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UNPAN-AP
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Asia-Pacific Governance Watch

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1、Government Policy and Legislation

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Intl Experts Convene to Align AI Standards During WAIC 2025

The International Forum on Standardization of Artificial Intelligence was held on Saturday during the 2025 World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai, gathering experts to address technical standards, ethical governance, and global collaboration. Over 200 delegates from international organizations, governments, universities, research institutions, and enterprises convened to advance global consensus on AI standardization. Shan Zhongde, vice-minister of industry and information technology, emphasized China's commitment to leveraging AI for new industrialization while strengthening cooperation with international standard technical organizations. "We'll continue to engage with the international community on AI ethics, legal standards, technology, and applications to promote global consensus," Shan said. He highlighted three priorities for advancing AI governance, including building an inclusive global cooperation ecosystem, accelerating industrial AI applications, and enhancing security and mutual trust for global governance consensus. Xiao Han, director of the standards innovation management department at the State Administration for Market Regulation, revealed that China has published several AI-related standards and plans to develop over 50 more by the end of next year, aligned with international standards where appropriate.

Zhang Ying, deputy secretary-general of Shanghai Municipal Government and director of Shanghai Economic and Information Technology Commission, introduced the city's systematic approach to developing the AI industry, highlighting Shanghai's commitment to pioneering AI development and governance through standardization. Cho Sung-hwan, president of the International Organization for Standardization, underscored how international standards ensure AI's orderly development, particularly in facilitating developing countries' participation in standards development. He emphasized the need for coordinated standards to build ethical, inclusive, and reliable AI systems for the public. Bilel Jamoussi, deputy director of the telecommunication standardization bureau at the International Telecommunication Union, highlighted the importance of AI cooperation and standardization, noting that 69 Chinese organizations currently contribute to ITU's standardization activities. A roundtable discussion explored global AI governance framework coordination and responsible AI standards consensus, with participants emphasizing the need for unified standards in the rapidly evolving AI landscape. The forum launched several initiatives, including AI-powered industry application governance, AI technology ethics and assessment, and global technical guidelines for industrial AI. It also unveiled 10 outstanding cases of AI enabling sustainable development, providing models for AI implementation across sectors. The event was guided by the WAIC organizing committee and hosted by the Global Alliance on Artificial Intelligence for Industry and Manufacturing Center of Excellence, supported by the Shanghai Artificial Intelligence Research Institute and China Electronics Standardization Institute, with the Bank of China's Shanghai branch as co-organizer.

From https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/ 07/27/2025

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APEC Economies Step Up Cooperation on Digital Policy Challenges

APEC member economies have concluded a two-day meeting of the Digital Economy Steering Group in Incheon, Republic of Korea, with renewed momentum to strengthen cross-border collaboration on digital regulation, online safety and sustainability. From artificial intelligence (AI) to online scams and environmental impact, the meeting focused on the critical balance between enabling innovation and safeguarding users, particularly vulnerable groups such as women, youth, as well as small businesses. “There is growing recognition that growth in the digital economy must go hand in hand with trust, inclusion and responsibility,” said Ichwan Makmur Nasution, Chair of the Digital Economy Steering Group (DESG). “The solutions we’re exploring are not only about technology. They’re about protecting people, building resilience and ensuring no one is left behind.” Throughout the meeting, delegates grappled with how to align digital regulations across borders without stifling innovation. Conversations around data privacy, cybersecurity and AI governance reflected the diversity of legal systems and policy approaches in the region, while underscoring a shared urgency to create interoperable, forward-looking digital frameworks.

One of the central policy dialogues examined how economies can better manage harmful online content, misinformation and abuse. These issues threaten not only individual safety but also social trust and economic participation. The discussion highlighted the disproportionate impact of online harms on women and youth, urging greater investment in digital literacy, user protection and responsible platform governance. As part of its forward agenda, the group examined the environmental footprint of AI and digital infrastructure. From growing energy demands to electronic waste, members explored how policy and innovation can work together to reduce the sector’s impact while supporting continued digital growth. Ongoing and proposed APEC-funded projects covered a wide range of priorities, from AI policy cooperation and Privacy Enhancing Technologies (PETs) to micro, small and medium enterprises’ access to digital trade. “This meeting reinforced the strategic value of DESG as a platform for shared learning and joint action,” said Nasution. “It’s not just about exchanging views. It’s about building alignment where possible and respecting diversity where needed, so that our cooperation continues to deliver real value to people across the APEC region.” Held under the APEC 2025 theme “*Building a Sustainable Tomorrow*,” the DESG meeting was part of the broader Third Senior Officials’ Meeting (SOM3) hosted by Korea. During this meeting cluster, there will be over 30 events related to digital innovation, including at the upcoming APEC Digital Ministerial Meeting and the Global Digital and AI Forum to be held on 4-5 August.

From https://www.apec.org/ 07/29/2025

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Plastic Leakage Could Fall by More Than 95% in Southeast and East Asia by 2050 With Stronger Policies

Southeast and East Asia plays a central role in the global effort to tackle plastic pollution, given its substantial share of the global economy, strategic position in plastics value chains and rapidly rising plastics demand, according to a new OECD report. The ***Regional Plastics Outlook for Southeast and East Asia*** – focusing on ASEAN Plus Three (APT) countries, comprising the 10 ASEAN Member States as well as the People’s Republic of China (China), Japan and Korea – shows that plastics use in the region has surged almost nine-fold since 1990, reaching 152 million tonnes (Mt) in 2022. The region now accounts for almost one-third of global plastics use, with annual per capita use ranging from 32 kg in lower middle-income countries to over 100 kg in many upper middle- and high-income countries in the APT region. In 2022, the region leaked 8.4 Mt of plastics into the environment – over one-third of the global total, including 3.5 Mt from ASEAN Member States and 4.9 Mt from China. Plastic leakage refers to any plastic that enters the terrestrial or aquatic environment, resulting from inadequate collection and disposal. This includes plastic waste, such as packaging or beverage cups, that is littered or openly dumped.

The report finds that by 2050, plastics use is projected to reach 280 Mt per year, with plastic leakage projected to increase by 68% to 14.1 Mt per year. The report presents a High Stringency scenario that shows how comprehensive action across the plastic lifecycle could reduce use by 28%, more than quadruple regional recycling rates to 54%, and reduce mismanaged waste by 97% in the region by 2050, compared to Baseline projections. “Southeast and East Asia can become a global model in tackling plastic pollution and advancing circular economy solutions for plastic waste,” said **OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann**. “With stronger regional co-operation, ambitious policies and targeted investments, the region can almost completely eliminate plastic leakage by 2050, delivering lasting benefits for people, the environment and the global economy.” The estimated macroeconomic cost of a High Stringency scenario – equivalent to 0.8% of regional GDP in 2050 – is unevenly distributed. ASEAN lower middle-income countries face a steeper cost (2.8% of GDP on average), underscoring the need for enhanced regional co-operation and international support.

Despite challenges, including rising waste generation that outpaces waste management in a region that is highly diverse in terms of income levels, plastics use and capacity to manage it, significant progress is being made. Most APT countries have adopted national action plans on plastic pollution and stepped up regional co-operation. The average recycling rate in the region (12%) already exceeds the global average (10%), and efforts are underway to improve waste segregation at source, reduce littering and increase the use of recycled materials in manufacturing. Effective strategies can be further tailored to local contexts and supported by investments in waste collection and recycling infrastructure, stronger regulatory frameworks, clear policy signals to unlock investments and support for the integration of informal waste workers.

From https://www.oecd.org/ 07/30/2025

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East Asia

CHINA: How CPC Is Shaping Modernization Roadmap Through Five-year Plans

As the Communist Party of China (CPC) celebrates the 104th anniversary of its founding this week, the Party's signature five-year plans continue to serve as a roadmap for China's modernization drive. This year, China is set to complete its 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) and is formulating the blueprint for the next one, marking a pivotal moment in the country's long-term strategy for national rejuvenation. From transforming an agrarian society into the world's second-largest economy to charting a path toward becoming a great modern socialist country in all respects by mid-century, these plans reflect the CPC's enduring commitment to long-term strategic vision and collective prosperity. Through this cyclical yet ever-evolving roadmap, China sets strategic goals, defines government priorities, regulates business operations, and mobilizes national resources -- all in pursuit of its overarching objective of building a modern socialist nation.

The country's first plan in 1953 marked its initial push toward industrialization with the establishment of the nation's first major steel and automobile plants. Fast-forward to the 13th (2016-2020), and it saw the completion of the world's largest high-speed rail network. "Five-year plans are to China's development what construction drawings are to building a house," said Ran Hao, a professor at the Party School of the CPC Central Committee. "It tells the government and society which 'floor' to focus on and which 'road' to build over the next five years, helping avoid a piecemeal approach."

A FRAMEWORK, NOT A DOGMA

Although China's five-year plans include quantitative targets, such as the GDP growth goal, first introduced in the seventh five-year plan, it does not mean the CPC is running a centralized planned economy. "It's not about the government dictating everything; rather, the plans set the direction and priorities," Ran said. Since 2006, targets have been divided into two types: binding targets, which reflect government commitments, such as reducing energy consumption per unit of GDP, and anticipatory targets, which represent desired outcomes like GDP growth, to be pursued primarily through market mechanisms. In a break from tradition, the 14th Five-Year Plan did not set a quantitative target for GDP growth; instead, it described expected growth in broader terms, in part to emphasize quality over speed.

"Five-year plans are suited to the Chinese mentality and the Chinese idea of thinking long-term," said British scholar Martin Jacques. For millennia, Confucian classics have taught that those who plan ahead are more likely to succeed. China's five-year plans set clear goals but give regions the leeway needed to tailor their own pathways. National plans are broad frameworks that guide local governments in creating their own action plans, explained Yin Jun, a researcher with the Peking University. At present, the CPC is drafting proposals for the country's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030). Observers said the upcoming plan will emphasize a future-oriented approach to global challenges, foster new quality productive forces, and strengthen the social safety net to improve public well-being.

PLANNING WITH COLLECTIVE EFFORTS

Given their far-reaching impact, China's five-year plans are developed over several years, and informed by research, expert reviews, inter-agency coordination and public consultation. For example, work on the current 14th Five-Year Plan began as early as 2018. While drafting the five-year plan, the CPC highly values public inputs, which reflect society's needs and help foster consensus. In 2020, for the first time, public advice was collected online, with suggestions like mutual-aid elderly care included in the final plan. Over three months that year, seven symposiums were held with the Party's leader meeting with entrepreneurs, experts, local officials, and representatives from the grassroots level to listen to their suggestions. The combination of top-level planning with public participation continued this year. In May, major media platforms invited public feedback, and netizens proposed improvements such as enhancing rural express delivery infrastructure and installing elevators in older communities, among other ideas. An old saying from Sun Tzu's "The Art of War" offers insight into the success of China's five-year plans: Triumph comes when the leaders and the people share the same goal.

IMPACT BEYOND BORDERS

China's five-year plans not only guide national development but also offer opportunities for global investors. Madiyar Tukpatov, chairman of a public transport company in Astana, Kazakhstan, visited China earlier this year to research electric buses. His company began using Chinese electric buses in 2020 and plans to further integrate Chinese EV technology into Astana's transport system. New energy vehicles (NEVs) have been developed as a strategic industry over several five-year plans. Their production and sales each exceeded 12.8 million units in 2024, maintaining China's position as the global leader in this sector for 10 consecutive years. Chinese NEVs can be found in over 70 countries and regions. Benjamin Mgana, chief editor of foreign news at The Guardian newspaper in Tanzania, praised China's approach to planning, saying it demonstrates that developing countries can create workable strategies based on their own realities, rather than copying Western models. Inspired by China's success, a growing number of countries have adopted their own medium- to long-term strategies. Poland, Ethiopia and Tanzania have sought support from Chinese institutions to assist in their planning process.

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Under Xi, China's First 15-year City Plan Resonates Far

In a quiet corner of an exhibition hall in the coastal city of Xiamen in east China's Fujian Province rests a faded blue binder, its 300 yellowed pages meticulously preserved, containing the city's economic and social development strategy from 1985 to 2000. During a 2024 inspection, President Xi Jinping paused here, his fingers tracing the pages he helped draft four decades ago. "We planted seeds here," he said. "Today's harvest surpasses our expectations." In the summer of 1985, when 32-year-old Xi assumed the office of Xiamen's vice mayor, the city was grappling with uncertainties. The central government had just expanded the Xiamen Special Economic Zone from 2.5 to 131 square kilometers, raising a pivotal question: how could a modest port city morph into a global harbor while preserving its unique features? With no domestic precedents to follow, officials here were divided. Some were overly optimistic about replicating Singapore or Hong Kong, while others remained skeptical that major breakthroughs could be achieved given Xiamen's weak economic fundamentals.

Xi took a different view. He argued that modern economic development demanded long-term thinking and a comprehensive approach. "We must think far ahead and see the bigger picture. Acting only for short-term goals leads to inefficiency and strategic drift," he said in a 1986 meeting. It was under his direct leadership that Xiamen established an office to draft a development strategy for the next 15 years. "Xi's contribution wasn't merely in the construction of a building, a road or a bridge, but in establishing a long-term, forward-looking, and systemic approach to development," recalled Zheng Jinmu, then deputy head of the city's planning commission and one of the plan's lead authors. At the time, it was common at both national and local levels to create annual or five-year development plans, but never a 15-year plan for a city. "Facing such a monumental research task, we had limited experience," Xi acknowledged. "That's why the team must study hard and explore boldly."

He led delegations to Beijing to seek guidance from top economists. He also met with researchers from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Xiamen University. Ultimately, over 100 experts and government staff contributed to 21 thematic reports covering industry, trade, port logistics, tourism, education, and more. Beyond expert consultation, Xi emphasized the importance of public participation. In 1986, a city-wide essay campaign themed "Xiamen in the Year 2000" was launched, inviting members of the public to give advice. Contributions poured in from scholars, engineers, civil servants and ordinary workers. The final blueprint positioned Xiamen as a strategic economic center in southern Fujian, a key gateway in China's southeast coastline, a bridge for cross-Strait relations and a hub for China's connections with Asia-Pacific economies. It set ambitious goals for port development, industrial modernization, and infrastructure, including turning the port of Xiamen into a major hub. Today, that vision is a reality.

In reform policy, Xi pushed for bold steps, insisting that Xiamen should "dare to break through" and "explore a uniquely Chinese path" to free port development. He led study trips to Singapore and other ports, convened international conferences in Xiamen, and proposed a "three-step" approach: first, create bonded zones; then expand to a free trade zone; and eventually, a quasi-free port. This framework laid early conceptual groundwork for China's national free trade zones decades later. Ecological governance was another key theme of the plan, years before "green development" became a national strategy. Yundang Lake, once heavily polluted, was Xi's priority. In 1988, he introduced a clear-cut guideline for lake management focused on legal enforcement, sewage treatment, dredging, water flow improvement, and environmental beautification. This set in motion a decades-long transformation of the lake area into one of Xiamen's most iconic scenic spots.

"Destructive development isn't always done by the ignorant," Xi warned in a 1986 government address. "Sometimes it reflects a lack of responsibility or vision." The plan also emphasized livelihoods. Of the six core goals set for 2000, three were directly related to people's livelihoods: income growth, improved social services, and a healthy environment. It also proposed early solutions to urban-rural integration. "In building the city of Xiamen, we have carried on the approach adopted by Xi and our focus must be on creating places where citizens feel a sense of gain and belonging," said Li Decai, chief of the city's housing and development department. The same spirit of forward-thinking, grounded in evidence and public input, has sustained Xi's later political career, while the experiences that began in one city continue to resonate far beyond it. As the general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, Xi has repeatedly stressed the importance of strategic thinking and planning for a political party and a nation.

In 2020, to formulate the 14th Five-Year Plan, public opinions and suggestions were solicited online. That same year, Xi chaired seven symposiums over three months that engaged representatives from various sectors. As China prepares to draft its 15th Five-Year Plan this year, Xi has stressed the importance of sound, democratic and law-based decision-making, emphasizing the need to integrate top-level design with public consultation, enhance research and dialogue, and build broad consensus. "When Xi led the formulation of Xiamen's development strategy, he upheld an open and forward-looking vision that embraces historical trends," said Zhang Xingxiang, a professor at the School of Economics, Xiamen University. "This approach offers invaluable insights for current national and local planners in formulating socio-economic development plans for the next five years."

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China Launches First National Standard on School Meal Services

China has released its first national standard specifically targeting school meal services, scheduled to take effect on Dec. 1 this year, the country's State Administration for Market Regulation announced Monday. The Guidelines for the Management of School Meal Service Enterprises will apply to enterprises that provide meal preparation and delivery services to primary and secondary schools and kindergartens. China now has more than 460,000 primary and secondary schools and kindergartens, involving over 237 million students. The guidelines stated that enterprises must designate full-time staff responsible for food safety management and inspection. Enterprises are required to purchase major ingredients such as rice, flour and oil from designated suppliers, and retain testing reports for each batch of raw materials. Meal preparation should be integrated into the internet-enabled transparent kitchen monitoring system, with key operational procedures publicly accessible to schools, parents and students, according to the guidelines.

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Chinese Police to Tighten Regulation of Intelligent Driving

China will tighten regulation and management of intelligent driving as the current intelligent driving systems installed in vehicles have not yet achieved true autonomous driving, an official with the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), said Wednesday. "The driver remains the ultimate party responsible for operating the vehicle," Wang Qiang, director of the traffic management bureau of the MPS, said at a press conference held by the State Council Information Office. He stressed that if a driver takes hands off the wheel or eyes off the road while the vehicle is in motion, it not only poses serious traffic safety risks but may also lead to civil liability, administrative penalties, and even criminal prosecution. To strengthen the regulation and management of intelligent driving, the police will support the refining of laws and regulations to clarify the manual control in Level 0 (no driving automation) to Level 2 (partial driving automation) of vehicle autonomy, Wang said. China will also encourage vehicle manufacturers to continuously improve the reliability of assisted driving systems, and establish relevant safety technology standards, he added.

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China Issues Guideline on Strengthening Financial Services for Rural Revitalization

The People's Bank of China (PBOC), China's central bank, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs has jointly issued a guideline on promoting all-around rural revitalization with strengthened financial services. The PBOC said in a statement that the guideline was issued to improve the rural financial service system, enhance the efficiency of financial resource allocation, and advance rural revitalization with reform measures. According to the guideline, more financial resources will be invested in the key areas of rural revitalization, including enhancing financial support for safeguarding food security by increasing credit support to major grain-producing regions, enhancing financial services for high-standard farmland and water conservancy projects and strengthening financial support for the development of agriculture's new quality productive forces. To help consolidate and expand the achievements of poverty alleviation, the level of credit support will be maintained for previously impoverished regions.

Meantime, efforts should be made to come up with a new financial support mechanism for such regions after the transitional period following their success in poverty alleviation, according to the guideline. Financial services will be strengthened to promote wealth-creating industries in rural regions by broadening collateral options and offering innovative financing models and financial products. Through financing methods such as loan-equity combination and syndicated loans, diversified financing solutions will be provided to support the extension of infrastructure and public services to rural areas, and promote the integrated development of urban and rural areas as well as new urbanization in counties. Furthermore, enhanced financial services will be provided for promoting the in-depth integration of agriculture, culture and tourism and empowering the development of digital villages, according to the guideline.

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China Releases New E-bike Safety Standards Enforcement Guidelines

China has issued a set of guidelines ensuring the effective implementation of new mandatory national safety standards for electric bicycles (e-bikes), in an effort to improve regulation of this sector. The document, released by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT), the Ministry of Public Security, the State Administration for Market Regulation, and the National Fire and Rescue Administration, outlines comprehensive measures which apply across the industry chain. There will be stricter oversight ranging from manufacturing to sales and registration, as well as the replacement of outdated vehicles, according to the guidelines. This move comes amid growing safety concerns over substandard e-bikes and unauthorized modifications, stoked by incidents involving e-bike fires and traffic accidents in recent years -- which were often linked to illegal retrofitting that can make e-bikes exceed speed limits.

To address these risks, China has already launched campaigns targeting safety hazards, while the new national standards will take effect on September 1. Preliminary results have indicated positive progress. In the first half of 2025, the country recorded 7,048 e-bike-related fire incidents, a 44.7-percent decrease compared to the same period last year. According to the MIIT, these guidelines aim to help manufacturers deliver compliant products to the market more quickly and accelerate the phasing out of non-conforming inventory. Efforts, notably, will be made to reinforce quality supervision endeavors and crack down on the production of non-compliant vehicles and illegal retrofitting. Meanwhile, China will continue to offer subsidies aimed at encouraging consumers to replace outdated e-bikes. So far this year, nearly 9.06 million new e-bikes have been sold nationwide via the government trade-in program.

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China Seeks Public Opinion on Draft Amendment to Pricing Law

China's authorities on Thursday released a draft amendment to the pricing law to solicit public opinion. The public can log on to the official website of the National Development and Reform Commission or the website of the State Administration for Market Regulation to share their views or submit proposals until Aug. 23. The draft amendment consists of 10 provisions, further clarifying the standards for identifying unfair pricing practices and specifying the legal responsibilities for price-related violations. The move is also expected to address the rat race competition. For instance, the draft amendment states that market operators must refrain from engaging in illegitimate pricing practices, such as predatory pricing by selling below cost to eliminate competitors or monopolize the market. Practices such as utilizing influence and industry advantages to impose or bundle the sale of goods are also regarded as illegitimate, according to the draft amendment. The pricing law was promulgated in December 1997 and took effect in May 1998.

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Breaking New Ground in China's Reform, Development

As global growth falters and geopolitical tensions roil markets, China is doubling down on reforms to drive high-quality development and provide much-needed stability to the world. By further deepening reforms spearheaded by President Xi Jinping, China is opening up new prospects for modernization, building on decades of reform and opening-up efforts that have resulted in remarkable economic growth and global influence. "We draw impetus from reform, leveraging reform to stimulate vitality and consolidate strength," said Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission. One year ago, a pivotal CPC plenum laid out the reform roadmap for the following five years. Over the past year, steady progress regarding these reforms has enabled China to navigate economic headwinds with greater stability and resilience.

