all critical data, including that tucked away in cloud apps or mobile devices? Backups only save the day if you know how to use them under pressure. Know Where You're Exposed Many businesses underestimate their digital sprawl. Laptops, cloud services, mobile phones, third-party tools—each one is a potential entry point. Risk assessments help map out this landscape. A good assessment doesn't just list threats; it prioritises them based on likelihood and impact. These insights should flow directly into policy. Define what “acceptable use” looks like, lay out clear BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) guidelines, and set rules around remote access. A policy is only effective if it's based on how your business actually operates, not just how you think it should.

Firewalls, Antivirus, and Beyond A solid digital perimeter starts with well-configured firewalls and up-to-date endpoint protection. But not all tools are created equal. Antivirus software remains a staple, but many businesses now pair it with Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR) systems, which provide more advanced threat detection and response capabilities. Real-time visibility is just as crucial. Centralised dashboards let IT teams—or outsourced providers—monitor for unusual activity across devices and networks. If something goes wrong, the faster you can spot it, the faster you can respond. Don't Forget the Physical Cybersecurity doesn't end at the screen. An unlocked office door, an unattended USB port, or an unencrypted mobile phone can undo even the most robust digital defences. Physical security and digital security must go hand in hand.

Make sure company Wi-Fi is encrypted and hidden, mobile devices are managed centrally, and physical access to sensitive equipment is tightly controlled. Be Ready for the Worst: Incident Response Planning When a breach occurs, chaos is not a strategy. A functional incident response plan lays out who does what, when, and how. Detection, containment, communication, and recovery all need to be clearly defined. Legal and PR protocols should be baked in too—mishandling the aftermath can do as much damage as the breach itself. Run tabletop exercises with your team to test your response. These simulations expose weak spots in your plan and ensure everyone knows their role when it counts. Continuous Monitoring Cyber threats don't sleep. That's why proactive monitoring is essential. Whether you opt for real-time Intrusion Detection Systems (IDS) or detailed log analysis, knowing what "normal" looks like across your network allows you to spot anomalies fast.

The best setups include baseline behaviour profiling—understanding typical patterns so you can detect subtle shifts that indicate trouble. The faster you catch an intrusion, the less damage it can do. Align with Proven Frameworks Rather than inventing your own approach to security, lean on established frameworks like the NIST Cybersecurity Framework. Its five core functions—Identify, Protect, Detect, Respond, and Recover—offer a structured, adaptable approach to cybersecurity. Even small steps toward alignment can improve audit readiness and long-term resilience. Resources like CISA, industry ISACs, and regional cybersecurity partnerships can help businesses stay current and continually refine their approach. Final Thoughts: Cybersecurity Is Discipline, Not Drama. Cybersecurity isn't a project. It's a practice. The good news? Most breaches stem from a handful of preventable issues—untrained staff, weak passwords, missed updates. Getting these basics right cuts your risk dramatically. The key isn't perfection—it's consistency. Businesses that build a culture of cybersecurity and treat it as a daily discipline are the ones most likely to withstand the next attack. Don't wait for a crisis to prioritise it. The time to get it right is now.

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NZ Study Reveals Privacy Gaps in Period Apps

A recent New Zealand study shows that millions using period-tracking apps may not fully understand the privacy implications of sharing sensitive health information. The findings come as global focus on reproductive data surveillance intensifies following the 2022 reversal of Roe v. Wade. Period Apps Collect More Than Menstrual Data Period apps today do far more than just track menstruation. Many encourage users to log information on sexual activity, medications, emotional states, sleep patterns, and even social interactions. Some apps sync with wearable devices like the Oura smart ring or Apple Health, further expanding the data footprint. As one participant in the study reflected, "there's no such thing as private data these days." The said period apps have become indispensable for many users managing menstrual health

or planning pregnancies. However, that convenience comes with a hidden cost — often, users do not fully understand what information they are giving away or how it might be used. Researchers Highlight Data Sharing Beyond Privacy Policies A recent analysis cited by the researchers found that “many period apps exported more data than was declared in privacy policies.” It includes the data shared with commercial and research entities — often without users’ explicit knowledge or consent. Period app Flo settled with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission in 2021 for sharing user data with marketing and analytics firms, despite assurances of privacy.

Apps’ Data Use Raises Global Legal Concerns Apps’ ability to infer pregnancies through data patterns poses serious privacy risks in countries banning abortion, where law enforcement access could lead to prosecutions. Although abortion laws in New Zealand remain unchanged, some users expressed anxiety. “I worry for all users about what this information can be used for in future,” said one participant, citing fears of political spillover from overseas. New Zealand Users Show Mixed Attitudes Towards Data Risks The study found a range of responses from New Zealand app users. About half were unconcerned or optimistic, believing their data could help improve health outcomes. Others limited the information they entered or felt resigned to the risks. One participant referenced Māori concepts of autonomy and sovereignty, saying: “I don’t have full control or rangatiratanga over the data I provide.” While researchers advocate for informed consent and data protections, they also stress that users shouldn’t have to choose between health insights and privacy. “Menstruators shouldn’t have to trade data privacy and security in order to access the benefits of period-tracking apps.”

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6、 AI&ICT Development

Asia-Pacific

AI Technology Key to Green Energy Transition

The application of artificial intelligence technology will significantly improve energy utilization efficiency and accelerate the transition of traditional high-carbon industries towards green, low-carbon development, experts said during a forum focusing on carbon peak and carbon neutrality science and technology at the Zhongguancun Forum. "AI technology is one of the key points in the innovation chain for the future energy structure. It plays a crucial role in promoting green energy transition and achieving carbon neutrality," said Ding Chibiao, vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, during the forum held in Beijing on Friday. He added that this trend has boosted the efficiency of the chemical industry and promoted energy conservation and emission reduction, thereby contributing to China's dual carbon

goals of peaking carbon emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060. Ye Mao, a researcher at the Dalian Institute of Chemical Physics of the CAS and head of the intelligent chemical engineering large model team, mentioned that some chemical companies have pioneered the application of AI models, which has sparked industry interest in this technology. The rapid development of current AI models has led to increased acceptance within the industry. According to a survey his team did, nearly 50 chemical companies have had their engineers and technicians try the intelligent chemical models, and this number is continually growing, he said.

Since 2016, the team led by Liu Zhongmin, director of the DICP and academican of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, has been dedicated to applying AI technology to chemical engineering development. In March of last year, they launched the chemical engineering large model ChemELLM, which achieved autonomous design and optimization of chemical knowledge retrieval and process flows. In November, ChemELLM 2.0 was released. "The upgraded version shows significant improvements in industrial catalysis, chemical foundations, and chemical safety," Ye said, adding that these advancements enable the intelligent chemical models to cover a broader range of chemical application scenarios. "We have found during our interactions with companies that traditional engineers and AI model-based human-machine collaboration will coexist for a long time and that there will be a period of adjustment. Building an intelligent chemical ecosystem will take some time," he said. "We hope to assist the chemical industry in its intelligent upgrading, enhance production efficiency and intrinsic safety, and further support the energy revolution, dual carbon goals, and new industrialization," Ye said. In 2022, the CAS formulated and implemented the Strategic Action Plan for Science and Technology Supporting Carbon Peak and Carbon Neutrality. "In the future, the CAS will further deepen collaborative innovation with all sectors of society through interdisciplinary and cross-field integration to collectively advance AI-assisted low-carbon energy development," Ding said.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 03/29/2025

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Drones and Robots Take Center Stage at Shanghai EDRR Expo

Drones, robots and artificial intelligence (AI) are among the highlights at an emergency disaster reduction and rescue expo in Shanghai, as the latest technologies are increasingly being used in disaster relief efforts. Over 3000 cutting-edge equipment and technologies are on display at the fourth Yangtze River Delta International Emergency Disaster Reduction and Rescue Expo. Intelligent firefighting drones, AI-powered early warning systems and quadruped firefighting robots stood out among the exhibits. With an exhibition area of approximately 60,000 square meters, this year's expo, which runs from Tuesday to Thursday, has attracted over 500 leading companies from nearly 20 countries and regions. These companies

are showcasing innovations in fields such as emergency rescue, smart security, and disaster prevention and reduction. Among the exhibits, 120 breakthrough innovations made their global or Asian debut at the event. For the first time, the expo features an aerial emergency rescue zone, which focuses on the application of aviation equipment and intelligent drones in rescue operations. With more frequent geological disasters, such as earthquakes, floods and mudslides, as well as extreme weather events in recent years, drones, particularly vertical take-off and landing models, have become an essential part of China's aerial emergency response system.

Weflying has unveiled the world's first ducted-fan, high-altitude tethered firefighting drone. Supported by eight fans, it functions like an aerial fire hydrant, capable of continuously spraying water to combat fires in high-rise buildings. Another standout exhibit is China Tower's mobile super base station. This station integrates a foldable command center, a hydraulic lifting tower and a drone landing platform, enabling flexible configuration according to varying terrains and emergency requirements to optimize signal coverage. Unitree Technology, a pioneer in robotic technology, showcased its quadruped robot designed for fire and rescue operations. This robot features a panoramic camera for intelligent real-time image transmission and can conduct rescue and search while navigating complex disaster environments. According to Unitree Technology, the quadruped robot has been widely adopted by fire departments across China and has also gained numerous overseas clients. The expo also serves as a hub for industrial collaboration and international partnerships. It has attracted exhibitors and visitors from countries such as the United States, Germany, Brazil, Japan and Singapore. The event is jointly hosted by the emergency management departments of Shanghai and the provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui, as well as the Council for the Promotion of International Trade Shanghai. The four regions have collaborated to establish an integrated emergency management mechanism in the Yangtze River Delta.

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Symposium Discusses AI for Health

A symposium on "AI for Health," hosted by the Specialized Committee on Artificial Intelligence (SC on AI) of the World Internet Conference (WIC), took place at the National Convention Center in Beijing on May 17. The event brought together more than 150 participants, including members of the WIC SC on AI and representatives from governmental departments, international organizations, embassies and consulates in China, leading domestic medical institutions, research institutes, and smart healthcare enterprises, to discuss digital transformation and AI-enabled innovation in the healthcare sector. Chaired by Liang Hao, executive deputy secretary-general of the WIC, the symposium featured opening addresses by Wang Jingtao, deputy minister of the Cyberspace Administration of China and Ren Xianliang, secretary-general of the WIC. The attendees agreed that digital

technologies are reshaping the healthcare ecosystem with unprecedented depth and breadth, and digital transformation and AI are key drivers for high-quality healthcare development. To promote AI-empowered healthcare, integrated innovation is necessary to stimulate cross-sector development, the participants said. Relevant institutions should actively embrace new technologies like AI, adapt to the needs of the industry, and explore joint talent cultivation and discipline-building to deepen integration among industry, academia, and research, they noted. Security is the top priority and a risk prevention and control system should be built under a people-centered philosophy, to ensure that AI development is in line with laws, medical ethics, and public interests, according to the participants.

International cooperation needs to be enhanced for collaborative and inclusive development of AI-driven healthcare, they said. The role of the WIC organization should be leveraged to strengthen exchanges in smart healthcare and break data barriers, in order to help create inclusive public goods for the world, they added. Martin Taylor, WHO representative to China, addressed the event via video link. Keynote speakers at the event included Li Haizhou, a fellow of Singapore Academy of Engineering and executive dean of the School of Data Science at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen; Yang Dungan, secretary of the Discipline Inspection Commission of Peking Union Medical College Hospital; and Zhu Lifeng, deputy director of the Shanghai Digital Medicine Innovation Center, Ruijin Hospital, affiliated with the Shanghai Jiao Tong University School of Medicine. Several other speakers also shared their views on AI for health, including Hou Yan, president of the Chinese Medical Equipment Association; Huang Jin, executive vice president of West China Hospital of Sichuan University; Min Dong, deputy director of the Cloud Computing and Big Data Research Institute, China Academy of Information and Communications Technology; Chen Qixiao, vice president of Greater China Region, Siemens Healthineers Ltd.; and Qian Wei, general manager of Oncology, Roche Pharmaceuticals China. Cai Xiujun, president of Sir Run Run Shaw Hospital, affiliated with the Zhejiang University School of Medicine, also delivered a video speech at the symposium.

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Google I/O 2025 Kicks Off with Major AI Updates

Google I/O 2025, the company's largest annual developer conference, kicked off on Tuesday in Mountain View, the US state of California, for a two-day event, featuring a series of product announcements spanning Google's entire portfolio. One of the major highlights is Deep Think, a new "enhanced" reasoning mode for Google's flagship Gemini 2.5 Pro model. According to Google, Deep Think enables the model to evaluate multiple possible answers before responding, significantly improving its performance on select benchmarks. Currently, Deep Think is available to trusted testers via the Gemini API, with Google stating that it is conducting additional safety

evaluations before a broader release. Another key announcement was Veo 3, the company's new Flow video editing app, which can be prompted using either text or an image. Veo 3 improves upon its predecessor, Veo 2, by generating higher-quality video content. Google claims Veo 3 is capable of adding sound effects, background noise, and even dialogue to accompany the videos it produces. Veo 3 is available starting Tuesday through Google's Gemini chatbot app, exclusively for subscribers to the AI Ultra plan, which costs \$249.99 per month. The Gemini Ultra subscription offers what Google describes as the "highest level of access" to its AI-powered apps and services.

Google also introduced Imagen 4, the latest version of its AI image generator, which is said to be faster and more powerful than Imagen 3. The company plans to release a variant of Imagen 4 that is up to 10 times faster than its predecessor. Imagen 4 can render fine details -- such as fabrics, water droplets, and animal fur -- and supports both photorealistic and abstract styles. It can generate images in various aspect ratios and resolutions up to 2K. Both Veo 3 and Imagen 4 will power Flow, Google's AI-driven video tool designed for filmmakers and content creators. Google also announced that Gemini Live, which offers real-time verbal interactions, camera input, and screen sharing, will roll out this week to all iOS and Android users. Powered by Project Astra, Gemini Live enables near real-time conversations while simultaneously analyzing video from the user's smartphone camera or screen. In the coming weeks, Gemini Live will integrate more deeply with other Google apps, including the ability to provide directions from Google Maps, create events in Google Calendar, and generate task lists using Google Tasks. Google is rolling out AI Mode, the experimental Google Search feature that lets people ask complex, multi-part questions via an AI interface, to users in the United States this week, according to the company. Additionally, Google unveiled new AI Workspace features for Gmail, Google Docs, and Google Vids. For example, Gmail will soon offer personalized smart replies and a new inbox-cleaning capability. The company also previewed its new XR glasses, capable of augmented reality including live language translation. "Android XR is the first @Android platform built in the Gemini era, and it supports devices across a variety of use cases -- from headsets to glasses," Google said.

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Video Editing Features Added to Meta AI

Meta said Wednesday that it is adding video editing capabilities to Meta AI, which let users edit short videos using preset artificial intelligence (AI) prompts. The company said that the features were inspired by its Movie Gen AI models. It plans to add more customization options later this year. For now, users will have to deal with 50 presets to edit a 10-second video. Meta said that it gathered feedback from creators to make these presets so they can be easily included in the Edits app. Meta AI already has image generation features across platforms. With this video editing feature, Meta

could attract more creators to use its own tools rather than third-party apps. "We built this ... so that everyone can experiment creatively and make fun, interesting videos," the company said in its blog post.

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Impressive Array of AI-Powered Innovations Bedazzle Visitors

Late last month, I had a chance to attend the 4th China-CEEC (Central and Eastern European countries) Expo in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, which has set records for exhibition space, number of exhibitors and the variety of products on display. Walking through the exhibition halls of the grand event, I was immediately struck by the colorful stands teeming with wines, honey, amber, crystal and intricate textiles that showcased the rich cultural heritage of Central and Eastern Europe. As the day unfolded, I noticed an intriguing shift. Many European exhibitors were quietly leaving their booths to explore the "Smart CEEC" pavilion, a buzzing display area of China's latest advances in artificial intelligence and robotics. This zone was home to leading Chinese tech and robotics companies, featuring an impressive array of artificial intelligence-powered innovations, from scent-detecting robots to augmented reality glasses capable of real-time translation and teleprompting. "These are the future," a Polish exhibitor told me. "I am glad to be here and see these technologies. This is an opportunity to bring new findings back to Lodz in Poland." Beyond being a vibrant marketplace for CEEC specialty goods, the expo also served as a gateway for deepening investment and cooperation in emerging sectors. An exhibitor of AR glasses said that, given the current global trade climate, they plan to focus more on the European market this year, using Central and Eastern Europe as a strategic launchpad to expand further.

On the first day of the expo, many visitors from CEEC were already keen to discuss product functions and market prospects with the Chinese tech firms. The vast Chinese market is proving to be a powerful magnet, drawing in more than 400 companies from the region. Meanwhile, the allure of Chinese innovation is turning many European attendees and exhibitors into enthusiastic buyers. With every new leap in technology, fresh commercial opportunities are unfolding, weaving a tighter web of global cooperation. The shift from "showcasing" to "seeking" spoke volumes about the growing pull of China's technological edge. It was a transformation that was both vivid and symbolic. Alongside British, African and Vietnamese business visitors, CEEC exhibitors who had arrived to sell wines and handwoven textiles suddenly found themselves mesmerized by glimpses of the future, reimagining their roles in a rapidly evolving global marketplace. I watched a group of Serbian entrepreneurs gather around a robot that could identify scents, impressed by its ability to analyze different fragrances. Down the aisle, a Bulgarian artisan who had earlier been presenting embroidered fabrics was now engaged in a deep discussion with the maker of real-time translation AR glasses, exploring how this technology

could transform her business back home. But this wasn't merely about gadgets, it was about the power of possibility.

In the eyes of these visitors, you could see the spark of a thousand "what-ifs" — what if these AR glasses could offer immersive multilingual guided tours? What if smart logistics platforms could seamlessly connect the supply chains stretching from China to Europe? What had begun as a cultural extravaganza was quickly morphing into a living laboratory of ideas. Conversations shifted from simple product pitches to potential partnerships, from static displays to the birth of real collaborations. As the afternoon wore on, I was struck by how the vibrant buzz of the event was about more than just trade. It was about curiosity — the kind that forges connections across continents. In this fusion of craftsmanship and cutting-edge technology, everyone seemed ready to trade not only goods, but also visions of a smarter, more cooperative future. If there was a lesson in Ningbo this year, it was that innovation has become the universal language of trade, and China's fluency in that language is opening doors for everyone willing to listen.

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World AI Conference 2025 to Be Held on 70,000 sq m, a New Record

The World AI Conference 2025, which will be held in Shanghai from July 26 to 28, will see its exhibition area hit a record high of 70,000 square meters, said the conference organizer during the WAIC's 30-day countdown news conference held on Thursday. More than 800 companies will showcase over 3,000 frontier products and technologies, including more than 40 large language models, 50-plus AI-powered devices and another 60 smart robots at this year's WAIC, which has come to the eighth edition. It should be noted that 80 products will make their global or China debut via the WAIC, also a new record. The exhibition will be further divided into the four themes of core technologies, industrial application, smart terminals, and universal links. As WAIC's incubation platform, Future Tech will improve its services of transforming innovation projects into products, demonstration and financing. More than 500 startup projects from all the world have applied to be part of Future Tech this year, covering smart hardware, AI generated content, embodied intelligence, among others. Connect platform, which serves as the procurement arm of WAIC, has already made institutional upgrading. During this year's exhibition period, Connect will come up with more than 200 purchase lists, covering urban renewal, outbound services, smart manufacturing and healthcare. Over 100 one-on-one business matchmaking activities will be held during the exhibition to address market demand more directly.

CONNECT will be extended throughout the year, which is the first such attempt, to connect to successive resources, incubate projects and link to the entire ecosystem.

Meanwhile, more than 1,200 guests from over 30 countries and regions have confirmed their participation in this year's WAIC, including 12 winners of international top-notch awards such as the Turing Award and the Nobel Prize, over 80 academicians from home and abroad, and representatives from world's leading labs. A total of 22 new cooperation institutions of WAIC were unveiled during the Thursday news conference, including Smale Institute of Mathematics and Computation, China-BRICS Artificial Intelligence Development and Cooperation Center, and Hong Kong Trade Development Council.

The four themed exhibition areas are:

- Core technologies: LLM, computing chips and digital platforms
- Industrial application: AI-powered new-type industrialization, intelligent driving, smart city, fintech
- Smart terminals: humanoid robots, hardware, autopilot
- Universal links: connect startups and capital, demonstrate innovation results, release companies' demand, business matchmaking

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AI Opens Doors to Efficient, Convenient and Personalized Banking

In the global conversation about artificial intelligence, Silicon Valley often takes center stage. However, a quiet but powerful revolution is unfolding in Asia's financial sector, where regional banks are leading the charge by tailoring AI to the unique needs of their communities. This hyper-local approach is not only enhancing customer engagement and satisfaction, but also positioning these banks as frontrunners in the global AI revolution. It's not just about translating chatbots into Mandarin. These banks are developing AI that understands local dialects, such as Hokkien in Singapore, and the subtle differences in customer etiquette between Mumbai and Chennai. An AI-powered customer service center can decipher regional slang and pick up on emotional cues, crucial for building trust and offering personalized services. This hyper-localization is essential for creating a seamless and culturally sensitive banking experience. For example, a Chinese regional bank implemented an AI chatbot capable of understanding and responding to local dialects and cultural norms. The chatbot provided accurate and timely information, engaging customers in a manner that felt natural and respectful. This resulted in a significant increase in customer satisfaction and loyalty. Cultivating local AI talent is another critical piece of the puzzle. China is expected to face a 5 million AI talent shortfall by 2030, with less than 15 percent of professionals possessing both algorithmic and financial business skills. This gap is a region-wide crisis, affecting India, Southeast Asia, and other parts of Asia. Regional banks can't compete with the deep pockets of global institutions that can afford to poach the best and brightest minds.

The talent gap is further compounded by internal challenges. Many regional banks are burdened by legacy systems and fragmented data. Data silos are a primary bottleneck, with 40 percent of companies having over 50 data silos, leading to a 20-30 percent decrease in model accuracy. Regional banks often struggle with legacy infrastructure, making data integration difficult and leading to wasted effort. However, this gap also presents an opportunity. Regional banks should partner with universities and technical schools to create specialized AI training programs. These programs should focus on both the technical aspects of AI and its financial applications, as well as local language processing. Graduates will be uniquely equipped to develop and deploy AI solutions that meet the specific needs of their communities, filling the skills gap and fostering economic growth. Asia's embrace of mobile technology is a significant advantage. For many people in Asia, the smartphone is the primary gateway to the internet, banking, and marketplaces. AI solutions must be seamlessly integrated into mobile platforms, making them intuitive and accessible to all users. This means designing AI-powered services that are optimized for the mobile experience, from simple balance inquiries to complex loan applications. It means leveraging AI to provide personalized financial advice and support through mobile channels, helping customers make informed decisions and manage their finances effectively.

