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# ASIA-PACIFIC GOVERNANCE

## WATCH

April 2025, Issue 258

**UNPAN-AP**  
Editorial Department,  
RCOCI





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# Asia-Pacific Governance Watch

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## 1、 Government Policy and Legislation

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## **Simpler, More Streamlined and Smarter Regulations Are Required to Address Evolving Policy Challenges**

Governments should renew their efforts to better design, deliver, and review regulation and regulatory processes, according to a new OECD report. The [\*Regulatory Policy Outlook 2025\*](#) - the OECD's flagship publication on drafting laws and regulations, their implementation and review - highlights the efforts governments are making to advance policy objectives while adapting to rapid technological change and evolving policy environments. It identifies opportunities to reduce unnecessary regulations, while ensuring regulatory frameworks are focused on better outcomes for people, and contribute to a policy environment that supports innovation and strong and sustainable growth. Regulations are often seen as burdensome for citizens and businesses, while their weak enforcement can raise concerns about government effectiveness in protecting people and the environment. Governments must renew efforts to design and review rules and build trust, the report said. "To navigate today's complex policy environment, with fast technological changes and growing demands for efficiency and effectiveness, governments need to ensure that regulatory frameworks are adaptive, efficient and proportionate to underlying policy objectives," **OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann** said. "By tackling unnecessary regulations, and ensuring regulatory frameworks are focused on better outcomes, governments can contribute to a supportive policy environment for stronger and more sustainable growth. This fourth edition of the *Regulatory Policy Outlook* provides evidence-based recommendations for developing best practice regulatory frameworks to achieve these objectives."

New analysis shows that OECD Members have made good progress toward improving stakeholder engagement, particularly by using digital platforms, extending consultation periods, and enabling the public to provide evidence on both the anticipated and actual impacts of regulations. However, there is room for improvement. Only 33% of OECD countries provide direct feedback to stakeholder engagement, missing the chance to make interaction more meaningful and encourage future participation. Broader consultations are also needed to ensure inclusivity and reduce concerns around undue influence. Regulations are more likely to be effective when based on sound evidence. Governments have improved evidence-based decision making, requiring an examination of more social and environmental considerations alongside economic ones when using tools such as regulatory impact assessment. These efforts should continue and be followed by effective implementation of regulations, the report said. Current regulatory frameworks often lag behind technological progress, and struggle with overlapping jurisdictions, legal fragmentation, and outdated rules. To better support innovation while managing risks, governments must embrace adapt and learn from experience to improve anticipatory governance, while also strengthening co-operation and co-ordination across authorities. The use of strategic intelligence tools like horizon

scanning and strategic foresight can also help anticipate and mitigate risks, ensuring rules stay relevant and effective even as circumstances change.

Most OECD countries have scope to further support compliance and desired outcomes by adopting risk-based analysis. This would allow enforcement resources to be focused on where non-compliance would have the greatest impact, saving both businesses and government time and resources, while maintaining positive outcomes. However, less than 50% of OECD countries currently allow regulators to base enforcement work on risk criteria. Significant challenges remain in implementing governments' commitments to environmental protection while preserving economic growth. Only 21% of OECD Members review rules with a "green lens" of environmental sustainability across sectors and the wider economy. Deepening such reviews to consider the local and broader impact of pollution, carbon emissions and biodiversity is critical to ensure that regulations actively support the green transition. To achieve meaningful environmental outcomes, governments should streamline the complex patchwork of rules with environmental objectives, viewing them as a system, reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens including across borders, prioritising risk-based regulation and focusing enforcement efforts on areas where the greatest risks to the environment exist.

To access the report, data, and summary, visit: [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-regulatory-policy-outlook-2025\\_56b60e39-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-regulatory-policy-outlook-2025_56b60e39-en.html). For further information on OECD work on regulatory policy, visit: <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/policy-issues/regulatory-reform.html>. Media enquiries should be directed to [Lawrence Speer](#) in the [OECD Media Office](#) (+33 1 45 24 97 00). *Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.*

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 04/09/2025

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## **Policy Dialogue Crucial to Resilient Partnership, Say Top Voices at Forum**

With China and Malaysia entering a new era of bilateral relations and sustained academic collaboration, policy dialogue will be essential to realizing the shared vision of a closer and more resilient partnership. That was the consensus of experts and scholars at a recent China-Malaysia think tank forum at Universiti Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. The forum, themed on deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership and advancing the building of a China-Malaysia community with a shared future, brought together leading voices from think tanks and academic institutions of both countries. Zhen Zhanmin, vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that under the guidance of head-of-state diplomacy, China and Malaysia have made remarkable progress since establishing a comprehensive strategic partnership.

"China and Malaysia enjoy a time-honored friendship that continues to thrive," Zhen said. "To further deepen bilateral relations, we must strengthen political trust, uphold multilateralism and advance practical cooperation for mutual benefit. People-to-people exchanges remain key to fostering mutual understanding."

Zhen underscored the importance of think tanks in realizing that goal. "Think tanks in both countries should leverage their strengths to jointly study key challenges in bilateral relations and offer forward-looking, targeted and actionable recommendations to policymakers," he noted. Yvonne Lim Ai Lian, associate deputy vice-chancellor at Universiti Malaya, echoed that view, stating that academic and cultural exchanges are vital tools in building mutual trust. She said close cooperation between universities and think tanks in Malaysia and China has created platforms for academic dialogue and student exchanges, laying a solid foundation for the long-term development of people-to-people ties. In recent years, academic cooperation between China and Malaysia has flourished. Over 10,000 Malaysian students have studied in China, while a growing number of Chinese scholars and researchers have participated in collaborative programs in Malaysia. Institutions such as Universiti Malaya and Xiamen University Malaysia campus have played a key role in promoting academic research, language learning and cultural awareness.

The forum also addressed economic collaboration, particularly in the palm oil industry — an area of strategic importance for Malaysia. Chan Foong Hin, Malaysia's former deputy minister of plantation and commodities, emphasized that bilateral ties are at a new juncture, especially following high-level visits since 2023 that have accelerated cooperation. Malaysia hopes to deepen research and industrial collaboration with China in multiple sectors, including palm oil, to enhance product quality and promote sustainable growth, Chan said. According to Belvinder Sron, CEO of the Malaysian Palm Oil Council, Malaysia remains a key strategic supplier to China. In 2024, bilateral trade between the two countries reached \$212.04 billion, with China maintaining its status as Malaysia's largest trading partner for the 16th consecutive year. Malaysia exported 2.74 million metric tons of palm oil and related products to China last year, including 1.39 million metric tons of palm oil and 1.35 million tons of derivatives. "We are dedicated to positioning Malaysian palm oil as a global benchmark for sustainable development," the CEO said.

Wang Cheng, head of MPOC's operations across China, highlighted the long-standing trust Chinese consumers place in Malaysian palm oil due to its quality and stable supply. "We will continue to explore innovative pathways for industry upgrading and deepen bilateral engagement in trade and technology," she said. The China-Malaysia think tank forum, first launched in 2016, has been held alternately in both countries for seven sessions. This year's forum was co-hosted by the National Institute of International Strategy under CASS and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Universiti Malaya, and organized by the Institute of China Studies at Universiti Malaya. Over the years, the forum has become a cornerstone of academic

diplomacy, fostering mutual understanding, shaping public discourse and enhancing long-term cooperation between China and Malaysia.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 04/17/2025

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## **Stronger Immunization Policies Needed as Vaccine Confidence Falls**

A new APEC report raises concerns over declining vaccine confidence and uptake across the region, increasing the risk of preventable disease outbreaks and underscoring the urgent need for stronger immunization policies and cross-border collaboration. Findings from the updated [APEC Regional Dashboard on Vaccination Across the Life-Course](#) reveal gaps in vaccine access, financing and data collection, with only eight economies meeting the 95 percent measles herd immunity threshold in 2023—a 27 percent drop from 2022. The dashboard also highlights a decline in vaccine confidence, with adults in at least 16 APEC economies increasingly questioning the safety, effectiveness and importance of vaccines. “Strengthening life-course immunization is critical to building resilient healthcare systems and ensuring economic sustainability across APEC economies,” said Dr Victor Yosef Melt Campos, Chair of the [APEC Health Working Group](#). “A well-vaccinated population is not only healthier but also more productive, contributing to stronger communities and a more robust workforce,” Dr Campos added. “Investing in immunization helps economies safeguard public health, enhance social well-being, and create a foundation for sustainable growth and prosperity.”

Developed by the APEC Vaccines Task Force under the Health Working Group, the dashboard tracks progress on the [APEC Action Plan on Vaccination Across the Life-Course](#), a regional strategy that supports member economies in expanding vaccine access, strengthening immunization programs and preparing for future health challenges. The dashboard highlights the need to expand immunization programs beyond childhood to include adolescents, adults and at-risk groups. Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic underscore the importance of scalable, adaptable strategies to strengthen vaccine uptake across different population segments. Gaps in data collection and assessment remain a critical challenge, according to the dashboard. Only one-third of APEC economies currently track the indirect benefits of vaccination, despite growing evidence that adult vaccines can return up to 19 times their initial investment. Additionally, just over half of APEC economies have a comprehensive framework to assess both the economic and social benefits of immunization. Strengthening evidence-based policymaking and ensuring that vaccine investments align with broader economic and public health goals will be key to improving immunization outcomes across the region.

The dashboard also underscores the importance financial sustainability for immunization programs. The dashboard highlights best practices, including free

vaccines for older adults, multi-year procurement contracts and tax levies to support vaccine programs. Pandemic preparedness remains a key priority. While 90 percent of APEC economies have established preparedness strategies, fewer have introduced catch-up vaccination plans to address routine immunization disruptions. Strengthening surveillance systems, harmonizing regulatory frameworks and ensuring rapid vaccine deployment in response to outbreaks will be essential to mitigating future health crises. With 2025 marking the halfway point for both the APEC Action Plan on Vaccination Across the Life-Course and the WHO Immunization Agenda 2030, the dashboard urges member economies to accelerate efforts to strengthen immunization systems. Sustainable and adaptable policies will be essential to ensuring resilient vaccination programs amid evolving public health challenges. The APEC Vaccines Task Force remains committed to fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing to support economies in enhancing immunization coverage. For more information, visit [this page](#) or contact [apecvtf@gmail.com](mailto:apecvtf@gmail.com).

From <https://www.apec.org/> 04/10/2025

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## East Asia

### **CHINA: Legislature Mulls Improving Foreign-related Arbitration System with Draft Revision**

China's top legislature is set to mull a draft revision to the country's Law on Arbitration, which features provisions to further improve the foreign-related arbitration system, at a session next week, a spokesperson said on Friday. The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) will convene a session between April 27 and 30, and lawmakers are scheduled to deliberate on the draft revision for the second review, according to Huang Haihua, spokesperson for the Legislative Affairs Commission of the NPC Standing Committee, at a press conference. The latest draft also includes measures to strengthen supervision over arbitration and enhance the courts' support for arbitration, Huang said, citing stipulations on optimized qualification requirements for an arbitrator and clear stipulation that the people's courts should process applications for the preservation of property or evidence from an arbitration committee in a timely manner. The draft seeks to better align with international rules, increase the credibility and competitiveness of arbitration, and serve the country's high-quality development and high-standard opening-up, the spokesperson said. The legislators reviewed the draft at a session in November last year, and it was further improved after the commission extensively solicited opinions from various sectors and conducted research on some key issues with relevant parties, according to Huang.

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

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## **Draft Law Revision Reviewed to Boost Oversight, Int'l Cooperation in Arbitration**

A draft revision to China's Law on Arbitration, which aims to curb fraudulent arbitration and strengthen international cooperation, was submitted for a second reading Sunday. The bill was submitted to the ongoing session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) after the first reading in November 2024. The draft proposes stricter oversight of arbitration practices, requiring tribunals to reject arbitration claims by parties if they are found to have fabricated evidence or colluded maliciously in an attempt to harm national interests, public interests, or the legitimate rights and interests of others through arbitration. It also aims to further improve foreign-related arbitration system and actively align with international common rules to enhance the credibility and international competitiveness of arbitration.

Key revisions include provisions to bolster exchanges and cooperation between Chinese arbitration agencies and overseas arbitration institutions and relevant international organizations, as well as participation in the formulation of international arbitration rules. Additionally, the draft added stipulations for recognizing and enforcing foreign arbitration awards in China. Applications for recognition and enforcement of foreign arbitration awards can be filed with intermediate people's courts in places where people subject to enforcement reside or their property is located, or at a place which has appropriate connection with the dispute adjudicated. Courts shall handle such cases in accordance with relevant international treaties, or the principle of reciprocity.

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## **China to Roll Out Measures to Keep Employment, Economy Stable**

China will roll out measures to keep its employment and economic performance stable and promote high-quality development, Zhao Chenxin, deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission, told a press conference on Monday. Zhao detailed the new measures in five key areas: supporting employment, keeping foreign trade stable, promoting consumption, expanding effective investment, and fostering a sound environment for development. On employment, the government will encourage businesses to maintain stable staffing levels, intensify vocational skills training, expand work-relief programs, and strengthen public employment services, according to Zhao. To stabilize foreign trade development, key measures include introducing tailored policies to assist export enterprises in mitigating risks, expanding the global presence of service products, and encouraging foreign-funded enterprises to reinvest in China.

On the consumption front, measures will be unveiled to boost service consumption, improve eldercare services for disabled seniors, stimulate auto sales, and establish skills-oriented wage distribution systems, he said. Efforts to expand effective investment will focus on improving consumption-related infrastructure, galvanizing private investment, and introducing new policy-based financial instruments. In terms of creating a favorable environment for stable development, China will continue to keep the capital markets stable and active, consolidate the stable development of the real estate market, and increase financial support for the real economy, Zhao noted. He said that all policies have been designed with a strong emphasis on specificity and practicality so that enterprises and individuals feel tangible benefits, and the government will introduce each measure once it is ready.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/28/2025

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## **China's Top Legislator Emphasizes Implementation of Amended Lawmakers Law**

China's top legislator Zhao Leji on Tuesday stressed fully implementing the newly amended Law on Deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC) and to the Local People's Congresses at Various Levels. Zhao, chairman of the 14th NPC Standing Committee and also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks at a symposium where he exchanged views with a group of lawmakers attending the ongoing 15th session of the 14th NPC Standing Committee. Zhao said the move to amend the lawmakers law, which was adopted at the third session of the 14th NPC in March, had strengthened legal guarantees for legislators to exercise their powers, perform their duties, and play their roles. He stressed that lawmakers should consistently uphold the Party's leadership in all aspects of their work, perform their duties for the people under their supervision, and actively respond to major public concerns.

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## **China Adopts Law Dedicated to Promoting Private Sector**

China's national lawmakers on Wednesday voted to adopt the country's first fundamental law dedicated to promoting the private sector, underscoring support for a key part of the world's second-largest economy. After over a year of legislative process, the private sector promotion law, passed at a session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, will take effect on May 20, 2025. Comprising 78 articles in nine chapters, the law covers such areas as fair competition, investment and financing promotion, scientific and technological innovation, regulatory guidance, service support, rights and interests protection and

legal liabilities. The law will further optimize the development environment for the private economy, ensure fair market competition for all types of economic entities, and foster the sound development of both the private sector and its practitioners. Private enterprises have long been a key driving force behind China's economic ascendance, contributing more than 60 percent of GDP and 80 percent of urban employment. By the end of March 2025, the country's more-than-57-million registered private enterprises made up over 92 percent of all businesses in China.

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## **China Passes New Law in Major Push to Bolster Private Sector**

China's national lawmakers on Wednesday voted to adopt the country's first fundamental law dedicated to promoting the private sector, underscoring support for a key part of the world's second-largest economy. After over a year of legislative process, the private sector promotion law, passed at a session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, will take effect on May 20, 2025. The law stipulates that the promotion of the sustainable, healthy and high-quality development of the private economy is a significant and long-term policy of China. From ensuring fair market access and financing support to enhancing services and protection of original innovation, the 78-article law cements efforts to encourage, support and guide the growth of the private sector. The law will provide a clearer and more solid legal guarantee for the private sector, said Li Shuguang, a professor at China University of Political Science and Law.

This marks China's latest step in strengthening the sector -- recognized by the law as a key component of the socialist market economy -- amid efforts to tackle economic headwinds both at home and abroad. Officials and analysts view the formation and adoption of the law as "highly timely and absolutely essential," given the private sector's significant role in the economy. Boosting the private sector should feature prominently on the country's economic policy agenda: Whether it is to stimulate domestic demand, expand the domestic market, or boost production and improve the quality of supply, private businesses will be a key participant and contributor, according to Anbound, an independent think tank in China. Private enterprises have long been a key driving force behind China's economic growth, contributing more than 60 percent of GDP and 80 percent of urban employment. By the end of March 2025, the country's more-than-57-million registered private enterprises made up over 92 percent of all businesses in China.

From electric vehicle maker BYD to artificial intelligence innovator DeepSeek and robotics pioneer Unitree Robotics, private enterprises have also become key players in China's push for innovation-driven growth. Yet, industry insiders note that challenges remain -- domestically, private businesses may face financing constraints and invisible market access barriers in some sectors; while abroad, they must

navigate increasing impact from external shocks. The law will transform policy support into legal guarantees, giving entrepreneurs greater reassurance and motivation to keep moving forward, said Qi Xiangdong, chairman of cybersecurity firm Qi-Anxin and vice chairman of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce. "The rule of law is the best business environment," Qi said. In February, the country held a high-level symposium on private enterprises, which was widely viewed as a strong signal to boost the confidence and growth of the private sector. A month later, at the "two sessions," the country reiterated support for private enterprises, vowing to take effective moves to stimulate the vitality of all market entities.

To support the private sector, China has established a special bureau under the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) dedicated to serving the sector's development. Multiple provincial-level regions, including Guangdong, Shanxi, Qinghai and Zhejiang, have all set up such bureaus. Efforts to level the playing field are also underway. Last week, the NDRC unveiled the new version of the market access negative list, which specifies fields that are off-limits to both domestic and overseas business entities, reducing the number of items on the list from 117 to 106. Nan Yi, chairman of Wontai Group, said the law will support private firms' entry into sectors such as infrastructure and energy, and provide a strong guarantee for their continuous investment in research and development. "The enactment of this law will inject strong impetus into the sound development of the private economy," Nan said.

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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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## **Japan Upper House Begins Debates on Active Cyberdefense Bill**

The House of Councillors, the upper chamber of Japan's parliament, on Friday

began deliberations on an active cyberdefense bill. The bill is aimed at allowing the government to monitor online communication in order to neutralize threats if it detects any sign of a major cyberattack. An independent supervisory body will also be established to ensure strict operations. The proposed active cyberdefense system "is based on systems already introduced in the United States and major European countries," Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba told a plenary meeting. The system "is essential to protect the safe life and our country's peace, security and national interests," he also said. After going through modifications, such as the addition of a provision to respect the secrecy of communication as guaranteed by the Constitution, the bill passed the House of Representatives, the lower chamber, earlier this month.

From <https://www.nippon.com> 04/18/2025

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## **Japan to Assist in Achieving International Standardization for Specialist Areas; Solar, Sectors Include Solar, Hydrogen Technologies**

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry will help key five sectors, such as perovskite solar cells, to achieve international standardization as part of efforts to help their competitiveness in cutting-edge technologies, The Yomiuri Shimbun has learned. In addition to perovskite solar cells, the ministry has named four sectors that Japan is seen to excel in: quantum, hydrogen and ammonia, bio-manufacturing and data linkage platforms. It has designated these areas as priorities to achieve standardization and will promote their development through partnerships with the private sector. It will be the first time for the government to promote the standardization of specific areas. The ministry plans to formulate a national strategy on international standards by June. International standards are decided by the International Organization for Standardization and International Electrotechnical Commission and consist of specifications regarding products and technologies, including testing methods. Common examples include QR codes as well as R14 and R6 dry cell batteries. The standards ensure that products and service are compatible and safe to use and contribute to future technological development.

If Japan can push international standards in specific fields, it will help to gain the upper hand in overseas markets. The ministry will head efforts to set up specialized human resources for the development of the strategy and rules, and will promote the development and utilization of the standards. Perovskite solar cells were developed in Japan and have been positioned as a game changer for the future expansion of renewable energy. Sekisui Chemical Co. has been working to mass-produce light and bendable film-type perovskite solar cells, while Panasonic Holdings Corp. has been developing perovskite glass panels which can be used for construction. Global competition is also intensifying in the development of quantum computers, which may outperform supercomputers in performance. All these fields are expected to see a rise in demand globally and are becoming increasingly important from the

viewpoint of economic security. While Japan has led efforts for international standardization through private-sector initiatives, the United States, China and some European nations have already pushed forward with such efforts as a national strategy. The Japanese government is set to cultivate relevant expertise in the five priority areas and apply it to other fields.

From <https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp> 04/22/2025

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## **Guidelines for New Law to Prohibit Tech Giant from Hindering App Store Distributors from Providing New Stores on Market**

Guidelines for a new law to regulate giant tech companies will clarify the prohibited acts of the firms imposing on app companies fees and other financial burdens that make it difficult for such companies to distribute apps on new app stores, sources said. Tech giants have been found to circumvent restrictions and hinder the business of new app store market entrants in Europe, where similar regulations are already in place. The guidelines, therefore, are aimed at clarifying specific acts that constitute violations of the law and preventing companies from circumventing regulations. The guidelines are scheduled to be published by July before the full implementation of the new law on promotion of competition for specified smartphone software by the end of the year. The new law will prohibit tech giants from hindering other companies from providing app stores. However, in Europe, there have been reports that Apple Inc. charges high fees to app companies who distribute their apps to new app stores, making it difficult for them to use new app stores. Observers say that this in turn makes it difficult for other companies to enter the app store business.

Pornography apps have also emerged as a problem in Europe following the entry of other companies into the app store business. The guidelines therefore will state that allowing parents and others to restrict access to app stores provided by other firms does not constitute a violation from the perspective of protecting youth by preventing the use of age-restricted apps or unintended in-app purchases. While the new law will prohibit large tech companies from taking discriminatory actions against app companies, the guidelines will clarify that screening apps for distribution is not a violation of the law from the perspective of ensuring cybersecurity and public order. The provision is also meant to prevent dark patterns, or deceptive design elements on websites and apps that are meant to trick or manipulate users into consenting to something they did not originally intend.

From <https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp> 04/23/2025

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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.

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## **SOUTH KOREA: Gov't to Devise Support Measures for Chip Industry in Response to U.S. Tariffs**

The government will "swiftly" devise support measures for the local chip industry to cushion the impact of the United States' planned tariffs on semiconductor imports, the industry minister said Thursday. Industry Minister Ahn Duk-geun said the government measures will be announced in the very near future while meeting with officials from local chip manufacturers to discuss a response strategy against the planned U.S. tariffs. U.S. President Donald Trump has warned of tariffs on semiconductor imports since taking office in January, and reaffirmed the plan last week, saying they will begin "very soon." In Thursday's meeting, semiconductor industry officials called on the government to actively negotiate with the U.S. and devise support measures to minimize the tariffs' impact on local businesses, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. The business officials noted the proposed tariffs may have a limited impact on the local chip industry, pointing to the U.S.' limited production capacity and South Korea's high global market share, especially in high-value products, such as high bandwidth memory.

They still expressed serious concerns over growing uncertainties in the global trade market that may adversely affect the local industry, as well as the economy, according to the ministry. The ministry said the government's potential support measures for the chip industry may include tariff response vouchers and efforts to reduce cost burdens from materials and components that rely heavily on imports. The government is also reviewing expanding the domestic use of Korean-made chips for the national artificial intelligence (AI) computing center and assisting Korean companies in exporting their chips to AI data centers in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. To encourage corporate investment in the semiconductor sector, the government is considering stronger incentives, such as additional financial support for the semiconductor cluster in Yongin, just south of Seoul, and regulatory streamlining.

The ministry also said there will be efforts to enhance the overall competitiveness of the semiconductor ecosystem, including the construction of fabrication plants for advanced chips and the launch of large-scale research and development (R&D) projects. Specifically, the government aims to invest 1 trillion won (US\$674.3 million)

in developing on-device AI chips for use in the automotive, robotics, defense and Internet of Things (IoT) industries. "The private and public sectors must work together to address the trade and supply chain risks we currently face," Ahn said. "The government will continue negotiations with the U.S. through various channels and swiftly implement support measures for the semiconductor industry by mobilizing the nation's full capabilities as the tariff war is also a battle for attracting corporate investment," he added.

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## **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

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## **South-East Asia**

### **CAMBODIA: Capital Takes Measures to Prevent, Reduce Air Pollution**

Cambodia's Phnom Penh Municipality on Tuesday took measures to curb air pollution in the months of April and May. Phnom Penh Municipal Governor Khuong Sreng said the measures were designed to better manage sources of air pollution in order to ensure the well-being of the people as well as to improve the capital's beauty. "It's essential to take measures to prevent wildfires and burning of grass, straw, garbage, and solid waste at open spaces, dumpsites, and construction sites in the city," he said. Sreng advised authorities to educate construction owners, construction contractors, mixed concrete business owners, and stone, sand transport business

owners to prevent dust or inert particles from floating into the air. "The Phnom Penh Municipal Department of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation must inspect the standard level of sulfur contained in fuels at gas stations in Phnom Penh," he said. He also asked municipal environment officials to closely monitor air quality and inert particles floating in the air in order to prevent risk to public health. According to experts, 70 percent of air pollution came from vehicle fuels, 20 percent from dust at construction sites and 10 percent from other sources such as rubbish burning.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/23/2025

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## **SINGAPORE: PM Outlines Vision for Regional, Global Cooperation amid Global Tensions**

To navigate an "increasingly fragmented and turbulent world," Singaporean Prime Minister Lawrence Wong has proposed three key thrusts to strengthen the city-state's regional and global partnerships. Speaking at the S Rajaratnam Lecture on Wednesday, Wong said the first thrust is to "contribute actively to the stewardship of the global commons." Singapore, while maintaining its focus on Southeast Asia, will set aside more resources for partners further afield, including those in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, the Pacific, and the Caribbean. The second thrust is to "champion deeper regional cohesion and integration." Noting that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) remains "central to Singapore's foreign policy," Wong called for eliminating 100 percent of tariffs across the region, further reducing non-tariff barriers, and concluding the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement. He also urged the upgrading of ASEAN's free trade agreements with key partners such as China, India, and South Korea. The third thrust is to strengthen Singapore's global network of partnerships. Wong advocated for greater collaboration between the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the European Union (EU), while also deepening the ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership. Beyond economic ties, Singapore seeks to expand strategic partnerships with like-minded countries and forge new connections in regions like the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, he said. To that end, Singapore plans to open new diplomatic missions in Africa and Latin America in the coming years. Wong proposed the three thrusts in response to what he called "deeply worrying" global trends. While such practices, like using economic tools to advance national interests, are not new, he noted that they have reached new intensity with the latest U.S. tariff moves.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/17/2025

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## **VIETNAM: National Assembly Reforms Laws to Create Favourable Investment Environment**

The HCM City Investment and Trade Promotion Centre (ITPC), in coordination with

the Việt Nam International Arbitration Centre (VIAC), held a seminar this morning (April 24) titled “The National Assembly’s Law No. 57/2024/QH15 and New Investment Policies.” The National Assembly of Việt Nam has recently passed amendments to four major laws governing investment and business activities. Collectively referred to as Law No. 57, these amendments include revisions to the Law on Planning, the Law on Investment, the Law on Public-Private Partnership Investment (PPP), and the Law on Bidding. Law No. 57 is designed to address existing legal bottlenecks, improve the business climate, unlock private sector resources, and create stronger momentum for economic development. As Việt Nam navigates an era of rapid economic transformation marked by both opportunities and challenges, ensuring a modern and effective legal framework is critical. It not only fosters sustainable development but also enhances investor confidence—particularly among foreign investors who are playing an increasingly important role in Việt Nam’s economic growth.

### **Key Highlights of Law No. 57**

**Simplification of Administrative Procedures:** The law streamlines investment processes, cutting red tape, and making it easier for investors to initiate and operate projects. **Decentralisation and Delegation of Authority:** Local governments now have more power to manage and approve projects, significantly reducing bureaucratic delays. **Special Investment Procedures Introduced:** Law No. 57 introduces a new investment mechanism tailored to high-priority zones such as industrial parks, export processing zones, high-tech parks, IT zones, free trade zones, and functional areas within economic zones. This measure provides a flexible and expedited route for large-scale projects. **Revised List of Conditional Business Sectors:** Some sectors now require new compliance measures. This may affect businesses that were previously operating legally but now fall short of updated legal conditions, risking license revocation, capital adjustments, or limited expansion rights. These regulatory changes necessitate immediate attention from the business community.

Companies—especially foreign-invested enterprises—must proactively update their legal understanding and review current operations to ensure compliance. Failure to do so could lead to legal disputes with the government or between investors. Việt Nam’s National Assembly plans to continue refining its legal system, prioritising economic growth while ensuring macroeconomic stability, inflation control, and domestic financial balance. Upcoming reforms are expected in laws related to enterprises, digital industries, science and technology, innovation, and advertising. These changes aim to further institutionalise investment incentives and flexible mechanisms for bidding and PPPs, especially in the innovation and digital transformation sectors. Of notable interest is Việt Nam’s proposal to establish international financial centres in HCM City and Đà Nẵng City. This marks a strategic leap in attracting global capital and positioning Việt Nam on the regional financial map. These centres will operate under 15 special policy groups, offering tax incentives, flexible foreign exchange and banking policies, open capital markets, and

advanced dispute resolution mechanisms. Foreign firms will be allowed to set up holding companies with cross-ownership without complex investment registration, and will be permitted to apply international accounting standards. Law No. 57 reflects Việt Nam's strong commitment to law modernisation, investment facilitation, and sustainable development. It sends a powerful message to both domestic and international investors that Việt Nam is evolving into a more open, competitive, and investor-friendly economy.

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## South Asia

### **INDIA: Unveiling New Electronics Manufacturing Scheme to Boost Global Role**

In a major boost to India's electronics manufacturing ecosystem, Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology, Railways, and Information & Broadcasting, Ashwini Vaishnaw, inaugurated VVDN Technologies' largest Surface Mount Technology (SMT) Line and Mechanical Innovation Park at the company's Global Innovation Park in Manesar, Haryana. The event marked a significant milestone in India's efforts to deepen its role in global electronics value chains. Highlighting the progress made over the last decade under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, the Minister announced that the recently approved Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme will soon be implemented. This initiative is set to complement the National Semiconductor Mission by covering passive components, thereby completing the entire ecosystem required for electronics component manufacturing. Vaishnaw emphasised that the Indian electronics sector has grown remarkably, with production increasing fivefold to ₹11 lakh crore and exports expanding sixfold, crossing ₹3.25 lakh crore. Describing this as a key success story under the Make in India initiative, he stated that the sector now employs over 25 lakh individuals and is on a path to exponential growth. Speaking at the inauguration, the Minister said, "India is no longer just a manufacturing hub but is emerging as a global leader in electronics design and innovation. Our talent pool is not only assembling products but designing complex, AI-driven systems, which gives us a competitive edge globally."

During his visit, Vaishnaw interacted with over 5,000 engineers working on cutting-edge technologies at VVDN's R&D facilities. He also inspected VVDN's advanced labs, including the Server R&D Lab, 5G R&D Lab, and Video Image Tuning Lab. The Minister highlighted the growing capability of the country in developing design tools domestically, a major step towards achieving technological self-reliance. He also lauded the recent deployment of 6,000 AI servers by VVDN as a demonstration of India's advancing hardware capabilities. The Minister reiterated the government's commitment to developing a trusted electronics manufacturing

base, anchored in intellectual property protection, indigenous innovation, and a resilient rare-earth supply chain. A three-tier skilling strategy was also outlined, focusing on basic training, on-site product-specific modules, and industry-aligned university courses, particularly vital for capital-intensive skills in the electronics sector. The newly launched SMT Line, VVDN' s largest to date, supports PCB sizes up to 850mm x 560mm and operates at a speed of 250,000 components per hour. It will enable the mass production of high-tech products such as AI servers, networking devices, and motherboards. The 1.5 lakh sq. ft. Mechanical Innovation Park houses state-of-the-art facilities for tool-making, CNC machining, EDM, and injection moulding, facilitating a complete design-to-manufacturing ecosystem. These facilities are expected to generate over 3,000 skilled jobs, advancing the government' s employment and skilling vision.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 04/19/2025

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## Central-West Asia

### **KYRGYZSTAN: President Signs Law to Launch Pilot of National Digital Currency**

President of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Zhaparov has signed the constitutional law "On Amendments to the Constitutional Law on the National Bank," paving the way for the introduction of Kyrgyzstan's national digital currency, the digital som, Trend reports via the presidential administration. The law was adopted by the parliament on March 20, 2025, and sets the legal foundation for the development, issuance, and circulation of the digital som, as well as the creation of its supporting technological platform. The primary objective of the law is to launch a pilot project for the prototype of the digital som and formally define its status within the country's monetary system. According to the law: The National Bank holds the exclusive right to issue the digital som, determine its circulation procedures, and manage the operation of the digital som platform. The digital som is recognized as legal tender in digital form within the territory of Kyrgyzstan. It will be issued and circulated through a specialized platform operated by the National Bank. The platform represents the technological and software infrastructure for issuing, accounting, and distributing the digital som. The National Bank is also authorized to: Develop and approve payment rules for banks and other regulated entities using the platform. Define cryptographic security standards to ensure safe transactions and prevent fraud. Exercise additional functions related to the operation of the digital som platform in accordance with Kyrgyzstan's legislation on the payment system.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/17/2025

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### **Kyrgyzstan Approves New Electricity Tariff Policy**

The Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan has approved a new medium-term electricity tariff policy for the period 2025–2030, Trend reports via the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan. The resolution was signed by the Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers, Adylbek Kasymaliev. Under the new structure, starting May 1, 2025, residential consumers using up to 700 kWh per month will rise by 23.8 percent, from 1.11 through 1.37 soms per kWh (from \$0,013 - through \$0,016), with annual increases of 20 percent thereafter. The tariff will increase by 8.5 percent, from 2.39 to 2.6 soms per kWh (from \$0.027 to \$0.03) for consumption above 700 kWh. According to the project justification, 82 percent of households consume electricity within the social norm of 700 kWh per month, while 18 percent exceed this threshold. For non-residential consumers, such as social and public organizations, electric vehicle charging stations, and energy-intensive industries, the policy suggests annual adjustments based on inflation and a 3.5 percent average exchange rate change for the US dollar.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/30/2025

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## **New Law in Kyrgyzstan Establishes Penalties for Denial of Digital Som Payments**

A fresh piece of legislation inked by President Sadyr Zhaparov lays down the law, bringing a stick to those who turn their noses up at Kyrgyzstan's national digital currency, the digital som, Trend reports via the presidential administration. The provision is part of broader legislative amendments aimed at defining the legal status of the digital som and establishing a framework for its pilot launch. Adopted by the parliament on March 20, 2025, the law amends several key legal acts, including the Civil Code, the Budget Code, and the Law on Consumer Protection. Key provisions of the law include: - Incorporating the concept of the digital som into existing laws; - Prohibiting the use of terms like “digital som” and “digital som platform” in business names; - Adding a new article (303-1) to the Code of Offenses, introducing fines for refusal to accept the digital som; - Expanding the Law on the Payment System with definitions and regulations related to digital currency, including requirements for finality of settlements; - Introducing requirements for banks when conducting transactions involving the digital som. Thus, the digital som will be in the same boat as cash and non-cash forms, with all three being on equal footing and fully interchangeable.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/30/2025

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## **President of Kyrgyzstan Seals New Law on Insurance and Insurance Activities**

President Sadyr Zhaparov has signed the new Law "On Insurance and Insurance Activities," which was adopted by the parliament on March 20, 2025, Trend reports

via the administration of the president. The law lays the foundation for a modern insurance market structure and aims to enhance the protection of policyholders and insured individuals, improve the financial resilience of insurers, and contribute to the development of the national economy. Moreover, it outlines the key principles governing insurance as an entrepreneurial activity, including the procedures for establishing, licensing, regulating, and terminating insurance and reinsurance companies. The law also defines the rules for other individuals and entities operating in the insurance market and sets out the responsibilities of state authorities in regulating, overseeing, and supervising market participants. The primary goal of the law is to create a favorable and stable insurance environment that supports economic growth, safeguards the interests of citizens and businesses, and strengthens Kyrgyzstan's position in the global insurance market.

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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

## **TURKMENISTAN: Parliament Tightening Up Legal Framework with Fresh Batch of Transport Laws**

During the eighth session of the seventh convocation of the Majlis (Parliament) of Turkmenistan, lawmakers rolled up their sleeves and gave the green light to a batch of laws designed to push the country's socio-economic development forward, Trend reports. The newly enacted laws were designed in accordance with the priority areas of state policy under the leadership of President Serdar Berdymukhammedov and went through the wringer with a fine-tooth comb by the necessary committees, ministries, and agencies. Among the key decisions was the approval of an updated version of the Law of Turkmenistan "On the Court," which modernizes the country's legal framework for the judiciary. The parliament also ratified Turkmenistan's accession to the 1988 Protocol to the International Convention on the Cargo Mark, reinforcing the country's commitment to improving maritime safety standards. Legislative changes also extended to the transportation sector, with an updated "Road Transport Law" that focuses on enhancing transport safety and clarifying the responsibilities of regulatory bodies, including the Cabinet of Ministers and the "Türkmenawtoulaglary" agency. At the conclusion of the session, the Ombudsman for Human Rights, Yazguly Gurbannazarov, delivered the annual report on the accomplishments achieved over the past year.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/14/2025

## **President of Turkmenistan Approves Major Amendments to Road Transport Law**

President of Turkmenistan, Serdar Berdymukhammedov, has approved amendments to the Law on Road Transport, designed to modernize legal regulations in the sector, Trend reports. The updated version of Article 10 clarifies the roles of key regulatory bodies, which now include the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan, the Transport and Communications Agency under the Cabinet, and the agency "Türkmenawtoulaglary." Significant revisions have been made to the articles defining the responsibilities of the Transport and Communications Agency. As per the new version of Article 12, the agency will now be responsible for implementing state policy in road transport, issuing licenses, overseeing transportation safety and vehicle maintenance, and representing Turkmenistan in international organizations. Additionally, a new Article 12 has been introduced to define the powers of the "Türkmenawtoulaglary" agency. Its duties include participating in the development of industry programs, setting transport tariffs, issuing route permits, conducting market analysis, and enhancing international cooperation in the sector. The amendments also provide clarity on the procedures for the disposal of road vehicles owned by state enterprises and institutions. These changes are designed to enhance the

efficiency of Turkmenistan's road transport management system and promote stronger international collaboration in the sector.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/21/2025

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## **Turkmenistan Steps into Global Shipping Safety Standards**

Turkmenistan has officially thrown its hat in the ring by signing on to the 1988 Protocol to the International Convention on Load Line 1966, Trend reports. The International Convention delineates stipulations for the freeboard parameters of maritime vessels, encompassing compartmentalization protocols and damage stability assessments, applicable to all craft undertaking international voyages, with delineated exemptions for military vessels, those with a gross tonnage below 150 tons, fishing craft, and private yachts. In accordance with the established protocol, stakeholders are mandated to transmit all newly enacted legislative instruments pertinent to international cargo marking standards to the General Secretariat of the International Maritime Organization (IMO). In 2003, amendments were made to Annex B of the 1988 Protocol, which introduced significant changes concerning the strength and stability of vessels in undamaged condition. These amendments elucidated the stipulations pertaining to diverse maritime components, including but not limited to superstructures, bulkheads, ingress and egress mechanisms, hatches, apertures within engine compartments, elevated decks above the freeboard, portholes, crew safeguarding measures, and safety ingress for personnel access.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/21/2025

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## **Oceania**

### **AUSTRALIA: Low and Mid-Rise Policy to Unlock 112,000 Homes in Five Years**

The Minns Labor Government's Low and Mid-Rise policy is set to deliver 112,000 homes across New South Wales over the next five years as the next stage of the policy comes into effect. The new reforms change planning controls within 800 metres, or 10-minute walk, around 171 town centres and stations to allow dual-occupancies, terraces, townhouses and residential flat buildings across metropolitan Sydney, the Central Coast, Illawarra-Shoalhaven and Hunter regions. Without these changes, New South Wales risks becoming a state without a future because it's simply too expensive to put a roof over your head. The Low and Mid-Rise housing policy will reintroduce housing choice and diversity back into our communities, filling the "missing middle" between high-rise apartments and greenfield development. Terraces, townhouses and residential flat buildings have a long history in NSW urban planning, but over recent decades have effectively been banned across local government areas.

Currently, only two of 33 councils in Greater Sydney allow terraces and townhouses in low-density (R2) zones, and residential flat buildings are prohibited in 60 per cent of all medium-density (R3) zones. The NSW Government's changes will remove the restriction on developing terraces, townhouses and low-rise residential flat buildings on R1 and R2 zoned land, while also removing the restriction on delivering medium rise residential flat buildings on R3 and R4 zoned land in these areas. These changes still allow councils to assess important development conditions including parking, light access and minimum frontages. Allowing these housing types to be permissible again will boost housing supply around transport and town centres, improve affordability, maintain the character of an area and build better communities.

Sites were selected considering the following criteria: •Access to goods and services in the area •Public transport frequencies and travel times •Critical infrastructure capacity hazards and constraints •Local housing targets and rebalancing growth These planning reforms will further enable the rollout of the NSW Pattern Book, so those families, young people and downsizers who select these architecturally designed low and mid-rise designs will be able to build them in areas now zoned for low and mid-rise housing. The Low and Mid-Rise policy has been consulted on extensively, with the NSW Government publicly exhibiting the policy and carefully considering feedback from councils, town planners, architects, developers, Government agencies, and community groups. Due to the extent of bushfire and flood hazards, the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Wollondilly Local Government Areas, have been excluded from stage 2 of the reforms.

Similar to the Transport Oriented Development sites, the planning controls will apply in heritage conservation areas with council assessment and approval, however not on heritage items. This is part of the Minns Labor Government's plan to build a better NSW with a greater choice of homes, so young people, families and workers have somewhere to live in the communities they choose. The policy will come into effect on 28 February 2025. For more information visit <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/low-and-mid-rise-housing-policy> Premier of New South Wales said: "These types of homes have played a really important part in delivering homes over the last century but recently councils have effectively banned them, this reform changes that. "Housing is the single largest cost of living pressure people are facing and these changes will deliver more homes for young people, families and workers.

"The homes built under these reforms will be close to transport, open spaces and services that people need, creating better connected and more liveable neighbourhoods by making the most of existing critical infrastructure." Minister for Planning and Public Spaces Paul Scully said: "This policy fills a gap in new housing supply. Allowing low and mid-rise housing in more locations will help increase the number of homes in our state, improve affordability for renters and buyers and give

people a choice on the type of home they want to live in. “Housing choice and diversity is at the heart of the Minns Government’s planning reforms – a choice of where they want to live, what kind of home they want to live in and when they want to make that move.

“There has been increasing demand for well-located, medium-density housing. These reforms build on the reforms introduced on 1 July 2024, which allowed dual occupancies and semi-detached homes to be built on nearly all low-rise residentially zoned land in NSW. “This will unlock the huge potential of the NSW Pattern Book, with the new patterns being allowed in the areas where these planning controls apply. Those that use the Pattern Book will be able to build in these areas and gain access to a fast-tracked planning approval.”

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

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## **New Strategy to Boost University Pathways and Workforce Readiness in NSW**

The Minns Labor Government has unveiled a bold new strategy to ensure universities align with the state’s workforce and community needs over the next five years. Public Partnerships for Public Benefit: The NSW Higher Education Strategy 2025-29 sets out a strategic framework to enable stronger collaboration between government and universities that targets workforce needs, student pathways, equity and effective public policy. The Government will now work with universities to ensure that academic programs are aligned with current and future workforce demands. Developed in partnership with the state’s public universities, the strategy is the only one of its kind in Australia. A key focus of the strategy is prioritising regional workforce development, addressing critical skills shortages in areas such as early childhood education, aged and disability care, nursing and health related professions to support local economies and communities.

The NSW Government will work with universities to streamline credit recognition and transfer systems between vocational and higher education, making it easier for students to move between different types of study and to tailor their learning to suit their career goals. This is a key pillar of the Minns Labor Government’s broader tertiary education reform agenda, working alongside the NSW Skills Plan, the Industry Policy and Innovation Blueprint to strengthen connections between universities, TAFE NSW, and employers to ensure the state’s workforce is ready for the future. By 2036, nine out of 10 jobs will require a post-secondary qualification, with around half requiring a university degree, and 44% requiring a vocational education and training pathway.

The NSW Government will collaborate with the Commonwealth, Jobs and Skills Australia, and education providers to deliver these reforms and create a higher

education sector that provides the skilled workforce we need today and into the future. Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education, Steve Whan said: “This is an exciting step forward for NSW. Our universities are world-class, and with this strategy, we are ensuring they remain at the forefront of education, research, and industry collaboration. “We know NSW faces major workforce challenges, and this strategy ensures our tertiary sector is agile and responsive to those needs. “Importantly, this is about ensuring people—particularly in regional areas— can access the training and education required to fill critical skill gaps.” “By working closely with universities, TAFE NSW, industry, and the Commonwealth, we’re creating a system that empowers students, supports communities, and drives our state’s economic growth.”

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 04/15/2025

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## **NEW ZEALAND: Modern Civil Aviation Law Comes into Effect**

New Zealand’s new civil aviation law will modernise regulations and ensure New Zealanders are safe in our skies, Acting Transport Minister James Meager says. “A strong aviation sector is integral to New Zealand’s economic success and to ensuring New Zealanders can get to where they need to go for work or leisure,” Mr Meager says. “This Government is committed to supporting the aviation sector to grow and innovate. The new Civil Aviation Act, which comes into force today, focuses on keeping Kiwis safe while allowing for new technology and changing aviation needs. It will ensure we can keep pace with a rapidly changing aviation environment. “A better and more robust process for authorising airline cooperation agreements will improve competition and ensure benefits for New Zealanders. Proposed decisions will be published and open for consultation before a final decision is made, ensuring transparency over the whole process.