PROPELLING ECONOMY AGAINST HEADWINDS

Since the third plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee in July 2024, which unveiled more than 300 major reform initiatives, advancing reform has remained a central focus for Xi. During key meetings and domestic inspections, he has consistently made instructions on reform-related issues, covering major principles, critical reform measures and their implementation. Just weeks after this key plenum, the Central Commission for Deepening Overall Reform, which Xi heads, held a meeting to formulate detailed plans to push forward the reform agenda, specifying expected outcomes, timelines and division of responsibilities for the reform initiatives. At a central Party school study session in October last year, Xi urged officials to confront challenges head-on, eradicate deep-rooted problems resolutely, address risks and difficulties with courage, and strive to "break new ground in reform and development."

During his first domestic inspection after the plenum, Xi stressed the need to "take further deepening reform comprehensively as a driving force" while chairing a seminar in Lanzhou, capital city of northwest China's Gansu Province. One month later, in east China's Fujian Province, Xi called for focusing on key areas and crucial segments, ensuring that reform of the economic system takes the lead in promoting development, while continuing to boldly experiment and independently reform. Over the past year, he has visited more than 10 provincial regions across China -- tailoring reform guidance to each region's specific circumstances, as part of the country's broader modernization drive. In southwest China's Guizhou Province, Xi called on the province to actively integrate itself into the building of a unified national market. In Shanghai in east China, he urged accelerated efforts to develop a globally influential sci-tech innovation hub.

During his visit to central China's Henan Province, Xi demanded continued efforts to strengthen the real economy. This targeted approach has prompted China's provincial regions to leverage their competitive advantages while adapting national reform priorities to local conditions -- with each region assuming distinct roles in propelling the country's overall reform agenda forward. In the course of the past year, China has rolled out an array of well-timed, innovative policy measures to address economic challenges. The country has innovated on the policy front to bolster domestic demand, issuing ultra-long special treasury bonds to support large-scale equipment upgrades and consumer goods trade-ins, as well as implementation of major national strategies and security capacity building in key areas. Reform measures were also unveiled in China's quest to improve its business environment, which Xi believes directly correlates with development vitality.

The Private Sector Promotion Law, the country's first fundamental law dedicated to promoting the private sector, came into effect in May 2025, while new guidelines for building a unified national market were put in place to dismantle market barriers. Xi's visits to research institutes, science parks, manufacturing firms and industrial zones have underscored his push to integrate scientific and technological innovation with industrial development -- and to translate research achievements into real productivity. Reflecting the dividends of reform, China's economy grew by 5.3 percent year on year in the first half of 2025, up from a 5-percent increase in 2024.

Major indicators exceeded expectations, with steady progress seen in innovation-driven development and further opening up.

FROM TOP-LEVEL DESIGN TO GRASSROOTS IMPACT

As China begins charting its next five-year development plan, policy analysts view the blueprint not only as a roadmap for economic development but also as a bold reform agenda. In late April this year, Xi convened a meeting in Shanghai to set the tone for the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030). Aligning it with the country's broader reform drive, Xi called for a steadfast expansion of high-standard opening up and faster progress in building a new development dynamic. This reform effort rests on a long-standing foundation, which sees the Party firmly at the center. A hallmark of China's reform playbook since the late 1970s, the overall leadership of the CPC serves as the key to the success of China's reform agenda. "No matter what we reform, or how far the reform goes, the Party's leadership must be upheld," Xi emphasized.

To reinforce this leadership role, Xi in late June chaired another meeting that reviewed new regulations governing how the Party's decision-making and coordination bodies are formed and operate. Such bodies have been instrumental in ensuring CPC leadership of reforms across a wide range of areas. As institutional mechanisms are strengthened, some major reforms are now being codified into law, allowing proven practices to offer long-term guidance for governance. China has long emphasized a people-centered approach to reform, framing progress not just in terms of growth or governance, but in terms of how it improves the daily lives of the Chinese people. "Reform only matters when it serves the people and reform only advances when it relies on the people," Xi has said, positioning the Party's reform priorities as a response to people's needs.

Urbanization, household registration reform and the renewal of dilapidated urban neighborhoods have all figured prominently among his concerns. In January 2025, just before the Chinese New Year, Xi visited a refurbished residential compound in Shenyang, capital of northeast China's Liaoning Province, which is an old industrial city, to check on the progress of a massive renovation project there. Notably, such neighborhood overhauls are not only about improving living conditions -- but also about supporting sustainable urban development. During the visit, Xi called for reform efforts to further zero in on real-world problems, highlight key areas and tackle persistent challenges. Over the past year, China unveiled a five-year action plan to advance a people-centered new type of urbanization, listing 19 initiatives closely tied to everyday life.

These include deepening reforms of the household registration system, boosting intercity commuting efficiency and renovating aging urban neighborhoods. The government has also rolled out reforms in education, elder care and youth employment, while expanding access to affordable childcare. One of the most consequential steps came last year, when officials announced a gradual increase in the statutory retirement age -- introducing voluntary and flexible measures to address the challenges posed by the country's aging population. Observers have said that such reforms have addressed the most pressing demands of ordinary people and ensured that the fruits of development are shared more broadly and equitably.

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JAPAN: Starting FY 2025 Minimum Wage Talks

Japan's labor ministry held an advisory panel meeting on Friday to kick off talks to draw up guidelines for each prefecture to raise its minimum wage for fiscal 2025. Currently, the country's average minimum hourly wage is 1,055 yen, following a record increase of 51 yen, or 2.1 pct, in fiscal 2024. Amid rising food and other prices, a focal point is whether even a higher minimum wage increase will be realized. The fiscal 2025 guidelines are expected to be released around the end of this month, and each prefecture will implement its new minimum wage around October. The advisory panel is expected to hold discussions based on consumer price and other data. In May, the broader consumer price index rose 4 pct from a year earlier, with food prices surging over 6 pct. Meanwhile, the national average minimum wage needs to rise 7.3 pct each year to reach the government's target of 1,500 yen by the end of the 2020s.

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Japan Unveils Space Domain Defense Guidelines

Japan's Defense Ministry on Monday unveiled guidelines aimed at enhancing the country's defense capabilities in the space domain through cooperation between the public and private sectors. "It's an urgent task to utilize outer space using rapidly developing private technology," Defense Minister Gen Nakatani told reporters after a visit to the Air Self-Defense Force's space situation awareness radar in Sanyoonoda, Yamaguchi Prefecture, western Japan. The guidelines outline the need to build capabilities for the real-time detection and tracking of adversarial ships and troops from space to quickly assess war situations. They also highlight the necessity of protecting SDF satellites from Chinese and Russian killer satellites. In 2022, the government announced plans to rename the ASDF as the Aerospace SDF to bolster its space operations capabilities.

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Japan Releases Guidelines for IT Giants on Smartphone Apps

The Japan Fair Trade Commission on Tuesday released guidelines for information technology giants, such as Google LLC and Apple Inc., regarding smartphone apps, ahead of the full implementation in December of a new law to promote competition in the app market. The guidelines prohibit these companies from using data obtained through their operating systems to develop products with competitive advantages and hampering the use of other companies' payment systems in apps. They are also urged to allow customers to choose from among multiple search engines when buying new devices. The law, which will take full effect on Dec.18, covers smartphones using the operating systems of Apple and Google and bans excluding other companies' app stores from the platforms. It also requires OS functions necessary for developing apps to be made openly available. To draw up the guidelines, the commission accepted public comments until June 13. Apple voiced concern that the law could force it to share confidential technology and user information with third parties.

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Japan Sets Guidelines Targeting Tech Giants Dominating App Market

Japan's antitrust watchdog has announced guidelines under a new law to regulate monopolistic practices in the smartphone app market, mainly targeting U.S. tech giants Apple Inc and Google LLC. The core of the guidelines issued by the Japan Fair Trade Commission is a ban on discriminatory treatment of app stores not operated by the two platform companies. If more app stores compete and lower the commissions they charge developers, app prices for users could also fall, analysts said. Apple and Google account for over 90 percent of Japan's smartphone operating system market. Currently, app purchases and usage fee payments are effectively limited to the official stores of the two firms, restricting competition in the industry. According to a private research company, Japan's domestic app market in 2024 was valued at about 2.4 trillion yen ($16.2 billion) from in-app purchases alone. Opposing the guidelines, Apple said the regulations not only undermine privacy and security but also force it to provide its technology and services to competitors free of charge, potentially creating new risks. In 2024, Japan's parliament enacted a law to regulate smartphone app stores with the aim of promoting easier market access for third-party developers, with the legislation scheduled to take full effect in December. The new law will require that app developers be given access to OS functions like voice calls and biometric authentication. Some functions, such as email, are now restricted from connecting with external devices like smartwatches. The guidelines, finalized after the commission solicited public comments between May and June, listed 100 specific examples of violations, including setting additional screening criteria for certain app stores.

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SOUTH KOREA: Lee Calls for Measures to Boost Consumption, Curb Inflation

President Lee Jae Myung on Tuesday called on the government to ramp up efforts to boost domestic consumption alongside universal cash handouts, while also ensuring inflation is kept in check. Lee made the remarks during a Cabinet meeting as the government began issuing cash handouts, called "consumption coupons," following the first round of applications accepted on Monday. The program offers a one-time payment of 150,000 won (US$108), with residents outside the greater Seoul area and low-income households eligible for payments of up to 450,000 won. "While consumption coupons provide some income support, the more fundamental goal is to stimulate consumption," Lee said. "I urge each ministry to prepare additional programs aimed at encouraging domestic consumption." Lee also warned against the risk of rising prices, calling on the government to implement measures to control inflation. "This may cause some inflationary pressure," he said. "But even when coupons weren't distributed, prices continued to rise unreasonably for various reasons. (The government) should respond swiftly and firmly in managing inflation."

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Gov't Vows Measures to Stabilize Supply Chains

South Korea's first vice finance minister instructed government officials to come up with measures to ensure stable supply chains Wednesday, amid the nearing deadline for trade negotiations with the United States. "Global supply chain risks are escalating due to various external factors, including major economies changing their trade policies and deepening geopolitical conflicts," Lee Hyoung-il said in an expert committee meeting to discuss economic security items, goods and services that are crucial to the national economy. "The ministry should conduct a thorough inspection to check for supply chain vulnerabilities and preemptively come up with countermeasures," he added. Possible revisions to the country's list of "economic security items" were also discussed, the ministry said in a press release. As of last year, 300 items have been put on the list to ensure their stable supply. The items include materials used in manufacturing, defense, cybersecurity and other sectors closely linked to the everyday lives of people. The list is reviewed every year.

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MONGOLIA: Economic Forum 2025 Government Commits to Investor-Friendly Policies and Economic Diversificatio

The Mongolia Economic Forum 2025 is being held on July 8-9, 2025, under the theme “Together for Tomorrow.” Organized annually since 2010, the two-day forum serves as a key platform to address pressing issues related to Mongolia’s economic and social development and to identify possible solutions. Each year, the forum is held under a different theme. In 2022, it was conducted under the theme “New Recovery Policy,” while in 2023, under the name “Regional Development Mongolian Economic Forum,” where discussions centered around the regional development policy, investment allocation, and budget efficiency. This year, the agenda focuses on topics such as urban planning, urban economy, foreign direct investment, emerging opportunities and risks, critical minerals, and supply chain. More than three thousand delegates are participating in the event, including policymakers, foreign and domestic investors, representatives of businesses, and international organizations. According to organizers, the forum aims to address critical questions, such as how to prevent economic downturns, adapt to changes in global trade, encourage investment, and protect the rights of investors.

Prime Minister of Mongolia Zandanshatar Gombojav opened the forum, presenting the Government policies, the progress of major investment and infrastructure projects, and short- and mid-term goals, including the goal to become an energy-exporting country within the next five years. The Prime Minister stated, “The Government aims to diversify the economy and double GDP within the next decade. Mongolia ranks among the top ten countries globally in terms of natural resources and is rich in rare earth elements. We are ready to support open, mutually beneficial, and trustworthy investment and implement sound mining policies. Mongolia must become a country that welcomes investors and upholds trust, not one that discourages them. Only when investors themselves declare that Mongolia is an investor-friendly country can we say that we have created a healthy business environment. The new Cabinet will place specific focus not only on mining but also on developing agriculture, renewable energy, and tourism. We will also accelerate the digital transformation to ensure prompt and transparent public services to citizens and businesses.”

Director General of the Investment Policy Department at the Ministry of Economy and Development of Mongolia, Anar Bat-Ireedui, noted that "The Ministry is working on attracting and protecting investment, improving the business environment, and diversifying the economy and exports. Negotiations on trade agreements are ongoing with Japan and the Eurasian Economic Union in pursuit of economic diversification. In his keynote address, Prime Minister Zandanshatar Gombojav stated that future investments will be carried out through public-private partnerships and proposed implementing mining and non-mining mega projects based on private investment. This indicates that the Government will continue to pursue its policy consistently. The 100-Day Government Action Plan includes the submission of key draft laws aimed at improving the investment and business environment, such as draft laws on investment, public-private partnership, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and green finance. The Ministry is currently formulating this law package. "
On the second day, the Mongolia Economic Forum 2025 continues with discussions under the themes “Sustainable Development and the New Economy,” “Digital Era,

Artificial Intelligence and Data Infrastructure," and "Renewable Energy: Challenges and Solutions."

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Easing Regulation on Franchising Businesses

Indonesia has eased registration requirements for companies seeking to franchise their businesses, aiming to streamline the process. The modified rules are stipulated in the 2025 Ministerial Regulation No. 25 on Procedures for Issuing Franchise Registration Certificates by Local Administrations. At a press conference here on Monday, the country's Trade Minister Budi Santoso said those franchising businesses that have registered for a permit and obtained the registration certificates will be eligible to operate in any region, despite no confirmations from local administrations within five working days. Santoso explained that the modified rules were prompted after the ministry found out that the issuance of registration certificates by each regional government often took a long time, potentially hindering business operations across the country. Prior to the easing, local administrations had authority in issuing the certificates.

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Indonesia to Roll Out New Stimulus Packages to Boost Consumption

The Indonesian government will introduce new economic stimulus packages in the third quarter to strengthen people's purchasing power, a senior official said on Wednesday. Haryo Limanseto, spokesperson for the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs, said that the upcoming program is the continuation of stimulus packages previously launched from June to July. "The new policy is still being drafted, and it will likely be finalized this week," Haryo told reporters, adding that discussions on the details of the program are currently underway. The Indonesian government had rolled out various stimulus measures during the June-July period, aiming to support household spending and stimulate domestic consumption, particularly during the school holiday season.

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CAMBODIA: Approving Investment Projects Worth 5.8 Bln USD in H1, Up 77 Pct

Cambodia attracted fixed-asset investment of 5.8 billion U.S. dollars in the first half of

2025, a year-on-year increase of 77 percent, said a Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC) report released on Monday. The Southeast Asian nation approved 373 investment projects during the January-June period this year, up 96 percent from 190 projects in the same period last year, creating approximately 255,000 jobs, the CDC said. Major projects included an auto garage equipment factory, a car assembly plant, car tire plants, an electric three-wheeler assembly plant, solar power plants, a solar panel plant, wind power stations, a hydroelectric plant, metal and aluminum processing plants, a dry port, and tourism resorts. China was still the top foreign investor in the kingdom, the CDC said, adding that other key foreign investors were from Singapore, Vietnam, the United Kingdom, the United States, Samoa, and South Korea. Ministry of Commerce's Secretary of State and Spokesperson Penn Sovicheat said the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement and Cambodia's bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) with China, South Korea, and the United Arab Emirates are major factors in attracting foreign direct investment. "These FTAs are magnets for foreign investors to Cambodia," he told Xinhua. "New investments will bring new capital, technologies and job opportunities for Cambodian people."

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Cambodia Launches Cash Subsidy Program for Pregnant Prisoners

Cambodia on Wednesday launched a cash assistance program for pregnant prisoners and children under the age of two living with their mothers in prison. Chea Somethy, minister of social affairs, veterans and youth rehabilitation, said the cash support program aimed at enhancing the pregnant prisoners' well-being and combating child malnutrition in prison. "The program will enhance the physical and mental well-being of imprisoned mothers and their infants and address nutritional deficiencies in children who were born and raised in prison," he said at the launch event. Women's Affairs Minister Ing Kantha Phavi said the program truly reflected the government's attention to jailed pregnant women and children under the age of two. She added that the government, through the Social Protection Fund, will cover the costs of health check-ups and vaccinations to improve the well-being of pregnant prisoners and children under the age of two living with their incarcerated mothers. Under the program, the aid package is divided into three phases. In phase one, expectant mothers will get 80,000 riel (20 U.S. dollars) per prenatal check-up, up to a maximum of four times. In phase two, a one-time delivery assistance will be provided. One child delivery receives 100 dollars, twins 150 dollars, and triplets 200 dollars. In phase three, for post-natal care, mothers will receive 20 dollars per check-up and their child's vaccination, up to 10 times, including three times for the mother's postnatal health checks and seven times for child immunizations up to the age of two.

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Cambodia Amends Constitution, Paving Way for Creating Legal Framework on Citizenship Revocation

The National Assembly of Cambodia on Friday amended the country's constitution, allowing the government to create a legal framework to revoke Cambodian citizenship from any individuals who conspire with foreign countries to destroy national interests. A total of all 125 lawmakers, including Prime Minister Hun Manet, unanimously approved the amendment to Article 33 of the Constitution, allowing the citizenship of Cambodian citizens who collude with foreign countries to be revoked. The amendment to the constitution came after some self-exiled opposition figures criticized the government over current border issues with Thailand.

From https://english.news.cn/ 07/11/2025

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Cambodia to Enforce Law on Compulsory Military Service from 2026

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet said here on Monday that the Southeast Asian country will enforce the Law on Compulsory Military Service, starting from 2026. The law was promulgated on Dec. 22, 2006, aiming at building the armed forces, but it has not been enforced in practice. "From 2026 onwards, the Law on Compulsory Military Service will be enforced," Hun Manet said in a speech during the celebration of the 32nd founding anniversary of the National Military Police held at a training center in central Kampong Chhnang province. "The military conscription law will help us increase the number of soldiers, reinforcing our army," he said. Under the Law on Compulsory Military Service, all Cambodian male citizens between 18 and 30 years old are obliged to register for and fulfill military service for 18 months. However, Hun Manet said the 18-month mandatory training period will be increased to 24 months.

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MYANMAR: To Implement Development Projects in 458 Villages in FY2025-26

Myanmar's Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development has been planning to implement development projects in 458 villages during the 2025-26 fiscal year, with a budget of 6.87 billion kyats (about 3.27 million U.S. dollars), the state-owned Myanmar Radio and Television reported on Friday. The villages will be selected based on factors such as transportation, security situation, the report said. Since the 2015-16 fiscal year, the ministry has implemented development projects in more than 19,000 villages, it said. There are over 63,000 villages across Myanmar, with development projects carried out in over 30 percent, it added.

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MALAYSIA: To Start Enforcement of New Minimum Wage Policy on Aug. 1

The Malaysian government will begin enforcement of its minimum wage policy starting Aug. 1, the Human Resources Ministry said. The government had raised the minimum wage from 1,500 ringgit (354.8 U.S. dollars) per month to 1,700 ringgit starting Feb. 1, with an adjustment period, the ministry said in a statement. "Without exception, all employers, including those who previously benefited from the deferment period, must comply with monthly minimum wage order," the statement said. The ministry also urged employers to review their company's wage structure and progressively adjust operations by focusing on productivity enhancement and employee skills training. (1 ringgit equals 0.24 U.S. dollars)

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Malaysian PM Announces Measures to Mitigate High Cost of Living

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim announced on Wednesday several measures to provide relief for Malaysians grappling with the high cost of living in the country. Among the measures are a one-off cash payment of 100 ringgit (23.6 U.S. dollars) for every Malaysian citizen, a deferment on the toll rate increases on 10 highways to allow the public to continue paying existing rates, and the lowering of the price of the RON95-grade petrol via a subsidy scheme that will be implemented in September, Anwar said in a televised message. Anwar said the cost of living remains a pressing challenge that must be addressed wisely and urgently. He added that while overall inflation in June 2025 dropped to 1.1 percent, the lowest in 52 months, food and beverage prices continue to rise above the national average.

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PHILIPPINES: President Orders Review of Flood Control Projects in Wake of Severe Flooding

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Monday ordered a review of flood control projects built over the past three years, following recent flooding caused by consecutive tropical storms and the enhanced southwest monsoon. In his 4th State of the Nation Address, Marcos ordered the Department of Public Works and Highways to submit a comprehensive list of all flood control projects in the last three years. The list will be examined by the regional project monitoring committee that will report "those that have been failures, those that were not finished, and those that are alleged to be ghost projects," Marcos said. Marcos said the list will be published for public scrutiny. "At the same time, there will be an audit and performance review regarding these projects to check and make sure and to know how your money was spent." Marcos said he has personally seen the sloppy flood control projects, and in some cases, even failed projects, when he visited and inspected the communities hit by flooding. "Let's stop pretending. The public is aware that there was racketeering involved in these projects, so to those who conspired to take the public funds and to rob the future of our citizens, you should be ashamed," he said, vowing to hold all responsible parties accountable. An average of 20 typhoons lash the Philippines yearly. The archipelago is prone to tropical cyclones, which trigger heavy rains, flooding, and strong winds, resulting in casualties and destruction of crops and properties.

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SINGAPORE: New Anti-Scam Law Empowers Police to Restrict Suspected Victims' Bank Access

A new anti-scam law that took effect on Tuesday allows Singapore police to issue restriction orders instructing banks to temporarily block the banking and credit facilities of individuals believed to be under the influence of ongoing scams. The Protection from Scams Act 2025, which was passed by the parliament in January, provides that such orders may be issued only as "a last resort," after other attempts to convince the individual have failed, according to a statement from the Ministry of Home Affairs. Once an order is in effect, individuals will still be able to access their funds for legitimate needs such as daily expenses and bill payments, subject to police approval on a case-by-case basis. Each restriction order is valid for up to 30 days and may be extended for the same duration up to five times, if necessary. In a wrap-up speech during the bill's second reading in January, then Minister of State for Home Affairs Sun Xueling said the law aims to strike a balance between protecting individuals from harm and respecting their personal autonomy and responsibility. She added that restriction orders will automatically lapse after the final renewal, even if the individual remains intent on sending funds to a scammer. Sun also noted that scam victims who require emotional support during the process may notify the investigating officer, who will help arrange for them to speak with a victim care officer.