In China, this mobile-first approach is not just a strategy, it's a reality. The smartphone is the primary gateway to financial services for millions of people. Therefore, Chinese regional banks must prioritize mobile-first AI solutions that are intuitive, accessible, and tailored to the specific needs of their customer base. This approach enhances customer convenience and allows regional banks to reach a wider audience, particularly in rural and underserved areas where access to traditional banking services may be limited. To win the AI race, smaller Asian banks must focus on high-impact, customer-centric AI applications rather than getting bogged down in a talent war they can't win. The AI revolution is reshaping industries and redefining the future of work. In financial services, the shift is already underway. Global giants like Morgan Stanley have rolled out AI tools to approximately 15,000 financial advisers, helping them generate meeting notes and optimal next steps. ING has deployed intelligent chatbots to around 37 million customers across 10 markets. A clear signal is emerging in the financial industry: the AI arms race has shifted from technology exploration to value realization. For regional banks, this transformation is a necessity. Generative AI is expected to drive significant productivity gains in banking, with a potential boost of \$200 billion to \$340 billion. If fully realized, AI could lead to a 14-24 percent increase in potential profits, gradually rising to 60-80 percent over the next three years.

Hyper-personalized dynamic recommendation engines combine customer risk preferences and market data to generate cross-asset allocation solutions optimized in real-time. Regional banks can leverage their existing data to create tailored financial products, personalized investment advice, and proactive customer service.

AI-powered chatbots with dialect recognition can provide 24/7 support, addressing customer inquiries in their native languages and building stronger relationships. Ecosystem collaboration is crucial. Regional banks can't afford to build AI solutions from scratch. Instead, they should seek partnerships with fintech companies and other AI providers. From a cost-benefit perspective, finding the right ecosystem partners to help regional banks quickly align their strategies and integrate use cases is the most cost-effective choice. This allows them to access pre-built solutions, tap into external expertise, and rapidly deploy AI applications without breaking the bank. This means collaborating with fintech companies that specialize in AI-powered lending, fraud detection, and customer service. It means partnering with technology providers that can help them build and deploy mobile-first solutions. It means embracing open APIs and data-sharing initiatives to create a more interconnected and collaborative financial ecosystem. But collaboration must be strategic. Regional banks should carefully evaluate potential partners, focusing on those who can provide solutions that align with their specific needs and target markets. A scattershot approach to partnerships will only lead to wasted resources and diluted efforts.

The future of finance in Asia holds immense potential for regional banks to spearhead the AI revolution. The prospect of a 14-24 percent increase in profits, rising to 60-80 percent over the next three years, is a compelling call to action. The path forward is clear but demanding, requiring strategic deployment and collaboration to ensure that AI solutions are not only technologically advanced, but also culturally and contextually relevant. The AI revolution in Chinese banking is fundamentally about people, culture, and community. Regional banks, with their deep local connections, are uniquely positioned to harness the power of AI to create financial services that are efficient, convenient, and deeply personalized. By embracing hyper-localization, cultivating local talent, prioritizing mobile-first solutions, and forming strategic partnerships, they can thrive in the face of competition from global giants. They can become the champions of their communities, the trusted partners of their customers, and the driving force behind a more inclusive and prosperous financial future for China. The future of Chinese banking isn't about mimicking the global giants; it's about redefining what it means to be a bank in the 21st century, and regional banks are poised to lead this transformation.

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CHN Energy Launches World's First Large-Scale AI Model for Power Generation

China Energy Investment Corp (CHN Energy) has launched the world's first large-scale artificial intelligence model specifically designed for the power generation industry, the State-owned energy giant announced on Saturday. The model, described as operating at the hundred-billion parameter level, is intended to support

intelligent decision-making system across the entire power generation chain, from safety and environmental protection to power trading, production scheduling, and equipment maintenance, it said. CHN Energy said the initiative aims to achieve comprehensive intelligent upgrades across all power scenarios and lead China's energy sector towards greater intelligence and digitalization. In the power trading domain, the AI model enhances spot market decision-making by accurately forecasting weather changes, predicting water risks, and analyzing market conditions. The company stated that the model has significantly improved the accuracy of weather data, such as wind speed forecasts and boosted the accuracy of new energy power output forecasts by 2.8 percent. The model is also applied in equipment maintenance enables a shift from traditional reactive repairs to more proactive, state-based maintenance. While in safety and environmental protection, the model also offers technical support for full lifecycle monitoring equipment and strengthens safety process control for operations.

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East Asia

CHINA: "Lab Assistant" - AI Enhancing Scientific Research with Speed, Precision

As scientists are striving to develop AI products and solutions to enhance various industries and daily life, this booming technology is also serving as a "lab assistant," contributing to scientific progress in turn. In China, AI has been increasingly integrated into diverse research fields, particularly in life sciences, drug discovery and environmental studies. It shows substantial potential to boost efficiency, transform approaches and expedite breakthroughs.

OFFERING EARLY DISEASE DETECTION

Researchers from Shanghai-based Fudan University have made a technological breakthrough in early disease detection. With the assistance of AI, this advancement enables doctors to diagnose and predict diseases simply through a blood test. Targeted at Alzheimer's disease, the research team used big data and an AI algorithm to screen 1,500 plasma proteins and identified 11 that are capable of predicting dementia risks. "Through blood tests, we identified that these proteins exhibited consistent changes. With the help of AI-based calculations for disease markers, we were able to detect Alzheimer's disease at least 15 years before diagnosis," lead researcher Yu Jintai said. "These changes are not caused by genetic modifications but rather due to differences in protein expression," Yu explained. "Much like how a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly."

The study soon garnered attention within the global medical community after being featured in the journal Nature in late 2024. Rather than resting on their laurels, the

research team continued their experimental efforts, endeavoring to uncover more relationships between diseases and proteins with the AI tool. Following an analysis of over 50,000 blood samples and health data collected during a 14-year follow-up study, the team created the world's first atlas of plasma proteins in health and disease states, which can help forecast diabetes and heart disease risks a decade in advance. Researchers are currently developing a low-cost detection kit, priced under 100 yuan (14 U.S. dollars) to make protein testing as routine as glucose checks.

SLASHING DRUG DEVELOPMENT TIMELINES

At Hangzhou-based Liangzhu Laboratory, a research team has invented an AI algorithm to reduce the development process of a drug for treating progeria, a rare pediatric disease. The traditional large-scale screening method for small-molecule drug development takes 15 to 20 years, with a high failure rate. However, the AI algorithm can reduce the cycle to approximately 3 to 5 years, accelerating preclinical trials that previously consumed 90 percent of the research time, according to Shen Ning, a researcher in the lab and a member of the program. Under Zhejiang University, the laboratory in 2021 established a multidisciplinary research team of experts in clinical medicine, bioscience, mathematics, computing and statistics. They have developed several advanced AI algorithms specifically designed for the precise diagnosis of genetic and rare diseases.

China's National Health Commission and other departments jointly issued the guidelines for 84 AI application scenarios in the health sector, including drug research and development. For decades, the pharmaceutical industry has been confronted with a "double-10" challenge: it usually requires 10 years and an investment of 1 billion U.S. dollars to develop a new drug. Many people believe that AI will be the most promising solution to overcome the long-standing dilemma. "AI has the potential to impact the entire chain of drug development," said Academician Chen Kaixian of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS). While no AI-assisted drug development has reached markets yet, multiple candidates are advancing through clinical trials in China.

DECODING CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

In March, CAS researchers and tech company Alibaba Cloud collaboratively unveiled "Luoshu," an AI model that can precisely trace water origins and predict runoff volumes in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, which is known as the Asian Water Tower, home to headwaters of over 10 major Asian rivers. Warming at twice the global average over the past 50 years, the plateau is experiencing an imbalance in its water systems among glaciers, lakes and rivers. This imbalance is expected to exacerbate uncertainties in water supply, energy supply and demand, as well as food production, according to Xia Cuihui, a participant and an associate researcher at the CAS's Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research. Hydropower generation capacity in glacier regions has declined globally in recent years. Although the reasons remain unclear, it is most likely associated with climate change, the researcher told Xinhua.

The new AI model can help predict water flow for hydropower plants by tracking where the water comes from -- like rain, melting glaciers, or underground water. "If something unusual happens, such as glaciers melting too fast or a bad drought, it will automatically update the water supply predictions," Xia explained.

Compared with conventional approaches, the AI model enhances prediction accuracy by 20 percent and can monitor real-time source contributions. It can alert power grids to prepare for short-term emergencies while providing scientific support for long-term decision-making in clean energy generation. "Luoshu" is one of the numerous AI models recently launched by the CAS. Several institutes within the country's highest natural sciences academic organization have launched AI tools based on Alibaba's reasoning model, covering applications from astronomical observation to coral species identification. For researchers like Xia, who holds a Ph.D. in geography, AI has already become an essential tool in the lab, but it is not just about efficiency. "It unlocks research once deemed impossible," the female scientist added, noting that many research ideas previously limited by traditional methods can now be realized with AI support, promoting greater innovation.

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China Sci-tech Museums Adopt AI-powered Assistants

The China Science and Technology Museum (CSTM) said on Sunday that it has assisted 13 provincial sci-tech museums in deploying artificial intelligence (AI) assistants to enhance visitor experiences, marking a step forward in AI-driven exhibition for sci-tech museums nationwide. In November 2024, CSTM launched the country's first AI-powered museum assistant, combining popular science knowledge with large-model technology. The smart assistant not only provides on-site guidance and information but also answers scientific queries for young learners remotely, showcasing AI's potential in educational settings. Since March, CSTM has expanded the initiative, training technical teams from 13 provincial museums through workshops. Participants have built customized knowledge bases and deployed AI assistants tailored to their venues. A CSTM spokesperson highlighted that as technology advances and more museums join, the AI ecosystem will diversify, creating a smart, ubiquitous network of assistants for multiple applications.

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China Holds AI Education Forum on Responsible Technology Integration

The China Public Diplomacy Association on Wednesday hosted an AI-themed salon that featured a keynote speech by Lionel M. Ni, the founding president of the Hong

Kong University of Science and Technology (Guangzhou), which was followed by an interactive session with Chinese and foreign journalists. The event highlighted how advanced AI models like DeepSeek are transforming knowledge acquisition and content creation. These systems can rapidly process vast amounts of literature, generate high-quality summaries and research papers, and produce multimedia content such as images and videos, enabling users to create diverse materials on demand. Lionel M. Ni stressed that higher education institutions should pay close attention to AI's impact on the education sector. "The responsible use of AI within legal frameworks should be encouraged," he said, citing the technology's irreversible integration into modern education. Faculty members at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (Guangzhou) are encouraged to incorporate AI into curricula, leveraging its capabilities to enhance pedagogy. "AI won't replace humans, but professionals leveraging AI will outpace those who do not -- this is inevitable," Ni cautioned. As AI capabilities continue to advance at a remarkable pace, the event also underscored the need for balanced approaches to its development that harness the technology's benefits while conscientiously managing fundamental concerns like computational efficiency and privacy safeguards.

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AI-powered Healthcare Takes Spotlight at China's Medical Conference

Experts gathered in Beijing over the weekend for the 2025 China Medical Development Conference, where the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and healthcare has become the center of attention. The two-day event, held annually since 2021, brought together leading voices in mathematics, AI, medicine, public health and pharmacy to discuss innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and policy directions to drive the medicine sector forward in the AI age. Attendees emphasized AI's transformative potential in reshaping medical research and the broader healthcare ecosystem. Wang Chen, vice president of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and president of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences (CAMS), proposed a phased roadmap for integrating AI into medicine. According to Wang, in the short term, scenario-based pilot programs will take the lead. The medium term will focus on deeper applications and international collaboration, while the long term aims to establish an AI-driven ecosystem encompassing scientific research, clinical care, and healthcare management.

Zheng Hairong, vice president of Nanjing University, stressed that breakthroughs in biomedical AI must be underpinned by standardized data and ethical governance. He pointed to fields such as medical imaging and brain-computer interfaces as areas where cross-disciplinary collaboration will be crucial in overcoming technological hurdles. In recent years, China has ramped up its "AI Plus" initiative in healthcare, promoting standardized infrastructure, cross-institutional data sharing, and the

development of industry-specific AI models to improve the precision and efficiency of diagnostics and treatment. Ensuring the safe and responsible deployment of AI technologies in healthcare was a recurring theme throughout the conference. Participants underscored the importance of building a secure, well-regulated environment to maintain public trust. Shen Jianfeng, an official with the National Health Commission, called for the creation of high-quality medical datasets and AI language corpora. He also urged stronger policy coordination across disciplines and investment in talent development, with a focus on medical ethics. A highlight of the conference was the release of the "Top Medical Advances in China 2024" by the CAMS, a list of 13 breakthroughs selected from over 310,000 research projects -- all seen as major steps forward in China's disease prevention and treatment capabilities. Among the standout achievements were a method to diagnose Alzheimer's disease up to 18 years before symptoms appear, and a gene therapy breakthrough for hereditary deafness.

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Teen AI Academies Pave Way for China's Next-gen Innovators

With the launch of groundbreaking artificial intelligence (AI) academies for teens in major cities, China is poised to shape the next generation of AI pioneers. In a significant step forward, a teen-focused AI academy was inaugurated in late March in Beijing, as a collaboration between Zhongguancun Academy -- a higher education research institution dedicated to innovation in AI and interdisciplinary fields -- and local education authorities. Designed to create a comprehensive AI talent development pipeline that integrates basic education, higher education, and industry practice, the Beijing Teen AI Academy (Haidian) plans to tap into faculty resources from 31 top universities across China. As part of its programming, the new academy will guide secondary school students to participate directly in national-level research projects. It also leverages the innovation ecosystem of Zhongguancun -- often referred to as China's Silicon Valley -- to offer students opportunities to incubate entrepreneurial ventures. The academy's launch follows the announcement of a similar initiative in Shanghai in August 2024. A teen AI academy will be established under a partnership between the School of Artificial Intelligence at Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) and the China Welfare Institute Children's Palace.

According to SJTU, full-scale programs of the academy are set to begin in the second half of 2025, with a focus on building foundational AI skills in young learners while piloting a new, continuous model for nurturing exceptional talent. Beijing and Shanghai -- known for their deep pool of AI talent and top-tier universities -- are at the forefront of developing new education systems tailored to the intelligent era. Their endeavors come as China navigates a growing gap between the rapid advancement of AI technologies and the limited supply of qualified talent needed to keep pace. E Weinan, a renowned academician at the Chinese Academy of

Sciences, emphasized the urgency of the mission. "The era of intelligence will profoundly reshape how we think about research, education, and talent development," he said. "We need a broader base of leading talent. It's not enough to have just a few pioneers." In higher education, elite universities, including Tsinghua University, Wuhan University and SJTU, are expanding enrollment in AI and interdisciplinary fields in response to surging demand.

These moves align with national priorities to elevate the quality of undergraduate education and accelerate the development of world-class universities and academic programs. SJTU has long been a pioneer in AI education. It was among the first Chinese universities to receive national approval for an AI major in 2019. Since then, it has expanded its program, establishing the School of Artificial Intelligence in 2024 and launching a PhD program in intelligent science and technology. The university has also rolled out an AI minor open to all students, spanning disciplines from science, engineering, agriculture and medicine to humanities and social sciences. Parallel efforts are unfolding in basic education. In the latest move, SJTU launched its AI Empowerment in Basic Education initiative on Sunday, aiming to identify and cultivate top talent from an early stage. As part of the initiative, the university signed a strategic cooperation agreement with the education authorities of Shanghai's Xuhui District.

The agreement outlines plans to jointly promote AI education in primary and secondary schools, support early-stage talent development, and develop intelligent educational tools. In the country's capital, an AI experimental class project -- an early-stage talent training program -- has been running in Haidian District since 2023. Jointly launched by local education authorities and Tsinghua University, the program introduces secondary school students to computational thinking, mathematics, programming, and AI fundamentals. Classes are held on weekends and holidays to accommodate school schedules. In 2024, the program expanded its intake to 180 students, up from 120 in its inaugural year. The selection process is highly competitive, with only 11.76 percent of the over 1,500 applicants being admitted. These local initiatives reflect a broader, long-term effort by Chinese educators and policymakers to strengthen policy support for building the AI talent pipeline from the ground up. The foundation for this push was laid as early as July 2017, when the State Council released a development plan for next-generation AI.

The document called for offering AI-related courses in primary and secondary schools. In late 2024, the Ministry of Education issued a directive setting clear benchmarks for AI instruction at each educational stage: lower primary grades will focus on hands-on exposure to AI technologies; upper primary and junior high students will deepen their understanding and practical skills; while senior high school students will engage in project-based learning and explore advanced applications of AI. To support the national agenda, local governments in cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen have introduced their own tailored plans, accelerating the

rollout of AI education across regions. "We aim to build an AI talent pipeline that begins with basic education and seamlessly connects to higher education and industry," said Liu Tieyan, president of Zhongguancun Academy. "The goal is to identify promising young minds early and empower them to drive innovation across every industry."

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AI Transforms Deep Reading in Digital Age

In a classroom in northeastern China, students are holding conversations with Confucius -- not through seances or historical reenactments, but through artificial intelligence (AI). At Hunnan District No. 9 Middle School in Shenyang, Liaoning Province, students use AI-powered software to interact with avatars of literary giants like Confucius and Lu Xun. With each interaction, these historical figures shed their textbook stiffness, becoming vivid, almost tangible guides in these students' literary journeys. "AI is not just a tool here, it's more like a guide and a mentor," said Zheng Jun, the school's principal. "It helps students crack open the classics and explore the depths of their meaning when they hit a wall." These immersive reading experiences are part of a rising trend in China, where deep reading -- once confined to libraries and lecture halls -- is being reshaped by digital innovation.

According to official data, China's digital reading user base totaled 670 million in 2024, up 17.5 percent year on year. Yet, as convenient as digital tools can be, experts warn of the challenge of preserving depth in an era of shallow, skimmable content. For Nie Zhenning, head of the national reading committee at the Publishers Association of China, digital technology and deep reading are not opposites but partners in a new reading paradigm. "By leveraging digital tools, readers can build their knowledge base in fragmented reading time. In this way, AI is breaking down barriers and injecting fresh energy into the pursuit of deep reading," Nie noted. For the increasing number of readers with high professional or academic reading needs, Nie's observation rings especially true. Among these readers is Liu Shuai, a doctoral candidate in the field of classic Chinese literature at East China Normal University.

On his computer screen, faded pages of a centuries-old Chinese manuscript flicker to life. On one side are fragmented, yellowed images from ancient Chinese classics, and on the other are crisp lines of searchable text, deciphered by AI with stunning precision. Liu uses the digital reading platform named Shidianguji. Launched in 2022 by tech giant ByteDance and Peking University, the platform has digitized more than 18,000 Chinese classics and made them available on mobile and web platforms. "Anytime you want to read (a Chinese classic), you can click to find it. If you find the ancient version difficult to read, you can click on the annotated version in modern Chinese, even with phonetic notations for ancient characters. Some people use the platform to research the history of their birthplace recorded in ancient books, or to

look up their family trees," said Wang Yu, who is in charge of the platform's development. Behind the interface is a powerful AI system with over 96 percent character recognition accuracy and up to 98 percent named entity recognition accuracy. With support from apps like Douyin, which is the Chinese version of TikTok, and Doubao, ByteDance's large language model, these once-esoteric classics are now just a click away for millions.

"This is not just digitization, it's transformation," said Wang. "With AI, we're teaching machines to 'read' Chinese classics, making the inaccessible accessible." But perhaps the most transformative aspect of AI reading is the human-machine collaboration driving this renaissance of classic Chinese literature. With AI tools to hand, more than 10,000 students and teachers at nearly 1,000 universities across China have become modern-day "scribes," and are helping AI refine and annotate ancient texts. Many of them major in fields unrelated to classic Chinese literature. To date, more than 1,600 ancient texts, totaling nearly 200 million characters, have been edited, annotated and shared through this AI-human collaboration. "Once, I thought this work was endless," Liu said. "But with AI, not only is it possible, it's participatory. Ancient books are no longer locked away for specialists. They belong to everyone." "AI and humans complement each other during reading," said Wu Guowu, deputy secretary general of the Ministry of Education's National Commission for Ancient Chinese Classics Editing and Research by Institutions of Higher Learning. "Experts feed AI with deep readings. AI, in turn, assists scholars and enthusiasts alike, forming a virtuous cycle."

Zheng Jun shares Wu's sentiment. "In the past, reading was just a one-way interaction between a student and a text," Zheng said. "Now, it's a dynamic, multi-dimensional process involving AI, teachers, students and the text itself." The new model, the principal added, sparks greater interest in reading among children. AI may be reshaping the landscape of deep reading and knowledge exploration, but it still has a long road ahead, experts note. Wu said that current AI reading tools often fall short when it comes to asking meaningful, professional-level questions, tending to focus instead on surface-level needs. The key to unlocking AI's full potential in reading, he believes, is the closer integration of academia and industry. As for the future, Nie envisions a society shaped not just by what people read, but by how they read. "One day, AI-generated content could be our daily readable texts," Nie said. "We might even have AI columns in magazines." But even as AI stretches the boundaries of what is possible, Nie reminds us, "Deep reading still has a paper side. We must not forget to keep reading books the old-fashioned way."

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AI Used to Enhance Patent Examination Efficiency, Quality

With the world's largest number of patents, China is continuously enhancing the quality and efficiency of invention patent examination with the help of AI-assisted systems. According to the China National Intellectual Property Administration (CNIPA), the country's average examination time for invention patents has been reduced to 15.5 months, the fastest among countries with the same examination systems. The accuracy rate for concluding invention patent examinations has reached 95.2 percent, while user satisfaction with examination quality has risen to 86.8 percent. By the end of 2024, the number of valid invention patents in China had reached 4.75 million, and China became the world's first country to have more than 4 million valid invention patents. Through rapid patent authorization, enterprises and individuals can promptly safeguard their innovations and prevent imitation or infringement by competitors. "For patent applications in key industries like next-generation IT and high-end equipment manufacturing, CNIPA offers priority examination to shorten review times further," CNIPA deputy commissioner Hu Wenhui said at a press conference on Thursday.

The patent review improvement has also benefited from new technologies. According to the CNIPA, it has deployed AI-assisted examination and search systems, leveraging machine translation, image recognition, and natural language processing to automatically distribute prior art documents, conduct image-based searches for design patents, and identify deficiencies in application files. Hu noted that these technological advancements have significantly enhanced examination efficiency while maintaining high-quality standards. "We are exploring the application of large AI models in patent examination processes to better serve applicants' needs," he added. China has established a target to further shorten the examination process to 15 months by the end of 2025. Besides, greater efforts will be placed in fields such as artificial intelligence, big data, and quantum technology. Noting that patent examination is key to IP protection, Hu said the CNIPA will continue to advance reforms in patent examination by embracing new ideas and technologies to support the country's scientific innovation and industrial development.