The new Act also provides the ability for more on-time performance reporting for airlines and price transparency mechanisms. “As remotely piloted aircraft, commonly referred to as drones, continue to develop, changes will also enable policies and rules to be updated more quickly, to encourage further innovation and investment. “Aviation safety and security have also been boosted through random drug and alcohol testing being introduced for people involved in safety-sensitive work, and AvSec officers will have clearer powers to keep travellers safe. “A new independent review function has also been introduced to enable individuals and organisations to seek expert independent reviews of decisions made by the Director of Civil Aviation, saving them significant time and money. This will enable a faster and more cost-effective alternative to going through the courts and will help ensure that our regulatory processes are fair and transparent. I expect to announce the names of the reviewers in the coming weeks. “I know this legislation is something the aviation sector has been eagerly awaiting, and I thank them for their cooperation as the Act is implemented.”

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 04/05/2025

## Multi-Billion Dollar Defence Plan Unveiled

The Coalition Government today released a multi-billion dollar plan for a modern, combat-capable New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) that pulls its weight internationally and domestically. “Global tensions are increasing rapidly, and New Zealand has stepped up on the world stage, but our current Defence spending is simply too low,” Prime Minister Christopher Luxon says. “This new Defence Capability Plan contains \$12 billion of funding over the next four years, which includes \$9 billion of new spending. This will raise New Zealand’s defence spending from just over one per cent of GDP to more than two per cent in the next eight years. “This blueprint has been designed with a 15-year horizon but deliberately focuses on critical investments needed in the next four years to ensure our Defence Force can adapt as the world around us changes.

“The Government has committed to reviewing the plan every two years. Put simply, this is the floor, not the ceiling, of funding for our Defence Force. “I want to acknowledge our coalition partners, New Zealand First and ACT, for their unwavering support in advancing this plan – and note New Zealand First previously drove the procurement of our new P-8A and Hercules aircraft.” Defence Minister Judith Collins says the world is inherently more dangerous and our personnel are at the frontline of New Zealand’s security. “They cannot do their jobs without the right equipment and conditions. “This plan outlines what resources, equipment and support we need to modernise the NZDF to operate now and in the future,” Ms Collins says.

The 2025 Defence Capability Plan outlines indicative investments to ensure the NZDF is: Combat capable with enhanced lethality and deterrent effect: This includes increased strike capabilities which will increase our ability to deter actions counter to New Zealand’s interests.

A force multiplier with Australia and interoperable with partners: New Zealand and Australia have committed to modernise our alliance and further strengthen our bilateral defence relationship, including the development of a more greatly integrated “Anzac” force. Innovative and has improved situational awareness: Innovation in this plan covers new ways of doing things, as well as exploring new technologies for the NZDF such as uncrewed vehicles, new space technologies, and increased funding for Defence Science & Technology. Ms Collins says the men and women of the NZDF have endured 35 years of cuts and underfunding.

“They join up to serve the people of New Zealand, however that is needed, and we feel immense pride and gratitude when we see them stepping up and into situations that the rest of us are running from,” Ms Collins says. “But the way they were used for a prolonged period of time to patrol Managed Isolation Facilities during Covid led to many experienced personnel – those with 10-15 years’ experience – leaving for other

career options. “That has left us with a hollowed-out middle in our personnel, and this plan allows us to address that. Already our attrition has fallen from 15.8 percent in December 2022 to 7.5 percent in February 2025 – but we know we need to rebuild the core of the NZDF so we can fully utilise the ships, aircraft, vehicles and weapons we already have, while looking to what is needed in the future.

“Our personnel are expected to be called upon more often, in more places, and for longer. For this, they must be equipped and trained for a range of operations, to be more combat capable and able to deter actions adverse to our interests while also being ready to provide essential humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. “This plan does that. It gets our NZDF out of the intensive care unit and not just growing but growing where we need it to.”

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 04/07/2025

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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.”

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 04/16/2025

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## Health Infrastructure Plan Released

Health Minister Simeon Brown has today released New Zealand's first-ever Health Infrastructure Plan, setting out a national, long-term approach to renewing and expanding the country's public health facilities. "This is a first for New Zealand – a single, long-term plan that lays out a clear pipeline for health infrastructure," Mr Brown says. "Our health system is under significant pressure from ageing infrastructure that hasn't kept pace with the needs of a growing and ageing population. "The average age of our public health estate – 1,274 buildings across 86 campuses – is around 47 years. This is creating some significant challenges. Buildings that require major remedial work to avoid service disruption. Facilities with poor seismic ratings or serious compliance risks. Outdated infrastructure that unable to support modern models of care.

"The state of our health infrastructure is not a new challenge; it is a problem that has developed over multiple decades. Addressing it requires a long-term plan to both renew existing capacity, and invest in new facilities, to meet future demand and ensure New Zealanders continue to receive high-quality care. "The Health Infrastructure Plan identifies the more than \$20 billion investment required to meet future health needs and introduces a more efficient way of delivering large hospital projects, called 'Building Hospitals Better'. "Instead of building single, large-scale structures, the plan proposes a staged approach – delivering smaller, more manageable facilities in phases. This will mean patients benefit from modern healthcare environments sooner, while providing greater certainty around delivery timeframes and costs.

"The plan outlines a comprehensive, phased programme of hospital and facility developments across the country to be delivered in three to four stages. This includes major new builds and expansions across the country, featuring new acute services buildings, inpatient units, expanded emergency departments and wards, and upgraded facilities. "It also includes the planning and initial build of the recently announced new hospital in South Auckland – a critical investment for one of the country's fastest-growing regions. "The plan is underpinned by the National Clinical Service and Campus Plan, which seeks to deliver more health services in the community and reduce demand on hospitals. "Building new ambulatory hubs in population centres means services such as radiology, oncology, dialysis, and day-stay surgeries can be delivered closer to the community, while also reducing capital investment costs."

Each project in the pipeline will require a business case and will go through normal funding approval processes by Cabinet. "While the infrastructure deficit will take time to address, this plan is a critical step forward. It outlines what needs to be done, and how we will do it – ensuring New Zealanders have access to modern, safe, and reliable health infrastructure across the country. Dunedin Hospital Next Steps "I am

also announcing that Health New Zealand has started a tender process for the next stage of construction for New Dunedin Hospital's inpatient building, with works to recommence on the former Cadbury site from mid-year. "An Advance Notice will be published on GETS – the Government Electronic Tender Service – to complete the substructure for the building, which is an important step while commercial negotiations for the main construction continue.

"The substructure is the vital foundation of the main hospital structure that will follow, and includes the installation of the lower slab, concreting, and plinths for the base isolators. "Capping of the 324 piles on the site will commence mid-year, followed by work on the perimeter of the basement to form the base for the substructure. The third part of the process will be installing the base isolators and then the frame of the main construction. "Work continues to ensure the design of the inpatient building will deliver health services effectively for generations to come. While this continues, I look forward to seeing the physical progress of the hospital take its next steps from mid-year once the tender is awarded," Mr Brown says.

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## **New Commercial Fish-Landing Rules Come into Force**

Common sense new rules allowing certain species of live fish to be legally returned to the sea will reduce unnecessary red tape and support sustainability, Oceans and Fisheries Minister Shane Jones says. Under the Quota Management System most fish caught by commercial fishers must be kept and taken to shore unless there is an exception in place. The new rules exempt southern bluefin tuna, legal-sized pāua and Bluff oysters from this requirement as long as they are alive and likely to survive being returned to sea. "Returning these species to their fisheries in circumstances when they are likely to survive benefits the sustainability of fish stocks as returned fish will remain part of the spawning population," Mr Jones says. "Commercial fishers have been allowed to return southern bluefin tuna since 2004 but these new rules set out the conditions in which they are likely to survive.

Under the new exception, commercial fishers can return southern bluefin tuna only if it has been caught by surface longline or troll, is confirmed to be alive, without major injury, and is returned to the sea as soon as possible. "Commercial pāua fishers have put in place voluntary minimum harvest sizes, which are larger than the minimum legal size. These voluntary measures from industry support sustainability of pāua fisheries by maintaining a larger amount of spawning pāua in the fishery," Mr Jones says. "The exception will allow commercial pāua fishers to return pāua that are larger than the legal size, but smaller than the voluntary harvest size, which supports efforts to look after the fisheries they depend on." The change allowing oysters to be returned to the sea is a practical response to how they grow, Mr Jones says.

“Oysters grow in clumps, which can include both legal and undersized oysters. Without the exception, undersized oysters must be removed from the legal-sized ones and returned to the sea. The exception requires legal-sized oysters, if attached to such a clump, to be returned to the water quickly as possible as well. “Bluff oysters need to be returned to the sea quickly for them to have the best chance of surviving, so the handling time needed to separate the undersized oysters hurts their chances of surviving to grow and spawn more oysters.” “My thanks to everyone who provided feedback as part of the consultation on these changes,” Mr Jones says. The commercial landing exceptions come into force on 1 May 2025.

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 04/30/2025

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## **SOLOMON ISLANDS: ADB Establishes Resident Mission**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has announced the establishment of its Resident Mission in Solomon Islands, upgrading its Honiara-based country office that has been active since 2008. The move comes following a request from the Government of Solomon Islands amid the country's increasing development needs. "For more than 50 years, ADB has been assisting Solomon Islands to achieve its development goals," said ADB Vice-President Scott Morris. "The new office signifies a stepped-up and long-term commitment in ADB's partnership with Solomon Islands. With the new resident mission, we will be in a stronger position to help Solomon Islands achieve sustainable and inclusive economic growth by improving connectivity, strengthening human capital, and promoting reforms." "As the Minister of Finance and Treasury and Governor of the ADB Board, I welcome the establishment of a resident mission in Solomon Islands. It is representative of the natural progression of our long-standing partnership," said Minister Manasseh Sogavare. "We have seen the value that a growing local presence can bring, and believe a resident mission is crucial for enhancing the performance of ADB-financed projects, speeding up decision making processes, expanding ADB support for private sector development, and giving us more opportunities for regular dialogue on portfolio performance, policy reform, and overall strategies for growth and development."

The establishment of ADB's Resident Mission comes at a time when ADB's portfolio is growing rapidly. As of 31 December 2024, ADB's active sovereign portfolio in the country comprised 16 projects totaling \$414 million, up from 11 projects totaling \$215 million as of 31 December 2023. The planned commitments during 2025–2028 include 13 projects and programs valued at more than \$213 million. ADB-supported projects focus on transport, particularly roads, and the upgrade of the international port in Honiara and smaller provincial wharves. It also covers investments to support health, renewable energy, urban water supply and sanitation, solid waste management, and economic reforms through policy-based operations. Solomon Islands has been working with ADB since 1973. As of 31 December 2023, ADB has committed 126 public sector loans, grants, and technical assistance totaling \$481

million to Solomon Islands. ADB's current sovereign portfolio in Solomon Islands includes 6 loans and 9 grants worth \$202.8 million. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting sustainable, inclusive, and resilient 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.

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#### East Asia

#### **CHINA: Vice Premier Stresses Need to Deepen SOE Reform, Build Regional Emergency Rescue Centers**

Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing has called for the deepened reform of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and the accelerated establishment of regional emergency rescue centers. Zhang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during an inspection tour in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province which began on Monday and ended on Wednesday. He stressed the resolute need to make SOEs stronger and better, as well as the importance of reinforcing the principal role of enterprises in scientific and technological innovation, making breakthroughs in key technologies and forging new advantages. Work must be done to efficiently allocate resources to principal businesses and important industries and sectors, strengthen core competitiveness, and make steady progress on the path of high-quality development, Zhang said. It is necessary to advance the establishment of regional emergency rescue centers to cope with flood and forest fire, he said, stressing the importance of coordinating with local governments, of quick reactions, and of cross-regional support. When inspecting local dairy firms, Zhang called for strengthened source management and full-chain oversight to improve food safety.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/16/2025

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#### **Senior Chinese Official Highlights Reform of Elderly Care Services**

China will push forward reforms in its elderly care services and improve its civil services, State Councilor Shen Yiqin said during a visit to south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, which began on Sunday and ended on Wednesday. Shen urged efforts to improve the efficiency of elderly care services and build a comprehensive, three-tier service network that covers both urban and rural areas. Providing tailored, sustainable paid-meal services for the elderly was highlighted as a priority. Shen also stressed the importance of enforcing newly revised marriage registration regulations that aim to improve marriage services and ease registration pains. She called for enhanced dynamic monitoring and regular assistance for low-income groups, improved support for children in difficult situations, and reinforced social safety nets. Efforts should also be made to improve the social security system for people with disabilities, particularly care services for those with severe disabilities, she said.

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## **Xi Chairs CPC Leadership Meeting on Economic Situation and Work**

The Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee held a meeting on Friday to analyze and study the current economic situation and economic work. Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, presided over the meeting. It was noted at the meeting that the country has seen its economy improve this year, with public confidence continuously boosted and solid progress made in high-quality development. However, the foundation for the country's sustained economic recovery needs to be further consolidated, and the country faces increasing impact from external shocks, the meeting said. The meeting urged preparing for worst-case scenarios with sufficient planning, and taking concrete steps to do a good job in economic work. The meeting noted that it is imperative to coordinate domestic economic work and endeavors in the international economic and trade field, unwaveringly manage the country's own affairs well, stay committed to expanding high-standard opening up, focus on keeping employment, businesses, markets and expectations stable, and deal with the uncertainty of drastic changes in the external environment with the certainty of the country's high-quality development.

The meeting called for efforts to accelerate the implementation of more proactive and effective macro policies, and make full use of a more proactive fiscal policy and a moderately loose monetary policy. Key measures include quickening the issuance and utilization of local government special-purpose bonds and ultra-long special treasury bonds, and timely cuts in the reserve requirement ratios and interest rates to ensure ample liquidity and stronger support for the real economy, according to the meeting. New structural monetary policy instruments and policy-based financial instruments will be established to foster technological innovation, expand

consumption, and keep foreign trade stable. Efforts will be made to increase the earnings of low- and middle-income groups and boost service consumption to strengthen the role of consumption in driving economic growth, the meeting said. The meeting called for a swift removal of restrictive measures in the consumption sector and proposed to introduce a re-lending facility for service consumption and elderly care.

To aid businesses facing challenges, the meeting urged a multi-pronged approach, including stronger financial support and accelerating integration between domestic and foreign trade development. Work will be done to cultivate new pillar industries, introduce a "sci-tech board" in the bond market, and speed up the implementation of the AI Plus initiative, according to the meeting. The meeting emphasized that China should stay committed to deepening reform and opening up to solve the problems in the course of development. The country will accelerate the development of a unified national market and bolster trials to further open up the service sector. China will work together with the international community to actively uphold multilateralism and oppose unilateral bullying, the meeting stressed. The meeting pointed out that China should make continuous efforts to prevent and defuse risks in key areas. This includes efforts to implement the package of measures to defuse local government debt risks, to consolidate the stable development of the real estate market and to keep the capital market stable and active.

Stressing ensuring people's livelihood, the meeting said that for enterprises that suffered relatively bigger impacts from tariffs, the proportion of unemployment insurance funds returned to enterprises to keep payrolls stable will be increased. Efforts will also be made to strengthen agricultural production and stabilize the prices of important agricultural products such as grain. China will continuously improve the policy toolkit for keeping employment and the economy stable, according to the meeting. Once decided, policies should be rolled out as soon as possible. Incremental policies in reserve should be promptly introduced in response to changes in the situation. The country will also strengthen unconventional counter-cyclical adjustments, and spare no effort to consolidate the fundamentals of economic development and social stability, according to the meeting.

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## **Xi Makes Important Instructions on Work Related to Civil-military Mutual Support**

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, recently issued important instructions on work concerning mutual support between the military and the government as well as that between the military and the people, highlighting that civil-military mutual support is a fine tradition and unique political

advantage for the Party, the military and the people. On the new journey, Xi stressed the need to adhere to the guidance of the Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, uphold the Party's overall leadership, deepen reform and innovation, improve policy mechanisms, and achieve continuous progress in promoting civil-military mutual support.

He urged Party committees and governments at all levels to care about and support military development and reform, proactively address the concerns and resolve difficulties of officers and soldiers, and further foster a positive social atmosphere of valuing national defense, supporting the military and honoring military personnel. Xi stressed that the military should firmly establish a strong awareness of its fundamental purpose, actively support local construction and development, and take concrete actions to bring benefits and prosperity to the people. Xi called for close civil-military collaboration to consolidate and develop rock-solid unity between the military and the government and between the military and the people, so as to jointly write a new chapter of mutual love and support between the people and the military in the new era.

The national conference on honoring model cities (counties) for civil-military mutual support was held in Beijing on April 23. Xi's important instructions were conveyed at the conference. Li Qiang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and premier of the State Council, attended and addressed the conference. In his speech, Li said that General Secretary Xi Jinping's important expositions and instructions on civil-military mutual support are a summary of historical experience from work done in this respect under the Party's leadership and the fruit of theoretical innovation, providing fundamental guidance for advancing work in this regard on the new journey of the new era. He called for resolute implementation of Xi's instructions to continuously break new ground for work in this respect.

Li said that in recent years, through all-around efforts across the military and the civilian sectors, progress has been made in promoting civil-military mutual support, relevant laws and regulations have been optimized, and social organizations and service networks supporting the military have been improved. The military has actively taken part in implementing major strategies such as poverty alleviation, rural revitalization and the consolidation of border defense. It has also outstandingly accomplished missions including emergency response and disaster relief, evacuation of citizens from foreign countries and escorting services, maintaining stability and addressing contingencies. The present and the near future constitute a critical period for our endeavor to build a great country and stride toward national rejuvenation on all fronts through Chinese modernization. Promoting civil-military mutual support connects and unites the two sides.

We should ensure that work in this regard plays an important role in pooling strength and should leverage its unique advantage of providing two-way support, thus contributing to advancing the cause of the Party and the country. Li emphasized that all regions and departments must strengthen their awareness of national defense and overall strategic thinking, focus on key areas of military development and reform, enhance resource allocation and coordination, deepen civil-military collaboration, and proactively serve the modernization of national defense and the armed forces. Efforts should be made to take into account the practical needs of both active-duty and retired service members, enhance the targeted support services, and address wholeheartedly the concerns of military personnel, such as education for their children, employment for their spouses, and elderly care for their parents.

Li also called for solid and down-to-earth efforts in the resettlement of retired military personnel, employment and entrepreneurship support, preferential treatment, and assistance to those in need. The military should be supported to take an active part in local economic and social development by leveraging its strengths, and to play a greater role in promoting high-quality development, supporting local work and maintaining public security and social stability. In addition to deepening the reform and innovation of work related to civil-military mutual support, Li also urged efforts to boost the quality and effectiveness of such work, improve the mechanisms for organization and leadership, further foster models in this regard, consolidate and expand the social foundation, and push for the effective implementation of the CPC Central Committee's decisions and plans on the matter.

At the conference, a decision was read out on honoring model cities (counties) for work related to civil-military mutual support, and awards were presented to representatives of them. Representatives from both the military and civil sectors delivered speeches. Shi Taifeng, Li Shulei, Zhang Youxia, Wang Dongming, Wu Zhenglong and Shen Yueyue attended the meeting, which was presided over by Shen Yiqin. Also present were representatives of the honored model cities (counties) for civil-military mutual support, members of the National Leading Group for Civil-Military Mutual Support, officials in charge of relevant military and civil departments, and officials in charge of leading groups and offices for civil-military mutual support of provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities, and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps.

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

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## **JAPAN: 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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## **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.

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## South-East Asia

### **SINGAPORE: President Dissolves Parliament, Paving Way for General Election**

Singaporean President Tharman Shanmugaratnam on Tuesday dissolved the parliament, initiating the process for the country's next general election, local media reported. A Writ of Election is expected to be issued soon, specifying the polling day. Prime Minister Lawrence Wong will lead the ruling People's Action Party into the contest.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/15/2025

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### **Singapore Kicks Off General Election Campaign as Parties Finalize Candidates**

Singapore officially launched its general election campaign on Wednesday, as political parties nominated their candidates for members of Parliament across 33 constituencies ahead of the May 3 polls. The ruling People's Action Party (PAP) secured an early win in the Marine Parade-Braddell Heights constituency in eastern Singapore, where no other party fielded candidates. The Workers' Party, which had been expected to contest the seats, withdrew to give its candidates "the best chance of electoral success," according to the party chief Pritam Singh on Facebook. Several constituencies are set to see multi-cornered contests. In Tampines in eastern Singapore, for instance, three opposition parties are challenging the incumbent PAP team. Senior Minister Teo Chee Hean and Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat, both from the PAP, will not stand in this election. Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, who leads the PAP team in Marsiling-Yew Tee, said on Facebook that "both could have continued, but they chose to step aside to make way for leadership renewal." On April 15, Wong advised President Tharman Shanmugaratnam to dissolve the parliament, officially triggering the election process. As parties finalized their candidate slates, Singapore entered a nine-day campaigning period, followed by a cooling-off day on May 2 for voters to reflect on the issues raised. The PAP, which has governed Singapore for over 60 years, secured 61.24 percent of the vote in the 2020 general election, down from 69.86 percent in 2015. The Workers' Party, the only opposition party to win seats in 2020, expanded its representation from six seats in 2015 to 10 in the last election. Also on Wednesday, the Singapore Police Force announced the designated sites and approved time slots for election meetings, as well as venues where candidates, supporters, and members of the public may gather to await the results after polls close at 8 p.m. local time (1200 GMT) on May 3.

## **VIETNAM: Party Central Committee Discusses Organizational Restructuring**

The 13th Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) Central Committee commenced its 11th plenum in Hanoi on Thursday with a primary focus on restructuring the political system's organizational apparatus and addressing key personnel matters, Vietnam News Agency reported. In his opening remarks, General Secretary of the CPV Central Committee To Lam underscored the long-term strategic significance of reorganizing administrative units across all levels. He noted that the Politburo and the Secretariat are keen to gather proposals and solutions aimed at achieving an economic growth rate of 8 percent or higher in 2025, followed by sustained double-digit growth in the following years. During the three-day plenum, the Politburo is expected to report to the Party Central Committee on personnel matters within its authority. Delegates will also prepare for the upcoming 14th National Party Congress and elections of deputies to the 16th National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels for the 2026-2031 term.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/10/2025

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## **Hà Nội Announces Restructuring Plan for Administrative Units**

The capital city of Hà Nội has announced its administrative unit restructuring plan, reducing the number of local-level administrative units from 526 communes and wards to just 126. According to an official announcement released by the Hà Nội People's Committee on April 20, the capital is now home to 12 central urban districts with 153 wards, accounting for over 42 per cent of the city's population despite covering just 9% of its total area. Under the restructuring option, Hoàn Kiếm district will be reduced from 18 wards to just two, with the planned names of Hoàn Kiếm and Cửa Nam, while Ba Đình district will merge 13 wards into three – Ba Đình, Ngọc Hà, and Giảng Võ. Đống Đa district will shrink from 17 wards to five, Long Biên from 13 to four, Tây Hồ from eight to two, Cầu Giấy from eight to three, Hà Đông from 15 to five, Hoàng Mai from 14 to seven, Thanh Xuân from 11 to three, Bắc Từ Liêm from 13 to five, and Nam Từ Liêm from 10 to four. A new administrative unit, Hồng Hà ward, is to be established with an area of 16.61 square kilometres and a population of approximately 126,000. This ward will be formed through the mergence of the entirety of Chương Dương and Phúc Tân wards (Hoàn Kiếm); Phúc Xá (Ba Đình); most of Nhật Tân, Tứ Liên, and Yên Phụ (Tây Hồ); Bạch Đằng and Thanh Lương (Hai Bà Trưng); as well as parts of Phú Thượng and Quảng An (Tây Hồ), and Ngọc Thụy and Bồ Đề (Long Biên). Hà Nội also has 17 suburban districts and Sơn Tây township, which collectively span 91 per cent of its area and accommodate nearly 58 per cent of its residents. They comprise 373 wards, communes and commune-level

towns. The plan will see Sơn Tây's 13 sub-level administrative units cut to just three.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 04/20/2025

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## South Asia

### **INDIA: Radha Raturi Appointed as Uttarakhand's Chief Information Commissioner After Historic Stint as State's First Woman Chief Secretary**

In a significant development, Radha Raturi (Retd IAS: 1988), who recently made history as Uttarakhand's first woman Chief Secretary, has been appointed as the State's Chief Information Commissioner. The appointment was made by the Governor of Uttarakhand on Saturday. She will hold this constitutional position for a tenure of three years or until the age of 65, whichever comes earlier. Raturi officially retired from the post of Chief Secretary on March 31, 2025, passing the baton to her successor Anand Vardhan (IAS: 1992: UK). Her appointment as Chief Information Commissioner marks yet another milestone in a trailblazing administrative career that spanned several decades. Before her appointment as Chief Secretary on January 31, 2024, Raturi served as Additional Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister. She replaced Sukhbir Singh Sandhu (IAS: 1988: UD) and was granted two consecutive six-month extensions after her initial two-month tenure as Chief Secretary, culminating in her retirement at the end of March 2025. The government's decision to elevate her to the Chief Information Commissioner role follows considerable anticipation, as she had applied for the post well in advance. This move was confirmed recently with the issuance of an official appointment order. Simultaneously, the Uttarakhand Information Commission has also appointed Dalip Kunwar, a recently retired IPS officer and former SSP of Dehradun, as an Information Commissioner. He joins Yogesh Bhatt in the Commission, with Radha Raturi now leading the body as the Chief Information Commissioner. Radha Raturi, originally from Jabalpur, holds a background in journalism. She worked with Indian Express Mumbai and India Today before joining the Indian Information Service in 1985-86. She subsequently cleared the IPS in 1987 and entered the IAS in 1988. Over the years, she has served in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, establishing a legacy of leadership and excellence in public service.

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### **Manoj Kumar Parida Appointed Chief Information Commissioner of Odisha**

The Government of Odisha has appointed Manoj Kumar Parida, a retired IAS officer of the 1986 batch (AGMUT cadre), as the new Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) of the Odisha State Information Commission (SIC). Manoj Kumar Parida, who most

recently served as the Insurance Ombudsman in Bhubaneswar, brings with him a distinguished career in public administration, having earlier held key positions, including Chief Secretary of Puducherry, Adviser to the Administrator of Chandigarh, and Secretary, National Authority Chemical Weapon Convention, Government of India. Parida succeeds Jalada Kumar Tripathy, a retired IPS officer and former Director General of Police of Tamil Nadu, who demitted office on October 4, 2024. The CIC post had remained vacant since then, with Susanta Kumar Mohanty, a former journalist and current Information Commissioner, holding additional charge. Alongside Parida' s appointment, the state government has inducted three new Information Commissioners to the SIC:

Pranabindu Acharya, retired IPS officer

Kalpana Pattnaik, advocate of the Orissa High Court

Pabitra Mandal, retired IAS officer

With these new appointments, the Odisha Information Commission now comprises six members, including the Chief Information Commissioner and five Information Commissioners. The other two serving members are Susanta Kumar Mohanty and Jagannath Rath, also an advocate of the Orissa High Court. Established on March 2, 2006, the Odisha Information Commission operates under the Right to Information Act, 2005, and is headquartered in Bhubaneswar. The Commission plays a pivotal role in ensuring transparency and accountability in public administration across the state.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 04/11/2025

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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.

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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.

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## **Mihir Kumar Appointed as CEO of Government e-Marketplace**

The Government e-Marketplace (GeM) has announced the appointment of Mihir Kumar as its new Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Mihir Kumar, a distinguished officer from the 1996 batch of the Indian Defence Accounts Service (IDAS), has been selected by the Government of India to lead the platform at a crucial juncture in its growth journey. Prior to joining GeM, Kumar served as Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs. With over 28 years of comprehensive experience spanning finance, public administration, and policy implementation, he has held several key leadership positions, including Controller of Defence Accounts under the Ministry of Defence, Director in the Department of Financial Services in the Ministry of Finance, and Deputy Controller of Defence Accounts (DCDA) in the United Nations Mission in Congo. An alumnus of the University of Delhi, Kumar holds a Bachelor’s degree in Economics (Hons) from Kirori Mal College, an LLB from Campus Law Centre, and

has completed an MBA (Executive) from the Faculty of Management Studies (FMS), Delhi. He has also undergone executive training at RIPA International, London; MDI Gurgaon; RMIT University, Melbourne; and IIM Bangalore. His appointment comes at a pivotal phase for GeM, which is undergoing a major technological transformation. Built on a robust, technology-agnostic, microservice-based architecture that supports multi-tenancy, multi-rule, and multilingual capabilities, GeM is rapidly evolving into a world-class digital public procurement platform. In a significant milestone, GeM recently surpassed ₹5.4 lakh crore in Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) during FY 2024 - 25, reinforcing its role as a cornerstone of transparency, efficiency, and inclusivity within India's digital governance ecosystem.

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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."

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### **KYRGYZSTAN: To Enhance Public Services Through Partnership Between MEGA and Kyzmat**

Kyrgyzstan's state-owned mobile operator Alfa Telecom (operating under the MEGA brand) and the Kyzmat State Institution have signed a memorandum of understanding launching a large-scale partnership in the field of information and communication technology, Trend reports via Kyzmat. The primary aim of this partnership is to streamline public digital services, making them as easy as pie, quicker than a wink, and accessible to every citizen under the sun throughout the nation. Both parties have rolled up their sleeves and are ready to join forces to enhance the quality and efficiency of digital government tools. The memorandum outlines a range of joint initiatives. These include simplifying the payment process for public services through both cash and non-cash methods, introducing online appointment systems and digital queues in government institutions, and integrating new digital solutions into existing state portals. The partners also plan to upgrade and expand current services while jointly developing business strategies and modernizing operational processes. A key part of the collaboration will be the integration of Kyzmat's digital services into the MegaPay mobile application, developed by MEGA. In addition, both sides agreed to test new technologies and explore innovative approaches to further improve the country's digital public services. On October 10, 2024, President of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Zhaparov signed a decree establishing the state institution Kyzmat. The organization is responsible for delivering public services to individuals and legal entities, implementing state policy in the field of population registration and documentation, and improving the conditions for providing government services related to civil registration.

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## **KAZAKHSTAN: Tokayev Appoints New Ambassador to India**

President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has appointed Azamat Yeskaraev as the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Republic of India, Trend reports via the press service of the President of Kazakhstan. According to the president's decree, Azamat Yeskaraev replaces Nurlan Zhalgasbaev, who has been appointed Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Republic of Poland. "Nurlan Zhalgasbaev has been appointed Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Republic of Poland and has been relieved of his duties as Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Republic of India, the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, the Kingdom of Bhutan, and the Maldives, where he served concurrently; Azamat Nesipbaevich Yeskaraev has been appointed Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Republic of India," the press service of the president of Kazakhstan reported. Azamat Yeskaraev once led the Ministry of Justice of Kazakhstan and occupied other roles within the state administration framework.

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## **Kazakhstan's President Appoints New Ambassador to Ukraine**

Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has appointed a new Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Ukraine, Trend reports via the press service of the President of Kazakhstan. "By the decree of the President of Kazakhstan, Tolezhan Barlybaev has been appointed as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Ukraine," the press service of the President of Kazakhstan stated. Previously, President Tokayev relieved Darkhan Kaletayev from the position of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Ukraine. Tolezhan Barlybaev served as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Republic of Croatia from May 2017 to March 2022, as well as concurrently to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro from May 2018. From March 30, 2022, to November 15, 2024, Barlybaev held the position of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Slovak Republic.

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## **Kazakhstan Strengthens Agricultural Leadership with New Appointment**

By agreement with the Administration of the President and the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, by order of the Minister of Agriculture, Aidarbek Saparov, Sergey Li has been appointed as the leader of the apparatus of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Trend reports. "Sergey Li previously headed the department for the enforcement of judicial acts in the Aktobe region, served as chairman of the board of the Republican Chamber of Private Bailiffs of Kazakhstan, deputy akim (mayor) of Aktobe since September 2019, and director of the legal department of the Ministry of Trade and Integration," reads a statement from the press service of the ministry. Prior to this appointment, he served as Deputy Chairman of the Board at JSC "National Company QazExpoCongress."

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## **President Tokayev Appoints New Ambassadors to Mongolia, Sri Lanka, and Denmark**

President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has appointed new ambassadors to Mongolia, Sri Lanka, and Denmark, Trend reports. "Almas Seitakynov has been appointed as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of

Kazakhstan to Mongolia; Sergei Viktorov has been appointed as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka; Olzhas Suleimenov, the current Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Kingdom of Sweden, has also been appointed as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Kingdom of Denmark concurrently," the press service of the President of Kazakhstan stated. Earlier, President Tokayev appointed a new Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Ukraine - Tolezhan Barlybaev, who previously served as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Slovak Republic from March 30, 2022, to November 15, 2024.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/21/2025

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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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## **20 More Projects Declared State Significant Through the Housing Delivery Authority**

Today, a further 20 projects have been declared as State Significant Development following recommendations from the Housing Delivery Authority (HDA) that has been established by the Minns Labor Government. Of these proposals, 17 are in metropolitan Sydney and 3 are in regional NSW. If lodged and approved, this could create more than 5,600 well-located homes across New South Wales, including affordable housing. To date, 64 proposals with an estimated 27,800 homes have been declared state significant. Since the formation of the HDA, 10 projects have had Secretary Environmental Assessment Requirements issued Recommendations from the HDA are published as required under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 before the SSD declaration.

All proposals declared as SSD will have their development applications assessed by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, without needing to be approved by councils. This can cut approval times and speed up the delivery of new homes. The HDA builds on the Minns Government’s recent reforms to speed up the delivery of more homes, including:

- The development of the NSW Pattern Book and accelerated planning pathway for those who use the pre-approved patterns.
- The largest rezoning in NSW history around transport hubs and shopping centres to address the “missing middle.”
- The largest ever investment in the delivery of social and affordable housing in NSW.
- \$200 million in financial incentives for councils that meet the new expectations for development applications, planning proposals and strategic planning.
- \$450 million to build new apartments for essential workers including nurses, paramedics, teachers, allied health care workers, police officers and firefighters.

This is all part of the Minns Government's plan to build a better NSW with more homes and services, so young people, families and key local workers have somewhere to live and in the communities they choose. The Ministerial Order can be found here. Minister for Planning and Public Spaces Paul Scully said: "Together the 20 new state significant housing developments are expected to deliver more than 5600 homes, including affordable housing. "For too long councils have been saddled with the majority responsibility of the housing delivery in NSW, the Housing Delivery Authority is the State Government taking greater responsibility in this space and this has been well-received by industry."Proponents now have nine months to get their detailed plans ready for assessment and if planning approval is granted, we expect construction to start within 12 months of that approval."

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 04/15/2025

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## **NEW ZEALAND: Disability Working Groups Announced**

Strong interest in the development of a refreshed New Zealand disability strategy has been welcomed by Disability Issues Minister Louise Upston. Membership of the strategy working groups was announced today, drawn from the disabled community, industry and government agencies. The groups will develop actions in the five key areas of education, employment, health, housing and justice. "There has been a particularly strong response from the disability community, reflecting the commitment of people who want to be part of this important work," Louise Upston says. "The Ministry of Disabled People - Whaikaha received almost 350 expressions of interest from the disability community before making their appointment decisions.

"In total, Whaikaha is announcing 26 members of the groups, including the chairs, who I congratulate today: Education – Grant Cleland Employment – Lorraine Toki Health – Dr Josephine Herman Housing - Daniel Clay Justice – Paul Gibson "The Ministry is taking a new approach to developing the new strategy, and I will be excited to see the results. "Ultimately, the purpose is to improve the lives of disabled people. For instance, recent data from the Stats NZ Household Disability Survey found disabled New Zealanders continue to face many barriers, for example in education, employment and housing. "We know 1 in 6 New Zealanders are disabled, yet three quarters of unemployed disabled people want to be working which means creating employment opportunities must be an important focus. "Disabled people, like non-disabled people, want to participate in their communities, to thrive and make decisions about their own lives. "The strategy refresh represents huge opportunities to make a positive difference," Louise Upston says. The Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha is managing the refresh process. The draft strategy will go to the wider disabled community later this year for further review before being agreed by Cabinet.

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 04/04/2025

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## Cutting Red Tape at the Start of Employment

Workplace Relations and Safety Minister Brooke van Velden says changes are coming to support freedom of choice and reduce the burden on employers when new employees start in a role. The Government has agreed to repeal the changes made by the previous government by removing the 30-day rule and reducing related employer obligations. “Currently, if a collective agreement is in place the employee’s individual agreement must reflect the terms of the collective agreement and that applies for 30 days regardless of whether an employee chooses to join a union or not. “Not only is the status quo convoluted and confusing, the process adds another administrative cost on top of many others, and those costs are dragging down workplace productivity. “If a new employee chooses to negotiate the terms and conditions that suit their personal preferences or situation, they should have that choice realised from day one of employment,” says Ms van Velden.

Removing the 30-day rule means employees and employers are free to agree on a wider range of employment terms including those that differ from the collective employment agreement for the first 30 days. A further benefit of these changes is that 90-day trials can be made available from the start of employment if the employee chooses an individual employment agreement. “Expanding the availability of 90-day trials was an ACT-National coalition commitment and supports workers that may struggle to gain employment and also give employers greater confidence around hiring,” says Ms van Velden. Changes are also being made to the way employers communicate and report back on union membership for new employees.

The current processes are the most extensive since the Employment Relations Act was enacted, and these changes will ensure employees still receive the information they need to make a decision about their employment agreement and union membership options. Employers will no longer have to use the ‘active choice form’, created by the previous government, and unions will no longer have the ability to provide information about the role and functions of the unions, that the employer must pass on to the employee. Employers will still need to communicate that the employee may join a union that is a party to the collective employment agreement, how to contact the union and that if the employee joins the union, the collective employment agreement will bind the employee. These changes will be included in the Employment Relations Amendment Bill that will be introduced this year and is expected to be passed by the end of 2025. “I am striking the right balance between ensuring information about unions is available to new employees, protecting the personal choice of workers and reducing the compliance burden for employers,” says Ms van Velden.

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 04/08/2025

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## Government Accepts Election Process Changes

Voters can expect the 2026 Election to be more efficient, resilient and transparent with the Government accepting a raft of recommendations, Justice Minister Paul Goldsmith says. “The Justice Committee recommended 65 changes following its routine inquiry into the last election. “Many of these recommendations are practical, like considering a single deadline for all candidate and party list nominations, or amending the cut-off date for enrolments prior to polling day. “We plan to implement 23 either in full or in part, through an electoral amendment bill to be announced later this year. “In some cases, the Government may progress an option which differs from the specific approach recommended by the Justice Committee, but addresses the issue raised or the overall intent of the recommendation. “We will then consider a further 36 recommendations as priorities and resourcing allows. “The remaining six recommendations do not require legislative change and we have asked the Electoral Commission to consider how these can best be implemented. “I want to thank the Committee for its report and recommendations, and the almost 100 people and organisations that made submissions.” A full list of the recommendations is attached.

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## 3、 Management, Capacity Building and Innovation

### Asia-Pacific

#### Europe and Central Asia: Accelerate Growth Through Entrepreneurship, Technology Adoption, and Innovation

Economic growth in the developing economies of the [Europe and Central Asia](#) region is likely to slow, says the World Bank’s [Economic Update](#) for the region, released today. Regional growth is now expected at 2.5% in 2025-26 owing to weaker external demand and a slowdown in Russia. In 2024, growth across the region stabilized at 3.6% buoyed by private consumption and supported by robust real wage increases, higher remittances, and stepped-up consumer borrowing, all of which offset weaker external demand due to low growth in the European Union. Higher increases in prices for food and services resulted in higher inflation, which increased to 5% year-on-year by February 2025, from 3.6% in mid-2024. The recent pickup in inflation prompted several central banks to hike policy rates or delay further easing. “While countries of the Europe and Central Asia region were able to maintain steady growth last year, global uncertainty, geoeconomic fragmentation and weak expansion among key trading partners are making it more challenging to sustain this growth,” said **Antonella Bassani, World Bank Vice President for Europe and Central Asia**. “To achieve stronger economic expansion over the long term, it is

*crucial for the countries in the region to accelerate domestic structural reforms that foster a dynamic and innovative private sector, entrepreneurship and technology adoption.”*

**Central Asia** is likely to remain the fastest growing sub-region this year and next, even with growth forecast to ease to 4.7% in 2025-26. The slowdown is due to a weaker expansion of the oil sector in Kazakhstan as well as declining exports and the normalization of remittances inflows. In the **South Caucasus**, growth is projected to average 3.5% in 2025-26, as spillovers from trade intermediation, labor and capital inflows continue to diminish. Trade policy uncertainty, increased trade barriers, and indirect spillovers from euro area supply chains are expected to temper recoveries elsewhere in the region. Growth in the **Western Balkans** is expected to moderate to 3.4% in 2025-26, while **Central Europe** should improve only slightly to 2.7%. In **Russia**, growth is projected to fall to 1.3% during 2025-26. Growth in **Türkiye** is likely to improve modestly to 3.3% in 2025-26, although it will remain below its long-term trend, as external demand remains weak and the economic rebalancing continues. Growth in **Ukraine** is likely to decrease to 2% in 2025.

In a special analysis of how to accelerate growth in the current challenging global environment, the report stresses the importance of a dynamic private sector. Countries should invest more in innovation, undertake reforms to support young companies, deepen financial markets, and increase research and development (R&D) investment while continuing to focus on integrating global technology, expertise, and capital. For the middle-income countries in the region to achieve high-income status, their economies need to become more dynamic. Countries that have successfully transitioned to high-income status have done so through entrepreneurial dynamism and innovation and should sustain such growth by leveraging technology, expertise and capital to enhance within-firm productivity growth. *“Innovation and experimentation in business are essential for boosting productivity and a prerequisite for achieving and sustaining high-income status,”* said **Ivailo Izvorski, World Bank Chief Economist for Europe and Central Asia**. *“Middle-income countries in the region can reach high-income status if firms grow, innovate, and compete. While every country needs its own approach to reignite growth, spurring innovation and enabling business dynamism is crucial.”*

The report argues that investing in young, innovative companies is needed rather than the entire small and medium enterprise (SME) sector, as these companies are generating jobs. This approach should be supported by improving access to finance, especially long-term and risk capital. The region does not have enough finance as venture capital and equity finance remain underdeveloped. Strengthening competition is essential to allow such dynamic firms to emerge. The region has too many small, low-productivity businesses and few large companies outside of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), which often dominate markets and stifle entrepreneurial dynamism. Policies that encourage business innovation and

technology adoption, such as larger and better-targeted R&D incentives, are also needed to help firms become more productive and innovative. Many firms in the region currently rely on resource reallocation and operate as production facilities for foreign companies instead of developing their own technologies. Finally, investing in human capital is essential for attracting and retaining highly skilled workers and entrepreneurs, as well as for creating opportunities to upgrade skills through training.

### Europe and Central Asia Country Forecast

*(Real GDP growth at market prices in percent, unless indicated otherwise)*

Country	2021	2022	2023	2024e	2025f
Albania	9.0	4.8	3.9	3.9	3.2
Armenia	5.8	12.6	8.3	5.9	4.0
Azerbaijan	5.6	4.6	1.1	4.1	2.6
Belarus	2.4	-4.7	3.9	4.0	2.2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	7.3	3.7	1.9	2.6	2.7
Bulgaria	7.8	4.0	1.9	2.8	1.6
Croatia	12.6	7.3	3.3	3.8	3.1
Georgia	10.6	11.0	7.8	9.4	5.5
Kazakhstan	4.3	3.2	5.1	4.8	4.5
Kosovo	10.7	4.3	4.1	4.4	3.8
Kyrgyz Republic	5.5	9.0	9.0	9.0	6.8
Moldova	13.9	-4.6	1.2	0.1	0.9
Montenegro	13.0	6.4	6.3	3.0	3.0
North Macedonia	4.5	2.8	2.1	2.8	2.6
Poland	6.9	5.3	0.1	2.9	3.2
Romania	5.5	4.0	2.4	0.9	1.3

Russian Federation	5.9	-1.4	4.1	4.1	1.4
Serbia	7.9	2.6	3.8	3.9	3.5
Tajikistan	9.4	8.0	8.3	8.4	6.5
Türkiye	11.4	5.5	5.1	3.2	3.1
Ukraine	3.4	-28.8	5.5	2.9	2.0
Uzbekistan	8.0	6.0	6.3	6.5	5.9

Source: World Bank.

Note: The estimates and forecasts reflect data available until April 10, 2025. e = estimate; f = forecast, Domestic Product.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/23/2025

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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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## **Regional UN Forum Calls for Urgent Actions to Tackle Growing Challenges in Asian, Pacific Cities**

Government leaders, city planners and development experts have gathered in Bangkok, calling for stronger regional cooperation to shape resilient and sustainable urban futures. The call came from the 81st session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), which is held in Bangkok from April 21 to 25. United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana said that while cities have long been drivers of economic growth, the region's rapid urbanization is intensifying social and environmental pressures. She underscored the urgency of rethinking how cities grow and function, transforming cities into hubs of innovation, resilience and equity. In her speech, Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra said solving global challenges that cut across boundaries and regions requires strengthening of cooperation at all levels and good leadership, leading to inclusive and sustainable development. Multilateral platforms, including the United Nations, ESCAP, ASEAN, as well as multilateral agreements, are more crucial than ever in the collective pursuit of these goals, she said.

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu attended the meeting and delivered a speech. Ma elaborated on China's position on U.S. arbitrary tariffs, stating that the recent imposition of the so-called reciprocal tariffs by the U.S. government on many countries is typically economic bullying featuring unilateralism and protectionism, and all Asia-Pacific countries are victims. Ma said that China has taken resolute countermeasures to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests and to uphold international fairness and justice as well as the international economic order. In the face of bullying and hegemony, there is no way out through compromise and concession; only unity and cooperation can bring a future. Ma said that the ESCAP should firmly defend multilateralism, deepen openness and cooperation, cultivate new driving forces for innovative development, promote inclusive and sustainable development, and promote the building of an Asia-Pacific community with a shared future. Ma said that China is willing to strengthen a synergy between the high-quality joint development of the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative and the ESCAP, injecting greater impetus into connectivity and sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region. The ESCAP is an important

intergovernmental comprehensive economic and social development organization established by the United Nations in the Asia-Pacific region.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/25/2025

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## East Asia

### **CHINA: Top Political Advisor Stresses Democratic Oversight Over Yangtze River Eco-environmental Conservation**

China's top political advisor Wang Huning on Wednesday urged solid efforts to strengthen democratic oversight over the eco-environmental conservation of the Yangtze River. Wang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee, made the remarks at a seminar attended by leaders of the non-CPC political parties and personages without party affiliation. With the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) concluding this year, all tasks related to the democratic oversight over the eco-environmental conservation of the Yangtze River must be completed with high quality, Wang said.