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THAILAND: Unveiling Quality-First Strategy to Drive Sustainable Tourism

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) announced its 2026 direction on Monday, highlighting a quality-first strategy in a move toward sustainable and balanced growth in the Southeast Asian country's vital tourism sector. In his keynote address, Minister of Tourism and Sports Sorawong Thienthong said the government has allocated a 4.5 billion baht budget (about 139.5 million U.S. dollars) to drive 22 strategic initiatives in response to the changing tourism landscape based on a forward-looking framework of five new paradigms. With a focus on new customers, products, partnerships, marketing strategies, and key performance indicators, the goal is to enhance trust, safety, and accessibility, develop sport tourism, promote hidden destinations, and leverage Thai soft power and cultural identity, Sorawong said. TAT Governor Thapanee Kiatphaibool said next year will mark the beginning of a fundamental shift from volume-driven tourism to quality-based growth. Thapanee said that this approach will prioritize value over volume, using precision marketing and promoting cultural experiences, balancing tourism across regions and seasons, encouraging creative and thematic travel, and making sustainability a key standard for the entire industry. Thailand has received over 18.08 million foreign visitors, generating 1.4 trillion baht (about 43.44 billion dollars) in revenue so far this year, official data showed.

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South Asia

INDIA: Ministry of Youth Affairs and Digital India Corporation Sign MoU for MY Bharat 2.0

In order to empower digital empowerment among the nation’s youth, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Digital India Corporation (DIC), under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, for the development of MY Bharat 2.0. The MoU was formalised in New Delhi on June 30, 2025, in the presence of Union Ministers Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya and Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw. The enhanced MY Bharat 2.0 platform is envisioned as a cutting-edge national digital gateway for youth engagement, aligning with the larger vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. The upgraded platform will leverage emerging technologies to empower India’s ‘Amrit Peedhi’—the vibrant youth population that constitutes 65% of the country’s demographic profile. Union Minister Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya emphasised the strategic importance of the youth, stating, “India’s greatest strength and opportunity lie in its youth. MY Bharat 2.0 will harness their potential and channel it toward nation-building.” Echoing the sentiment, Union Minister Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw highlighted the transformative power of public digital infrastructure. “Just like UPI and DigiLocker, MY Bharat 2.0 aims to scale with purpose and impact with speed,” he said. The upgraded platform will be rebuilt on a modular architecture to ensure flexibility, scalability, and future-readiness. A fully functional mobile application for Android and iOS users will also be introduced to ensure accessibility across digital touchpoints. With over 1.76

crore youth and 1.19 lakh organisations already registered, the platform is poised for significant expansion.

Key AI-powered features such as a Smart CV Builder, personalized Digital Profiles, AI Chatbots, voice-assisted navigation, and speech-to-text functionalities will redefine user experience. The platform will also include WhatsApp integration for real-time interaction and geo-tagging tools for localized discovery of opportunities. Dedicated sections within MY Bharat 2.0 will cater to career development and wellness, including the National Career Services, a Mentorship Hub, and the Fit India initiative. This holistic approach aims to promote personal growth, career readiness, and healthy living among the youth. Dr. Pallavi Jain Govil, Secretary, Department of Youth Affairs, noted, “The platform will drive value, aspiration, opportunity, learning, and community connection—all of which are central to youth engagement.” MY Bharat 2.0 will seamlessly integrate with national digital ecosystems such as Aadhaar, DigiLocker, Bhashini, and MyGov, while also ensuring data privacy and cybersecurity compliance. Backend infrastructure will be supported by training modules, MIS systems, cloud hosting, call centers, and communication tools. Shri Nand Kumarum, MD & CEO of Digital India Corporation, described the collaboration as “a model for digital governance that truly empowers future generations.” As India accelerates toward becoming a developed nation by 2047, MY Bharat 2.0 stands as a pivotal initiative combining governance, innovation, and youth-centric solutions. It represents a strategic investment in the country’s demographic dividend and a leap forward in making India’s youth the driving force of national transformation.

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Andhra Pradesh Launches ‘Digi-Lakshmi’ Scheme to Empower Urban Poor Women

In a major step toward digital inclusion and women-led entrepreneurship, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has launched the ‘Digi-Lakshmi’ scheme to establish 9,034 Common Service Centres (CSCs) across all Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). The initiative, announced through G.O. MS. No. 117 by S. Suresh Kumar, Principal Secretary, MA&UD, aims to digitally empower urban poor women and operationalize the government’s ‘One Family, One Entrepreneur’ (OF-OE) vision. These CSCs will be managed exclusively by eligible Self-Help Group (SHG) women, facilitating their transformation into Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Designed as standardized ‘ATOM Kiosks’, each centre will deliver around 250 public services. SHG women aged 21–40, with a graduate degree, a minimum of three years of active SHG membership, and adequate technical aptitude, are eligible to operate these centres.

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Karnataka to Launch State-Specific AI Mission, Announces Minister Priyank Kharge

Karnataka is planning an AI mission to address innovation, regulation, and employment challenges, to be part of the IT Policy 2025-2030 or a standalone initiative. Minister Priyank Kharge emphasizes regulatory sandboxes and investments to balance AI innovation with risks like deepfakes and financial frauds. An AI workforce impact study was launched on June 17 to analyze automation's effect on entry-level tech jobs, with the strategy to be finalized at the Bangalore Tech Summit in November. Karnataka is considering the introduction of a specific artificial intelligence (AI) mission specific to the state's needs, as it struggles to find its way through the rapidly evolving AI innovation, regulation, and employment landscape. State Electronics and IT Minister Priyank Kharge announced that talks are going on to determine if this AI mission must be included as part of the upcoming Karnataka IT Policy 2025-2030 or as an independent policy initiative. While the growth of AI adoption is gathering speed around the world, Karnataka, with India's biggest concentration of engineers, is at the juncture of challenge and opportunity. The minister realized the increasing complexity of the task of regulating a game-changing technology like AI, which is currently being applied across fields from healthcare to governance. While highlighting the tremendous potential of generative AI, he warned about the dangers it poses, such as the proliferation of deepfakes and AI-facilitated financial frauds. "It's very difficult to say that I will regulate AI now", Kharge said, emphasizing that a balanced and agile approach was necessary. He promoted the creation of regulatory sandboxes, in addition to more investments, incubators, and accelerators, so that innovation would not be suppressed and risks would be taken responsibly.

The government has already taken the first steps to comprehend the long-term effects of AI on the state's enormous IT industry. On June 17, it initiated an 'AI workforce impact study' to assess how automation and generative AI are affecting employment levels, especially at the entry level. Kharge said that AI was changing recruitment trends in the tech industry with the speed of junior-level hiring reducing sharply due to automation. Karnataka is not the only one to hail this mission. Other states like Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Odisha, Haryana, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Gujarat are launching their own AI-specific missions. These state missions are meant to drive AI-driven innovation, advance adoption in key sectors, and make public service delivery more efficient. As meetings are ongoing with industry players and think tanks, Karnataka will complete its strategy over the next few months. The new IT policy, which may be tied in with or complemented by a state-level AI mission, is scheduled to be launched at the Bangalore Tech Summit in November, marking the state's seriousness in charting the future of AI responsibly and strategically.

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Amit Shah Launches National Cooperative Policy 2025 for Grassroots Growth

Policy aims to establish at least one cooperative society in every village across India by 2047. Target to triple the sector’s GDP contribution and bring 500 million citizens into the cooperative fold. Cooperatives to expand into taxi services, insurance, green energy, and tourism with profit-sharing and tech-driven frameworks. Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Thursday launched the National Cooperative Policy 2025 in New Delhi, terming it a historic step that will ensure the achievement of Viksit Bharat by 2047. The policy will provide massive scale employment opportunities, allow inclusive growth, and integrate more than 500 million citizens into the cooperative space, with emphasis on villages, agriculture, rural women, Dalits, and tribals. Addressing the launch, Shah added that the mission of the policy is to encourage professional, transparent, tech-savvy, accountable, and economically independent cooperative units with the lofty aim of having at least one cooperative society per village. “This is a major step towards fulfilling Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision of ‘Sahkar Se Samriddhi’ (prosperity through cooperation),” Shah noted. He reminded the audience that India’s first national cooperative policy was launched in 2002 under the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, and now in 2025, the second policy has also come under a BJP-led government. With a decided goal of transforming India into the world's third-largest economy by 2027, Shah highlighted the importance of cooperatives in facilitating inclusive economic growth for 1.4 billion people. He further stated that the establishment of the Ministry of Cooperation in 2021 was a turning point and conformed to India's post-75th Independence vision.

The policy, according to Shah, is aimed at making cooperative institutions inclusive, future-oriented, and professionally managed and opening up humongous employment and livelihood opportunities, especially in rural India. By 2034, the policy hopes to:
Triple the cooperative sector's share of the GDP
Enroll 50 crore active members in the cooperative movement
Link youth with entrepreneurial and employment opportunities
In only four years, the cooperative sector has equaled the corporate sector in priority status, tax advantages, and access to development funds. Formerly a dying sector in 2020, it's now being recognized as a future-proof driver for inclusive growth," Shah insisted. The policy was developed by a 48-member national committee headed by ex-Union Minister Suresh Prabhu, and involves members from cooperative federations, societies from various sectors and states, concerned ministries, and academic specialists.

In the future, Shah declared that cooperatives will be ventured into new areas such as taxi services and insurance by the end of 2025, with straight profit-sharing models in favor of stakeholders such as drivers and small entrepreneurs. A grading system at the village level, on the basis of data analysis, has been launched to ensure equitable growth across states and sectors and avoid regional differences in cooperative development. No panchayat will be left behind," Shah said, confirming again that the roadmap is customized for 21st-century mid-century challenges, such as venturing into tourism, green energy, and other new sectors. Main objectives of the policy are:

A 30% rise in the number of cooperative societies across the country

Opening at least one cooperative in each village

Providing equal growth opportunities in all states through a graded, data-driven approach

Constructing member-led models that put the growth of the individual at the forefront of cooperative success

"The cooperative model is the only one that can propel bottom-to-top, inclusive development for all 1.4 billion Indians. It is a visionary, outcome-based policy for a new India," Shah concluded.

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AI Mission 2025 to 2030 Announced by Gujarat Chief Minister

Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendrabhai Patel has officially approved the state’s “Action Plan for Implementation of Artificial Intelligence 2025–2030,” marking a significant move towards leveraging artificial intelligence across key sectors of governance and public service. The initiative is poised to skill over 2.5 lakh individuals, including students, MSME professionals, and government staff, in AI technologies, machine learning, and data-driven innovation. The comprehensive five-year strategy was crafted following a reflective policy workshop held in late 2024. It is the result of an in-depth consultation by a dedicated 10-member task force, established to evaluate the role of AI in enhancing service delivery and improving decision-making processes in public administration. A central element of the plan is the establishment of a dedicated institutional mechanism, known as the AI and Deep Tech Mission. This mission will function as the primary agency for implementing AI-related policies, fostering collaboration between academic institutions, industry stakeholders, startups, and government departments. The roadmap is structured around five core pillars: Data Infrastructure – Establishing a secure, interoperable, and scalable data ecosystem that complies with governance and privacy standards. Digital Readiness – Strengthening technical infrastructure to support AI-based services across various departments. Workforce Development – Offering structured training programs to build capabilities in AI and related technologies for students, MSMEs, and public sector employees. Research and Innovation – Promoting academia–industry collaboration for joint research, development of indigenous technologies, and intellectual property creation. Startup Support – Encouraging the growth of AI-focused startups through funding, incubation, mentorship, and regulatory assistance. The action plan also outlines the introduction of AI into sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture, fintech, and civic governance. Potential applications include AI-assisted diagnostic tools, predictive learning platforms, precision agriculture advisories, and data-driven public policy design.

Training and upskilling initiatives under this plan are expected to prepare a future-ready workforce. Special focus will be placed on creating curriculum modules aligned with global AI standards, tailored skill certification, and fostering a culture of continuous learning across all participating sectors. The AI and Deep Tech Mission will also oversee pilot programs, establish implementation benchmarks, and ensure accountability in execution. By offering structured support to startups, the mission aims to create a thriving innovation ecosystem with Gujarat as a hub for responsible and inclusive AI development. This initiative aligns with Gujarat's broader digital transformation policies and underlines the state' s ambition to be a leader in AI adoption at the state level. With a clear governance framework, strong institutional backing, and measurable outcome targets, Gujarat is setting the stage for a future driven by intelligent automation and data-powered public service. The action plan is expected to achieve full rollout by 2030, with periodic evaluations to ensure that objectives are met efficiently and adaptively. Through this bold move, the state government aims to not only empower its institutions but also prepare its citizens for the technological advancements shaping tomorrow's world.

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SRI LANKA: GovPay Crosses 50 Organisations & Announces Plans for Future of Government Digital Payments

At a media conference held today, the Information Communication Technology Agency (ICTA), in collaboration with LankaPay and under the guidance of the Ministry of Digital Economy, showcased the growing success of GovPay, Sri Lanka's official Government Digital Payment Platform. The briefing also highlighted the pilot rollout of the online traffic fine payment system and marked the official launch of the revamped GovPay.lk website. Since its official launch by His Excellency the President on 7 February 2025, GovPay has rapidly scaled across the public sector. As of today, the platform has successfully onboarded over 50 government organisations, enabling around 700 active government services to be paid digitally. GovPay has processed 7024 transactions, collecting a total of Rs. 65.62 million in government revenue via seamless, secure digital payments. Speaking at the media conference, Eng. Eranga Weeraratne, Hon. Deputy Minister of Digital Economy, noted: "Reaching 50 organisations island wide is not just a milestone, it's a clear signal that GovPay is leading Sri Lanka's national drive toward building a cashless society. By digitizing government payments, we are making public services more accessibl's economy. This is more than a technological shift, it's a transformative step toward financial inclusion, transparency, and economic empowerment for all.” Dr. Hans Wijesuriya, Chief Advisor to the President on the Digital Economy and Chairperson of ICTA, emphasized: “GovPay represents a pivotal step in Sri Lanka’s journey toward a fully digitized economy, ensuring that every citizen can pay for government services with ease and convenience. GovPay is a highly scalable platform, and we are confident that the 50+ organisations connected will grow exponentially – leading to the establishment of an accessible and trusted digital ecosystem of nationwide scale.”

Harsha Purasinghe, Board Member of ICTA, added:“Reaching 50 organisations is a significant milestone, but our real journey begins now. Our immediate goal is to onboard 100+ government organisations within the next couple of months and drive massive citizen adoption of digital payments across these services. We are aiming for over a billion rupees in transaction value within the next 12 months — bringing unparalleled convenience to citizens, advancing Sri Lanka’s vision for a truly digital government, and contributing meaningfully towards the government’s ambition of achieving a USD 15 billion digital economy.” Among the top-performing institutions on the platform are the University of Moratuwa, Kotelawala Defence University, Department of Technical Education and Training, and the Apeksha Cancer Hospital, each reflecting high transaction volumes and user trust. In parallel, ICTA also announced promising progress on the online traffic fine payment system, a real-time traffic fine issuance and payment system. Launched as a pilot in April 2025 across selected police divisions, the system has already processed 461 digital transactions, collecting over Rs. 739,500. The pilot is currently active in locations including Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Dambulla, Kekirawa, and surrounding divisions.

Channa De Silva, CEO of LankaPay, also announced: “GovPay is a citizen-centric digital payment service enabling the government to collect revenue efficiently while providing greater convenience to citizens. This service will be further enhanced soon by bringing in card payment option in addition to the current account-based payments. With this newest feature, GovPay will become more accessible and flexible to citizens by allowing them to make payments even from overseas using their credit/debit cards. LankaPay is proud to be the technology partner for this groundbreaking initiative, which is expected to grow to over 150 government organizations by the end of the year.” Adding to the vision, Sanjay Karunasena, Acting CEO of ICTA, stated: “GovPay marks the first step toward establishing a secure, scalable, and interoperable Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for payments in Sri Lanka. The envisioned Payment DPI will operate as an open-loop system, supporting multi-network participation. Our vision is to streamline government transactions while fostering private sector innovation, encouraging market competition, and ensuring vendor neutrality.” ICTA also unveiled the revamped GovPay.lk website at the media briefing, which now includes an enhanced user interface and real-time dashboards for better visibility of transaction volumes and institutional performance. ICTA and the Ministry of Digital Economy urged all government institutions to integrate with GovPay to improve service delivery, increase transparency, and reduce operational burdens. Institutions are encouraged to nominate a focal point and begin onboarding immediately. Citizens are also encouraged to make their government payments through the GovPay platform via Banks or FinTech Apps, where services are now available 24/7 with a secure and simple process — designed to bring convenience and accountability to everyday transactions. “Together, ICTA, LankaPay, and the Ministry of Digital Economy remain committed to building a more inclusive digital economy and ensuring that every citizen experiences the benefits of Sri Lanka’s digital transformation.”

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Setting Ambitious Target for Industry 4.0 Readiness by 2028

The goal is to ensure that more enterprises benefit from the Industry 4.0 Readiness Program by the year 2028, said the Azerbaijani Minister of Economy, Mikayil Jabbarov, Trend reports. Addressing the Industry 4.0 Forum - Industry of the Future: Technology and Human Power in Baku, Jabbarov stated that last year the Industry 4.0 Readiness Program, led by the Azerbaijan Center for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (C4IR Azerbaijan), was implemented in pilot phase at several private companies. “The primary aim of the program is to stimulate the adoption of advanced technologies with state support and, as a result, increase business efficiency and competitiveness. This year, we plan to expand the scope of the program and involve more participating enterprises. The goal is to ensure that even more businesses can benefit from these opportunities by 2028. I invite industrial and manufacturing-oriented enterprises participating in the forum to learn more about the program and submit their applications through the official website ‘industry4.az’,” the minister said.

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Azerbaijani Government Considers New Legal Framework for Innovation, Minister Says

The Azerbaijani government is reviewing a draft law aimed at accelerating innovation and strengthening the country's competitiveness through advanced technology, said Minister of Economy, Mikayil Jabbarov, Trend reports. Speaking at the Industry 4.0 Forum – Industry of the Future: Technology and Human Power held in Baku, Jabbarov noted that the proposed legislation, titled "On Innovation Activity," seeks to build the ecosystem necessary for the rapid development and adoption of new technologies. Jabbarov said the initiative is part of a broader Digital Economy

Development Strategy, designed to align Azerbaijan's economic transformation with global technology trends. The strategy aims to foster collaboration between government, business, and society. "The world has already entered the fourth industrial revolution. Artificial intelligence, big data, robotics, the internet of things, and cloud technologies are no longer just technical innovations—they are reshaping economic growth models. These challenges are also highly relevant for our country. In recent years, steps taken in this direction — such as the establishment of industrial and technology parks, the inclusion of the digital economy as a core area in the country's socio-economic strategy, the launch of the C4IR [Center for the Fourth Industrial Revolution] Azerbaijan Center, and various digitalization initiatives are all part of this transformation," Jabbarov said.

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Azerbaijan Grants Local Status to Domestically Packaged Medicines Under Procurement Law

Pharmaceutical products and substances that undergo the packaging stage of production within the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan will be considered local goods for five years starting from June 1, 2025, Trend reports. This provision is reflected in an amendment to the presidential decree on the implementation of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Public Procurement," dated July 14, 2023, signed by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev. According to decree, such classification will allow these medicines to benefit from preferential treatment under public procurement rules in line with the national legislation.

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Azerbaijan Making Fresh Coat of Paint on Its Legal Framework in Artificial Land Investment

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, has signed a law introducing amendments to legislation governing investment activity on artificial land areas in Azerbaijan, Trend reports. The changes affect the civil, criminal, and administrative offenses codes, as well as several key laws, including those on information and its protection, state duty, advertising, licenses and permits, the prevention of money laundering and terrorist financing, and the creation of artificial land areas in the section of the Caspian Sea belonging to the Republic of Azerbaijan. As part of the amendments, the Cabinet of Ministers has been instructed to prepare proposals, within six months, for improving legal regulations concerning the organization and operation of casino games, taking into account leading international practices, and to submit them to the President of Azerbaijan. The head of state has also signed a decree ensuring the implementation of the adopted law.

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Azerbaijani Government Fixes State Dev't Program for Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, has signed a decree introducing changes to the State Program for the socio-economic development of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic for 2023-2027, Trend reports. The updated provisions designate several new implementing bodies responsible for various sectors of the program. Under the decree, the State Customs Committee will now be joined by the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport, the State Agency of Azerbaijan Automobile Roads (AAYDA), and Azerbaijan Railways CJSC in leading efforts to accelerate customs procedures and increase freight capacity at border checkpoints in Nakhchivan. The list of institutions tasked with developing various forms of tourism, such as winter, rural, and ecotourism, as well as preparing a comprehensive tourism atlas, has also been expanded. In addition to the State Tourism Agency, the Ministry of Science and Education will now contribute to this effort. Moreover, AAYDA has been integrated into the roster of principal stakeholders, in conjunction with the Cabinet of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic, for the advancement of transportation infrastructure within the region.

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Oceania

NEW ZEALAND: Commonsense Changes to Insulation Rules

Overly rigid insulation rules are being removed to ease costs for designers, builders and homeowners, Building and Construction Minister Chris Penk has announced. “I’ve heard clearly from the industry that the current one-size-fits-all approach to insulation requirements is needlessly driving-up costs. “The most prescriptive compliance pathway currently available for insulation – known as the Schedule Method – doesn’t allow for design trade-offs that can affect a home’s energy efficiency, like adjusting window size. “This has led to designers and homeowners having to over-insulate in certain areas to achieve Building Code compliance, offering little extra energy efficiency benefit at a significant cost. “To address this, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) will remove the current Schedule Method in favour of more flexible alternatives.