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BMW Chairman Reaffirms Commitment to China Market, Highlights Key AI Partnerships

Chairman of the Board of Management of BMW AG, Oliver Zipse, has underscored China's strategic importance to the German automaker during his visit to the Shanghai auto show. Speaking to Xinhua on the sidelines of the event, which commenced on Wednesday, Zipse said that China is not only BMW's largest single market but also a vital hub for innovation. Highlighting China's growing role in innovation, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI), Zipse said BMW is deepening its partnerships with Chinese tech companies to integrate advanced AI features into its vehicles for the Chinese market. He added that BMW will begin integrating AI

technology from Chinese tech startup DeepSeek into its latest models in China later this year. "The BMW has become a 360-degree AI-driven company," Zipse said. "We take full advantage of this new technology."

Capitalizing on China's tech boom, BMW has been steadily strengthening its collaborations with leading Chinese technology firms. Last week, BMW announced plans to deepen its collaboration with ByteDance, the owner of TikTok, to enhance AI applications in marketing and customer service. In March, the automaker teamed up with Alibaba to integrate large language model (LLM) AI into its next-generation vehicles and partnered with Huawei to further develop a smart in-car digital ecosystem tailored to the Chinese market. "This country is so innovative that we really enjoy putting all the technology into the cars for China," Zipse said. At the auto show, BMW showcased more than 30 car models, highlighting the technological innovations of its next-generation intelligent vehicles, known as the Neue Klasse.

China is pivotal in driving technological innovation for BMW's next-generation intelligent vehicles, Zipse noted, adding that the first Neue Klasse models produced in China will roll off the line at the company's Shenyang plant in 2026. According to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers, China's auto output and sales remained the first globally in 2024, both exceeding 31 million units. Industry observers say China's auto sector is projected to maintain its growth momentum in 2025 following the implementation of a series of supportive measures. Noting that China is "the largest global market" for BMW, Zipse said the company will further expand its presence in China. "We have a very strong foothold in China, and we are here to stay." Currently, BMW operates research and development (R&D) centers in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenyang and Nanjing, forming its largest R&D network outside of Germany.

The Shenyang facility, which combines research, development and production, is the carmaker's largest production base in the world. With approximately 460 local supplier partners in China, the company has expressed strong confidence in the resilience of the country's supply chain. "The supply chain here is not only about China for China, but it's also China for the world," Zipse said. "We have an ever-growing purchasing team here, who looks for opportunities that we can also deliver parts for our other global sites from China." Boasting the world's largest manufacturing system with the most complete industrial chains and supporting facilities, China holds a pivotal position in global industrial and supply chains.

The 21st Shanghai International Automobile Industry Exhibition, running from April 23 to May 2, has attracted nearly 1,000 companies from 26 countries and regions. In addition to BMW, leading automotive manufacturers like Volkswagen, Mercedes-Benz, Ford and Toyota are also participating in the event, demonstrating their strong commitment to the Chinese market despite global trade challenges and growing protectionist trends. Zipse's visit to the Shanghai auto show marks his third

trip to China in just 30 days. Emphasizing the importance of connectivity of the world, he said that BMW always advocates free trade and open markets. "Economic growth thrives through opening, not closing," he said. "In this world, everything is connected; there is no one who can be completely independent from other countries."

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Steel and Speed - China's Robolympics Kicks Off New Era of AI Sports

Move over, human athletes, and behold a futuristic "Robolympics". China's first-ever multi-sport games for AI-powered robots opened Friday in the eastern city of Wuxi, proving that the arena of sports is no longer reserved for flesh and blood alone. The groundbreaking event came just days after Beijing made history with a half-marathon featuring humanoid robots running alongside humans. The all-robot sports event took innovation one step further, gathering over one hundred of China's top robotics research teams to push the boundaries of embedded AI in competitive sports. More than 150 cutting-edge AI robots, including humanoid ones, clashed in the steel showdown across an array of disciplines from sprinting and football to combat and dance. The robot athletes raced down the track with their movements optimized for maximum velocity in the high-octane sprint, while the cross-country challenge tested their agility as they navigated grass, puddles, slopes and barriers, showcasing advanced obstacle avoidance in rugged terrain. Football matches highlighted 2v2 robot teams competing for possession of the ball, and chasing it down until one side scored. In basketball, robots showed off their autonomous navigation, movement and shooting skills, sinking baskets with consistency.

The combat arena saw robots weighing 1.5kg - equipped with reinforced metal frames and hyper-flexible joints - spin, dodge and strike with calculated ferocity until one emerged victorious. "Just like the Olympic motto, in robotics, it's also about 'Faster, Higher, Stronger - Together'," said Wang Yitao, who is in charge of the combat competition. "Everyone strives for breakthroughs and innovation." "Yet when a robot falls, we cheer, because high-intensity sports activities test the robots' stability and generate invaluable data, which will ultimately help improve future applications," he added. Other tasks included box lifting, indoor rescue operations, and smart grasping, allowing the robots to flaunt 360-degree rotating metal fingers and grip strength 10 times that of humans. According to the China Electronics Society, the event's organizer, the competing robots are evaluated on gait efficiency, battery life, cognitive computing, and even facial recognition capabilities, with winners receiving honor certificates and a prize of 10,000 yuan (1,370 U.S. dollars). No sweat, all gears. While the metal athletes won't bite their medals (yet), their legacy transcend trophies -- a glimpse into a future where AI and humanity push each other to new heights.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/25/2025

Xi Inspects AI Industry in Shanghai, Calling for Its Development

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday visited an AI incubator in Shanghai, calling on the city to take the lead in AI development and governance. The inspection trip came four days after China's leadership convened a dedicated AI study session, where Xi called for gaining a head start in this strategic sector. "AI technology is evolving rapidly and entering a phase of explosive growth," said Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, as he visited the Shanghai Foundation Model Innovation Center, a large-model incubator home to over 100 enterprises. During the group study session last Friday, Xi pointed out that AI, as a strategic technology leading the new round of sci-tech revolution and industrial transformation, has profoundly changed the ways people work and live. The Party Central Committee attaches great importance to the development of AI, and has improved top-level design and strengthened implementation efforts in recent years, Xi said at the session. In the incubator, Xi joined a salon themed on the autonomous evolution of next-generation intelligent agents, engaging in discussions with young innovators on the spot. "AI is a nascent industry, and it's also an industry that belongs to young people," said Xi. He then walked into an AI product experience store, where he inquired in detail about the functions and market trends of the products, and tried on a pair of smart glasses for a firsthand experience.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/29/2025

Xi Inspects Shanghai Large-model Incubator, Underscoring China's AI Ambitions

President Xi Jinping on Tuesday visited a large-model incubator in Shanghai, urging the city to take the lead in AI development and governance while highlighting China's vast potential for the industry. The trip came four days after China's leadership convened a dedicated AI study session, during which Xi called for gaining a head start in this strategic sector. "AI technology is evolving rapidly and entering a phase of explosive growth," said Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, as he visited the Shanghai Foundation Model Innovation Center, a large-model incubator home to over 100 enterprises. During the group study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee last Friday, Xi pointed out that AI, as a strategic technology leading the new round of sci-tech revolution and industrial transformation, has profoundly changed the ways people work and live.

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China's AI market is projected to experience substantial growth in the coming years, according to International Data Corporation. U.S. companies, including Tesla and Microsoft, have set their sights on the commercial prospects of China's AI market. The Yangtze River Delta region, anchored by Shanghai, is at the forefront of China's AI innovation. DeepSeek, hailing from Hangzhou in the southern part of the delta region, is less than 200 kilometers away from Shanghai. Noting China's rich data resources, complete industrial system and huge market, Xi said in Shanghai that the country holds broad prospects for AI development, emphasizing enhanced policy support and talent cultivation. Cultivating and strengthening the AI industry has been included in China's 14th Five-Year Plan and its development vision for 2035, aiming to advance the sector toward a beneficial, safe and equitable direction. A recent Stanford University report has shown that China is closing the gap with the United States in cutting-edge AI model development.

According to a report by the World Intellectual Property Organization, China topped the global rankings with over 38,000 patent applications for generative AI between 2014 and 2023. "Despite external pressure and technological blockades, China has the capability to leverage AI technology to drive leapfrog economic growth and significantly enhance productivity," Liang Zheng, vice dean of the Institute for AI International Governance at Tsinghua University, told Xinhua. "Amid the fragmented and exclusive AI governance landscape, China can play a crucial role in promoting global cooperation," added Liang. Calling AI a global public good, the Chinese leadership has pledged to help Global South nations build tech capacity, thus narrowing the global AI divide. Xi on Tuesday urged Shanghai to embrace its historical role as a leading international center for scientific and technological innovation and to build itself into a globally renowned sci-tech high ground.

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China Launches Special Crackdown on Abuse of AI Technology

China's top internet regulator has issued a circular announcing the launch of a three-month nationwide campaign to crack down on the misuse of artificial

intelligence (AI) technologies. According to the circular issued by the Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission and made public on Wednesday, the campaign will be carried out in two phases. The first phase will focus on strengthening the management of relevant sources, including removing unauthorized AI applications, enhancing the regulation of AI-generated content and related technologies, and encouraging online platforms to improve their ability to identify and verify violations. The second phase will target specific issues such as the use of AI to create and disseminate rumors, misinformation, obscene content, impersonation, and instances of "internet trolling." This phase will also focus on removing illegal and harmful content, while penalizing violations committed by relevant accounts, multi-channel network (MCN) organizations and online platforms, according to the circular.

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Chinese Institute Launches AI-powered Research Platform "ScienceOne"

The Institute of Automation of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) has unveiled an AI-driven research platform, ScienceOne, marking a significant step toward transforming traditional research methods through AI automation. Developed to overcome the limitations of generic AI models in scientific research, ScienceOne integrates advanced capabilities in data comprehension, computational optimization, and reasoning evaluation. The platform's debut features two flagship tools: S1-Literature, an AI literature assistant capable of synthesizing thousands of papers into structured reviews and providing in-depth analysis tools like concept mapping and citation tracing; and S1-ToolChain, a workflow orchestrator that autonomously coordinates over 300 specialized scientific tools. Developed in collaboration with CAS institutes, including the Computer Network Information Center and the National Science Library, ScienceOne leverages scientific literature databases and multidisciplinary expertise to support fields such as mathematics, physics, and materials science.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 05/06/2025

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South China's Guangdong Unveils Series of AI Application Scenarios

South China's Guangdong Province has introduced 30 types of artificial intelligence (AI) application scenarios, according to the Science and Technology Daily on Wednesday. These AI application scenarios span four fields: manufacturing, education, health care and safety. In terms of education, Guangdong has identified typical application scenarios for AI in five major areas: learning, teaching,

experimentation, resource distribution, and assessment and decision-making support. As for healthcare, the province has sorted out 10 typical application scenarios of AI in areas such as imaging diagnosis, clinical decision-making, surgical planning, outpatient triage, and medical consultation. The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area boasts both mechanical and electrical technology as well as digital and intelligent technology, Qu Xiaojie, an official of the Department of Industry and Information Technology of Guangdong Province was quoted as saying by the newspaper. The area also has a complete industrial chain for AI and robotics. The province will support the industrialization of technology, marketization of products and commercialization of services for the AI and robotics enterprises.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 05/07/2025

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Scientists Develop Insect-inspired Vision System with AI Capabilities

Researchers have recently made a major breakthrough in the field of bionic vision, paving a new path for microscopic observation and high-end instrument development. The study, a collaboration between the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology and Duke University in the United States, was published in the journal Science Advances on Thursday. Inspired by insect compound eyes, scientists have previously developed various imaging systems using microlens arrays and sensors, achieving initial applications. However, traditional bionic compound-eye systems have long faced limitations due to their complex 3D structures and restricted spatial resolution, resulting in blurry imaging. "We aim not only to let bionic vision systems 'see' the world but also 'see clearly' and 'understand' it," said Zhang Dawei, a professor at the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology and leader of the research team. The innovative breakthrough stems from an in-depth bionic study of the structural characteristics and information-processing mechanisms of arthropod compound eyes. Insects rely on hundreds or thousands of small visual units working together to respond instantly to complex environments.

Mimicking this, the team developed a compact 0.8-cubic-centimeter bionic vision system capable of megapixel-level, full-color, ultra-wide-field ($165^{\circ} \times 360^{\circ}$) high-resolution imaging. Using deep learning, the team built a multi-level visual processing model that performs tasks such as high-definition panoramic image reconstruction, wide-field multi-target positioning, object recognition, multi-target tracking, and 3D tracking. This advancement enables bionic vision to truly "see clearly and understand," overcoming traditional limitations. Zhuang Songlin, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said the research exemplifies interdisciplinary innovation by merging bionics with AI. The team is now refining the bionic compound-eye structure, focusing on applications in micro-unmanned platforms, endoscopic inspection instruments and other high-end equipment. This

achievement not only advances AI-powered scientific instruments but also supports advancements in medical diagnosis, environmental monitoring and intelligent security, demonstrating strong potential from fundamental research to industrial applications.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 05/25/2025

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Chinese Scientists Develop AI Model to Predict Stellar Flares

Chinese scientists have developed FLARE, a cutting-edge artificial intelligence (AI) model designed to predict stellar flares, offering a transformative tool for astronomical research, the Institute of Automation under the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) announced on Tuesday. The model, co-developed by researchers from the CAS Institute of Automation and the CAS National Astronomical Observatories, leverages the integrated intelligent research platform ScienceOne to analyze stellar data and forecast magnetic eruptions on stars. Stellar flares are sudden bursts of energy caused by the release of magnetic fields in a star's atmospheres. They hold critical clues for understanding stellar structure, evolution, magnetic activity, and the potential for habitable exoplanets, said Chen Yingying, a researcher from the Institute of Automation. "Research has shown that various physical properties of stars, such as age, rotation velocity, and mass, as well as historical flare records, are significantly related to stellar flares," Chen said.

However, limited observational data has hindered comprehensive studies. Accurately predicting the timing of stellar flares has become an important task in astronomical studies, said Chen. The researcher further explained that FLARE addresses this gap by integrating a star's physical properties with historical flare records through its unique architecture, combining soft prompt modules and residual record fusion modules, to enhance feature extraction from light curves and therefore, significantly improve prediction accuracy. Notably, the model demonstrates a certain level of adaptability, enabling precise flare forecasts based on varying light curve patterns of different stars. Even for the same star with different variability patterns, precise predictions can still be achieved, said Chen. The research paper detailing FLARE's development has been accepted by the 34th International Joint Conference on Artificial Intelligence, a premier global AI conference.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 05/27/2025

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China, SCO Countries Expand Cooperation in AI Applications

It's soybean planting season in Russia. Across vast farmlands in Ussuriysk, agricultural machinery equipped with automatic navigation systems and artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms developed by a Chinese company performs precise

automated sowing. "Chinese agricultural technology leads in innovation and intelligence. This product enables automatic turning and precise operation along preset routes, making it popular in the Russian market," said Dmitry Vladimirovich Banin, a local distributor. This navigation system was displayed at the 2025 China-Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Forum held in north China's Tianjin Municipality on Thursday, drawing attendees from SCO countries. The AI-themed forum aims to strengthen practical collaboration in AI development and governance among SCO member states. "AI-powered agriculture is transforming the industry," said Yan Bingxin, senior engineer of Nongxin Tianjin Technology Co., Ltd., adding that the company has intensified R&D in smart agriculture and sold dozens of agricultural navigation systems to Russia.

As a strategic technology driving a new wave of scientific revolution, AI has seen comprehensive advancement in China. The country has established a robust AI industrial ecosystem with systematic capabilities. More and more AI applications from China now benefit the development of SCO countries, including "vision-enabled" pool-cleaning robots, heavy-duty robots that can safely transport wind turbine blades, and advanced digital medical imaging diagnostics. In Kazakhstan, an AI-powered pool-cleaning robot equipped with infrared and ultrasonic sensors navigates intelligently via mobile app control. "Users can monitor cleaning routes remotely, view real-time maps, and schedule sessions via Wi-Fi," said Yu Guoxing, overseas channel manager of Subblue Underwater AI Co., Ltd. Kazakh distributor Vadim Vestev, impressed by their technology and intelligence, purchased 40 such robots. The products have gained traction in Russia and Tajikistan. Heavy-duty automated guided vehicles produced by a Tianjin robot company, widely used in automotive manufacturing, metallurgy, and port logistics, are also popular in some SCO countries.

"Through Tianjin's talent initiatives, we have recruited Pakistani and Iranian graduates to boost our overseas trade, furthering China-SCO collaboration," said Kong Liang, vice general manager of Tianjin Lonyu Robot Co., Ltd. "China stands ready to collaborate with other SCO member states to promote the beneficial, secure, and equitable development of AI," said Huang Ru, a senior official at China's National Development and Reform Commission. China has invited SCO member states to work together to build an AI application center for inclusive technological advancement, according to a plan unveiled on Thursday. Participants expressed commitment to expanding AI application scenarios, advancing digital economy collaboration, and deepening open innovation to harness AI dividends for high-quality development. "AI represents one of the fastest-growing cooperation areas within the SCO," said Oleg Kopelov, deputy secretary-general of the SCO. "We will enhance AI and digital infrastructure connectivity, improve AI ecosystems, foster industrial coordination, and strengthen academic exchanges and talent development within the SCO framework."

From <http://www.news.cn/> 05/30/2025

AI Pets Emerge as New Form of Companionship in China

On a typical workday in Beijing, a soft hum rises from 26-year-old Wang Tongtong's desk, not from her phone or computer but from a small grey creature nestled beside her keyboard. The creature is no ordinary toy -- it's an AI pet. With plush fur, oversized blinking eyes, and synthetic skin that radiates a gentle warmth, it tilts its head toward her, emitting a faint whimper and leaning into her touch like a needy kitten. "It comforts me when I feel anxious," Wang said. "Real cats and dogs can be messy and moody, but this one just quietly stays by my side." Though it doesn't move around like a live animal, it can detect people, food, and objects with a built-in camera and respond with eye contact, sound and gesture. Equipped with eight personality modes, the pet evolves based on user interaction. "Treat it harshly, and it grows grumpy; treat it gently, and it becomes sweet," Wang explained.

This line of AI pets, named ROPET, was developed by Cute World Technologies Ltd., a Beijing-based company where Wang Tongtong is part of the design team. As one of the developers, she has been closely involved in bringing the product to life and was among the first to test it in everyday settings. According to Zhou Yushu, co-founder of ROPET and a professor at Renmin University of China, the AI pet was designed to "compete" with real animals in terms of touch and feedback. "Most AI pets are designed to serve people," he said. "But we wanted to create something that people see as a real pet." The appeal of ROPET lies not only in its emotional sensitivity but also in its simplicity. It requires no feeding, walking, or litter cleaning, only occasional charging. All user data is stored locally, ensuring privacy. Targeted at women aged 25 to 40, the device is gaining traction overseas.

Since development began in 2022, ROPET was officially launched on overseas crowdfunding platforms this January, with 1,400 units sold in Europe and North America. An additional 8,000 units have been sold in Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the regions of Hong Kong and Taiwan, with a full launch on the Chinese mainland expected next year. Another emerging category is AI pets designed for children. At a shopping mall in Nanjing, east China's Jiangsu Province, kids can be seen crowding around several four-legged robotic dogs that can sing, dance, and respond to touch. These are BabyAlpha, AI-powered companion robots developed by Nanjing WEILAN Intelligent Technologies Co., Ltd. Built on a proprietary multimodal model, BabyAlpha can engage in fluent bilingual conversations, respond to touch with lifelike gestures, take photos, and even patrol rooms. "Four-legged robots are timeless," said Sun Lixiao, vice president of the company. "We believe embodied AI will become a household interface connecting the digital and physical worlds."

Thanks to China's strong supply chains, BabyAlpha is priced competitively -- on par with a smartphone -- and has seen strong sales across e-commerce platforms. According to the company, its AI pet users are now spread across all provincial-level regions in China. In the first quarter of this year, sales soared by more than 150 percent year on year, with factory production capacity increasing by 200 percent. Beyond emotional support, AI pets are increasingly being developed to meet the needs of individuals with special needs. In Shenyang, capital of northeast China's Liaoning Province, a team from Shenyang Ligong University has created an electronic guide dog designed to assist the visually impaired. Lead developer Yang Wei, a doctoral student at the university, explained that the AI guide dog is built on the Robot Dog Go2 platform developed by Chinese firm Unitree Robotics.

It features advanced capabilities such as obstacle avoidance, object recognition, and conversational interaction, and can even assist users in selecting matching clothing colors. "It's like having a reliable companion," said a trial user at a senior care center. "It helps me travel safely and interact with the world." According to Jiang Yueqiu, a professor at the university, China has nearly 20 million visually impaired people, with only about 400 trained guide dogs available. "Electronic guide dogs can help address mobility challenges, provide emotional companionship, and make daily life more accessible for a wider group of visually impaired individuals," she said. The team plans to trial the device in multiple elderly care institutions and is seeking investment to begin mass production. In recent years, the growing number of young people living alone has fueled the rise of the "loneliness economy," a market now worth hundreds of billions of yuan.

Against this backdrop, AI pets are emerging as a new option for those who crave companionship but are too busy with work to care for real cats and dogs, allergic to animal fur, or living in pet-restricted housing. From desktop pets that ease loneliness to robotic dogs that assist the visually impaired, China's AI pet sector is rapidly evolving, promising a future where companionship, care, and cutting-edge technology go hand in paw. "As an extension of traditional pets, AI companions offer stickiness and sustainability," said Wei Xiang, a professor at the University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. "Annual compound growth rate has exceeded 8 percent in recent years, and forecasts indicate it could reach 10 percent over the next five years."

From <http://www.news.cn/> 05/31/2025

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AI vs Human Farmers: China's Smart Agriculture Competition Enters Round 2

Under the golden June sun, emerald rice paddies ripple across the "Tianfu granary" core demonstration zone in Chongzhou, southwest China's Sichuan Province, where a high-stakes agricultural experiment unfolds. As the second AI rice cultivation

challenge goes on for three weeks, organizers find they constantly encounter a pivotal question: can machine learning outperform centuries of farming wisdom? The competition, running from May 15 to Sept. 30, pits six human farming teams against four AI-assisted groups across 1,000 mu (or 66.7 hectares) of prime Sichuan farmland. This modern-day duel between tradition and technology offers a window into China's quest for smart agriculture. In fields dotted with multispectral sensors and solar-powered monitoring poles, the AI teams employ a "sky-ground-space" data network developed by the Institute of Urban Agriculture under the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS).