He called on non-CPC political parties and personages without party affiliation to give full play to the unique strengths of consultative oversight and offer pragmatic opinions and suggestions. Efforts and resources should focus on the most critical, urgent and prominent issues to make democratic oversight more targeted and effective, Wang said. He also urged efforts to review and assess the effectiveness of democratic oversight over the ecological and environmental protection of the Yangtze River and plan for a new round of special oversight. Li Ganjie, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and head of the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee, presided over the seminar. Leaders of the eight non-CPC parties and a representative of personages without party affiliation also delivered remarks at the seminar.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/02/2025

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### **Vice Premier Calls for Improved Flood Control Capacity, Agricultural Production**

Chinese Vice Premier Liu Guozhong has emphasized the need to improve the flood control and disaster reduction capacities of the Haihe River Basin, and the importance of strengthening spring agricultural production. Liu, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during a research trip to Beijing and Hebei. He stressed the importance of implementing the central authorities' decisions and plans on accelerating the

improvement of the flood control system in the Haihe River Basin, and the need to ensure the safety of major cities and infrastructure. Liu also called for improving the rain monitoring and forecast system, with strict control over the quality of the entire process, and supervision over the construction progress and use of funds. It is necessary to strengthen flood control management and eliminate various kinds of risks and hidden dangers in a timely manner, he said. During the tour, he stressed that solid work should be done in spring ploughing and related preparations, and in promoting high-quality summer grain production. He also required efforts to ensure there is no large-scale return to poverty.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/16/2025

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## **Vice Premier Stresses Need to Consolidate Development Confidence, Innovation-driven Growth**

Chinese Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang has called for the consolidation of development confidence and strengthened innovation-driven growth to enable steady progress in the country's high-quality development. Ding, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during an inspection tour in northwest China's Shaanxi Province from Monday to Wednesday. He stressed the importance of promoting the integrated development of sci-tech innovation and industrial innovation, and of accelerating the development of a modern industrial system. Work must be done to maintain a fair, organized market order and prevent rat-race competition, Ding said, adding that basic research in the applied sciences should be enhanced. He urged more efforts to make breakthroughs in key and core technologies, and efforts to increase support for investment in startups.

More should be done to improve vocational education and help graduates find suitable jobs quickly, he said. Opening to the outside world is a fundamental national policy for China, and the country is willing to deepen cooperation with all parties to achieve mutual benefits, Ding said. Shaanxi should be integrated more deeply into the process of the joint construction of the Belt and Road, and move faster to build a highland for inland reform and opening-up, he noted. At a symposium during the tour, Ding called for the effective implementation of central decisions and plans, and for the expansion of domestic demand on all fronts. He also stressed the need to help foreign trade enterprises overcome difficulties, and to make greater efforts to stabilize employment. Ding expressed the hope that Shaanxi will give full play to its advantages and strive to write its own chapter of Chinese modernization.

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## **Chinese Premier Urges Efforts to Improve Social Expectations**

Chinese Premier Li Qiang has stressed the importance of improving social expectations and coordinating efforts to address risks and challenges while advancing high-quality development. Li made the remarks at a study session held by the State Council on Thursday. Also in attendance were He Lifeng and Zhang Guoqing, both of whom are vice premiers, and State Councilor Wu Zhenglong. Li emphasized the need to regulate the supply-demand balance, and to pay close attention to expectation management and guidance in macroeconomic governance. Policies should be targeted and tailored to address specific issues, he said, adding that the timing of policy introductions should be carefully considered to exert positive influence on market expectations. Li stressed the importance of strengthening communication with the market to ensure policies truly benefit the people and businesses. He also called for efforts to accelerate the implementation of major strategies and reforms, guide the development of clear and stable market expectations, and protect the legitimate rights and interests of all business entities in an improved manner.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/17/2025

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## **Innovation, Self-reliance Become Hallmarks of China's Tech Startups**

How small can a sensor be? In the southern Chinese tech hub of Shenzhen, the answer is just 8.5 millimeters in diameter. The world's smallest optic-based force sensor to date was developed by Haptron Scientific, a technology firm that launched in the city in 2019. Founder and CEO Yu Chen has revealed that the button-shaped gadget is domestically produced and has full technological independence. "Sensors are the precondition for translating intelligence into reality and applying it to practical uses," Yu told Xinhua, adding that the company's high-precision sensor solutions have been applied to sectors such as space, aviation, robotics, smart medical devices and new energy. Yu said that, for example, installing the sensor at the fingertip or wrist of a humanoid robot can greatly improve the machine's force control, making it possible to develop robotic arms that are as delicate as a human's.

"We don't worry at all about being bottlenecked technologically," Yu said. Shenzhen is known as China's Silicon Valley. Yu noted that his company decided to settle there due to its complete supply chains, favorable business environment and wealth of international talent. In Shenzhen's Nanshan District, an industrial cluster is attracting more and more tech firms, with robot startups and academic and research institutes forming a robust ecosystem. UBTECH is one such firm. With a leading edge in humanoid and intelligent service robots, the company was among the 10 entities to found the Beijing Humanoid Robot Innovation Center in 2023, opening access to more than 300 patents. Earlier this month, the Tien Kung Ultra robot developed by

the center claimed victory among the machines competing in the world's first humanoid robot half marathon, which was held in Beijing.

Michael Tam, chief brand officer at UBTECH, said that by the end of 2024, the company boasted 2,680 authorized patents, and more than 90 percent of the core accessories used in its humanoid robots were developed domestically. Its latest industrial humanoid robot, Walker S1, has undergone real-scenario practical training at automakers, logistics companies and manufacturers, undertaking tasks from handling and sorting goods to installing parts and conducting quality control tests, according to Tam. Riding the wave of China's burgeoning artificial intelligence (AI) sector, Shenzhen is taking measures to expand the scale of its humanoid and intelligent robot industries. An action plan aims for about 1,200 related companies to be established by 2027, creating a market of more than 100 billion yuan (about 13.9 billion U.S. dollars).

The appeal of this industrial cluster is becoming stronger. Unitree Robotics, a technology company that is based in east China's Hangzhou and rose to fame after its humanoid robots staged an arresting performance on China's 2025 "Spring Festival Gala," has chosen to establish an office in Nanshan. "The complete industrial chain here helps shorten the period of product development, making our products highly competitive in overseas markets," Yu said. Another advantage of seeking business opportunities in Shenzhen is its close connection with neighboring Hong Kong, indicating an abundant supply of international talent, Yu added. Since a development plan outline for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) was issued in 2019, the interaction between Shenzhen and Hong Kong has been increasing, particularly in the sci-tech field.

The Hong Kong Science Park, a business incubator and the largest R&D base in Hong Kong, opened a Shenzhen branch in 2023. To date, more than 66 sci-tech institutes and companies from Hong Kong have settled at the new site. "Hong Kong is cultivating its new growth driver, and a consensus to develop sci-tech and innovative industries has been reached," Fang Zhou, head of a think tank based in Hong Kong, said in an interview with Xinhua. He said that Hong Kong can leverage its strong R&D capabilities and integrate with the GBA's downstream industries to form a more complete industrial chain. Ma Yang, general manager of an AI company headquartered in Beijing, also spoke highly of the prospect of developing cutting-edge technologies in the GBA. At his office in Nanshan, Ma said about one-third of the company's grassroots customers are located in Shenzhen, while Hong Kong is a perfect alternative for connecting with the world and promoting products to more countries. "We hope that Chinese products with an excellent cost performance can be accessible across the world," Yu said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/27/2025

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## **China Refines Departure Tax Refund Policy to Encourage Inbound Consumption**

In a fresh move to boost inbound spending, China unveiled a new set of measures on Sunday to further optimize its departure tax refund policy to improve the shopping experience of overseas travelers. The minimum purchase threshold for departure tax refunds has been lowered, allowing overseas travelers to apply for a refund if they spend at least 200 yuan (about 27.75 U.S. dollars) at the same store on the same day and meet other relevant requirements, according to a circular jointly issued by the Ministry of Commerce and five other government departments. While ensuring proper risk management, refunds will be made available through multiple channels, including mobile payments, bank cards and cash, to better accommodate the diverse payment preferences of overseas travelers. The upper limit for cash refund has been raised to 20,000 yuan. The circular also outlines steps to expand the number of departure tax refund stores, enrich the supply of related goods and improve related services.

More departure tax refund stores will be set up in major shopping areas, pedestrian streets, tourist sites, resorts, cultural venues, airports, passenger ports and hotels, according to the circular. Departure tax refund stores are encouraged to broaden product offerings to include time-honored brands, renowned Chinese consumer goods, smart devices, intangible cultural heritage items, crafts and specialty products, among others. A series of activities to promote shopping in China will be launched to support local efforts to cultivate and promote high-quality signature products, such as "city gifts" and "must-buy" items, in departure tax refund stores. Speaking at a press conference on Sunday, Sheng Qiuping, vice minister of commerce, said that overseas travelers mainly purchased international brands when claiming tax refunds, with relatively few domestic brands available and limited shopping choices overall.

The lower threshold not only reduces the entry barrier for tax refund shopping, but also allows more specialty stores, souvenir shops, and gift shops with lower average transaction amounts to join the tax refund network, helping promote the sales of Chinese brands, Sheng said. Meanwhile, the regulations regarding departure tax refund have been revised to optimize related services and streamline the refund process to help overseas travelers more easily benefit from departure tax refund policies, according to the country's taxation authorities. Earlier this month, China announced a nationwide shift from a refund-upon-departure model to a refund-upon-purchase model for departure tax refund, enabling foreign visitors to instantly claim value-added tax rebates at tax-free stores across the country.

"Providing overseas travelers with a greater variety of shopping options and more convenient tax refund services will help stimulate inbound consumption and support high-standard opening up and economic growth," said Chen Binkai, vice president of the Central University of Finance and Economics. China started to implement the

departure tax refund policy for overseas travelers in 2015. Since its implementation, the scale of departure tax refunds has grown year by year, benefiting an increasing number of overseas travelers. Official data showed that last year, the sales revenue of goods eligible for departure tax refunds and the amount of tax refunded both posted strong growth, rising by 120 percent and 130 percent year on year, respectively.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/27/2025

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## **Chinese Premier Chairs Meeting on River and Lake Protection, Child Welfare**

Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Sunday presided over a State Council executive meeting, which made arrangements for river and lake protection and studied measures to further protect the welfare of children in difficulties. The meeting also discussed the draft healthcare security law and decided to approve nuclear power projects including one in Sanmen of east China's Zhejiang Province. Noting that China's aquatic ecosystems have been continuously improving, the meeting called for adopting a targeted, scientific and law-based approach in pollution treatment, and urged coordinated efforts to improve water resources, aquatic environments, and aquatic ecosystems. Forceful measures should be taken to address problems from the source, strengthen monitoring and source-tracing, and curb excess emissions, according to the meeting.

Highlighting the importance of welfare protection of children in difficulties, the meeting called for efforts to prioritize children's development and maximize benefits for children, and continuously improve the service systems for their living, medical, education, and mental health needs. The meeting discussed and approved in principle the draft healthcare security law, and decided to submit it to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for deliberation. It also stressed absolute safety in nuclear power development. Efforts should be made to ensure that nuclear power units are built and operated in accordance with the highest global safety standards, and continuously enhance capacity building for safety supervision, the meeting said.

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## **"World's Supermarket" Navigates Trade Changes with Resilience, Innovation**

In a compact shop no larger than 10 square meters, Tao Yang, a vendor in Yiwu -- a city in Zhejiang Province known as "the world's supermarket" -- keeps a well-used World Atlas on her desk. "I ask my customers to sign their names over their home

countries," she says, adding that she has collected signatures from clients in 20 countries. "Our doors are always open to the whole world." Despite the U.S. government's recent tariff increases on imports from China and other trade partners, business remains brisk at the Yiwu International Trade Market. In the first quarter of this year, Yiwu's total import and export value reached 167.45 billion yuan (about 23 billion U.S. dollars), an increase of 13 percent year on year, with trade links spanning over 230 countries and regions. Among this, exports amounted to 147.27 billion yuan, up by 14.5 percent year on year.

### **LEVERAGING CHINA'S MANUFACTURING EDGE**

Tao is working with a U.S. client on new designs. In early April, her guest from the United States arrived at Yiwu as scheduled. "The U.S. government's successive imposition of tariffs has caught my client off guard, but he still resolutely came to China to discuss new product development and orders face-to-face with me," Tao told Xinhua. Despite feeling a bit jet-lagged, he made his way to the market the very next day, promptly placed an order for a batch of diamond-studded car cups and got to work on crafting the diamond-encrusted accessories. Tao delivered 35 new samples in just six days. "Yiwu's efficiency and supply chain keep us competitive," she said. According to Tao, what attracts the U.S. client to Yiwu is not just the products. At its core, he is choosing Chinese manufacturing for its ability to swiftly launch new items, maintain a stable supply chain, and offer competitive pricing.

Having been in the trade for over 40 years, Tao's client, who is now 69 years old, has seen disputes and market ups and downs throughout his career. "We all believe that business and progress won't be stopped by unexpected events," she said. Of Yiwu's 75,000 merchants, around 3,000 are involved in U.S.-related trade, and only about 100 merchants like Tao conduct direct business with American buyers. To navigate the challenges posed by tariff escalation, many merchants are adapting by innovating their products, streamlining production, and expanding into both domestic and global markets. Zeng Hao, a supplier of 3D-printed toys, believes the emerging product category is unlikely to be replaced in the near future. At his factory, more than 3,000 machines are running at full capacity, producing over 100,000 pieces each day. Zeng noted that if the toys were to be produced in the United States, the costs would double. He said he is seeing rising orders from South America, Southeast Asia and Russia, and aims to boost domestic sales to 30 percent by the end of the year.

### **A GLOBAL TRADING HUB**

Christmas decor merchant Jiang Jiangping's business has entered the peak season. With an eye-catching range of nearly 2,000 Christmas products, he is not too concerned about U.S. tariffs, as the U.S. market accounts for less than 3 percent of his sales. Meanwhile, orders from Europe and other regions have steadily increased in recent years. "Our sales revenue has maintained a double-digit growth in the past two years. Orders for this year's Christmas products have already been scheduled

through the end of June," Jiang said. "Recently, we've been rushing to fulfill orders from the Middle East," said Sun Lijuan, a doll toy merchant. Sun's company has developed Arabic-speaking smart dolls for the Middle East market, and has seen a 10-percent increase in order volume from the Middle East compared to the same period last year.

"The business in Yiwu is truly global," said Sun. In recent years, the local government in Yiwu is also actively driving the globalization of trade. Leveraging AI tools, merchants in Yiwu can produce promotional videos in 36 languages to showcase their products worldwide. The "Brand Globalization" program, launched in 2023, has already been introduced to over 20 countries and regions, helping more than 5,000 businesses tap into overseas markets. Additionally, Yiwu's logistics network is constantly being enhanced. Just days ago, a train loaded with 100 standard containers of export goods, including home appliances, hardware machinery, and decorative materials, departed from Yiwu and headed for Kashgar, Xinjiang. This marked the launch of the first intermodal rail-road freight train from the Yangtze River Delta region. The cargo will then be transferred by truck at Kashgar and ultimately delivered to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. Railway data shows that in 2024, Yiwu saw a total of 1,300 China-Europe train trips, transporting over 140,000 standard containers of goods, registering a year-on-year growth exceeding 10 percent.

Pan Yigang, deputy director of the Zhejiang Provincial Development and Planning Institute, noted that by capitalizing on its strategic position along the Belt and Road, the Yiwu International Trade Market has developed a trade network that spans emerging markets in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. This trade network is defined by its diverse customer base and robust resilience to risks associated with single market. Data shows that Yiwu's 2024 trade with Belt and Road partner countries surged 18.2 percent year on year to 413.34 billion yuan (about 57 billion U.S. dollars), making up 61.8 percent of the city's total imports and exports. At 8:30 a.m., Fu Jiangyan and dozens of fellow merchants gathered at the language center for Arabic lessons, a new initiative introduced at the Yiwu International Trade Market. Spanish classes will also be introduced in the near future. "Speaking our clients' languages helps build trust and opens up new market opportunities," said Fu, a sock merchant focused on the Middle East and Africa.

*From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/29/2025*

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## **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.

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. Shanghai announced a comprehensive plan last December aimed at developing a world-class AI industry ecosystem by 2025, including measures to step up global cooperation. In 2024, Shanghai's AI industry scale exceeded 400 billion yuan (about 55 billion U.S. dollars).

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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## **JAPAN: PM Ishiba Vows to Protect Free Trade System**

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba on Wednesday pledged to protect the global free trade system during Diet discussions on the tariff measures of U.S. President Donald Trump. In a parliamentary debate of party leaders, Ishiba, president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, made the vow as Yoshihiko Noda, president of the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, criticized economic revitalization minister Ryosei Akazawa's actions in trade talks with Washington as akin to diplomacy under a tributary system. Noda said that "the visual impression" made by Akazawa wearing a cap with Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan is "very negative for Japan." Multiple U.S. cabinet members including Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent attended the tariff talks alongside Trump, Noda said, blasting Tokyo's handling of the negotiations as "too weak and too late" despite Ishiba calling the tariff situation a national crisis. "We ran thorough simulations of what would happen following a Trump victory" in last year's U.S. presidential election, Ishiba said. "We'll boost our (negotiation) system, but we don't think it's been inadequate."

From <https://www.nippon.com> 04/23/2025

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## **Japanese Govt Mulls Raising Number of Cars to Be Imported Under Simplified Screen System in U.S. Tariff Negotiations**

The government is considering presenting a plan to increase the number of cars imported under a preferential certification system as a possible card to play in tariff negotiations with the United States, according to government sources. The system, called the "preferential handling procedure for imported motor vehicles," or PHP, is designed to promote imports of vehicles by simplifying the screening process of imported cars. The proposal is expected to be put on the table as U.S. President Donald Trump views safety standards as problematic non-tariff barriers. The Japanese government is also considering sounding out the United States about cooperation in the field of shipbuilding technology for icebreakers, whose importance is increasing for advancing to the Arctic Circle, the sources said. The government may present these proposals as a package, together with other proposals to increase imports of U.S.-grown corn and soybeans, in an effort to get the United States to review its tariff measures.

Economic revitalization minister Ryosei Akazawa will visit the United States as early as Wednesday and present the package in talks with U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and other officials. The PHP system allows exporters to simplify the documentation that is required for the ordinary screening process and be exempt from certain other procedures, including screening that uses sample vehicles. While the system is beneficial to carmakers as it shortens the inspection period, the number of vehicles eligible under the system is capped at 5,000 per car model per year. Although the number was previously limited to 2,000, it was raised to 5,000 in 2013 during Japan-U.S. negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement. The government plans to finalize how much it will raise the number from 5,000 based on negotiations with the United States. However, an idea to double the figure has been floated within the government.

If realized, it will become easier to sell U.S. cars in Japan from the screening standpoint. The Japanese government hopes to appeal to Trump, who is eager to expand exports of American cars. Because the measure can be taken by expanding the existing system, it is expected to be relatively easy to obtain understanding domestically. The government is also considering Japan-U.S. cooperation on building icebreakers as a proposal that would be of interest to Trump. Trump is increasingly keen on advancing to the Arctic Circle with an eye on resource development there. However, the U.S. shipbuilding technology of icebreakers is said to lag behind that of Russia and other countries. If Japan and the United States promote cooperation in this field, it is also expected to benefit Japan. Additionally, the Japanese government is considering expanding imports of U.S.-grown rice.

From <https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp> 04/30/2025

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## **SOUTH KOREA: Gov't to Foster Growth of Modular Housing Market to Innovate Construction Industry**

The government will take measures to foster the growth of the modular housing market as part of efforts to boost the ailing construction industry, the finance ministry said Monday. The government will triple the order of modular homes for public rental services to 3,000 by 2026 from 1,000 last year, and provide incentives for public-owned rental houses built with the modular construction method, according to the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Modular homes refer to prefabricated homes built in a factory for on-site assembly. They are known to reduce the average construction period by up to 30 percent and provide other benefits, such as improved productivity and a decrease in safety accidents. The value of the domestic modular home market has expanded to 805.9 billion won (US\$550.9 million) in 2023 from 32.4 billion won in 2019, according to the ministry.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/07/2025

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## **S. Korea to Invest 60 Bln Won in Securing Materials, Components Technologies for Future Industries**

South Korea will funnel 60 billion won (US\$40.4 million) by 2028 into expanding infrastructure for the development of materials and components technologies essential for advanced industries, such as artificial intelligence (AI), the industry ministry said Wednesday. The investment will be used to build research facilities and equipment for the development and testing of technologies related to materials and components essential for the AI, advanced bio and other future industries, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. In detail, the government will support the construction of infrastructure for the development of core materials for next-generation AI chips, messenger RNA-based drugs and others. The government will support efforts to secure materials and components for advanced industries aimed at stabilizing supply chains and the private sector's endeavors to achieve technological innovations, the ministry said.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/09/2025

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## **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 Aeirobot 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; Aeirobot, 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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## **Gov't to Strengthen Support for Food Exporters amid Global Trade Uncertainties Minister**

The government will expand support for South Korean companies that export food and agricultural products amid heightened global trade uncertainties sparked by U.S. tariffs, Seoul's agriculture minister said Wednesday. "The government will extend necessary support to exporting companies as we are in a critical period where market diversification is needed to respond to the fast changing export environment, including the United States' reciprocal tariffs," Agriculture Minister Song Mi-ryung said in a food export promotion fair held in Seoul. The two-day fair kicked off amid growing concerns surrounding the country's food and agricultural exports following the Donald Trump administration's announcement of "reciprocal" tariffs on South Korea and other countries earlier this month. On April 2 (U.S. time), Trump announced steep "reciprocal" duties on its major trading partners, including a 25 percent tariff on South Korea, but later decided to grant a 90-day suspension of the new measures to allow negotiations. The fair is attended by 123 buyers from 43 countries, including the U.S., China and Japan, and 230 food companies here, according to the agriculture ministry.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/16/2025

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## **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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## **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.

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## **Acting President Vows Support for Animation Industry**

Acting President Han Duck-soo said Thursday the government will support the growth of the local animation industry by creating a specialized fund and helping attract investment. Han made the remark during a ministerial meeting, saying the government has drawn up a basic plan to promote the animation industry in order to cultivate it into a new growth engine for "K-contents," or Korean pop culture content. "We will create an animation-specialized fund to invest heavily in related small and medium-sized firms and venture firms, while actively supporting the attraction of investment to OTT services, broadcasting companies and venture capital," he said. Moreover, the government will support the development of technology to facilitate the application of artificial intelligence and other technologies to the production of

animation while fostering professionals in the field, he added. Also discussed during the meeting was a plan to improve standards for the production, distribution and storage of drinking water, and a plan to upgrade digital maritime navigation systems.

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## **S. Korea to Devise Long-Term Strategy to Commercialize Autonomous Vessel Technology**

South Korea will set up a long-term strategy this year to commercialize autonomous marine vehicle technology as part of efforts to innovate the shipping industry, the oceans minister said Tuesday. "Autonomous ships utilizing cutting-edge digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), will play a significant role in improving maritime safety and reducing carbon emissions of the shipping industry," Oceans Minister Kang Do-hyung said in the inaugural meeting of a new policy committee on such technology. The long-term plan will cover a 10-year road map on developing technologies essential to building autonomous vessels, transitioning the maritime shipping system to align with the technology, fostering professional talent in the area and revising related domestic policies, according to the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries. South Korea launched the policy committee on autonomous ships in line with the Our Ocean Conference (OOC), a global maritime conference being held in the southeastern port city of Busan. Kang said Seoul will also strengthen cooperation with the international community in joint efforts to develop a new global regulatory framework on the design, construction and operation of autonomous ships. The International Maritime Organization is working to develop a maritime autonomous surface ship code by 2032.

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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.

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## **Acting President Vows Unsparring Support for Construction Industry**

Acting President Han Duck-soo vowed Tuesday to provide unsparring support for the construction industry as he marked 60 years since South Korea won its first overseas construction order. The construction sector was a key engine of South Korea's economic development and growth following the 1950-53 Korean War as it helped earn foreign cash by building expressways, plants and other infrastructure largely in the Middle East. "The construction industry at home and abroad is faced with grave challenges," Han said during a ceremony in southern Seoul celebrating the 60th anniversary and US\$1 trillion in total overseas construction orders, citing global economic uncertainties and a downturn in the domestic real estate market. "The government will not spare our active support in order that these difficulties can be overcome at an early date and overseas construction can provide a new breakthrough for our economy," he said. Han outlined plans to build an interagency diplomatic network targeting not only "strategic nations" in Asia, the Middle East and Europe, but also emerging economies in Latin America and elsewhere. He also vowed to focus assistance on South Korea's strengths, such as smart city and urban development, and railway and infrastructure construction, including by creating an additional government fund worth 1.1 trillion won (US\$766 million) for related projects.

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## **South-East Asia**

### **INDONESIA: Deploying Triple Intervention to Stabilize Rupiah amid U.S. Tariff Threat**

The Indonesian central bank, Bank Indonesia (BI), vowed to maintain the stability of the rupiah by optimizing its triple intervention strategy, following the imposition of U.S. "reciprocal tariffs" on Indonesian exports, an official said on Saturday. Executive Director of the BI's Communication Department Ramdan Denny Prakoso explained that the triple intervention involves intervening in the foreign exchange spot market, the Domestic Non-Deliverable Forward market, and the secondary market for government securities. "The BI remains committed to maintaining the stability of the rupiah exchange rate by optimizing the triple intervention instruments," Prakoso was quoted by local media. He noted that the strategy is aimed at ensuring sufficient

foreign exchange liquidity for banking and business needs, while also maintaining market confidence. Prakoso added that the BI will continue to closely monitor developments in both global and domestic financial markets following the recent announcement of the new U.S. tariff policy. Indonesian experts have raised concerns that the 32 percent U.S. "reciprocal tariffs" on products from Indonesia could further pressure the rupiah against the U.S. dollar.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/05/2025

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## **CAMBODIA: Promoting Implementation of RCEP Commitments on Standards, Trade Facilitation**

Cambodia on Tuesday organized a workshop to raise awareness on standards, technical regulations, and conformity assessment procedures (STRACAP) under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement. The event was presided over by Nhim Khemara, permanent secretary of state of the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology & Innovation, with the participation of more than 150 representatives from the public and private sectors, consumer groups, and relevant stakeholders. "Enhancing standards, technical regulations, and conformity assessment procedures will strengthen Cambodian businesses and increase their competitiveness in regional and international markets through increased trust among trading partners and evidence of quality and safety," Khemara said. The workshop also focused on developing a roadmap for implementing standards, technical regulations, and conformity assessment procedures under the RCEP agreement to help promote Cambodia's trade development with partners effectively. "Today, we begin the development of a roadmap towards sustainable growth through a commitment to implementing standards, technical regulations, and conformity assessment procedures," he added. The workshop received key input and facilitated fruitful discussions in identifying challenges and solutions to enhance national quality infrastructure and promote the effective and sustainable implementation of regional and international trade agreements. Cambodia's trade volume with RCEP member countries reached 34.52 billion U.S. dollars in 2024, a 17.7 percent increase from 29.32 billion dollars in 2023, according to an official report. Entered into force in 2022, the RCEP comprises 15 Asia-Pacific countries including 10 ASEAN member states -- Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam -- and their five trading partners, namely China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

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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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## **THAILAND: To Test Mobile Emergency Alert System in May**

Thailand is set to launch a public test of its new emergency alert system using cell broadcast technology in May, the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation announced on Wednesday. The tests will be conducted across all regions in the Southeast Asian country to evaluate the system's efficiency in delivering notifications quickly and accurately and to enhance public confidence ahead of its full-scale rollout, said the department's Director-General Phasakorn Boonyalak. The scheduled tests will be implemented in three stages, ranging from small to medium to large scale, with the provincial-level drill to cover five areas, including the capital Bangkok, Phasakorn told a news conference. Phasakorn said the cell broadcast technology allows messages to be sent directly to mobile phones within a specific geographic area, accompanied by a loud alert tone and an on-screen message in Thai and English to ensure clarity for both local residents and foreigners. "These messages are designed to be clear and actionable to help the public respond appropriately to emergencies," he added. According to the department, the cell broadcast system aims to complement existing SMS alerts, and incompatible devices will continue to receive emergency alerts through the Short Message Service (SMS). The strong earthquake that struck neighboring Myanmar last month and caused strong tremors across Thailand has prompted the Thai government to ramp up efforts to modernize the kingdom's emergency warning infrastructure.

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## **VIETNAM: Vowing Tough Measures After Counterfeit Milk Powder Ring Busted**

Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Bui Thanh Son has called for strict punishment

and tightened supervision following the dismantling of a major counterfeit milk powder ring, local daily newspaper Nhan Dan (People) reported. Chairing the first-quarter meeting of the National Steering Committee 389 on Monday, Son emphasized that "there must be no relaxation in management," according to the state-owned media outlet. Authorities found that the ring had manufactured nearly 600 counterfeit milk powder brands, with products containing less than 70 percent of their declared nutritional value, earning illegal profits of about 500 billion Vietnamese dong (around 20 million U.S. dollars) over four years. Despite the large scale of the case, no consumers have filed complaints related to the counterfeit products so far, Vice President of the Vietnam Consumer Protection Association Vu Van Trung said in an interview with Nhan Dan, calling for greater public awareness to better protect consumer rights.

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## **EVN Prepares Power Supply Plans to Meet Rising Demand in 2025**

Vietnam Electricity (EVN) has outlined a series of proactive measures to ensure stable electricity supply across the country in 2025, as national power demand is expected to surge significantly. According to EVN, the total system load capacity this year is estimated to hit 54,510MW, marking an increase of 11.35 per cent compared to 2024. Commercial electricity output is forecast at 300.9 billion kWh, with contingency plans raising this figure to 305.6 billion kWh to accommodate high-growth scenarios. The warning comes as heatwaves begin to grip parts of the country, with northern and southern regions already experiencing temperatures of up to 38 degrees Celsius. The spike in temperatures has caused a notable rise in electricity use, especially for cooling and domestic purposes. "This puts considerable pressure on the national grid, from power generation and transmission to distribution," said Deputy General Director of EVN, Võ Quang Lâm. "Ensuring a stable power supply during peak heat periods requires not only the efforts of the electricity sector, but also close cooperation from households, businesses and the broader community." While cooler weather at the beginning of the year slowed demand slightly, EVN reported that commercial electricity output in the first quarter of 2025 still reached 63.645 billion kWh, a year-on-year increase of 4.43 per cent. However, demand is expected to continue climbing as the hot season intensifies. EVN has developed multiple supply scenarios to ensure energy security, including provisions for demand growth of up to 12–13 per cent. EVN is carrying out ten major power projects totalling 8,800 MW, with key works set for completion in 2025, including the Hòa Bình Hydropower expansion, Quảng Trạch I Thermal Plant, major transmission lines and the Côn Đảo grid link. In addition to infrastructure investment, EVN and its subsidiaries are rolling out demand-side management initiatives, including load shifting, power-saving campaigns and encouraging customers to use electricity more safely and efficiently.

## **Gov't Ramps Up Efforts to Curb Wastefulness for Socio-Economic Growth**

The Government's efforts to reduce wastefulness in 2024 have seen significant progress, according to official reports presented to the National Assembly (NA) Standing Committee on Thursday. Speaking at the meeting, Minister of Finance Nguyễn Văn Thắng noted that the focus was put on boosting efficiency in managing the State budget and public assets, public investment, resource management and utilisation, public sector's labour and time management and inspection activities. The Prime Minister has issued a comprehensive programme for 2025 to prevent wastefulness, aiming to implement practical measures and drive breakthroughs to meet the targets of the 2021-25 socio-economic development plan. The Deputy Chairman of the NA's Committee on Economic and Financial Affairs, Lê Quang Mạnh, agreed with the tasks outlined by the Government and urged more efforts to implement the Party's directives on wastefulness prevention. He also called for swift policy reviews across social and economic management to identify bottlenecks and propose effective solutions, including a review and amendment of the Law on Thrift Practice and Wastefulness Prevention.

Efforts should also focus on strict financial regulations, effective fiscal policies, budget deficit control and solutions to address shortcomings in the implementation of national target programmes and public investment, he added while calling for better implementation of key projects in line with NA resolutions. The Government should continue reorganising public land and property, transferring underused or ineffective central-level assets to local authorities for socio-economic development, especially in terms of public facilities after administrative restructuring and unused land in delayed projects. Wastefulness prevention has long been identified as a top priority, with the Government issuing various directives and focusing on policy reform to address inefficiencies in national resource allocation. During the meeting, NA Deputy Chairman Trần Quang Phương and head of the NA's Deputies Affairs Committee Nguyễn Thanh Hải requested a detailed review of the report to identify the root causes of current issues and propose improvements for future implementation. They also called for better evaluation of thrift practices across public agencies and localities.

Citing the second facilities of Bạch Mai Hospital and Việt Đức (Việt Nam-Germany Friendship Hospital), NA Deputy Chairman Nguyễn Khắc Định said that a comprehensive review of incomplete or delayed projects is necessary to prevent wastefulness. "There are places where land has been left unused for years after registering for projects. Inventory should be conducted to revoke those to prevent waste," he said. Định also called for tighter financial and asset management to

prevent losses and misconduct, while also stressing the need for clear responsibility for thrift practices and wastefulness prevention across all ministries, sectors and local authorities. In 2024, the State budget revenue reached VNĐ2.043 quadrillion (US\$78.5 billion), about 20.1 per cent higher than the estimates. Expenditures were estimated at VNĐ1.83 quadrillion (\$70.3 billion), accounting for 86.4 per cent of the plan. Budget execution was tightly controlled to reduce recurrent expenditures and eliminate unnecessary or delayed spending. Ministries, sectors and local areas reported a total of VNĐ64.014 trillion (\$2.46 billion) in saved funds and capital. The national multidimensional poverty rate dropped to 1.93 per cent in 2024, down by one percentage point from 2023. By the end of 2024, 78 per cent of communes nationwide had met the new-style rural standards, and five provinces were recognised for completing the national rural development programme. As of December 31, 2024, the total disbursed capital for nine national key transport projects was VNĐ70.74 trillion (\$2.72 billion), or 72.9 per cent of the year's plan (VNĐ96.99 trillion). Accelerated public investment disbursement contributed to the launch and rapid progress of many strategic infrastructure projects. However, 30 out of 46 central ministries and agencies, along with 26 out of 63 localities, recorded disbursement rates below the national average.

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## **Việt Nam 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.

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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.

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## **UP Government Accelerates Specialised Training for Commercial Drivers with New IDTRs**

In a significant push for road safety and skill development, the Yogi-led Uttar Pradesh government has initiated the establishment of Model Institutes of Driving Training and Research (IDTRs) to provide specialized training for commercial drivers. Transport Commissioner Brajesh Narayan Singh has formally written to District Magistrates of nine districts, requesting 10-15 acres of land for the project. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has directed the setting up of IDTRs in Lucknow, Gorakhpur, Ballia, Agra, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Jhansi, Kanpur Nagar, Shahjahanpur, and Prayagraj, with financial backing from the central government. Once approved by the state, the proposal will be sent to MoRTH for final approval and funding. With 30,37,166 commercial vehicles and only 27,48,523 licensed drivers, the state faces a 20% shortfall in trained drivers. The IDTR initiative aims to bridge this gap by ensuring structured training, improving road safety, and boosting employment in the transport sector. Phased Implementation of IDTRs: Land Allocation - District Magistrates to confirm land availability. State Evaluation - Proposals to be assessed by the state government. Central Proposal Submission - State-approved proposals sent to MoRTH. Final Approval & Funding - MoRTH to approve and finance the project. With this move, the UP government is taking decisive steps to institutionalise driver training, ensuring safer roads and a

well-equipped transport workforce.

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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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## **India Mobile Congress 2025 Unveiled by Telecom Minister**

## **Jyotiraditya Scindia at MWC Barcelona**

Union Minister for Communications Jyotiraditya Scindia officially announced the 9th edition of the India Mobile Congress (IMC) at the Mobile World Congress (MWC) in Barcelona. Scheduled to take place in New Delhi from October 8 to October 11, 2025, IMC is recognized as Asia's largest digital technology forum and is expected to bring together global leaders from the technology and telecommunications sectors. IMC 2025, organized by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), is projected to attract over 100,000 attendees from more than 120 countries. With over 1,000 exhibitors, including GSMA, the event aims to be a key platform for industry stakeholders to discuss advancements in connectivity, sustainability, and innovation. Speaking at MWC Barcelona, Scindia highlighted the pivotal role of IMC in shaping India's digital landscape. "India Mobile Congress has been instrumental in driving progress in the telecom and technology sectors. As Asia's largest technology forum, IMC will further solidify India's leadership in digital transformation and create new opportunities for collaboration in the global ecosystem," he said. Focus on Emerging Technologies. The 2025 edition of IMC will focus on key areas such as 5G and 6G technology, artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductors, electronics manufacturing, quantum computing, cybersecurity, satellite communications, deep-tech, clean-tech, smart mobility, Industry 4.0, and enterprise transformation. The event will serve as a global platform for policymakers, industry leaders, and technology enthusiasts to explore new frontiers in digital technology. A significant highlight of IMC 2025 will be ASPIRE, its pioneering startup program. ASPIRE is expected to feature participation from over 1,000 startups, along with 300 investors, incubators, accelerators, and venture capitalists. The program will include mentorship workshops, live pitches, networking sessions, and opportunities for strategic partnerships.

India's Digital Transformation. Scindia emphasized India's remarkable progress in the telecom and technology sectors, attributing this growth to the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "India is entering a new era of digital leadership and economic prosperity. Our advancements in emerging technologies such as 6G, AI, and quantum computing will position us at the forefront of global innovation," he stated. The previous edition of IMC, held in October 2024, recorded unprecedented participation, with over 175,000 attendees and more than 1,012 partners and exhibitors representing 123 countries. Building on this success, the upcoming event aims to further expand India's influence in the digital and telecom sectors. As the global landscape of digital technology continues to evolve, IMC 2025 is poised to play a crucial role in shaping the future of connectivity and innovation, reinforcing India's status as a leader in the digital revolution.

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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).

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**India Poised to Become a Global Hub for IP-Led Innovation**

Saying that there is 'Unlimited Headroom for Entrepreneurs', Accel partner Prashanth Prakash announced that the venture capital firm would deploy its recently raised USD 650 million fund within the next two-three years to invest in start-ups dealing with AI and industrialisation driven by technology. The firm is targeting investments in 20-25 start-ups this year as it embarks on an aggressive drive to take advantage of India's budding innovation ecosystem. "If you're an entrepreneur starting up, there can be no better time. The number of industries in which start-ups are making their presence felt is also 10-fold. It is more multi-dimensional and multi-industry", Prakash explained to PTI in an interview. "There are huge opportunities for entrepreneurs who possess the ability to visualize and see what products the world and India require. There is unlimited headroom for entrepreneurs", he added. While US tariff effects are still unclear, India certainly has the strong potential to be an IP-led innovation and high-value manufacturing hub of the world, especially in areas such as defence, EVs, aerospace and energy, Prakash added. It can do that by leveraging the prowess of its enormous talent pool, start-up flexibility, and increasing capacity to tap into global supply chains through innovation and strategic partnerships, he added. According to the entrepreneur, philanthropist and venture capitalist, who was among the Padma Shri awardees announced earlier this year, Indian start-ups have matured post-Covid and are striking a stronger balance between growth and profitability.

Prakash said he is upbeat about the potential of startups, particularly in AI, tech-led industrialisation as well as Indian ventures driving smart innovation in areas such as sustainability, EVs, aerospace and space tech. He added that early-stage investment has a robust momentum, with considerable available capital, including money from Indian family offices -- organizations in charge of running the investments of high networth families who are now also looking at start-ups as an attractive asset class. The entire ecosystem has essentially grown up as a healthier, more stable and better-aligned founders-investor environment. "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, and there's enough of a matchmaking that is happening in terms of this opportunity," Prakash said. Entrepreneurs as well as investors have identified the right module for India and the right type of start-up that can be built for India. "We have just closed a USD 650 million fund. And we are aggressively deploying the fund. We make 15-25 investments per year, and our expectation is that we will make 20-25 investments this year in the three sectors of AI, industrialisation led by technology, and 'Bharat' (start-ups serving the top 30 per cent of Indian tier 2 plus households)", he says.

"The deployment of the USD 650 million war chest would take place over the course of next two-three years," he said. With a 16-year strong history in India and Southeast Asia, Accel has been working with firms that have transformed industries from e-commerce and SaaS to manufacturing. It has made significant investments in

firms from sectors such as Amagi, Acko, BlackBuck, BlueStone, BrowserStack, Cult.fit, Flipkart, Freshworks, Swiggy, Urban Company and Zetwerk. For Prakash, the Padma Award award in the Trade and Industry sector in a way is the coming of age of the start-up ecosystem itself. He believes it is an acknowledgement of the power and potential of start-ups to revolutionize the Indian economy. The Accel partner added the start-up ecosystem has changed hugely and bumper IPOs by start-ups going public have made sure that there is mass participation in start-up phenomenon. Further, the start-up ecosystem is reaching further beyond the city centres, going deeper into tier 2 and tier 3 cities and making entrepreneurship a pan-India movement. "The next decade will hold even bigger promises, with start-ups likely to touch even more sectors, with a critical role to play in nation-building". AI's ability to revolutionize and disrupt businesses is raising up enormous opportunities, Prakash emphasized.

"I think that businesses have been observing and willing to implement AI, but I don't think they've been able to really leverage it to the fullest. And that's where the Indian ecosystem, through our ability to develop applications on foundation models, will be a gigantic space that Accel and other investors will focus on", he says. Industrialisation led by deep-tech, he added, is another place to look out for. Start-up founders increasingly no longer feel "intimidated" to establish manufacturing capacity, or construct actual products. "Hi-tech AI driven industrialisation, or AI combined with physical asset based manufacturing is going to contribute to the country a great deal of import substitution. And once you sort of use that for import substitution and construct for the nation, the potential for us to construct frugally and at a very low-cost base in India will assist us in tapping into this fresh multipolar complex supply chain which is being developed from in the US and everywhere", Prakash stated. He called upon Indian tech entrepreneurs to seize the opportunity to connect with such value chains, marrying their deep knowledge of AI, of new age manufacturing and IP leverage. Referring to the defence ecosystem as one of the prime opportunities, he called upon start-ups to take advantage of iDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence) and similar initiatives, and investors to fund innovations in this segment. "In electric cars, can we make the parts that can plug into the EV system? Is it just going to come from China? No, it's not just BYD that's going to ship all the stuff to the rest of the world. They have the lead in battery and do that, but there are plenty of other parts that go into an EV supply chain and that we see as something entrepreneurs here building", he says.

Prakash is optimistic about this industrialisation prospect, and about start-ups taking a central role in segments of sustainable products, EV products, aerospace products, space technology and defence. Accel has invested in more than 27 AI start-ups in India or started by Indian-origin entrepreneurs within the past two years alone. Over the last few years, it has rolled out some flagship initiatives to enable a founder's journey to be as frictionless as possible and drive the ecosystem's growth. The company's open-source community platform and open-source content, SeedToScale,

makes knowledge on building companies democratic with insights from successful industry leaders, operators and founders. Its early-stage scaling program, Accel Atoms - currently in its fourth iteration - has already backed 36 start-ups that have collectively raised more than USD 200 million.

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## **QpiAI Unveils One of India's Most Powerful Quantum Computers Under National Quantum Mission**

Bengaluru, April 15, 2025 — 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.

From <https://news.siliconindia.com/> 04/18/2025

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## **Karnataka Government Launches Incubation Centre in Kalaburagi to Boost Innovation in Tier-2 Cities**

In a major push towards decentralising innovation and strengthening the startup ecosystem beyond metropolitan hubs, the Karnataka government has inaugurated a state-of-the-art Incubation Centre in Kalaburagi. The initiative, launched under the state's flagship Local Economy Accelerator Programme (LEAP), is a significant stride in the government's ongoing #BeyondBengaluru mission, which aims to empower Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities across the state. The announcement was made by Priyank M Kharge, Karnataka's Minister for IT & BT, who stressed the importance of preparing regional cities for the future of innovation. "If Tier-2 and Tier-3 India aren't future-ready, then the nation never truly will be," Kharge remarked, underscoring the government's commitment to fostering localised, inclusive economic growth. With a financial outlay of ₹1,000 crore, the LEAP programme is geared towards nurturing innovation ecosystems outside Bengaluru by offering advanced infrastructure, industry mentorship, skill development in emerging technologies, and robust industry-academia collaboration. The new centre in Kalaburagi is a collaborative venture between the Department of IT & BT, Karnataka Digital Economy Mission (KDEM), and PDA College of Engineering. The launch event, held at the Kalaburagi District Administrative Complex on April 9, also witnessed the signing of crucial agreements aimed at establishing both an Incubation Centre and an Offshore Development Centre (ODC). Deputy Commissioner Fauzia Taranum highlighted that the initiative aligns with LEAP's broader objective of generating five lakh jobs across Tier-2 cities such as Kalaburagi, Hubballi-Dharwad, Mysuru, and Mangaluru.

As part of this initiative, a tripartite agreement has been signed between the Deputy Commissioner's Office, KDEM, and PDA College of Engineering to establish the incubation centre, which is expected to support over 50 startups from the Kalyana Karnataka region. The centre will serve as a strategic platform to nurture entrepreneurial talent, boost employment, and promote digital innovation in the region. Adding further momentum, a partnership has been forged with XCEL Corp, a New Jersey-based global technology firm. The company is expanding its research and development operations in Kalaburagi, thereby reinforcing its presence in India. XCEL Corp, a leader in areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), generative AI, quantum computing, and IoT, already operates R&D hubs in Bengaluru, Chennai, Belagavi, and Hubballi-Dharwad. "Kalaburagi is emerging as a vital node in Karnataka's tech ecosystem," said Ms. Taranum. "Minister Priyank Kharge has played an instrumental role in bringing these developments to fruition, envisioning Kalaburagi as a cornerstone of Karnataka's future economic landscape." Supporting this vision, Shashil G. Namoshi, MLC and Chairman of the Hyderabad Karnataka Education Society, noted that the incubation centre at PDA College would help retain local talent and contribute to the region's industrial development. Sanjeev Kumar Gupta, CEO of KDEM, reaffirmed the organisation's commitment to expanding the IT ecosystem across Karnataka, while XCEL Corp CEO Jit Goel expressed confidence in the region's talent and potential for global innovation. Dr. S.R. Patil, Principal of PDA College of Engineering, summed up the sentiment: "This initiative blends education, industry, and government support to lay the foundation for a new era of innovation-led regional growth."