“Smarter online tools now let us take a balanced, whole-of-home approach to energy efficiency – enabling builders and designers to measure a home’s total heat loss instead of being locked into prescriptive requirements. “Using adaptable Calculation and Modelling Methods is shown to cut the cost of an average new build by up to $15,000. “The government will now work closely with the sector to ensure a smooth transition before the change takes effect. “The Schedule Method will be removed from the Building Code’s Acceptable Solutions and Verification Methods for Energy Efficiency by the end of the year, followed by a 12-month transition period to give the sector time to adjust. “I’ve also directed officials to explore designating the Far North as a separate climate zone under the Building Code, responding to calls from local leaders to ease insulation rules in the region.

“The Far North District Council made a strong case in its energy-efficiency review submission, highlighting that the region’s warmer climate and need for affordable housing allow for a more tailored approach.“ I’ve heard from the district council that building costs in the Far North are approaching $5,000 per square metre. They’re pushing for change to deliver more homes for locals at a reasonable price – an ambition I fully support.“ In my view, recognising Northland’s unique climate with a separate zone is a sensible step that could lower costs and unlock much-needed housing supply.“ MBIE will consult on any proposed changes to the region’s climate zone designation before final decisions are made, and I look forward to hearing feedback from the public. “This Government is committed to making commonsense changes and cutting construction red tape to make building easier and more affordable – putting more roofs over Kiwi heads, while ensuring those homes stay safe and dry for our families.”

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Strengthening Trespass Laws for Businesses

The Government is strengthening trespass laws to make them more effective and practical for businesses, Justice Minister Paul Goldsmith and Associate Justice Minister Nicole McKee say. “We know our trespass laws are no longer fit for purpose. They’re difficult to enforce and often criminals take no notice. They return with impunity and just continue to rob businesses of their livelihoods,” Mr Goldsmith says. “Our plan to restore law and order is working, but there’s still more work to be done. Trespass laws are an area we know will make a world of difference to the community. “Businesses need extra tools to better protect their properties, keep offenders away, and stop them from coming back.” The proposed changes to the Trespass Act are: Increasing the maximum trespass period from two years to three years. Allow businesses, such as franchises, to trespass individuals from multiple locations. Increase the maximum fine for anyone refusing to leave when asked, or returning when trespassed from $1,000 to $2,000. Increase the maximum fine for anyone refusing to give their name and address when requested, or giving false information, from $500 to $1,000. “For too long, offenders have treated trespass notices like a joke. These changes send a clear message: enough is enough. If you threaten retail workers or steal from businesses, don’t expect to walk back in like nothing happened,” Mrs McKee says. “Every New Zealander deserves to feel safe at work, especially our frontline retailers. These reforms aren’t just about fines and paperwork;

they are about making retail spaces safer and giving businesses the respect they deserve." "I want to thank Sunny Kaushal and the Retail MAG for engaging with retailers across the country and for their recommendations on how to modernise the Trespass Act, so it better upholds retailers' business and property rights, while keeping customers and staff safe," Mr Goldsmith says. "Our goal before the Bill is introduced is to explore how best to support retailers when distributing notices to those who refuse to engage."

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Government AI Strategy to Boost Productivity

Science, Innovation and Technology Minister Dr Shane Reti has launched New Zealand's first AI Strategy to boost productivity and grow a competitive economy. "AI could add $76 billion to our GDP by 2038, but we're falling behind other small, advanced economies on AI-readiness and many businesses are still not planning for the technology," says Dr Reti. "We must develop stronger Kiwi AI capabilities to drive economic growth, and this Strategy sends a strong signal that New Zealand supports the uptake of AI. "The Government's role in AI is to reduce barriers to adoption, provide clear regulatory guidance, and promote responsible AI adoption. "We're taking a light-touch approach, and the Strategy sets out a commitment to create an enabling regulatory environment that gives businesses confidence to invest in the technology. "Private sector AI adoption and innovation will boost productivity by unlocking new products and services, increasing efficiency, and supporting better decision-making. "New Zealand's strength lies in being smart adopters. From AI-powered precision farming techniques to diagnostic technology in healthcare, Kiwi businesses can tailor AI to solve our unique challenges and deliver world-leading solutions." The Strategy aligns with OECD AI Principles and the Government will continue to work with international partners on global rules to support the responsible use and development of AI. "New Zealanders will need to develop trust and give social licence to AI use, so the Government has also released Responsible AI Guidance to help businesses safely use, develop and innovate with the technology," says Dr Reti. The Government will use existing legislation and regulations such as privacy, consumer protection and human rights, to manage risk and privacy concerns.

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Feedback Sought on National Fuel Security Plan

The Coalition Government is seeking feedback on a draft Fuel Security Plan that provides a long-term strategy to ensure New Zealanders have reliable access to fuel in times of domestic and global disruption, Associate Energy Minister Shane Jones says. "As a small and remote island nation that imports nearly all of its liquid fuels, New Zealand is vulnerable to supply chain shocks beyond its borders," Mr Jones says. "The Government is seeking to improve our fuel resilience and protect our economic wellbeing so our people and businesses can continue to move, work, and grow. New Zealanders are invited to have their say on the plan." The plan builds on findings of the 2025 Fuel Security Study by focusing on four key areas: Strengthening resilience against global supply disruptions Enhancing domestic fuel infrastructure and emergency preparedness Supporting the development of domestic low-carbon fuel alternatives Managing fuel security during the transition to new energy technologies "Our recent decision to boost minimum fuel reserves and improve storage locations is prudent given the current global geopolitical environment. "Fuel security is not just an energy issue — it's an issue of economic and national resilience. The consequences of inaction are too great. The Fuel Security Plan was a key plank in the New Zealand First-National Coalition Agreement to safeguard our transport and logistics systems and emergency services from any international or domestic disruption," Mr Jones says.

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Employment Relations Amendment Bill Passes First Reading

Workplace Relations and Safety Minister Brooke van Velden welcomes the successful first reading of the Employment Relations Amendment Bill, calling it a major milestone in helping businesses employ and contract with confidence. The Employment Relations Amendment Bill will now be considered by the Education and Workforce Select Committee where people can have their say on the proposed changes. "This Bill reflects the Government's commitment to supporting New Zealand businesses and creating more and better opportunities for workers." The legislation delivers on key commitments from the ACT–National Coalition Agreement, including: Clarifying the distinction between employment and contracting arrangements, giving greater certainty to both businesses and workers.Simplifying the personal grievance process, including the introduction of an income threshold of $180,000, above which unjustified dismissal claims cannot be pursued. This Bill also proposes removing the 30-day rule, allowing employers and employees to negotiate mutually beneficial terms from the start of employment, reducing compliance burden and increasing flexibility. "I encourage all interested New Zealanders to have their say on the Bill, and I see the Select Committee process as an important way of strengthening the final Bill and making sure it works for a wide variety of working relationships and situations. "I am particularly interested in hearing feedback on whether the gateway test criteria are workable and whether the test covers a variety of genuine contracting relationships. I am also interested in hearing feedback on the high-income threshold for personal grievances, both from those who may use it as an employer and those who would be affected as a worker. "I am looking forward to hearing what New Zealanders have to say about the Bill during the Select Committee process," says Ms van Velden.

$120 Million Auckland School Property Growth Plan

The Government's investing more than $120 million into building more classrooms in Auckland, so thousands more students can learn in safe, warm and dry environments. "Auckland is booming, and we are stepping up by investing heavily in extra classrooms to support the city's rapid growth. Through Budget 25 funding, 137 new classrooms will be rolled out, creating space for an additional 3,014 student places in the network, supporting schools with growing rolls," Education Minister Erica Stanford says. "We're delivering these through a combination of cost-effective repeatable designs and offsite manufactured buildings, so our funding can go further and more students benefit. The schools getting classrooms are: Bucklands Beach Intermediate – 2 classrooms Helensville School – 1 classroom Kauri Flats School – 4 classrooms Lincoln Heights School – 6 classrooms Macleans College – 8 classrooms Massey High School – 8 classrooms Mission Heights Primary School – 6 classrooms Mountain View School – 6 classrooms Northcross Intermediate – 8 classrooms One Tree Hill College – 6 classrooms Orewa College – 12 classrooms Panama Road School – 4 classrooms Papakura Normal School – 10 classrooms (in addition to the two learning support classrooms already announced) Papatoetoe Central School – 4 classrooms Papatoetoe East School – 4 classrooms Papatoetoe Intermediate – 6 classrooms Papatoetoe South School – 6 classrooms Puhinui School – 2 classrooms Pukekohe North School – 4 classrooms Rangitoto College – 10 classrooms Te Kura o Pātiki Rosebank School – 4 classrooms Takanini School – 4 classrooms Tuakau College – 6 classrooms Whenuapai School – 6 classrooms

"All of these projects are expected to enter construction in the next 12 months. We are getting on with the job of future-proofing Auckland's school network to keep pace with population growth." "I am also thrilled to announce we have confirmed a site purchase in Pōkeno to build a new primary school. We will also establish a new Junior College in Chapel Downs, on the site of Chapel Downs Primary School." The school is due to open in Term 1, 2027, with an initial roll of up to 270 which is expected to grow to 1000 students over time. "Significant progress has also been made through Budget 24 property investment into two new schools. Te Kura Rau Iti in Flat Bush is in the final stages of construction and is set to open for Term 1, 2026. A new primary school in Massey Redhills is in construction and set to open in Term 1, 2027. "These new classrooms and schools are a fantastic boost for students, teachers, and the wider community. We will continue to drive efficiencies in school property delivery so more schools, communities and children benefit sooner," Ms Stanford says. "Auckland is a magnet for talent, with thousands of people moving to our largest city each year to build a better life for themselves and their families. Ensuring that our city has the services and infrastructure for growth is a priority for our Government," Minister for Auckland Simeon Brown says. "The Government's investment in new classrooms for our young learners will help Auckland accommodate growth, while also supporting construction sector jobs across the region."

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Secondary Legislation Access to Be Improved

A bill to make it easier to find and comply with the law and to digitise government services by improving access to secondary legislation has passed its first reading, Attorney-General Judith Collins says. "Secondary legislation includes regulations and many types of orders, rules, exemptions, bylaws, notices and instruments with many different names," Ms Collins says. "The Legislation Amendment Bill promotes high-quality legislation for New Zealand that is easy to find, use and understand. "Currently most secondary legislation is drafted and published by agencies and is difficult to access. In fact, no one knows how much there is, with estimates ranging from 7500-10,000 published by about 100 government and non-government agencies, plus every local authority. "Some is published on the agency's website, some is published in the New Zealand Gazette or in newspapers or, sometimes, it appears to not be publicly available at all.

"These variable publication arrangements undermine the rule of law, increase compliance costs, hamper digital government and impair scrutiny of delegated law-making powers." "The bill will standardise publication practices, making it a requirement that secondary legislation drafted by agencies is published on the agency website or another approved internet site." Alongside the Bill, the Parliamentary Counsel Office is redeveloping the official New Zealand legislation website using data collection technology to find, index and link agency-published secondary legislation and make it searchable from the website. A public demo of the new legislation website is available for users to test and already includes a lot of agency-published secondary legislation. "This will turn the website into a one-stop shop for legislation matters," Ms Collins says. "My vision is that the public will soon only need to visit one website to find all New Zealand legislation and related information."

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New Law to Support Safe, Responsible Space Use

Legislation regulating ground-based space infrastructure to deter foreign interference and protect New Zealand's national interests has passed all stages under urgency in Parliament, Space Minister Judith Collins says. "The Outer Space High Altitude Activities Amendment Bill is a significant milestone and enhances New Zealand's national security with immediate effect," Ms Collins says. "It supports New Zealand's interest in the safe, secure and responsible use of space and stop any attempts by foreign entities that do not share our values or interests. “Ground-based space infrastructure in New Zealand plays a vital role in supporting global satellite operations and space activities, but without regulation, it can also pose risks to national security, and other national interests. “The global space sector continues to push the boundaries of satellite technology, space communications and orbital operations. As this sector evolves, so too must our regulatory settings. “From 29 July, when the legislation takes effect, ground-based space infrastructure such as satellite tracking stations and telemetry systems will be subject to appropriate oversight and safeguards. “While all in-scope operators will be treated as having a transitional authorisation from the end of July, as the Minister for Space I will be able to vary, suspend or revoke these authorisations on national security grounds.” MBIE will be the administrator, backed with enforcement powers and able to take action to stop malicious activity. Regulations will be developed later this year setting out further requirements for ground-based space infrastructure authorisation, under which operators will need to implement security and due diligence systems. A transition period for operators to implement the necessary systems for successful registration will apply until the regulations come into force in the first half of next year. “This system helps maintain New Zealand’s reputation as a trusted and capable space-faring nation, one that takes its responsibilities seriously and is prepared to manage the risks and opportunities of space activity,” Ms Collins said.

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Overhauling Unsustainable Electoral Laws

The Government is overhauling outdated and unsustainable electoral laws including stopping same-day enrolment, Justice Minister Paul Goldsmith says. “Allowing late enrolments, however well intentioned, has placed too much strain on the system. The final vote count used to take two weeks, last election it took three. “If we leave things as they are, it could well take even longer in future elections. The 20-day timeframe for a final result will likely already be challenging to achieve at the next election without changes. “Therefore, the Government has agreed to close enrolment before advance voting begins. People will need to make sure they enrol or update their enrolment details by midnight on the Sunday, before advance voting opens on Monday morning. “This is a significant, but necessary change. The Electoral Commission will have plenty of time to run an education campaign to ensure people understand the new requirements. For Australia’s federal election earlier this year, the enrolment deadline was 26 days before election day. I have every confidence New Zealand can manage within the 13-day deadline. “We’ve also agreed to a range of other changes, including creating a new offence to strengthen the rules around treating near voting places. There has been some confusion in the past around what is and isn’t treating. This will make the rules crystal clear. “The donation threshold for reporting the names of party donors is also being adjusted from $5,000 to $6,000, to account for inflation."

Key changes include: Closing enrolment 13 days before election day to reduce pressure on post-election timeframes. Requiring 12 days of advance voting at each election. Introducing automatic enrolment updates so the Electoral Commission can update people's enrolment details using data from other government agencies. Enabling greater use of digital communication by removing postal requirements for enrolment. Creating a new offence that prohibits the provision of free food, drink or entertainment within 100 metres of a voting place while voting is taking place. It will be punishable by a fine of up to $10,000. Reinstating a total ban on prisoner voting. The Bill makes a wide range of other changes including: Enabling special vote processing to begin earlier. Increasing the Electoral Commission's board from three to up to seven members. Setting a single deadline for all candidate nominations. Changing party registration requirements and timeframes. Providing flexibility on the contact details that can be included in promoter statements. The Government is progressing a separate bill to amend the Constitution Act 1986 to ensure the continuity of executive government in the post-election period.

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Removeable Battery Regulations Revoked

The Government is revoking 2023 regulations requiring all vaping devices to have removeable batteries to resolve a current court challenge brought by Mason Corporation Limited. "Cabinet was advised that taking this step was the best way to resolve the case," Associate Health Minister Casey Costello says. "This decision means the proceedings, which relate to regulations brought in by the Labour government, can be withdrawn." The changes will be gazetted today and take effect from 1 September. From that date vaping devices will not be required to have a removeable battery. "It is not expected that the revocation will negatively impact our falling smoking or vaping rates," Ms Costello says. "This Government legislated to ban disposable vapes, which have been the most popular products among young people, and these are now off the market."

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Asia-Pacific

OECD Council Extends the Mandate of Secretary-General Mathias Cormann to 2031

The OECD Council has today decided to renew the mandate of OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann for a second and final 5-year term from 1 June 2026. The decision by Member consensus followed a process of consultations lead by the Dean of Ambassadors, the OECD Ambassador for Mexico Sybel Galván Gómez over the past two months. **"This decision reflects the strong and broad-based confidence that Members place in Mathias Cormann's leadership,"** said Ambassador Sybel Galván Gómez, who chaired a special session of the Council on Friday. **"Over the course of his first term, he has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the core mission of the OECD: promoting better policies for better lives. A few months after his arrival, Members adopted 'Trust in Global Co-operation: The vision for the OECD for the next decade', a framework that will continue to guide our work over these next six years." "I am grateful for the trust and confidence OECD Members have placed in me to continue to lead this great Organisation,"** Secretary-General Mathias Cormann said. **"The OECD is a unique, consensus-based organisation that brings together a community of countries around shared values, working together to develop evidence-based policy advice and standards to help deliver better outcomes and living standards for people around the world. I will give it my absolute best to help ensure that the OECD continues to deliver as a platform for the development of policy best practice and effective international cooperation,"** he said.

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Global Efforts on AI Governance Stressed

The need for international cooperation to govern artificial intelligence was highlighted at the 2025 World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) that concluded in Shanghai on Monday, as experts, scholars and industry insiders from home and abroad reached a consensus to advance coordination and tackle challenges together in AI governance. AI's borderless nature makes single-country governance insufficient to tackle global risks, potentially fueling international competition over rules, said experts. "Cross-border data flows face structural barriers amid balancing national security, privacy and commercial interests, making multilateral talks critical to finding common ground on AI's global challenges," said Jiang Zeting, Party secretary and chair of the university council of the China University of Political Science and Law (CUPL). The Global AI Governance Rules Map 2025 and the Global AI Governance Regulation Collaboration Research Platform, both research outputs by professors at CUPL, were launched during the conference. The map is an interactive platform that integrates multisource data — including legislation, cases, strategies and guidelines — into an interactive world map, breaking down isolated rules to enable visibility, connectivity and practical use. Covering areas like technology innovation, data security, culture and climate protection, the map updates new rules within 72 to 96 hours and includes translation and annotation. Available in

Chinese and international versions, it supports title or full-text searches and one-click filtering by authority, region or rule type.

Building on a domestic research network, the Global AI Governance Regulation Collaboration Research Platform has expanded internationally, establishing nodes across continents and engaging leading global experts. It aims to pool global wisdom for inclusive, consensus-based governance frameworks. A forum focusing on AI cooperation and development among BRICS countries was also held during the WAIC. Featuring deep discussions on global open-source ecosystems, industrial application innovation and governance frameworks, it aims to promote coordinated AI development across BRICS through joint achievements spanning academia, industry and application. The BRICS AI Industry Collaboration Network and International Artificial Intelligence Industry Alliance Global-Link were also launched at the event. The WAIC also saw efforts aimed at promoting open cooperation and technology sharing in AI among developing nations. A representative of the China Meteorological Administration donated "MAZU-Urban", a multihazard early warning smart system for urban applications, to representatives from Djibouti and Mongolia during the conference. This will enable the system, which integrates advanced algorithms and multisource data, to enhance early warning practices and disaster mitigation efforts internationally. Experts also discussed ways to bridge the AI divide for emerging markets and developing nations.

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World Bank Group Names New Head of Guarantee Business

The World Bank Group today announced the appointment of Tsutomu Yamamoto as Managing Director of the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), home of the World Bank Group Guarantee Platform. Yamamoto, a Japanese national, will join the agency from Mizuho Financial Group, where he is a Senior Managing Executive Officer and Head of the Global Transaction Banking Unit. *"Tsutomu Yamamoto has more than 30 years of experience in banking and finance at Mizuho,*" said **World Bank Group President Ajay Banga**. "*Given the crucial role guarantees have to play in mobilizing the private sector to create jobs, his expertise will be invaluable for growing our guarantee business."* Yamamoto has built a distinguished career in banking and international finance in both developing and advanced markets. In his current position, he plays a key role in global strategy for Mizuho. Since joining the Dai-Ichi Kangyo Bank, one of the predecessors of Mizuho, in 1991, he has held various positions of increasing responsibility, including executive roles in the Americas, Asia, and Europe in international finance.

He brings extensive experience in building relationships with key stakeholders and in leading global projects. Notably, he partnered with Japan International Cooperation Agency on the co-financing of projects, advancing investment initiatives to support infrastructure development in emerging markets. As Head of the Global Transaction Banking Unit, he led service expansion in collaboration with fintech companies in India and promoted the digitalization of electronic bank guarantees. Yamamoto received a master's degree from the Stanford Graduate School of Business and a bachelor's degree from Keio University. Yamamoto will assume the position held by Hiroshi Matano. Under Matano's tenure, MIGA became the home of the new World Bank Group Guarantee Platform, bringing together guarantee products from across the World Bank Group. The total for the Guarantee Platform in FY25 was $12.3 billion, a 19 percent increase over the previous year. He will start in his new position in early December.

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ADB Appoints Christine Engstrom as Director General for Its New Sectors Department 3

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has appointed Christine Engstrom as the Director General of its newly established department, Sectors Department 3 (SD3). ADB's SD3 will oversee the bank's operations in finance, human and social development, and public sector governance. "I am honored to lead this exceptional team advancing ADB's work on development priorities that are crucial for inclusive and sustainable growth in Asia and the Pacific," said Ms. Engstrom. "We will deepen our engagement with ADB's developing member countries to help them deliver innovative financial solutions, equitable social development, and effective governance reforms." Ms. Engstrom joined ADB's Private Sector Operations Department in 2006 as a Senior Structured Finance Specialist. She was promoted to Director in 2013, leading transactions with financial institutions to support local financial sectors and capital markets. Following the implementation of ADB's New Operating Model in 2023, she was appointed Senior Sector Director for the Finance Sector Office, overseeing policy development, regulatory programs, and technical assistance. A national of the United States, Ms. Engstrom holds a Master's degree in International Affairs from the University of Virginia and a Master's in Business Administration from Georgetown University. She has over 38 years of professional experience, including 19 years at ADB. The restructuring of ADB's Sectors Group into three distinct departments in 2022 aimed to enhance managerial oversight, improve efficiency, and ensure stronger leadership across operations. This realignment enables a more balanced distribution of responsibilities, addressing the rapidly evolving needs of member countries. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting inclusive, resilient, and sustainable growth across Asia and the Pacific. Working with its members and partners to solve complex challenges together, ADB harnesses innovative financial tools and strategic partnerships to transform lives, build quality infrastructure, and safeguard our planet.