The system tracks crop health, soil conditions, and pest activity in real time, feeding information to cloud-based AI that generates planting strategies. "Our team consists of around 10 members, and we plan to cultivate a trial area of 100 mu this year," said Gao Ying, a contestant from the Qingqiao land cooperative in Chongzhou, about 50 kilometers away from the provincial capital Chengdu. She noted that the advantage of AI farming over traditional methods is its ability to quickly impart essential knowledge and production skills related to agriculture. Additionally, when prompted, it offers constructive feedback. According to the event schedule, the rice transplanting period will occur from May 15 to 30, during which the AI system will initiate intelligent monitoring. Mid-term data analysis and evaluation will take place on July 15, followed by yield and quality assessments in September.

LESSONS FROM THE FIRST HARVEST

Gao is no stranger to the challenge. Last year's inaugural competition delivered a reality check. The CAAS-developed AI system, guiding novice farmer Gao through 100 mu, finished seventh among nine teams -- outperforming two human counterparts but falling short of veteran growers. Specifically, regarding yield rankings, the AI group achieved an average yield of 516 kilograms per mu, securing eighth place. In terms of quality rankings, the group placed sixth in both the whole milled rice rate and the chalky grain rate, and seventh in chalkiness. The organizers noted that the AI group utilized the Qianxiangyou 956 variety, reaching 88 percent of the established yield standard, an achievement experts called "commendable." However, its 7th-place finish highlighted challenges in replicating human adaptability. "AI needs field schooling," explained Wang Nan, the executive chief scientist of the urban agricultural development strategy and planning team at the CAAS Institute of Urban Agriculture, whose team developed the decision-making system. "During the initial development of AI algorithms, our data was fragmented, but now we have constructed a comprehensive dataset," Wang said. This dataset encompasses the entire rice growing process, including timing, crop growth images, and relevant climatic and soil moisture data.

Moreover, as the dataset expands, both the precision of AI decision-making and its analytical capabilities are improving, enabling farmers to make more accurate assessments regarding key agricultural practices such as fertilization and weeding.

However, the technology is not without its limitations. Experts noted that while AI collects data through cameras and sensors installed in the fields, its environmental perception capabilities remain underdeveloped, particularly with regard to satellite imagery, which has not performed ideally in practical applications. Additionally, the integration of AI technology with traditional agricultural practices requires time to establish trust and collaborative processes between AI and farmers. "AI's strength lies in processing 10,000 data points per mu from our monitoring network, but translating that into field actions requires deeper farmer-algorithm synergy," Wang said. He said that last year, the adoption rate for AI decisions has reached 73 percent, with particular struggles in pest management timing. "This year, we're targeting above 80 percent alignment between AI suggestions and farmer actions," he said.

HYBRID HORIZONS EMERGE

Rather than framing it as man-versus-machine, organizers emphasize convergence. "Artificial intelligence is a tool that assists rather than replaces human labor. We aim to enhance support for urban producers and decision-makers through upgraded computing power," said Wang. He emphasized that while agricultural technology resources are abundant, smallholder farmers often rely on traditional practices and face challenges with aging populations and a gap in technology application. "There is a pressing need for sustainable intellectual support systems," he said. Furthermore, the scattered nature of urban land combined with diverse farming operations complicates the provision of traditional agricultural technology, leading urban agriculture to require more flexible and localized decision-making support compared to the industrialized model of large-scale tomato production in northwest China's Xinjiang. "The core value of this system lies in establishing a bridge between technology innovators and the needs of farmers, enhancing decision-making for farmers while providing data support for government industrial planning," said Wang. The technological edge shows promise. At Chongzhou's Longxing Town, intelligent transplanters demonstrate 20 percent efficiency gains through automated U-turns and AI-optimized planting patterns. Veteran farmer Liu Decheng paused from adjusting an AI-guided transplanter to check his phone's pest alert. "Last year, the system warned of stem borers three days before I spotted them," he admitted, "but my organic pesticide mix worked better than its chemical suggestion."

From <http://www.news.cn/> 06/04/2025

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AI and Chinese Studies Through the Eyes of Global Sinologists

Unlike the traditional study of Chinese history, which relies heavily on manually processing large volumes of historical data and text, artificial intelligence (AI) has opened up new pathways for Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, offering fresh access to diverse historical perspectives. As a German sinologist, Schmidt-Glintzer attended the 2025 World Conference on Sinology held from June 5 to 7 in the southern Chinese metropolis of Shenzhen, where he joined nearly 200 sinologists from over

50 countries and regions to explore the innovative development of Sinology in the age of AI and to advance cultural exchanges between China and the world. During the conference, some scholars visited the headquarters of Chinese tech giant Tencent, Artron Art Centre, and some digital creation platforms, where they experienced AI applications, learned about how traditional Chinese art is being digitized, and explored the potential of generative AI tools. Many scholars expressed admiration for how digital technology is bringing Chinese culture to the world. At Tencent, they experienced an immersive VR tour of one of the caves in the Mogao Grottoes, explored AI-powered platforms designed to accelerate oracle bone research, and learned about how gaming technology was used to create high-definition digital assets of Beijing's Central Axis, supporting its successful UNESCO World Heritage application.

Giray Fidan, a Turkish sinologist and professor at Ankara Haci Bayram Veli University, who had just returned from a field trip to the ancient Silk Road hub of Dunhuang in northwest China, said he was amazed by the scale of the digital preservation efforts there, unaware at the time that many of them were powered by Tencent. "AI has made significant contributions to cultural heritage preservation. Human being capabilities are limited, but AI, like computers, is a tool that helps us accumulate knowledge and boost research efficiency," he noted. The rapid advancement of digital technology is reshaping the landscape of humanities research, bringing unprecedented transformation to the field of Sinology. Emerging tools such as AI, big data analysis, and natural language processing are offering new possibilities for deciphering the vast body of Chinese classics. The development of AI in China carries a distinct humanistic character, especially in its applications to areas that directly impact people's lives, according to Schmidt-Glintzer.

He noted that China's AI contribution is not merely technological, but also deeply cultural -- a culture-driven approach to AI represents an important contribution to the collective wisdom of humanity. Many scholars noted that China's human-centered technological innovations are gaining international recognition and becoming part of everyday life around the world. Through digital platforms and interactive technologies, elements of Chinese culture, such as historical figures and stories, are reaching younger generations globally in engaging new ways. Themed "Understanding China: Sinologies in the Age of Artificial Intelligence," this year's World Conference on Sinology highlighted the growing impact of AI on Sinology and China studies, and the global cultivation of young scholars. China's first postdoctoral program for Sinology talent was also launched at the conference.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 06/13/2025

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Chinese Researchers Pioneer PlantGPT, an AI Assistant for Functional Plant Genomics

Chinese researchers have developed PlantGPT, an Arabidopsis-based expert Q&A system for plant functional genomics, capable of delivering precise responses and specialized analyses in the field, China Science Daily has reported. The research, conducted by teams from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, South China Agricultural University and Tsinghua University, has been published in the journal Advanced Science. Amid growing global challenges such as food security and the need to improve crop quality, functional genomics has become increasingly vital for boosting yield, nutritional value, pest resistance and stress adaptability. However, existing computational biology tools often fall short in deciphering complex biological regulatory mechanisms and effectively integrating multi-omics data. While traditional plant databases are rich in resources, they typically require precise trait or gene names for searches, due to limited interaction capabilities.

To overcome these hurdles, the team of researchers developed PlantGPT, the first large language model AI assistant tailored for plant functional genomics. Built on Arabidopsis expertise and literature, the system features a robust framework for biological knowledge generalization, serving three key purposes: promoting public agricultural education, assisting early-career researchers in navigating plant genomics and supporting senior scientists in strategic decision-making. With its open-source design, easy transferability and continuous updates, PlantGPT not only enhances research efficiency and knowledge dissemination but also paves the way for developing specialized AI tools across vertical domains. This achievement marks a major leap forward in applying AI to plant functional genomics. Currently available online for free, PlantGPT is set to expand into synthetic biology and support additional crop species in the near future.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 06/17/2025

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Autonomous Driving Innovation Fuels AI Reach Worldwide

On the outskirts of Beijing, a self-driving bus navigated effortlessly through traffic, demonstrating China's rapidly advancing autonomous driving technology. Developed by UISEE, a Beijing-based unicorn, this solution is now expanding beyond Chinese capital's streets and beginning to make its mark on the global robotaxi industry. These "AI drivers" have spread to countries like Singapore, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia and Qatar, penetrating industries including energy, heavy industry, pharmaceuticals and chemicals, said Wu Gansha, CEO of UISEE. The unmanned buses operate at over 20 airports worldwide, forming a fleet of more than 1,000 autonomous vehicles that have collectively covered 5.8 million kilometers. These busy shuttles reflect the rising influence of Chinese companies like UISEE in the autonomous driving sector, as they secure increasing numbers of international contracts thanks to their reliable and innovative technology. In addition to buses, UISEE's diverse fleet includes unmanned retail vehicles, patrol cars, cleaning vehicles, towing tractors and heavy-duty trucks, varying in size and function.

Equipped with the latest solid-state LiDAR, the autonomous cars achieve 360-degree, blind-spot-free vision, according to Wu. While Tesla relies mainly on vision-based technology, Chinese tech firms are rolling out a multi-sensor data-driven approach globally.

GOING GLOBAL

UISEE is not alone in this global push. Last month, Pony.ai, a Guangzhou-based robotaxi service provider, announced a strategic partnership with Dubai's transport authority. Under the partnership, Pony.ai's robotaxi fleet is scheduled to commence test operations in 2025, with plans to start fully autonomous commercial services in 2026 in Dubai. "This partnership is integral to our goal of transforming 25 percent of all journeys in the city into autonomous trips by 2030, reinforcing Dubai's position as a global leader in autonomous mobility and innovation," said Ahmed Bahrozian, CEO of Public Transport Agency at Dubai's Roads and Transport Authority (RTA). To date, Pony.ai, a partner of ride-hailing platform Uber, has obtained Robotaxi licenses in countries such as the United States, the Republic of Korea and Luxembourg. Last July, during the signing ceremony of the memorandum of understanding between Pony.ai and Luxembourg authorities, the country's Minister of the Economy, Lex Delles, described the agreement as "a significant opportunity to advance Luxembourg's technical capabilities in the smart mobility sector."

"We are extending our proven-in-China integrated capabilities of autonomous driving, encompassing R&D, mass production, and commercial operations, globally," said Pony.ai's CFO Wang Junhao. The UAE is emerging as one of the showcasing grounds for China's self-driving technology. In April this year, WeRide announced its collaboration with Uber and the RTA to launch robotaxi services in Dubai. It came after the Guangzhou-based tech firm secured the first autonomous driving license for the UAE in July 2023. In December last year, WeRide partnered with Uber to officially introduce robotaxi services in Abu Dhabi. Also, Baidu's Apollo Go has inked a deal with the RTA this March to launch autonomous driving tests and services in Dubai, marking its entry into the Middle East. It plans to deploy 100 fully autonomous vehicles in Dubai by the end of 2025 and scale the fleet to at least 1,000 by 2028. The global Robotaxi market will grow at a compound annual growth rate of 64.1 percent from 2025 to 2032, according to a market forecast released by Coherent MI early this year.

TECHNOLOGICAL STRENGTHS

The global expansion of Chinese autonomous driving companies is partly driven by the country's "data dividend" and strong government support for developing a self-driving ecosystem. With the country's advantage of a vast population, extensive road networks, diverse and complex driving conditions, and rapidly advancing AI technology, robotaxi startups in China have quickly grown into leading companies in the world. Baidu and WeRide were named among the top 10 vendors in the Guidehouse Insights Leaderboard Report on automated driving systems (ADS),

published last December, alongside NVIDIA and Waymo. They are developing at least Level-4 ADS that can operate without human intervention or supervision, according to research. Plus, Chinese authorities have designated at least 20 cities and city clusters as pilot zones for the application of "vehicle-road-cloud" integration for intelligent connected vehicles. This extensive road test data has boosted international recognition of China's robotaxi services. "One day, autonomous driving will liberate human hands, and we will endeavor to see 'AI drivers' cruising in every corner of the world," said UISEE's CEO Wu when he talked about his ambitious plan.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 06/24/2025

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AI Drives Smart Upgrade of China's Manufacturing Industry

Artificial intelligence has accelerated the transformation of traditional manufacturing in China, helping the country shift from a manufacturing giant to an innovation powerhouse, said industry leaders at the ongoing Summer Davos Forum in north China's Tianjin Municipality. Li Dongsheng, co-chair of this year's Davos and chairman of Chinese electronics giant TCL, said technologies, such as AI and robots will lead a new round of industrial transformation and transform economic growth models. TCL is investing heavily in key technologies, including edge intelligence, AI, and digital twins to strengthen digital manufacturing capabilities, according to the company. For instance, its China Star Optoelectronics Technology (CSOT) has applied an AI-based detection system in the production of liquid-crystal displays (LCDs) to monitor processes in real time.

With smarter equipment operations, the company has enhanced product yield and increased efficiency by 70 percent. Another Chinese company Tianjin Huabei Group has also undergone a major digital shift. "Based on historical production data and AI algorithms, we have developed an intelligent mapping model that enables post-order product customization," said Ling Yulan, CEO of the company. "The system can automatically match the optimal production parameters to meet personalized demands while improving delivery efficiency." She emphasized that achieving intelligent manufacturing requires both technological upgrades and shifts in development mindset. "Through the forum, we hope to explore cutting-edge solutions, deepen industrial chain cooperation and promote the development of new quality productive forces of enterprises." Similar transformations have also taken place in Chinese liquor producer Luzhou Laojiao. It has shifted from "experience-based decision-making" to "data-driven operations" through digital twin technologies. Liu Miao, chairman of the company said that the company has digitally replicated its facilities at a 1:1 scale and utilized digital twin simulations to streamline material flows before construction. "This system has increased equipment utilization by 45 percent, improved emergency response efficiency by 40 percent, and reduced operation and maintenance costs by 25 percent," Liu said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 06/25/2025

JAPAN: Interviewing People About AI, Technology, and Robots

In a series of street interviews across Japan, people of all ages were asked about their everyday use of AI and how emerging technologies like ChatGPT, humanoid robots, and cashless payments are shaping their lives. When asked whether they use AI, many quickly responded that they use ChatGPT. Students frequently said they rely on it to help them understand difficult subjects like math or to generate ideas for book reports. One said, "When I don't know how to start writing something, I ask ChatGPT for help." Another added, "I use it to summarize really long texts, so I can grasp the main point quickly." Among younger generations, there was also a sense of AI becoming indispensable. One person said, "It's become a part of my life. I'd feel a bit lost without it." However, several students admitted that while schools have rules against using AI tools for assignments, many still secretly do so. "They say not to use it, but I've never been caught," one said. Another revealed their strategy: "I just change the tone from polite language to my own words, so it doesn't sound like AI wrote it."

ChatGPT wasn't the only AI mentioned. Some said they rely on AI navigation tools like Google Maps or voice assistants such as Alexa. In terms of practical applications, one office worker noted using AI to draft contracts, while another said they use it to translate or check the accuracy of foreign language texts. Asked what tasks they'd assign to a humanoid robot, many gave practical answers—help with housework, cooking, or reminders about daily schedules. Some wanted a companion to talk to or even give massages. "I want a robot friend. I'd name him Taro," one said with a laugh. Opinions on AI's role in society were mixed. Some believed overreliance on AI could diminish human thinking abilities. "I want to think things through on my own," said one woman. "Otherwise, we may forget how to think for ourselves." Still, others viewed AI positively as a helpful assistant as long as it wasn't misused.

When asked about digital payments, many said they rarely carry cash. Popular apps like PayPay were mentioned, and respondents said they prefer cards or smartphones for convenience and point rewards. Some still carry cash for places that don't accept electronic payment, such as local markets or budget supermarkets. Most estimated that cash-only establishments now make up only 20–30% of shops, and expect this number to continue declining. The interviews also touched on older technologies still in use in Japan. For example, fax machines. Several people admitted their workplaces still used fax for sending estimates or invoices. "My house still has a fax machine," one said, "but we only use it for business." Another noted, "Fax has become something like a museum piece at this point."

Security and convenience were also hot topics. While some prioritized convenience when using services like ChatGPT, others emphasized the importance of protecting

personal data, especially for banking or sensitive tasks. "When it comes to money or private information, I care more about security," one said. Others struck a balance, saying they trusted AI tools but avoided entering private details. The interviews closed on a playful note, asking who people would want to be kidnapped by—aliens, ghosts, or pirates. Many picked aliens, imagining the excitement of space travel or inspiration for fashion design. Others said they'd bring sushi into space to share with extraterrestrials. When asked if they'd want an AI boyfriend, most laughed it off, saying they preferred human connection or joked that a humanoid robot couldn't give a proper hug. Across the board, the responses painted a picture of a society quietly and rapidly integrating AI into daily life—often with humor, caution, and curiosity.

From <https://www.newsonjapan.com> 05/17/2025

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Japan to Lift Intellectual Property Competitiveness Via AI Use

The Japanese government said Tuesday it will seek to enhance the country's competitiveness in the area of intellectual property by promoting the use of artificial intelligence and attracting foreign talent. In the intellectual property strategy for 2025, the country will take advantage of the international popularity of Japanese anime and the content of such movies that highlights local culture to help promote regional economies, expecting a total economic impact of around 1 trillion yen. "Intellectual property and technology, the sources of our country's earning power, are extremely important to ensure corporate competitiveness," Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said at a meeting on the strategy at his office. The strategy set a target to raise the country's standing in the World Intellectual Property Organization's Global Innovation Index to fourth or higher by 2035. Japan ranked 13th in 2024, coming below South Korea in sixth and China in 11th. Published annually, the index ranks 132 economies using over 80 indicators including measures on the policy environment, education and infrastructure. Japan will consider recognizing the patent rights of individuals who have developed AI used to create new technologies as rules are currently vague regarding how to evaluate contributions made by a developer of AI, according to the plan. The strategy stressed the need to attract top talent from abroad, while supporting human resources development and promoting public-private cooperation in eight strategic fields such as energy, disaster prevention and mobility to make more Japanese technologies international standards.

From <https://japantoday.com> 06/03/2025

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Using AI to Achieve Zero Evacuation Delays in Disasters

In the ongoing series on disaster preparedness, the focus this time is on how to make evacuation decisions. During heavy rains that threaten communities, timely evacuation information issued by local governments becomes the key to saving lives. In Fukuoka Prefecture, a pilot test of a new AI-powered system is underway to assist

in making these difficult decisions. Takashi Shiromizu, a 64-year-old farmer in Ogori City, Fukuoka Prefecture, has seen his vegetable fields flooded repeatedly by heavy rains. At times, the damage has reached as much as 20 million yen. "Once it floods, there's no way to recover," he said. "Rather than constantly investing in measures like surrounding the fields to keep water out, I have to accept flood damage as a fact of life and find ways to generate income elsewhere." Ogori City has experienced repeated flood damage to farmland and urban areas. Although there was no damage from yesterday's rainfall, the city recorded a total of 820 water-related incidents over the past five years. In response, the city has introduced an AI-based municipal disaster management integration system for this fiscal year as part of a pilot project.

Professor Mitani, who developed the system, explained its strengths: "We can predict, up to six hours in advance, whether flooding will expand or not. This allows local governments to take preemptive measures." The system combines weather data from the Japan Meteorological Agency with local conditions such as the proportion of elderly residents and the distance to evacuation centers. AI processes this vast amount of information to quickly forecast where and how severely flooding might occur. "For example, if this river overflows, people living in the red zones on the map may face difficulties evacuating," said Mitani. "Authorities can issue early evacuation orders for these areas, especially for elderly residents." The system displays risk levels for each area on a color-coded map showing predicted danger several hours ahead. Based on this information, municipalities can encourage residents to evacuate earlier and more precisely.

Until now, Ogori City relied on small teams to collect and assess large amounts of data manually before issuing evacuation instructions according to the city's disaster response manual. "We had to go out and check the situation, gather information, analyze it, and then forecast how conditions might develop before taking action," said one official. The city now hopes that the new system will enable faster and more informed decisions. "By using AI analysis to forecast flooding and other developments, we hope to speed up the process of issuing evacuation information," the official added. While expectations are high for the system's ability to support quicker decisions, Mitani emphasized that residents also need to understand the risks in their areas. "It's important for people to recognize whether they live in high-risk zones and how vulnerable they may be," he said. "By being aware of these factors, residents can better prepare themselves and plan their evacuations accordingly." As municipalities face the critical task of protecting lives, there is growing hope that the adoption of advanced systems like this will help eliminate evacuation delays.

From <https://www.newsonjapan.com> 06/17/2025

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SOUTH KOREA: Newly Launched K-Humanoid Alliance to Develop Robots, AI

The launch of the K-Humanoid Alliance seeks to make the nation a global superpower in humanoid robots by 2030 through active government support. The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy on April 10 announced its hosting of the launching ceremony for the alliance in Seoul. The estimated 350 attendees included figures from 40 entities like leading robotics companies Airobot and Rainbow Robotics and universities such as Seoul National University (SNU), Korea University, and the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST). The alliance is dubbed a "dream team" that stimulates collaboration among humanoid robot makers, artificial intelligence (AI) experts, companies dealing in parts and demand, and universities. The participants at the ceremony signed an agreement on cooperation, something that the ministry predicted would lead to an investment of over KRW 1 trillion by 2030.

Comprising 15 domestic experts in AI and robotics, the alliance is roughly divided into two groups: one for AI development led by Zhang Byoung-Tak, director of SNU's AI Institute, and the other for robot manufacturing led by Han Jeakweon, a robotics professor at Hanyang University. They will perform tasks in collaboration with university personnel associations and provide their developed AI models to robot makers. Participating robotics companies include Rainbow Robotics, which was founded by the research team that developed the country's first domestic humanoid robot Hubo; Airobot, with over 15 years of research and development (R&D) in the field; wearable robot developer Angel Robotics; and collaborative robot maker Neuromeka. The alliance's initial task is to develop robot AI, or the brain for a robot, under its goal of producing a model for the basis of robot AI by 2028. Led by the AI Institute, a campaign will gather the nation's best AI researchers to develop the model including those from KAIST, Korea and Yonsei.