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 04/22/2025

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## **NIELIT Signs Strategic MoUs to Foster Innovation and Skilling**

In a significant move to accelerate the Digital India vision, the National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT) has entered into Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with eight leading organisations. The MoUs, signed on 25th April 2025 at Electronics Niketan in New Delhi, aim to foster innovation, research, skilling, and education in emerging technologies. The event, attended by key officials, was graced by Sh. S. Krishnan, Secretary of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY). It marks a momentous collaboration between NIELIT and a diverse array of institutions, signalling a significant push towards strengthening the country's digital infrastructure. The organisations involved in these strategic collaborations include Semiconductor Laboratory (SCL), ERNET India, National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE), Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, SKYROOT Aerospace, Institute for Financial Management and Research (IFMR), Kyndryl India, and the Heartfulness Institute. These partnerships are geared toward advancing research, education, training, and capacity building, particularly in the domains of Electronics, IT, and emerging technologies. The areas of collaboration include joint

research projects, curriculum development, capacity building initiatives, and skilling programs designed to enhance India's technological expertise and support the Digital India agenda. These initiatives will focus on developing a workforce that is adept at leveraging the latest innovations in technology.

Sh. S. Krishnan, Secretary of MeitY, emphasised the importance of such collaborations for the growth of a digital economy. He stated, "This is a strategic convergence of academia, industry, and government institutions to foster a robust digital ecosystem. Such collaborations are vital to shaping a digitally empowered society and a thriving knowledge economy." In his address, Sh. Krishnan also lauded the efforts of Dr. M. M. Tripathi, Director General of NIELIT, and the entire NIELIT team for their leadership in forging these partnerships, which aim to bridge the gap between academic institutions and industry requirements. He noted that these collaborations will ensure the development of a future-ready workforce, equipped with high-quality education and practical skills to meet industry needs. The signing ceremony was attended by several distinguished dignitaries, including Ms. Preeti Nath, Economic Adviser, MeitY; Dr. M. M. Tripathi, DG, NIELIT; Ms. Tulika Pandey, Scientist G & Group Coordinator, MeitY; Dr. Kamaljeet Singh, DG, SCL; Sh. Sanjeev Bansal, DG, ERNET India; Ms. Girija Mukund, Director CSR & ESG, Kyndryl India; Dr. Krishnashree Achuthan, Dean & Director, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham; Dr. C. V. S. Kiran, VP, Skyroot Aerospace; Dr. Mohammad Rihan, DG, NISE; and Dr. Narsi Reddy, Director, Heartfulness Institute. NIELIT, an autonomous body under MeitY, is committed to promoting education, training, and research in Electronics, IT, and emerging technologies. With 56 centers across India and a vast network of over 700 Accredited Training Partners, NIELIT plays a pivotal role in developing skilled manpower for India's growing digital economy. The institute also serves as the National Examination Body for accrediting institutions conducting non-formal courses in IT and Electronics.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 04/28/2025

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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.

From <https://news.siliconindia.com/> 04/28/2025

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## **CM Yogi Urges Tech Institutes to Create Affordable, Sustainable Tech Models**

Uttar Pradesh's CM Yogi Adityanath on Monday called on technology institutes to extend their efforts beyond campus confines and contribute to national development by creating affordable, practical, and sustainable technology models. Speaking at Madan Mohan Malaviya University of Technology (MMMUT) during an event that inaugurated and laid the foundation for 13 development projects worth over Rs 91 crore, the Chief Minister emphasized that while technology makes life easier, its high cost remains a barrier to accessibility. Highlighting the need for inclusive innovation, the Chief Minister remarked, "When technology is expensive, it becomes inaccessible to the common people." He challenged academic institutions to develop cost-effective solutions in key sectors such as housing, environment, and sanitation. Referencing the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, he posed a question: "The government provides Rs 1.20 lakh for constructing a house in rural areas. Can technology be devised to build a house within this budget and reduce construction time from nine months to three?" CM Yogi also expressed concerns about traditional construction methods, urging the adoption of modern innovations rooted in indigenous techniques to address issues like solid and liquid waste management. He stressed that the affordability of technology is essential because government funds come from public taxes, and thus, it is imperative to ensure that this money benefits the people effectively.

During the event, which also saw the flagging off of four CNG buses, the Chief Minister noted how technology has transformed governance. Citing tech-enabled systems that facilitated the transparent distribution of free rations to 15 crore citizens and the inspection of 80,000 fair-price shops in a single day—leading to the

identification of 30 lakh fake ration cards—he underscored the immense impact of digital innovation on public service delivery. He also highlighted measures such as the direct transfer of increased monthly pensions for the elderly, destitute women, and differently abled individuals, which have helped eliminate corruption. CM Yogi pointed to a striking public utility example where the transition from halogen to LED street lighting reduced carbon emissions and saved Rs 1,000 crore for the state. He further praised an indigenous water purification method implemented by the Municipal Corporation in Gorakhpur, where a natural filtration process using boulders, stones, and vegetation replaced a proposed Sewage Treatment Plant costing Rs 110 crore, reducing expenses to just Rs 10 crore. This innovative model, which meets environmental standards, has drawn praise from international bodies, including experts from Germany. Looking ahead, CM Yogi emphasised the growing importance of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, and Quantum Computing in addressing modern challenges. He mentioned the current use of robotics in municipal sewer cleaning and stressed the need for developing more accessible and affordable solutions in this domain. Drawing a contrast between Western concepts of sustainable development and India's holistic approach, CM Yogi reiterated the nation's commitment to fostering total progress across all dimensions of life, citing India's historical leadership in education and technology. CM Yogi also congratulated the 76 newly appointed teachers at MMMUT, urging them to live up to their responsibilities and contribute positively to the institution's development journey. In his closing remarks, he reiterated that those who face challenges emerge stronger, while those who shy away are left behind. The event, attended by dignitaries including Mayor Dr. Manglesh Srivastava and University Vice-Chancellor Prof. J.P. Saini, also saw the felicitation of teachers and researchers under the research scheme, marking a celebration of both innovation and academic excellence.

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

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## Central-West Asia

### **AZERBAIJAN: Assuming Leadership of Global South NGO Platform**

Azerbaijan has been entrusted with the leadership of the Global South NGO Platform, following the agreement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from 116 countries, Trend reports. Ramil Iskandarli, the head of the Azerbaijan National NGO Forum, has been appointed as the temporary Secretary General of the platform for a one-year term. During this period, the platform's internal structure will be finalized, and the General Assembly of the Global South NGO Platform is set to be convened in 2026.

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

## **Azerbaijan Pushes for Greater Focus on Green Hospitals to Enhance Healthcare Sustainability**

The VIII meeting of health ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is taking place in the Chinese city of Xi'an, Trend reports via the Azerbaijani Health Ministry. "Azerbaijan, which has the status of SCO dialog partner, is represented at the international event by a delegation headed by Health Minister Teymur Musayev. Minister of the National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China Lei Haichao made an opening speech. Welcoming the participants of the meeting, he noted that the most important topic on the agenda of the current meeting is to discuss issues of effective coordination of activities in such key areas of health care as emergency medical care, primary health care, digital health and traditional medicine. In his speech, Azerbaijani Health Minister Teymur Musayev stressed the high level of organization of the meeting of the SCO Health Ministers. The Minister recalled that on July 3, 2024, within the framework of the SCO summit held in Astana, the Joint Declaration on Establishing Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the People's Republic of China was adopted: " President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev in an interview with Chinese agency Xinhua called the adoption of the Joint Declaration a historic event opening a new page in Azerbaijan-China relations".

Moreover, it was noted that a Joint Statement between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the People's Republic of China on the establishment of relations of comprehensive strategic partnership was signed in Beijing on April 23, 2025 within the state visit of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev to the People's Republic of China: "The state visit of President Ilham Aliyev to China at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping will further strengthen and accelerate the development of our bilateral relations." "Under the leadership of President Ilham Aliyev, implementation of socially oriented policy, transition to digital state governance, and economic diversification have contributed to strengthening Azerbaijan's sovereignty and its role as a leading country in the region. As the head of state noted, the unanimous decision to hold COP29 in Baku last November is an indicator of great respect and trust of the international community in our country. Reducing the negative impact of environmental pollution on the health of the population and promoting a healthy lifestyle are key priorities of the Azerbaijani government," Teymur Musayev noted. According to the Minister, in recent years, global health has faced both achievements and significant challenges due to factors such as pandemics and environmental changes.

However, global crises offer opportunities for positive transformation and should be seen as milestones on the road to progress: "The future development of health systems is likely to be driven by technological advances, the widespread use of data

analytics, and the move towards personalized medicine. In the face of a global shortage of medical personnel, a new helper - artificial intelligence (AI) - is coming to our aid. One of its key contributions is to increase access to healthcare, particularly by strengthening primary care systems. However, to fully integrate AI, it is necessary to create an appropriate legislative framework to ensure effective utilization of the practical capabilities of artificial intelligence,” the Minister added. He emphasized that despite the obvious advantages of digital solutions, they should not replace the human factor, but only complement it: “Digital technologies should act as auxiliary tools, allowing medical professionals to pay more attention to patient care.” The Minister paid special attention to the sustainability of health care systems. He emphasized the importance of reducing the negative impact on the environment, reducing energy consumption, and improving the sustainability of healthcare facilities. “For this purpose, it is necessary to more actively implement the concept of “green hospitals” and invest in improving the energy efficiency of healthcare facilities. Investments in the healthcare sector are investments in our common future,” Teymur Musayev concluded. Heads of government agencies involved in healthcare activities of the SCO member states spoke about the main areas of cooperation of the SCO member states in the field of healthcare.

They noted that all the countries of the region support the active expansion of cooperation in this area. In conclusion, the participants of the meeting exchanged views on the development of national health care systems, the role of international organizations, increasing the capacity of medical and pharmaceutical personnel, as well as on the prospects for cooperation in the areas of primary health care, digital health and traditional medicine,” the information notes.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/29/2025

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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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## Oceania

### **AUSTRALIA: Department of Education to Take on Oversight of Home Schooling in NSW**

The Department of Education will assume responsibility for overseeing home schooling in NSW from May 5, 2025. This change transfers oversight from the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) to the Department, and will align NSW with most other Australian jurisdictions. The Department of Education has obligations under the Education Act 1990 to ensure students are either enrolled in an approved school or registered for home schooling. These changes will better enable the Department to ensure it is meeting that responsibility. NESA staff currently involved in the regulatory oversight of home schooling will transfer to the Department of Education, retaining the expertise, working knowledge and relationships that are important to the administration of home schooling in NSW. The NSW Government will also consider any recommendations made in relation to home schooling in the NSW Auditor-General's review of Education in alternative settings. As in all NSW educational settings, the wellbeing and safety of children remains paramount.

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

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### **NSW Government Receives Drug Summit Report**

The NSW Government has today received the Drug Summit report from Co-Chairs Hon. Carmel Tebbutt and John Brogden AM. The Drug Summit delivered on an election commitment from the Minns Labor Government to bring together those with lived and living experience, frontline workers and experts in addiction and illicit drug use. The summit listened to over 400 participants as well as 3,600 written submissions, over four days across metropolitan Sydney, Griffith and Lismore. It sought to reflect the many different parts of our community touched by this challenge – healthcare, justice, housing, social services and those disproportionately impacted by illicit drugs. Not everyone agreed on everything, but we sought to have every voice listened to. I want to thank the Co-Chairs John Brogden and Carmel Tebbutt for their tireless efforts in facilitating discussion and reporting on it. The report has put forward 56 recommendations across key areas including prevention, early intervention, community support, stigma, workforce and reform. The Government will now carefully consider these findings and respond in due course.

From <https://afndaily.com.au> 04/16/2025

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### **NEW ZEALAND: Next Steps on Emergency Ocean Response Capability**

The Government is considering next steps on developing an emergency ocean response capability and has contracted ocean-going tugboat 'MMA Vision' to provide assurance in the meantime, Minister of Transport Chris Bishop says. Last year Cabinet directed the Ministry of Transport and Maritime New Zealand to develop a business case that considers options to improve New Zealand's maritime emergency ocean response capability, with a focus on the Cook Strait. "The Detailed Business Case recommends a "two-strike" solution. This would comprise a locally based (in the Cook Strait area) "first-strike" capability dedicated to quickly reaching and stabilising a stricken vessel in the Cook Strait, and a regionally based (for example, Port Taranaki) "second-strike" capability that could tow any stricken vessel in New Zealand back to port.

"Solutions would be procured by Maritime NZ as a service by entering into retainer contracts with commercial providers. The Crown would not directly purchase or own a vessel. "There have been 23 maritime incidents over the last five years where ready access to an emergency ocean response capability may have supported the response. However, it is worth noting that all these incidents were resolved with existing capabilities and vessels of opportunity, with most occurring outside the Cook Strait area. "There have been several notable incidents in the Cook Strait area, including the Kaitaki loss of power (January 2023), Shiling loss of power (April 2023), Aratere grounding (June 2024), and Connemara loss of power (September 2024). The Connemara incident is the only clear example that a Cook Strait based first-strike capability would have improved the response.

"The latest analysis also indicates the cost of a two-strike solution is significantly higher than initially thought. "The Government has decided to continue to explore procuring an emergency ocean response capability, on a predominantly user-pays basis. We are interested in testing the willingness of users (public and industry) to pay a levy to fund a permanent response capability. I have instructed officials to provide me with advice on the most effective approach and expect to hear back in the middle of the year. "To provide assurance while a long-term solution is worked through, the Government has contracted the services of ocean-going tugboat 'MMA Vision' through to June 2026. The tug is expected to arrive in Wellington tomorrow and will be based between the Cook Strait area and Taranaki."

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 04/17/2025

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## **Over 200,000 New Zealanders to Benefit from Medicines Funding Boost**

Associate Health Minister David Seymour and Health Minister Simeon Brown are pleased that hundreds of thousands of New Zealanders are set to benefit from access to more than 60 medicines, following the Government's funding boost to Pharmac. The funding boost of \$604 million over four years has allowed Pharmac to

fund or widen access to 59 medicines so far, with five more being considered for funding as of today. By comparison, in the financial year immediately prior to receiving the funding boost from this government, Pharmac was able to fund or widen access to 28 treatments. “Pharmac’s consultation for asthma inhalers, released today, represents the final consultation related to last year’s funding increase,” Mr Seymour says. “If the proposal to widen access is approved, it will mean over 200,000 New Zealanders in total will have benefitted from the additional medicines funded using the Government’s budget boost.

“When this Government assumed office, New Zealanders were facing an uncertain future for medicine access. Pharmac had a \$1.8 billion funding hole and no new money to increase access for medicines. It was a priority for this government to fix that. We’ve allocated Pharmac its largest ever budget of \$6.294 billion over four years, so that it can get on and do its job – negotiating the best deals for medicine for New Zealanders. “For example, Pharmac opened consultation on a proposal to widen access to pembrolizumab (Keytruda) for five types of cancer within days of the funding boost being announced. Just over three months later, people with these conditions could start their new treatments. “In my letter of expectations to Pharmac last July I asked it to ensure that its decision making and evaluation model includes the wider fiscal impact of funding or not funding a medicine.

While Budget 2025 is still under consideration, I have confidence in Pharmac’s ability to increase medicines access for Kiwis with the budget provided to them.” Mr Brown says delivering better and faster access to cancer care in New Zealand has been a focus of this Government, which is why it is one of our five key health targets, and is able to deliver because of the Government’s \$604 million investment in new cancer medicines. “As Minister of Health, I am focused on ensuring better access to more cancer medicines, better cancer management driven by our faster cancer treatment target, and earlier detection of cancers through screening programmes,” Mr Brown says. “Some of these medicines, such as Keytruda, have been described as ‘game-changers.’ Other medicines, such as the heart medicine empagliflozin, will help keep people with chronic heart failure out of hospital, relieving pressure on the health system. “It is encouraging to see continued improvement in our efforts to provide faster cancer treatment, with more patients receiving their first treatment within 31 days in the first financial quarter than in the previous quarter and more cancer treatments available.” While the consultation released today is the last related to the Government’s funding boost, Pharmac will continue to assess applications to fund new medicines and make more medicines available to New Zealanders as budget allows.

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 04/17/2025

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## **A Better Path for Apprentices and Trainees**

The Government is making changes to work-based learning so that industries have more influence over how they train apprentices and trainees, Vocational Education Minister Penny Simmonds says. “Whether you’re a carpenter building the warm, dry homes of tomorrow, or a mechanic working to keep us safe on the roads, it’s important you have the right skills to do your job effectively,” Ms Simmonds says. “However, industry representatives have made it clear that the current work-based learning model is not delivering because it has become overly centralised through Te Pūkenga. As a result, the training of apprentices and other workers is often disconnected from the realities of the jobs they are working towards. “We are fixing this by giving industries more control over how they train people. “Beginning next year, the Government will introduce a new, independent, and industry-led model for work-based learning.

“This means vocational education and training providers will be able to manage all aspects of an apprenticeship or traineeship at an industry level, rather than taking direction from a centralised behemoth. “This is great for learners because it makes their learning more relevant to their employment, and it is beneficial to businesses who will gain access to more capable workers to boost their productivity and deliver economic growth. “Public and industry consultation clearly showed that this model was the preferred option, and this Government is proud to deliver the changes that we called for,” Ms Simmonds says. From 1 January 2026: New Industry Skills Boards (ISBs) will be set up to set training standards, endorse programmes and moderate assessments.

Apprentices and trainees currently with Te Pūkenga will move to the ISBs for up to two years.

New students will enrol directly with new work-based learning private providers, polytechnics, or Wānanga. ISBs will be able to enrol new learners until other providers are set up to deliver work-based learning. “So, if you’re a learner or an employer — keep going. Your qualifications are essential, and your training is valuable. There will be no disruption, your training stays on track,” Ms Simmonds says. “We’re building a better system — for learners, for industry, and for the future of New Zealand.”

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 04/26/2025

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## **Women’s Refuge Receives Funding Boost**

Minister for Mental Health Matt Doocey is pleased to announce today that the Women’s Refuge is the latest recipient of the Government’s Mental Health and Addiction Innovation Fund. “Women’s Refuge do incredibly important work in our communities. They provide a safe space for women and children experiencing family violence, some of whom may be experiencing mental health and addiction challenges. I am delighted that the organisation will receive funding from the

Government to help deliver mental health and addiction support to those in need,” Mr Doocey says. “I am pleased the funding announced today will support 250 advocates based within the 41 Women’s Refuges across New Zealand with mental health and addiction training, advisory support from clinical specialists and strengthen referral pathways so clients can access local mental health and addiction services more efficiently.

“The feedback I often hear about mental health services is that it is too hard to navigate and know where to go in a time of need. This funding will enable Women’s Refuge to upskill their staff on mental health and addiction as well as improve connections with local services and referral pathways and join up the system to make it more accessible to those in need. “Over the past five years, Women’s Refuge has supported an average of 15,000 clients per year. This funding will strengthen the workforce and improve referral pathways for those women and children who are accessing Women’s Refuge services. “Initiatives like this is exactly what the Innovation Fund was designed for, and this support will only grow as we move into the second round of funding.”

The Women’s Refuge will receive \$540,000 from the Government across two years, which will be matched by the Women’s Refuge to make a total of \$1,080,000 over a two-year period. In round one of the Innovation Fund the Government have so far supported MATES in Construction, The Mental Health Foundation, YouthLine, Wellington City Mission, Rotorua Youth One Stop Shop and the Sir John Kirwan Foundation. “I am committed to doing everything possible to bring down mental health and addiction wait times in New Zealand. Partnering with organisations such as Women’s Refuge through the Innovation Fund to deliver innovative projects and initiatives supports the Government’s priority focus of increasing access to mental health and addiction support for Kiwis,” Mr Doocey says.

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 04/28/2025

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## 4、 Economic and Social Development and ICT

### Asia-Pacific

#### Historic Expansion in Social Protection in Past Decade

A new World Bank report reveals both the progress and the ongoing challenges in strengthening social protection and labor systems across low- and middle-income countries. Drawing from administrative and household surveys, it shows that in the past decade, and particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, social protection coverage reached 4.7 billion people in low- and middle-income countries, the highest point in history. However, three out of four people in low-income

countries have no access to social services, according to [The State of Social Protection Report 2025: The 2 Billion-Person Challenge](#). Despite significant gains in expanding social protection systems over the past decade, a staggering two billion people remain without adequate coverage. It will take 18 years to achieve full coverage for those living in extreme poverty at current growth rates. Social protection goes well beyond direct cash or in-kind support; it includes policies and programs that bridge skill, financial and information gaps. The three pillars of social protection—social assistance, social insurance, and labor market programs—play a crucial role in helping households and workers manage crises, escape poverty, navigate transitions, and seize job opportunities. “Well-designed social protection programs empower people, helping them move out of poverty and become self-reliant. They prevent pulling children out of school or selling productive assets when shocks occur. They also help women start small businesses, or young people acquire the skills needed to secure their first job,” said **Iffath Sharif, Global Director for Social Protection and Labor at the World Bank**. “These programs help people thrive, and that in turn benefits their communities and their economies.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, emergency social protection responses reached 1.7 billion people in developing countries, demonstrating the importance of shock-responsive systems. Countries with robust delivery infrastructure prior to the pandemic responded more effectively, emphasizing the need for proactive investment. The report finds, however, that social protection benefits are unevenly distributed. Across a sample of 27 countries, women receive, on average, 81 cents for every \$1 received by men. Unreached populations are disproportionately concentrated in fragile, conflict-affected, and hunger-prone regions of Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East. Social services and labor programs can significantly enhance labor opportunities for the poor, the report shows. Programs like public works, unemployment insurance and job placement services can greatly improve incomes for the poor. However, their potential is often underutilized due to inadequate funding and a lack of tailored design.

The report outlines three policy actions governments can take, tailored to each country’s context, capacity, and fiscal restraints:

- Expand coverage by investing limited resources, particularly in low-income countries, in infrastructure such as databases, digital payments, and case management systems to effectively support those in need.
- Tailor support to help people, especially in middle-income countries, move beyond survival toward self-reliance.
- Build shock-responsive systems by strengthening data, payments, and early warning tools to provide timely support and employment stability during crises.

To help fund these recommendations, the report notes that better use of existing resources could make a big difference. For instance, redirecting cash transfers from the wealthy to the poor could cover nearly half the cost of providing social protection to the bottom 20%. In a world undergoing rapid change, the cost of inaction will not

only be higher than the cost of investment—it will be measured in lost opportunities, deeper inequalities, and diminished resilience for generations to come.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/07/2025

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## International Aid Falls in 2024 for First Time in Five Years, Says OECD

International aid from official donors fell in 2024 by 7.1% in real terms compared to 2023, the first drop after five years of consecutive growth, according to preliminary data collected by the OECD. The fall in official development assistance (ODA) was due to a reduction in contributions to international organisations, as well as a decrease in aid for Ukraine, lower levels of humanitarian aid and reduced spending on hosting refugees in donor countries. ODA by member countries of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) amounted to USD 212.1 billion in 2024, representing 0.33% of DAC members' combined GNI. "Pressures on development finance and developing countries' growth are increasing," **OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann** said. "Optimising the effectiveness of available official development assistance will help developing countries manage these fiscal pressures, make essential investments in growth, and protect the most vulnerable." Net ODA to Ukraine fell by 16.7% in real terms compared to 2023 and amounted to USD 15.5 billion, representing 7.4% of total net ODA. Humanitarian aid dropped by an estimated 9.6% in 2024, amounting to USD 24.2 billion. ODA used to cover refugee costs within donor countries fell by 17.3% in 2024 compared to 2023 and amounted to USD 27.8 billion, representing 13.1% of DAC member countries' total ODA, down from 14.6% in 2023. For five countries, in-donor refugee costs still represented more than a quarter of their ODA in 2024.

The United States continued to be the largest DAC member country provider of ODA (USD 63.3 billion), accounting for 30% of total DAC ODA in 2024, followed by Germany (USD 32.4 billion), the United Kingdom (USD 18.0 billion), Japan (USD 16.8 billion), and France (USD 15.4 billion). "It is regrettable that ODA decreased in 2024 after five years of continuous growth. It's even more concerning that some of the major donors have signalled further, and quite significant, decreases over the coming years." **OECD DAC Chair Carsten Staur** said. "In this situation, it is paramount that ODA is invested where it is most needed, especially in the poorest and most fragile countries. Going forward, poverty eradication, the just green transition and governance should remain at the core, and we must also make ODA work harder in mobilising other sources of finance. Doubling down on aid effectiveness, together with partner countries, will be the key to achieve this." ODA rose in ten DAC member countries and fell in twenty-two countries. Only four countries exceeded the United Nations' target of 0.7% ODA to GNI: Denmark (0.71%), Luxembourg (1.00%), Norway (1.02%) and Sweden (0.79%). Net bilateral ODA for programmes and projects and technical assistance, excluding in-donor

refugees and humanitarian aid, fell slightly by 1.2% in real terms, due in part to the reduction in ODA for Ukraine. Net debt relief grants remained low at USD 241 million. Preliminary estimates show that net bilateral ODA flows from DAC members to Africa stood at USD 42 billion in 2024, representing a fall of 1% in real terms compared to 2023.

Within this total, net ODA to sub-Saharan Africa was USD 36 billion, a decrease of 2% in real terms. Net bilateral aid flows from DAC members to the group of least developed countries (LDCs) were USD 35 billion, a fall of 3% in real terms compared to 2023. Links to aid data and background information: Interactive charts showing ODA trends over time up to 2024: [Official development assistance \(ODA\)](#). More detail on ODA statistics including the breakdown for 2024: [O.N.E - Preliminary official development assistance levels in 2024](#). For further information, journalists are invited to contact [Spencer Wilson](#) in the [OECD Media Office](#) (+33 1 45 24 81 18). *Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.*

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

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## **'Moment of Truth': Debate over Trade, Peace Sparks Global Buzz**

Two high-profile Chinese and US experts engaged in a heated, one-on-one debate on the effects and implications of China's growth, broadcast on the Al Arabiya English Channel show Counterpoints. The video of the debate has proved quite popular on YouTube, garnering more than half a million views and 9,300 comments as of Monday. Exchanges between Elliott Abrams, a senior fellow for Middle Eastern studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, and Chinese geopolitical expert Victor Gao on April 16 revolved around the Donald Trump administration's antagonistic moves against China in the escalating tariff war and in expanding the United States' military presence along China's coast. Moderator Melinda Nucifora framed her questions in terms of how and why US policy treats China as a hostile threat to its global dominance rather than as a "win-win" partner in friendly competition. While agreeing with Gao that "China's rise is inevitable", Abrams, a former US deputy national security adviser, accused China of "belligerence" as "China has used its power to threaten neighbors". Abrams claimed that an example of this is "the Philippines being threatened by China", and the return of US military bases in the country being justified because the Philippines "is asking us for help, so we're helping".

In his rebuttal, Gao, vice-president of the Center for China and Globalization in Beijing, said US military presence in the Philippines is "illegal activity" under the Philippine constitution and its "explicit provisions", adding that "the US intends to use the Philippines as a proxy against China, and even wants to provoke some conflict

between China and the Philippines so that it can benefit". On tariffs, Gao said the US trade war against the world is a "wrong war" that "throws all the rules of the game out the window" and "damages free trade". "This manhandling of mankind" — the US imposition of additional tariffs against all trading partners — will see China "rise up to the occasion and strongly defend free trade", he added. "China will fight to the end and China has now imposed a retaliatory tariff of 125 percent against all US imports to China. "In essence, what China declares is that it is prepared to fight to the end: trade war, tariff war, technology war or real war. So the ball is in Trump's court. You decide and I will reciprocate. I will never succumb to the US pressure. And this is the moment of truth: China wants to defend free trade, the US wants to destroy free trade. The rest of the world is watching, and there will be a choice by the end of the day."

Abrams maintained that China's "belligerent behavior ... has been growing slowly but steadily over the last 15 years... so it has nothing to do with Donald Trump" and that Trump's focus on the US domestic economy "means dealing with China and trade with China". "It means dealing with the fact that most Americans have come to the conclusion that China today... is a greatly expansionist military and economic power that is trying to achieve dominance first in Asia, but then outside of Asia." Gao countered: "If you want to strike China in the cheek, China will strike you back. That is the preferred decision and the determination of the Chinese nation. This is not belligerence; this is the minimum decency you need to apply to international relations. How can you demand (of) other countries 'I will slap you in the face, don't slap me back, otherwise I will punish you more'. That's the law of the jungle." Questioned by Nucifora as to whether China "really has the power to be that sort of bold against the US", given the "much bigger defense budget" of the US, Gao replied: "By today, China and the US can both destroy each other, and cause Armageddon for mankind. China wants to pursue peace. The United States is agitating for war... possibly a perverse version of the proxy war, or cold war, or hot war. China wants to promote peace of all kinds.

"China wants to be the standard bearer of free trade now that the US abandoned free trade and uses bullying and intimidation to force other countries to follow its line of thinking. This is the moment of truth: Who is the standard bearer of free trade." Abrams replied that "China does not practice free trade", mentioning what he called China's "massive theft of intellectual property", and stating that the US under Trump "above all wants to avoid war", citing Trump's efforts to conclude the Ukraine crisis and the conflict in Gaza, and the start of US negotiations with Iran. Gao said: "About intellectual property ... China now has more patents approved every year than the United States. China is a leading nation (for) protecting of IPR (intellectual property rights) ... China is a fierce protector of intellectual property rights for its own good, for mankind's good." Abrams stated that Trump is "protecting the economy and that's not a declaration of war". The US is aiming to "protect its own people and its own economy from practices that in his words have robbed the American people and the

American economy over the last few decades", he added. "Donald Trump is not threatening war against China, but the United States does have some treaties, treaties with Japan for example, and we're not prepared to see China run roughshod over the rights of all of its neighbors." He further described China as being "dangerous". "I think we are in for a period of greater danger for all of those who are neighbors of China and for the United States."

### **Track record**

Gao countered, "Since the end of the Cold War in 1991, how many wars has the United States been involved in? If the Americans pretend not to know, the world knows. How many wars has China been involved in? Zero. Let me emphasize: zero. This is the track record of China defending peace. And this is the track record of the United States being involved in war after war. "According to the Chinese view, the world in the future... should be a world of peace. 'MAGA', or 'Make America Great Again', is fine, but you cannot achieve that at the expense of other countries. You cannot achieve your greatness by belittling or denigrating or relegating other countries to the lowest echelon of the hierarchy," Gao said.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 04/23/2025

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## **Space for All: Explore the Universe for the Benefit of All Humankind**

Global collaboration has been a major feature of Chinese space exploration, from joint satellite projects to lunar missions and the co-development of the International Lunar Research Station. Join CGTN for "Space for All" to learn more.

From <https://news.cgtn.com/> 04/23/2025

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## **ADB Sees Growth Declining for Asia and the Pacific**

Economies in developing Asia and the Pacific are projected to grow 4.9% this year, down from 5.0% last year, according to the latest forecast by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Solid domestic demand and strong global appetite for semiconductors driven by the artificial intelligence boom are supporting growth, but tariffs and trade uncertainty will act as a headwind. Regional growth is expected to decline further to 4.7% next year, according to [Asian Development Outlook \(ADO\) April 2025](#), released today. Inflation is projected to moderate to 2.3% this year and 2.2% next year as global food and energy prices continue to decline. The growth forecasts were finalized prior to the 2 April announcement of new tariffs by the US administration, so the baseline projections only reflect tariffs that were in place previously. However, *ADO April 2025* does feature an analysis of how higher tariffs may affect growth in Asia and the Pacific. The report notes that while economies in the region are resilient, faster and larger-than-expected changes in US trade and economic

policies pose risks to the outlook. Along with higher US tariffs, increased policy uncertainty and retaliatory measures could slow trade, investment, and growth.

“Economies in developing Asia and the Pacific are supported by strong fundamentals, which are underpinning their resilience in this challenging global environment,” said ADB Chief Economist Albert Park. “Rising tariffs, uncertainties about U.S. policy, and the possibility of escalating geopolitical tensions are significant challenges to the outlook. Asian economies should retain their commitment to open trade and investment, which have supported the region’s growth and resilience.” Further deterioration in the property market of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the region’s largest economy, could also drag on growth. ADB projects a 4.7% expansion for the PRC this year, and 4.3% next year, compared with 5.0% last year. Stronger growth in South Asia and Southeast Asia, driven by domestic demand, and a continued recovery in tourism elsewhere in the region will partly offset the slowdown in the PRC. India—South Asia’s largest economy—is projected to grow by 6.7% this year and 6.8% next year. Economies in Southeast Asia are forecast to grow by 4.7% this year and next year.

Weak external demand is expected to weigh on economic activity in Caucasus and Central Asia, with growth projected to slow from 5.7% last year to 5.4% this year and 5.0% next year. For the Pacific, tourism will continue to support growth but at a slower pace, which is forecast at 3.9% this year and 3.6% next year, compared to 4.2% last year. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting sustainable, inclusive, and resilient 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.

GDP Growth Rate and Inflation, % per year								
	GDP Growth				Inflation			
	2023	2024	2025	2026	2023	2024	2025	2026
<b>Developing Asia</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.2</b>
<b>Developing Asia excluding the PRC</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>3.7</b>
<b>Caucasus and Central Asia</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>5.9</b>
Armenia	8.3	5.9	5.0	4.7	2.0	0.3	3.0	2.8
Azerbaijan	1.1	4.1	3.4	3.3	8.8	2.2	4.2	3.5
Georgia	7.8	9.5	6.0	5.0	2.5	1.1	4.0	3.5
Kazakhstan	5.1	4.8	4.9	4.1	14.5	8.7	8.2	6.5
Kyrgyz Republic	9.0	9.0	8.5	8.6	10.8	5.0	6.0	7.8
Tajikistan	8.3	8.4	7.4	6.8	3.8	3.6	5.0	5.8
Turkmenistan	6.3	6.3	6.5	6.0	1.3	5.5	6.0	6.0
Uzbekistan	6.3	6.5	6.6	6.7	10.0	9.4	8.0	7.0
<b>East Asia</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.9</b>
People's Republic of China	5.4	5.0	4.7	4.3	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.7
Hong Kong, China	3.2	2.5	2.3	2.5	2.1	1.7	1.9	2.0
Republic of Korea	1.4	2.0	1.5	1.9	3.6	2.3	1.9	1.9
Mongolia	7.4	4.9	6.6	5.9	10.3	6.8	9.1	7.0
Taipei, China	1.1	4.6	3.3	3.0	2.5	2.2	2.0	1.8
<b>South Asia</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>4.5</b>
Afghanistan	-6.2	2.3	2.6	2.2	10.6	-7.7	-5.3	5.0
Bangladesh	5.8	4.2	3.9	5.1	9.0	9.7	10.2	8.0
Bhutan	4.9	5.5	8.5	6.0	4.2	2.8	3.4	3.5
India	9.2	6.4	6.7	6.8	5.4	4.7	4.3	4.0
Maldives	4.7	5.5	5.0	4.8	2.9	1.4	4.7	2.2
Nepal	2.0	3.9	4.4	5.1	7.7	5.4	5.2	5.0
Pakistan	-0.2	2.5	2.5	3.0	29.2	23.4	6.0	5.8
Sri Lanka	-2.3	5.0	3.9	3.4	17.4	1.2	3.1	4.5
<b>Southeast Asia</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>2.8</b>
Brunei Darussalam	1.1	4.2	2.5	2.0	0.4	-0.4	0.5	-0.2
Cambodia	5.0	6.0	6.1	6.2	2.1	0.8	3.7	2.4
Indonesia	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.1	3.7	2.3	2.0	2.0
Lao People's Democratic Republic	3.7	4.0	3.9	4.0	31.2	23.3	13.5	10.4
Malaysia	3.6	5.1	4.9	4.8	2.5	1.8	2.5	2.5
Myanmar	0.8	-0.7	1.1	1.6	27.5	27.8	29.3	20.0
Philippines	5.5	5.6	6.0	6.1	6.0	3.2	3.0	3.0
Singapore	1.8	4.4	2.6	2.4	4.8	2.4	2.0	1.7
Thailand	2.0	2.5	2.8	2.9	1.2	0.4	1.0	1.1
Timor-Leste	2.4	3.3	4.0	3.8	8.4	2.1	2.9	2.6
Viet Nam	5.1	7.1	6.6	6.5	3.3	3.6	4.0	4.2
<b>The Pacific</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.7</b>
Cook Islands	14.0	16.0	8.1	2.9	13.2	4.6	2.3	2.0
Fiji	7.5	3.5	3.0	3.2	2.4	4.5	2.6	2.4
Kiribati	4.2	5.8	4.1	3.3	9.3	3.0	2.5	2.2
Marshall Islands	-3.9	0.4	2.5	3.0	7.4	4.7	3.6	3.0
Federated States of Micronesia	0.8	1.1	1.7	1.1	6.2	4.1	3.0	2.7
Nauru	1.6	2.0	2.5	2.5	5.2	5.0	3.5	2.5
Niue	8.9	3.8	3.4	3.0	5.1	5.4	3.7	3.2
Palau	1.5	6.6	9.5	4.5	12.4	3.7	2.5	2.6
Papua New Guinea	3.8	4.3	4.2	3.8	2.3	0.7	3.8	4.3
Samoa	8.6	10.0	5.5	3.0	12.0	3.6	3.0	2.7
Solomon Islands	3.0	2.5	2.9	3.2	5.1	4.1	2.7	2.5
Tonga	2.1	1.6	2.5	2.3	10.2	4.6	3.2	3.0
Tuvalu	3.7	3.1	2.7	2.5	7.2	1.2	2.5	2.0
Vanuatu	2.4	1.7	2.0	2.5	11.2	4.8	3.5	2.4

GDP = gross domestic product, PRC = People's Republic of China.

Notes: ADB placed on hold its regular assistance in Afghanistan effective 15 August 2021. Effective 1 February 2021, ADB placed a temporary hold on sovereign project disbursements and new contracts in Myanmar.

Source: *Asian Development Outlook* database.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 04/09/2025

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## **ADB President Affirms Support for ASEAN and Accelerated Action on ASEAN Power Grid**

Asian Development Bank (ADB) President Masato Kanda participated in the 12th ASEAN Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' Meeting with international financial institutions on 10 April. During the meeting, he affirmed ADB's support for bolstering economic resilience amid escalating global trade tensions and stressed the importance of enhancing regional cooperation and connectivity, including through the ASEAN Power Grid. "Global trade tensions have clouded ASEAN's growth prospects, and I am deeply concerned about the resulting economic shocks, especially for our poorest and most vulnerable communities," said Mr. Kanda. "It is imperative that ASEAN countries work together to build long-term resilience, safeguard growth and investments, and protect against external shocks. ADB stands ready to support our developing member countries in overcoming these challenges." ADB has programmed \$27 billion in financing over the next 3 years to support ASEAN members' development priorities, including boosting economic growth and competitiveness, enhancing human capital, and strengthening resilience. Mr. Kanda assured ASEAN partners that ADB can mobilize additional resources as needed.

Despite economic headwinds, Mr. Kanda expressed optimism for the region, citing strong domestic demand across many ASEAN economies and the availability of policy tools to cushion adverse impacts. He emphasized that current challenges present an opportunity to accelerate reforms, implement sound economic policies, and strengthen regional cooperation and connectivity through open trade and investment, market diversification, and increased competitiveness. Highlighting the region's rapidly growing energy demand, which is projected to triple by 2050, Mr. Kanda underscored the need for modern, interconnected energy systems. He noted that ADB can readily commit \$10 billion toward the ASEAN Power Grid to expedite cross-border connections, national grid projects, and renewable energy initiatives that will facilitate power trade. The initiative aims to connect the electricity networks of ASEAN's 10 member countries by 2045, thereby enhancing energy security and access for the region's 670 million people. "ASEAN member states have rightly acknowledged the need to accelerate action on the ASEAN Power Grid. Its successful implementation will transform lives and industries across the region, and provide enormous opportunities for all our ASEAN member countries and their economies," Mr. Kanda added.

During his visit, Mr. Kanda also held bilateral meetings with regional finance and economic officials, including Malaysia's Finance Minister II Amir Hamzah Azizan, Minister of Economy Rafizi Ramli, and Central Bank Governor Abdul Rasheed Ghaffour; Indonesian Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati; and ASEAN Secretary General Kao Kim Hourn. He also attended the launch of the ASEAN Infrastructure Fund (AIF) Action Plan (2025–2028), which is designed to strengthen the AIF's

financing capacity, competitiveness, financing facilities, and visibility and partnerships. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting sustainable, inclusive, and resilient 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.

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## Cooperation Thrives Among Asian Nations

China and Malaysia have taken a significant stride in their deepening industrial cooperation with the signing of a \$22 billion agreement to jointly develop the China-Malaysia High-Tech Eco-Industrial Park in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, a flagship project aimed at enhancing bilateral industrial collaboration, fostering technological innovation and accelerating economic growth. The agreement, signed on Friday between the city's industry outbound alliance and Malaysian counterparts, marks a key milestone under the China-Malaysia "Two Countries, Twin Parks" model — a strategic initiative designed to link the innovation and production capabilities of the two nations. Under the pact, the Shenzhen government procurement association and the alliance will serve as lead coordinators, leveraging the strengths of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone to introduce key industrial players, facilitate enterprise settlement and build a comprehensive industry and supply chain management system. "We want to create a shared home for Chinese and Malaysian companies," said Feng Qiang, president of the procurement association. "Though global uncertainties remain, Shenzhen once grew from scratch. Now, with experience, resources and strong determination, we're committed to making this park a benchmark for China-Malaysia cooperation and a model for replication elsewhere."

Liu Jinghua, deputy director of the economic affairs center at the international department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, echoed the sentiment. "We hope the project will become a highland of innovation in China-Malaysia high-tech collaboration and pioneer a replicable model for cross-border corporate expansion," Liu said. "By integrating Malaysia's market and resource advantages with China's strengths in research and development and manufacturing, the park can nurture a high-tech industrial cluster and drive innovation." The park is designed around three key pillars: vertical international collaboration, institutional innovation and inclusive development. First, it adopts a vertical division of labor — with R&D based in Shenzhen and manufacturing operations in Malaysia. The initial phase will focus on strategic emerging sectors such as artificial intelligence, new energy and high-end equipment manufacturing. The project has so far attracted the attention of 28 Shenzhen-based companies, who have already committed to join the park. Second, institutional innovation will play a

critical role. Shenzhen's ISO9001 quality management standards will be extended to Malaysian operations, ensuring consistent quality assurance. A cross-border digital customs platform will also be introduced to enable "single declaration, dual clearance" procedures, streamlining logistics and trade. So far, 42 service providers, including Huawei Cloud and SF International, have joined the project's ecosystem.

Third, the park will emphasize inclusive development, particularly by supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in Malaysia. A dedicated fund will be set up to help local companies upgrade technological capabilities and participate in high-tech value chains. One early success story is the partnership between Shenzhen-based Googol Technology and Malaysian semiconductor testing company Censof, which combines tech equity with joint order fulfillment. The collaboration is expected to generate around 1,200 new jobs in the local market. In a recent interview with Xinhua News Agency, Chinese Ambassador to Malaysia Ouyang Yujing underscored Malaysia's growing appeal as a destination for Chinese investment, particularly in emerging industries. Ouyang highlighted recent moves by Chinese new energy vehicle makers such as Geely and Chery to set up manufacturing operations in Malaysia, driving regional supply chain integration. Meanwhile, data center projects by GDS and Chindata Group are supporting Malaysia's digital transformation.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 04/17/2025

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## East Asia

### CHINA: ADB Forecasts Economy to Grow 4.7% in 2025

The economy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is forecast to grow by 4.7% this year, supported by policy stimulus that will help mitigate headwinds from global trade uncertainties, according to the [Asian Development Outlook April 2025](#), released today by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Growth is projected to moderate from a 5.0% expansion last year. Heightened uncertainty in the global trade system will likely affect global demand and the PRC's export performance. Growth will further moderate to 4.3% next year. "The increased policy support should help counteract the property market slowdown and deceleration of export growth as the proposed new US tariffs take effect," said ADB Country Director for the PRC Safdar Parvez. "The policy focus on boosting household consumption should improve domestic demand, which is much needed to sustain GDP growth of the PRC." Fiscal expansion will likely bolster investment, pushing up its contribution to growth. The expansionary fiscal policy will prioritize national strategic projects, advanced manufacturing, technological innovation, and small and medium-sized enterprises. While property sector measures will continue to incentivize housing purchases, the high inventories will likely dampen property market investment this year and next.

Inflation is forecast to rise slightly to 0.4% this year and 0.7% in 2026, with weak private demand likely keeping inflation subdued. Rising industrial output should further mitigate inflationary pressures in 2025 and 2026. Risks to the outlook are mainly on the downside. The evolving US stance on foreign trade, particularly with the new tariffs, has increased uncertainty and risks to the PRC's and the global outlook. Furthermore, the property sector could pose risks if the sector does not respond to policy measures. On the upside, additional supportive policy measures, particularly to improve private sector confidence more rapidly than anticipated, could lead to stronger GDP growth and inflation than forecast. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting sustainable, inclusive, and resilient 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/> 04/09/2025

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## **Chinese Premier Stresses Greater Efforts to Boost Consumption**

Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Tuesday called for greater efforts to boost consumption, expand domestic demand, strengthen domestic circulation, and further unleash the vitality and potential of China's ultra-large market to address challenges posed by external shocks. Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during an investigation and research tour in Beijing. When inspecting a local exhibition promoting domestic sales of foreign trade firms, Li noted that while profound changes in the external environment have caused adverse effects on China's exports, foreign trade companies should actively explore diversified markets and innovate sales channels to keep foreign trade stable. Li stressed efforts to make good use of existing policies to promote domestic sales of foreign trade goods, further carry out actions to boost consumption, and encourage healthy competition among firms to create new demand with high-quality supply.