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ADB Appoints Yevgeniy Zhukov Director General for Climate Change and Sustainable Development

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has appointed Yevgeniy Zhukov as Director General for its Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department (CCSD). As Director General for CCSD, Mr. Zhukov will lead and oversee ADB's overall engagement on climate change, environment, gender, and other thematic areas. He will build stakeholder commitments as well as partnerships to develop operations that deliver strong development outcomes across Asia and the Pacific. His appointment takes effect today. "ADB is committed to transformative action, innovation, and strong partnerships that promote climate resilience, environmental sustainability, and inclusive development," said Mr. Zhukov. "I am honored to serve in this role and will do my utmost to continue to build on ADB's strong track record in these priority areas." Mr. Zhukov has over three decades of working experience, most of them at ADB. He was appointed Director General of the Central and West Asia Department in 2021. Previously, he served as the Secretary of the bank. He has also held senior positions at ADB's Strategy, Policy, and Partnerships Department; Budget, People, and Management Systems Department; South Asia Department; and Pacific Department. Mr. Zhukov, a national of Kazakhstan, holds a Master's degree in Economics from Claremont Graduate University in the United States, and a University Diploma with Distinction in Political Economy from Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting inclusive, resilient, and sustainable growth across Asia and the Pacific. Working with its members and partners to solve complex challenges together, ADB harnesses innovative financial tools and strategic partnerships to transform lives, build quality infrastructure, and safeguard our planet.

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Leah Gutierrez Appointed Director General for ADB's Central and West Asia Department

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has appointed Leah Gutierrez as Director General for its Central and West Asia Department. As Director General, Ms. Gutierrez will deliver ADB's strategic agenda in the Central and West Asia region. She will lead ADB's engagement with 11 countries: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Her appointment takes effect today. "I am honored to serve in this position and will continue to engage with developing member countries and stakeholders to promote inclusive growth, regional cooperation, and sustainable development across the region," said Ms. Gutierrez. Ms. Gutierrez has over four decades of professional experience, including 25 years at ADB. Prior to her appointment, Ms. Gutierrez was the Director General for ADB's Sectors Department

3, where she managed operations for finance, human and social development, and public sector management and governance. She is also a former Director General of the Pacific Department. She has held senior positions in ADB's Strategy, Policy, and Partnerships Department; Southeast Asia Department; and Office of the Secretary. A national of the Philippines, she holds a PhD and Master's in Economics from the University of Pennsylvania, in the United States, and a Bachelor's degree in Business Economics from the University of the Philippines. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting inclusive, resilient, and sustainable growth across Asia and the Pacific. Working with its members and partners to solve complex challenges together, ADB harnesses innovative financial tools and strategic partnerships to transform lives, build quality infrastructure, and safeguard our planet.

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East Asia

CHINA: Xi Urges Youth, Students' Federations to Deepen Reform, Innovation for New Achievements

Chinese President Xi Jinping has called on youth and students' federations to adhere to the right political orientation, deepen reform and innovation, and under the Party's leadership, score new achievements on the new journey. Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks in a congratulatory letter to a session of the All-China Youth Federation and a congress of the All-China Students' Federation, which opened in Beijing Wednesday morning. On behalf of the CPC Central Committee, Xi extended congratulations and greetings to young people of all ethnic groups and all walks of life, to young students, and to young Chinese overseas. Over the past five years, youth and students' federations at all levels have acted proactively and worked diligently, showcasing the vigorous and upward spirit of the new generation of Chinese youth, Xi said in the letter.

He pointed out that young people have a great role to play as China strives to build a strong country and realize national rejuvenation on all fronts through Chinese modernization, urging them to maintain firm ideals and convictions, foster a sense of responsibility to the country, and shoulder their historic mission. Xi called on Party organizations at all levels to strengthen their leadership of the youth work, support the work of youth and students' federations, and create favorable conditions for the healthy growth and success of young people and students so that they can make contributions to the country. Cai Qi, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and a member of the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee, attended the opening meeting, which gathered about 3,000 participants.

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China Unveils Guidelines to Improve One-stop Government Services

China on Tuesday released guidelines on providing regular, one-stop government services for major matters to improve administrative efficiency. Efforts will be made to drive improved coordination across government departments and integrate government services in more areas, aiming to boost governance capabilities and optimize the country's business environment, according to the guidelines, which were published by the General Office of the State Council. The guidelines outline key tasks, including strengthening the list management of major matters covered by one-stop government services, promoting the regular implementation of plans related to those major matters, and expanding the application of one-stop government services. They call for efficient resource use, warning firmly against "vanity projects" in government services, and underscore coordinated planning to integrate advanced technologies like large AI models into government services in a sound, orderly manner. Additionally, they stress the need to improve the nationwide online government services platform, enhance system integration and the interconnectivity of relevant services, and strengthen security protection.

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Chinese National Political Advisors Discuss Refining, Innovating Social Governance

The National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), China's national political advisory body, convened a special consultative session in Beijing on Tuesday, focusing on refining and innovating social governance. Addressing the meeting, Wang Huning, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the CPPCC National Committee, called on political advisors to prioritize a people-centered approach to improve social governance. Wang urged them to advance a model of social governance based on collaboration, co-governance and common gains, shift the focus of social governance down to the primary level, and improve the quality and effectiveness of consultations. He emphasized sustained efforts in deepening research on critical social governance issues, expanding feedback channels of public opinion, and pooling strength for social governance. Nearly 100 CPPCC National Committee members attended the consultative session, with 22 delivering speeches. Chen Wenqing, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and head of the Commission for Political and Legal Affairs of the CPC Central Committee, also addressed the meeting. He stressed the importance of modernizing social governance, translating the Party's leadership advantage into effective governance, better addressing public concerns, protecting people's interests, and enforcing law-based social governance.

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Chinese Women's Federations Urged to Advance Institutional Reform

Chinese State Councilor and All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) President Shen Yiqin on Thursday called for continued reform of women's federations. Speaking at an expanded meeting of the ACWF Standing Committee, Shen said advancing reform of women's federations is both a key mandate from the third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee and essential to mobilizing women's strength in advancing Chinese modernization. Shen highlighted actions to strengthen political orientation and grassroots presence of women's organizations, and maintain their progressive nature. She urged the federations to reinforce organizational networks, expand diverse working teams, improve cadre competence, and facilitate a shift in working style.

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Top Political Advisor Asks CPPCC Members to Engage in Economic Consultations

Wang Huning, China's top political advisor, on Thursday urged members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) to engage in consultations on key economic issues. Wang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the CPPCC National Committee, made the remarks when presiding over a meeting of the Chairperson's Council of the CPPCC National Committee. He called on CPPCC members to focus their consultations on key areas such as planning economic and social development goals for the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030), developing new quality productive forces based on local conditions, and building a unified national market. He also stressed the importance of understanding the goals of building modern, people-centered cities, and of deepening research related to key tasks in urban governance.

The meeting reviewed and approved a report on the CPPCC National Committee's work in the first half of 2025, as well as a revised draft of regulations related to proposals from CPPCC National Committee members. The documents will be submitted to the 13th session of the Standing Committee of the 14th CPPCC National Committee. On Thursday morning, Wang also presided over a seminar of the Chairperson's Council of the CPPCC National Committee. He called for focusing on core Party and state tasks and pooling wisdom and strength. Wang urged political advisors from various backgrounds to undertake in-depth research on key issues in their respective fields, and put forward targeted and practical policy recommendations.

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Chinese Government Proposes Creation of Global AI Cooperation Organization

The Chinese government has proposed the creation of a global artificial intelligence (AI) cooperation organization, and is tentatively considering establishing its headquarters in Shanghai, Xinhua has learned from sources involved in the matter. This is an important move China has made to practice multilateralism and promote a style of global governance that features extensive consultation and joint contribution for shared benefits, the sources said. They also noted that it is a concrete action taken by China in response to the call of the Global South to bridge the digital and intelligence divide, and to promote the inclusive development of AI and the use of AI for good. China expects the organization will serve as a platform for countries to deepen cooperation on innovation, promote pragmatic cooperation to fully unleash the unlimited potential of AI, and achieve common development and prosperity, the sources said. They said that through this platform, China hopes to assist countries in the Global South to strengthen their capacity-building, nurture an AI innovation ecosystem, ensure that developing countries benefit equally from waves of AI, and promote the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Further goals for the organization, they said, are to enhance the coordination and alignment of development strategies, governance rules and technical standards among countries, and to gradually form a global framework and international standards for AI governance that have broad consensus, based on full respect for the differences in policies and practices among countries. By establishing the organization's headquarters in Shanghai, China hopes to leverage its advantage in AI -- and Shanghai's advantage, in particular -- to boost cooperation, according to the sources. They said that China stands ready to discuss relevant arrangements with countries that are willing to join the organization.

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Chinese Premier Calls for Early Formation of Global AI Governance Framework

Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Saturday said the international community should place greater emphasis on the joint governance of artificial intelligence (AI), calling for the early formation of a global framework and rules that have broad consensus to guide the development and use of AI. "China attaches great importance to global AI governance, and has been actively promoting multilateral and bilateral cooperation with a willingness to offer more Chinese solutions," Li said while addressing the opening ceremony of the 2025 World AI Conference and High-Level Meeting on Global AI Governance in Shanghai. Li said that the Chinese government proposes the creation of a global AI cooperation organization. He said that rapid progress is being made in fields such as large language models, multimodal large models and embodied AI, propelling AI development toward greater efficiency and higher intelligence. Acknowledging that AI has begun to empower various industries and enter households, emerging as a new engine for economic growth, Li said the risks and challenges posed by AI have sparked widespread concern. There is an urgent need to foster further consensus on how to strike a balance between development and security, he noted.

No matter how technology transforms, it must remain a tool to be harnessed and controlled by humans, Li said, adding that AI should become an international public good that benefits humanity. Li urged more efforts to ensure universal access to AI so that more countries and groups will benefit from it. "China is willing to share its AI development experience and technological products to help countries around the world -- especially those in the Global South -- to strengthen their capacity building." He suggested greater cooperation on innovation to achieve more groundbreaking results. He said that China stands ready to undertake joint technical research with other countries, and will be more open in sharing open-source technology and products. More than 1,000 officials and representatives of industries, universities and research institutes from China and abroad attended the opening ceremony. An action plan for global AI governance was issued at the conference.

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CPC Leadership Holds Symposium to Seek Advice on Economic Work

The Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee has held a symposium with non-CPC personages to seek opinions and suggestions on the country's current economic situation and economic work for the second half of the year. Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, presided over the symposium and delivered an important speech on July 23. Stressing the general principle of pursuing progress while ensuring stability, Xi said efforts should be made to keep employment, businesses, markets and expectations stable, effectively bolster consumption, and break free from rat-race competition. Work should be done to strengthen domestic economic circulation and promote the positive interplay between domestic and international economic flows, Xi said. The symposium was attended by Li Qiang, Wang Huning, Cai Qi and Ding Xuexiang, all members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee. Li briefed the meeting on economic work in the first half of 2025 and introduced relevant considerations for the economic work in the second half.

Chairpersons of the central committees of eight non-CPC parties, chairperson of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC), and a representative of personages without party affiliation made speeches. They agreed with the CPC Central Committee's analysis and considerations for the economic work and offered suggestions on issues including inter-regional coordination of sci-tech and industrial innovation, service consumption and private enterprises. The Chinese economy posted stable performance and made progress in the first half of this year, reflecting its solid foundation, multiple advantages, strong resilience, great potential, and continuous accumulation of positive factors supporting high-quality development, Xi noted after listening to their speeches. In the face of risks and challenges in the second half, China should focus on expanding domestic demand, deepening reform and opening-up, promoting the in-depth integration of sci-tech and industrial innovation, preventing and mitigating risks in key sectors, and improving people's livelihoods, Xi said. Xi expressed the hope that all non-CPC parties, the ACFIC, and personages without party affiliation will forge broad consensus on economic development and put forward more forward-looking and actionable opinions and suggestions on high-quality development.

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JAPAN: Personal Info Panel Chair Suggests Fine System

The head of Japan's Personal Information Protection Commission has emphasized the need to introduce a monetary penalty system to help develop the country's artificial intelligence industry. In a recent interview with Jiji Press, Satoru Tezuka, who assumed the role of commission chair in May, said that the country "should introduce" a fine system for profits gained through the misuse of personal information, as part of a triennial revision of the personal information protection law. The law revision was postponed during this year's ordinary Diet session amid strong opposition from business circles to a fine system. "The word 'fine' makes businesses cautious, but our planned system is intended to crack down on malicious law violators and would not affect diligent business operators," Tezuka said. "We are proposing making personal information available without consent in principal if it is used for AI development, and for this, we need to ensure proper governance among business operators," he said.

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SOUTH KOREA: Statistics Agency to Implement Key Changes in Census to Reflect Evolving Social Norms

This year's population and housing census will incorporate significant changes to better capture the nation's shifting social and economic landscape, as the survey marks its 100th anniversary, the statistics agency said Thursday. Conducted every five years, the population and housing census offers a comprehensive snapshot of the nation's demographics and residential conditions through field surveys and data verification. "This year's survey items were carefully selected to accurately reflect our country's diverse and rapidly changing social and economic conditions while also minimizing the burden on respondents," Statistics Korea said in a press release. To keep pace with evolving societal trends, such as changing views on marriage and the rise of multicultural families, the agency has introduced new categories in the questionnaire. One notable addition is the inclusion of a category for "non-marital cohabitation," aimed at capturing the growing acceptance of alternative living arrangements outside traditional marriage. "The new questions are designed to reflect the public's changing perceptions of marriage and cohabitation," the agency added. Statistics Korea also said the updated survey would provide foundational data for policymaking by capturing the increasingly diverse types of households in Korean society. In a bid to encourage participation among foreign residents, the questionnaire will be available in 20 languages. Foreigners, regardless of their visa or residency status, will be randomly selected for the survey.

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S. Korea Launches Task Force to Create Re100 Industrial Complex

South Korea on Wednesday launched a task force to establish the so-called RE100 industrial complexes entirely powered by renewable energy sources, in a move aimed at addressing regional energy imbalances and accelerating the country's energy transition, the industry ministry said. In its inaugural meeting, the task force discussed necessary measures for creating RE100 industrial zones, including the development of renewable energy infrastructure, strategies to attract corporate investment and the creation of incentive packages, such as improved living conditions and electricity bill discounts. RE100, short for Renewable Energy 100 percent, refers to a global initiative that encourages companies to source 100 percent of their electricity from renewable sources as part of efforts to achieve carbon neutrality. The task force, comprising industry, finance, land, environment and other relevant ministries, also plans to draft a special legislation within this year to facilitate the establishment of RE100 industrial zones. "RE100 is becoming a key requirement for export-oriented companies. Rather than viewing it as a regulation, we must embrace it as an opportunity to drive balanced regional development and energy transition through renewable energy," First Vice Industry Minister Moon Shin-hak said.

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S. Korea Launches Consultative Body on Defense Technologies

South Korea's industry ministry said Thursday it has launched a private-public consultative body to strengthen technological partnerships between the military and the private sector. The body's first meeting took place in Seoul earlier in the day, attended by officials from the military, academia and domestic defense companies, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy said in a press release. Participants discussed future plans for cooperation, including sharing information on technology trends and technology transfers between the military and the private sector. It also agreed to make efforts to localize production of key defense materials, components and equipment by supporting research and development of such items, the ministry said. The group's launch comes as South Korea seeks to stabilize supply chains in the defense sector amid escalating export controls on cutting-edge strategic weapons systems, the ministry explained.

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MONGOLIA: National Forum of Civil Servants Emphasizes Reforms for Effective Public Service

The National Forum of Civil Servants was held under the theme “Mongolian Civil Service and International Cooperation and Experience” on July 3, 2025 at the State Palace, bringing together 800 participants representing the capital city, 21 aimags, 330 soums, ministries, agencies, government institutions, and international guests. The Forum was organized under the auspices of the Chairman of the State Great Khural of Mongolia. A greeting message by President of Mongolia Khurelsukh Ukhnaa was delivered to the delegates by Chief of Staff of the Office of the President of Mongolia Uilstuguldur Altankhuyag, and presented to Chairman of the Civil Service Council Tsedevsuren Lkhagva. In his message President Khurelsukh emphasized that “Every civil servant must deeply understand their duty to serve the Mongolian state, the people, and the fundamental national interests; remain free from rumor and slander; uphold unity; consistently protect and elevate the reputation of the civil servant; and leave a legacy of justice and integrity in the service of the Mongolian state.”

Deputy Chairman of the State Great Khural Bulgantuya Khurelbaatar presented the message of Chairman of the State Great Khural Amarbaysgalan Dashzegve. Recalling Mongolia’s transition to a market economy in 1990 and the adoption of a new democratic Constitution in 1992, the Speaker highlighted in his message that the Law on Civil Service, enacted in 1994, was among the first to regulate social relations in line with global development trends, laying the foundation of Mongolia’s central civil service institution. “In 1994, there were 141,500 civil servants, earning an average salary of MNT 24,000, while GDP per capita stood at MNT 292,800 or USD 654. By 2024, the number of civil servants had increased to 226,800, with an average monthly salary of MNT 2.3 million, and GDP per capita grown to MNT 23.4 million or USD 6,898. During this period, Mongolia's population grew from 2.24 million to 3.54 million, and total GDP rose from MNT 651.4 billion to MNT 80 trillion. Speaker Amarbayasgalan emphasized the need to further improve the unified management system of the civil service and to develop a human-centered civil service based on 30 years of modern governance experience, achievements, and lessons learned.

In his keynote address, Prime Minister Zandanshatar Gombojav stated, “Reform must thrive in the present and aspire to the future, not dwell in the past. For this reason, the new Government has announced reforms aimed at establishing a productive and efficient state.” Noting that in a rapidly changing global political and social environment, the functions, roles, characteristics, and significance of the civil service are constantly evolving, the Prime Minister urged the delegates to take the lead in implementing these reforms. In recognition of the founding members of Mongolia's central civil service institution, Member of Parliament and Chair of the Standing Committee on State Structure Sandag-Ochir Tsend paid tribute to L. Lingov, N. Chadraabal, and Kh. Shaandar, who were appointed on July 3, 1995, as the first members of the Civil Service Council of Mongolia, in accordance with Resolution No. 62 of the State Great Khural.

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South-East Asia

MYANMAR: Announcing Formation of New Union Gov't

Myanmar's National Defense and Security Council (NDSC) on Thursday formed a new union government and State Security and Peace Commission, the state-owned Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV) reported. The union government is led by U Nyo Saw as prime minister, and the State Security and Peace Commission is chaired by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the report said. The NDSC also decided to annul the order transferring the sovereign power to the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, according to the report. Zaw Min Tun, a spokesperson of Myanmar's State Administration Council, said on Thursday the NDSC had decided to end the state of emergency to hold general elections. In February 2021, Myanmar's then-Acting President U Myint Swe declared a one-year state of emergency and transferred sovereign power to the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services. The office of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services subsequently formed the State Administration Council, with Min Aung Hlaing as its chairman. The NDSC has made multiple six-month extensions until July 31 this year.

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Singapore Launches Safety Watch Group for Restaurant Industry

Singapore has launched the Restaurant Industry Safety and Security Watch Group, bringing together the police and members of the Restaurant Association of Singapore to strengthen protection against crime and security threats in the food and beverage sector. Speaking on Tuesday, Senior Minister of State for Home Affairs Sim Ann said that restaurants in other countries have been targeted in attacks on crowded public spaces, underscoring the need for vigilance. "As a major food hub and tourist destination, Singapore's vibrant restaurant scene must be vigilant to safety and security threats," she said. Sim also urged the industry to play a proactive role by sharing information on crimes and scams with employees and customers. She noted that more than 51,000 scam cases were reported in Singapore in 2024, and the food and beverage sector was not spared. The new industry watch group is the 10th of its kind established since 2008. Others have been set up for sectors including hospitality, manufacturing, chemicals, public entertainment, retail, finance, logistics, and point-to-point transportation.

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THAILAND: King Endorses Cabinet Reshuffle Under PM Paetongtarn

Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn has endorsed a cabinet reshuffle as proposed by Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, said a royal command released on Tuesday, following the exit of a key party from the ruling coalition. According to the official Royal Gazette, Deputy Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai is reassigned as interior minister. Paetongtarn is assigned to double as culture minister, while eight new cabinet members are also appointed to fill vacant ministerial posts after the Bhumjaithai Party, the second-largest partner in the previous ruling bloc, pulled out its support last month. The reshuffle comes amid growing political tension as a leaked phone conversation sparked widespread backlash over Paetongtarn's handling of border issues with neighboring Cambodia. The Bhumjaithai Party announced last week that it would seek a censure debate against Paetongtarn and her cabinet and invite other opposition groups to support its motion when parliament reconvenes this week. The party's departure from the government leaves the ruling coalition led by Paetongtarn's Pheu Thai Party with only a slim majority in the House of Representatives. Paetongtarn is also under judicial scrutiny after a group of senators last week petitioned the Constitutional Court and the National Anti-Corruption Commission to investigate her conduct, citing the lack of integrity and serious violation of ethical standards over the phone call with Cambodian Senate President Samdech Techo Hun Sen. Paetongtarn, the 38-year-old Pheu Thai Party leader and the daughter of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, was elected

Thailand's youngest and second female premier after winning a parliamentary vote last August.

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Thai Cabinet Appoints Phumtham As Acting PM Following Paetongtarn's Suspension

Thailand's cabinet on Thursday agreed to appoint Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Phumtham Wechayachai as acting prime minister, following the suspension of Paetongtarn Shinawatra. Phumtham, who is listed as the first acting prime minister, will possess the same authority and responsibilities as the prime minister, the Thai government said in a statement issued after new cabinet members were sworn into office. Deputy Prime Minister and Transport Minister Suriya Jungrungreangkit, who previously took the role as acting prime minister, was named as the second acting prime minister. Paetongtarn, who was previously appointed to double as culture minister in the cabinet reshuffle, has been suspended from performing her prime ministerial duties by a constitutional court order pending an ethics investigation. A group of 36 senators last month petitioned the court seeking Paetongtarn's dismissal from office, accusing her of serious ethical violations linked to a leaked telephone conversation over border issues with Cambodia.