Robot producers are working on core technologies for hardware to build humanoids with the world's highest specifications. Their plan is to develop by 2028 high-spec robots weighing under 60 kg, possessing 50 joints or more, boasting a payload of over 20 kg and enabling movement of more than 2.5 m per second through self-development or collaboration. The ministry pledged its full support for technological development by companies through the budget for robotics R&D, infrastructure and verification. To supplement this year's robotics budget, which is KRW 200 billion, it will continue consultations with related ministries and the National Assembly. Minister of Trade, Industry and Energy Ahn Dukgeun said at the ceremony, "Humanoid robots are a promising sector that is seen to show 25-fold growth from USD 1.5 billion this year to USD 38 billion by 2035," adding, "We'll do our best to support the K-Humanoid Alliance."

From <https://www.korea.net> 04/11/2025

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S. Korea to Apply AI Technology in Retail Businesses for

Productivity Innovation

South Korea will work to apply artificial intelligence (AI) technology in retail businesses as part of efforts to enhance the productivity of the highly competitive sector, the industry ministry said Wednesday. A new alliance of some 40 retail and AI companies was set to be launched later in the day to this end, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. The alliance plans to initiate 10 projects aimed at developing AI-based retail sales models, supporting the creation of 30 AI-focused retail startups and compiling a database of 1 million standardized retail product entries. The ministry said the current AI utilization rate among local retail companies remains below 3 percent, but more active adoption of the technology is needed to improve the productivity of the sector amid fierce global competition and rapidly evolving consumer trends.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/23/2025

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S. Korea to Spend 480 Bln Won on Developing AI-Related Services in 2025

South Korea will spend some 480 billion won (US\$349.1 million) this year to develop innovative products and services based on artificial intelligence (AI), such as AI factories, AI chips and self-driving cars, the industry ministry said Wednesday. The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy said the investment is aimed at promoting the industrial use of AI to foster new growth engines and advance the country's manufacturing industry. In detail, the ministry will invest 62.7 billion won in developing AI factories, 21.6 billion won in AI chip technologies and 120.6 billion won in autonomous driving technologies. Some 68 billion won has been allocated for advanced bio projects, 29.6 billion won for intelligent robot development and 13.8 billion won for advancements in display technologies. In addition, the government plans to create foundational AI models that could be used by small and medium-sized enterprises for quality inspection, precision control and other manufacturing processes. It also aims to develop AI models that can predict and prevent the generation of impurities throughout the pharmaceutical manufacturing process for the bio industry. The envisioned projects also include developing key components that determine AI performance, such as AI semiconductors and sensors, according to the ministry. "Given South Korea's position as the world's fourth-largest manufacturing powerhouse, the area with the highest potential to lead and gain a competitive edge in the global AI race is industrial AI," the ministry said, vowing to expand investment in the field.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 05/28/2025

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1 in 4 S. Koreans Experience Generative AI Services in 2024 Survey

One in 4 South Koreans have used generative artificial intelligence (AI) services, such as ChatGPT, last year, a government survey showed Thursday. In the Korea Communications Commission (KCC) poll, which surveyed 4,420 people aged 15 to 69 who use smartphones and accessed the internet more than once a day, 24 percent of respondents said they had used generative AI services last year. The figure is nearly double the 11.7 percent reported a year earlier. Users mainly utilized these services for text creation, voice and music generation and image production. Seven percent said they paid for generative AI services in 2024, nearly a sevenfold increase from 0.9 percent a year earlier. South Korea ranked second after the United States in terms of paid subscriptions for generative AI services, the KCC said. By contrast, those who had not used the services cited reasons such as the high level of knowledge required and concerns over potential personal data leaks. Respondents also expressed concerns over various side effects, including job displacement, reduced creativity, copyright infringement and possible illegal use of generative AI.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 05/29/2025

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4 in 10 Korean Firms Turn to AI to Boost Efficiency

Nearly 40 percent of Korean companies have already integrated artificial intelligence technologies into their operations, underscoring the rapid adoption of AI across local industries, according to a government report released Sunday. According to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy's report on the "Survey on Industrial Infrastructure and AI Utilization" conducted via e-consumer, 37.1 percent of the 685 companies surveyed nationwide responded that they use AI in their business practices. By company size, large enterprises led AI adoption with a rate of 65.1 percent. Interestingly, small businesses (35.6 percent) outpaced mid-sized companies (31.2 percent) in their use of AI tools. Firms that embraced AI cited substantial benefits, including increased productivity (33.6 percent), reduced operating costs (26 percent) and improved decision-making accuracy and speed (22.1 percent).

AI was most widely applied in research and development, followed by process optimization, customer care and market forecasting. While small and mid-sized firms primarily leveraged AI for R&D, large firms tended to focus their use on enhancing customer care. Despite the positive impact, many companies faced challenges adopting AI technologies. The most frequently cited obstacle was a shortage of skilled personnel, followed by insufficient internal data, high upfront investment costs and a lack of technological infrastructure. When asked what kind of government support would be most helpful, 49.8 percent of AI-using companies pointed to R&D funding, while 15.1 percent sought infrastructure support. To manage AI-related risks, businesses most commonly opted to collaborate with external experts (34.5 percent), followed by forming dedicated internal teams (29.8 percent) and enhancing data

security (24.5 percent).

Among companies not yet using AI, only 39.9 percent reported plans to adopt the technology, with the majority — 61.1 percent — expressing no such intention. The primary barriers cited were high initial investment costs and a lack of technical manpower. These firms identified several forms of needed government support for future AI adoption: R&D subsidies (31.5 percent), infrastructure assistance (24.6 percent), technical training and workforce development (18 percent) and case studies and application examples (11.3 percent). "The findings highlight a growing consensus that AI is no longer a futuristic concept but a crucial lever for strengthening companies' competitiveness," the report concluded. "Tailored policy support based on company size, industry and regional needs is essential to lower entry barriers and boost practical adoption."

From <https://www.koreaherald.com> 06/08/2025

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South-East Asia

CAMBODIA: E-commerce Contributes 6.68 Pct to GDP in 2024

E-commerce market contributed 1.51 billion U.S. dollars, or 6.68 percent, to Cambodia's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2024, said a Ministry of Commerce's iTrade Bulletin on Tuesday. The bulletin projected that the e-commerce revenue in the kingdom would rise to 1.78 billion dollars in 2025. "Facebook, TikTok, and Telegram dominate online sales," the bulletin said. With the total population of 17 million, the Southeast Asian country has 11.65 million Facebook users and 9.96 million TikTok subscribers, it added. The e-commerce sector has boomed in recent years thanks to the rapid growth of Internet subscribers and mobile payment users. The bulletin said the country had approximately 21.9 million internet subscribers, with most of them having access to online platforms via smartphones. Also, the kingdom had registered about 30 million e-wallet accounts as of 2024. Cambodian Ministry of Commerce's Secretary of State and Spokesperson Penn Sovicheat said the e-commerce market was convenient, fast, reliable, and safe for consumers. "We consider e-commerce as a potential sector to help boost Cambodia's economic growth in the long run," he told Xinhua. Jack Lee, secretary of the Digital Economy Professional Association of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Cambodia, said e-commerce became popular in Cambodia thanks to the rapid increase in internet users and digital payments. "Many Cambodian businesses rely on Facebook, TikTok, and Telegram to sell products, making social commerce a dominant trend," he told Xinhua recently. Lee, who is also the chief executive officer of online marketplace Smile Shop in Cambodia, said Cambodia's 4G internet coverage is over 80 percent of the country's land area, providing a solid foundation for e-commerce growth.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 05/06/2025

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MALAYSIA: State to Launch AI Training Program

Malaysia's state-owned agency Center for Technology Excellence Sarawak (CENTEXS) announced Monday an expanded skills training collaboration with Amazon Web Services (AWS) that will help Sarawak achieve its vision of becoming Malaysia's premier artificial intelligence (AI) state by 2027. This move demonstrates their continued commitment to developing Sarawak's AI capabilities, CENTEXS and AWS said in a joint statement. According to the statement, AWS is launching three specialized AI development tracks with CENTEXS in 2025: executive AI briefings targeting 60 C-level leaders, AWS certified AI practitioner training for 80 civil servants, and advanced certification in machine learning engineering and data engineering for 120 university graduates. As part of Sarawak Digital Economic Blueprint 2030, the state aims to transition from a resource-based economy to an environmentally sustainable and technology-driven one, said the statement. It highlighted that the initiative will transform state government operations through integrated digital services, improving citizen experience and agency productivity. "Through our expanded collaboration with CENTEXS, AWS will help realize this vision by training professionals and enabling them to develop practical AI solutions that will drive meaningful impact for Sarawak," said Eric Conrad, regional managing director of worldwide public sector ASEAN at AWS. Meanwhile, CENTEXS Chief Executive Officer Syeed Mohd Hussien Wan Abdul Rahman said that the new innovation center, launching in August, will leverage generative AI and machine learning to develop practical AI solutions for key industries. Through partnerships with AWS and other agencies, they will create targeted solutions for government services and industries, including energy, agriculture, media, and other sectors, he added.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 05/05/2025

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AI Firm Univers to Launch Malaysia's First Net-Zero Center of Excellence

Univers, an artificial intelligence (AI) and internet of things technology firm for energy, announced Monday the signing of a strategic partnership with the Sarawak Digital Economy Corporate (SDEC) to establish Malaysia's first net-zero center of excellence in Kuching, capital of the northern Borneo state of Sarawak. Univers said in a statement that the new center will serve as a hub for innovation, bringing together digital intelligence and climate ambition to accelerate Sarawak's transition toward a low-carbon, tech-enabled economy. The partnership will explore how digital tools can improve energy efficiency, reduce emissions, and drive operational excellence across Sarawak's key economic sectors. Additional joint efforts may include skills-building programs and knowledge-sharing initiatives to nurture local talent and ideas. "We are bringing AI for energy to the forefront, using intelligent systems to transition to a low-carbon economy and enable emerging regions like

Sarawak to leapfrog toward a net-zero future," said Arun Poojari, global vice president of Unisers. "This collaboration is a significant step towards shaping a future where digital solutions are embedded in the way we design and sustain our built environment," said Sudarnoto Osman, chief executive officer of SDEC.

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SINGAPORE: Teaming Up With Firms to Drive AI, Digital Skills for SMEs

Singapore has launched new partnerships with three companies -- Alibaba Cloud, ST Engineering, and Prudential Singapore -- to accelerate digital development among enterprises, with a strong emphasis on artificial intelligence (AI). Speaking at the "Asia Tech x Singapore" conference on Tuesday, Senior Minister of State for Digital Development and Information Tan Kiat How said the digital economy now contributes nearly 18 percent of Singapore's GDP. "Despite the global uncertainty, we expect technology, especially AI, to continue to drive quality economic growth," he said. While the government has introduced multiple digitalization initiatives, Tan said strong partnerships with industry stakeholders are needed. As part of the new collaborations, Alibaba Cloud will work to enhance the digital capabilities of up to 3,000 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and digital solution providers, focusing on cloud technologies and AI. ST Engineering will launch a program to equip SMEs with the knowledge and tools to identify cyber risks and strengthen their cybersecurity posture. Meanwhile, Prudential Singapore will support SMEs by providing hands-on experience and training in the implementation of generative AI solutions.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 05/28/2025

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VIETNAM: Aiming to Universalize AI by 2030

Vietnam has set its sights on universalizing artificial intelligence (AI) and becoming one of the top three Southeast Asian countries leading in AI by 2030, according to the national strategy on AI being developed by the government. Ho Duc Thang, deputy head of the National Digital Transformation Department under the Ministry of Science and Technology, said the strategy aims to make AI accessible to everyone, from students in remote mountainous areas to entrepreneurs in major urban centers, Vietnam News Agency reported on Monday. AI will be present in all aspects of social life, from helping doctors make quicker diagnoses, supporting teachers in better instruction, to improving the accuracy of weather forecasts, he said. The strategy also aims to develop a network of around 1,000 top-tier AI experts and approximately 50,000 AI engineers across the country over the next five years.

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Vietnam's E-Commerce Retail Sales to Grow 30 Pct Through 2030

Vietnam's e-commerce retail sales are projected to grow at an annual rate of 20 to 30 percent through 2030, accounting for 20 percent of the country's total retail turnover, Vietnam News Agency reported on Tuesday. The target has been outlined in a newly approved national e-commerce development master plan by the Ministry of Industry and Trade. Under the plan, 60 percent of the country's small and medium-sized enterprises are expected to operate on e-commerce platforms by 2030. The ministry is targeting an increase in the proportion of adults shopping online to 70 percent, said the report. The Vietnam E-commerce Association reported that the value of the country's e-commerce market reached 32 billion U.S. dollars in 2024, up 27 percent year-on-year.

From <https://english.news.cn> 06/10/2025

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AI Expected to Contribute \$130 Billion to Việt Nam's GDP by 2040

Artificial intelligence (AI) is projected to contribute between US\$120 billion and \$130 billion to Việt Nam's economy by 2040, becoming a key driver of growth in the digital age. This forecast was presented at the launch of the report "Việt Nam's AI Economy 2025", jointly organised by the National Innovation Centre (NIC) under the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Ministry of Finance, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) on June 12 in Hà Nội. According to the report, this projected contribution will stem from two main sources: revenue from the consumption of AI-integrated products and services (estimated at \$45–55 billion) and cost savings through productivity improvements enabled by AI (estimated at \$60–70 billion). Public administration, education and healthcare are identified as the top three sectors with high potential for AI breakthroughs. In particular, AI could help reduce medical disparities across regions, optimise educational data and enhance the efficiency of public sector management.

NIC Director Vũ Quốc Huy said the report is the first comprehensive document analysing Việt Nam's AI economy. It outlines the current landscape, development models, application areas and strategic roadmaps, structured around five key pillars: technology, start-up ecosystem, labour, resources and international collaboration. A representative from BCG highlighted that Việt Nam is emerging as the fastest-growing digital economy in Southeast Asia, with an annual growth rate of over 20 per cent. A structured and robust AI ecosystem will help bolster national competitiveness and assert Việt Nam's proactive role in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. To realise this vision, the country is implementing major policy frameworks such as Resolution 57, Resolution 68 and the AI start-up acceleration programme. Over the next few years, NIC and JICA will continue to promote initiatives supporting AI start-ups, developing a specialised workforce and facilitating

research partnerships with global tech corporations. “With a young, tech-savvy workforce and a strong drive for innovation, Việt Nam has every opportunity to become the region’s AI hub,” Huy said.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 06/12/2025

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Vietnamese Businesses Lead Global Shift Toward AI Hiring

Around 91 per cent of Vietnamese business leaders are considering hiring for artificial intelligence (AI)-specific roles, surpassing the global average by 13 percentage points, according to Microsoft Việt Nam’s latest report released on Thursday. The “2025 Work Trend Index” — based on a survey of 31,000 people across 31 countries, including 1,000 in Việt Nam — reveals that Vietnamese companies are at the forefront of AI adoption in the workplace. The report combines insights from Microsoft 365, LinkedIn hiring trends and perspectives from AI start-ups, economists and academics. It highlights a widening gap between workforce capacity and rising productivity demands. In Việt Nam, 67 per cent of business leaders surveyed said increasing productivity is a priority, yet 84 per cent of employees reported lacking the time and energy to complete their tasks — both figures notably higher than the global averages of 53 and 80 per cent, respectively. “AI is becoming a sustainable resource for businesses — abundant, essential and scalable,” the report stated, adding that it also allows organisations to overcome limitations in workforce size and expertise.

According to the study, 95 per cent of Vietnamese leaders expect to use digital labour to expand their workforce within the next 12 to 18 months, compared to 82 per cent globally. Furthermore, 83 per cent believe AI can empower less experienced employees to take on strategic roles more quickly. The top five areas expected to see AI investment in the next six to 12 months include product development, customer service, marketing, cybersecurity and financial performance. Other potential fields include business forecasting, customer insights, law, training and supply chain management. At the report’s launch, General Director of Microsoft Việt Nam Nguyễn Quỳnh Trâm said digital labour will reshape even the most established enterprises and give rise to entirely new business models. Microsoft’s analysis of LinkedIn data shows that AI start-ups are hiring at twice the rate of major tech companies. Globally, 78 per cent of business leaders are evaluating AI-related hiring, while in Việt Nam the figure rises to 91 per cent. “Countries in the Asia-Pacific, including Việt Nam, are poised to gain a competitive edge by embracing AI early,” the report noted, adding that just as the internet ushered in a wave of knowledge jobs, AI is now creating entirely new roles.

New AI-driven roles emerging in Việt Nam and globally include AI trainers, agent and data specialists, ROI analysts and AI strategists for marketing, finance and customer support. Experts recommend that employees build AI skills and that companies

support this transformation through tools and training. According to the report, AI literacy and digital skills are the top two workforce strategies moving forward. Basic AI knowledge is now considered one of the five most essential skills in the new world of work — alongside conflict resolution, adaptability, process optimisation and creative thinking. “AI has opened access to knowledge that was once only available to large corporations, enabling individuals and businesses to succeed regardless of their size or technical background,” Trâm said. “However, technology only delivers value when people are ready to embrace it. Leaders must invest not only in technology but also in digital mindset, skill-building, and collaboration between humans and AI. This is the key to unlocking Việt Nam’s full potential in the AI era,” she added.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 06/13/2025

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Vietnam Sets Up National Data Fund to Strengthen AI Infrastructure

Vietnam has launched the National Data Development Fund with an initial capital of nearly SGD 49 billion (USD 38.4 billion) to strengthen digital infrastructure. It will channel resources into artificial intelligence (AI), big data, machine learning, cloud computing, blockchain technology, and Internet of Things (IoT) infrastructure, to support national digital governance. The government will prioritise rural, mountainous, and economically challenged regions as part of its broader digital transformation goals. The fund will support scientific research and innovation by enhancing a network of data scientists, technology organisations, and research associations. This will be done at the domestic and international levels. It will also support the development and application of critical and core datasets, particularly those related to national defence, security, and foreign affairs. The Ministry of Public Security administers the fund, which operates as a non-budget state financial entity. Besides the state capital, the fund will generate revenue from interest income, sponsorships, donations, and trust funds. Organisations and individuals can contribute through direct cash, bank transfers, or physical assets, under protocols defined by the decree.

From <https://www.itnews.asia/> 06/30/2018

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South Asia

INDIA: Microsoft Announces Free AI Skills Training

As AI begins to outsmart humans and alter the world order, experts believe that artificial intelligence will redefine work. This implies that jobs of the future might not be identical to current jobs and will need different skill sets, which will challenge employees and employers alike to adjust to the shift quicker than anticipated.

Keeping that in mind, availing Microsoft's free AI skills training course can assist you to learn about changing priorities and learn about future required skills. The event that starts on April 8 and continues until May 28, 2025, is a 50-day AI training fest that will assist you to learn about generative artificial intelligence and learn how to use AI in your work or home. It's absolutely free, and Microsoft will not cost anything for the training. The concept of the AI Skills Fest is to provide AI training for everyone, regardless of experience or background. With the registration of the event, you can learn more skills or enhance your AI skills if you already have some basic knowledge, during the 50-day event, you can experiment with your existing AI capabilities and acquire new ones. There will be a series of challenges across tasks, activities, and themes a combination of tasks, modules, and tutorials. Microsoft will provide on-demand and live training, as well as face-to-face training. But that is not all. The event will also feature hackathons, self-study, challenges, community forums, and meetups. The greatest thing is that the courses are available to everybody regardless of the skill level. This implies you can begin to learn about AI as a newcomer or deepen your knowledge of AI concepts if you already have a little experience. Microsoft invites students, tech professionals, business professionals and business leaders to participate in the AI Skills Fest. The event is also available for Microsoft employees, customers, partners, technical professionals, developers, business leaders, students, and AI enthusiasts around the world. On the website of AI Skills Fest, Microsoft has outlined the various sessions, enabling participants to know more about various core Microsoft apps and services that will be included in the course. Training sessions range from 45 minutes to 60 minutes.

Lessons will be offered in Albanian, Arabic, Brazilian Portuguese, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Global, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Macedonian, Mandarin Chinese, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Simplified Chinese, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Thai, Turkish, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese. As part of the event, Microsoft is organizing AI Skills Fest Challenge where it will be distributing 50,000 free Microsoft Certification exam vouchers in weekly drawing prizes. While that's going on, GitHub is providing a 50 percent discount code for GitHub's newest certification exam, GitHub Copilot. After completing the GitHub Learn module, you will be provided with a discount code and it will be activated until May 28, 2025. Please ensure you complete the exam before June 30, 2025. Microsoft's AI Skills Fest also features the actual Guinness World Record that the company is attempting to break. The objective is to have the largest number of users to complete an online multi-level AI lesson in a 24-hour span.

From <https://news.siliconindia.com/> 04/07/2025

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Honeywell Unveils AI-Assisted Suite to Optimize Green Hydrogen Plants

Honeywell (NASDAQ: HON) today announced the launch of Honeywell Protonium, an advanced suite of technologies enabled by artificial intelligence (AI) and powered by machine learning (ML) designed to make the production of green hydrogen more efficient, cost-effective, and scalable. Honeywell Protonium™ will first be deployed by Aternium, a US based large scale producer of clean hydrogen, who will leverage the new technologies across its planned Mid-Atlantic Clean Hydrogen Hub (MACH2), one of seven national hydrogen hubs selected for an award by the US Department of Energy. To help meet industries' growing energy demands and support a broader range of sources, Honeywell Protonium™ helps scale green hydrogen production by tackling key challenges such as power intermittency, carbon intensity reduction, and high production costs. The new solution enhances electrolysis efficiency and optimizes plant design and operations by integrating predictive control algorithms, making hydrogen production more sustainable and cost-effective. "Our selection of the Honeywell Protonium™ portfolio for our planned Mid-Atlantic sites was a strategic decision to ensure we operate with the highest efficiency and safety standards," said Andrew Cottone, CEO and Founder of Aternium. "Honeywell's proven expertise and innovative solutions will be instrumental in helping us achieve our mission of producing clean hydrogen with an exceptional commitment to safety while adding value for our communities and investors." "Honeywell is helping to accelerate the commercial viability of green hydrogen use through optimized design and improved efficiency of plants," said Pramesh Maheshwari, President of Honeywell Process Solutions.

"As adoption of green hydrogen as a diversified energy source continues to grow, it is crucial for producers to look to autonomy to ultimately advance electrification and the energy transition. With these new technologies, we are helping to further reshape the green hydrogen landscape and equip producers with the transformative solutions they need to scale." The Honeywell Protonium™ portfolio includes three innovative offerings: Concept Design Optimizer – optimizing plant design to lower the Levelized Cost of Hydrogen (LCOH) and enable quicker investment decisions. Hydrogen Electrolyser Control System – analysing and electrolyzer performance for greater efficiency and longevity. Hydrogen Unified Control and Optimizer – streamlining energy management and operations across the plant to reduce operating expenditure by leveraging technologies such as digital twins, AI/ML optimization and predictive analytics. Honeywell Protonium™ is now available globally and is positioned to help deliver transformative results for clean hydrogen producers by reducing emissions, cutting costs, and empowering industries to achieve greater sustainability. For more information, please visit [Honeywell.com](https://www.honeywell.com).