Li also inspected a real estate project site and learned about local efforts to convert inventory housing into talent apartments. Li said that the purchase of existing commercial housing for use as affordable housing is a crucial step in stabilizing the real estate market and improving people's livelihoods, urging efforts to support such initiatives. For now and some time to come, China's real estate market still has a lot of room for development, Li said, calling for efforts to further release the market potential, focus on promoting the construction of high-quality houses, accelerate the building of a new model of real estate development, and promote the steady and healthy development of the property market.

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## **Chinese Vice Premier Calls for High-quality Development of Foreign Trade**

Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng called for the high-quality development of foreign trade and joint efforts to build an open global economy. He, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks when attending the 137th China Import and Export Fair, also known as the Canton Fair, on Tuesday and Wednesday. More efforts will be made to bolster foreign trade, foster new growth drivers of foreign trade, and encourage broader international economic and trade cooperation, he said. The vast market and huge consumption potential of China provide opportunities for the entry of quality products from the world, the vice premier said, noting that the country has always been a trustworthy trade partner. He urged foreign trade enterprises to make good use of the Canton Fair and explore diversified markets, and encouraged foreign buyers to promote trade and investment between China and the world.

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## **China Further Shortens Market Access Negative List to Boost Business Vitality**

China has further shortened its market access negative list, which specifies fields that are off-limits to both domestic and overseas business entities, in its latest effort to stimulate the vitality of business entities, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) announced on Thursday. The new version of the market access negative list reduced the number of items from 117 to 106, a decrease of 11 items, according to the NDRC, China's top economic planner. Replacing the version issued on March 12, 2022, the new version of the list was jointly published by the NDRC, the Ministry of Commerce and the State Administration for Market Regulation, after approval by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council. The new list has lowered the entry threshold by directly removing a set of national measures, for example, the seal engraving industry has shifted from a licensing system to a filing one, according to an official with the NDRC.

Some national measures have been partially relaxed, according to the NDRC official. For instance, while maintaining necessary market access regulations in sectors including TV drama production and new telecom services, the entry process has been streamlined. Some regional measures, including ship design and construction as well as alcohol production and operation management measures established by local authorities, have been eliminated. These matters affected by such eliminations are now managed under a unified national access method. The new list also legally standardizes market access in key sectors. It further refines market access requirements for specific fields, including incorporating management measures for new business formats and emerging fields into the list, such as the issuance of

operating licenses for civilian unmanned aerial vehicles. Initially issued in 2018 by the NDRC and the Ministry of Commerce, the market access negative list underwent four revisions in 2019, 2020, 2022 and 2025.

The number of listed items has decreased from 151 in 2018 to the current 106, a reduction of approximately 30 percent, demonstrating that a shorter list fosters a more dynamic market, according to the official. After more than seven years of implementation, the negative list management model -- which allows market entry for all sectors not explicitly restricted -- has significantly streamlined approval procedures, reduced administrative intervention and steadily dismantled access barriers, substantially boosting market access efficiency, according to Guo Liyan, from the Economic Research Institute of the NDRC. The new list underscores China's commitment to accelerating the establishment of a unified national market and firmly eliminating all forms of market access barriers, Guo noted. It reflects China's reform trajectory toward further optimizing the business environment to meet the demands of high-quality development, accelerating the creation of a high-standard market system and effectively boosting the vitality of business entities, Guo said.

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## **VAT Data Reflects Progress in China's Green Development**

Official data shows that China's green and low-carbon development has steadily progressed and yielded remarkable outcomes in the first quarter of 2025, contributing to the country's high-quality growth. Here is a set of the first quarter's value-added tax (VAT) invoice data released by the State Taxation Administration on Friday, reflecting growth momentum in the industries, optimized energy structure, growing investment in environmental protection and energy conservation, and higher energy efficiency. -- In the first three months, the combined sales revenue of green and low-carbon industries in China increased by 13.6 percent from a year earlier, 11.5 percentage points higher than the national average. -- The number of newly established enterprises in the green and low-carbon industries surged 19.3 percent from a year earlier, up by 12.3 percentage points compared with the same period in the previous year.

-- The combined sales revenue of the five major clean energy sources -- nuclear power, hydropower, photovoltaic power, wind power, and biomass power -- was 20.3 percentage points higher than that of thermal power. These clean energy sources accounted for 31.7 percent of the total power generation sales revenue, marking an increase of 3.6 percentage points compared to the same period in the previous year. -- The value of environmental protection and governance services purchased by Chinese enterprises grew by 11 percent year on year. Among them, the purchase

value by manufacturing enterprises rose by 16.5 percent, showing a relatively fast growth momentum.

-- The electricity consumption per unit of sales revenue for enterprises nationwide decreased by 2.4 percent from a year earlier. Among them, industrial enterprises saw a further decline of 5.5 percent based on a 1.2 percent year-on-year decrease in the fourth quarter of last year. -- The electricity consumption per unit of sales revenue in the green and low-carbon industries went down 9.4 percent year on year in the first quarter, the data revealed. The administration will continue to optimize tax and fee services and leverage the role of tax regulation and guidance to safeguard the cultivation of new drivers of green growth and the high-quality development of the Chinese economy, it said.

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## **China Sees Continued Progress in Eco-environmental Quality**

China's ecological environment continued to improve in 2024, according to a report on last year's environmental protection efforts submitted to lawmakers for deliberation on Sunday. The Standing Committee of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) started its four-day 15th session on Sunday in Beijing. In 2024, China reported steady progress in air quality, as the proportion of days with good air quality reached 87.2 percent, up 1.7 percentage points from the previous year, while the proportion of heavily polluted days fell by 0.7 percentage points to 0.9 percent, said Minister of Ecology and Environment Huang Runqiu while presenting the report. The country's surface water quality also improved, while groundwater and seawater quality remained stable, Huang noted. Efforts to curb soil pollution made progress, with heavy metal levels at key monitoring sites showing a declining trend and further soil deterioration preliminarily brought under control. All environmental quality improvement targets for 2024 were met, surpassing the scheduled progress outlined in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), Huang said. Looking ahead to 2025, the final year of the 14th Five-Year Plan period, Huang emphasized that environmental protection efforts will focus on fully achieving the plan's goals, including further reductions in PM2.5 levels and increases in the proportion of days with good air quality.

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## **Chinese Official Calls for Enhancing Shanghai's Role as International Financial Center**

Senior Chinese official He Lifeng on Tuesday called for the comprehensive enhancement of Shanghai's capabilities as an international financial center. He, a

member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and director of the office of the Central Financial Commission, made the remarks while attending a symposium on supporting Shanghai to build itself up as an international financial center. He emphasized that the city's functions as a gateway to and hub of financial opening-up should be strengthened continuously under the premise of ensuring financial security, and its status as both a global allocation center for RMB assets and a risk management center should be enhanced. Shanghai Municipality should assume its primary responsibility, He said, adding that financial regulatory authorities and financial institutions -- especially those in Shanghai -- should enhance coordination and cooperation.

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## **Development Index Shows China's Digital Push Is Gaining Speed**

China's digital transformation is gaining strong momentum, with its Digital China development index climbing to 150.51 in 2024, up 10.65 percent from the previous year, according to the National Data Administration's national institute for data development. The index, which rose 10.1 percent in 2023, is a benchmark for the assessment of China's digital progress. The institute developed the index system, which covers 10 primary and 47 secondary indicators. In 2024, five of the primary indicators saw double-digit growth, with particularly strong momentum in the development of digital infrastructure and digital technology, with those indicators rising a respective 17.55 percent and 13.56 percent year on year. Among notable individual indicators, the added value of China's core digital industries accounted for about 10 percent of the country's gross domestic product, and China's total data generation came in at 41.06 zettabytes, marking a robust 25 percent year-on-year increase.

According to institute head Hu Jianbo, the rapid development of emerging fields such as artificial intelligence is placing new demands on data development. Hu emphasized the importance of advancing market-oriented data reforms and the national "AI Plus" initiative to accelerate the construction of a Digital China, while also strengthening computing infrastructure, enhancing data quality and promoting data circulation. According to official data, China's digital industry generated a total business revenue of 35 trillion yuan (about 4.86 trillion U.S. dollars) in 2024, up 5.5 percent year on year, with total profits increasing 3.5 percent to 2.7 trillion yuan. Hu noted that ongoing monitoring and timely updates to the Digital China development index will play an important role in steering the nation's digital push. The latest index data was released at the eighth Digital China Summit, which began on Tuesday and will close on Wednesday in Fuzhou, the capital of east China's Fujian Province.

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## **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.

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## **China's Migrant Workers See Steady Income Rise in 2024**

China's migrant workers earned higher wages and experienced improved living standards last year, according to a survey released by the National Bureau of Statistics on Wednesday. In 2024, the total number of migrant workers in the country reached 299.73 million, an increase of 2.2 million from the previous year, representing an increase of 0.7 percent, according to the survey. The average monthly income of migrant workers rose to 4,961 yuan (about 689 U.S. dollars) in 2024, up 3.8 percent year on year. Those working outside their hometowns earned an average of 5,634 yuan per month, up 3.5 percent, while those working within their registered townships saw a slightly faster wage growth of 3.9 percent, with average monthly earnings reaching 4,291 yuan. The tertiary sector, which includes industries such as retail, logistics and hospitality, continued to dominate migrant worker employment in 2024, accounting for 54.6 percent of the workforce, a 0.8 percentage point increase from 2023.

Meanwhile, the share of workers in the secondary sector, including manufacturing and construction, declined by 0.8 percentage points to 44.7 percent. Quality-of-life indicators also showed notable improvement. The average living space for migrant

workers in urban areas increased to 24.7 square meters per person, up by 0.7 square meters from 2023. Access to education for their children improved significantly, with preschool enrollment rates for children aged three to five rising by 3.6 percentage points to 94.5 percent, and 99.8 percent of school-age children enrolled in compulsory education, up 0.1 percentage points. Migrant workers refer to rural residents with agricultural household registration engaged in non-agricultural work locally or outside their hometowns for six months or longer annually.

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## **China's Economy Demonstrates Resilience amid Uncertain External Environment**

China's economic output continued to rise in April, though changes in the external trade environment brought a level of disruption to the manufacturing sector, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said on Wednesday. In April, China's composite purchasing managers' index (PMI) stood at 50.2, indicating that overall business activity continued to expand, according to data released by the NBS. The PMI for the manufacturing sector fell to 49, while the PMI for the non-manufacturing sector came in at 50.4. The composite PMI is calculated based on the weighted average of the two indices. A reading above 50 indicates expansion, while a reading below 50 reflects contraction. NBS statistician Zhao Qinghe attributed the manufacturing PMI decline to a high base effect from the previous period's rapid growth in the sector and drastic changes in the external environment.

Wen Tao, an analyst at the China Logistics Information Center, said that April saw market demand and production cool temporarily amid rising external pressures, which also led to fluctuations in raw materials procurement and market prices. However, he noted that China's economic fundamentals remain solid, supported by its supersized domestic market and resilient industrial and supply chains, along with policy measures that have helped sustain steady growth. Though overall manufacturing activity moderated, certain sectors continued to show resilience and growth. The PMI for high-tech manufacturing stood at 51.5 percent, well above the overall manufacturing level, with both production and new orders sub-indices exceeding 52 percent, reflecting the sector's continued strong momentum. Sectors such as agricultural and sideline food processing, food, liquor, pharmaceuticals, and beverages and refined tea also saw their production and new orders sub-indices come in above 53 percent, driven by the continued release of demand potential in China's supersized domestic market.

Despite headwinds, business expectations remained in expansion territory, with the production and business activity expectations index standing at 52.1 percent in April. In particular, enterprises in sectors such as food, liquor, beverages and refined tea, automobiles, and railway, ship and aerospace equipment all saw their expectations

indices rise above 58, indicating strong business optimism. In the non-manufacturing sector, the PMI has stayed above 50 for four consecutive months this year, indicating a stable pace of expansion. Business activity indices in sectors related to air transport, telecommunications, radio, television and satellite transmission services, internet software and information technology services, and insurance remained above 55, indicating robust growth in overall business volume. The business activity expectations index came in at 56.4, remaining in a relatively high range, with most services enterprises maintaining a positive outlook.

China's economy has started 2025 with renewed vigor, with its gross domestic product registering 5.4 percent year-on-year growth in the first quarter. Chinese policymakers recognized this positive trend at a high-level meeting of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee last Friday, while cautioning that an economic recovery requires further consolidation to withstand intensifying external shocks. Looking ahead, it is imperative that the country coordinates domestic economic work with responses to international economic headwinds, and deals with the uncertainty of drastic changes in the external environment with the certainty of its own high-quality development, Zhao said.

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## **SOUTH KOREA: Seeking to Expand Maritime Information Market to 27 TIn Won by 2029**

South Korea will work to expand the size of its maritime information market to 27 trillion won (US\$18.9 billion) by 2029, the oceans ministry said Thursday. The Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries announced the goal at a government policy coordination meeting as part of its broader plan to innovate the maritime navigation information system. Under the plan, the government will work to increase the size of the maritime information market by 6 trillion won from the current value of 21 trillion won. To achieve the goal, the government will roll out a high precision location information service that will reduce the margin of error in GPS from 10 meters to just 5 centimeters and support industrial use of the upgraded information. The new location information service can be used in the advanced mobility industry for smart ports, autonomous ships and farming drones, the ministry explained. With the upgrade, the user base of the maritime navigation information system could expand to 1.1 million from the current 70,000, according to the ministry. The ministry said it will also work to distribute receivers for the terrestrial positioning system to vessels operating near the maritime border in the West Sea to respond to potential GPS signal jamming attempts by North Korea. Additionally, South Korea will seek international standardization of its high-precision location information service by 2028, while it will also work to establish an international cooperation center under the International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities (IALA) within the country.

## **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.

## **MONGOLIA: ADB Report Economy to Grow by 6.6 Percent in 2025**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) forecasts that Mongolia's economy will grow by 6.6 percent in 2025 and by 5.9 percent in 2026. In its flagship economic report, Asian Development Outlook (ADO) April 2025, Mongolia's economic growth slightly slowed in 2024, it is expected to accelerate in the coming years. Key drivers include the mining sector—particularly the increased production of copper concentrate at the Oyu Tolgoi mine—and the anticipated recovery of the livestock sector, which suffered significant losses in 2023 and 2024. ADB Mongolia Resident Mission, Senior Economist Eduard Faber stated, "Mongolia managed to maintain economic resilience in 2024. The sharp contraction in the agriculture sector was offset by strong growth in mining and services. The mining sector will remain the main engine of the economy in 2025 and 2026. Domestic demand, infrastructure investment, and the gradual recovery of agriculture will also contribute to growth. However, risks remain due to dependence on commodity exports, especially coal."

Government spending and increased energy prices have pushed inflation to 9.1 percent. While inflation pressure will remain high this year, it is expected to ease slightly to 7 percent in 2026. Exports are also projected to rise as mining output increases. However, imports will likely grow due to purchases of essential equipment and materials for investment projects, which may in turn put some pressure on the exchange rate. The report highlights that these projections remain subject to change

due to a range of potential risks, including volatility in commodity prices, particularly copper and coal—a downturn in the real estate market of the People's Republic of China, weather-related delays in the recovery of the agricultural sector, and inflation exceeding the projected rate of 9.1 percent, which could necessitate further tightening of monetary policy. While tariffs imposed by the United States and potential spillover effects are expected to have limited direct impact on Mongolia, the Asian Development Bank cautioned that a deceleration in demand from China may lead to indirect repercussions for the Mongolian economy.

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## **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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## **South-East Asia**

### **INDONESIA: New Capital Attracts 7.83 Bln USD in Investment for Infrastructure, Housing**

Indonesia's new capital city, Nusantara, has secured 132 trillion rupiah (around 7.83 billion U.S. dollars) in investment through public-private partnerships, Basuki Hadimuljono, head of the Nusantara Capital City Authority, said on Wednesday. The funds will be allocated to road construction, an integrated utility tunnel, and housing projects, including apartments and landed houses, Basuki said during an online press conference. He noted that the investment came from domestic and international consortiums, individual investors, and private sector players, with a focus on housing, hospitality, and food and beverage services. Several development packages have already been tendered, and contracts are expected to be finalized by

mid-May. Basuki expressed confidence that with strong financial backing and clear development strategies, the second phase of the capital's construction will remain on track. Priority will be given to accelerating housing for civil servants, legislative members, and judicial officials.

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## **Indonesia's QRIS Transactions Surge Nearly 170 Pct**

Indonesia has recorded a robust year-on-year increase of nearly 170 percent in transactions using the Quick Response Code Indonesian Standard (QRIS), the central bank Bank Indonesia reported on Wednesday. "Digital payment transactions through the QRIS continue to grow by 169.1 percent year-on-year, supported by rising numbers of users and merchants," central banker Perry Warjiyo said here at a press conference. He noted that the surge in QRIS transactions aligns with the growth of digital economy transactions in Southeast Asia's largest economy. "Digital payment transactions via mobile internet applications in the first quarter of 2025 reached 10.76 billion, marking a 33.5 percent year-on-year increase," he said. On the same occasion, Deputy Governor Filianingsih Hendarta noted that QRIS users in the first quarter of 2025 had reached 56.3 million, with transaction volume hitting 2.6 billion. "The total value of QRIS transactions reached 262.1 trillion rupiah (15.5 billion U.S. dollars), with most merchants being micro, small, and medium enterprises," Hendarta said. Bank Indonesia's report comes amid criticism from the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), which has raised concerns over Indonesia's financial service system, including the QRIS. The USTR argues that the system restricts the flexibility of foreign companies, including payment providers and U.S. banks.

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## **Indonesia Aims for Sale of 100,000 Electric Vehicles by 2025**

The Indonesian government is targeting a total sale of electric vehicles (EVs) at 100,000 by the end of 2025, as EV adoption continued to rise in the Southeast Asian country. From January to mid-April this year, electric car sales have already exceeded 16,000 units, according to Rachmat Kaimuddin, deputy for basic infrastructure coordination at Indonesia's Coordinating Ministry for Infrastructure and Regional Development. "That's why we're quite optimistic about the target. If we look at the trend, we could potentially reach 100,000 units this year," Kaimuddin said during his speech at an EV forum in Jakarta on Thursday. Citing government data, he noted that EV sales in Indonesia have surged annually since 2021. In 2024, sales jumped 152.9 percent year-on-year to 43,000 units, up from 17,000 units in 2023. "We have enormous potential to become a global EV production hub. We have the capability and the supply chain," Kaimuddin said. He emphasized the importance of

Indonesia's transition to EVs in supporting economic growth, energy independence, and improved air quality.

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## **Indonesia's Jakarta-Bandung HSR Transports 9 Mln Passengers Since Launch**

The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, locally known as Whoosh, has transported 9 million passengers as of Sunday since its launch on Oct. 17, 2023, PT Kereta Cepat Indonesia-China (KCIC), a joint venture consortium between Indonesian and Chinese firms that constructs and operates the railway, announced on Monday. KCIC also reported that by Sunday, Whoosh had operated a total of 26,168 train trips, covering more than 4.11 million kilometers. As a major transportation link between Jakarta and Bandung, Whoosh has gained popularity, offering a safe, green, efficient, and comfortable travel experience. Currently, the company operates 62 train services daily, with the highest single-day passenger volume reaching 24,350. During the recent Eid al-Fitr holiday earlier this month, passenger numbers surged significantly. KCIC recorded 341,100 passengers traveling on Whoosh during the holiday. Daily passenger volume ranged between 16,500 and 23,500, with the peak reaching 23,500 on April 6. Jointly developed by China and Indonesia, the Whoosh high-speed railway stretches 142.3 kilometers and operates at a maximum speed of 350 kilometers per hour, cutting travel time between Jakarta and Bandung from over three hours to 46 minutes.

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## **Indonesia's Foreign Direct Investment Grows 12.7 Pct in Q1 2025**

Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Indonesia grew by 12.7 percent year-on-year to 230.4 trillion rupiahs (13.8 billion U.S. dollars) in the first quarter of 2025, Investment and Downstreaming Minister Rosan Roeslani announced on Tuesday. "Foreign direct investment continued to rise," the minister said during a press conference at his office, referring to the January-March period. Rosan noted that Singapore was the most significant contributor to FDI growth in the first quarter, with investments worth 4.6 billion U.S. dollars, followed by China's Hong Kong (2.2 billion U.S. dollars), China (1.8 billion U.S. dollars), Malaysia (1.0 billion U.S. dollars), and the United States (1.0 billion U.S. dollars). He attributed the FDI expansion to increased investments in key sectors, including the basic metal industry, metal goods, machinery and equipment, transportation, telecommunications, warehousing, mining, other services, housing, and industrial and office areas.

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## **CAMBODIA: Targeting 25 Mln Air Passengers by 2035**

The Cambodian government on Friday approved the National Policy on Air Transport 2025-2035, aiming to attract 25 million air passengers, a press release said. The approval was made during a weekly cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Hun Manet, the press release said. "This national policy was designed to develop an efficient, sustainable, and resilient air transport in Cambodia through strengthening and expanding domestic, regional, and global air connectivity," it said. It added that the national policy is also to create fair business opportunities in the civil aviation industry. Sinn Chanserey Vutha, secretary of state and spokesperson at the State Secretariat of Civil Aviation, said Cambodia is expected to receive 7.5 million air passengers in 2025, a rise of 20 percent over 2024.

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## **Cambodia Launches Tourism Port in SW Kampot Coastal Province**

Cambodia on Monday inaugurated a 10-million-U.S.-dollar tourism port in the seaside southwestern province of Kampot here, aiming to promote the kingdom's maritime transportation sector. Located in Teuk Chhou district, the 4.2-hectare Kampot International Tourism Port has a water depth of three meters and can accommodate vessels carrying up to 300 passengers or tourists. Speaking at the event, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet said the port would play an important role in attracting more tourists to coastal areas and islands. "The port will boost the tourism sector in the province, contributing to improving local economy and people's livelihoods," he said. The prime minister added that the port has connected seaborne tourists from Thailand and Vietnam. Peng Ponea, minister of Public Works and Transport, said the port's construction started in August 2018 and was completed in June 2022 under the credit of 10 million dollars from the Asian Development Bank. He said that to date, the Southeast Asian country has a total of 119 ports including 31 sea ports and 88 river ports. Tourism is one of the four pillars supporting Cambodia's economy. The country is expected to attract up to 7.5 million international tourists in 2025 from 6.7 million in 2024, according to the Ministry of Tourism. Cambodia has a pristine coastline stretching in the length of about 450 km in four southwestern provinces of Preah Sihanouk, Kampot, Kep, and Koh Kong. The kingdom is renowned for four UNESCO-listed world heritage sites, namely the Angkor Archaeological Park in northwestern Siem Reap province, the Temple Zone of Sambor Prei Kuk in central Kampong Thom province, and the Temple of Preah Vihear and the Koh Ker archaeological site in northwestern Preah Vihear province.

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## **Cambodia on Verge of Achieving Malaria-Free Goal**

Cambodia is making great progress towards achieving its malaria-free target by the end of 2025, Prime Minister Hun Manet said. In a message to mark the National Malaria Day on Friday, he said the Southeast Asian country reported only 355 malaria cases in 2024, a significant drop of 75 percent compared to 2023. The prime minister added that the kingdom had reported zero deaths from the disease since 2018 and no local Plasmodium Falciparum cases since 2024. "Cambodia is on the verge of achieving a malaria-free goal by the end of 2025," Hun Manet said, urging all stakeholders to continue to support the country to achieve the target. Huy Rekol, director of the National Center for Parasitology, Entomology and Malaria Control, said malaria diagnostic tests and treatments have been highly effective in Cambodia, with Artesunate/Mefloquine, or ASMQ, being 100 percent safe and efficacious against malaria. "This progress has put Cambodia in the category of successful countries in eliminating malaria," he told Xinhua. Malaria is a mosquito-borne infectious disease that is typically found in forest and mountainous provinces, especially during rainy seasons. To avoid being bitten by malaria-carrying mosquitoes, Rekol advises people living in malaria-risk areas to sleep under insecticide-treated mosquito nets at all times.

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## **Cambodia Launches Initiative to Advance School Feeding Program**

Cambodia has launched a 10-million-U.S.-dollar initiative from 2025 to 2029 to promote the kingdom's school feeding program, a press release said on Tuesday. Supported by South Korea, the program will be carried out by Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the United Nations World Food Program. The program will provide hot, nutritious meals to 133,300 pre-primary and primary school children across 428 schools, the press release said. "Through this program, we are not only improving access to nutritious food but also investing in Cambodia's future by building a stronger, more resilient education system that supports our national development goals," Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Youth and Sport Hang Chuon Naron said. The program adopts a home-grown approach, linking education and nutrition with local agriculture by sourcing food from smallholder farmers, the press release said. In a country where 57 percent of households rely on agriculture, this approach stimulates local economies, strengthens food systems, and serves as a safety net for vulnerable families affected by recurrent shocks, it added.

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## **MALAYSIA: Median Monthly Wages Up 6 Pct in 2024**

Malaysia's median monthly wages in the formal sector grew 6 percent year-on-year in 2024, official data showed Tuesday. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) said in a statement that the median monthly wages rose to 3,045 ringgit (703 U.S. dollars) with a 5 percent growth in December 2024. The median monthly wages were higher as compared to 2,764 ringgit in both November and October 2024. According to the DOSM, the increase indicated a better labor market landscape, in line with a growing economic expansion in the fourth quarter of 2024. The number of citizens in the formal sector also continued to show a year-on-year increase, with a growth of 2.3 percent in December 2024.

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## **PHILIPPINES: Jobless Rate Eases to 3.8 Pct in February**

The Philippines' unemployment rate in February reached 3.8 percent, down from 4.3 percent in January, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said Tuesday. PSA Chief Dennis Mapa told a press conference that an estimated 1.94 million Filipinos were out of work in February, lower than the 2.16 million jobless Filipinos in January. National Economic and Development Authority Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said the unemployment rate in February this year was higher than the 3.5 percent settled in February last year. Balisacan said in a statement that the Philippine government aims to swiftly pursue initiatives and fast-track the implementation of projects generating high-quality jobs. "The continued rollout and implementation of high-impact infrastructure flagship projects, particularly in energy, transport, and digital connectivity, will boost domestic employment and business activity," he said.

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## **SINGAPORE: Seizing Illegally Made Health Products, E-Vaporizers**

Singapore's Health Sciences Authority (HSA) has seized illegally manufactured health products and related items worth about 51,000 Singapore dollars (approximately 38,760 U.S. dollars) in a raid conducted in the southern part of the city-state, the authority said Monday. During the raid on March 21 at a residential flat, the HSA confiscated over 18,000 units of prescription medicines and supplements for sexual enhancement, several pieces of equipment and paraphernalia used to manufacture capsules, along with 30 e-vaporizers and related components. A 36-year-old man is currently assisting with investigations into the suspected illegal manufacture and distribution of health products, as well as the sale of e-vaporizers, the HSA said in a statement. To date, the HSA has not detected any online sales of the seized products. Under Singapore law, individuals found guilty of importing, manufacturing, or supplying illegal health products face up to two years' imprisonment, a fine of up to 50,000 Singapore dollars, or both. It is also an offence

to import, distribute, sell, or offer e-vaporizers and their components for sale.

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## **VIETNAM: 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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## **Education Ministry Proposes Tuition-Free Schooling for All Public Students**

The Ministry of Education and Training is currently seeking public feedback on a proposal to end tuition fees for children attending public kindergartens, primary, secondary and high schools. The initiative is outlined in a draft resolution of the National Assembly, aiming to waive tuition fees across all levels of public general education, from preschool to upper secondary. According to the proposal, the State budget would be used to subsidise tuition fees for preschool children and high school students attending public kindergartens and general education schools, public continuing education centres and other public institutions, implementing the general

education curriculum that are self-financing their regular and investment expenditures. The State budget would also be used to support tuition fees for preschool children and high school students attending non-public kindergartens and general education schools, including private and semi-public institutions, that deliver the national general education curriculum. The maximum tuition support would be based on the ceiling level of fees applicable to public institutions that have not yet achieved full financial autonomy, as determined annually by the provincial People's Councils. The ministry has proposed the new tuition exemption policy be implemented from the 2025–26 academic year.

The ministry explained that the draft resolution aims to establish a unified 'no tuition fees' policy across public general education institutions, including preschools, lower and upper secondary schools and reaffirm the existing no-fee policy for public primary education, ensuring that learners, at all levels in public schools, are not required to pay tuition. Currently, under the 2019 Law on Education, only five-year-old children in public preschool, primary pupils and secondary students in public schools are legally exempt from tuition fees. The ministry said the policy would directly benefit citizens by easing financial burdens, especially for those in difficult economic circumstances. The savings on tuition could stimulate consumer spending on other goods and services, while also fostering public trust in the Government and the Party. The estimated increase in State expenditure resulting from the proposed policy is VNĐ8.2 trillion (US\$316 million). According to the ministry's analysis, based on 2023–24 academic year data, Việt Nam currently has approximately 23.2 million students. Of these, 21.5 million attend public schools (93 per cent) and 1.7 million are enrolled in non-public institutions (7 per cent). A breakdown by education level shows 4.8 million preschool children (3.8 million in public, one million in private), 8.8 million primary school pupils, 6.5 million lower secondary students and 2.99 million upper secondary students. The ministry calculated funding needs based on the minimum tuition thresholds set in Decrees No. 81/2021/NĐ-CP and No. 97/2023/NĐ-CP. Accordingly, the total annual budget required to cover tuition waivers for students in public institutions and to provide financial support for those in private schools delivering the national general education curriculum is estimated to be around VNĐ30 trillion (\$1.15 billion). Currently, the State budget allocation to maintain tuition exemptions for five-year-old pre-schoolers, primary pupils and lower secondary students is at VNĐ22.5 trillion (\$867 million) annually. Thus, the additional budget needed to implement the full tuition-free policy, as proposed in the National Assembly resolution, would amount to VNĐ8.2 trillion (\$316 million).

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## **ADB Provides Infrastructure for Ethnic Minorities in Phu Yen and Quang Tri**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of Viet Nam signed a \$60 million financing package to upgrade and construct transport and water supply infrastructure in five upland districts with the highest concentration of ethnic minority communities in the central coastal provinces of Phu Yen and Quang Tri, Viet Nam. Deputy Minister of Finance Tran Quoc Phuong and ADB Country Director for Viet Nam Shantanu Chakraborty signed the financing package agreement at Ha Noi's National Convention Center. ADB Vice-President (East and Southeast Asia, and the Pacific) Scott Morris and Minister of Finance Nguyen Van Thang witnessed the signing. The [Climate Resilient Inclusive Infrastructure for Ethnic Minority Project II](#) will upgrade about 133 kilometers of district and commune roads using climate-resilient standards, construct and upgrade rural water supply, and provide reliable weather and climate data for early warning and disaster response. About 363,000 people, including 187,000 from ethnic minority groups, will directly benefit from the project. "This project is a significant step towards enhancing the resilience and inclusiveness of rural infrastructure in Viet Nam's central coastal region," said Mr. Chakraborty. "It will not only improve the quality of life for ethnic minority communities but also contribute to the sustainable economic development of the region."

The financing package includes \$59 million in ADB loans and a \$1 million grant from [ADB's High-Level Technology Fund](#). The grant will fund the supply and installation of data systems for climate and disaster risk management. Additionally, the project will include \$19.74 million in financing from the Government of Viet Nam. Viet Nam's economic growth rebounded to 7.1% in 2024. However, significant gaps exist between the coastal districts with strong economies and upland districts with a high ethnic minority population. In particular, upland district areas face low-quality and incomplete transport networks and water supply infrastructure. In addition, increasing exposure to extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and typhoons is causing livelihood vulnerabilities and raising the cost of repair, reconstruction, and adaptation. The project will address some of these challenges. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting sustainable, inclusive, and resilient 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.

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## **Average Income of Ethnic People to Be Raised**

Viet Nam aims to raise the average income of ethnic people to at least half of the national average. That's according to the second phase of the National Target Programme for Socio-Economic Development in Ethnic Community and Mountainous Areas for the 2021–30 period (programme 1719). The programme has

been proposed by the Ministry of Ethnic and Religious Affairs. It also aims to reduce the poverty rate among ethnic households to below 10 per cent and eliminate all extremely disadvantaged communes and villages. It looks to ensure that 70 per cent of communes in ethnic community and mountainous areas meet the national new rural development standards. Hà Việt Quân, Chief of the Coordination Office for the National Target Programme 1719, said the programme will also promote the restructuring of the labour force in rural areas. It targets 40 per cent of ethnic workers becoming skilled in industrial, handicraft, tourism and service-related occupations. About 80 per cent of ethnic farming households are expected to participate in commodity-based agroforestry. Over 85 per cent of communes and villages in ethnic and mountainous areas will be equipped with adequate infrastructure to support socio-economic development, he said. He said 100 per cent of ethnic households currently residing in scattered, remote, isolated areas, or in high-risk zones prone to flash floods and landslides, will be relocated and resettled in safer and more convenient locations. Programme 1719 implemented since late 2022 has contributed to reducing the poverty rate among ethnic communities by an average of around 4 per cent per year, higher than the national average. Livelihoods have become more diverse, and the average annual income of ethnic communities reached VNĐ42.7 million (over US\$1650) as of December 31, 2024. This has helped bridge the development gap between regions and played an important role in fostering sustainable and prosperous national development.

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## **HCM City Opens Three New National-Standard Schools**

HCM City on Tuesday inaugurated three new national-standard schools in Tân Bình District. The district's People's Committee held an inauguration ceremony to officially open a cluster of the three new schools, including Sơn Ca Kindergarten, Hùng Vương Primary School, and Mạc Đĩnh Chi Secondary School. These schools were constructed on over 50,000 square metres of land in the district's Ward 6. This is one of the city's key infrastructure developments under the 4,500-classroom initiative, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Liberation of the South and National Reunification (April 30, 1975 – 2025). Speaking at the opening ceremony, Trần Thị Diệu Thúy, deputy chairwoman of the municipal People's Committee, said the launch of the schools demonstrates the strong commitment of the city's Party, Government, and the people in improving educational quality. The new schools help the district surpass the goal set by the city's 11th Party Congress (2020–2025 term), reaching 301 classrooms per 10,000 school-aged residents, exceeding the target of 300. "The new schools, all meeting national standards, not only highlight the local government's commitment to educational infrastructure and community development, but also provide a modern, safe, and friendly learning environment that supports students' holistic growth," she said. According to the district People's Committee, construction of the schools began in December 2023, with a total investment of more

than VNĐ466 billion (US\$17.9 million).

Mạc Đĩnh Chi Secondary School occupies over 12,200sq.m, with over 4,000sq.m of construction area, consisting of one ground floor and three upper floors. It includes 45 classrooms, function rooms, specialised subject rooms (IT, Art, Music, History–Geography, Civic Education, English), a library, a swimming pool, and a kitchen for semi-boarding students. Hùng Vương Primary School covers more than 9,400sq.m, with over 3,300sq.m of construction, also with one ground floor and three upper floors. It features 30 classrooms, functional areas, a dining facility, and a multi-purpose gymnasium. Sơn Ca Kindergarten spans over 6,300sq.m, with 2,100sq.m of building area, including one ground floor and three upper floors. The facility houses 20 classrooms, function rooms, and a kitchen. At the event, many students and local residents expressed their joy at the new, spacious and modern learning environment, which is especially meaningful during this period of national pride leading up to the Reunification Day celebration. Cao Chu Giảng, a local resident whose land was cleared for the project, said the new school cluster is expected to provide educational opportunities and contribute significantly to the district's development. Dương Thị Ngọc Phượng, principal of Hùng Vương Primary School, said all classrooms are equipped with projectors, screens, sound systems, and computers. "Class sizes are kept between 30 and 35 students, and modern teaching aids create favourable conditions for effective instruction and comprehensive education," she said. The city also invested in complementary infrastructure such as urban landscaping, upgrading Chấn Hưng and Hưng Hóa streets, and the development of a green park connecting the new schools and surrounding residential areas. The total investment in this extended urban project is more than VNĐ649 billion (\$24.9 million).

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## **Vietnam to Start Construction of North-South High-Speed Railway Line by 2026**

The Vietnamese government has set a deadline for the north-south high-speed railway line's groundbreaking by Dec. 31, 2026, Vietnam News Agency reported Thursday, citing a resolution issued on Wednesday. The government has required the project's construction, procurement and equipment installation to be completed by 2035 for its official operation. The Vietnamese National Assembly approved the investment policy for the north-south high-speed railway project last November, with a total investment of 1.7 quadrillion Vietnamese dong (about 65.2 billion U.S. dollars). The railway line is scheduled to stretch roughly 1,541 km, pass through 23 passenger stations and five freight stations, and have a design speed of 350 km per hour.

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## South Asia

### **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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## **IndiaAI Mission Strengthens AI Research with AI Kosha Launch**

The Union government has officially launched AI Kosha, a pioneering platform designed to provide Indian researchers, entrepreneurs, and startups with access to crucial datasets, computing resources, and tools to develop advanced Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications. This initiative is part of the broader IndiaAI Mission, which aims to strengthen the country's AI ecosystem by facilitating innovation and fostering AI-driven solutions. AI Kosha serves as a repository for non-personal datasets that can aid in developing AI models and applications. At its inception, the platform houses 316 datasets, mostly focusing on developing and validating language translation tools for Indian languages. These datasets will be instrumental in enabling AI-driven linguistic advancements, thereby promoting inclusivity and accessibility in digital communication. Apart from translation, the platform includes datasets sourced from various government initiatives, such as Telangana's Open Data Initiative, which comprises health records, Census 2011 data, satellite imagery, meteorological reports, and pollution data. By consolidating these resources, AI Kosha seeks to empower developers with rich, locally sourced data, essential for training AI models tailored to Indian needs. AI Kosha is a critical component of the IndiaAI Datasets Platform, one of the seven pillars of the IndiaAI Mission. The mission, which has a financial outlay of ₹10,370 crore, is the government's flagship initiative to advance AI research and deployment across multiple sectors. As part of this mission, the Compute Capacity pillar was recently introduced, granting startups and academic institutions pooled access to high-performance Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) required for AI model training.

Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw highlighted the expansion of GPU resources during the launch. He announced that the government has commissioned 14,000 GPUs for shared access, an increase from the earlier 10,000 announced at the beginning of the year. The GPU infrastructure will be expanded further every quarter to accommodate the growing demand from AI researchers and developers. In addition to AI Kosha, the government is also progressing towards the establishment of a homegrown foundational AI model. This effort has gained traction following global developments in AI, including the emergence of cost-effective foundational models from international competitors. The initiative aims to position India as a global AI leader by fostering indigenous technological capabilities. The Indian government has

consistently emphasized the importance of open data for fostering innovation. Platforms such as the Open Governance Data (OGD) platform (data.gov.in) already host over 12,000 datasets provided by various government agencies. In line with this approach, AI Kosha is expected to enhance access to structured data, enabling startups, researchers, and policymakers to develop AI solutions that cater to the country's socioeconomic needs. With the launch of AI Kosha and the expansion of computing resources, India is taking significant strides toward building a robust AI ecosystem. By ensuring access to critical datasets and computational infrastructure, the initiative aims to bridge existing gaps in AI research and application, paving the way for India to emerge as a global hub for AI innovation.

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## **Kerala CM Launches AI-Powered Cybersecurity Centre to Strengthen Police Systems**

Kerala has set a national benchmark by implementing an AI-powered cyber safety system, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan announced while inaugurating a series of new initiatives by the state police department. AI-Enabled Cybersecurity Centre Launched. A major highlight was the launch of the Kerala Police's AI-enabled Security Operations Centre (SOC). In its first phase, the centre will secure computers and critical infrastructure at police headquarters, city commissionerates, and affiliated stations. Developed in collaboration with the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT), the SOC will be overseen by IG Cyber Operations. A senior official called it a landmark achievement, making Kerala the first state in India to establish such a cybersecurity centre, a crucial move amid growing cyber threats targeting law enforcement agencies. 30 New Police Buildings Inaugurated. As part of the modernization drive, 30 newly constructed police buildings across various districts were inaugurated, completed at a total cost of Rs 62.61 crore. The Chief Minister also laid the foundation stone for six additional buildings, further enhancing the state's law enforcement infrastructure. Public Feedback System for Transparency. To improve accountability and citizen engagement, a real-time public feedback system has been introduced. Citizens visiting police stations can now rate services by scanning a QR code displayed at every station, ensuring transparency and efficiency in grievance redressal. CM Calls for Study on Rising Youth Crimes. Expressing concern over increasing criminal activities among youth, CM Pinarayi Vijayan directed the police to conduct a scientific study to analyze this trend and develop effective strategies for intervention. Awards & Notable Attendees. The Chief Minister also distributed awards to police stations that won the Chief Minister's Trophy for Excellence in Service. The event saw the presence of MLA Antony Raju, State Police Chief Shaikh Darvesh Sahib, and ADGPs Manoj Abraham, H Venkatesh, and S Sreejith.

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## **ADB Forecasts India's Economy to Grow 6.7% in FY2025**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) forecasts India's gross domestic product (GDP) to expand by 6.7% in fiscal year (FY) 2025 (ending 31 March 2026) spurred by higher domestic demand, rising rural incomes, a strong services sector, and moderating inflation that will boost consumer confidence. Favorable monetary and fiscal policies are expected to sustain the growth momentum, with GDP projected to increase by 6.8% in FY2026, according to the [Asian Development Outlook \(ADO\) April 2025](#), released today. "India continues to show resilient growth despite global uncertainties, driven by the Government of India's focus on infrastructure development and job creation," said ADB Country Director for India Mio Oka. "The further strengthening of the manufacturing sector through regulatory reforms, combined with the already robust services and agriculture sectors and the recently announced tax incentives for the middle class, will help sustain India's strong economic growth trajectory." The report underscores that consumption will be a major growth driver, fueled by rising rural incomes and increased demand from urban middle-class and affluent households thanks to reductions in personal income tax rates. Additionally, moderating inflation is expected to further boost consumer sentiment with rates projected at 4.3% in FY2025 before declining slightly to 4.0% in FY2026. Falling inflation would create policy space for more cuts to repo rate even with global financial uncertainty.

The services sector will remain a key growth driver, supported by the expansion of business services exports, education, and health services. The agriculture sector is expected to maintain strong growth in FY2025, driven by robust winter crop sowing, particularly wheat and pulses. Meanwhile, the manufacturing sector is anticipated to rebound after experiencing tepid growth in FY2024. Investment in urban infrastructure will increase, supported by a new government fund with an initial allocation of 100 billion Indian rupees (\$1.17 billion). While global economic uncertainties may hinder private investment prospects in the short term, they are expected to improve with the gradual lowering of borrowing costs and planned regulatory reforms aimed at spurring investment. The report notes a range of near-term growth risks, including uncertainties created by the recent increase in US tariffs on Indian exports and broader global developments that could lead to higher commodity prices. However, some of these risks are expected to be mitigated by India's relatively stable macroeconomic position. The growth forecasts were finalized prior to the 2 April announcement of new tariffs by the US administration, so the baseline projections only reflect tariffs that were in place previously. However, *ADO April 2025* does feature an analysis of how higher tariffs may affect growth in Asia and the Pacific. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting sustainable, inclusive, and resilient 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.

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## **PFC Signs Rs 1 Lakh Crore Financing Pact with MMRDA for Infrastructure Projects**

State-owned Power Finance Corporation (PFC) has inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) to provide financial assistance worth Rs 1 lakh crore for infrastructure development in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). The agreement was signed in Mumbai in the presence of Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, PFC Director (Projects) Rajiv Ranjan Jha, and MMRDA Metropolitan Commissioner Sanjay Mukherjee. According to PFC, the MoU aims to establish a robust collaborative partnership with MMRDA, facilitating the development of bankable infrastructure projects through financial support of up to Rs 1,00,000 crore. Power Finance Corporation (PFC), a leading non-banking financial company (NBFC) under the Ministry of Power, is a state-owned Indian public sector enterprise and a “Maharatna” CPSE. Established in 1986, it provides financial assistance to the power sector, with a particular focus on generation, transmission, distribution, and renewable energy projects.

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## **RailTel and NBCC Join Hands for Strategic Collaboration on Data Centre Projects in India and Overseas**

In a significant development aimed at enhancing India’s digital infrastructure, RailTel Corporation of India Ltd has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with NBCC (India) Ltd for strategic collaboration in the development and execution of Data Centre projects, both within the country and internationally. The MoU was signed in the presence of Sanjai Kumar, CMD, RailTel; K P Mahadevaswamy, CMD, NBCC; Raj Kumar Chaudhary, CMD, NHPC; Dr Devesh Tyagi, CEO, NIXI; Sanjay Kumar Tyagi, IPS, Additional CP, Delhi; Rajeev Ranjan (Retd IAS, TN); and senior officials from their respective organizations. As per the agreement, RailTel and NBCC will work in tandem to execute Data Centre projects from concept to commissioning by leveraging their respective core strengths. RailTel will be responsible for end-to-end IT infrastructure services, including planning, design, supply, installation, testing, commissioning, and operations & maintenance of IT systems—covering computing hardware, security systems, networking, and disaster recovery mechanisms. NBCC will manage the civil and passive infrastructure aspects, offering comprehensive project management services such as contract administration, construction supervision, cost control, quality assurance, and final

project handover. The scope of collaboration also extends to international markets, with targeted regions including Vietnam, Mauritius, UAE, and select African countries. Each international project will be governed by a separate agreement, with provisions for third-party participation when mutually agreed upon. This partnership lays the foundation for a long-term strategic framework, enabling both RailTel and NBCC to synergise capabilities for shared growth and innovation in the rapidly advancing digital infrastructure ecosystem.

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## **HUDCO Signs ₹1.5 Lakh Crore MoU with MMRDA to Boost Infrastructure**

The Housing and Urban Development Corporation Limited (HUDCO) signed a significant Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) on April 8, 2025, aimed at financing large-scale infrastructure projects in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). As part of this MoU, HUDCO has committed to exploring and extending financial assistance of up to ₹1,50,000 crore over a five-year period. The agreement also includes consultancy and capacity-building support from HUDCO to empower MMRDA in meeting its growing institutional and developmental requirements. The signing took place in the presence of Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, and HUDCO Chairman and Managing Director Sanjay Kulshrestha. This strategic partnership represents a transformative step toward enhancing urban infrastructure in one of India's most densely populated and economically vital regions. It underscores HUDCO's commitment to sustainable urban development and integrated planning across the country.