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VIETNAM: PM Calls for Nationwide Startup Movement

Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh has called on all citizens to actively participate in the nation's startup strategy, local media outlet Voice of Vietnam reported on Tuesday. Speaking at a government meeting, the prime minister also highlighted innovation and digital transformation as crucial drivers of sustainable and inclusive growth, according to the state-owned media. Chinh urged ministries and localities to accelerate the drafting of a comprehensive national startup development plan to foster entrepreneurship and boost economic growth. According to data from the National Statistics Office, in the first six months of 2025, the number of newly registered enterprises in Vietnam reached 91,200, up 11.8 percent compared to the same period last year.

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South Asia

INDIA: AI Governance Gets a Boost as Sarvam AI Commits to Open Source

Sarvam.ai, one of the key beneficiaries of the IndiaAI initiative, is training large-scale language models using a compute infrastructure comprising 4,096 Nvidia H100 GPUs over six months. The startup was selected in the mission's first phase, receiving a substantial portion of the allocated compute subsidy to support its development of indigenous AI capabilities tailored to India's diverse linguistic and cultural landscape. The company has now confirmed that these models, once trained, will be released under open-source licenses, enabling developers, researchers, and enterprises to access and build upon them freely. The move is aimed at accelerating the creation of domain-specific AI tools, improving language inclusion, and encouraging ecosystem-wide collaboration across public and private sectors. The open-source commitment includes weekly model drops, detailed documentation, and public APIs. Sarvam.ai plans to publish comprehensive updates, including performance benchmarks for Indian languages, reasoning tasks, and other capabilities, inviting feedback and contributions from the wider AI community. This initiative aligns with the broader objectives of the IndiaAI Mission, which was launched with a budgetary allocation of ₹10,000 crore to support the development of foundational AI technologies within the country. The mission focuses on building sovereign AI capabilities by funding access to high-end GPUs, incentivising model development, and promoting open innovation.

India's push for open-source AI models is being driven by the need for language equity, cultural contextualization, and technology democratisation. By opening up access to foundational models, the government aims to empower Indian startups, academia, and developers to create AI tools that are affordable, locally relevant, and scalable. Sarvam.ai's leadership emphasised that the financial support received under the mission is structured as an equity-based investment rather than a grant. The startup aims to balance commercial sustainability with public interest by delivering models that can support critical use cases in education, governance, agriculture, healthcare, and more. The announcement is also seen as a response to growing public interest in ensuring that government-supported AI infrastructure remains accessible and transparent. With over 500 proposals submitted under the IndiaAI Mission—more than 40 of which focus on large language models—the move toward open-source AI represents a strategic shift in how India envisions the future of artificial intelligence. Looking ahead, Sarvam.ai intends to contribute to the creation of AI systems that are multilingual, inclusive, and aligned with Indian values and priorities. The decision to open-source these models sets a precedent for other mission-aligned startups and reinforces India's positioning as a global leader in responsible and equitable AI development.

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Bihar Chief Secretary Launches Major e-Governance and Welfare Initiatives Under BPSMS

In a renewed push for transparent and citizen-centric administration, Bihar Chief Secretary Amrit Lal Meena unveiled a suite of e-governance and welfare initiatives under the Bihar Prashasnik Sudhar Mission Society (BPSMS) at the Secretariat Meeting Hall. The event was attended by senior officials including the Development Commissioner, Additional Chief Secretary-cum-Mission Director of BPSMS, departmental secretaries, and key representatives from NIC, SBI, and KPMG. RTPS Online Appeal & Review Portal. The RTPS Online Appeal & Review Portal (https://rtpsappeal.bihar.gov.in) was launched to enhance the effectiveness of the Bihar Right to Public Services Act, 2011. Equipped with paperless workflows, digital signatures, real-time dashboards, and tracking mechanisms, the portal empowers citizens to appeal or review delayed or denied services. Chief Secretary Meena emphasized, “Technology must serve the people—this portal turns the promise of timely service into a lived reality.” HRMS Bihar App. The HRMS Bihar App was also introduced, now available on the Google Play Store. It allows government employees to access and manage service records, leave applications, and correction submissions. The upcoming iOS version and Phase II will include modules for disciplinary action, pension, training, and more. Comprehensive handbooks for e-service books and employee self-service were also launched.Group Health Insurance for Contractual Staff. In a significant welfare move, an MoU between BPSMS and SBI General Insurance was signed to provide Group Health Insurance (GHI) to 3,560 contractual employees—including Executive Assistants, IT Assistants, and IT Managers—across various administrative levels. The scheme covers ₹5 lakh cashless treatment annually, including pre-existing conditions, maternity, ICU, AYUSH, and hospitalization benefits. A dedicated 24×7 claims team and expedited processing windows ensure timely service. The ₹1.42 crore (plus GST) annual premium will be fully borne by BPSMS. The Development Commissioner lauded the initiatives, calling them a step toward inclusive and compassionate governance. These reforms mark Bihar’s sustained commitment to leveraging technology for good governance, citizen empowerment, and social security.

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Andhra Pradesh Government Enters MoU to Establish India’s First “Creator Academy”

In a landmark initiative aimed at positioning Andhra Pradesh (AP) as a global creative and digital content hub, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has formally signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to launch what will be branded as the Creator Academy, a pioneering facility within the newly announced Creator Land entertainment city. The agreement, reached during the WAVES Summit in Singapore, was sealed in the presence of Andhra Pradesh’s Minister for Education, IT and Electronics, Nara Lokesh, and representatives of Creativeland Asia, the media firm partnering with the state. The Creator Academy is a cornerstone of the larger Transmedia Entertainment City project, Creator Land, which is touted to be India’s first integrated creative ecosystem. As stated by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, the project is designed to spur development through state-of-the-art infrastructure, global partnerships, and targeted training in future-oriented digital disciplines. Creator Land aims to generate up to 25,000 direct and ancillary jobs, attract foreign direct investment of approximately ₹10,000 crore over the next six years, and elevate AP's presence in global creative industries. The Creator Academy will serve as the educational and vocational arm of the entertainment city. It is envisioned to equip youth and creative professionals with skills in content creation, including filmmaking, gaming, music production, virtual production, and AI-driven storytelling techniques. The initiative seeks to channel local creative talent into globally competitive production pipelines under the rallying call: "Create in AP & Create for the World."

Situated in the Amaravati region, Creator Land is intended to become a world-class destination for creative innovation and digital content development. Through alliance with global media and technology partners, the Academy is expected to deliver immersive training, credential certification, and hands-on exposure in next-generation content technologies. The broader entertainment city will support studios, production houses, gaming labs, training facilities, coworking spaces, and live-event venues. By fostering this creative economy, the AP government seeks to diversify the state's industrial landscape, moving beyond traditional sectors into high-growth, knowledge-based areas. The venture is expected to empower local entrepreneurs, catalyse startups in the creative and tech domains, support regional economic development, and enhance Andhra Pradesh's brand as a cutting-edge destination for innovation. Officials emphasise that the MoU establishes a public-private partnership model with clear governance, investment inflows, and performance metrics. The initial phase will focus on infrastructure planning, curriculum design, faculty recruitment, and forging tie-ups with international institutions. Over the ensuing years, successive phases will expand facilities, ramp up student intake, and scale production capabilities. In summary, through the adoption of this partnership, Andhra Pradesh's government aims to leapfrog into a leadership position in India's emerging creative economy. By combining educational excellence, digital storytelling, and immersive media platforms under one umbrella, Creator Academy and Creator Land are poised to reimagine how regional talent is nurtured and showcased on a global stage.

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Government Blocks 43 OTT Platforms Over Obscene Content, Cites Violation of IT Rules

The government has blocked 43 OTT platforms for hosting sexually explicit, violent, or culturally inappropriate content. Action taken under IT Rules, 2021 and Section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act, mandating ethical content and age-based classification. Platforms like Ullu, ALTT, Desiflix, and 22 others were recently ordered to be taken down by ISPs to curb unlawful content. In a significant move to regulate digital content, the Government of India has blocked access to 43 over-the-top (OTT) platforms that were allegedly disseminating explicit, violent, or culturally inappropriate content. This was informed by Union Minister for Electronics and IT, Ashwini Vaishnaw, in a written reply to the Lok Sabha. The action comes under the framework of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, notified under the IT Act, 2000. Part III of these rules mandates a Code of Ethics for digital news publishers and OTT platforms. The minister emphasized that OTT platforms must ensure their content does not violate any existing laws and should adhere to ethical and cultural standards. "OTT platforms are obligated to self-classify their content based on age and follow the general guidelines outlined in the Rules regarding depictions of nudity, sex, and violence," Vaishnaw stated. They are also required to implement access controls to restrict children from viewing age-inappropriate content. The government has invoked Section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act, which allows it to direct intermediaries to remove or disable unlawful content when notified by the appropriate authority. An advisory has already been issued to OTT platforms and their self-regulatory bodies to ensure full compliance with Indian laws and the Code of Ethics. In a recent crackdown, the Ministry directed Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to disable public access to 25 OTT platforms hosting sexually explicit or unlawful content. This list includes popular names such as Ullu, ALTT, Desiflix, and others like Big Shots App, Boomex, Navarasa Lite, Gulab App, Kangan App, Bull App, Jalva App, Hitprime, Feneo, Sol Talkies, NeonX VIP, HotX VIP, MoodX, and Triflicks, among others. This move signals a tightening grip on digital content in India as the government pushes for greater accountability, ethical content hosting, and protection of cultural sensibilities in the fast-growing OTT ecosystem.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Judges of Several First Instance Courts Appointed

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has signed a decree on the appointment of judges of a number of first instance courts, Trend reports. The full list of judges and courts is given here.

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Azerbaijan Set to Introduce New Coordinate System in Geodetic and Cartographic Work

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, signed a decree approving the transition to a new coordinate system in all types of geodesies, gravimetry, topography, cartography, and cadaster work carried out across Azerbaijan, regardless of their purpose, Trend reports. The decree was signed to align the field of geodesy and cartography with the global geodetic network and to ensure a unified national coordinate system. The World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS-84), based on the Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) projection, will be adopted as the standard coordinate system for all geodetic, gravimetric, topographic, cartographic, and cadastral activities conducted within the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, regardless of their intended purpose. The use of alternative coordinate systems will be permitted only for the completion of ongoing geodetic, gravimetric, topographic, cartographic, and cadastral projects that were initiated using those systems prior to this decision. The Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan is tasked with addressing and resolving any issues arising from the implementation of this directive.

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IRAN: Coming Out with Minting Regional AI Center Within ECO Framework

Iran proposes establishing a regional artificial intelligence (AI) center within the framework of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), President of Iran Masoud Pezeshkian said during the 17th ECO summit, Trend's special correspondent reports. "New technologies and artificial intelligence are changing the economy. If our countries do not prepare for digital transformation, they will lag behind global players. We propose to create a specialized regional center for artificial intelligence under the auspices of the ECO," he said. Pezeshkian mentioned that the organization's member countries need to get their ducks in a row and bolster the transport infrastructure that links domestic and interregional routes. "Iran and its transit neighbors play a key role in this. It is necessary to develop logistics networks and ensure international standards at borders and ports," the head of state emphasized.

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KYRGYZSTAN: Establishing State Body for Blockchain and Virtual Assets Development

Kyrgyzstan has launched the creation of a state institution — the Secretariat of the National Council for the Development of Virtual Assets and Blockchain Technologies under the President, Trend reports. The move follows a decree signed by President Sadyr Japarov, aimed at accelerating the institutionalization of digital innovation governance in the country. The Secretariat will provide organizational support to the Council, which was initially approved by presidential decree on April 30, 2025. The structure, staffing plan, management scheme, and salary coefficients for the new body have been formally approved. The Secretariat is required to undergo state registration within one month and will be financed through the national budget and other legal sources. The head of the Secretariat will be appointed and dismissed directly by the President. The decree also introduces amendments to existing legal acts governing the register of state and municipal positions and the financing mechanism of the Council.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Investment Delivery Authority to Turbocharge Business Investment in NSW

NSW is set to secure our place as a global hub for innovation and investment with the creation of the Minns Labor Government's Investment Delivery Authority and nearly $80 million in innovation funding as part of the 2025-26 Budget. The Government's third Budget puts investment, productivity and economic growth front and centre, delivering reforms that will make NSW an attractive place to invest and start a business, and securing the future of our state. Investment Delivery Authority to attract and accelerate major investment The Minns Labor Government is investing $17.7 million in the 2025-26 Budget to establish and support the work of an Investment Delivery Authority. Modelled after the successful Housing Delivery Authority, the Investment Delivery Authority will accelerate approvals for major projects across all industries, including advanced technologies and energy.

Businesses have said that making major investments in NSW is too complex and too time consuming, which is slowing down productivity. The Investment Delivery Authority will address this by helping cut through red tape, coordinate across government, and encourage investment. It is expected to assist around 30 large projects per year, bringing forward up to $50 billion of investment each year. It will provide advice on how best to navigate the planning system while evaluating projects for fast-track assessment and coordinating the necessary infrastructure to deliver them. The Investment Delivery Authority will also be able to identify reforms to remove hurdles for private investment, and offer government assistance to support a proponent if their project is chosen.

This makes it easier for businesses to invest, build and create jobs in NSW. The Investment Delivery Authority will accept expressions of interest from eligible domestic and international investment projects valued over $1 billion and will come into effect in the 2025-26 financial year. A multi-agency Investment Taskforce, in Investment NSW under the Premier's Department, will support the Authority's work. The Investment Delivery Authority will comprise Premier's Department Secretary Simon Draper, Treasury Secretary Michael Coutts-Trotter, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure Secretary Kiersten Fishburn, and Infrastructure NSW

Chief Executive Tom Gellibrand. It will make recommendations to the Treasurer, the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, and the Minister for Industry and Trade.

Eligible projects must be able to commence development quickly and aligned with NSW Government priorities, as set out in policies including the NSW Industry Policy and Trade & Investment Strategy. The Authority will not be restricted to a specific industry or sector. Major projects able to be considered may include hotels, data centres, renewable energy projects, and commercial developments. Innovation Blueprint: Growing the economy through investment to secure NSW's future The Minns Labor Government is working to cement NSW as a global hub for innovation and technology through the recently launched Innovation Blueprint. The 2025-26 Budget includes nearly $80 million of new funding to deliver the Innovation Blueprint, which will establish NSW as the best place to innovate, connect with investors, and scale a business.

With NSW accounting for 65 per cent of the nation's venture capital investment in 2024, and being home to five out of eight Australian unicorn companies (privately held companies valued at over $1 billion), the state is already a recognised leader in driving economic growth through innovation. The funding package for the Innovation Blueprint will promote more global success stories like Afterpay, Atlassian and Canva in the years ahead through the following groundbreaking initiatives: •$38.5 million to turbocharge Tech Central, Australia's largest technology and innovation hub. •$20 million for Emerging Technology Commercialisation to drive growth and productivity in key areas such as Housing and Energy. •$6 million to extend the existing Minimum Viable Products Ventures program to support more startups at the early stages of development.

•$6 million to support manufacturing businesses to adopt innovative technologies. •$4 million to promote housing construction through the Housing Innovation Network and the Innovation in Construction Fund. •$4 million to support tech founder diversity by providing training programs for female founders and our future tech leaders living and working in Western Sydney and regional NSW. •$700,000 to extend the operation of National Space Industry Hub. Premier of NSW, Chris Minns said: "The fact is major projects from the private sector are getting bogged down in red tape, which is making it harder to do business in NSW when we should be doing everything we can to get things moving. "Our state is open for business and this change will encourage more people to bring their best ideas to life in NSW, all backed by our government.

"We've made great progress with the Housing Delivery Authority. This reform is a big signal that NSW is not just open for business—it's serious about being a global leader in innovation, industry, and investment." Treasurer of NSW, Daniel Mookhey said: "We have listened to what we are being told, loud and clear: everything in NSW is awesome, except for how long it takes to get major projects done. "We are creating a way to address the blockages, speed up the process and ensure NSW is properly open for business. “The Investment Delivery Authority is the turbocharger to drive economic growth across the state.” Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, Paul Scully said: “Lifting productivity growth is a critical issue for NSW and we recognise the challenges businesses and investors face when it comes to bringing their projects to life.

“The Investment Delivery Authority, supported by the Investment Taskforce, will identify and clear barriers that businesses may face, while advising on reforms that promote investment, competition and productivity in NSW.” Minister for Innovation, Science and Technology Anoulack Chanthivong said: “With this nearly $80 million of funding, we will ensure we nurture, grow, and support the next Afterpay, Atlassian, and Canva from the early stages through the most vulnerable periods of a startup’s life cycle – particularly just before the jump to commercialisation. “The funding package will allow Tech Central – the largest tech innovation ecosystem in the country – to flourish as a melting pot for groundbreaking innovation, research, and lifestyle.

“We also understand that the best and brightest tech ideas aren’t just born in the inner city of Sydney, so we are providing startup support to our future tech superstars right across the state.” Author of Pounder Review and Former Chair of the Tech Council of Australia, Kate Pounder said: “This significant investment in innovation will cement NSW as a world leader in the tech sector. “Most hearteningly, this money will also go where it is needed most – to female founders, and those from diverse cultures and backgrounds, as well as our budding tech giants living and working in Western Sydney and regional NSW.” CEO of Business NSW, Daniel Hunter said: “This is a game-changing step forward for New South Wales. “With a clear plan to streamline approvals and coordinate government agencies, the new Investment Delivery Authority is exactly what NSW needs to turn ambition into action.

“Coupled with the Innovation Blueprint and nearly $80 million in new funding, this initiative will help transform breakthrough ideas into global enterprises—fostering the next Atlassian or Canva right here in our backyard.” CEO & Managing Director of NEXTDC, Craig Scroggie said: “In today’s geopolitical environment, trust and sovereignty are economic assets. As a Five Eyes nation, Australia is uniquely positioned to lead the next industrial era, and New South Wales is stepping up to that role. The Investment Delivery Authority is about execution. It reflects a deep understanding of the five pillars now shaping global AI infrastructure: speed, scale, security, sustainability, and sovereignty. “Speed and scale are the new currency of global leadership. The Authority creates a faster path from planning to execution – reducing friction, aligning government, and providing the regulatory certainty private capital requires.

NEXTDC has over $15 billion in AI infrastructure projects planned across NSW –

including AI factories, high-density data centres, and mission-critical operations centres. This reform allows us to build the digital backbone of the future – faster, and at global scale. “AI infrastructure has outgrown traditional planning systems. These aren’t just data centres – they’re sovereign-scale assets designed to power the AI era. Conventional frameworks are now facing first-of-a-kind scale challenges. This reform clears the path for accelerated approvals and long-term certainty – unlocking the investment required to deliver national capability and positioning NSW as a global destination for next-generation digital infrastructure.” Managing Director, Corporate and International, AirTrunk, Carly Wishart said: “Streamlining planning and approval processes for development permits and power allocation is essential if Australia is to capitalise on the data centre growth opportunity and become a smart economy. If Australia is to be a leading digital economy and build its own artificial intelligence capability, then it must have the necessary digital infrastructure and renewable energy needed to support it. AirTrunk welcomes the NSW Minns Government announcement in recognising that the race to build AI infrastructure is a global one and speed to build is the critical factor. We look forward to working with the Investment Delivery Authority to hasten planning processes, ensuring that NSW and Australia get the productivity boosting benefits of AI.”

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NEW ZEALAND: New CT Unit Will Boost Diagnostic Services in Palmerston North

A $12.7 million investment in a new modular CT unit at Palmerston North Regional Hospital will double scanning capacity and significantly improve access to diagnostic services across the region, Health Minister Simeon Brown says. “This is a major step forward for Palmerston North and the surrounding communities. It means faster diagnoses, shorter wait times, and earlier treatment for people with serious conditions like cancer,” Mr Brown says. The new modular facility will house two state-of-the-art CT scanners – one replacing an ageing machine, and a second to expand the hospital’s capacity by around 3,000 additional scans per year. “This is about delivering better health outcomes, sooner. Doubling CT capacity means more timely scans and less stress for patients, with workforce planning already underway to support the expanded diagnostic service.” The hospital currently relies on a single loaned CT scanner with limited capability, which is contributing to delays in emergency, inpatient, and elective care. In some cases, patients must be transferred to other hospitals or private providers for scans. “With greater scanning capacity, we’ll ease pressure across the system – reducing ED delays, supporting planned surgeries, and enabling faster diagnoses for time-critical conditions. It will also reduce the need to outsource scans, ensuring patients are seen sooner and closer to home.” The modular CT unit will begin operating in February 2026 and provide care for up to eight years, while a permanent imaging hub is developed as part of the hospital’s wider redevelopment. “Modular facilities are faster to deliver, more cost-effective, and flexible – helping us expand critical services sooner while hospital upgrades are underway. “This is exactly the kind of smart infrastructure our health system needs. It strengthens frontline services, supports our health workforce, and ensures people get the care they need, when and where they need it,” Mr Brown says.

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New Governance for Health New Zealand

The Government is today announcing the reestablishment of the Health New Zealand Board, with new appointments to drive its priority of ensuring timely, quality healthcare for all New Zealanders, Health Minister Simeon Brown says. The re-established Health New Zealand Board will take over from the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners appointed last year to stabilise the organisation and set a clear direction. “Under Professor Lester Levy’s leadership as Commissioner, Health New Zealand has delivered a strong financial plan, and a clear Health Delivery Plan is now in place. He is refocusing the organisation on patients and driving progress on the Government’s health targets, which are seeing waitlists reduced,” Mr Brown says. Professor Levy has been appointed Chair of Health New Zealand for a 12-month term to ensure continuity of leadership. His appointment will maintain momentum on the Government’s health targets and keep the focus firmly on patients. Mr Brown also announced his intention to begin a nomination process later this year for a permanent Chair to take effect from 1 July 2026. “I have also appointed an experienced team of Board members who will support Health New Zealand to deliver for patients, including the appointment of Dr Andrew Connolly as Deputy Chair. Dr Connolly is an experienced surgeon and clinical director who has also held numerous appointments across Governments, including Chair of the Medical Council, Crown Monitor, and Commissioner on District Health Boards.