From <https://news.siliconindia.com/> 04/09/2025

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How AI and Cloud Are Revolutionizing Test Automation

In a rapidly changing world where technology is reshaping the way software is

developed and delivered, test automation has become a game-changer in maintaining quality at speed. Test automation is the process of using software tools and scripts that run tests automatically, reducing significantly the effort involved, human mistakes, and test time. By automating routine tasks like regression testing, fitting well into CI/CD pipelines, and supporting different kinds of testing from unit to functional it improves accuracy, test coverage, and scalability. With organizations competing for shorter development cycles, test automation not only increases efficiency but also guarantees consistent software quality while lowering long-term costs, making it a vital pillar of contemporary software development. The rise of test automation for software testing is redefining the sector at an unprecedented pace as it is pushed by quicker delivery, increased efficiency, and greater precision. In line with a 2025 report by MarketsAndMarkets, the international market for automation testing is set to jump from USD 24.7 billion in 2022 to USD 52.7 billion in 2027 at a CAGR of 16.4%. Rising trends such as AI-driven testing, codeless automation, and self-healing test execution are on the rise, with more than 70% of teams using AI-driven methods, according to reports. Tools like Selenium, Playwright, Cypress, and no-code tools are entering the mainstream, making complicated testing processes easy. The movement towards agile and DevOps practices is also driving the need for continuous testing and feedback in real-time. With its capability to cut manual labor, reduce mistakes, and support quicker releases, test automation is not a nice-to-have anymore it's becoming the foundation of contemporary software development. Harsh Agarwal, CEO & Founder, AIO Tests, says, "Data quality and quantity are critical, as the effectiveness of AI depends on accurate, sufficient data. Today many companies are ensuring users provide detailed requirements to generate relevant test cases while managing the cost of AI interactions for efficiency" .

The New Standard in Test Automation Excellence. In 2025, software testing is seeing a huge metamorphosis through the strength of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Cloud technologies. What was very much dependent on manual intervention and cyclical test scripts is today being reimaged with intelligent, scalable, and highly elastic solutions. As the need for quicker releases and impeccable user experience grows, businesses are quickly embracing AI-driven test automation and cloud-based platforms in order to get ahead of the game. Kishore Ravi, CEO and Founder, QualiTlabs, says, "AI is not here to replace testers or programmers but to support and enhance their capabilities. While tools like GPT have evolved significantly from basic tasks in 2022 to advanced reasoning in 2025, they still rely heavily on human input and context. AI excels at automating repetitive tasks and identifying risk areas using historical data, enabling faster, more focused testing. However, critical thinking, creativity, and decision-making remain human strengths. The role of testers now involves clearly distinguishing between tasks AI can handle and those requiring human expertise, ensuring improved efficiency, quality, and innovation in software development through effective human-AI collaboration.

AI: Intelligent Testing, Less Maintenance. AI is introducing a degree of intelligence into test automation that was previously unimaginable. Scripts used to fall apart with even the slightest change in the application, but AI-based systems today are self-healing they automatically adapt to UI changes, minimizing downtime and reducing maintenance effort. Machine learning algorithms can now identify defect-prone areas, create test cases dynamically, and even order tests based on user behavior and historical data. Generative AI is further accelerating this process by generating test scripts automatically, minimizing human effort and maximizing test coverage. With AI-based tools, quality assurance has accelerated, improved, and become much cheaper. From regression to functional testing, AI is streamlining the entire software development cycle. Cloud: Scalability and Speed at Its Best. While AI is experiencing a meteoric rise, cloud computing is making available unprecedented scalability in test environments. No longer bound by the limitations of hardware, teams can now create on-demand cloud-based test labs to mimic real-world conditions across browsers, devices, and networks anytime, anywhere. Cloud testing also supports smooth integration with DevOps pipelines, with continuous testing and quicker feedback loops. Cloud-hosted automated monitoring and observability tools allow teams to identify problems early, enhance application resilience, and minimize time-to-market.

A Unified Future: AI + Cloud = Innovation at Scale. Together, cloud and AI are not just complementing present practices but even revolutionizing the whole test automation space. Tools infused with AI are being deployed via the cloud, ensuring clever testing becomes much more accessible, collaborative, as well as scalable. While the organizations move in the direction of hyper-automation and digital maturation, both these technologies emerge as pillars-of-strength ensuring quality at velocity. The Future of Test Automation. The future of test automation is a synergy between AI and human intelligence. While AI can excel at routine tasks and work with big data, human know-how is needed for critical decisions, strategic thinking, and creative problem-solving. This potent partnership holds the key to faster, more thorough testing, resulting in better software quality and faster time-to-market. The role of AI in test automation is multifaceted. It executes repetitive tasks, creates test cases, and handles sophisticated testing environments. AI algorithms can even sort through huge data sets to detect patterns, anticipate problems, and refine testing tactics. AI is also good at early bug detection, fast identification, and repair of broken tests, and minimizing manual maintenance. AI also helps optimize performance by recognizing bottlenecks and proposing improvement. Conversely, human intellect is essential when it comes to strategic planning, usability testing, and security audit. Humans can excel at testing scope definition, test case prioritization, and overall user experience evaluation, validating the product meets real-world expectations. They are also invaluable for detecting edge cases and possible weaknesses that AI can miss. The hybrid approach offers several advantages: accelerated test cycles, enhanced software quality, cost savings, and improved efficiency. AI enhances productivity by streamlining testing processes, while human intuition provides relevance and

thoroughness. The collaboration leads to innovation, as teams are able to try new testing methodologies with the aid of AI-based automation.

Still, issues like AI bias, ethics, and the need for ongoing upskilling persist. With the growing evolution of AI, companies need to find a balance between human oversight and automation to achieve peak testing value and keep high ethical standards. The future of test automation will survive through the harmonious interplay of AI and human intelligence. In 2025 and beyond, the future of test automation will be shaped by this convergence where AI improves capability and human directs purpose. It is not man versus machine; it is man with machine, a smarter, faster, and more ethical way to quality software.

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QpiAI Unveils One of India's Most Powerful Quantum Computers Under National Quantum Mission

In a significant stride towards advancing India's quantum technology landscape, Bengaluru-based startup QpiAI has launched one of the nation's most powerful quantum computers, equipped with 25 superconducting qubits. The announcement was made on the occasion of World Quantum Day, aligning with global celebrations of quantum science and its transformative potential. QpiAI is among the eight startups selected under the National Quantum Mission (NQM), an initiative spearheaded by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India. The startup's quantum system, named QpiAI-Indus, marks a historic milestone as India's first full-stack quantum computing platform, integrating quantum hardware, control systems, and software in a unified ecosystem. The QpiAI-Indus system features a fusion of advanced superconducting quantum processors, high-performance quantum control platforms, and AI-augmented quantum software solutions. It is designed to support hybrid quantum-classical computing and is expected to revolutionise applications in life sciences, materials engineering, mobility, logistics, climate science, and sustainability.

Founded in 2019, QpiAI has quickly emerged as a leader in the Indian quantum tech space. The company has filed 11 patent applications and maintains an annual revenue of approximately ₹1 million. In addition, it has attracted significant investment support, including funding from the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI). As a key contributor to India's National Quantum Mission, QpiAI is not only advancing indigenous quantum technology but also actively participating in the creation of a robust quantum talent ecosystem. The startup is committed to enhancing national quantum adoption programs and contributing to global breakthroughs in deep-tech innovation. The launch of QpiAI-Indus represents a

pivotal development in India's pursuit of quantum excellence. It also highlights the country's growing capabilities in building scalable and accessible quantum technologies, positioning India as a notable player on the international quantum stage. Speaking on the occasion, QpiAI reaffirmed its vision of making quantum computing practical and transformative. The launch coincided with World Quantum Day, a global initiative that brings together scientists, researchers, policymakers, and innovators to celebrate the evolution and promise of quantum science. This milestone is part of India's broader push under Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, which commemorates 75 years of India's independence through transformative achievements across sectors. The success of QpiAI signifies a new chapter in India's scientific journey—one that is deeply rooted in innovation and future-readiness.

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India Can Lead in Global IP-Led Innovation, Defence, EVs and AI

Asserting that there is "limitless headroom for entrepreneurs," Accel Partner Prashanth Prakash said the venture capital firm will deploy its recently announced USD 650 million fund over the next two to three years to back start-ups focused on artificial intelligence and tech-driven industrialisation. The firm is looking to invest in 20-25 start-ups this year alone, signalling an aggressive push to tap into India's evolving innovation landscape. "If you're a start-up entrepreneur, there's no better time to begin. The number of sectors that start-ups are impacting is 10-fold... it is more multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral," Prakash told the media. He believes opportunities abound for founders who can envision products needed both in India and globally. India, he said, has strong potential to position itself as a global hub for IP-led innovation and high-value manufacturing in sectors like defence, EVs, aerospace, and energy, leveraging its vast talent pool, agility, and strategic supply chain collaborations. Prakash, who was among this year's Padma awardees in the Trade and Industry category, emphasised that Indian start-ups have matured post-Covid, achieving a stronger balance between growth and profitability. He sees a bright future for AI and tech-led ventures in sustainability, electric mobility, and space and defence technologies. The start-up ecosystem, he noted, is witnessing strong early-stage investment activity, including growing participation from Indian family offices viewing start-ups as a viable asset class. "We have come to a very nice sweet spot in the ecosystem where entrepreneurs understand how and what to build and investors also know what they are looking for," he said.

Accel's new fund will focus on three major areas — AI, tech-driven industrialisation, and "Bharat" (start-ups catering to the top 30% of households in India's Tier-2+ regions). The deployment of the USD 650 million "war chest" is planned over the next 2-3 years. With a 16-year legacy in India and Southeast Asia, Accel has backed transformational companies across sectors, including Amagi, Acko, BlackBuck, BlueStone, BrowserStack, Cult.fit, Flipkart, Freshworks, Swiggy, Urban Company,

and Zetwerk. Prakash sees the Padma recognition as a broader acknowledgment of start-ups' pivotal role in reshaping India's economy. He also highlighted how IPOs have democratized participation in the start-up ecosystem, which is now extending into Tier 2 and 3 cities and fuelling a pan-India entrepreneurship movement. "The next decade holds even greater promise, with start-ups set to impact a wider range of sectors, playing a key role in nation-building," he said. He believes AI is creating transformative opportunities across enterprises, with India's capabilities in building applications on foundational models being a key growth driver. "Deep-tech-led industrialisation is another promising area," he said, pointing to how more founders today are ready to set up manufacturing capabilities and build real products.

Prakash stressed the potential of AI for industrialisation and import substitution, citing India's cost-effective manufacturing as an asset for integrating into emerging global supply chains. Encouraging Indian entrepreneurs to tap into these opportunities, he urged them to leverage programmes like iDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence) in the defence sector and innovate across the EV supply chain, countering China's dominance. "It is not only BYD that will supply everything to the rest of the world... there are many components in the EV value chain that Indian entrepreneurs can build," he said. Accel continues to support the ecosystem's growth through initiatives like SeedToScale, an open-source content and community platform sharing insights from founders and operators, and Accel Atoms, an early-stage programme that has helped 36 start-ups raise over USD 200 million across four cohorts.

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India's First AI Cradle 'Cradlewise' Launched by Pimpri-Chinchwad Engineer

Pimpri-Chinchwad's young engineer has invented the world's first automated cradle based on artificial intelligence (AI), which goes by the name of 'The Cradlewise'. This intelligent cradle has been patented in India and the United States and is now up for sale in Indian markets. Cradlewise, the company founded by Radhika Patil from Pimpri-Chinchwad and her husband Bharat Patil, has come up with this innovation. In this day and age, wherein both parents in most families work, child care is now a huge problem. Lack of sleep affects the physical and mental development of children. With this, The Cradlewise a secure, accurate, and automated cradle is a big help for parents. The cradle senses the movement of the baby and immediately alerts the parents via a mobile app. Even before the baby begins to cry, the cradle softly sways, solving sleep problems and enabling parents to get enough rest too. The cradle uses AI technology, high-definition cameras, and precise sensors to monitor the baby's every movement closely. Its functioning is so quiet that the baby does not get disturbed and sleeps peacefully. Parents can control the cradle from their smartphone, making it convenient. Also, it has received necessary safety

certifications such as JPMA and GREENGUARD from the United States, which are regarded as standards for product quality and safety, particularly for products intended for young children. At a media conference organized in Pimpri, Cradlewise Project Manager Kiran Byahatti gave an elaborated presentation regarding the product. Byahatti explained that the cradle can be utilized up to the age of 24 months for the baby, greatly benefitting the child's growth and assisting busy parents in closely monitoring their children amid their busy schedules.

The idea behind Cradlewise was born out of Radhika and Bharat Patil's own experience as new parents in 2018. The new parent struggles of baby care coupled with sleep deprivation and round-the-clock worrying prompted the couple to look into tech-based solutions. Their endeavors bred the Cradlewise. Radhika Patil, daughter of celebrated surgeon Dr. Nitin Gandhi, finished her studies in Pimpri-Chinchwad after which she went to Pune's COEP. Radhika and Bharat both did their higher studies at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru. Some of the experts involved in this innovative project are Dr. Chitra Akileswaran, who is an award certified gynaecologist in the US, and Dr. Anup Rao, a neonatologist from Stanford University. The product has already helped thousands of families all over the United States and Canada, giving more than 25 million hours of quiet sleep to babies, as reported by the company. Now that it is available in India, Indian families can also gain from this innovation. The reference to this revolutionary cradle has brought praise from leading personalities like Sam Altman, a world researcher and co-founder of OpenAI and X (formerly Twitter), who bought the cradle himself. Altman congratulated Radhika and Bharat Patil and wished them all the best for their success. This feat is regarded as a reflection of empowered women of modern India and innovative entrepreneurship.

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Google's Gemini AI Grows to 350M Users, Trails ChatGPT and Meta AI in Popularity

Google's top AI chatbot app Gemini seems to have seen strong user expansion over the past year, with more than 350 million or 35 crore users worldwide as of March 2025. The information was disclosed during the current Google Search antitrust trial, in which a US federal court is pondering suggested solutions to Google's monopolization of the search space. The technology giant's AI app last month had more than 35 million daily active users, reflecting the adoption of Google's AI services, as Gemini reportedly had nine daily active users in October 2024. The mass adoption by consumers of Gemini might be due to Google's gradual rollout of the AI chatbot to Samsung phones, Google Workspace apps, and Chrome. It has also come out with Gemini 2.0 and 2.5 models since last year. These AI models are reported to be demonstrably huge upgrades over Google's earlier Gemini models. However, Gemini might still have to play catch up as its estimates of traffic to OpenAI's ChatGPT is roughly 600 MAUs in March this year, while Meta AI's MAU count is

around 500 million MAUs. A year ago, US Judge Amit Mehta had decided Google's search engine is an illegal monopoly. The three-week hearing in the case this month is regarding what damages Google needs to pay and how bad the penalties on the company need to be. The trial testimony has disclosed that Google gives Samsung huge sums of money for a contract to have its Gemini AI chatbot pre-installed on phones produced by the South Korean electronics giant, as reported by Bloomberg. As part of the two-year Gemini agreement, Google is to provide Samsung with a share of its ad revenue generated from the AI app as well as fixed monthly payments, the report added. Internal slides presented in court also indicate that Google "was considering more restrictive distribution agreements that would have required partners to preinstall Gemini alongside Search and Chrome", The Information reported.

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MeitY Set to Support Four Startups Under ₹10,000 Crore IndiaAI Mission

In a significant move to bolster India's artificial intelligence capabilities, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) is set to back four homegrown startups—Sarvam AI, Soket AI Labs, Gnani.ai, and Gan.ai—under the ambitious ₹ 10,000 crore IndiaAI Mission, according to a report by The Economic Times. The official announcement is expected shortly, with Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw likely to make the declaration. This initiative forms part of India's broader strategy to develop indigenous AI foundational models and infrastructure, ensuring the country keeps pace with global advancements in artificial intelligence. The selected startups will lead the first wave of efforts to create Large Language Models (LLMs) and multimodal AI systems suited to India's linguistic and cultural diversity. Sarvam AI, one of the shortlisted companies, has already commenced work on a 70-billion parameter multimodal AI model designed to understand both Indian languages and English. Instead of direct financial grants, Sarvam AI is anticipated to receive GPU compute credits valued at ₹200 crore, reflecting MeitY's approach of providing strategic infrastructure support to promising projects. Similarly, Soket AI Labs has proposed the EKA Project, a 120-billion parameter open-source Indic LLM, trained on two trillion tokens. The project, led by CEO Abhishek Upperwal, is structured as a 12-month plan, with the expectation of delivering smaller models within the first six months. While the exact funding details for Soket AI Labs remain undisclosed, the project's scale underscores its potential significance for India's AI ecosystem.

Meanwhile, Gnani.ai and Gan.ai have submitted proposals focusing on smaller-scale language models. Gan.ai's CEO, Ganesh Gopalan, has previously indicated that their efforts are centred around building speech-to-speech models specifically for Indic languages. Co-founder Ananth Nagaraj's involvement in the IndiaAI Mission's draft policy team further highlights the startup's strategic alignment with the

government's vision. This selection comes at a time of heightened urgency within India's AI sector, particularly following the global recognition of China's DeepSeek AI model earlier this year. In response, India has accelerated its initiatives to foster homegrown AI innovations and reduce dependence on foreign technologies. To complement these efforts, MeitY had earlier launched a ₹1,500 crore incentive scheme to encourage individuals and organisations to develop foundational AI models. The ministry received an enthusiastic response, with 67 applications submitted by February 15, followed by another 120 in March. Final selections under this scheme are expected to be announced soon. Additionally, MeitY is working to strengthen the national AI infrastructure by onboarding 10 GPU-as-a-service providers, including Jio, Yotta, CtrlS, Tata Communications, and NxtGen. This initiative aims to offer affordable GPU access at rates below \$1 per hour, making India one of the most cost-effective global destinations for AI compute resources.

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Sam Altman Targets 100 Million Sales for OpenAI's Upcoming AI Device

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman has revealed bold ambitions to launch a groundbreaking AI device, targeting sales of 100 million units by the end of 2026. According to a report by The Wall Street Journal, Altman disclosed the company's plans during an internal meeting with OpenAI employees, aiming to position the new product as a revolutionary tech tool on par with smartphones and personal computers. The announcement follows OpenAI's recent \$6.5 billion acquisition of a company led by former Apple designer Jony Ive. The strategic move is aimed at accelerating the development of a novel class of AI-powered devices. Altman reportedly believes the partnership could add up to \$1 trillion in value to OpenAI. The planned AI device is expected to be radically different from existing gadgets. It will not be a phone, screen-based, or wearable. Instead, Altman envisions a compact tool that can fit in a user's pocket or rest on a desk, offering continuous awareness of its surroundings and seamless integration into users' lives. Altman and Ive are collaborating to create what could become a 'third core device' for everyday use, following the PC and smartphone. While details remain scarce, the concept is intended to provide direct access to OpenAI's technology outside of conventional platforms like smartphones and browsers. Despite the ambitious goals, the AI hardware sector has seen limited success. Previous launches from Humane and Rabbit Inc. both AI device startups have struggled with adoption due to hardware and software limitations. Moreover, OpenAI itself is under financial pressure, with earlier reports indicating it may not turn a profit until at least 2029. Nonetheless, Altman appears confident that breaking into the consumer hardware space is essential for OpenAI to establish a direct interface with end users, making the Ive partnership a crucial step in realizing this vision.

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GenAI Is a 'Civilizational Shift', Not Just Another Tech Cycle

N Chandrasekaran calls GenAI the most transformative force of 2024, redefining analytics, customer experience, and marketing not just a tech cycle, but a civilizational shift. TCS is investing in AI agents, human-plus-AI solutions, advanced infrastructure, and strategic partnerships to lead in the AI era. TCS launched its GenAI platform WisdomNext, is splitting its AI.Cloud business, and aims to have the largest AI-trained workforce by 2025. In a strong endorsement of generative AI (GenAI), Tata Sons and TCS Chairman N Chandrasekaran has described the technology as a 'civilizational shift' rather than just another phase in the tech cycle. In his letter to shareholders, featured in TCS' latest annual report, Chandrasekaran emphasized GenAI's transformative potential across industries, from analytics to customer experience and marketing. "GenAI is not just another tech cycle, it is a civilizational shift", he wrote. "Its adoption is accelerating rapidly, driven by advances in semiconductors, cloud computing, quantum technologies, robotics, and energy innovation". To solidify its leadership in an AI-first world, TCS is executing a multi-pronged strategy focusing on four key vectors: deploying a wide range of AI agents to collaborate with employees, delivering services via a human-plus-AI model, investing in AI data centers and cloud infrastructure, and establishing strategic partnerships with top-tier hardware vendors, solution innovators, and start-ups. Chandrasekaran stated that this integrated approach will ensure customers remain 'future-ready, resilient, and competitive', with TCS committed to driving innovation responsibly and purposefully. As GenAI reshapes the technological landscape, businesses across sectors are adopting AI strategies, refining proprietary data, and integrating AI tools to enhance operational efficiency and reduce costs. However, Chandrasekaran cautioned that the IT industry must undergo significant transformation to stay ahead. He noted that several traditional services, including coding and testing, are being rapidly automated, altering the software development lifecycle. Agentic AI is also being deeply embedded into enterprise systems. "TCS is proactively leading this change", he affirmed. "We have embedded AI throughout our offerings and developed intelligent agent solutions across the value chain". The company recently announced the launch of its enterprise-grade GenAI platform, TCS WisdomNext, and expects to have the industry's largest AI-trained workforce by 2025. It also revealed plans to split its AI.Cloud business into two distinct units to boost growth, while continuing to hire AI talent and enhance internal training programs.