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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.

From <https://news.siliconindia.com/> 04/15/2025

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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 ‘unringing 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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## **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.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 04/29/2025

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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 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.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/11/2025

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## **Azerbaijan Determines New Benefits for People with Disabilities**

New benefits have been established for individuals with disabilities in Azerbaijan, Trend reports. This comes as part of a decree signed today by President Ilham Aliyev, which includes amendments to the "Social Insurance Law" of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Tax Code of Azerbaijan. The changes are reflected in the decree on amendments to certain presidential orders related to these laws. The document stipulates several measures aimed at simplifying tax administration for individuals with disabilities and supporting their self-employment initiatives. These include: - A 2 percent tax rate on income derived from the sale of handicrafts will be implemented at the source of payment. - A special electronic portal will be created for the sale of handicrafts. - Individuals with disabilities who sell handicrafts will register on this portal. - After taxes are deducted from the income generated from the sale of handicrafts, the remaining amount will be transferred to a bank account opened for the individual with disabilities. - Those registered on the portal will be exempt from registering with tax authorities, calculating taxes, and preparing and submitting tax reports; these processes will be conducted electronically via the portal. - Additionally, income from the sale of handicrafts will be considered as exempt from mandatory state social insurance contributions.

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## **Azerbaijan's Nominal GDP to Continue Growing in Coming Years**

According to a forecast by the Netherlands' largest banking group, Internationale Nederlanden Groep (ING), Azerbaijan's nominal GDP will continue to grow in the coming years, Trend reports. In 2024, the country's nominal GDP stood at \$74.3 billion, with projections indicating an increase to \$80.6 billion in 2025 and \$81.7 billion in 2026. A similar trend is observed in GDP per capita, which amounted to \$7,284 in 2024 and is expected to rise to \$7,728 in 2025 and \$7,765 in 2026. The company forecasts that Azerbaijan's GDP growth will stabilize in the 2–3% range in the coming years. Specifically, real GDP growth is projected to reach 3% in 2025 and 2.5% in 2026.

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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.

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## **High-speed Internet, Digital Infrastructure Boosting in Azerbaijan**

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.

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## **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.

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## **IMF Expects Moderate GDP Growth for Azerbaijan in 2025-26**

Azerbaijan's economic growth is expected to moderate over the next two years, according to the latest forecast from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Trend reports. As such, the country's real GDP is projected to grow by 3.5 percent in 2025, followed by a further slowdown to 2.5 percent in 2026. This comes after an estimated growth rate of 4.1 percent in 2024. The revised outlook reflects a gradual easing of economic momentum following the post-pandemic recovery period. Meanwhile, official data shows that Azerbaijan's GDP reached 29.8 billion manat (\$17.5 billion) in the first quarter of 2025, representing a modest year-on-year increase of 0.3 percent.

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## **KAZAKHSTAN: 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.

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## **Kazakhstan's NGOs Drive Significant Progress in Reaching SDGs**

Kazakhstan's NGOs are making a significant contribution to achieving the country's Sustainable Development Goals, the chairperson of the Civil Society Committee under the Ministry of Culture, Gulbara Sultanova said, Trend reports. She made the remark during the founding conference of the Global South Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Platform in Baku, on "Solidarity in Action: Strengthening Global South NGOs for a New and Fair World". "In Kazakhstan, civil society is rapidly developing thanks to the Civil Society Development Concept for 2021-2030. Today, there are more than 20,000 NGOs in our country, and about 40 percent of citizens participate in civic activities. Kazakhstani NGOs make a significant contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. They participate in consultations and working groups," she said. According to her, the government has created excellent conditions for dialogue, such as the Coordination Council, public councils, and civic forums. "Every year, NGOs implement more than 2,000 social projects related to the Sustainable Development Goals, improvement of education, gender equality, nature protection, human rights, and many others," Sultanova emphasized.

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

## **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

## **Oceania**

### **AUSTRALIA: Gov Scopes Architecture for Public Health Surveillance Platform**

The federal government is developing a blueprint for a new data analytics platform to track and manage diseases across Australia. The Department of Health is currently putting together an architectural strategy and design for what's known as the National Public Health Surveillance System (NPHSS), with the aim of completing "a minimum viable product" by FY2028-29. According to a BuyICT request for consultants to review the proposed strategy, the platform will use "advanced data and analytics to provide near real-time disease surveillance, enabling rapid health risk detection and scenario modelling." In a statement to iTnews, a Health spokesperson said the proposed platform will "address limitations" identified in its existing National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System (NNDSS), including "fragmented data systems across jurisdictions and sectors of government".

"The intention is for the NPHSS to capture Australian-specific surveillance data, covering various health and environmental factors," the spokesperson added. "The NPHSS will initially focus on improving communicable disease surveillance and linking data with other relevant datasets. "This approach will provide early warnings

and support better decision-making.” The NPHSS’ development follows Prime Minister Anthony Albanese pledging \$251.7 million to build a new Centre for Disease Control in October. “The Australian CDC will adopt modern surveillance and data analytics tools to act as a frontline defence against diseases,” Health told iTnews. “The NPHSS project will inform further data and surveillance system investment decisions for the Australian CDC.” Limitations in the existing National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System platform were highlighted in the Covid-19 response inquiry report [pdf] released in October. This urged the government to “build foundations for a national communicable disease data integration system, enabled for equity and high-priority population identification and data interrogation.” Health told iTnews that specific datasets for integration into a new system have yet to be determined.

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

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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 rebranding 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: Regional Tourism to Benefit from \$2.45 Million Boost**

Tourism and Hospitality Minister Louise Upston says opening a second multi-million dollar funding round for regional tourism will drive economic growth. "We know a successful tourism and hospitality sector is crucial for growing our economy," Louise Upston says. "Tourism is a crucial part of this Government's focus on economic growth, with domestic and international tourism expenditure at almost \$38 billion and supporting nearly 200,000 jobs "We also know we need to see visitors in regions outside our main cities, and outside peak periods. Hosting exciting local events is one of the best ways we can do this. "Today I'm pleased to be announcing that regional tourism organisations will have a pool of \$2.45 million to pitch to from the Regional Events Promotion Fund. "Regions with big ideas can reach out straight away. As Minister, I'm always looking forward to working closely with the sector to help maximise the benefits of tourism and hospitality and support the workforce to grow. "All ideas are up for discussion, as we reinforce the message that New Zealand is open for business and ready to welcome visitors from home and overseas. "In this second round, I'm particularly keen to encourage regions which might not traditionally have seen a high volume of domestic tourists to host events which will drive spending and activity in their communities. "This is the latest in our push to support the tourism sector, including: \$500,000 for marketing New Zealand as the 'go now' destination for Australians \$30 million to support conservation visitor related experiences \$9 million for Great Rides cycle infrastructure \$3 million from the International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy to secure more business events for New Zealand. "2025 is our chance to reinforce the value of tourism and show what our humming, vibrant country has on show. New Zealand tourism is open for business," Louise Upston said during comments to the University of Otago Tourism Policy School in Queenstown. The first round of funding for the Regional Events Promotion Fund saw 132 events approved, with \$2.375 million allocated. Applications for the second round of funding are open now with decisions expected to be made in May 2025.

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 04/03/2025

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## **Health Targets Focusing System on Delivering More for Patients**

New data highlights that while the Government's commitment to health targets continues to stabilise the health system, increased service delivery is required to get on top of waitlists, Health Minister Simeon Brown says. "Ensuring all Kiwis have access to timely, quality healthcare is a priority for the Government. I am encouraged

by Health New Zealand's release of second quarter 2024/25 results today, which show improvements in three of the five health targets," Mr Brown says. "Wait times in emergency departments continue to reduce, with 72.1 per cent of patients being admitted or discharged within six hours, an improvement from 67.5 per cent in the previous quarter. "Access to faster cancer care continues to improve, with 85.9 per cent of patients receiving treatment within 31 days – just 0.1 per cent away from the yearly milestone.

"And more children are now fully immunised, with 77 per cent of two-year-olds being immunised in the second quarter of this year, up from 75.7 per cent in the previous quarter." The data also confirms that more work is needed to get on top of waitlists for those waiting over four months for elective treatment and first specialist assessments, which grew by 2,500 per cent and 6,400 per cent respectively under the previous government. "While performance declined for the elective treatment and first specialist assessment targets, more was delivered by Health New Zealand in 2024, with more Kiwis having their elective surgeries and first specialist assessments than previous years. "However, more people are being added to waitlists than who are receiving treatment or assessments, which means there is still significant work required to improve the pace at which elective treatment and first specialist assessments are being delivered.

"Delivering more at a faster rate than patients are added to waitlists is key to reducing waitlists and wait times. "That's why I recently announced the elective boost, partnering with private hospitals to maximise operating capacity and expand procedures. This initiative will deliver 10,579 additional procedures by mid-year, with 2,000 already completed, including cataracts, hip, and knee replacements. "We are reducing specialist assessment delays by improving waitlist management, expanding service models, and implementing initiatives like AI diabetes retinal screening and Kaitaia's complete cataract care pathway to free up waitlists. "To further ease pressure on hospitals and emergency departments, our Government is taking action to ensure New Zealanders have increased access to more doctors and nurses and expanding primary healthcare options. "The Government is investing more than ever into our health system – a record \$30 billion each year – and we expect it to deliver more for patients as a result. "By measuring what matters and holding the system accountable, we are putting patients first and supporting our frontline healthcare workers to deliver the healthcare New Zealanders need in a timely and quality manner," Mr Brown says. \* First specialist assessment data for 2024 excludes the Auckland district.

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 04/03/2025

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## **Melling Transport Improvements to Start This Year**

Construction on the Melling Transport Improvements project on SH2 in the Hutt

Valley will start this year, Minister of Transport Chris Bishop says. The NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) has now signed the delivery contract with AECOM and Fletcher Construction to deliver the project. “This is a critical project for the future of the Hutt Valley and will be transformational for the city of Lower Hutt – reducing congestion, improving safety, boosting public transport and active transport, and driving economic growth. “Of course, Melling is just one part of a complex jigsaw puzzle of the RiverLink programme being delivered by NZTA, Greater Wellington Regional Council and Hutt City Council. This wider programme will significantly increase the Hutt Valley’s resilience and improve protection from floods and severe weather events. “Around 40,000 vehicles travel north and south of Melling on the state highway every day, making it one of the busiest intersections in Lower Hutt and the wider network. It’s a severe bottleneck for traffic that slows down commuters and freight.

“The project includes the construction of a new grade-separated Melling interchange and bridge over the Hutt River, improvements to walking and cycling infrastructure, and better access to public transport like buses and trains through the relocation of the train station with park and ride facilities south of the current station. “The wider Riverlink programme, which also includes flood protection and city revitalisation, has an overall budget of approximately \$1.5 billion comprising approximately \$1 billion from NZTA (construction costs, property, consenting, design, investigations, demolition and other NZTA managed costs), \$295 million from the Greater Wellington Regional Council and \$180 million from the Hutt City Council.” “The project has been undoubtedly challenging from a cost perspective. NZTA has worked hard with AECOM and Fletcher Construction to bring costs for the project down and deliver value for money in a challenging environment.

Approximately \$200 million in savings has been found, and Cabinet agreed in late 2024 to provide NZTA with additional Crown funding to deliver this vital Road of Regional Significance. “I can also confirm that the wider programme will include the construction of a City Link Bridge, a key connection point between the Lower Hutt city centre and the relocated train station, providing better access to public transport like buses and trains. “The bridge will be delivered by Hutt City Council and will help unlock better public transport opportunities and housing within the city. The government has agreed to a variation of Infrastructure Acceleration Funding (IAF) already provided to Hutt City Council to enable this to proceed. “The Melling Transport Improvements project will contribute to an already strong pipeline of work underway or about to get underway, while also supporting local businesses, trades, and wider infrastructure opportunities in the region.

“Over the coming months, NZTA will continue working through several elements of the project’s early stages, including finalising the detailed design. This will help ensure that when construction starts later this year, NZTA can work as efficiently as possible and keep the project on track. “I am confident the transport improvements at

Melling will have significant benefits for motorists, freight, and those travelling to, through and from Lower Hutt once work is complete, and I want to thank Mayor Campbell Barry, GWRC Chair Daran Ponter, NZTA and Ngāti Toa and Taranaki Whānui. “Today is a great day for the Hutt Valley. Getting on with the Melling project will give much needed certainty to residents, businesses, and the wider community that have been calling for these improvements for many years. I look forward to being on site later this year to turn the first sod and kick off construction.” The Melling interchange and bridge construction is expected to be completed in 2031 with demolition of the old bridge to follow in 2032.

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## **Government Delivers Breakthrough Week for Building**

Significant action by the Government this week will make building in New Zealand easier by unclogging the consenting system, reducing construction costs, and giving tradies the support they need to get on with the job, Building and Construction Minister Chris Penk says. Tradies are bogged down in paperwork instead of doing what they do best. Building materials cost too much, and securing land for roads, housing developments, and hospitals takes far too long. “Kiwis are fed up - and rightly so. We’ve listened to frustrated builders, first-home buyers, and families calling out for concrete change, and we’re acting. “This week, we announced the final stage of reforms to the Public Works Act to make the process of purchasing land for much-needed public projects clearer, faster and fairer.

“Negotiations sometimes take years. We’re putting incentive payments of up to \$100,000 on the table for landowners who agree to sell early. That means fewer drawn-out legal battles and costly delays. “We’re also stripping back needless red tape in the consenting system and taking our granny flat proposal further - lifting the maximum permitted size of granny flats that can be built without consent from 60 to 70 square metres, so more families can build without jumping through hoops. “These changes are expected to see 13,000 more granny flats built over the next decade - giving families more affordable, flexible housing options. “We’re also backing our skilled builders by cracking down on the cowboys. Stronger disciplinary powers, new waterproofing licences for wet area bathrooms, and a better complaints process will lift trust in the industry and help protect Kiwis’ biggest investment - their homes.

“Building new homes and granny flats and doing renovations will also become more affordable – thanks to new legislation passed this week, that will make it easier for builders and designers to use top-quality products from overseas. “We expect up to 250,000 more building products—like plasterboard, insulation, and cladding—to become available this year alone through the streamlined Building Product Specifications pathway. “This week’s announcements are just the start. There’s more to come as we get on with fixing the consenting system and making it easier to put a

roof over every Kiwi's head.”

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## Backing Community-Led Biodiversity Protection

A \$9.2 million investment into community-led biodiversity protection will benefit the environment and sustainable tourism, Conservation Minister Tama Potaka says. The Department of Conservation – Te Papa Atawhai has chosen 20 groups who applied to the DOC Community Fund for support in protecting threatened species and ecosystems across Aotearoa New Zealand. A total of 291 groups applied for the 2025 funding round. “Our country’s natural beauty and rich biodiversity attracts visitors from around the world. Investing in biodiversity is great for the environment, good for tourism, and helps support economic growth that creates jobs and boosts incomes,” Mr Potaka says. “Projects include supporting The Forest Bridge Trust to do landscape scale predator control, which will protect nationally critical tara iti and matuku-hūrepo up north of Auckland. With a population of fewer than 40, the tara iti is probably our most endangered indigenous breeding bird.

“At the other end of the country, we are supporting the Hokonui Rūnanga in their goal of helping the nationally vulnerable kanakana/lamprey by identifying waterway issues. “Delivering better public services means prioritising high value initiatives that will deliver the greatest outcomes. The department selected projects most likely to have the greatest impact for biodiversity working with local communities, Iwi and Hapū,” Mr Potaka says. “In the Lower North Island, we are supporting the Manaaki Ruahine Trust to do predator control over 40,000 ha in Ngā Pae Maunga o Ruahine to support the recovery of nationally vulnerable whio and other threatened species. “We are supporting the Chatham Islands Taiko Trust to do predator control mahi over private and public land that will protect breeding habitats for the nationally critical Chatham Island tāiko.” The DOC Community Fund is a contestable Crown fund, open to community groups and private landowners to support community-led conservation projects on public and private land. It has invested \$57.4 million into 769 community conservation initiatives since 2014.

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## More Jobseekers Finding Work

More than 2,000 additional Jobseekers found work in the first three months of 2025 than in the same period last year, statistics Social Development and Employment Minister Louise Upston describes as “cautiously encouraging.” Quarterly benefit numbers released by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) today show more than 23,000 clients receiving a main benefit found employment in the March 2025 quarter – an increase of 2,421 people, or 11.6 percent on the same period last year.\*\*

Other key indicators released this morning show: Consecutive decreases in the number of people on benefit for three months in a row, from January 2025 through to March 2025. The number of people receiving Jobseeker Support reducing by almost 3,500 people from December 2024 to March 2025.

“While encouraged by these figures, I’m also taking a cautious approach as our Government continues to drive for economic and job growth in a challenging global and domestic environment,” Louise Upston says. “We must consider Jobseeker improvement alongside figures showing that the number of people on a main benefit is higher than it was in the March 2024 quarter, following increases throughout 2024. “I am however particularly encouraged by the work of MSD staff over recent months. One of the drivers behind the increased number of people moving into work is MSD’s heightened focus on employment. “MSD frontline staff are doing a great job engaging proactively with Jobseekers, informing them not only of the obligations and sanctions we’ve introduced under the traffic light system, but also the supports available to help New Zealanders find work.

“This one-on-one intensive prep for the job market can only help more people back into work. “We know the faster we can help beneficiaries – especially young people – find sustainable employment, the better the outcomes for them, their families, our communities, and our economy. “Our Government has introduced more early intervention for young beneficiaries through a new phone-based employment case management service, we’ve got 2,100 more places for young people to get community job coaching, more regular work seminars, and a traffic light system to help them stay on track with their obligations. “The new Relocate for Work Support payment will also make it easier for people to move to take up sustainable employment. “All of these initiatives are helping on the frontline, and that matters because ‘work’ is about more than money. It also gives people a sense of purpose, independence, connectedness – leading to a better future and helping families break out of the cycle of inter-generational welfare dependence. “We know there will be more to do, but these figures indicate what a difference strong interventions can make,” Louise Upston says.

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## **Record Growth in Research and Development to Drive a Stronger Economy**

Science, Innovation and Technology Minister Dr Shane Reti has welcomed a significant milestone in New Zealand’s research and development (R&D) sector, with new figures showing total expenditure on R&D has climbed to \$6.4 billion – a 21 per cent increase since 2022. Dr Reti says the strong rise in R&D expenditure demonstrates growing momentum and reflects the Government’s commitment to backing science, innovation and technology as core drivers of economic growth and

supports its global trade and investment agenda. “Using new ideas, knowledge and technology to develop better ways of doing things helps the New Zealand economy grow,” Dr Reti said. “R&D is how we lift productivity and create high-value jobs. It’s also critical to opening opportunities in global export markets, helping build a resilient economy that can thrive on the world stage.”

According to data released by Stats NZ today, between 2022 and 2024, the business, government, and higher education sectors reported: Total R&D expenditure rose to \$6.4 billion – up 21 per cent since the 2022 survey Average R&D expenditure per entity increased 24 per cent to \$2.8 million – an average increase of \$524,000 The number of R&D FTEs increased by 9 per cent to 42,000 R&D expenditure as a proportion of GDP rose from 1.49 per cent to 1.54 per cent “These figures show the depth and intensity of investment has strengthened. That’s a positive trend toward smarter, more focused innovation. In the business sector, R&D expenditure reached \$4.0 billion in 2024 – a 9 percent year-on-year increase. The number of R&D FTEs remained stable at 21,000, while the average R&D spend per business rose by nearly 9 percent to \$1.8 million.

Businesses reported that their top motivations for investing in R&D were to gain access to new markets and to maintain their market position. “Having businesses investing more in technology and innovation will create higher-paying jobs for New Zealanders and diversify our economy into new industries and global markets,” Dr Reti says. “Science, innovation and technology is a key pillar in our Government’s plan to grow our economy. “It will not only create more jobs, increase incomes and provide more opportunities at home in New Zealand but also enable additional international trade and investment – something the Government is actively pursuing, including through international trade agreements like those with the UAE and GCC. “We’re making deliberate choices to back science, innovation and technology as powerful enablers of productivity and opportunity across the board.”

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## **Accelerating the Roll-out of Public EV Chargers**

The Government is updating the way it co-invests in public electric vehicle (EV) chargers with the private sector to accelerate the delivery of EV chargers across New Zealand, Transport Minister Chris Bishop and Energy Minister Simon Watts say. “New Zealand needs more EV chargers. We have fewer public chargers per EV than many other countries in the OECD, and we know that this is a barrier to Kiwis purchasing EVs,” Mr Bishop says. “People buying an EV need confidence that they can charge where and when they need to on a comprehensive public network. “The number of EV charge points (as of 31 December 2024) is 1,378 – around one for every 84 EVs (battery electric and plug in hybrid). The Government is targeting 10,000 by 2030, so that there will be one public charge point to around 40 EVs. This

will remove people's 'range anxiety' and make owning an EV as easy as possible.

"The Government will therefore utilise the highly successful Ultra-Fast Broadband model to accelerate the roll-out of EV chargers. Under the status quo, the private sector are reluctant to invest in charging infrastructure until there's sufficient demand, but demand for charging won't grow until the purchase of EVs stops being hampered by a lack of public charging. This chicken-and-egg situation is hampering the roll-out and justifies government action. "Since 2016, government investment in EV chargers has consisted of direct grants. This made sense when the market for public EV charging was being established. This model is now outdated, with EVs now making up over 2 per cent of the light vehicle fleet, and expected to make up around 11 per cent by 2030. A range of charge point operators have now also entered the market.

"The Government is moving to a more sophisticated, commercial procurement model. We have set aside up to \$68.5 million in currently held grant funding, to provide concessionary loans to private operators to co-invest in public EV charging infrastructure. Loans will be quicker to implement and will help achieve the Government's objectives with less complexity, cost and risk. "Concessionary loans will bring forward private investment in public EV charging infrastructure by lowering the cost of capital. They will also provide better value for money by maximising private sector investment while keeping the taxpayers' contribution to a minimum. "Loans will be awarded through contestable co-investment rounds, and applications will be open to proposals to establish portfolios of public EV charging sites (i.e. multiple charging locations). This is the best way to support scaled-up development and to maximise competitive tension between providers.

"Giving effect to commitments made on the National-Act Coalition agreement, this competitive tension will help ensure public investment flows to proposals delivering the best value-for-money. A cost benefit analysis will also be applied at the point loan applications are assessed, with a successful applicant having demonstrated that the benefits to New Zealand of its project outweigh the costs." Mr Watts says that EVs make a huge amount of sense for New Zealand. "With our bountiful renewable energy resources EVs are a winner for New Zealand. Kiwis charging their EVs are essentially filling their cars with predominantly water, wind, and geothermal energy – rather than fossil fuels – due to our high level of renewable energy. "There are real benefits to owning an EV. Not only does it support our economic and climate goals, but it also delivers long-term benefits to users by helping keep running costs low. This Government is focused on growing the economy so Kiwis can get ahead.

"By giving people more options to reduce everyday expenses like transport, we're helping households stay ahead and build a more sustainable future. By co-investing to accelerate public EV infrastructure ahead of demand, we will give more Kiwis the confidence to go electric." The new EV charging initiative will be administered by National Infrastructure Funding and Financing (NIFFCo), the successor organisation

to Crown Infrastructure Partners (which delivered Ultra-Fast Broadband). EECA will provide assistance as required.

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## **Government Exploring Northern ‘Energy Bridge’**

The Regional Infrastructure Fund will invest up to \$2 million to investigate building additional electricity transmission and distribution capacity in Northland, which could also have benefits further afield, Regional Development Minister Shane Jones says. “New Zealand needs significantly more electricity generation as the economy grows and demand for power increases. Northland is rich in natural renewable resources, such as wind and solar which are suitable for generating renewable energy,” Mr Jones says. The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) will use up to \$2m from the Regional Infrastructure Fund to investigate the feasibility of upgrading Northland’s electricity infrastructure to act as an ‘energy bridge’ between Northland and Auckland. MBIE will also carry out an economic analysis of the potential benefits in conjunction with local stakeholders.

“This project has the potential to unlock \$1 billion of private investment in new renewable energy. If this is feasible, Northland could become a significant electricity generator and supplier of power which might have flow-on benefits for Auckland and the rest of the country,” Mr Jones says. “This investment could increase electricity self-sufficiency in the region and improve the power generation capacity and resilience of the Northland network which will benefit local people. It could also reduce power prices for Auckland and nationally if wholesale prices can be brought down. “More detailed work needs to be done into the feasibility of expanding Northland’s power generation before further government funding can be considered but if the outcome is positive, the payoff could be massive. “This is a long-term project and there is a lot of water to pass under the bridge yet, but if it goes ahead some new power generation could come online as components are completed, with full commissioning by 2029,” Mr Jones says. The project aligns with the Coalition Government’s goals of building infrastructure and doubling renewable energy generation for New Zealand by 2035 to reduce emissions and enable economic growth.

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## **Protecting New Zealand's Energy Infrastructure**

Improving the current system to better protect power lines from falling trees will protect the security of New Zealand’s electricity infrastructure, says Energy Minister Simon Watts. “Secure electricity lines are critical to electrifying New Zealand’s economy and delivering the resilient and reliable electricity supply we need to power

economic growth," Mr Watts says. "Cyclone Gabrielle and Cyclone Tam highlighted the vulnerability of our infrastructure to severe weather events like storms and floods. During Cyclone Gabrielle alone, trees outside the Growth Limit Zone caused power outages that left 68,000 households without heating, lighting, internet, and access to essential appliances." The Government has now agreed to amendments to the Electricity (Hazards from Trees) Regulations 2003, that will lower the risk to power lines from trees that are close to but aren't immediately beside the line.

"We're taking action to deal with the increasing risk of damaged infrastructure and support our adaptation to the changing climate," Mr Watts says. The amendments introduce two key measures: Enabling lines owners to assess the likelihood and potential impact of a fall for trees they consider could be a risk to lines, then issue a Treefall Hazard Notice for moderate- and high-risk trees. Restricting the planting of new trees on land that is not already forested outside of urban areas. "We have worked closely with lines owners and other impacted stakeholders to ensure we struck the right balance between security of our electricity supply, protecting property rights, and making sure the forestry sector's Emissions Trading Scheme-related revenues are not unduly impacted," Mr Watts says. "This Government has made it clear that we are committed to unleashing transmission and distribution infrastructure on our mission to electrify the New Zealand economy. Ensuring the security of our network infrastructure is essential to delivering reliable electricity to all New Zealanders."

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### Asia-Pacific

#### Lower Tariffs Are Good for Everybody

World Bank Group President Ajay Banga said on Tuesday that lower tariffs are good for everybody, while noting that he has seen increased inter-regional trade and bilateral trade in recent years. "For the last 10 years, if you look at the number of bilateral and regional trade deals being signed in the world, they are way in excess of what most people are paying attention to," Banga said at an event during the 2025 Spring Meetings of the World Bank Group (WBG) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Referring to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) – two major trade agreements in the Asia-Pacific region, Banga said that "these are all deals involving groups of nations in the last decade, and it has changed the way trade is working in those countries." At a press conference last

week, the World Bank president noted that there is "untapped potential" in deeper regional integration. "Trade among developing economies is growing rapidly. Nearly half of exports from these countries now go to other emerging markets," Banga said. "Strengthening regional ties through more efficient border processes, lower trade costs, less friction, clear rules of origin, these can boost trade volumes and support more stable and diversified growth," he said. The World Bank president also noted that many developing economies still maintain higher tariffs than advanced economies, averaging several percentage points more on key imports, which creates a real risk of "reciprocal tariffs" and a loss of competitiveness. "So a broad-based liberalization, not just with favorite partners, can help offset these risks and actually expand market access," he said, adding that history shows that more open economies tend to grow faster and they withstand stocks and shocks more effectively. Banga told reporters that uncertainty and volatility are contributing to a more cautious economic and business environment, urging countries to negotiate and engage in dialogue on trade issues.

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## **Tariff Policies May Further Worsen Debt Levels**

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Wednesday that if fiscal revenues and economic output decline more significantly than current forecasts due to rising tariffs and weakened growth prospects, debt levels may exceed existing "debt-at-risk" estimates. "The series of recent tariff announcements by the United States, and countermeasures by other countries have increased financial market volatility, weakened growth prospects, and increased risks," IMF officials wrote in a blog post published alongside the release of the organization's latest Fiscal Monitor, stressing that current major policy shifts are exacerbating global uncertainty. "They come in the context of rising debt levels in many countries and already strained public finances, which in many cases will also need to accommodate new and permanent increases in spending, such as defense," they said. "Rising yields in major economies and widening spreads in emerging markets further complicate the fiscal landscape," they added. The IMF projects global public debt to increase by 2.8 percentage points this year, pushing debt levels above 95 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). This upward trend is likely to continue, with public debt nearing 100 percent of GDP by the end of the decade, surpassing pandemic levels. "Amid substantial policy uncertainty and a shifting economic landscape, debt levels could rise even further," IMF officials noted.

According to the Fiscal Monitor's debt-at-risk, in a "severely adverse scenario," global public debt could reach 117 percent of GDP by 2027. This would represent the highest level since World War II, exceeding reference projections by almost 20 percentage points. "Risks to the fiscal outlook have further intensified. Debt levels may rise even further than the debt-at-risk estimates if revenues and economic

output decline more significantly than current forecasts due to increased tariffs and weakened growth prospects," according to the blog. "Additionally, escalating geo-economic uncertainties could heighten debt risks, driving up public debt through increased expenditures, particularly in defense," it noted, adding that demands for fiscal support could also rise for those vulnerable to severe disruptions from trade shocks, pushing up spending. The Fiscal Monitor estimates that a significant rise in geo-economic uncertainty could increase public debt by approximately 4.5 percent of GDP in the medium term. The report also warned that tighter and more volatile financial conditions in the United States could have "ripple effects" on emerging markets and developing economies, leading to higher financing costs. "This significantly impacts commodity prices, resulting in lower prices and heightened price volatility," IMF officials said. "Limited fiscal improvements may further heighten risks from rising interest rates, especially as many countries have substantial financing needs. High interest rates could limit essential spending on social programs and public investments." "Additionally, reduced foreign aid, due to shifting priorities among advanced economies complicates financing for low-income countries," they added. The IMF urged countries to, first and foremost, put their fiscal houses in order in an "uncertain and rapidly changing world." This means implementing prudent policies within robust fiscal frameworks to build public confidence and help reduce uncertainty, it said.

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## **ADB Issues Its First Local Currency Education Bond**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has issued its first local currency education bond, raising 45.7 billion Mongolian togrog (approximately \$13.1 million) to support an education project in Mongolia. The 5-year Mongolian togrog-denominated bond carries a fixed coupon rate of 10%. Proceeds from the issuance will finance the construction of the country's first internationally certified [green educational facility](#), a new annex to the Orchlun School and Kindergarten Complex LLC. This landmark issuance reflects ADB's growing commitment to mobilize local capital for development impact. The bond, arranged by ING Bank N.V. (ING) and fully subscribed by a single European investor, reflects the amortizing nature of the loan. "This marks our fourth issue connecting Mongolia with an international investor," says ADB Treasurer Tobias Hoschka. "We extend our gratitude to ING and the investor for their continued support towards advancing educational initiatives in emerging markets." ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting sustainable, inclusive, and resilient 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/> 04/10/2025

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## **ADB Invests \$20 Million in ABC Impact Fund II to Drive Sustainable Development in the Region**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed an equity investment of up to \$20 million with ABC Impact Fund II LP (ABC Impact II), a regional private equity fund managed by Temasek Trust Asset Management Pte. Ltd. (TTAM). ABC Impact II will focus on four core development goals: better health care and education, financial and digital inclusion, sustainable food and agriculture, and climate and water solutions. The investment will provide growth capital for businesses that drive sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, with a particular focus on the People's Republic of China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam. "The impact investment landscape in the region remains nascent, with a significant funding gap for growth-stage companies," said the Regional Director and Head of ADB's Singapore Office Jackie Surtani. "ADB's investment in ABC Impact Fund II reflects our commitment to catalyzing impact capital across Asia and the Pacific. By supporting innovative businesses that tackle pressing social and environmental challenges, we aim to improve lives and livelihoods throughout the region."

ABC Impact is signatory to the Operating Principles for Impact Management, a global standard for managing impact investments that has been endorsed by nearly 200 organizations in 40 countries. The fund targets mid-market companies with the potential for significant social and environmental impact. By providing long-term equity financing and capacity building support, ABC Impact II will help these companies scale and attract additional investment. The adherence to ABC's impact investment principles is independently verified by Bluemark, a global leader in impact verification services. Established in Singapore, ABC Impact is a private equity impact fund managed by TTAM. The fund aims to provide growth capital to innovative business models that advance sustainable development efforts in Asia and the Pacific. With a capitalization of over \$600 million, ABC Impact seeks to drive positive social and environmental change while delivering solid financial returns. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting sustainable, inclusive, and resilient 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.

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## **ADB Deploys Almost 40 Bln USD for Development Across Asia, Pacific in 2024**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) said Thursday it committed 24.3 billion U.S. dollars from its resources in 2024, coupled with 14.9 billion dollars in co-financing in collaboration with its partners, to help Asia and the Pacific solve a range of complex

development challenges. The bank's annual report released on Thursday detailed how the multilateral bank supported its developing members to make progress toward sustainable, inclusive, and resilient development. The report said the 24.3 billion dollars comprised loans, grants, equity investments, guarantees, and technical assistance provided to governments and the private sector. To build on the 1 million direct jobs it generated in 2024, the ADB committed 4.8 billion dollars through its private sector projects and programs, up 28.5 percent from 2023. "With our increased financial firepower and a sharper strategic focus, ADB is turning commitment into concrete results," said ADB President Masato Kanda. "We are financing more affordable and efficient energy and transport systems, supporting a vibrant private sector that creates better-quality jobs, and strengthening basic services in education, health, and social protection," he added.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/24/2025

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## East Asia

### **JAPAN: Reports ¥5.22 Tril Trade Deficit in FY2024**

Japan recorded a trade deficit in its March-April fiscal year but racked up a surplus with the U.S., the Finance Ministry reported Thursday. Japan's global trade deficit totaled 5.2 trillion yen for the fiscal year through March, for the fourth straight year of deficits, according to the provisional statistics. The surplus with the U.S. ballooned to 9 trillion yen. Exports to the U.S. are a contentious issue for U.S. President Donald Trump and Japanese negotiators are in Washington to argue their case against higher U.S. tariffs. Japan is a key longtime U.S. ally and major investor in the U.S., employing hundreds of thousands of Americans. Trump said on April 2 that he planned to impose a 24% tariff on imports from Japan as part of an announcement of higher tariffs on dozens of countries. After financial markets panicked, he put a partial 90-day hold on the import taxes, while increasing his already steep tariffs on Chinese goods to as much as 145%. Japan still faces a 10% baseline tariff and a 25% tax on imported cars, auto parts, steel and aluminum exports. Most of those duties took effect recently, but they pose a grave challenge for embattled Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba.

Some analysts say Tokyo could at some point announce surprise concessions, like importing more American rice. Rice holds a special place in the Japanese psyche as the nation's staple and has long been a protected sector in Japan. But recently a rice shortage has been pushing up prices. Japan's annual exports climbed 5.9% from a year earlier, helped by strong shipments of goods like computer chips and vehicles. Imports rose 4.7%. But a weaker Japanese yen made imports more costly. A recent influx of foreign tourists to Japan has pushed exports higher, since such spending counts as exports. For the month of March, Japan recorded a trade surplus of 544 billion yen (\$4 billion). Exports climbed nearly 4% from a year earlier, for the sixth

straight month of gains, although the surge was slower than in February. Exports to the U.S. rose 3%, while shipments to the rest of Asia grew 5.5%. Exports to China fell, while shipments to Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea surged. "This is likely due to the rerouting of exports within Asia to avoid tariff conflicts with the U.S.," Min Joo Kang, a senior economist at ING, said in a report.

From <https://japantoday.com> 04/17/2025

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## **SOUTH KOREA: Financial Watchdog Chief Calls for Measures for Market Stability, Financial Prudence**

The chief of South Korea's financial watchdog said Tuesday the country needs to map out all feasible measures for the market stability and prudence of financial institutions amid increased volatility. In a meeting with staff, Lee Bok-hyun, governor of the Financial Supervisory Service (FSS), said the United States' reciprocal tariffs are feared to cause a global trade war, which will lead to an economic slump and further stir market volatility. "We need to analyze the impacts from the looming tariff war and take measures in advance to minimize any fallout," he said. The FSS chief also called for steps to thoroughly monitor the capital market and prudence of banks. On Monday, the benchmark Korea Composite Stock Price Index (KOSPI) plunged by more than 5.5 percent, marking a fourth consecutive session of losses as investors were shaken by concerns over an escalating global trade war, exacerbated by reciprocal tariffs imposed by the U.S. The South Korean won also experienced its sharpest decline against the U.S. dollar since the COVID-19 pandemic.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/08/2025

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## **S. Korea to Invest 830 Bln Won for Industrial Technology Development in 2026**

South Korea plans to spend 830 billion won (US\$561.2 million) on research and development (R&D) of industrial technologies next year as part of efforts to bolster the country's competitiveness in advanced industries amid escalating global competition, the industry ministry said Thursday. The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy will review its investment plan with experts to better support R&D projects in artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, mobility, semiconductors and other cutting-edge technologies, according to ministry officials. Since last year, the government has devised 124 R&D projects for the advanced industries, which will receive a combined investment of 6.7 trillion won. "In the face of uncertain domestic and global conditions, the key breakthrough lies in technology and innovation," said Oh Seung-cheol, deputy minister of industries and enterprises at the ministry.

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## **BOK Holds Key Rate Steady to Shore Up Weak Currency**

South Korea's central bank kept its benchmark interest rate unchanged Thursday, despite sluggish growth, in an effort to stabilize the local currency amid uncertainties regarding the United States' sweeping tariff scheme. The monetary policy committee of the Bank of Korea (BOK) held its key rate unchanged at 2.75 percent during a rate-setting meeting in Seoul. The decision follows a quarter-percentage-point rate cut at the previous meeting in February, which marked the third reduction since October 2024, when the BOK began its monetary easing cycle for the first time since August 2021. Thursday's decision underscored the BOK's focus on maintaining financial stability, even as it grapples with a trade-off between supporting economic growth and safeguarding markets. Volatility increased in the financial and foreign exchange markets recently due mainly to the Donald Trump administration's unpredictable tariff policies. Earlier this month, the local currency fell to as low as 1,484.1 won against the U.S. dollar, the lowest level in about 16 years, after the U.S. announced "reciprocal" tariffs that include a 25 percent tariff for South Korea, along with a 10 percent baseline tariff on foreign imports.

In a dramatic policy shift, however, the U.S. president announced a 90-day pause in the implementation of the reciprocal tariffs shortly after they came into effect, and the Korean won has somewhat strengthened to a yearly high of the 1,420 won level in recent sessions. Currently, the gap between the key interest rates of South Korea and the U.S. stands at up to 1.75 percentage points, and a further widening of the gap could lead to additional depreciation of the Korean currency, according to experts. The BOK appeared to have opted to secure policy space by holding its rate steady, as the country is preparing for tariff negotiations with Washington. Trump has instructed his administration to begin immediate tariff talks with South Korea and other key partners, and Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok was to hold talks with U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent next week over tariffs and other trade issues. The won opened at 1,416.0 won Thursday, up 10.7 won from the previous session.

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

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## **Gov't Plans to Provide 25 Trn Won in Liquidity to Help Exporters amid Global Trade War**

South Korea plans to provide 25 trillion won (US\$17.58 billion) in liquidity to local exporters expected to be dealt a blow from the United States' tariff scheme, the country's extra budget bill showed Friday. Under the extra budget bill, the government proposed expanding the size of special policy funds by 1.5 trillion won to a total of 25 trillion won to prevent a possible liquidity crisis of Korean companies amid heightened global trade uncertainties, according to the Ministry of Economy and Finance. The government unveiled the details of the envisioned 12.2 trillion-won supplementary budget earlier in the day, highlighting the need to support key

industries amid the escalating trade war, as well as recovery efforts following recent wildfires in the country's southeastern region. Among the 12.2 trillion won, the government plans to spend 4.4 trillion won on mitigating trade risks and supporting advanced industries.

In detail, the 25 trillion-won policy financing scheme includes low-interest loans worth 15 trillion won for companies hit by U.S. reciprocal tariffs and 10.2 trillion won of surety insurance for the shipbuilding and other export industries. The Seoul government is currently preparing for its negotiations with the Donald Trump administration, slated for next week, on U.S. import tariffs that include a 25 percent reciprocal duty for South Korea. Additionally, the government plans to double its annual spending to 400 billion won on stabilizing the supply chains of six critical minerals, including rare earth minerals, such as lithium and molybdenum, that are expected to suffer supply disruptions due to China's export controls. Earlier this month, China placed export restrictions on key rare earth elements, essential for advanced industries, in retaliation against Washington's hefty tariffs.

The government is also planning to raise the issuance cap of foreign exchange stabilization bonds from US\$1.2 billion to \$3.5 billion to better respond to heightened volatility in the foreign exchange market. To boost the country's competitiveness in artificial intelligence (AI), the government allocated 1.8 trillion won to purchasing advanced graphic processing units (GPUs), developing global-level large language models (LLMs) and annually fostering more than 3,300 personnel with masters' or doctorate degrees in related fields. To this end, the size of the AI innovation fund will be expanded to 200 billion won from the current 90 billion won, while 10 billion won will be provided to 50 companies conducting research and development projects. Another 500 billion won has been set aside to help boost the competitiveness of the semiconductor and other strategic industries.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/18/2025

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## **S. Korea Soon to Be Included on Watch List for MSCI Index**

South Korea is likely to be put on a watch list for development market status in the Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI) index in the near future, the country's financial regulator said Monday, noting most issues that prevented the country's inclusion have now been addressed. Since June 2024, the country has remained on an emerging market list by the global index as the country reimposed a ban on stock short-selling in November in 2023. Kim So-young, vice chairman of the Financial Services Commission (FSC), said it is highly likely for the country to be on the watch list for development status in the MSCI index, which is reclassified every year in June. "We believe the possibility of (the country's) inclusion in the near future is very high, even if it does not get included this time," Kim said in a press briefing with foreign correspondents in Seoul.

He said over 90 percent of the issues raised by MSCI, such as the short-selling ban and others, have been resolved. South Korea has undertaken a series of market reform measures to receive development market status in the MSCI index. Those measures include its plan to improve the country's foreign exchange (FX) market, under which foreign institutions are allowed to participate in the onshore interbank FX market upon registration. On March 31, the country lifted its stock short-selling ban on all listed firms, which had been in place since November 2023 after a series of naked short-selling violations involving several global investment banks was discovered.