“I am also appointing Hamiora Bowkett as a Crown Observer to keep a close watch on performance and support the Board with independent oversight. This role will focus on supporting the Board’s re-establishment and ensuring Health New Zealand delivers on the Government’s health targets. Mr Bowkett will advise me directly, with a particular focus on Health New Zealand’s financial position and the delivery of health targets.” “We’re also tackling one of the biggest barriers to better care - our ageing health infrastructure - by establishing a dedicated Infrastructure Committee to make sure our Government’s significant investment in health infrastructure delivers modern facilities, on time and on budget. “This is about accountability. Patients care about seeing a doctor sooner, getting their hip surgery faster, being treated in a hospital that works. That’s what these governance changes are designed to achieve.”

The key appointments include: Professor Lester Levy, currently Commissioner of

Health New Zealand and Chair of the Health Research Council, has been appointed Chair of the Health New Zealand Board for a 12-month term. Dr Andrew Connolly, a senior surgeon and clinical leader, is appointed Deputy Chair. Board members include Roger Jarrold, Dr Frances Hughes, Parekawhia McLean, Peter McCardle, and Terry Moore. Hamiora Bowkett is appointed as Crown Observer to support and monitor Health New Zealand. A new Infrastructure Committee, chaired by Dr Margaret Wilsher, will oversee the delivery of critical health projects, supported by experienced members: Mark Binns, James Christmas, Sarah Sinclair, Evan Davies, and Roger Jarrold. “I want to acknowledge the work of Professor Levy as Commissioner, and thank Deputy Commissioners Roger Jarrold, Ken Whelan, and Kylie Clegg for the rapid progress they have made in refocusing Health New Zealand on patients. "There is still much work to do, and I look forward to working with the Health New Zealand Board to deliver for patients, achieve the Government’s health targets, and continue driving progress on the key priorities I announced in March. “These changes ensure we have the right people in the right roles to get it done.” Appointed members will assume their roles on 23 July 2025, when the Commission ends.

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Regional Governance Will Return to Ten Polytechnics

Ten polytechnics will be re-established from 1 January 2026, restoring regional decision-making that supports strong communities and economic growth, Vocational Education Minister Penny Simmonds says. “This is a major milestone in building a vocational education system that’s locally led, regionally responsive, and future focused. We’ve listened to extensive industry feedback and I’m confident our plan will set the sector up for long-term economic and learning success. “We campaigned vigorously against Labour’s reforms which saw all New Zealand polytechnics merged into one unwieldy and uneconomic central institution, Te Pūkenga, taking away the ability of regions to respond to local training and employer needs. “Labour dismantled regionally-led vocational education – and we are restoring it,” Ms Simmonds says. The ten polytechnics returning to regional governance are: Ara Institute of Canterbury (Ara) Eastern Institute of Technology (EIT) Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT) Southern Institute of Technology (SIT) Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec) Unitec Institute of Technology (Unitec) and Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT), which will stand up as a single entity Otago Polytechnic Universal College of Learning (UCOL) The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand will be the anchor polytechnic of the new federation, which includes Otago Polytechnic and UCOL. The federation will coordinate programmes and other services, including shared academic boards. It will provide a low overhead way for polytechnics to create more efficient business models than they could on their own through the use of on online learning resources and programmes.

Four other polytechnics — NorthTec, Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki (WITT), Whitireia Community Polytechnic and Wellington Institute of Technology (Whitireia and WelTec), and Tai Poutini Polytechnic (TPP) — will remain within Te Pūkenga for now as they work toward viability, with decisions due in the first half of 2026. These changes are part of legislation before Parliament. The Education and Workforce Select Committee is reviewing the Bill, which is expected to pass in October. The ten new polytechnics will begin operating from 1 January 2026. “I want to thank everyone who made submissions. Your feedback helped shape a better way forward,” Ms Simmonds says. Te Pūkenga will act as a transitional entity for up to a year to manage unallocated programmes and support a smooth handover. The legislation also allows mergers or closures if any polytechnic cannot achieve viability. “With more than 250,000 students in the vocational education system each year, these changes offer greater flexibility, financial sustainability, and ensure training remains relevant to employment needs,” Ms Simmonds says. “Industry will have a stronger role, communities will regain local control, and polytechnics will be financially sustainable. “We’re rebuilding our incredibly important vocational education system so that it delivers — for students, for employers, and for the future of New Zealand.”

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New Advanced Tech Institute Backs Science Sector

Science, Innovation and Technology Minister Dr Shane Reti has announced the establishment of a new institute to grow New Zealand’s advanced technology sector and boost high-value exports. Minister Reti says the new public research organisation, to be named the New Zealand Institute for Advanced Technology (NZIAT), will play a leading role in turning world-class science into commercial success. “The Institute will focus on breakthrough technologies like AI, quantum computing, and synthetic biology – fields with the potential to transform industries, grow exports, and lift New Zealand’s global competitiveness,” Dr Reti says. “It will be a cornerstone of our plan to grow a high-tech, high-value economy.” The Government has committed an initial $231 million over four years to: Invest in science and technology that supports industries with the potential to shape New Zealand’s future Develop skills and grow expertise in new and promising technologies Help boost New Zealand’s economy by innovating and commercialising new technologies into real-world businesses and products. The Institute is intended to have a central base in Auckland, as an existing centre of innovation, and will invest in a broad network of smaller centres to conduct research in collaboration with universities, industry, and existing research institutions. The first major investment, announced in May, is based at Wellington’s Robinson Research Institute, specialising in Future Magnetic and Materials Technologies. Additional investments will be confirmed following advice from the Prime Minister’s Science, Innovation and

Technology Advisory Council, which will meet for the first time today. “New Zealand has made significant investments in areas of existing strength, like agri-tech, resulting in our global reputation for cutting-edge agricultural science,” says Dr Reti. “This new Institute, supported by strategic advice from the Prime Minister’s Advisory Council, will build on existing strengths and capabilities, and break into new technologies to grow our global reputation as a centre of innovation. “This is about delivering long-term value for New Zealanders – transforming research into growth, jobs, and global impact,” Dr Reti says.

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New School Property Agency to Be Established

The Government will establish a new school property agency to help ensure Kiwi kids can learn in safe, warm and dry buildings. “The Government inherited a school property system bordering on a crisis. The previous government made big promises to school communities, but its unfunded, bespoke, expensive projects weren’t deliverable and left schools across the country waiting – often for years – for the classrooms and refurbishments they so badly needed,” Education Minister Erica Stanford says. “Our Government took immediate action to sort this out. We initiated a Ministerial Inquiry into School Property, I instructed the Ministry of Education to focus on offsite manufacturing solutions and improving communication with schools. A value for money review was also completed which helped inform a more fiscally responsible approach.

“These immediate actions are working, we’ve already lowered the average cost of a classroom by 28%, meaning we were able to deliver 31% more classrooms last year compared to 2023, 583 classrooms in total. Currently new classrooms cost on average $620,000, compared to the $1.2 million average cost per classroom at the end of 2023. “The report also found the Ministry of Education’s processes for managing the school property portfolio needed overhauling, that schools struggled with a lack of transparency, unclear prioritisation of projects, and inefficient project planning and delivery. “The Inquiry recommended the Government create a new entity separate from the Ministry of Education to manage school property. The Government accepted this recommendation, and Cabinet has now also agreed on the form that this new entity will take.”

The New Zealand School Property Agency (NZSPA), a new Crown agent, will be responsible for planning, building, maintaining and administrating the school property portfolio. The Ministry of Education will remain responsible for education policy and network decisions, including where growth is required. This separation will allow the Ministry to focus on education outcomes, while the board of NZSPA will be responsible for the school property portfolio. “A Crown agent balances flexibility, transparency and Ministerial direction while bringing commercial discipline to the leadership and board oversight. It will have a dedicated board with the commercial acumen appropriate to support informed investment decisions for the second largest social property portfolio in New Zealand," Infrastructure Minister Chris Bishop says.

"With the establishment of the NZSPA, schools can expect improved project delivery and communication, better value for money, and an increased level of transparency around decision making. "The agency will be established in this Parliamentary term. A Ministerial Advisory Group will provide specialist independent advice on the transition to the new agency. This group is chaired by Murray McCully, with Mark Binns, Rick Herd, Sarah Petersen and Craig Stobo as the other members. "School communities can be assured that works and improvements currently underway will continue as planned while we work through the next steps. Our focus remains on driving efficiencies across the school property portfolio through a combination of cost-effective repeatable designs and offsite manufactured buildings," Ms Stanford says. "We're backing our schools with the infrastructure they need to succeed – for teachers, for communities, and most importantly, for kids."

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Independent Children's Board to Protect Kiwi Kids

The Government is fulfilling a significant commitment to vulnerable Kiwi kids, with the appointment of Dr Ang Jury, ONZM as Chair of the new Board for the Independent Children's Monitor. The Monitor is one of three statutory bodies having oversight of the Oranga Tamariki system, along with the Children's Commissioner and the Ombudsman. "This marks a significant step for vulnerable children," Social Development and Employment Minister Louise Upston says. "The legislative changes I have taken through Parliament this year have enabled this appointment, reflecting commitments in the National-ACT coalition agreement to create a truly independent monitoring and oversight agency for Oranga Tamariki. "As current chief executive of Women's Refuge, Dr Jury is an outstanding appointee and will serve a five-year term. She brings expertise in the wider social and Oranga Tamariki sectors. "Her commitment and senior leadership experience will support the successful establishment of the new Board from 1 August 2025." Dr Jury's role with Women's Refuge is expected to conclude by the end of the year. Other Board members will be appointed in due course. The Monitor's current Chief Executive, Arran Jones, will remain in his role from 1 August 2025 to 31 July 2026 to oversee and support the organisation's transition.

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The Chief Human Rights Commissioner has Taken a Jab at the Coalition Government, Calling Its Voting Reforms a "Backward Step" for Democracy.

Opposition parties have been quick to criticise the proposals as undemocratic, while the Attorney-General has found they are inconsistent with people's rights. Dr Stephen Rainbow, who was appointed by Goldsmith late last year, has now weighed in with his own criticism of the legislation. "We have a time in history when democratic institutions are really struggling to maintain their legitimacy and their people's faith in them and I don't understand why, at a time like this, we would be making it even more difficult for people to participate in voting, which is a critical part of faith in our democratic institutions." Rainbow said New Zealand needed to be doing everything it could to strengthen and enhance its democracy, and that included making it as easy as possible for people to vote. "I think it's entirely understandable that the Government would want to have an efficient electoral process but, look, we've had a process from 1993 until 2020 where people could enrol until the day before the election. "The process over time has been made easier for people to enrol and then to vote and to step back from that at this point seems most undesirable and certainly, from a human rights perspective, is not an appropriate course of action." Rainbow wouldn't go as far as calling on the coalition to scrap the legislation, instead saying he would be making a submission outlining his opposition to the bill during the select committee stage. "I don't think that this legislative change is helpful to enhancing democracy, to encouraging people, particularly younger people and vulnerable communities, to participate in the democratic process.

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Asia-Pacific

Mobile-Phone Technology Powers Saving Surge in Developing Economies

More adults than ever in low- and middle-income countries now have bank or other financial accounts, leading to a rise in formal saving, according to the World Bank Group's Global Findex 2025 report. This momentum in financial inclusion is creating new economic opportunities. Mobile-phone technology played a key role in the surge, with 10% of adults in developing economies using a mobile-money account to save—a 5-percentage point increase from 2021. In 2024, 40% of adults in developing economies saved in a financial account in 2024—a 16-percentage-point increase since 2021 and the fastest rise in more than a decade. Higher personal saving—through banks or other formal institutions—fuels national financial systems, making more funds available for investment, innovation, and economic growth. In Sub-Saharan Africa, formal savings increased by 12-percentage points to 35% of adults. *“Financial inclusion has the potential to improve lives and transform entire* *economies,"* said **World Bank Group President Ajay Banga**. *"Digital finance can convert this potential into reality, but several ingredients need to be in place. At the World Bank Group, we're working on all of them. We're helping countries get their people access to new or improved digital IDs. We're constructing social protection programs with digital cash-transfer systems that deliver resources directly to those in need. We're modernizing payment systems and helping to remove regulatory roadblocks—so that people and businesses have the financing they need to innovate and create jobs."*

Bill Gates, Chair of the Gates Foundation, one of the supporters of the Global Findex, said: *"More people than ever have the financial tools to invest in their futures and build economic resilience, including women and others previously left behind. This is real progress. The case for investing in inclusive financial systems, digital public infrastructure, and connectivity is clear—it's a proven path to unlocking opportunity for everyone."* The Global Findex is the definitive source of data on global access to financial services—from payments to saving and borrowing. It highlights a major milestone in financial inclusion: nearly 80% of adults worldwide now have a financial account, up from 50% in 2011. But 1.3 billion adults still lack access to financial services. Mobile phones could help close this gap: about 900 million adults without financial accounts have a mobile phone, including 530 million with smartphones.
Investment in systems that enable instant money transfers—such as UPI in India or PIX in Brazil—could help expand financial usage. So could stronger consumer-protection frameworks and efforts to make phones and accounts more secure. The Findex data also show that digital financial services are helping narrow the gender gap in account ownership: globally, 77% of women have accounts compared with 81% of men. In low- and middle-income countries, women's account ownership nearly doubled—from 37% in 2011 to 73% in 2024.

For the first time, the report includes data on personal mobile-phone ownership and internet use. Globally, 86% of adults owned a mobile phone, including 68% of adults with a smartphone, according to the Global Findex Digital Connectivity Tracker 2025 shows. The rising use of mobile phones for digital transactions, however, comes with new risks. Of the 4 billion adults in low- and middle-income economies who own a mobile phone, only around half use a password to protect their phone. Across all developing countries, more adults are also using mobile phones or cards to pay merchants. In 2024, 42% of adults in low- and middle-income countries made an in-store or online digital merchant payment, up from 35% in 2021. Three-quarters of adults who receive government payments—and half of wage earners—receive their money into an account, a practice that helps reduce theft and ensure that money goes to the right person.

<u>Regional Highlights:</u>

East Asia and Pacific: The region leads the world in digital connectivity and use of financial services: 86% of adults have a smartphone and 83% of adults have a financial account.

Europe and Central Asia: The region has the highest internet usage and social media engagement rates among developing economies. Mobile-phone ownership rates top 94%.

Latin America and the Caribbean: About 70% of adults have an account, and over half use their account digitally using a card or phone.

Middle East and North Africa: Account ownership rose to 53% from 45% in 2021. In 2024, 17% of adults save formally, up from 11% in 2021.

South Asia: Nearly 80% of adults own an account, although the high rate is driven by India, where 90% of both men and women have an account and 65% own a mobile phone.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Account ownership in Sub-Saharan Africa grew to 58% of adults, up from 49% in 2021. Use of mobile money accounts is at the highest levels in the world.

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World Bank Group Strengthens Procurement Requirements to Support Job Creation, Skills Development

The World Bank is strengthening its procurement requirements to help address the jobs challenge in developing countries by requiring companies working on World Bank-funded projects to include local labor participation in civil works contracts. Under the updated rules, companies bidding on international civil works contracts—such as the construction and maintenance of transportation and energy infrastructure—must ensure that 30% of labor cost is local. The goal is to boost domestic job creation and skills development. These changes apply to civil works contracts subject to competitive international procurement, starting September 1, 2025. Employing local labor contributes to income generation within communities, allowing people to better support their families, build knowledge and skills, and reinvest in the local economy. Public infrastructure projects can be an especially powerful instrument for job creation. With 1.2 billion young people projected to enter the workforce in emerging economies over the next decade, this enhanced focus on job generation through the procurement process will help deepen the impact of the World Bank's financing. *"This new requirement underpins our commitment to job creation,"* said Gallina A. Vincelette, Vice President for Operations Policy and Country Services at the World Bank. "*By prioritizing the use of local labor in World Bank-funded projects, we not only create immediate employment opportunities for people in our client countries but also invest in the long-term potential of local communities. This approach helps build a skilled and better-equipped workforce and strengthens local economies.*" This update to the World Bank's procurement framework builds on measures introduced in March 2025 that were designed to deliver better outcomes in the procurement process by attracting highly qualified bidders and innovative solutions in Bank-financed investment projects. They include a stronger focus on quality in bid evaluation, ensuring that life-cycle costs, innovation, sustainability and other quality attributes, including local job creation, are given adequate weight in the evaluation of high-value contracts.

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STAR Market Reforms to Spur Innovation

Ongoing reforms at the tech-focused STAR Market of the Shanghai Stock Exchange, part of China's continued efforts to give more financial support to the private economy, will further spur technology innovation and facilitate high-quality economic growth in the country, said experts. The comments came after two new private economy-focused subindexes were officially launched at the STAR Market on Wednesday. The SSE STAR Private-owned Enterprises Index will track all private companies trading on the STAR Market. Public data show that there were 422 such companies by the end of June, with a combined market capitalization of 3.5 trillion yuan ($490 million). Among these, 171 reported increases both in sales revenue and net profit last year, 37 companies posted a 50 percent year-on-year increase in turnover, while 64 firms saw a 50 percent surge in annual net profit. Another subindex, SSE STAR Private-owned Enterprises 50 Strategy Index, was also launched on Wednesday. The index constituents are 50 private companies with high research expenditure and strong profitability. Companies specializing in semiconductors, computers and biomedicine account for about 68.5 percent weighting in the new index. The total market cap of its 50 constituents reached 1.2 trillion yuan by the end of June. The average daily trading value of these companies came in at 16.1 billion yuan in 2024.

Fang Yi, chief strategist at Guotai Haitong Securities, said that index-based investments have been maturing at the STAR Market after the board started trading six years ago. More products have been designed and introduced based on these indexes, boosting market activity and diversifying the investor pool, he said. A total of 32 STAR Market subindexes have been launched so far, deriving 86 STAR Market exchange-traded funds with a total market value of over 250 billion yuan. Half of these subindexes were rolled out after the release of eight additional reform policies for the STAR Market in June last year, according to SSE and China Securities Index Co Ltd. According to market tracker Wind Info, there are about 3,478 private companies trading on mainland's major exchanges, accounting for two-thirds of all the A-share companies. Their combined market cap topped 31.7 trillion yuan, accounting for 38.5 percent of the A-share market total. More important, A-share listed private companies saw their combined research investment exceeding 650 billion yuan for a second consecutive year in 2024. Research expenditure was equal to 3.8 percent of their annual sales revenue last year, 1.2 percentage points higher than the A-share market average.

A large number of STAR Market companies specialize in future-oriented industries such as biological manufacturing, quantum technology, embodied intelligence and 6G, which are at an early stage in China, said experts from Changjiang Securities. Focusing on hard technologies, cutting-edge technologies and market-based pricing, the STAR Market has served as a major venue for the Chinese capital market to facilitate technology innovation, said Tian Xuan, head of Tsinghua University's National Institute of Financial Research. China has also been advancing efforts to inject more vitality into the private sector. The Private Sector Promotion Law, which took effect in May, has unveiled substantial measures regarding the investment and financing of private enterprises. Apart from announcing a set of new STAR Market reform policies at the Lujiazui Forum in June, China Securities Regulatory Commission Chairman Wu Qing stressed that unprofitable yet quality innovation-driven companies will be supported to seek public listings. With concerted efforts from various government bodies, financing provided to private enterprises will be increased and their costs lowered. These companies' technology innovation and green transition will be better supported, said Tian Lihui, head of the Institute of Finance and Development at Nankai University.

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WIC Hosts Forum on AI Development and Governance

At the World Internet Conference (WIC) in Quanzhou, China a session on artificial intelligence (AI) development and governance took place on July 23. Wang Jingtao, deputy director of the Cyberspace Administration of China, shared China's approach to advancing and regulating AI, while Ren Xianliang, the WIC's secretary-general delivered welcome remarks.The event showcased China's dedication to advancing AI responsibly. It emphasized four core principles guiding China's approach: establishing a unique governance system through policy support, driving innovation by leveraging AI as a catalyst for new quality productive forces, ensuring comprehensive security measures for businesses, and fostering openness and collaboration to create a unified cyber community for the future. Next, efforts will focus on summarizing experience and improving mechanisms, with greater emphasis on balancing development and governance to further promote the healthy and orderly advancement of AI in a beneficial, safe, and equitable direction. Officials from the network management technology bureau, the cybersecurity coordination bureau, and the international cooperation bureau of the Cyberspace Administration of China participated in the event. During the interactive session, participants exchanged views on issues such as AI infrastructure development, regulatory policy interpretation, and industry development trends. This exchange broadened their comprehension of pertinent policies and tackled significant industry issues. They voiced optimism for the continuation of thematic discussions by the WIC to promote dialogue, collaboration, and enterprise development. The event hosted by the WIC drew representatives from more than 50 companies, including Qualcomm, IBM, Nokia Bell Labs, Huawei, Ping An Group, Baidu, Tencent, JD.com, CTM, Keeson Technology, and vivo.

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Intl Forum Seeks to Address AI Divide During WAIC 2025

The Emerging Markets and Developing Countries Forum on Bridging the AI Divide and the opening ceremony of the Artificial Intelligence for Industry and Manufacturing Center of Excellence was held on Sunday during the 2025 World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai, focusing on promoting open cooperation and technology sharing in artificial intelligence among emerging economies and developing nations. The forum, held in the city's Minhang district, attracted over 300 participants from more than 20 countries and regions, with representatives from think tanks, universities, governments, and enterprises discussing ways to bridge the global AI development gap. Amandeep Singh Gill, UN under-secretary-general and special envoy for digital and emerging technologies, highlighted disparities in global AI infrastructure. "All of Africa has just less than 1 percent of the world's data center capacity and less than 1,000 GPUs to train AI models," he noted, adding that 180 countries remain outside major AI governance initiatives. Gill revealed that the UN secretary-general will present a report proposing options, including a global fund on AI, to support countries lacking basic AI capabilities in computing, data, talent, policies, and use cases. "We move forward inclusively with confidence that AI will benefit all of humanity, and its risks and harms will not be unfairly loaded onto some sections of the global population," he noted.