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Microsoft Partners with India's Yotta Data Services to Accelerate AI Innovation

Microsoft and Yotta partner to bring AzureAI to Shakti Cloud, boosting AI access across India. Collaboration supports IndiaAI Mission with secure, scalable AI models

and tools. Partnership drives India's AI self-reliance, focusing on trust and responsible innovation. In a significant move to boost artificial intelligence (AI) innovation in India, Microsoft has joined hands with Yotta Data Services, the country's leading sovereign cloud infrastructure and platform services provider. The partnership, announced on Wednesday, aims to accelerate AI adoption across India by collaborating with government agencies, startups, enterprises, IITs, and software developers, leveraging IndiaAI Mission participants to drive forward the nation's AI ambitions. Under this collaboration, Microsoft will integrate its AzureAI services with Yotta's AI cloud platform, Shakti Cloud, enabling developers and organizations across sectors to access advanced AI capabilities. Puneet Chandok, President of Microsoft India and South Asia, highlighted the importance of the partnership, stating, "Our partnership with Yotta to power Shakti Cloud will help unlock AI innovation at scale. Microsoft is honoured to play its part in helping the country realise its AI ambitions through innovation that reflects India's unique needs and priorities". India has already emerged as a top global market for AI adoption and return on investment. With over 500 proposals submitted to the IndiaAI Mission as of May this year, the collaboration seeks to support the development of indigenous AI models by providing Shakti Cloud customers with a rich ecosystem. The platform will offer access to a vast catalog of foundational large language models (LLMs) and smaller specialized models (SLMs) via Azure AI Foundry, enabling rapid development, deployment, and scaling of AI solutions. Safety and responsibility remain core to this partnership, with built-in tools such as content filters, groundedness detection, and copyright protection designed to ensure secure AI deployment. Microsoft, known for its emphasis on trust, privacy, and security, aims to enable trustworthy AI adoption across India's public and private sectors.

Sunil Gupta, Co-founder, CEO, and Managing Director of Yotta Data Services, underscored the significance of this alliance, describing it as a 'key step forward towards India's AI self-reliance and digital transformation'. He emphasized the comprehensive support the partnership offers Indian enterprises in their journey toward AI excellence. Earlier this year, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella announced a collaboration with IndiaAI under Digital India Corporation to foster AI and emerging technology growth. The company also established an AI Centre of Excellence and AI Productivity Labs to promote inclusive development. Together, Microsoft and Yotta Data Services aim to democratize access to cutting-edge AI technologies, helping India become an AI-first nation while ensuring the adoption is secure, responsible, and tailored to national priorities.

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India's AI Ecosystem Poised for Global Impact

IndiaAI Mission launches global acceleration program, selecting 10 AI startups for a residency at Station F and HEC Paris to scale internationally. Union Minister Ashwini

Vaishnaw highlights India's AI leap, citing strong political backing and global innovation diplomacy as key drivers. Program bridges Indian AI talent with global markets, enabling cross-border collaborations, market access, and development of scalable, impactful solutions. India's AI ecosystem is poised for a global leap, Union Minister of Electronics and IT Ashwini Vaishnaw has stated. Government assistance will allow startups from image editing, deep-tech, earth observation to conversational AI to access the global market, build global collaborations and establish scalable impactful solutions, the minister further added. Taking a significant step towards taking India's AI proficiency to the world, the IndiaAI Mission under Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has recently announced the selection of 10 startups for the 'IndiaAI Startups Global Initiative', an overseas acceleration program in collaboration with Station F, Paris and HEC Paris. "Narendra Modi's participation at the Prime Minister level at the AI Action Summit in February 2024 was not only an indication of top-level political commitment but also showed that India is looking to become a builder of global AI norms and innovation diplomacy", said the Union Minister. "India's AI ecosystem is poised to make a global breakthrough. By programmes like this, we are empowering our most promising startups to access global markets, establish international partnerships, and develop scalable, high-impact solutions. This cooperation of IndiaAI Mission with Station F and HEC Paris marks a new era in India's innovation diplomacy", said Mr Vaishnaw.

As per Abhishek Singh, Additional Secretary MeitY and CEO IndiaAI Mission, The 'IndiaAI Startups Global Initiative' is a more than an acceleration program. "It is a bridge connecting India's talent to the world's innovation capitals. These 10 startups are the best examples of the depth, diversity, and global appeal of Indian AI. We are honored to give their next jump as global AI leaders", he said. These 10 startups were selected through an intensive multi-round selection process and will be India's vibrant AI innovation ecosystem representatives at Station F - the world's biggest startup campus for a four-month program aimed at enabling their cross-border scale-up, access to markets and collaboration. The program comprises a one-month online preparation phase followed by a three-month residency in Paris, France. This program is an extension of the IndiaAI Mission's overarching vision to drive India towards AI leadership, which is responsible, scalable, and inclusive.

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India's AI Preparedness Under Review as MeitY, UNESCO Launch Assessment

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the electronics and information technology ministry (MeitY), and law firm Ikigai Law (as the partner for implementation) have initiated a diagnostic exercise to evaluate India's readiness for artificial intelligence (AI). The diagnostic exercise will be conducted using UNESCO's AI Readiness Assessment Methodology (RAM), an

multi-dimensional assessment tool attuned to global benchmarks in accordance with the UN agency's 2021 suggestion on the Ethics of AI. The RAM, a comprehensive questionnaire, will evaluate India's AI readiness in the areas of legal, socio-cultural, scientific and educational, economic, and technical/infrastructure. There have been five consultations, each with AI ethics breakout sessions, spread over seven months as part of the process. There was a final stakeholder consultation on Tuesday in Delhi. Individuals who were aware of the issue said the participants noted inadequate data-sharing policy across states, Centre, and private players, insufficient data interoperability, and the need to be cautious about AI outputs. There was agreement that AI can't exist independently of intellectual property. Someone who was briefed on the discussions stated models like ChatGPT distort the distinctions between public domain and copyrighted content, leading to demands to rethink copyright legislation written for the print age. The exercise will conclude in a year-end report flagging what is working, what is lacking, and what can be improved. "The report will assist us in defining a strategy towards safe, reliable, and responsible AI", MeitY additional secretary and India AI Mission CEO Abhishek Singh said. He further added that the exercise is designed to encourage a pro-innovation strategy with light-touch regulation centered on avoiding user harm.

Singh stated that four Indian startups have been chosen to construct foundation models specifically suited to regional requirements. He mentioned initiatives to enhance compute capacity to 34,000 GPUs and increase access to data through the AI Kosha platform. Ten countries have completed RAM reports. The assessment is underway in 72 others to identify gaps and opportunities in AI readiness, said UNESCO's Eunsong Kim. "India is quite a unique story in the RAM conversation, because it is vast and diverse. It is also extremely vibrant in the AI ecosystem", said Kim. Kim described how the RAM reports helped other countries, using the example of Chile, where the exercise enhanced cybersecurity, data protection, and digital policy. The process resulted in an AI task force and national AI action plan in Indonesia, which is developing its RAM report. Experts warned India's peculiar social and cultural nuances require greater, more indigenous insight, even as the RAM exercise provides a systematic international framework. I don't believe we comprehend the socio-economic effect AI will have on a nation like India, remarked Indian Institute of Technology Madras Centre for Responsible AI head B Ravindran. We discuss bias mitigation and explainability, usually from the Western perspective. But Indian bias is a lot more nuanced than in the US. It's not black and white, but every color in between. And we haven't systematically documented that.

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Qualcomm Expands AI Portfolio with \$2.4 Billion Alphawave Acquisition

Qualcomm Acquires Alphawave for \$2.4B, Strengthening its position in AI,

Qualcomm acquires Alphawave to enhance its AI solutions. Boost to AI Infrastructure, Alphawave's high-speed data transfer semiconductors will optimize Qualcomm's AI-driven applications across industries. Expansion into New Markets, The acquisition helps Qualcomm diversify beyond mobile, focusing on telecommunications, automotive, and cloud services. Qualcomm has taken a major step in consolidating its position in the artificial intelligence (AI) domain by acquiring Alphawave, a technology leader in high-speed data transfer, for a whopping \$2.4 billion. The acquisition is expected to boost Qualcomm's portfolio of AI offerings and broaden its solutions to cater to the increasing need for sophisticated technologies in industries such as telecommunications, data centers, and cloud computing. Alphawave has a reputation for offering semiconductors that facilitate quicker and more efficient data transfer, which is essential for fueling AI and machine learning solutions. Through this acquisition, Qualcomm hopes to take advantage of Alphawave's innovative solutions to enhance the performance and efficiency of its own AI-based solutions. The acquisition is also likely to boost Qualcomm's capacity to access new growth prospects in the fast-changing AI space, especially as the demand for AI infrastructure and applications grows in numerous sectors. The company already has a solid foothold in mobile communications, but this acquisition sets it up to be a more formidable participant in the AI ecosystem, which is expected to expand significantly over the next few years.

Qualcomm CEO Cristiano Amon stressed that the acquisition will enhance the company's vision to deliver high-performance solutions that power next-generation AI applications. The merger with Alphawave's technology will empower Qualcomm to provide more sophisticated, power-efficient solutions that tackle some of the primary challenges involving data processing and AI workloads. The deal also supports Qualcomm's long-term strategy to diversify its business and expand its presence into markets outside of mobile devices. By adding Alphawave's know-how, Qualcomm wants to strengthen its capability to cater to industries dependent on high-speed data processing and AI technologies such as telecommunications, automotive, and cloud services. As AI continues to reshape industries, Qualcomm's acquisition of Alphawave puts the company squarely in the driver's seat to guide the future of AI infrastructure and enable businesses to unlock new growth from top technologies.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Implementing Projects on Introduction of AI in Energy Sector

Azerbaijan jointly with the World Economic Forum (WEF) is implementing projects in various directions, including the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the energy

sector, the executive director of the Analytical and Coordination Center of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (C4IR) under the Ministry of Economy of Azerbaijan Fariz Jafar said, Trend reports. He made the remark at the 6th International Forum on AI and Big Data at ADA University. "Azerbaijan is a member of the Artificial Intelligence Alliance of the World Economic Forum. We are working on projects to use AI in various spheres, including energy, as well as applying it in call centers," he added.

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Azerbaijan Prognosticates Global AI Market Volume by Late 2025

The global market of artificial intelligence (AI) will reach \$500 billion by 2025, the Executive Director of the Analysis and Coordination Center for the 4th Industrial Revolution (C4IR), Fariz Jafarov, said at the 6th International Artificial Intelligence and Big Data Forum held at ADA University, Trend reports. According to him, by 2030, this figure will grow to \$1.8 trillion. "Artificial intelligence will add \$15.7 trillion to the world economy by 2030, which is 14 percent of the current global economy volume," he pointed out. The executive director emphasized that the use of AI is impossible without supercomputers and the internet. He also stressed the importance of improving the use of AI in various areas. "We should turn the tools of artificial intelligence into inclusive tools," he added.

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AI in Agriculture to Be Discussed at International Agricultural Exhibition

The 18th Azerbaijan International Agriculture Exhibition ("Caspian Agro") and the 30th Anniversary Azerbaijan International Food Industry Exhibition ("InterFood Azerbaijan") have begun their third day in Baku, Azernews reports. According to the data, as in the first two days, the exhibition continues to show a lively atmosphere today. The exhibition has attracted significant interest from participants, as companies from various countries are presenting their products, ranging from technological solutions in agriculture to seed companies. This has directly impacted the number of visitors attending the event. Additionally, today's panel sessions are of particular importance due to their relevance. The agenda for today includes the panel session on "International Challenges in the Development of Fisheries and Aquaculture, and Perspectives for Regional Cooperation," an exhibition tour with members of the "Caspian Energy Club," a farmers' tour, the "Golden Shah 2025" International Culinary Championship, the 2nd International Agricultural Innovation Forum, and the conference on "International Challenges in Fisheries and Aquaculture Development, and Perspectives for Regional Cooperation."

Notably, today, the 2nd International Agricultural Innovation Forum will be held, focusing on areas such as livestock, artificial intelligence, and more. The forum will feature panel discussions on "Sustainable Development Perspectives, Challenges, and Innovative Approaches in Livestock," and "Application of Artificial Intelligence in Agriculture." In addition, the 7th meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) of the "Regional Commission for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Central Asia and the Caucasus" (CACFish) will take place. This year, 450 companies from 31 countries are participating in the "Caspian Agro" and "InterFood Azerbaijan" exhibitions, covering all pavilions and the outdoor area of the Baku Expo Center. Companies from Azerbaijan, as well as from Germany, the USA, Belarus, Belgium, the UAE, China, South Korea, Palestine, Finland, Georgia, India, Jordan, Iran, Spain, Israel, Sweden, Italy, Canada, Latvia, Egypt, the Netherlands, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Serbia, Sri Lanka, Turkiye, Turkmenistan, and Greece are showcasing their products. Notably, national groups from Germany, Belarus, South Korea, Georgia, Italy, the Netherlands, Sri Lanka, and for the first time, Egypt, are presenting agricultural and food industry products at the exhibition. For the first time this year, the "Caspian Agro" exhibition, which lasts four days, is showcasing modern innovative technologies, machinery, and irrigation systems used in agriculture. Participants can explore interesting information in areas such as Electronic Agriculture, robotics, drones, IT services, artificial intelligence, smart villages, startups, alternative energy sources, and "Green Agro." This year's exhibition also marks the debut of the fisheries and aquaculture sector. The "Caspian Agro" exhibition serves as an important platform for the demonstration of innovative solutions and advanced technologies supporting the development of the fisheries and aquaculture industries.

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Ministry Launches AI Collaboration for Farming Innovation

The Ministry of Agriculture has begun cooperating with international organizations on artificial intelligence technologies. Azernews reports, Anar Azimov, Deputy Chairman of the Agrarian Services Agency, made this statement during his speech at the "II Forum of Agronomists within the Framework of Public-Private Partnership." He emphasized that in a rapidly changing and developing world, digitalization and the application of artificial intelligence are essential for accelerating processes: "The Ministry of Agriculture is carrying out serious work in this area. Artificial intelligence plays a key role in forecasting, particularly in plant protection. These technologies significantly enhance pest control and early prediction." "AI technologies will also greatly improve services under state supervision and help deliver timely information to farmers. The Ministry has already launched cooperation with international organizations, and we are seeing tangible results," Azimov noted.

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Baku Hosts Global Meeting on AI And Technology in Anti-corruption

The 6th Plenary Session and the 10th Meeting of the Steering Committee are being held within the framework of the UN's Global Operational Network of Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Authorities – GlobE Network. According to Azernews, nearly 50 high-ranking officials representing law enforcement agencies from various countries will attend the event. The main topic of the Plenary Session is “The Application of New Technologies and Artificial Intelligence in the Fight Against Corruption.” Over 100 presentations are planned across panels, sessions, and side events covering topics such as asset confiscation from corruption, direct asset recovery, halting suspicious financial transactions, swift freezing of bank accounts in criminal cases, international cooperation, and public awareness in anti-corruption efforts. Additionally, within the session and on the initiative of the Prosecutor General's Office of Azerbaijan, a special session and side events will be held in connection with the “Year of Constitution and Sovereignty” and Azerbaijan's COP29 chairmanship, focusing on combating environmental crimes. The event will also feature numerous bilateral meetings and the signing of memorandums on mutual cooperation.

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AI Takes Center Stage in Global Anti-Corruption Efforts at Baku Summit

In an era where corruption continues to evolve in sophistication and scale, the role of artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative force in the global effort to uphold integrity, transparency, and accountability. Traditional investigative methods—while essential—are increasingly inadequate in addressing the complexities of modern corruption schemes, which often involve vast networks, cross-border financial transactions, and cyber-enabled concealment tactics. AI offers unprecedented capabilities in detecting and preventing corruption. Through the analysis of large datasets, real-time surveillance of financial systems, and predictive modeling, AI tools can identify patterns, anomalies, and risks that human oversight might miss. From automating red flag detection in public procurement to tracing beneficial ownership in shell companies, AI is reshaping the way law enforcement agencies, auditors, and compliance bodies operate.

Against this backdrop, the 6th Plenary Session and 10th Steering Committee Meeting of the UN Global Operations Network of Law Enforcement Agencies Against Corruption (GlobE Network)—held in Baku, Azerbaijan—marked a pivotal moment for the international anti-corruption community. The event's central theme, “Possibilities of Applying New Technologies and Artificial Intelligence in the Fight Against Corruption,” captured the urgency of embracing innovation to counter

corruption's adaptive nature. With the participation of senior officials from approximately 50 countries, this high-level gathering highlighted how AI and digital transformation are not merely technical tools but strategic enablers of global anti-corruption efforts. The discussions reflected a growing consensus: to stay ahead of increasingly complex corruption threats, international cooperation must go hand-in-hand with technological advancement. A new frontier: Technology and AI in anti-corruption At the heart of the Plenary Session was a forward-looking theme: "Possibilities of Applying New Technologies and Artificial Intelligence in the Fight Against Corruption."

The topic is not only timely but critical, as the global landscape of corruption becomes increasingly complex with the rise of digital financial systems, virtual assets, and cyber-enabled crime. More than 100 contributions—including expert speeches, panel discussions, and parallel sessions—explored issues ranging from asset confiscation, direct recovery of illicit gains, and transaction monitoring, to international coordination for freezing suspect financial accounts. This multidimensional approach illustrates the need for AI-driven tools that can rapidly analyze financial data, flag anomalies in real time, and detect patterns in cross-jurisdictional corruption networks. AI is uniquely positioned to revolutionize law enforcement's ability to preempt corruption rather than merely respond to it. From natural language processing (NLP) tools that detect procurement fraud to machine learning models capable of identifying unexplained wealth or shell company networks, the technology offers real-time, scalable solutions to problems that were once thought insurmountable. Azerbaijan's emerging role as a hub of global anti-corruption dialogue Azerbaijan's hosting of the Plenary is emblematic of its growing international visibility in the governance and rule of law sphere.

Prosecutor General Kamran Aliyev highlighted the country's strategic role in convening high-level dialogues, citing recent global events such as COP29 and the 29th Annual Meeting of the International Association of Prosecutors. By aligning anti-corruption initiatives with its broader goals of digital transformation and transparency, Azerbaijan seeks to position itself as a regional hub for innovation in legal enforcement. The country's focus on environmental crimes—addressed through dedicated parallel sessions—also aligns with the growing trend of integrating anti-corruption mechanisms into environmental governance frameworks, especially under the rubric of climate finance and sustainability. The GlobE Network: From information sharing to operational impact The GlobE Network, described by stakeholders as a trust-based and operational platform, continues to strengthen international coordination. Its unique value lies in operational agility: facilitating real-time information exchange, enabling informal cooperation between agencies, and reducing legal and procedural delays that often hamper transnational investigations. Brigitte Strobel-Shaw of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) emphasized that corruption "knows no borders and hides in legislative gaps."

Her statement encapsulates the structural weaknesses that AI and intergovernmental networks aim to address. By mapping corruption typologies and embedding AI tools within legal enforcement systems, institutions can better preempt and dismantle corruption ecosystems. UN Resident Coordinator Vladanka Andreeva added a crucial developmental dimension, noting that corruption undermines the rights of citizens and disrupts the foundations of good governance. She reaffirmed the importance of the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) as the cornerstone of international legal standards, calling for strengthened partnerships and transparency to drive sustainable development. Corruption in conflict-affected regions: A case from Azerbaijan In his official address, President Ilham Aliyev broadened the discussion by contextualizing corruption within post-conflict reconstruction and geopolitical dynamics. Highlighting Armenia's long-term occupation and the subsequent illicit exploitation of resources in the occupied territories, he linked anti-corruption with sovereignty, justice, and economic revitalization.

This narrative introduces a less explored but vital domain in anti-corruption: the use of AI and digital tools in post-conflict regions where institutional voids and opaque transactions are prevalent. In such settings, AI can help in auditing reconstruction funds, preventing elite capture, and enforcing compliance through blockchain-based transparency platforms. While the enthusiasm around AI is warranted, a nuanced approach is necessary. The deployment of AI in law enforcement must adhere to strict data protection standards and ethical frameworks to prevent overreach, algorithmic bias, or misuse. The GlobE Network could play a role not only in operational coordination but also in shaping global standards for the ethical use of technology in legal contexts. As AI continues to evolve, its strategic integration into anti-corruption frameworks must be guided by both innovation and accountability. The challenge is not only technological but institutional: building capacities, fostering interagency collaboration, and ensuring public trust. The 6th Plenary Session of the GlobE Network reflects a growing consensus that fighting corruption in the 21st century requires tools, technologies, and trust-based partnerships. AI and emerging technologies offer unprecedented potential, but their success will depend on multilateral commitment, policy coherence, and shared values. As the international community continues to confront old threats in new forms, platforms like the GlobE Network—and nations like Azerbaijan stepping forward to host them—will play a central role in shaping a more transparent, accountable, and digitally resilient global order.

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Harnessing AI Could Unlock Massive Employment Growth

Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have the potential to create nearly 180 million new jobs, said Yusif Valiyev, Deputy Executive Director of the Youth Foundation,

Trend reports. Speaking at the Youth Artificial Intelligence Forum, Valiyev emphasized that society should not only use AI but place itself at the center of these technologies. "Young people should seek support from the Youth Foundation for their AI projects. As the Youth Foundation, we are always ready to support such projects and provide grants. One of our main priorities today is digitalization across various sectors," he noted. Highlighting AI's positive impact on productivity, Valiyev addressed common concerns about AI encouraging laziness. "Sometimes, people think AI leads to laziness. However, it's important to recognize that these technologies simplify and speed up tasks that once took hours or days, ultimately boosting productivity. AI is not our competitor. While it is sometimes said that AI could replace many jobs, we should remember that if AI, robotics, and digitalization eliminate nearly 70 million jobs, they will create two to three times more new jobs. Therefore, AI is not our rival; those who distance themselves from these technologies are," Valiyev concluded.

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KAZAKHSTAN: Developing AI-Driven Professional Standards Across Eight Domains

The Government of Kazakhstan is developing professional standards using artificial intelligence (AI) for training specialists in eight key industries, Trend reports. In 2025, a cohort of eight novel vocations will emerge, encompassing roles such as a 3D printing engineer and a specialist in robotic painting system operations, with initial pilot initiatives slated for deployment in the urban centers of Almaty and Kostanay. In conjunction with this initiative, a comprehensive framework of 60 AI-enhanced professional standards is being developed, encompassing a total of 336 distinct occupational categories, particularly within the machine-building domain. To enhance the skills of engineering and technical personnel, an internship program at foreign enterprises is being implemented, co-financed equally by the republican budget and participating companies. This initiative aims to transfer advanced international experience adapted to Kazakhstan's conditions. In response to the shortage of qualified personnel in Kazakhstan's chemical industry, specific measures are underway. State educational grants have been expanded at institutions such as Satbayev University, KazNU, KazNITU, and the Taraz Chemical-Technological College to train specialists for the chemical sector. Additionally, dual education programs involving 536 colleges and industrial enterprises offer students practical training with guaranteed employment. Several companies also cover training costs for specialists. Through the Bolashak program and direct international partnerships, Kazakhstan is preparing engineers in high-tech fields, including automation, chemical safety, and environmental monitoring. In promoting the geology profession and developing future experts for the sector, the number of geology graduates has increased significantly—from 1,224 in 2022 to over 3,000 by 2024. According to

Satbayev Technical University, 98 percent of geology graduates find employment in their field.