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

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## **Gov't to Spend 463.5 Bln Won on Supporting R&D Projects of Mid-Sized Export Companies**

The government will invest 463.5 billion won (US\$324.7 million) by 2033 in research and development (R&D) projects led by medium-sized companies with export potential, the industry ministry said Thursday. Under the plan, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy has designated 10 R&D projects on cutting-edge technologies that will receive government funding. The technologies include future mobility, advanced manufacturing, energy and rechargeable batteries. Medium-sized firms leading R&D projects on such technologies will receive around 4 billion won per project on average over the next three to four years, according to the ministry. "For sustainable growth, medium-sized companies must not remain confined to the domestic market but should expand into the global market by securing global competitiveness through technological innovation," said Oh Seung-cheol, deputy minister of industries and enterprises at the ministry.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/24/2025

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## **S. Korea Retrieves 72 Pct of Bailout Funds Since 1997 Financial Crisis**

The government has retrieved over 70 percent of the public funds used to bail out troubled financial firms since the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis, the financial regulator said Wednesday. As of end-March, the government has been paid back 72.1 percent, or 121.6 trillion won (US\$84.7 billion), of the 168.7 trillion won in bailout funds, according to the Financial Services Commission (FSC). Last year, the government recovered 942 billion won in public funds by selling shares in Hanhwa Ocean Co. and others.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/30/2025

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## **S. Korea to Spend 113.4 Bln Won on Developing Next-Generation Defense Technologies**

South Korea will invest 113.4 billion won (US\$79.1 million) this year to develop next-generation defense technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductors and robots, the industry ministry said Wednesday. The figure marks a 32.3 percent increase from the corresponding tally for 2024, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. The investment will be funneled into 132 projects, including the development of an amphibious mobile reconnaissance robot and a micro-suicide drone system, as well as developing next-generation weapons systems for exports. The government will also create a civil-military council on naval vessel maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) as part of efforts to strengthen the country's defense cooperation with the U.S., the ministry said. "To lead the fast-evolving defense market, we need to achieve technological innovations through convergence of the cutting-edge technologies of the private sector, including AI and drones, and the defense sector," First Vice Industry Minister Park Sung-taek said.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/30/2025

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## **South-East Asia**

### **INDONESIA: To Implement New Mineral, Coal Royalty Rates in April**

The Indonesian government will begin implementing higher royalty rates for mineral and coal commodities in the second week of April this year, Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources Bahlil Lahadalia announced on Wednesday. According to Bahlil, the newly finalized regulation introduces a progressive royalty scheme that applies to coal, nickel, copper, gold, silver, and tin. "Rates will only increase if commodity prices rise, serving as a win-win solution for both the government and businesses," Bahlil told reporters. Despite differing opinions, the administration noted that the policy prioritizes national interests and is based on financial evaluations of several enterprises. The government has set a target of 124.5 trillion rupiahs (7.36 billion U.S. dollars) in non-tax state revenue from the mineral and coal sectors by 2025.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/09/2025

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### **CAMBODIA: Central Bank Joins Regional Payment Connectivity Initiative**

The National Bank of Cambodia (NBC) joined the Regional Payment Connectivity (RPC) initiative, further strengthening regional financial integration in Southeast Asia, a joint press release said on Tuesday. The NBC's inclusion in the RPC followed its formal expression of interest to be part of the initiative, the press release said. It

added that the NBC announced its participation in the fourth supplemental pages of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Regional Payment Connectivity during an event on the sidelines of the 12th ASEAN Finance Ministers' and Central Bank Governors' Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. "The NBC's inclusion into the RPC initiative brings the total number of signatories to nine ASEAN central banks," the press release said. First established in 2022 by the central banks of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, the initiative has since been expanded to include Vietnam in August 2023, as well as Brunei and Laos in February and April 2024, respectively. "This growing participation of the RPC initiative underscores its potential for further expansion within ASEAN and beyond to enhance collaboration on regional payment connectivity and foster greater financial integration within the region," the press release said. The RPC initiative aims to promote faster, cheaper, more transparent and more inclusive cross-border payments. Since its inception, it has fostered and accelerated the development of cross-border payment connectivity in the region through, among others, quick response code-based payment and fast payment modalities. By promoting seamless cross-border transactions in the region, the RPC initiative supports broader economic activities in ASEAN, including greater market access for small- and medium-sized enterprises, enhances trade facilitation, and improves remittance flows. "Participating in the RPC initiative will foster regional economic growth and establish a more interconnected payment system within ASEAN," NBC Governor Chea Serey said in the press release. ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/08/2025

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## **MYANMAR: ADB to Provide \$3 Million for Earthquake Relief**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is preparing a \$3 million grant to support emergency and humanitarian needs of the people of Myanmar affected by the 7.7 magnitude earthquake on 28 March. The grant, which is being prepared for expedited approval by ADB's Board of Directors, will be provided through the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) to meet immediate needs through the distribution of in-kind food and multi-purpose cash assistance to purchase essential items, such as drinking water, medical supplies, and shelter. The earthquake has intensified Myanmar's ongoing humanitarian crisis, adding urgency to the existing challenges faced by the people. "We are deeply concerned by the impact of the earthquake on the people of Myanmar and are immediately preparing a \$3 million grant to support emergency relief efforts," said ADB Director General for Southeast Asia Winfried Wicklein. "We will consider additional and more substantial support by tapping into resources from the community development window of Asian Development Fund 14." The grant will come from the [Asia Pacific Disaster Response Fund](#) (APDRF), which provides fast-tracked grants to developing member

countries for life-saving purposes in the immediate aftermath of major disasters triggered by a natural hazard. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting sustainable, inclusive, and resilient 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/> 04/01/2025

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## **UN Launches 275-Mln-USD Appeal for Myanmar's Earthquake Response**

The United Nations and its partners on Friday launched an appeal worth 275 million U.S. dollars to support Myanmar's response to the devastating earthquakes. The fund is an addendum to the 2025 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan to reach 1.1 million people with urgent aid and assistance, Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN secretary-general, said at a daily briefing. UN agencies, with its partners, have rapidly mobilized aid, including medical care, shelter, water, and food, to help people affected. To further strengthen efforts on the ground, the UN Central Emergency Response Fund has allocated an additional 5 million dollars for the earthquake response, on top of the 5 million dollars already provided a few weeks ago, Dujarric said. The devastating earthquakes that struck central Myanmar on March 28 have caused widespread death, human suffering and destruction, aggravating an already alarming humanitarian crisis. The earthquake has pushed 2 million people into critical need of assistance and protection, in addition to the 19.9 million people who were estimated to need humanitarian aid prior to this disaster, the spokesman said. Humanitarians said that people impacted need urgent healthcare and medical supplies, drinking water, food and other critical items. Tents and temporary shelter are also needed, as well as latrines and hygiene items. The United Nations called for the international community to immediately step up funding to Myanmar, and ensure rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to the most vulnerable across the country.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/12/2025

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## **PHILIPPINES: ADB Approves \$1.45 Billion Final Tranche for Malolos-Clark Railway Project**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved \$1.45 billion as the second and final tranche of its multitranche financing facility for the [Malolos–Clark Railway Project](#) (MCRP), a core element of the government's flagship project to provide a safe, affordable, reliable, and environment-friendly railway connecting northern and southern Luzon provinces to Metro Manila. The MCRP is a 53.1-kilometer (km) segment of the 163-km North–South Commuter Railway (NSCR), which will reshape

mass transportation in the country using disaster-resilient design and high-technology construction methods. ADB is also financing the southern leg of the NSCR system, the [South Commuter Railway Project](#). “The Malolos–Clark Railway Project is one of ADB’s biggest project financing in the entire Asia and Pacific region. We are proud to partner with the government in making the vision of a world-class mass transportation system in the country a reality. This major transformative project will spur more investments, create jobs, and contribute to sustaining the country’s growth momentum,” said ADB Philippines Country Director Pavit Ramachandran.

The MCRP features three types of commuter service—regular commuter trains, express trains with stops at stations with high passenger demand, and the country’s first airport express trains connecting to Clark International Airport. It will help lower the country’s greenhouse gas emissions with the shift to mass transit from private vehicles. Aside from helping decongest Metro Manila, the MCRP will promote regional economic integration by creating linkages to the Central Luzon Corridor. The [\\$1.3-billion tranche 1](#) of the financing facility for the project was approved by ADB in 2019 and is now fully utilized. ADB will continue to assist in the implementation of the MCRP and provide livelihood support for vulnerable communities via technical assistance. The Japan International Cooperation Agency is cofinancing the project. It will deliver the rolling stock and railway systems such as track, electrical, and mechanical systems. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting sustainable, inclusive, and resilient 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/> 04/16/2025

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## **THAILAND: Central Bank Announces New Standards to Strengthen Financial Crime Prevention**

Thailand’s central bank outlined new regulatory standards on Monday, requiring financial institutions and e-money providers to strengthen security measures and share responsibility for damages arising from cybercrimes. According to the Bank of Thailand (BOT), these standards will be imposed in early May and will be in line with the amended Emergency Decree on Technology Crime Prevention and Suppression that went into effect earlier this month. Speaking at a media briefing, BOT Deputy Governor Roong Mallikamas said the new regulatory framework aims to better protect customers and requires coordinated actions across banks, telecom companies, social media platforms, e-money businesses, and digital asset operators. Roong said key measures include limiting mobile banking access for each customer through only one user account and on one device, requiring facial recognition for high-value transfers, banning SMS and email links that could be used in phishing scams, and ensuring apps run only on secure devices. Financial institutions must

issue free-of-charge notifications for outgoing transfers and provide 24/7 emergency contact channels, she added. She noted that banks and e-money operators are also mandated to freeze suspicious transactions and act swiftly against mule accounts linked to fraudulent activities. Entities that fail to comply will be held financially liable in proportion to their involvement. The central bank emphasized that public vigilance remains crucial, urging consumers to avoid suspicious links, stay alert for impersonation scams, and monitor financial activities closely.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/28/2025

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## **VIETNAM: ADB, Vietnam Sign 60-Mln-USD Financing Package to Boost Infrastructure for Ethnic Minorities**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Vietnam on Thursday signed a financing package of 60 million U.S. dollars to upgrade and construct transport and water supply infrastructure in five upland districts with the highest concentration of ethnic minority communities in the central coastal provinces of Phu Yen and Quang Tri, Viet Nam. The Climate Resilient Inclusive Infrastructure for Ethnic Minority Project II will upgrade about 133 kilometers of district and commune roads using climate-resilient standards, construct and upgrade rural water supply, and provide reliable weather and climate data for early warning and disaster response. The ADB said about 363,000 people, including 187,000 from ethnic minority groups, will directly benefit from the project. The financing package includes 59 million dollars in ADB loans and a 1 million dollar grant from the ADB's High-Level Technology Fund. The grant will fund the supply and installation of data systems for climate and disaster risk management. Additionally, the project will include financing from the Vietnamese government of 19.74 million dollars.

From <https://english.news.cn/> 04/17/2025

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## **South Asia**

### **INDIA: 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.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 04/28/2025

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## **SRI LANKA: Colombo Stock Exchange Introduces GSS+ Bonds to the Capital Market**

In line with a broader, more inclusive approach and in alignment with evolving global standards, the Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE) is pleased to announce the launch of the GSS+ Bonds Regulatory Framework, effective March 2025. This marks the first comprehensive regulatory framework in Sri Lanka dedicated to thematic bonds. Under this initiative, the term "Sustainability Bonds" in the CSE Listing Rules has been replaced with "GSS+ Bonds", which now encompasses Green, Blue, Social, Sustainability, and other related bond types, including Sustainability-Linked Bonds.

Social Bonds are fixed-income instruments where proceeds are exclusively allocated to finance or refinance projects aimed at addressing social challenges and generating positive social outcomes—such as improved access to essential services, affordable housing, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. The global Social Bond market has seen significant growth in recent years, driven by rising investor interest in fostering inclusive and sustainable development. In a significant development, the requirements for issuing GSS+ Bonds are now fully aligned with the guidelines of the International Capital Market Association (ICMA). This alignment ensures consistency with globally accepted practices and enhances the credibility and transparency of the sustainable finance instruments listed on the CSE.

The verification framework has also been enhanced. In addition to the previously accepted forms of assurance and impact reporting, issuers may now utilize enhanced methods such as Second Party Opinion and Certification, providing additional layers of investor confidence and credibility. These rule enhancements were made possible through the collaborative efforts of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) of Sri Lanka, underscoring the commitment of all stakeholders to elevate Sri Lanka's sustainable finance landscape to meet international best practices. The primary objective of this initiative is to enable capital raising for projects with measurable environmental and social impact, while also offering investors the opportunity to align their investment strategies with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles. The introduction of GSS+ offers wide-ranging benefits. For issuers, it opens access to a new pool of capital dedicated to funding projects with positive social outcomes. Investors gain an opportunity to diversify their portfolios with instruments that deliver both financial and social returns. At a broader level, the initiative supports responsible capital allocation and contributes to key national development priorities such as poverty alleviation, gender equality, access to healthcare, and inclusive education. Commenting on the launch, Mr. Rajeeva Bandaranaike, Chief Executive Officer of the Colombo Stock Exchange, stated, "The introduction of GSS+ to the Sri Lankan capital market represents a significant step in our journey towards promoting sustainable finance. This initiative not only expands the suite of sustainable investment products available in the market but also empowers issuers to raise funds for socially impactful projects that can make a lasting difference in our communities." "We are proud to support this important development, which reflects our ongoing commitment to align capital market infrastructure with global best practices and to play an active role in Sri Lanka's sustainable economic growth." The CSE remains committed to advancing ESG-aligned initiatives and providing market participants with robust frameworks for sustainability-oriented investments. The introduction of GSS+ Bonds reinforces the CSE's role in facilitating financial innovation that contributes meaningfully to national and global development goals.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 04/27/2025

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## Central-West Asia

### **AZERBAIJAN: EBRD Funds 1.2GW of Renewable Energy Projects**

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has funded renewable energy projects totaling 1.2 gigawatts in Azerbaijan, said Harry Boyd-Carpenter, the bank's Managing Director for Climate Strategy and Implementation, during the 3rd ministerial meeting of the Green Energy Advisory Council in Baku, Trend reports. "We're proud to have financed 1.2 gigawatts of renewable energy projects in Azerbaijan, partnering with three outstanding companies: SOCAR Green, ACWA Power, and Masdar," he said. It's important to note that today Baku is hosting both the 11th ministerial meeting of the Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council and the 3rd ministerial meeting of the Green Energy Advisory Council. The event brings together 24 countries, 7 international financial institutions, 42 energy companies, as well as ministers, deputy ministers, and other high-ranking officials.

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

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### **Azerbaijan's Banking System Appears Resilient to Severe Adverse Shocks, Says IMF**

Azerbaijan's banking system appears resilient to severe adverse shocks, Trend reports citing the International Monetary Fund (IMF). "Azerbaijan's economy has recovered from two downturns driven by a global oil price collapse in 2015 and COVID-19 in 2020. Over the last decade, foreign exchange reserves have doubled, and significant reforms have been carried out to reinvigorate the bank-dominated financial sector. Banks have incorporated lessons from the 2015-16 economic crisis, resulting in increased capital adequacy and a significant decline in net open position in foreign exchange. Azerbaijan's banking system appears resilient to severe adverse shocks, though there are some pockets of weaknesses. Bank solvency stress tests reveal that the banking system remains adequately capitalized under both the baseline and adverse scenarios, though some banks with thin capital buffers could face solvency pressures in the adverse scenario," reads the latest report released by the international financial institution. IMF analysts note that in a hypothetical, extreme yet plausible adverse scenario, the systemwide total regulatory capital ratio could decline by 4.5 percentage points, with credit risk being the main driver of losses.

"Eight banks out of 23, which collectively account for 35 percent of total banking sector assets, could breach the hurdle rates. However, their capital shortfalls are contained at 0.5 percent of GDP. Similarly, banking sector liquidity buffers appear to be sufficient to withstand a severe adverse shock, though some banks appear vulnerable. Bank liquidity stress tests indicate that while the overall banking sector

has sufficient capacity to withstand severe liquidity shocks, certain banks would need support,” reads the report. IMF notes that commendable progress has been achieved since the 2015 FSAP, especially on banking oversight, macroprudential policies, and financial safety net. “The CBA made important efforts to implement the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision’s (BCBS) international standards adjusted for domestic settings, and strengthened prudential requirements, corporate governance, and risk management standards. In accordance with the Financial Sector Development Strategy (FSDS) 2024- 26, the CBA is implementing the Basel III prudential standards, and has developed a new Risk-based Supervision (RBS) model based on international best practices with the first pilot starting in early 2025. The institutional framework and instruments for macroprudential policy have been considerably enhanced. The lender of last resort (LoLR) function was strengthened. Moreover, the legal, policy, and procedural framework for bank resolution were overhauled,” the report says.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/29/2025

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## **KAZAKHSTAN: Cracks Down on State Budget Financing for Foreign Legionnaires**

President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has signed a law establishing a ban on the financing of foreign legionnaires using state budget funds and funds from quasi-governmental entities, Trend reports. President Tokayev signed the law “On Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan Regarding Physical Culture and Sports, and the Elimination of Excessive Legislative Regulation.” “The law is aimed at improving state policy in the field of physical culture and sports. The authorized body will develop national and regional lists of priority sports, determine the list of elite sports, as well as the procedures for their funding from the state budget,” the press service of the President of Kazakhstan stated. According to information, priority sports will be determined based on performance in international competitions. These include sports included in the Olympic, Paralympic, Deaflympic, Asian, and Para-Asian Games programs, as well as national sports. “The law also improves the accreditation process for sports federations, which will be categorized into national and local federations. A ban has been introduced on the financing of foreign legionnaires from both the state budget and funds of quasi-state sector entities,” the press release noted. The information also added that from now on, state budget funding in Kazakhstan will be directed toward four main areas: elite sports, including priority sports; the operation of state physical culture and sports organizations; mass sports; and the development of sports infrastructure. “Unified standards for athlete training have been developed, which include measures to strengthen traditional values and patriotic education. The concept of ‘national standards for sports training’ has been introduced,” the information adds. The authorized body will also be granted powers to take action in cases of anti-doping rule violations.

## Oceania

### **AUSTRALIA: NSW Government's Rental Taskforce Intervention Results In almost \$50,000 in Refunds for Renters**

The Minns Labor Government's Rental Taskforce has hit the ground running, with a recent investigation into incorrect charges for rental background checks resulting in almost \$50,000 being returned to renters. The Taskforce is also coming down hard on real estate agents who were found to have misappropriated trust funds and rental bonds. Following a \$8.4 million investment by the Minns Labor Government, the Rental Taskforce has been analysing activities and trends within the rental market and conducting education and compliance activities such as inspections, audits, and blitzes to prevent and act on breaches of the law. This work has recently resulted in refunds totalling \$47,321 for renters, after a company was found to be selling background checks to renters. Led by the Minns Labor Government, the NSW Parliament passed changes to rental laws in October 2024, banning landlords from making rental applicants pay for background checks before or when entering into a tenancy.

The NSW Fair Trading investigation revealed an online rental application platform had charged more than 2300 rental applicants for background checks allegedly due to a system error. Rental applicants were charged \$19.95 for a search of public databases and the National Tenancy Database, but following engagement from the Rental Taskforce, the platform has since voluntarily refunded affected consumers, disabled the background check feature on its website in NSW, and committed to periodic reviews to ensure compliance. NSW Fair Trading is asking for any rental applicants who have been charged for a background check to lodge a complaint with NSW Fair Trading by visiting: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/fair-trading/complaints-and-enquiries/housing-and-property>.

NSW Fair Trading has also been working with NSW Police on several cases in recent months where trust funds or rental bonds have been misappropriated. On 7 March 2025, Parramatta Local Court sentenced real estate agent Vanessa Nguyen to a 15-month Intensive Correction Order (ICO), with a condition to complete 180 hours of community service and to pay \$80,866.20 in compensation, after a NSW Fair Trading investigation revealed she had taken more than \$100,000 dishonestly from NSW Rental Bonds and a trust account managed at Ray White Canley Heights. Nguyen made 25 rental bond claims totalling more than \$50,000, and on 14 separate occasions transferred a total sum of \$50,505 from the agency's trust account into her personal account. Nguyen pleaded guilty and was convicted of two offences of

dishonestly obtaining financial advantage by deception.

By law, real estate agents are obligated to place client funds in trust accounts which cannot be used for any purpose other than for that client. In late 2024, NSW Fair Trading completed two prosecutions where a property manager and an administration assistant at real estate agency First National Parramatta, plead guilty to charges relating to the misappropriation of funds from Rental Bonds. Rachel Fares was sentenced to a 12-month Community Corrections Order in December 2024 after pleading guilty to one charge of fraud under the NSW Crimes Act for misappropriating \$1,801.34 of Rental Bonds, and one charge for money laundering after she received approximately \$7,400 in circumstances where there were reasonable grounds to suspect it was the proceeds of crime.

In a related matter, property manager Matthew Rizk was sentenced to an 18-month Community Corrections Order with 40 hours of community service in October 2024 for one count of fraud under the NSW Crimes Act for misappropriating the sum of approximately \$15,436 related to rental bonds. In January 2025, an investigation into property agent Bree Patricia Callaghan revealed she had diverted trust account funds, including rental payments, into her personal bank account and cancelled property management fees. NSW Fair Trading cancelled Callaghan's property licence and disqualified her from holding a property licence for 10 years. Quotes attributable to Minister for Better Regulation and Fair Trading Anouack Chanthivong: "The return of almost \$50,000 in incorrect charges back to renters demonstrates that the Minns Labor Government's Rental Taskforce has hit the ground running and is doing the job it was set up to do.

"The significant prosecutions and punishments we are seeing for real estate agents also shows that the message is clear – if you are doing the wrong thing, the Rental Taskforce will catch you and serious legal consequences will follow. "The new Rental Taskforce is a multi-disciplinary team bringing together new and existing resources drawn from across NSW Fair Trading, focused on preventing and responding to breaches of rental laws to create a more equitable market for the 2.3 million renters in this state."

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

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## **Coalition to Reveal Election Costings, Pledging \$40 Billion Less Debt over Four Years**

The Coalition will release its much-anticipated policy costings on Thursday, pledging to lower national debt by \$40 billion over the forward estimates, and axe more than \$60 billion dollars of government spending. The savings include ditching Labor's pledge to wipe \$16 billion off student debt, axing the Housing Australia Future Fund, the Rewiring the Nation program, production tax credits for critical minerals, electric

vehicle subsidies, and Commonwealth funding for Melbourne's controversial Suburban Rail Loop. Ahead of the release, the Coalition also stated that savings would come from slashing "unsustainable public servant increases". The election costings, to be released just days before the federal election, leave voters little time to digest the numbers.

In 2022, when Labor was in opposition, it also waited until the Thursday before the election to release its costings. Despite global inflation surging after the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Shadow Treasurer Angus Taylor said Australia's cost of living crisis was "not bad luck" but "bad management". "Labor has delivered the longest per-capita recession on record and the biggest collapse in living standards in the developed world," he said. "After raking in almost \$400 billion in extra revenue, Labor chose to splurge instead of save, leaving Australians more exposed to the next economic shock." Shadow Finance Minister Jane Hume referred to "Labor's decade of deficits" as "a warning sign." "They've ignored the IMF and credit agencies and are gambling with Australia's AAA credit rating," she said. "This won't just affect business but would impact all Australians." Before the Coalition lost power in 2022, the federal budget was also projecting a decade of deficits, but Labor delivered two near-record surpluses thanks to windfalls from high commodity prices and strong employment. Economists have broadly criticised both major parties' election spending commitments, which have competing tax cut pledges but no plans for structural budget reform.

From <https://www.sbs.com.au> 04/30/2025

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## **NEW ZEALAND: Freeing Up Access to Finance for Kiwi Households**

The Government is delivering on its commitment to make it easier for Kiwis to access the finance they need, when they need it, says Commerce and Consumer Affairs Minister Scott Simpson. "Access to finance is a critical part of life. Kiwis need finance to buy a house or a car, or to start and grow a business," says Mr Simpson. "Our Government campaigned on slashing red tape to make it easier and safer for Kiwis to access finance when they need. I am delighted that we are delivering on this promise by progressing three pieces of legislation which will simplify access to financial services. "Successive reforms heaped compliance requirements on banks, insurers, and lenders. The sector found itself in a bureaucratic straitjacket, regulated by multiple authorities and subjected to duplicative licence requirements.

"This illogical and overly cautious approach led to perverse outcomes for Kiwis who found it more difficult and costly to access basic financial services. "Many people will remember with frustration banks asking invasive questions about minor expenses like food delivery and subscriptions when they applied for a home loan during the peak of madness a few years ago. "The Government addressed this by removing

overly prescriptive requirements from regulations. These reforms, along with those being progressed, are all about bringing back common sense. “One of the key changes will mean lenders aren’t unfairly penalised for small, harmless mistakes. Lenders will still be required to identify and correct any mistakes. “Another change, which will apply retrospectively for the period between 2015 and 2019, will enable the courts to apply greater discretion when a lender has failed to disclose certain information to consumers.

This fixes a really bad law that meant if a lender forgot to include their address on a loan document – even if everything else was correct and the borrower wasn’t affected – they could be forced to cancel all interest and fees until the mistake is fixed. That’s like being fined for forgetting to write your return address on an envelope, even though the letter still gets delivered. “This punitive approach had a potentially chilling effect on competition, as small lenders are not able to absorb the risk and could face closure if faced with significant compensation imposed by the court. Meanwhile big lenders price in the risk and pass the cost on to consumers.” Other reforms include improvements to dispute resolution services so people can get help when something goes wrong and changes which mean that financial providers will only need to have one conduct licence instead of several. Directors and senior managers will also no longer be held personally liable for mistakes. Instead, the liability will fall on the businesses, which is fairer and more appropriate.” These reforms deliver on a National-ACT coalition agreement to rewrite the Credit Contracts and Consumer Finance Act 2003 to protect vulnerable consumers without unnecessarily limiting access to credit. “These reforms will simplify the financial services sector so Kiwis can get on with their lives, get ahead, and grow the economy.”

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 04/08/2025

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## **Government to Wind Down Green Investment Finance**

The Government has announced the New Zealand Green Investment Finance (NZGIF) will stop making new investments and will wind down its existing portfolio, Climate Change Minister Simon Watts says. “Almost \$400 million has been invested with very limited results and there are more than 20 other government funds operating with similar objectives to the NZGIF,” Mr Watts says. “Alongside this, the market for low emission investments has grown, there are more funding and financing products, and we have a more robust Emissions Trading Scheme, reducing the need for government involvement. “This Government is serious about climate change, that’s why we have committed to doubling renewable energy, investing in technology to lower emissions while boosting productivity, and cutting barriers to green investment. “We will prioritise actions that have the greatest impact on emissions and growth and will provide real value for money. In the current economic environment New Zealanders want assurance that taxpayer money is being well

spent and delivering results. We believe NZGIF is no longer aligned to that vision.” The transition will be carried out in a structured and responsible manner, ensuring that all stakeholders are kept informed. Within 90 days NZGIF will develop a plan for Ministers outlining how changes at the company will be implemented.

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 04/08/2025

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## **Latest Figures Confirm Inflation Back Under Control**

The latest inflation figures confirm inflation is back under control, Finance Minister Nicola Willis says. Stats NZ reported today that inflation increased slightly to 2.5 per cent in the year to March but remained within the Reserve Bank’s target range of 1 to 3 per cent. “This is the third consecutive quarter that inflation has remained within the bank’s target range and confirms the era of high inflation is over,” Nicola Willis says. “The steps the Government has taken to stop wasteful public expenditure have taken the heat out of inflation and given the Reserve Bank room to reduce interest rates. “Decisions about the Official Cash Rate are a matter for the Reserve Bank which is operationally independent, but the stabilisation of inflation is good news for people with mortgages. “It means people should be able to look forward to more rate reductions in the coming months. “Encouragingly, banks are continuing to drop their mortgage rates with some now offering fixed rates of less than 5 per cent. “Also encouraging is that non-tradeable inflation – which paints a picture of domestic demand and supply conditions – is continuing to fall, down from 4.5 per cent in the year to December to 4 per cent in the year to March. “The impact of lower rates on individual households depends on the terms of people’s mortgages but the Official Cash Rate has already fallen two percentage points since August. “For someone with a \$500,000 mortgage over 25 years, a two percentage point drop in their interest rate reduces their repayments by about \$300 a fortnight. “Further falls will mean more money in people’s pockets and more money flowing through business tills.”

From <https://www.beehive.govt.nz> 04/17/2025

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## **Financial Support on the Way for Drought-Hit Farmers**

The Government is making more financial support available for eligible farmers in many parts of the North Island and upper South Island to help with essential living costs, Social Development and Employment Minister Louise Upston and Rural Communities Minister Mark Patterson say. “Rural Assistance Payments are being made available from Monday 28 April 2025 in 27 districts affected by dry conditions. We want to help eligible farmers whose income has been severely affected by drought-stricken conditions,” Louise Upston says. “We know farmers in these regions have been significantly impacted by low rainfall over recent months, and we want people to be able to access support when they need it “These Rural Assistance Payments are being made available until 28 October 2025, when farmer incomes are

expected to lift.” Mark Patterson is encouraging farmers doing it tough to get in touch with their local Rural Support Trust to find out what help is available and to apply for a Rural Assistance Payment if they need it. “Droughts often have a sting in the tail with the cold tough winter months still to come. We know how hard it can be to recover from a drought, and we are here to support farmers through it,” Mark Patterson says. Farmers in the Northland, Waikato, Taranaki, Horizons (Manawatū-Whanganui, including Tararua), and the Top of the South Island (Marlborough, Tasman, and Nelson City) regional council areas can apply for Rural Assistance Payments.

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## 6、 Private Sector

### Asia-Pacific

#### **World Bank Group Launches Next Phase of Private Sector Investment Lab with Expanded Membership and Focus on Job Creation**

The World Bank Group today announced the launch of the next phase of its Private Sector Investment Lab, focused on implementing proven solutions at scale. This new chapter also expands the Lab’s membership to include industry leaders with experience generating jobs in developing economies, aligning directly with the Bank’s sharpened focus on job creation as a core driver of development. *“With the expanded membership, we are mainstreaming this work across our operations and tying it directly to the jobs agenda that is driving our strategy,”* said **World Bank Group President Ajay Banga**. *“This isn’t about altruism—it’s about helping the private sector see a path to investments that will deliver returns, and lift people and economies alike. It’s central to our mandate.”*

Over the last 18 months, the Lab brought together leaders from global financial institutions to identify the most pressing barriers to private sector investment in developing countries—and to test actionable solutions. That work has now been consolidated into five priority focus areas that are being integrated across Bank Group operations:

- **Regulatory and Policy Certainty:** Supporting governments in creating stable regulatory frameworks. For instance, the effort to connect 300 million people in Africa to electricity relies on upfront policy clarity to attract long-term capital.
- **Political Risk Insurance:** Streamlined guarantee instruments has led to a 30% increase in issuance compared to last year—enhancing investor confidence and helping the Bank meet its goal of tripling the use of guarantees by 2030.

- Foreign Exchange Risk: Scaling local currency financing to deepen domestic capital markets. Last year, IFC committed one-third of its long-term financing in local currency—with a goal of reaching 40% by 2030.
- Junior Equity Capital: Launched the Frontier Opportunities Fund to absorb early-stage risk. Initially capitalized with IFC income, the fund will grow with donor and philanthropic contributions.
- Securitization: Collaborating with institutions such as S&P and BlackRock to standardize and securitize portfolios, unlocking capital from pension funds, insurers, and sovereign wealth funds.

As the Lab enters its implementation phase, it is also expanding its membership to include private sector leaders in sectors critical to job creation—such as infrastructure and energy, agribusiness, healthcare, tourism, and manufacturing. These industries have a proven ability to translate investment into broad-based employment and economic opportunity.

New members of the Lab include:

- Bill Anderson, CEO, Bayer AG
- Sunil Bharti Mittal, Chair, Bharti Enterprises
- Aliko Dangote, President & CEO, Dangote Group
- Mark Hoplamazian, President & CEO, Hyatt Hotels Corporation

*“We are grateful to the original Lab leaders who helped us deliver strong results in the initial work period,” **Banga** said. “Now we’re building on that foundation—bringing in additional leaders from sectors that are central to job creation and moving from ideas to implementation.”*

The Lab’s founding members included senior executives from AXA, BlackRock, HSBC, Macquarie, Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group, Ninety One, Ping An Group, Royal Philips, Standard Bank, Standard Chartered, Sustainable Energy for All, Tata Sons, Temasek, and Three Cairns Group. The Lab is chaired by Shriti Vadera, Chair of Prudential plc. *“We are grateful to the Lab leaders who helped deliver such important results in the first phase. We welcome our new members’ support in continuing our focus on five key areas: regulatory and policy certainty; guarantees, as the most widely used and understood instrument to address political and credit risks; foreign exchange risk; scaling different forms of equity; and creating an asset class and liquid market to attract institutional funds.” **Shriti Vadera, Chair, Prudential plc. and Chair, Private Sector Investment Lab***

*“The World Bank Group is leading the way with initiatives to grow economies and create opportunities in emerging markets around the globe. As President Banga has said, the private sector will play a pivotal role in this transformation, and I am delighted to join the PSIL alongside other distinguished business leaders. I have seen firsthand the power of connectivity to transform lives by creating opportunities for businesses to grow and communities to thrive. I hope that the successes of the telecommunications sector will be valuable as PSIL embarks on the next stage of its*

*important work.” Sunil Bharti Mittal, Chair, Bharti Enterprises “I am honored to join the Private Sector Investment Lab during its next phase focused on implementation. Together, businesses and the WBG can unleash job creation in emerging markets by managing the risks and realizing the opportunities for the next generation growing up in low and middle income countries.” Bill Anderson, CEO, Bayer AG*

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/23/2025

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## East Asia

### **CHINA: Vice Premier Stresses Boosting Employment, Entrepreneurship for College Graduates**

Chinese Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang on Wednesday called for efforts to increase employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for college graduates and young people in a bid to keep the country's youth employment at a stable level. Ding, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks at a teleconference on the matter. Ding urged authorities to treat youth employment as a top priority, calling it a crucial matter that affects millions of households. All-out efforts should be made to increase high-quality job opportunities by tapping into key fields and industries, while fostering new employment growth points through industrial upgrades, Ding said. The vice premier called for outlining more favorable policies to support graduates who are willing to start up businesses. Ding also called for improved career services for graduates, and greater support for struggling jobseekers to ease their transition from campus to workplace.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/02/2025

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### **Chinese Premier Chairs Meeting with Economic Experts, Entrepreneurs**

Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Wednesday presided over a symposium with economic experts and entrepreneurs to listen to opinions and suggestions on the current economic situation and upcoming economic work. Although changes in the external environment have brought difficulties, the Chinese economy still retains multiple strengths, strong resilience, and immense potential, according to attendees of the meeting. They also put forward suggestions on coping with external challenges and promoting sustained economic growth during the meeting. Li noted that under this year's relatively special situation, the country calmly and steadfastly responded to various risks and challenges, and maintained sustained economic recovery and growth in the first quarter. At the same time, external shocks exerted pressure on the smooth operation of the economy, he said, adding that China is well prepared to

address all uncertainties. It is particularly crucial to ensure effective economic work in the second quarter and beyond, with sustained and intensified efforts across all tasks, Li stressed. It is necessary to implement more proactive macro policies and introduce new incremental policies in a timely manner in light of the needs of the situation, he said, noting responding to uncertainties in the external environment with strong and effective policies. China will make expanding domestic demand a long-term strategy and fully stimulate the vitality of all business entities, Li said. Li hoped that entrepreneurs will proactively adapt to evolving circumstances to drive growth, strengthen and elevate their enterprises.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/09/2025

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## **China Strengthens IP Protection Efforts for Private Enterprises**

China has implemented a series of measures to enhance intellectual property (IP) protection for private enterprises, ensuring a supportive environment that nurtures their growth, said the country's top IP regulator on Thursday. According to the China National Intellectual Property Administration (CNIPA), national IP protection centers in 2024 received over 240,000 patent pre-examination requests from private enterprises, providing them fast, timely protection. Nationwide IP departments also handled 37,000 patent infringement cases involving private firms last year, offering multiple dispute resolution channels. The CNIPA has launched a patent industrialization program to support the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises, with nearly 17,000 private enterprises participating in it. In addition, IP-backed financing has been extended to over 40,000 private enterprises. Furthermore, the country's top IP regulator has strengthened early warning mechanisms for overseas IP risks in recent years, helping private enterprises save over 400 million yuan (about 55 million U.S. dollars) in dispute resolution costs. It has also provided training on international IP applications to better equip private enterprises for global competition. Noting that the private economy serves as a crucial driving force in advancing China's modernization, Shen Changyu, head of the CNIPA, said that greater IP protection efforts will be devoted to private enterprises.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/24/2025

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## **China's Top Legislature to Further Advance Legislation to Support Private Economy**

China aims to better promote private economic development by introducing stronger support measures and ensuring fair law enforcement, a spokesperson said Friday. The draft private sector promotion law will be submitted for its third review at a session of the country's top legislature next week, Huang Haihua, spokesperson for the Legislative Affairs Commission of the National People's Congress (NPC)

Standing Committee, told a press conference. Huang said that multiple rounds of revisions had improved the draft, meaning it was at a good stage to be recommended for further refinement before deliberation and enactment. According to Huang, China's draft private sector promotion law has been revised to create a more favorable legal environment for the sector's high-quality development, based on feedback from legislative reviews and public consultations. The draft was released for public input in October last year, before being deliberated at top legislature sessions last December and in February this year, respectively. The Standing Committee of the 14th NPC will hold its 15th session in Beijing from April 27 to 30.

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## **Auto Shanghai Unveils Automakers' Strategic Focus on Intelligence, Global Vision**

The 21st Shanghai International Automobile Industry Exhibition (Auto Shanghai 2025) has drawn nearly 1,000 companies from 26 countries and regions and quickly become the focal point of the global auto market. Automakers seized the stage with their latest innovations, underscoring a clear trend: the rise of smarter and more globally oriented vehicles. With 97 new models debuting, Chinese brands led the charge in vehicle intelligence, according to a report by Kaiyuan Securities. Notably, advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) have become a key differentiator, and tech giant Huawei is among the standout players. Models from Huawei's Harmony Intelligent Mobility Alliance (HIMA), such as AITO M8, Stelato S9 and Maextro S800, drew big crowds at this year's event, showcasing a suite of smart features that turn cars into fully featured terminals.

From adaptive driver assistance and intelligent cockpits to smart keys and customizable welcome-light displays, these models reflect the latest evolution of the car into a connected tech hub on wheels. Huawei's tech support has injected new momentum into traditional original equipment manufacturers, such as Seres behind AITO and BAIC behind Stelato. At this year's Auto Shanghai, running from April 23 to May 2, Huawei's executive director Yu Chengdong and SAIC Motor president Jia Jianxu unveiled a new HIMA brand, pledging deeper collaboration in connected vehicles, electric drivetrains, smart vehicle controls and full-scenario mobility solutions. Established in 2023, HIMA is a dynamic ecosystem alliance focusing on intelligent vehicle technologies. Rather than building cars itself, Huawei plays a pivotal role within the alliance by shaping product planning, design and marketing, enhancing user experience and quality control, and supplying cutting-edge software and hardware solutions to traditional automakers.

The alliance's momentum is already considerable. As of mid-April, more than 700,000 vehicles had been delivered under HIMA. Huawei's smart automotive solutions business raked in 26.35 billion yuan (approximately 3.66 billion U.S. dollars)

in revenue in 2024, a stunning 474.4 percent leap from 4.58 billion yuan in 2023. Riding the wave of China's tech momentum, many global automakers are deepening local partnerships to supercharge their smart technology and electrification efforts. Speaking to Xinhua on the sidelines of the event, Oliver Zipse, chairman of the Board of Management of BMW AG, said that China is pivotal in driving technological innovation for BMW's next-generation intelligent vehicles, and BMW will begin integrating AI technology from Chinese tech startup DeepSeek into its latest models in China later this year.

Earlier this month, BMW announced plans to deepen its collaboration with ByteDance, owner of Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, to enhance AI applications in marketing and customer service. In March, the automaker teamed up with e-commerce giant Alibaba to integrate a large language model AI into its next-generation vehicles. It partnered with Huawei to develop a smart in-car digital ecosystem tailored to the Chinese market further. "This country is so innovative that we really enjoy putting all the technology into the cars for China," the senior executive said, adding that the first Neue Klasse models, its next-generation vehicles, will roll off the line at the company's Shenyang plant in 2026. Volkswagen Group, another German automotive powerhouse, is also sharpening its focus on what it calls "the world's most innovative automotive market."

Just ahead of the Shanghai auto show, the company unveiled a highly automated, AI-powered driver-assistance system developed by CARIZON, its joint R&D venture in China. This year, the automaker will roll out the first model featuring the new technology, and from 2026, the system will be standard on its next-generation, fully connected compact-class vehicles. "China is the technological pacemaker of global transformation," said Oliver Blume, CEO of Volkswagen Group. "At Auto Shanghai, we are now shifting into 'delivery mode.' With a new generation of intelligent, fully connected vehicles, we are focusing entirely on the digital, smart world in which our Chinese customers live." While global players double down on China, Chinese automakers are setting their sights abroad with a renewed sense of confidence. XPeng Motors announced plans to enter 60 international markets by 2025. The company reported stronger-than-expected overseas pre-orders for its newly launched X9 model, boosting its global ambitions.

"We're not just bringing the X9 to Europe," said an XPeng representative. "We're also planning to revamp our entire product lineup around a global vehicle concept tailored to international market needs." NIO founder William Li announced that the company's Firefly brand, focusing on compact smart EVs for urban mobility, will enter 16 international markets this year, including the Netherlands, Norway and Costa Rica, using a hybrid sales model combining local dealership networks with NIO's service standards. The Firefly brand will adopt tailored pricing and sales strategies across European markets. NIO remains optimistic about Firefly's growth potential, projecting that the brand will quickly become a major driver of the company's international

expansion. NIO anticipates that Firefly's success may eventually boost sales of its other product lines.

China FAW Group Co., Ltd. announced an ambitious development plan for its car brand Hongqi on Wednesday, targeting operations in over 100 countries and regions with 1,000 sales and service outlets in five years. The automaker said it will establish five overseas hub clusters in markets including Southeast Asia, Europe and Latin America. The company will also establish more localized low-carbon R&D centers, supply chain and operation centers, achieving an annual overseas production capacity exceeding 200,000 vehicles and creating over 20,000 new jobs across upstream and downstream sectors. "Our layout will truly make the Hongqi brand a globally recognized Eastern cultural icon," said Liu Changqing, vice president of the Hongqi Brand Operations Committee.

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## **Chinese Automakers Accelerate Global Expansion with Smarter, Consumer-centric Strategies**

The accelerating global ambitions of Chinese automotive brands have taken center stage at the ongoing 21st Shanghai International Automobile Industry Exhibition in east China's Shanghai Municipality, as leading manufacturers unveiled targeted strategies to drive overseas growth. The exhibition, also known as Auto Shanghai 2025, attracted nearly 10,000 international visitors in its first two days alone, with Chinese cars featuring innovation, adaptability and consumer-centric designs drawing much attention. Hisham Elsahn, general manager of Inter Emirates Motors and SAIC MG's UAE distributor, recalled his nearly decade-long participation in the event. "In the early days, Chinese cars were unknown here, but now customers actively seek them out. My dealerships alone sell over 1,200 MG vehicles monthly," he said while showcasing the MG Cyberster sports car, which saw strong pre-orders in the Middle East. His enthusiasm mirrored the broader momentum, with Chinese automakers increasingly tailoring vehicles for diverse markets.

Dai Lihong, Chery Auto vice president and general manager of the Jetour brand, outlined the roadmap for the "SOUEAST" brand, which includes prioritizing left-hand-drive markets with fuel and plug-in hybrid models through 2025, balanced offerings of right-hand-drive by 2027, and promoting electrified vehicles in the EU after 2028. Nio founder William Li revealed plans to enter 25 countries and regions this year, including 16 markets for its Firefly sub-brand, shifting from direct sales to local partnerships for infrastructure. "This year marks our global debut," said Liu Tao, co-CEO of IM Motors (Zhiji Auto), noting unexpected demand following the brand's launch in Thailand. He added that the company now has its sights set on Australia, the Middle East, and, eventually, Europe's premium EV market. SAIC Maxus, which

aims to expand into 100 countries by the end of 2024, reported a 9 percent growth in exports in the first quarter, reaching 25,000 units.

"Our custom-built pickups adapt to regional needs...enhanced suspension for Latin America's terrain, upgraded cooling for the Middle East," explained Zhao Aimin, CEO of SAIC commercial vehicle international and vice president of SAIC Maxus. He projected that annual overseas sales would exceed 100,000 units, with light commercial vehicle exports expected to double to 200,000 units by 2027. SAIC Group president Jia Jianxu emphasized the importance of "glocalization," announcing plans to launch 17 new global models and pursue localized production plans, including partnerships in ASEAN countries and the development of an African hub. This strategic agility aligns with Bosch's commitment to support Chinese brands abroad. "We've aided European automakers in China; now we'll enable Chinese automakers globally," said Stefan Hartung, chairman of the board of management of Robert Bosch GmbH. Backed by surging EV exports -- up 43.9 percent year on year to 441,000 units in Q1 -- China's automotive sector is shifting gears from domestic dominance to global resonance. With tailored designs and cross-border alliances, "Made in China" cars are accelerating beyond borders.

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## **China Promotes Development of Private Economy in Energy Sector**

China has introduced new measures to accelerate the development of the private economy in the energy sector and guide private enterprises to play a greater role in advancing the green, low-carbon transition of the industry, according to the National Energy Administration on Monday. Measures include those that support private enterprises in investing in and building energy infrastructure projects such as hydropower facilities, oil and gas storage facilities, and liquefied natural gas terminals, as well as those that encourage private investment in emerging areas like new energy storage, virtual power plants, charging infrastructure and smart microgrids, according to a circular released by the administration. Private enterprises will be encouraged to participate actively in the energy sector's major technological innovation, and to accelerate their transformation and upgrading, per the circular.

They will also be encouraged to accelerate digitalization and smart upgrades, promote technological innovation in renewable energy facilities, and develop advanced recycling technologies and business models to improve resource efficiency. Efforts will be made to ensure a level playing field for private enterprises by improving market access and enhancing mechanisms for the allocation of production factors, and through the further regulation of the energy market order. Efforts will also be made to streamline approval procedures for energy investment, effectively protect the legitimate rights and interests of private enterprises, and

support and guide them in expanding into overseas markets and enhancing their international competitiveness, according to the circular.

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## **Chinese Lawmakers Deliberate Draft Private Sector Promotion Law**

China's top legislature started deliberating the draft private sector promotion law on Sunday, with an aim to promote the sustainable and sound development of the private economy. The draft law was submitted to the ongoing session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) following the initial and second readings in December 2024 and February 2025, respectively. The formulation of the law is both very necessary and significant as it will elevate the major policies and measures adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China regarding the development of the private economy into legal norms, thereby consolidating the country's achievements on the development of private economy over the last more than 40 years since the reform and opening up.

This legislation will explicitly define the legal status of the private economy for the first time, with a clear stipulation that it will be a significant and long-term policy for China to promote the sustainable, healthy, and high-quality development of the private economy. During the drafting and deliberation process of the draft, lawmakers solicited public opinions through 54 legislative outreach offices and gathered wide feedback from private enterprises in various sectors, representing a vivid practice of implementing whole-process people's democracy in legislative work, according to the members of the NPC Standing Committee. Noting that the draft has fully incorporated suggestions and opinions from various sectors, they recommended that it be passed during this session of the NPC Standing Committee and called for related authorities to unveil concrete measures to ensure its adoption. The Standing Committee of the 14th NPC started its four-day 15th session on Sunday in Beijing.

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## **Wheels to Wings: Chinese Automakers Challenge Frontiers of Mobility**

At the ongoing 21st Shanghai International Automobile Industry Exhibition (Auto Shanghai 2025), Chinese new energy vehicle (NEV) maker XPENG's humanoid robot, IRON, stole the spotlight by debating the merits of the company's self-developed flying car with its creator, CEO He Xiaopeng. Combining an electric road vehicle with an electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) air module, the model has already garnered nearly 5,000 pre-orders since its debut at Airshow China

last year. Deliveries are scheduled to commence in 2026. "This is the Land Aircraft Carrier, the first-ever mass-produced flying car. The tech is absolutely next-level!" IRON said, raising its left hand and giving a thumbs-up to its audience. This fusion of robotics and aerial mobility signals a tectonic shift: China's auto industry is no longer confined to four wheels, with automakers breaking the mold and re-imagining mobility. And with embodied AI, cars aren't just evolving -- they're branching out into the areas of flying vehicles and humanoid robotics, forging a futuristic trio for the AI era.

### **BEYOND WHEELS**

Behind this technological spectacle is an impressive industry performance. Official data showed that China's auto production and sales both saw year-on-year growth exceeding 10 percent in the first quarter, and its low-altitude economy, according to industry analysts, is rapidly approaching the 1-trillion-yuan (about 138.8 billion U.S. dollars) milestone, growing at a compound annual rate of nearly 30 percent. "The intelligent automotive sector is evolving into an aggregated intelligent industry," said Zhang Yongwei, vice chairman and secretary-general of NEV industry think tank China EV 100. "Smart vehicles stay on roads, flying cars ascend to low-altitude skies, and humanoid robots embody AI-driven mobility." This three-pronged vision materialized at the show: Chery's "three-body" composite-wing flying car attracted Southeast Asian buyers seeking island-hopping solutions, while GAC Group showcased its third-generation GoMate robot capable of navigating factory floors, with its six-hour battery life powered by auto-grade energy systems.

"Our humanoid robot, Mornine, is now serving as a digital shopping assistant at Chery's dealerships in Malaysia," a company representative said, adding that following its rollout in Malaysia and Russia, Chery aims to have Mornine present in all of its dealerships worldwide. FAW Group unveiled its Hongqi-branded flying car at the show, featuring a flight range of over 200 kilometers and an intelligent cockpit system that delivers real-time voice and visual data to reduce operational complexity. The Changchun-based automaker confirmed that the vehicle will make its maiden flight this year, with development adhering to strict aviation safety standards. "Future auto shows won't just feature cars, they'll showcase more cutting-edge tech and embodied AI," He Xiaopeng said, drawing parallels to the early days of NEVs a decade ago. While flying cars and humanoid robots are still in their nascent stages, the tech entrepreneur feels confident in their rapid growth within the coming decade.

### **SYNERGY UNLEASHED**

Smart cars, flying vehicles and humanoid robots share common technical foundation and supply chains. Analysts say that eVTOLs can share up to 80 percent of their supply chain with electric vehicles, leveraging China's mature EV supply chain for cost efficiency. "Smart vehicles, eVTOLs and robots share the same fundamental roots," Zhang said, adding that the control architectures, key hardware chips and software platforms developed for intelligent vehicles can be adapted for eVTOLs

directly, with many components also transferable to humanoid robots. This technological synergy has been affirmed by many industry insiders. Aptiv China and Asia Pacific President Yang Xiaoming described flying cars as "electric vehicles that fly," saying that they bridge automotive electrification and aviation compliance.

And startups like Digua Robotics see cars as "four-wheeled robots." "Autonomous driving systems -- cameras, radar and AI chips -- are identical to robotics," Digua CEO Wang Cong said. Bolstered by thriving aviation, NEV, 5G and AI industries, China's flying car sector has built a solid industrial foundation, achieving technological parity with global competitors and even leading in certain areas. The inexorable logic of scale also persists. With 30 million vehicles produced annually, Chinese automakers can slash costs for niche products like flying cars and robots. For example, GAC's GoMate robots are now capable of handling full vehicle production tasks in its auto plants, creating a self-contained business ecosystem within the automaker.

### **BRIGHT HORIZON**

After 40 years of evolution, the Shanghai auto show has cemented its position as the world's premier automotive exhibition in both scale and prestige. "The exceptional visitor enthusiasm at this year's event speaks volumes about the robustness of China's industrial ecosystem and the magnetic pull of its economy," said Gu Chunting, vice chairman of the Council for the Promotion of International Trade Shanghai, which organized the event alongside the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers. From Toyota's 2-billion-dollar Shanghai EV hub to BMW's deepened partnerships with Chinese tech companies like Huawei and DeepSeek, global players are anchoring themselves in China's mobility metamorphosis. "China has emerged as the world's foremost proving ground for electric and intelligent vehicle transformation over the past 10 years," said Guan Mingyu, a senior partner at McKinsey & Company Greater China, noting that the Chinese market's evolution in these sectors will reshape global automotive technology roadmaps, business architectures and competitive dynamics through the next decade.

From wheels to wings and robots, China's auto industry is pioneering a smart ecosystem powered by cross-sector synergy and industrial scale. The country's eVTOL industry is approaching the threshold of mass production and scaled deployment, and its humanoid robotics are just beginning to show growth potential. "China's low-altitude economy hit its stride since last year," said Zhao Deli, founder of XPENG's flying car affiliate, Huitian. "Policy tailwinds, infrastructure rollouts and maturing supply chains are fueling growth, especially in drone logistics, air taxis and emergency services." Zhao noted that China's low-altitude tourism sector, though still small-scale due to infrastructure gaps and high costs, holds strong growth potential. Fueled by rising demand, it could become both a tourism highlight and a driver of regional economic development. "More supportive policies will energize the

market, channeling greater resources into infrastructure development, investment and consumer engagement," he added.

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## **How Rule of Law Is Further Empowering China's Private Economy**

The passage of China's first national law focused on the private sector reflects the country's concrete actions to provide legal guarantees of fair competition and equal treatment for the private economy, while also bolstering high-quality development within this economically crucial sector. The socialist market economy is essentially a law-based economy. The private sector promotion law, passed Wednesday by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, marks a crucial step in the promotion of a sound legal environment for the Chinese socialist market economy. The message is clear: the private sector is an important part of China's socialist market economy. The importance of the sector cannot and will not be changed, as the law stipulates that it is a significant and long-term policy to promote the sustainable, healthy and high-quality development of the private economy. The private sector has flourished under China's reform and opening-up policy, and has grown from a supplement for the public economy to an integral and important part of the Chinese socialist market economy.

Data speaks for itself. Officially registered private enterprises in China have surpassed 57 million, accounting for 92.3 percent of the total number of business entities. Furthermore, private enterprises contribute more than 50 percent of the tax revenue, more than 60 percent of GDP, over 70 percent of technological innovation achievements and more than 80 percent of urban employment. "Unswervingly consolidating and developing the public sector and unswervingly encouraging, supporting, and guiding the non-public economy" is part of the country's long-standing and major economic policy, demonstrating the Communist Party of China and the government's unwavering support for the private sector. The Chinese authority has delivered strong support to the private sector over the past few decades. However, private enterprises still encounter difficulties and challenges. Discriminatory enforcement and market access and financing obstacles once fueled deceleration of the private investment.

The private sector promotion law provides assurances that private enterprises enjoy legal status, market opportunities, and development rights equal to other economic entities. It also ensures equal treatment in competition, investment, financing, and support for technological innovation. Through its regulatory role, the law helps stabilize expectations and boost confidence, spur vitality of the sector and spark entrepreneurial investment enthusiasm, laying a solid foundation for the sustained prosperity of the economy. The law stipulates that in areas other than the negative

list for market access, all kinds of economic organizations, including private economic organizations, can enter on an equal footing in accordance with the law. It is well known that the rule of law plays a crucial role in the market economy. The private sector promotion law not only helps maintain economic order and protect the legitimate rights and interests of private enterprises, but also promotes the healthy development of the economy by providing legal guarantees and guiding economic behaviors.

While reassuring private investors, the law also improves the business environment for foreign investors who see the law serve as a mirror reflecting China's determination to provide a law-based business environment. As China's consumption structure and industrial structure are constantly upgrading, there is huge space for the development of the private economy, especially on the back of a huge market with a population of 1.4 billion, including a middle-income group of over 400 million people. As part of China's efforts to further deepen reform comprehensively, support from all levels of government is provided to promote sustainable, healthy, and high-quality development of the private sector. Amid external headwinds, it's necessary and timely. Furthermore, it also represents the certainty that China offers to the world.

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## **China's Landmark Private Sector Promotion Law to Fortify Economy Resilience, Vitality**

China's top legislative body passed the private sector promotion law on Wednesday, establishing a legal backing for the steady and healthy growth of the vast sector, including more than 57 million private firms and over 100 million self-employed individuals. As China's first fundamental legislation dedicated to the private sector, the new law will bolster confidence among the vast community by improving the business environment, fostering innovation, and ensuring fair competition -- key steps to sustaining high-quality growth in the world's second-largest economy amid growing external uncertainties, experts noted in the latest episode of the China Economic Roundtable, an all-media talk show hosted by Xinhua News Agency.

### **STRONG SHOT OF REASSURANCE**

China's socialist market economy operates under a framework where public ownership, manifested by entities such as state-owned enterprises, is the mainstay while multiple forms of ownership coexist. The private sector, including private enterprises and individual businesses, is a major component of the non-public economy. The new law enshrines into legal doctrine the long-standing principle of "unswervingly consolidating and developing the public sector and unswervingly encouraging, supporting, and guiding the development of the non-public sector." It also explicitly states that promoting the private sector's sustained, healthy and

high-quality development is a long-term major national policy. It marks the first time these principles have been codified, providing stronger legal protection for private businesses, according to Yang Heqing, an official with the Legislative Affairs Commission of the National People's Congress Standing Committee.

"The legislation reflects China's clear stance and firm resolve to support private-sector growth," said Liu Min, deputy director of the National Development and Reform Commission's private economy development bureau, a new institution set up in 2023 by the country's top economic planner to coordinate efforts to facilitate private-sector development. The passing of the law was warmly welcomed by many entrepreneurs. The law transforms policy support into legal guarantees, giving entrepreneurs greater reassurance and motivation to keep moving forward, said Qi Xiangdong, chairman of cybersecurity firm Qi-Anxin and vice chairman of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce. "The rule of law is the best business environment," Qi said.

### **ALL-ROUND, TARGETED PROMOTION**

The legislation takes direct aim at some of the biggest challenges facing private businesses, with specific mandates to address the community's major concerns. From ensuring fair market access and financing opportunities to enhancing services and promoting standardized operations, the legislation provides concrete measures to encourage, support, and guide private-sector growth. "The law adopts a problem-oriented approach," Yang noted, as both external factors and internal weak links affecting the private sector's development have been taken into consideration. By incorporating lessons from past reforms and practical experience, the law refines relevant institutions and measures and ensures alignment with existing laws, Yang said. Qi, a veteran entrepreneur, highlighted the law's focus on scientific innovation and facilitating financing for the private sector, which is critical for sectors like cybersecurity, where long development cycles require stable cash flow. China in recent years has stepped up efforts to channel more financing support to the private sector, most of which are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As of the end of March, the outstanding amount of inclusive micro and small loans increased by 12.2 percent year on year, with loans to technology-based SMEs growing by over 20 percent.

### **BIG ROLE TO PLAY AHEAD**

The law was timely for China's economy, which faces increasing impact from external shocks. Boosting the private sector, a heavyweight in manufacturing, digital economy, green tech and many other fields, is seen as essential to consolidating the country's sustained economic recovery. In 2024, private enterprises contributed over half to China's foreign trade and tax revenue, while accounting for more than 80 percent of urban employment. More importantly, they are playing a major role in sharpening the country's innovation edge, generating over 70 percent of China's technology innovation achievements. "The private sector is a vital force in advancing

China's modernization and serves as an important foundation for the Chinese economy's high-quality development," said Sheng Laiyun, deputy head of the National Bureau of Statistics. China's private sector has posted positive growth momentum recently, echoing the overall upward economic trajectory.

In the first quarter (Q1), some 1.98 million new private enterprises were registered nationwide, marking a year-on-year increase of 7.1 percent, surpassing the average growth rate of the past three years. Investment by the private sector reversed its decline from the previous year by increasing 0.4 percent year on year in Q1. Official data released on Wednesday showed that business confidence of China's manufacturing and service enterprises remain robust, with their index gauging business expectations both remaining in the expansionary territory in April. Qi said the company will focus on what high-tech firms do best -- innovating, upgrading industries, and competing globally. "We're now better positioned to become a more creative, competitive, and responsible driving force in this new era."

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## **SOUTH KOREA: Small Biz Owners Express Hope for Economic Rebound**

With the Constitutional Court's historic ruling to oust former President Yoon Suk Yeol on Friday, South Korean small enterprises and mom-and-pop store owners expressed hopes that reduced political uncertainties will help revive domestic demand and boost the economy. "We hope that the Constitutional Court's decision will bring the divided nation together and serve as an opportunity for Korea to enter a new path of growth," the Korea Federation of Small and Medium Business (KBIZ) said in a statement. "Now, we need to ease political confrontations and conflicts, and instead, unite the strength and wisdom of all Koreans to overcome the crisis and restore economic vitality." Monthslong political instability, sparked by Yoon's imposition of martial law on Dec. 4, 2024, has dealt a heavy blow to small and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly those reliant on exports, according to KBIZ.

A KBIZ survey conducted in December showed that 3 out of 10 exporting SMEs have experienced contract cancellations, an increase in inquiries and delays in shipments due to political uncertainty. The Korea Federation of Micro Enterprise (KFME), representing local mom-and-pop stores, also expressed optimism that the ruling will serve as a turning point for Asia's fourth-largest economy, which has been grappling with an economic slowdown for months. "It is time for the entire nation to unite its efforts to eliminate economic uncertainty," the KFME said. "We need to shift political energy toward economic recovery, creating an environment where people can focus on their livelihoods with peace of mind." Small business owners in Seoul also anticipated that greater political and social stability will revive consumer demand that

has remained sluggish for months.

"I am so tired of this situation. Maybe things will get better now that the fighting has stopped," said an owner of a small flower shop in downtown Seoul. "I hope there will be a lot of good news and events so that people buy flowers again." However, many remain cautious, recognizing that the economy is unlikely to recover overnight, especially given concerns that political turmoil could persist until the upcoming presidential election, expected to take place within two months. During this period, sporadic political rallies and protests are expected every weekend in Seoul, potentially discouraging consumer spending. "I think the mood of the country has been affected ever since the martial law was declared," said a coffee shop owner in southern Seoul, asking not to be named. "Things will probably improve after the presidential election is over."

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## **Upstage Sets Sights on Global Enterprise AI Market**

South Korean artificial intelligence startup Upstage unveiled Wednesday ambitious plans to expand into the global enterprise AI market, primarily focusing on the US and Japan. "Upstage AI is about shaping a better future of work," said CEO Kim Sung-hoon during a press briefing in Seoul. "We aim to bring the proven AI work standards established in Korea to the global stage and deliver measurable business outcomes through AI." The AI company recently made headlines by partnering with domestic telecom carrier KT Corp. to deploy a Thai language-specific large language model for Jasmine Technology Solutions, an IT arm of Thailand's tech giant Jasmine Group. The project marked Korea's first sovereign AI deployment overseas, cementing Upstage's reputation for technical excellence and expanding its presence in the Southeast Asian AI market. Last month, Upstage established its subsidiary in Japan, following its US expansion last year. In Japan, the company is developing a Japanese-specialized LLM in collaboration with local partners.

The key to Upstage's global strategy is its full-stack AI platform, designed for enterprise use. With the recent appointment of Hiroyuki Matsushita, a seasoned executive formerly with Panasonic and Amazon Web Services, to lead the Japanese arm, the company is positioning itself to capture a significant share of Japan's generative AI market, projected to reach \$11.85 billion by 2030. Upstage's strategy targets Japan's document-intensive enterprise environment -- estimated to be over 10 times larger than Korea's. The company aims to boost operational efficiency for Japanese firms through AI, particularly with the launch of Syn, a compact language model co-developed with Japanese chatbot startup Karakuri. Syn is tailored for industries such as finance, health care, manufacturing and legal services. In the United States, Upstage plans to leverage its successful document parsing use cases with major Korean insurers like Samsung Life Insurance and Hanwha Life to appeal

to enterprise clients.

It also seeks to replicate its Thai LLM success in other regions showing interest in sovereign AI, including Southeast Asia and the Middle East. To strengthen its global competitiveness, Upstage is advancing its LLM development. At Wednesday's event, the company introduced Solar Pro 1.3, which currently holds the highest benchmark scores among Korean-made models. It also plans to release Solar Pro 1.5 in June, a 33-billion-parameter model offering enhanced fluency and usability. Starting in June, Upstage will also roll out multimodal AI capabilities. Combining its Document Parse engine with the Solar LLM, the new vision-language model will support document-based applications such as summarization, Q&A and report generation. According to internal testing, the model outperforms Meta's LLaMA 4 Scout and Google's Gemini 2.5 Pro in accuracy. "We are establishing the standard for enterprise AI in Korea through our own Solar LLM and Document Parse technology," the CEO said. "Now, we are ready to take that standard global."

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## South-East Asia

### **INDONESIA: Posts Almost 5 Times Rise in EV Charging Transactions**

Indonesia's state-owned electricity company PT PLN announced Thursday that the transactions at the Public Electric Vehicle Charging Stations across the country increased 4.9 times, or around 80,970 transactions in total, during the period of Eid al-Fitr season year on year. Meanwhile, electricity consumption at the stations rose to 1,950 megawatt hours (MWh), which is 5.8 times higher compared to 334 MWh in the same period last year. "People's excitement in using electric vehicles is increasing. We want people to experience a safe and comfortable homecoming experience using electric vehicles," PLN President Director Darmawan Prasodjo was quoted by local media. Due to the increase of EV users in Indonesia, the Southeast Asian country under PLN has provided 3,558 units of charging stations in the country.

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### **Indonesia's State-Owned Coal, Gas Firms to Launch Clean Energy Project**

PT Bukit Asam (PTBA), one of Indonesia's largest state-owned coal producers, and PT Perusahaan Gas Negara (PT PGN), a government-controlled gas firm, will jointly establish a coal gasification project to produce clean energy, an official announced on Monday. The project will convert coal into synthetic natural gas to reduce carbon

emissions. Rosa Permata Sari, director of strategy and business development at PT PGN, said that the project will utilize PTBA's low-rank coal reserves in Tanjung Enim, South Sumatra, which have not been fully monetized. "The reserves are located near PT PGN's pipeline network, making infrastructure development more efficient," she said in a press release, adding that the initiative aligns with the government's priority to strengthen downstream industries. Regarding product distribution, Rosa noted that the synthetic natural gas is expected to be supplied to industries in western Java, where there are supply shortages. This year, the two companies will focus on feasibility studies to assess the potential for constructing synthetic natural gas production facilities, pipelines, and viable business models.

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## **Indonesia's Investment Realization Up 15.9 Pct in Q1 2025**

Indonesia recorded an investment realization of 456.2 trillion rupiahs (around 27 billion U.S. dollars) in the first quarter of 2025, marking a 15.9 percent year-on-year increase from 23.8 billion dollars, according to Rosan Roeslani, minister of investment and downstreaming. "This first quarter realization accounts for 24.4 percent of the 2025 target of 1,905.6 trillion rupiahs (112.8 billion dollars)," said Rosan at a press conference on Wednesday. The investment consisted of 49.5 percent foreign direct investment and 50.5 percent domestic investment. Five Asian countries and regions dominated the investment inflows, with Singapore leading at 4.6 billion dollars, followed by China's Hong Kong at 2.2 billion dollars, China at 1.8 billion dollars, and Malaysia and Japan with 1 billion dollars each. The most attractive sectors for investors were basic metal industries, transportation, mining, services, and industrial or office zones.

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## **CAMBODIA: Approving Investment Projects Worth 2.5 Bln USD in Q1**

Cambodia attracted fixed-asset investment of 2.5 billion U.S. dollars in the first quarter (Q1) of 2025, up almost 14 percent from 2.2 billion dollars in the same period last year, said a Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC)'s report released on Wednesday. The Southeast Asian country approved 172 investment projects during the January-March period this year, up from 106 projects over the same period last year, generating nearly 120,000 jobs, the CDC said. Key projects included an auto garage equipment manufacturer, a car tire plant, a car assembly plant, metal processing plants, plastic product factories, an aluminum processing plant, a medical equipment manufacturing factory, a solar-powered plant, and garment and travel goods factories. The top five foreign investors in the kingdom are from China, Singapore, the British Virgin Islands, Vietnam, and the Cayman Islands, the CDC

said, adding that investment from China accounted for 56.2 percent of the total investment. Cambodian Ministry of Commerce's Secretary of State and Spokesperson Penn Sovicheat said the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and Cambodia's bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) with China, South Korea, and the United Arab Emirates are key factors in attracting foreign direct investment. "These regional and bilateral FTAs are magnets for foreign investors to Cambodia," he told Xinhua. Sovicheat said new investments will bring new capital, technologies and job opportunities for the Cambodian people.

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## **Cambodia, UN Launch Project on Energy Efficiency in Building Sector**

Cambodia and the United Nations on Monday launched a new project, aiming to advance energy efficiency in Cambodia's building sector, said a joint press release. The project, titled "Accelerating Energy Efficiency in Cambodia's Building Sector," was funded by the UN Joint SDG Fund, the press release said. It was designed to address behavioral, regulatory and market barriers, and to facilitate green financing instruments for the private sector. The press release said the energy sector is the second-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Cambodia, with the building sector accounting for about 52 percent of energy consumption. Efforts are underway to integrate energy efficiency into design guidelines, such as the Building Energy Code, support the development of Building Technical Regulations, and implement the empanelment and rating of Energy Service Companies (ESCOs), it added. Furthermore, the government endorsed a sub-decree on Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS), with ongoing work to create energy efficiency labels for air conditioners and refrigerators. "Energy efficiency is at the center of our efforts at the Ministry of Mines and Energy," Chhe Lidin, an undersecretary of state at Cambodia's Ministry of Mines and Energy, said. "It is the most cost-effective tool for achieving increased energy security, reducing costs, and creating a cleaner environment in line with our National Energy Efficiency Policy 2022-2030," he added. Alissar Chaker, resident representative of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to Cambodia, said UNDP has been supporting the Cambodian government to accelerate just energy transition in line with the Long-Term Strategy for Carbon Neutrality and its 2050 target. She highlighted the potential of energy efficiency as low-hanging fruit for optimizing energy consumption.

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## **South Asia**

### **INDIA: Apple Intelligence Rolls Out with New Features**

Apple began rolling out the iOS 18.4 update, finally bringing Apple Intelligence features to users in India. The features were previously limited to users in the US, UK, Europe, and Canada, but the latest update expands availability to more regions, with support for additional languages, including localised English for India and Singapore, as well as French, German, Italian, Portuguese (Brazil), Spanish, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese. That stated, not all iPhones are eligible for the AI-powered tools. Apple Intelligence will only be available on the iPhone 16 series including iPhone 16e, iPhone 16, iPhone 16 Plus, iPhone 16 Pro, and iPhone 16 Pro Max as well as the iPhone 15 Pro and iPhone 15 Pro Max. For those with an eligible device, updating to iOS 18.4 will unlock several Apple Intelligence features, including Writing Tools, Smart Reply, Clean Up, and Genmoji. Apple initially announced Apple Intelligence at WWDC 2024, and while many expected it to roll out alongside the iPhone 16 launch last year, the company took more time to refine the experience. Now, nearly a year later, users in India can finally access these AI-driven capabilities. If you own a compatible iPhone, you can update to iOS 18.4 by going to Settings > General > Software Update. Since Apple rolls out updates in phases, it may take a few hours or days for all users to see the update. If you don't see it immediately, checking back later should do the trick. Apple Intelligence adds several new tools designed to enhance productivity and creativity. Writing Tools, for example, can rewrite, proofread, and summarize text across apps like Mail, Messages, Notes, and even third-party apps. Smart Reply offers quick response suggestions, and multilingual users can take advantage of AI-driven language adaptation.

Clean Up lets users remove unwanted objects from images, while Image Playground allows for the easy creation of customized images. Genmoji takes emoji use to the next level by letting users generate personalized emoji based on descriptions or photos. The Photos app also gets upgrades, including natural language search, which allows users to find specific photos or video moments by describing them in plain language. The Memories feature can now generate video montages based on user descriptions. Visual Intelligence: Your iPhone can now identify objects around you. One of the most interesting additions is Visual Intelligence, which lets users point their iPhone camera at an object to get more information about it. For example, pointing the camera at a flower will reveal details such as its name, ideal growing conditions, and whether it can be replanted. On the iPhone 16, iPhone 16 Plus, and iPhone 16 Pro models, Visual Intelligence can be triggered using the Capture button. On the iPhone 16e, iPhone 15 Pro, and iPhone 15 Pro Max, long-pressing the Action button will activate the feature. System-wide support for Indian languages. In addition to AI-powered tools, Apple recently announced system-wide support for 10 Indian languages, including Telugu, Tamil, Punjabi, and Marathi, for the iPhone 16e and other iPhone 16 models. This means users can not only type and chat in their preferred language but also see system settings, including the Calendar, Settings app, and lock screen date and time, in their chosen language.

Smarter Siri, better notifications, and ChatGPT integration. The update also

improves Siri, making it more conversational and allowing users to switch between text and voice inputs. Siri can now retain context across multiple queries and answer detailed questions about Apple device settings and features. Apple has also integrated ChatGPT into Siri and Writing Tools, enabling users to generate content, get image descriptions, and analyse documents without switching between apps. ChatGPT access is optional, and Apple assures users that privacy is maintained, with no data storage or tracking unless an account is connected. Notification management has been refined with Priority Notifications that highlight important messages, while the Reduce Interruptions mode filters out non-essential alerts. The Notes and Phone apps now support transcription and summarization for audio recordings, helping users quickly review key points from calls or voice memos.

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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.

## **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.

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## **Uttar Pradesh Signs MoU with Australian Smart Energy Council and Hinduja Group to Boost Renewable Energy Sector**

In a significant move to bolster its renewable energy ambitions, the Government of Uttar Pradesh has entered into a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Smart Energy Council of Australia and the Hinduja Group. The agreement, signed by Uttar Pradesh Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar Singh, aims to foster employment opportunities, enhance technological collaboration, and build a skilled workforce in the state's rapidly growing green energy sector. The MoU, effective from 2025 to 2027, sets forth a collaborative framework that includes developing and implementing solar skill development programmes, promoting technology transfer, and commercialising cutting-edge renewable energy technologies. It also seeks to strengthen the solar and green hydrogen value chains and facilitate bilateral investment and student exchange initiatives between India and Australia. Speaking at the signing ceremony, Chief Secretary Singh reiterated the state's commitment to expanding its renewable energy capacity. He highlighted the target of achieving 22,000 MW of solar power generation and stressed the need for skilled manpower to realise this vision. He further noted that this collaboration would be pivotal in transforming Uttar Pradesh into a renewable energy hub and would contribute to India's broader goal of attaining 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030.

The partnership will also explore new market opportunities in areas such as green hydrogen production and energy storage solutions. These efforts are expected to drive sustainable development, foster innovation, and promote environmental stewardship across the state. The Smart Energy Council, a prominent Australian organisation committed to advancing smart energy technologies, has expressed strong support for this partnership. Its CEO, John Grimes, stated that the initiative would deliver meaningful results in the coming years by facilitating the exchange of knowledge, expertise, and investment between the two countries. The Hinduja Group, through its renewable energy arm, Hinduja Renewables, has also reaffirmed its dedication to supporting India's sustainability and energy self-reliance goals. Dr Sunil K. Chaddha, Senior Advisor at the Hinduja Group, reiterated the company's commitment to driving renewable energy projects in Uttar Pradesh. As part of the MoU, specialised training modules and solar skill development programmes will be

introduced to equip the local workforce with the expertise needed in emerging green technologies. In addition, efforts will be made to commercialise innovative renewable solutions and attract investments that further the state's energy ambitions. The agreement was formalised in the presence of senior state officials, including Pankaj Kumar, Managing Director of Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited (UPPCL), and Anupam Shukla, Managing Director of UP Renewable and EV Infrastructure Limited, among others.

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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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## **Engineers India Secures International Contracts Worth Rs 730 Crore, Stock Shows Positive Movement**

Engineers India Ltd (EIL), a leading public sector engineering consultancy firm, has secured two significant international contracts with a combined estimated value of Rs 730 crore. These contracts have been awarded by clients in the Middle East for Project Management Consultancy (PMC) Services and Engineering & Project Management Services Agreements. According to the company's official filing with the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), the PMC Services contract is valued at approximately Rs 650 crore, while the Engineering & Project Management Services contract is worth around Rs 80 crore. This development underscores EIL's growing presence in the international engineering and consultancy sector, further strengthening its global portfolio. Following the announcement, EIL's stock witnessed a notable surge in early trading. The share price rose by 4.53 per cent, reaching an intraday high of Rs 173.95. However, it later settled with a modest gain of 0.78 per cent, closing at Rs 167.70. Despite the positive movement, the stock has recorded an overall decline of 8.98 per cent on a year-to-date (YTD) basis. Trading activity on the BSE indicated that around 2.42 lakh shares of EIL were exchanged at the time of reporting. This volume was below the two-week average of 3.78 lakh shares. The stock's total turnover for the day stood at Rs 4.11 crore, with the company's market capitalization reaching Rs 9,394.54 crore.

From a technical perspective, EIL's stock price is currently trading above its 5-day, 10-day, 20-day, 30-day, and 50-day Simple Moving Averages (SMA), reflecting short-term bullish momentum. However, it remains below the 100-day, 150-day, and 200-day SMAs, indicating the potential for further fluctuations. The stock's 14-day Relative Strength Index (RSI) is positioned at 55.17, suggesting that it is neither overbought nor oversold. Typically, an RSI below 30 indicates an oversold condition,

while a value above 70 signals an overbought scenario. EIL's financial indicators provide further insights into its market positioning. The company's Price-to-Earnings (P/E) ratio stands at 30.02, while its Price-to-Book (P/B) value is 3.95. The firm has reported Earnings Per Share (EPS) of 5.57, with a Return on Equity (RoE) of 13.14 per cent. Additionally, its one-year beta is 1.9, reflecting a relatively high level of stock volatility. As of December 2023, the Government of India holds a 51.32 per cent stake in the company, reinforcing its status as a key player in the state-run engineering and consultancy domain. The recent contract wins are expected to bolster EIL's financial performance and international footprint in the coming quarters. Industry analysts suggest that sustained execution of high-value projects and further diversification in overseas markets could contribute to long-term growth. With its expertise in engineering and project management services, EIL remains well-positioned to capitalize on global opportunities while maintaining its leadership in the domestic sector. Investors and stakeholders will closely monitor the company's performance shortly, especially in light of these strategic international contracts.

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## **Vodafone Idea Launches 5G Services in Chandigarh and Patna**

Telecom operator Vodafone Idea (Vi) has announced the official launch of its 5G services in Chandigarh and Patna. Starting Monday, customers in these cities using 5G-enabled smartphones will be able to access the high-speed network, marking another step in Vi's phased 5G rollout across the country. This development comes shortly after Vi introduced its 5G network in Mumbai in March 2025. The company reported that over 70% of eligible users in Mumbai are already utilising 5G services, which now account for nearly 20% of the total data traffic in the city. Building on this momentum, Vi plans to expand 5G coverage to Delhi and Bengaluru in May. As part of its promotional campaign, Vodafone Idea offers customers unlimited 5G data on recharge plans starting at ₹299. The telco aims to showcase the enhanced user experience 5G can deliver, ranging from faster downloads and seamless video streaming to improved gaming, virtual conferencing, and real-time access to cloud services. In addition to city-wide rollouts, Vi has also prioritised high-traffic public venues. The company has already enabled 5G coverage in 11 major cricket stadiums across India, capitalising on the ongoing T20 cricket season to allow fans a faster and more immersive digital experience during matches. Vi's network deployment strategy emphasises both performance and sustainability. In Chandigarh and Patna, the company has collaborated with South Korean tech giant Samsung to implement advanced, energy-efficient infrastructure and virtualised RAN (vRAN) technologies. This partnership is expected to enhance both network flexibility and performance. Vi has also integrated AI-powered Self-Organising Network (SON) systems to optimise connectivity and minimise service disruptions.

Commenting on the launch, a Vodafone Idea spokesperson highlighted the

company's commitment to expanding its next-generation network in a phased and sustainable manner, ensuring robust service quality in each new location. "The introduction of 5G services in Chandigarh and Patna is another key milestone in our nationwide rollout strategy. With the integration of cutting-edge technology and strategic partnerships, we are confident of delivering superior digital experiences to our customers," the spokesperson said. The 5G expansion comes at a time when smartphone users are increasingly upgrading to 5G-enabled devices, and demand for high-speed internet is surging. With competitive pricing and an aggressive rollout strategy, Vodafone Idea aims to regain market share in India's intensely competitive telecom sector. On the financial front, Vodafone Idea's stock closed slightly lower on Monday, declining 0.13% to ₹7.46 per share. However, the stock has shown an upward trend over the past month, gaining nearly 9.5%.

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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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### **Azerbaijani Minister Portrays Private Sector-Run Employment Contracts**

As a result of Azerbaijan's labor market reforms between 2018 and 2025, the number of labor contracts grew by over 500,000, representing a 42.4 percent increase, with the private sector accounting for 90 percent of this growth, said Anar Aliyev, the country's Minister of Labor and Social Protection, Trend reports. Speaking during a conference dedicated to World Labor Protection Day and the 120th anniversary of the first collective agreement. The conference was themed "Impact of Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence on Employment," Aliyev highlighted that during this period, the wage fund increased by 2.9 times, with the non-state sector seeing an even greater increase of 3.2 times. "Efforts to enhance social protection and employment for the families of martyrs and war invalids have been significantly strengthened. In

the four years following the Patriotic War, around 380,000 social services were provided to 131,000 individuals from this group, and the benefits and pensions for the families of martyrs and war invalids have, on average, been doubled. In the past five years, they have been allocated 6,800 apartments, and 567 vehicles have been provided to disabled veterans. Employment support has been extended to over 26,200 individuals, including more than 12,400 involved in self-employment programs and around 1,070 in vocational training programs. Additionally, 77,000 socio-psychological support and rehabilitation services have been provided to 11,000 people. This includes 609 high-tech prostheses for 492 servicemen and 70,000 rehabilitation tools for 2,300 war invalids," the minister added.

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## **Azerbaijani Official Urges Private Sector to Embrace AI Expansion for Enhanced Efficiency**

I would like to urge private sector representatives to take bolder steps in expanding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance service quality and operational efficiency, said Elnur Aliyev, First Deputy Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan, Trend reports. In his address at the "Impact of Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence on Employment" conference dedicated to World Day for Safety and Health at Work and the 120th anniversary of the first collective agreement, Aliyev emphasized that the government is fully prepared to listen to and collaborate on stimulating initiatives aimed at encouraging AI adoption in the private sector. "As a government, we are fully prepared to consider and support initiatives that will inspire you in this direction and collaborate towards achieving our shared goals. In the face of new challenges, a competitive economy can only be achieved through agile adaptation to technology and an open approach to innovation. Therefore, at both the government and private sector levels, investments in digital solutions and innovative technologies must be increased in terms of scope and impact. This is not just about technological modernization but also a vital tool for creating new jobs, enhancing productivity, and ensuring sustainable development," he said.

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## **JORDAN: World Bank Deepen Partnership for Private Sector-Led Growth, Jobs, and Innovation**

The World Bank Group has approved **US\$1.1 billion** in new financing to support Jordan to achieve results on its Economic Modernization Vision, and build socio-economic resilience in the face of continued shocks and crises. Investments span four projects aimed to positively impact people's lives by promoting reforms for inclusive growth and job creation, supporting startups and small- and medium enterprises, expanding social assistance, and promoting a more sustainable

energy future to fuel Jordan's economy. *"Jordan continues to demonstrate commitment to advancing critical reforms to build a more competitive, inclusive, and resilient economy,"* said **Jean-Christophe Carret, World Bank Division Director, Middle East Department**. *"These new programs reflect a comprehensive approach - supporting private sector-led investment, entrepreneurship, social protection, and energy transition - that is critical to achieving sustainable growth."* Since the launch of the Economic Modernization Vision, the Kingdom has taken steps to modernize its economy, promote innovation, strengthen fiscal sustainability, and expand social protection. With a focus on inclusion and digitalization, the Government is working to unlock private sector potential and deliver tangible improvements in people's lives across the country. The newly approved projects mark a significant milestone in the implementation of the World Bank Group's Country Partnership Framework for Jordan 2024-2029, reflecting a results-driven partnership that combines reforms with strategic investments.

*"This new financing reflects our continued partnership with the World Bank to promote economic opportunities, enhance social protection, and strengthen Jordan's innovation and clean energy agenda as per the development priorities under the Economic Modernization Vision,"* said **H.E. Zeina Toukan, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation**. The **Jordan Growth and Competitiveness Development Policy Financing (US\$400 million)** will support the government's efforts to unlock investment, boost exports, and strengthen job creation - particularly for youth and women. The program backs reforms to improve the business environment, promote fair competition, expand access to finance, and further enhance customs procedures. The **Innovative Startups and SMEs Fund (ISSF 2.0) (US\$50 million)**, aims to expand early-stage equity financing and catalyze private investment in high-growth startups in key sectors such as ICT, fintech, greentech, and healthtech. Building on ISSF 1.0, which mobilized over US\$240 million in private capital and created more than 2,290 jobs, the project will also draw on IFC's expertise in due diligence and co-investments in startups and regional venture capital funds. Over five years, ISSF 2.0 is expected to mobilize an estimated US\$150 million in private capital, support 100 startups, and create 1,500 new jobs in high-growth sectors, particularly for women- and youth-led businesses.

The **Resilient and Sustainable Social Protection Program (US\$400 million)** aims to strengthen Jordan's ability to respond to shocks, while improving support to the most vulnerable. The program expands cash-based assistance, enhances digital service delivery, and links social protection with access to education and healthcare services, and jobs. It aims to support 1.2 million vulnerable individuals through cash transfers, provide health insurance to 150,000 people, and deliver services to 1 million individuals through early warning and response systems. The **Additional Financing for the Electricity Sector Efficiency and Supply Reliability Program (US\$250 million)** scales up support to Jordan's clean energy transition while improving grid stability and financial sustainability. The program will roll out additional

cost savings and revenue enhancement measures in the sector, expand energy efficiency in public institutions, and strengthen cybersecurity in transmission operations. The program also supports Jordan's target of increasing the share of renewable energy in Jordan's electricity mix to 31 percent by 2030, while enhancing grid resilience. The World Bank's growing engagement in Jordan reflects a trusted and evolving partnership anchored in shared priorities and a strong commitment to delivery. Through integrated, multi-sectoral support, the Bank aims to support Jordan as it navigates regional pressures, promotes inclusive development, and delivers on the promise of the country's Economic Modernization Vision.

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## **KYRGYZSTAN: Landmark Initiative to Advance Sustainable Finance for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises with World Bank Support**

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors approved today \$120 million for [Developing a Sustainable Finance Market for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises \(MSMEs\) in the Kyrgyz Republic](#) project. This landmark initiative will be co-financed by a \$50 million loan from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), reflecting a strong partnership to catalyze sustainable economic growth in the Kyrgyz Republic. With a total funding of \$170 million, the project aims to advance green finance, mobilize private capital, and strengthen the capacity of local financial institutions. *"Increased private sector-led job creation is a key pillar of the World Bank Group's Country Partnership Framework with the Kyrgyz Republic,"* said **Hugh Riddell, World Bank Group Country Manager**. *"This project will directly benefit MSMEs and financial institutions, thus further contributing to sustained economic growth and creation of thousands of jobs."*

The project will focus on two key areas:

1. **Sustainable Finance for MSMEs:** This component will i) provide wholesale financing through Participating Financial Institutions (PFIs), enabling them to extend loans to MSMEs for green and sustainable investments; and ii) support the establishment of Green Finance Fund, a key initiative led by the Government. Priority will be given to projects promoting energy efficiency, renewable energy, and other environmentally sustainable practices.
2. **Green Guarantee Mechanism:** The project will introduce a green guarantee mechanism through the Guarantee Fund to provide partial credit guarantees to financial institutions lending to MSMEs. This will significantly reduce risks for lenders and encourage greater access to finance for MSMEs pursuing green projects.

Furthermore, the combination of direct financing for green initiatives and risk-reducing mechanisms is expected to mobilize up to \$148 million in private sector

investments over the next five years. *“The project builds on the success of our earlier engagement in this field – the Emergency Support for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises Project, which provided vital financial relief and recovery support during and after the COVID-19 crisis. We look forward to our continued partnership with the Ministry of Finance of the Kyrgyz Republic, the State Development Bank, the Guarantee Fund, development partners, and all stakeholders to further strengthen the country’s financial system and support sustainable growth that creates more and better jobs,”* said **Emiko Todoroki, World Bank Senior Financial Sector Specialist and Project Task Team Leader** . The financing for the [Developing a Sustainable Finance Market for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises \(MSMEs\) in the Kyrgyz Republic](#) is provided through the [International Development Association](#) (IDA), the World Bank’s concessional lending arm. It comprises a zero-interest, shorter-maturity loan, with repayments spread out over six years. The project will be implemented through December 2030, with strict adherence to international standards, including procurement, financial management regulations, and anti-corruption guidelines. The World Bank Group’s overall mission is to end extreme poverty and promote shared prosperity on a livable planet. The Bank’s program in the Kyrgyz Republic currently consists of 23 projects supporting the modernization and development of various sectors, with commitments of \$1.2 billion.

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## Oceania

### **NEW ZEALAND: Expanding Prescriber Rights Will Increase Access to Medicines**

The Government is making changes to prescriber regulations, giving New Zealanders better access to medicines, Health Minister Simeon Brown and Associate Health Minister David Seymour say. “We are committed to ensuring Kiwis have access to timely, quality healthcare in their communities,” Mr Brown says. “Making our health system more efficient and enabling our health workforce to better care for their patients is a key part of this. “Changes to the Medicines Act introduced to Parliament last week will give nurse practitioners, who are highly skilled health professionals, increased prescribing rights within their scope of practice. “Nurse practitioners work in a range of environments, including in rural areas and in aged residential care, and provide a key role caring for patients. “These changes will mean Nurse Practitioners will be able to prescribe more medicines, providing more and better continuity of care for their patients.

“They will also mean that when there are supply shortages of approved medicines, other professions, such as dentists, pharmacist prescribers, midwives, and registered nurse prescribers, will be able to prescribe replacement medicines that are funded by Pharmac. ”Together, these changes are about increasing access to

medicines for patients and supporting the Government's objective of ensuring all New Zealanders have access to timely and quality healthcare." The changes are included in the Medicines Amendment Bill, which amends the Medicines Act 1981. "The Medicines Amendment Bill also enables medicines to be approved in less than 30 days if the product has approval from two recognised overseas jurisdictions. This provides a quicker and easier option for pharmaceutical companies to get products approved in New Zealand," Mr Seymour says.

"We know expanding access to medicines significantly improves New Zealanders' health and life outcomes. "We've already taken a range of actions to give Kiwis better access to medicines. In addition to regulatory changes, we have made a record investment in Pharmac and provided additional funding for cancer and other medicines. "The Medicines Amendment Bill also updates the settings for the Medicines Classification Committee, which has an important role in providing access to medicines. The Bill modernises the membership requirements for the Committee and removes outdated provisions from the Act." The Government is also progressing work on a new Medical Products Bill, to replace the Medicines Act 1981.

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## **Minister Welcomes Newest Electricity Retailer**

Energy Minister Simon Watts welcomes Lodestone Energy's move to become New Zealand's newest electricity retailer. "Energy is critical to growing New Zealand's economy and lifting productivity. Our energy system should be supporting our businesses and industries to compete on the global stage by making sure they have access to reliable, affordable energy," Mr Watts says. "Our energy system also needs to better deliver for Kiwis who are feeling the pressure from the cost of living. We've heard too many reports of Kiwis getting a raw deal from our electricity market and last winter made it clear how a lack of competition is driving up energy prices and putting further pressure on families. "That's why this Government takes competition seriously. More competition in the energy sector means more affordable power prices, greater choices between providers and overall greater outcomes for Kiwis." Lodestone Energy is the most recent company to enter the electricity retail market as a major retailer. "Independent retailers only hold a 11 percent market share of the retail market, and so new players entering the market is a signal of the sector's confidence in this Government's actions to strengthen and promote confidence and investment in the electricity market. Fresh perspectives are exactly what New Zealand needs to ensure Kiwis get a fair deal and our businesses can compete globally," Mr Watts says.

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## **ECE Sector Review Changes Begin**

Regulation Minister David Seymour has today provided an update on the implementation of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) regulatory review. "This review and the changes announced today show the power of a sector review. The Ministry for Regulation went in and listened to the people who actually run, work at, and use early childhood regulation. They found people encircled by multiple regulators enforcing out of date rules, and proposed solutions now being put into action," Mr Seymour says. "By the end of next year ECE providers will be governed by a regulatory system which ensures regulations are focused on what matters, child safety. Cabinet has agreed to 15 changes which modernise and simplify regulations across ECE. Services will be able to get on with what they do best – providing safe, high-quality care and education as the changes are rolled out over the coming year.

"Part of the change will involve amending laws in Parliament. The Education and Training (Early Childhood Education Reform) Amendment Bill will action many of these changes. The bill will be introduced in July, and I expect it to be passed by the end of the year," Mr Seymour says. "The biggest complaint arises from the calcified, high stakes licencing criteria - 98 of them - that can each have a centre shut down with little to no notice. New licensing criteria will be gazetted by the end of September, following the recommendation to change or merge approximately three-quarters of the licensing criteria. Consultation will begin shortly to test the precise changes. "By mid next year, graduated enforcement tools will be used to respond to breaches of the remaining licensing criteria. The only enforcement tools previously available were the granting or removal of ECE licenses, which is too blunt a tool for managing minor breaches and enabling early intervention.

There will no longer be high-stakes open-or-shut rules that create anxiety and strained relationships for regulators and centre operators alike." Graduated enforcement will give the regulator a range of enforcement measures. They will be able to respond proportionately to breaches, changing the sector's culture from a punitive approach to promoting quality. "The implementation of the recommendations represents a major shakeup of the sector's outdated system. It is a great result for children, parents and ECE service providers," Mr Seymour says. "The changes will reduce unnecessary compliance costs, remove duplication, and streamline operational requirements. ECE providers will no longer be burdened with 98 separate licensing criteria, many of which were arbitrary or outdated, such as requirements to: maintain a constant indoor temperature of 18 degrees, when common sense says a minor deviation from 18 degrees won't hurt anyone, and hold immunisation records for every child over 15 months, which Health New Zealand already does.

"This will encourage more providers into a thriving market with reduced operation costs and compliance headaches. For parents this will mean more safe and affordable ECE options for their children. "As part of its comprehensive review, the

Ministry for Regulation analysed over 2,300 submissions and written feedback, met with parents and caregivers, providers and workers, visited 16 ECE services, and conducted a series of structured interviews and workshops with other agencies that engage with or regulate the sector. Thank you to the thousands of people who contributed their views. “This is just the beginning. The Ministry is now helping the agriculture and horticulture sector implement sector review findings, and progressing sector reviews into the hairdressing and barbering, and the telecommunications sector. They’re also working closely with the industrial hemp industry and others who’ve come forward through our red tape tipline. “In a high-cost economy, regulation isn’t neutral. It’s a tax on growth. Every completed review makes it easier to do business, access services, and innovate in New Zealand. The ECE review is the first of many examples of what smarter regulation looks like in action.”

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