From <https://www.trend.az/> 06/13/2025

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Kazakhstan Leads in Digital Economy with Growth in Fintech and AI

Kazakhstan ranks among the top 30 countries in terms of digitalization, according to the UN, said Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev during the 37th plenary session of the Foreign Investors Council, Trend reports. As articulated by the president, there has been a quadrupling in the proliferation of fintech enterprises since 2018, with an excess of 4,000 stakeholders, encompassing cryptocurrency exchanges and payment service providers, duly registered under the auspices of the AIFC (Astana International Financial Centre). The president extended an invitation to global stakeholders to synergize in the advancement of digital ecosystems and artificial intelligence frameworks. "The AIFC occupies the premier position in Eastern Europe and Central Asia according to the Global Financial Centres Index, establishing itself as a frontrunner in the domains of sustainable finance and digital financial innovation." Over 89 percent of all transactional activities in Kazakhstan are now executed through cashless mechanisms, with mobile banking engagement experiencing an exponential growth of over 460 percent in the last quadrennial period. We are strategizing to establish a groundbreaking pilot initiative dubbed CryptoCity, wherein digital currencies will facilitate the acquisition of commodities, services, and ancillary functionalities. The evolution of artificial intelligence encompasses significant strategic implications for our nation," the president articulated. In summation, President Tokayev articulated a robust assurance that enduring, synergistic collaboration between the public sector and private enterprises will be instrumental in fostering sustainable and inclusive economic advancement.

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AUSTRALIA: Defence Trials AI Radiocomms Deception Technology

The Australian Army is trialling technology that generates fake radio communications in order to mislead adversaries and protect frontline personnel. Known as TrapRadio, the system uses artificial intelligence to create synthetic radio traffic that mimics high-value communications or transmission patterns. Its goal is to divert enemy attention and resources away from real operations by creating convincing communication decoys. The deception technology mirrors techniques used in cyber security, where fake systems, data and applications are deployed to lure and distract

threat actors. Developed by British-Australian company Penten Amio, TrapRadio was recently tested during a large-scale international military exercise in California involving 140 Australian Defence Force personnel. In a blog post on the exercise, Defence said the system has “the potential to reshape the battlefield.” “TrapRadio supports Australian soldiers through force protection and also the ability to create a dilemma through the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning,” said Captain Wayne Mulhall of Electronic Warfare – Army Headquarters. “TrapRadio is able to generate a deception to support commanders, mimicking high-value targets, which creates a dilemma for adversary operators.”

From <https://www.itnews.com.au> 05/27/2025

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NEW ZEALAND: Deel Unveils Seven Products to Streamline Global Workforce Management with AI-Powered Capabilities

Deel, a leading global payroll and HR platform, today introduced a suite of AI-driven products designed to transform how companies hire, manage, and pay international teams. Deel's latest innovations address inefficiencies caused by fragmented payroll, HR, and IT systems, integrating these functions into Deel's all-in-one platform to help businesses operate seamlessly and compliantly across borders. Enhanced Payroll Capabilities Managing payroll across multiple countries is complex, but Deel is redefining the process with game-changing tech and a fully integrated solution. Deel is the only company to own its entire infrastructure stack including a single, unified payroll engine, which is paired with more than 2,000 in-house legal, mobility, immigration and compliance experts. Announcing that Real-Time Payroll is now available in 53+ markets, including the UK, Brazil, South Africa, Canada, and the UAE, with plans to expand to 130+ markets by 2027. This announcement allows Deel to deliver instant gross-to-net calculations, faster processing, and more flexibility for payroll changes. Launching Deel PEO, fully managed in-house by Deel, helping companies attract and retain top talent by offering big-company benefits, without the high costs. Introducing Deel Benefits Admin, a new tool that lets businesses manage benefits at scale across multiple countries from a single login, ensuring a compliant, consistent, and efficient experience for global teams. AI-Driven Global HR & IT Management The Deel product suite is an AI-powered, unified payroll, HR and IT management solution.

Following today's news, it integrates talent sourcing, workforce planning, employee engagement, compensation planning, IT management and core HRIS functionalities like time-off into a single system, allowing businesses to streamline operations and make data-driven decisions. Announcing Deel Talent, a new way to connect businesses with top staffing and recruiting agencies directly within the Deel platform, eliminating the need for multiple systems. With access to trusted talent partners, it's easier to find, hire, manage, pay, and develop a global workforce, all in one place. For growing mid-market and enterprise customers, Deel Talent also acts as a

centralised hub to streamline and manage their existing talent partner supply chain. Introducing Deel Workforce Planning, an AI-driven solution that equips HR, finance, and hiring teams with cutting-edge tools to strategically plan, model, and approve headcount worldwide. Deel Compensation enables HR teams to design and manage a best-in-class global compensation strategy from end to end, fully integrated with payroll to eliminate errors and manual adjustments. Deel Engage has been enhanced with AI-powered features, including Surveys for real-time employee feedback, Career Management for clear growth paths with skill-based frameworks that sync with Job Architecture and Compensation Band data, AI-infused Learning Management for compliance, skills development, and onboarding, and Performance for goal tracking, 360° reviews, and data-driven talent decisions to help employees thrive. New security features including Mobile Device Management (MDM), Identity & Access Management (IAM), and Endpoint Protection (EPP) have been added to Deel IT, helping companies handle global lifecycle management for laptops, tablets, monitors and mobile phones across 130 countries.

Shannon Karaka, Country Lead, Australia & New Zealand, Deel, said: “The global workforce is more interconnected than ever. It is clear that Australia must tap into talent pools beyond its borders to realise its ambitions to become a leading hub for innovation and technology. Not only do companies need AI talent for business development and growth, it is also essential for HR to leverage AI to enhance overall operational efficiency. To accelerate local businesses in their journey, we are proud to unveil a new suite of integrated AI-driven products designed to streamline HR functions. With intelligent tools that provide data-driven insights, Deel is empowering Australian businesses to attract, manage and retain global talent — getting them ready for the future of work.” Over the past year, Deel has made five strategic acquisitions, each aimed at strengthening its product suite and supercharging founder-led innovation within the business. The platform has seen remarkable adoption, with a 60% increase in customers using multiple Deel products over the past year. The company now serves over 35,000 customers globally and has processed more than \$11 billion in payments to workers worldwide. Deel also recently announced that it had achieved a run rate of \$800 million as of December 2024, growing 70% year-over-year, and remaining profitable for over two years. “Looking ahead, our goal is to build a generational company, one that both businesses and workers love,” Karaka added.

From <https://b2bnews.co.nz> 04/09/2025

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Data Centres Behind AI Set to Strain Power Grids

Data centres powering artificial intelligence systems could push electricity demand to unprecedented levels. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), AI may consume as much electricity by 2030 as Japan does today. Although the agency rejects the idea of a looming climate crisis, critics call this view “dangerously

optimistic.” **A Tsunami of Power Demand** The IEA reports that global data centre electricity consumption is on track to more than double by the end of the decade, led by a fourfold increase in AI-specific energy use. Electricity used for AI data processing is expected to exceed that used by all traditional energy-heavy industries combined in the U.S. A single data centre can use as much electricity as 100,000 homes today. New facilities could consume 20 times more, straining power grids.

Renewables Falling Short The IEA warns that by 2030, only about half of the electricity needed for AI systems will be sourced from renewables. Existing power grids, originally designed for centralised fossil fuel generation, are not fully equipped to handle the intermittency of wind and solar power. Some countries may turn back to fossil fuels with demand rising faster than clean energy supply. In the U.S., the possibility is intensified by shifting political leadership, including former President Donald Trump’s support for coal. The IEA report states: “The rapid increase in AI also means companies will seek the most readily available energy – which could come from gas plants... In the US, the demand could even be met by coal-fired power stations being given a new lease on life, aided by Donald Trump’s enthusiasm for them.”

Efficiency Potential vs. Climate Risk The IEA sees room for optimism, stating that AI, if used strategically, could help balance its own energy impact. Possible applications include improving grid management, cutting waste in industry, and streamlining public transport. “With the rise of AI, the energy sector is at the forefront of one of the most important technological revolutions of our time,” said Fatih Birol, the agency’s executive director. “AI is a tool, potentially an incredibly powerful one, but it is up to us – our societies, governments and companies – how we use it.” The report highlights how AI could assist in managing renewable inputs and identifying minerals essential for clean energy but the agency’s hopeful message is not shared by all.

Critics Warn of Industry Bias The IEA’s latest report has drawn criticism from environmentalists and energy experts, who accuse the agency of downplaying the risks posed by AI and large data centres. They argue that the report lacks firm guidance for governments. Claude Turmes, former Green MEP and current energy minister of Luxembourg, said, “Instead of making practical recommendations to governments on how to regulate and thus minimise the huge negative impact of AI and new mega datacentres on the energy system, the IEA and its [chief] Fatih Birol are making a welcome gift to the new Trump administration and the tech companies which sponsored this new US government.” Alongside energy use, growing attention is being paid to data centres’ water demands. These facilities often require vast amounts of water for cooling and are increasingly located in regions already facing water stress. A recent investigation found they are “sucking water from some of the world’s driest areas.” **Conclusion** The IEA highlights the importance of policy in determining AI’s environmental impact, stating that outcomes are still within government control. Critics caution that, without regulation, environmental risks could

overtake the gains AI might offer. AI remains a double-edged tool — its future effects on the planet will depend more on governance choices than on the technology itself.

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Survey Reveals Consumer Hesitation Toward AI in Insurance

The insurance industry continues to face consumer reluctance toward artificial intelligence, even though many users report favourable experiences with the technology. According to GlobalData's 2024 Emerging Trends Insurance Consumer Survey of more than 5,500 people in 11 nations, close to 74% of participants believe AI can decrease the time needed to reach a customer service agent. 71.5% highlighted possible improvements in operational efficiency, while a comparable percentage (71.2%) acknowledged AI might surpass humans in identifying patterns. Among insurance chatbot users, 74.5% expressed satisfaction or high satisfaction with their interactions. Despite recognising these advantages, many consumers maintain reservations about AI's wider adoption in insurance operations. "Despite the positive perceptions, insurers face challenges in ensuring consumers adopt AI tools. Many consumers find that the technology is not yet sufficiently developed to be adopted at scale, eroding their trust," GlobalData lead insurance analyst Beatriz Benito said. Benito emphasised transparency in AI-driven decision-making and clear communication on how data is utilised as critical factors for building consumer trust. Despite AI's dominance in digital transformation, Benito said that human interaction will continue to play a critical role in scenarios requiring empathy and nuanced judgement. "While all in all, AI has the potential of considerably improving satisfaction rates in insurance, the need for the human touch and empathy in engagements continues to limit its full potential. Better communication surrounding AI's capabilities and nuances will ultimately lead to improved adoption rates." GlobalData's survey features insights from a minimum of 500 participants per country, aged 18 and older.

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Top AI Prompts That Empower Entrepreneurs to Tackle Challenges

Entrepreneurs are under pressure to combine creativity, resilience, and strategy. Many are turning to AI tools like ChatGPT to sharpen their skills and enhance their entrepreneurial mindset to keep up. AI prompts serve as a starting point for self-reflection and brainstorming, helping entrepreneurs identify strengths, weaknesses, and growth areas. AI Tools Helping Entrepreneurs Develop Critical Skills Managing multiple responsibilities with limited resources is a common struggle for entrepreneurs. AI has become an essential tool in this process, enabling a shift in entrepreneurial education from knowledge acquisition to application, resilience, and creative problem-solving—qualities that are now highly valued by employers and

academic institutions.

Building an Entrepreneurial Mindset with AI Tools AI prompts help entrepreneurs strengthen their entrepreneurial thinking across several key dimensions: **Finding Your Why Prompt:** “How can I align my business idea with my personal passions and skills? How does this idea connect to a cause I care about?” This AI prompt is especially valuable for entrepreneurs looking to build a sustainable business. It encourages a deeper sense of ownership and motivation by helping business owners reflect on how their venture connects to their personal values. When entrepreneurs are driven by a cause, they are more likely to push through challenges, stay committed to their goals, and effectively communicate their values to both customers and investors.

Building Resilience for Business Challenges Prompt: “What challenges am I currently facing in my business? How can I reframe these challenges as learning opportunities, and what practical steps can I take next?” Entrepreneurs face numerous challenges daily—whether it’s market volatility, operational setbacks, or competition. The ability to reframe these challenges as learning opportunities is critical for maintaining momentum and ensuring long-term growth. This AI prompt encourages entrepreneurs to step back, reflect, and identify key lessons from their struggles, while also outlining practical next steps to move forward with confidence. **Developing Customer Empathy for Business Success Prompt:** “Who is my ideal customer? What are their pain points, needs, and desires, and how can my product or service address them effectively?”

This AI prompt is an effective tool for ensuring that their product development, marketing strategies, and customer service are aligned with the market’s true demands for entrepreneurs. It will help them have a clear understanding of the ideal customer, enabling entrepreneurs to focus their resources more effectively, optimise their offerings, and ensure that every touchpoint with the customer is meaningful and value-driven. **Mastering Strategic Problem-Solving in Entrepreneurship Prompt:** “What are the biggest challenges my business faces? What innovative solutions can I propose to tackle these challenges?” This AI prompt is a starting point for entrepreneurs to develop the strategic mindset required to drive business forward. Entrepreneurs can improve operational efficiency and set the stage for sustained growth and long-term success.

Setting SMART Goals for Business Growth Prompt: “Let’s create a SMART goal for my business: What is a specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound objective I can work on?” AI tools can help guide entrepreneurs in setting SMART goals—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound goals that enhance focus, accountability, and effective growth planning. **Brainstorming Marketing Strategies with AI Prompt:** “Given my current budget, what are three creative marketing strategies I can implement to generate more leads and grow my

customer base?" AI prompts can assist entrepreneurs in generating tailored marketing strategies, even with limited budgets. It empowers entrepreneurs to maximise brand reach and lead generation with smart, cost-effective approaches. Conclusion Entrepreneurs now have the opportunity to harness AI prompts to improve resilience, foster innovation, and optimise decision-making. This AI-powered approach provides the competitive advantage needed to tackle challenges and drive growth effectively.

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AI Adoption Grows in NZ as Workloads Surge, Study Finds

Artificial intelligence is gaining momentum in New Zealand's corporate sector, as firms including Genesis Energy, GHD, and Baker Tilly Staples Rodway integrate Microsoft 365 Copilot to tackle productivity demands. A recent Microsoft survey found that 26% of Kiwi business leaders would give up their daily coffee to retain access to generative AI. AI Adoption Accelerates Across New Zealand Enterprises Kiwi businesses are increasingly turning to AI to streamline operations and alleviate pressure on employees. Microsoft 365 telemetry data reveals a 15% year-on-year increase in after-hours emails and Teams messages, indicating that workers are finding it challenging to keep up with their workloads. AI tools like Microsoft 365 Copilot are being utilised to handle repetitive tasks, giving employees more time to focus on strategic work.

Genesis Energy, for instance, has incorporated Copilot to streamline tasks and foster work-life balance. Senior manager Isabelle Rousseau shared how the tool has transformed her workflow, "The content is of such high quality, it's saved me hours and hours, as well as the stress of knowing how much more I've got to do in a day. I now don't need to work extended hours to fit everything into the day – I can often just do things between meetings." AI-Mature Organisations Lead with Productivity and Inclusion The 2024 Microsoft Work Trend Index introduces the concept of 'Frontier Firms' – organisations with high AI maturity that have integrated AI tools across operations. These firms are twice as likely to report increased productivity and greater job satisfaction among employees. Additionally, Frontier Firms offer more opportunities for meaningful work, as AI takes over mundane tasks, enabling employees to focus on creative and strategic activities.

GHD, a global engineering and professional services firm, uses AI to promote inclusion and accessibility. AI-generated meeting recaps not only save time but also support employees who rely on speech-to-text technology. Baker Tilly Staples Rodway has utilised Copilot to assist employees new to Aotearoa in achieving the right nuance in their communications, helping them feel more confident and capable in their roles. AI Contribution to Workforce Health and Attendance A recent report by Southern Cross Health Insurance and Business NZ highlights that absenteeism is at

a record high of 5.5 days per worker, costing employers more than \$1 billion annually. However, 22% of companies using Copilot report reduced absenteeism, with improved wellbeing cited as a key factor.

The trend suggests that AI help enhances productivity and alleviates stress, allowing employees to maintain a healthier work-life balance. “Approaching AI like a thought partner is where you start to see real value from it,” said a spokesperson from the Work Trend Index. “The real magic is in how AI can reboot our energy and get us focused on the work that is meaningful and fulfilling.” Conclusion AI tools are gaining traction across New Zealand workplaces, their influence is extending outside of productivity. Organisations are beginning to prioritise job satisfaction and employee wellbeing, with AI increasingly seen as a means to ease routine workloads and enable more meaningful work.

From <https://b2bnews.co.nz> 05/19/2025

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Workhuman Live 2025 Highlights How AI Is Reshaping the Future of Recognition

Employee recognition has entered the era of intelligence. Organisations in 2025 are using real-time insights to reward performance, uncover potential, and build stronger teams. Workhuman Live 2025 illustrates a growing trend: recognition is no longer reactive—it’s a business-critical strategy. AI Shifts Recognition from Instinct to Intelligence Traditionally, employee recognition programmes were reactive, inconsistent, and influenced more by visibility than value. Managers praised what they happened to notice, often overlooking meaningful but less visible contributions. AI has flipped that script. Organisations harness data from: Communication patterns Performance reviews Peer-to-peer feedback These data sources proactively identify moments worth celebrating.

“We have collected best practices related to how recognition and rewards programs are set up, launched, cultivated, and communicated. We have loaded that data into an LLM and can serve those insights back to employers querying optimization opportunities in their own programs.” – Tom Libretto, President of Workhuman The shift turns recognition into a strategic, always-on capability—driven by analytics, customised to individual preferences, and scaled through automation. Recognition Programmes Become Measurable and Adaptive AI’s applications in recognition go beyond sending better thank-you messages. A key function is evaluating the health of a company’s recognition programme.

AI systems help identify: If participation is equitable Messages that are meaningful Where adoption is lagging Organisations can improve how recognition is delivered, boosting employee experience and business outcomes, with diagnostics built into recognition platforms. Recognition Data as Strategic HR Intelligence The most

promising frontier is using recognition data to understand people better. AI can mine this data for insights that traditional HR systems miss—provided the input is rich enough. “There’s an almost limitless runway in use cases where the recognition data itself is mined for rich, authentic, peer-based insider knowledge around who is doing what work in the organisation, what skills are being invoked to do that work, and what they are being recognised for relative to the impact that work is having on the broader company,” said Libretto.

Use cases include: Identifying leadership potential Predicting promotion readiness Spotting cultural influencers Matching employees to internal job opportunities Employers can now ask questions like “Who is the cultural flag bearer in this department?” and receive data-backed insights. This is possible because recognition data is descriptive, peer-generated, and tied to actual work. Data Quality and Adoption Drive System Value The impact of AI depends on the quality of input data, starting with how recognition messages are written. “Our platform will coach the writer of an award message to be more comprehensive and more specific and nudge them to talk about the impact to the business that the person receiving recognition demonstrated,” Libretto noted.

Shallow messages like “John did a great job” limit AI’s usefulness. “There’s not a lot AI can do with that. That’s where the in-product coaching comes in to get into something more specific and descriptive,” he added. Low adoption is another common issue especially if only half of employees receive recognition, the system misses the contributions of the other half. Broad adoption is essential, and requires: Consistent promotion of the programme Executive support Easy-to-use tools that encourage participation Embedding Recognition into Organisational Culture AI’s biggest impact may be cultural. It surfaces contributions that typically go unnoticed and encourages a more inclusive environment where employees at all levels feel seen and valued.

When recognition is: Frequent Personalised Tied to business impact Conclusion AI advances with tools like large language models and agentic interfaces, organisations are treating recognition as both a data asset and a human connection point. “Who is showing leadership skills that is predictive of a promotion in the next 18 months?” That’s no longer an abstract question—it’s something AI can help answer today. The future of recognition promises not only better rewards but smarter, more strategic business outcomes, for companies ready to invest in quality data and broad participation.

From <https://b2bnews.co.nz> 05/22/2025

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AI Training to Boost Public Sector Productivity

New artificial intelligence (AI) training will increase the uptake of AI and boost

productivity in the public service, Digitising Government and Public Service Minister Judith Collins says. “Across the public sector, AI offers a real opportunity to improve decision-making and deliver better outcomes for New Zealanders,” says Ms Collins. “I want public service leaders to embrace AI and support their teams to use it safely and effectively. “That’s why the Government Chief Digital Officer (GCDO) and the Public Service Commission’s Leadership Development Centre have partnered to develop two new AI training programmes. A three-part AI Masterclass series is now available to senior leaders to improve the understanding of and use of AI within agencies. These sessions will cover core AI concepts and key decision-making considerations. The all-of-government AI Foundational Development Programme starts this month for general public service users. Around 50 participants from 10 agencies will be upskilled in basic AI concepts and present their own ideas for the use of AI. This will create a pipeline of agency-specific AI applications to improve productivity, cost efficiency and customer experience. The five-week online course will be piloted from 26 May to 30 June and be repeated throughout the year. Material from these sessions will be published on the LDC: Public Service Core Learning Hub. “This initiative will enable greater use of AI in the public service, enhancing both the speed and quality of service delivery for Kiwis,” Ms Collins says. “Government agencies are already seeing promising results and this training will build on them to transform the way our government serves New Zealanders.”

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 05/26/2025

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Kiwis Wary of AI Job Impact but Continue to Use AI Services, New Survey Shows

65% of Kiwis are concerned about job losses caused by artificial intelligence, yet a large percentage still used AI services over the past year, a survey has found. Market research company Perceptive conducted a survey of 1,000 New Zealanders and uncovered conflicting attitudes towards AI. The findings showed that 65% of participants fear job losses due to AI, 62% are concerned about AI contributing to unfair decision-making, and 67% worry about the misuse of personal data. Despite these concerns, AI adoption remains high, with 77% of respondents reporting that they have knowingly used AI services within the previous year. The survey has also highlighted generational differences in AI interaction, with 90% of people aged 18 to 34 having used AI compared to just 60% of those aged 55 and older. Jason Paris, chief executive of One NZ, which commissioned the study, believes the actual number of New Zealanders using AI services is likely much higher than reported, suggesting that potentially 100% of Kiwis are using AI, with 77% doing so knowingly. “Because if you think about Google Maps, or Spotify, or Netflix, Instagram, or even just email, they’ve all got AI algorithms embedded in them,” he said. The above survey results align with other research, such as a study by the University of Melbourne and KPMG, which revealed that only 34% of New Zealanders trust AI. Additionally, a global poll conducted by Ipsos found that, on average, 65% of people

worldwide believe artificial intelligence is likely to cause job losses.

From <https://b2bnews.co.nz> 05/27/2025

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