Liu Fang, former secretary-general of the International Civil Aviation Organization, drew parallels between AI development and sustainable development goals, emphasizing the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships. "Just as no one nation can solve climate change alone, no single actor can ensure the responsible and inclusive development of AI," Liu said. Cho Sung-hwan, president of the International Organization for Standardization, stressed the importance of international standards in ensuring equitable AI development. "The benefits of AI must be shared by all, not just by those developing the technology," Cho said, highlighting ISO's inclusive standards development process that brings together diverse stakeholders. The forum marked the inauguration of the new site of AIM Global CoE, the first specialized international institution focusing on AI cooperation under the UN framework. The center aims to attract international cooperation projects, technology, resources, and talent to the Minhang district. Several strategic partnerships were announced during the event, including the signing of a mutual recognition mechanism agreement between AIM Global and the BRICS+ AI alliance network. The AIM Global CoE also established partnerships with institutes, including the Macao Translational Medicine Center and Shanghai Polytechnic University.

Two high-level roundtable discussions explored AI-driven industrial development paths for emerging economies and the construction of a fair AI future and its socioeconomic impacts. Experts agreed on the need to strengthen comprehensive capacity building and transnational collaboration in AI innovation, application, and governance. Supporting China's AI education strategy, the Shanghai Artificial Intelligence Research Institute signed agreements with Qibao high school education group and Xiehe education group to establish an international AI education laboratory and an AI+ education innovation cooperation body. This event is hosted by the AIM Global CoE and co-organized by institutions including the Shanghai Artificial Intelligence Research Institute and Shanghai Technology Innovation Center.

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Innovation Platform for Smart Tech Launched

A major national open innovation platform for artificial intelligence has been unveiled to leverage the collective strength of State-owned enterprises and the broader industrial chain for accelerating the development of the AI sector in China. Guided by ministries including the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council, the platform is roughly translated as AI Huanxin and is being spearheaded by telecom operator China Mobile. Positioned as an open-source platform to serve society, it brings together leading central SOEs, private-sector champions, and innovative research and development institutions. It offers a comprehensive channel for businesses of all sizes, universities, research bodies, and individual developers to access AI resources, including domestic large language models and chips, China Mobile said. China Mobile Chairman Yang Jie said the platform delivers full-cycle services to society — spanning computing power scheduling, data processing, model training and deployment, and application development — accelerating the technological and ecosystem maturity of domestic AI chips and foundational models. A cornerstone offering is its release of 40 strategic high-value AI scenarios drawn from 16 key industries, providing invaluable reference models for industrial AI applications.

The platform delivers six core functionalities through a comprehensive suite of resources. It aggregates substantial computing power, including over 2,000 domestically produced AI accelerator cards contributed by China's three major telecom operators. For AI development, it hosts an extensive model repository containing 274 open-source models alongside 10 proprietary technology models. Its data resources encompass five types of general datasets — including text, image, video and audio — plus 13 industry-specific datasets covering sectors such as telecommunications, petrochemicals, energy, defense, agriculture and finance, China Mobile said. The platform has already attracted significant participation from over 90 enterprises, more than 50 universities, and over 20 organizations, including more than 10 central SOEs, China Mobile added. Concurrently, a key institutional development marked the event with the inauguration of China Mobile Jiutian Artificial Intelligence Technology Co Ltd. The Jiutian team possesses a distinguished 12-year track record in scaling AI applications within the information and communications technology sector. Facing rapid global AI advancements in 2023, the team achieved a significant breakthrough by developing the Jiutian foundational large model — notable as the first central SOE model to receive dual certification from the Cyberspace Administration of China for both its service offerings and underlying algorithms.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Zhongguancun Modern Information Consumer Application Industry Technology Alliance, a telecom industry association, said the scarcity of industry data sets available for application and inefficient supply of computing power are two obstacles for China's AI development. The platform spearheaded by China Mobile will accelerate the development of the AI sector, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, Xiang added. Xie Shaofeng, chief engineer of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said at a news conference earlier this month that China will ramp up efforts to accelerate the application of AI in manufacturing as well as other key industries. The nation has nurtured and open-sourced AI-powered large language models, with stepped-up adoption across various industries including electronics and consumer goods, Xie said, highlighting that AI mobile phones, AI computers and AI glasses have become new growth points driving economic development.

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ADB President Calls for Increased Innovation Investment at STS Forum

Asian Development Bank (ADB) President Masato Kanda urged increased investment in science, technology, and innovation to drive inclusive and sustainable growth in Southeast Asia during his keynote address at the 9th Science and Technology in Society (STS) Forum ASEAN–Japan Conference in Jakarta. "ASEAN is home to extraordinary potential," said Mr. Kanda. "Countries that innovate are countries that thrive. By connecting ideas with resources and leveraging platforms like the STS Forum, we can create opportunities that reach every community." Mr. Kanda said innovation must remain central to regional strategies. He outlined opportunities to build resilient food systems, modern energy networks, and smart cities to improve lives across the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). He also underscored the importance of regional cooperation, increased investment in research and development, and partnerships with the private sector to close technology gaps and advance inclusive prosperity. Mr. Kanda identified three priorities: modern and interconnected energy systems, resilient food systems, and smart, inclusive cities. He reaffirmed that ADB will provide up to $10 billion for the ASEAN Power Grid in the next 10 years and $40 billion for food systems transformation by 2030, along with significant support for sustainable urban development, digital connectivity, and innovation. In Indonesia, Mr. Kanda also visited ADB-supported projects in Lombok, including an irrigation initiative by women-led water user associations to enhance food and water security, and a solar farm built by Vena Energy, a leading renewable energy producer, highlighting ADB's support for Indonesia's energy transition and private sector investment. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting inclusive, resilient, and sustainable growth across Asia and the Pacific. Working with its members and partners to solve complex challenges together, ADB harnesses innovative financial tools and strategic partnerships to transform lives, build quality infrastructure, and safeguard our planet.

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East Asia

CHINA: Xi Stresses Building Unified National Market, Promoting Marine Economy's High-quality Development

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday stressed efforts to advance the building of a unified national market and promote the high-quality development of the marine economy. Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks at a meeting of the Central Commission for Financial and Economic Affairs (CCFEA), which he heads. In his speech at the meeting, Xi emphasized that building a unified national market is essential for creating a new development pattern and promoting high-quality development, urging strengthened coordination and cooperation to build synergy in related work. Xi stressed that advancing Chinese modernization requires promoting the marine economy's high-quality development and forging a Chinese path of leveraging marine resources to achieve strength. It was noted at the meeting that the basic requirement for advancing the building of a unified national market is to unify underlying market institutions, market infrastructure, government conduct, regulatory enforcement, and markets of production factors and resources, while continuously expanding opening up both internally and externally.

Efforts must be made to regulate enterprises' disorderly price competition in accordance with laws and regulations, standardize government procurement as well as tendering and bidding processes, regulate local governments' investment attraction practices, and facilitate sales of export-oriented products at domestic market. It is also imperative to improve fiscal and taxation systems, statistics and accounting systems, and credit systems to foster a unified national market, and to refine evaluation frameworks for high-quality development and system for assessing officials' performance. To promote the high-quality development of the marine economy, there should be a greater focus on innovation-driven growth, efficient coordination, industrial renewal, harmony between human and the sea, and win-win cooperation, according to the meeting.

It also emphasized increasing policy support and encouraging private capital participation in the marine economy. China should boost its capacity for marine technological innovation, strengthen, optimize and expand its marine industries, enhance marine ecological protection, and promote global cooperation in marine scientific research, disaster prevention and mitigation, and the blue economy, the meeting said. Li Qiang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, Chinese premier and deputy director of the CCFEA, Cai Qi, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, a member of the CPC Central Committee Secretariat and a member of the CCFEA, and Ding Xuexiang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, Chinese vice premier and a member of the CCFEA, attended the meeting.

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Senior Official Urges Boosting Sci-tech, Industrial Innovation Toward High-quality Development

Senior Chinese official Wang Xiaohong has urged efforts to adhere to the new development philosophy, effectively boost sci-tech and industrial innovation, and achieve new results in the country's high-quality development. Wang, a member of the Secretariat of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and state councilor, made the remarks during an investigation and research tour in east China's Anhui Province between Thursday and Friday. During the tour, Wang urged efforts to transform and upgrade traditional industries while fostering and expanding emerging industries, and continuously enhance the capability of original innovation. He also stressed the need to actively develop the low-altitude economy on a safe and secure basis, devise more beneficial policies for the people and enterprises, and ensure law enforcement is carried out in a strict, procedure-based, impartial, and civilized manner.

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Chinese Vice Premier Underlines Sci-tech Innovation in Agriculture, Healthcare

Chinese Vice Premier Liu Guozhong has called for accelerating sci-tech innovation in the fields of agriculture and healthcare, and enhancing the independent innovation capabilities of medicines and medical devices. Liu, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during a research trip to south China's Guangdong Province from Thursday to Saturday. He emphasized that it is essential to focus on the urgent needs of the industry and target key areas such as seed industry, agricultural machinery, forage, and planting and breeding technologies. Liu called for speeding up the transformation of agricultural sci-tech achievements, actively supporting the intelligent agriculture, vigorously developing the deep processing of agricultural products, and strengthening the employment guidance and skills training to help the people who have been lifted out of poverty and rural workers maintain stable employment. Efforts should also be made to encourage enterprises, hospitals and research institutions to focus on the cutting-edge and "bottleneck" technologies of medicines and medical devices and strengthen the in-depth integration of industry, academia, research and application, Liu said.

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Chinese Procuratorates Continue to Ensure Lawful, Just Enforcement of Punishment

Chinese procuratorates issued more than 2,000 written notices and procuratorial suggestions regarding cases of commutation, parole and temporary execution of sentence outside prison in the first six months of 2025, China's top procuratorate announced Tuesday. The notices and suggestions were issued to urge relevant departments to rectify unlawful or irregular practices in the handling of these instances, as part of China's effort to enhance supervision to ensure lawful and just enforcement of punishment, according to the Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP). The SPP noted that, in the first six months of 2025, commutation, parole and temporary execution of sentence outside prison cases involving more than 130,000 individuals were handled by procuratorates nationwide. Procuratorial organs have, additionally, been continuously urging the rectification of supervision and law enforcement problems found in correctional facilities during special inspection tours conducted in 2024. They have been following up and supervising the handling of clues about judicial staff's job-related crimes -- such as favoritism and fraud, abuse of power and abuse of detainees.

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Chinese State Councilor Calls for Expanded Services Consumption, Safeguarded Livelihoods

Chinese State Councilor Shen Yiqin has called for efforts to expand services consumption in sectors like culture, tourism and elderly care, and to strengthen work on the key issues affecting people's livelihoods. Shen made the remarks during a research tour from Sunday to Wednesday in central China's Jiangxi Province. She emphasized the need for innovative approaches to create premium cultural-tourism brands and routes to transform resource advantages into development strengths, and highlighted the importance of transforming the cultural-tourism sector into a pillar industry to bring sustained economic vitality. It is crucial that China enhances its basic elderly care system, promotes home modifications involving old-age-friendly facilities, and develops its silver economy, Shen said. She called for increased assistance for people with disabilities, children in need, and low-income and unemployed citizens, and for efforts to safeguard the basic living standards of people in difficulty. Stressing the need to ensure both development and security, Shen also urged enhanced safety management of tourist sites, public cultural institutions and social services organizations, among others.

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Chinese Vice Premier Calls for Boosting Basic Pharmaceutical Research, Sci-tech Innovation

Chinese Vice Premier Liu Guozhong on Thursday stressed the need for efforts to enhance basic research and technological innovation capabilities in the pharmaceutical field. Liu, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, visited Peking University's School of Pharmaceutical Sciences to learn about medical research and development, as well as the construction and operations of key laboratories, and listened to opinions from various relevant parties at a symposium. Efforts should be made to strengthen collaborative research and policy implementation centering on people's health, and to advance the development of innovative drugs and medical facilities, thereby providing strong support to advance the Healthy China initiative, Liu said. Noting the positive momentum of China's pharmaceutical innovation in recent years, Liu called for joint research efforts from enterprises, universities, research institutions and medical institutions, and for full use of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data to accelerate the development of life and health databases. He also urged efforts to expand high-level opening up, and to deepen international exchange and cooperation in the field of pharmaceutical technology so as to better safeguard the health and well-being of the people.

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China Consolidates Poverty Alleviation Achievements in Five-year Transitional Period

China has made continuous efforts to consolidate and expand its poverty alleviation achievements in a five-year transitional period after the country, in February 2021, solemnly declared a complete victory in eradicating absolute poverty, a think tank report said on Friday. The report, titled "Striving for a Better Life for the People: China's Practical and Theoretical Innovations in Consolidating and Expanding Poverty Alleviation Achievement," was released by Xinhua Institute, a national high-level think tank of Xinhua News Agency. According to the report, following its victory in the battle against poverty, China set a five-year transitional period to consolidate and expand the achievements as part of the efforts to promote rural revitalization. In response to complex challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic headwinds and growing global development disparities, China has worked to bridge the urban-rural divide by promoting the experiences from Zhejiang's "Green Rural Revival Program" and deepening east-west collaboration to address regional imbalances and underdevelopment, making sustained efforts to narrow the gap between urban and rural areas as well as among different regions, the report noted.

The year 2025 marks the final year of the five-year transitional period. Throughout this period, China has firmly upheld the bottom line of preventing any large-scale relapse into poverty, it said. This has been manifested in employment and income. For instance, as of the end of 2024, 33.05 million individuals from formerly impoverished households were engaged in employment, a figure that has remained steadily above 30 million for four consecutive years, according to the report. In 2024, the per capita disposable income of rural residents in counties that had shaken off poverty reached 17,522 yuan (about 2,450 U.S. dollars), a 24.7 percent increase over 2021. For four consecutive years, income growth in these counties has outpaced the national average for rural residents, according to the report. The report also summarized that the transitional framework constituted a four-pronged long-term mechanism for preventing relapse into poverty, which was reflected through the continuity of responsibilities, policies, resources and funding support, and poverty monitoring. "As a pivotal institutional arrangement for transitioning from the eradication of absolute poverty to the pursuit of common prosperity, China's five-year transitional period established a comprehensive mechanism for monitoring and preventing a return to poverty," it added.

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Chinese Premier Stresses High-quality Implementation of Major National Projects

Chinese Premier Li Qiang has urged efforts to develop major national projects with high quality, promote economic and social development, and enhance well-being of the people of different ethnic groups. Li made the remarks during an inspection tour from Friday to Saturday in southwest China's Xizang Autonomous Region. During the tour, he emphasized the need to prioritize ecological conservation, ensure high-quality implementation of major national projects, and foster distinctive and competitive industries tailored to local conditions. While inspecting a construction site of the Sichuan-Xizang Railway project in Nyingchi city, Li said the completion and opening of the railway will be of great significance for promoting Xizang's development and improving people's livelihoods, noting that quality and safety must always be the top priority. Describing the Yarlung Zangbo hydropower project as a project of the century, Li called for the adoption of advanced technologies, equipment, techniques, and materials to provide robust support for high-quality construction of the project.

He also noted that special emphasis must be placed on ecological conservation to prevent environmental damage, and urged efforts to build the project into a major signature project of the new era. At a modern agriculture demonstration zone in Lhasa, the capital city of Xizang, Li learned about the development of Xizang's agriculture and animal husbandry industries as well as the plateau biology institute. He stated that leveraging unique local resources to develop plateau agriculture and animal husbandry serves as a key driver for boosting people's incomes and promoting economic growth in Xizang. Li urged efforts to enhance the demonstration and promotion of new technologies in the agriculture and animal husbandry sectors, and strive for breakthroughs in high-altitude breeding. Fully affirming Xizang's achievements in economic and social development, Li also urged officials and other people in Xizang to step up efforts to maintain stability, promote development, protect ecology, and boost development in border areas.

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Chinese Vice Premier Calls for Strengthened Agricultural Production, Poverty Alleviation Work

Chinese Vice Premier Liu Guozhong has urged efforts to strengthen China's production of key agricultural products, and to consolidate and expand the achievements of the country's poverty alleviation campaign continuously. Liu, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during an inspection tour in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region which began on Sunday and ended on Tuesday. During his tour, Liu learned about rice production, the cultivation of sugar plants and the construction of high-standard farmland. He stressed the importance of harvesting early-season rice in a timely manner, of boosting late-season rice yields, of stabilizing the production of sugar plants, and of continuing high-standard farmland development. With the ongoing threat of typhoons and flooding, Liu urged immediate action to manage waterlogging and implement measures such as crop replanting to minimize damage. He emphasized the need for targeted poverty alleviation measures focusing on stable employment for migrant workers and people who have emerged from poverty. He also highlighted the importance of tapping local strengths to develop rural industries that boost farmers' incomes.

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China Maintains Hard Stance on Gang Crimes

Chinese police have dismantled over 590 mafia-style organizations and over 8,900 other criminal gangs during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), according to the Ministry of Public Security on Wednesday. More than 105,000 gang-related criminal cases have been solved nationwide over the period, said Jiang Guoli, political commissar of the ministry's criminal investigation bureau, at a press conference. Jiang stressed that law enforcement agencies maintained a "zero-tolerance" policy toward organized crime, especially complex, high-profile cases. The ministry directly oversaw 183 major investigations during the five years and captured 2,353 fugitives in a nationwide campaign to bring key suspects to justice. Law enforcement authorities also focused on the root causes of organized crime through long-term crime prevention and social governance mechanisms, Jiang said, noting that targeted campaigns were carried out in cities and counties with a high volume of public complaints and gang-related incidents. Jiang said that efforts to address gang activity have extended into industries and regions vulnerable to criminal infiltration. Police have worked closely with regulatory bodies to address criminality in rural areas, wholesale markets, the natural resource sector, and construction projects. "By disrupting the cycle in which disorder fosters crime and crime evolves into organized gangs, authorities aim to eliminate the conditions that allow such groups to thrive," Jiang said.

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China Moves to Foster Healthy Market Driven by Innovation, Not Price Wars

China is strengthening oversight of what it describes as involution-style competition, aiming to foster a market that rewards quality and innovation while promoting healthier, more sustainable industrial development. Authorities have recently taken steps to regulate the new energy vehicle (NEV) sector and food delivery platforms, where aggressive price wars dominated the market. An array of measures from product pricing monitoring to quality inspections were announced at a meeting on market competition of the NEV sector held by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the National Development and Reform Commission, and the State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR). Meanwhile, the SAMR has urged three major players in the food delivery market to revise their promotional activities and adopt a rational approach to competition. This follows a fierce discount competition where platforms attracted customers with massive and unsustainable "free meal" subsidies.

These moves reflect the country's broader campaign to address "involution," a concept gaining traction in recent years to describe cutthroat competition, where companies, vying for market share, engage in aggressive price cuts but only get trapped in a cycle of diminishing returns. The 2025 government work report released in March vowed to "take comprehensive steps to address rat race competition." The focus was cemented at a meeting of the Central Commission for Financial and Economic Affairs on July 1, as policymakers pledged to tackle disorderly low-price competition, guide enterprises to improve product quality, and facilitate the orderly exit of outdated production capacities. Unlike healthy competition that drives innovation and efficiency, involution leads to nowhere and erodes industry health, analysts said. Mao Zhenhua, an economics professor of Renmin University of China, said such vicious competition is doing real damage to domestic industries. "It has driven down commodity prices, squeezing corporate profits and ultimately depressing household wages and consumption power."

In the NEV sector for instance, manufacturers have been engaged in relentless price undercutting in an effort to prop up sales, resulting in declining profitability and stoking concerns about deteriorating quality. In early 2025, over 60 car models slashed prices in China. Industry-wide net margins fell to 4.3 percent last year, according to the China Automobile Dealers Association. The race to the bottom also strained supply chains, said Liu Zhibiao, an economist at Nanjing University. As downstream industry giants wage price wars, they often push costs and risks upstream, such as delaying payments to parts suppliers or forcing last-minute price cuts -- practices that imperil small and medium-sized enterprises. China's parts and components industry, taking the major brunt of the clash of titans, saw its profit margin decline by 0.3 percentage points year on year in 2024, with liabilities up by 10.6 percent.

More importantly, analysts warned that the involution-triggered profit slip will lead to trimmed R&D budgets, sacrificing the long-term development potential not just for individual companies, but for the entire sector as a whole. "If R&D is like building internal strength, then a price war drains that strength. If you cut R&D spending just to win a price war, you might gain the market today but lose the future," said Wang Xia, head of the automotive sub-council of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade. China's anti-involution campaign has won broad industry backing. Many automakers have pulled out of the pricing battle and promised to cap supplier payment terms at 60 days. The national cement business group rolled out anti-cutthroat competition guidelines, and 33 construction enterprises jointly launched an industry-wide pledge to reject involution.

The long-term influence could be transformative. With benign competition back on track, a healthier business environment will emerge, driving innovation and facilitating industrial upgrading. By moving away from price wars and toward value-based competition, companies can focus more on enhancing innovation and improving product quality, according to a report by China International Capital Corporation, a leading investment bank, noting that this shift will ensure businesses continuously climb the technological value chain. Tackling involution in essence is addressing growing pains in economic restructuring, analysts said, stressing that by doing so, China will be able to accelerate building a unified national market, foster policy and market ecosystems conducive to new quality productive forces, and cultivate new, sustainable growth drivers.

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China Boosts Medical Insurance Spending on Innovative Drugs

During the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), China's medical insurance spending on innovative drugs grew significantly with it increasing by 40 percent annually, an official from the National Healthcare Security Administration said on Thursday. In 2024, related spending reached 3.9 times the amount recorded in 2020, Zhang Ke, head of the administration, told a press conference. During this five-year period, medical insurance fund expenditure totaled 12.13 trillion yuan (about 1.7 trillion U.S. dollars), growing at an average annual rate of 9.1 percent, Zhang said. According to Li Tao, the administration's deputy head, the basic medical insurance fund spent 2.98 trillion yuan in 2024, with the financial burden of patients reduced by around 5 percent compared to the previous year. Also, relevant departments have strengthened supervision of the spending and operation of medical insurance funds, adopting a zero-tolerance approach to all types of fraud and abuse related to these funds -- retrieving 104.5 billion yuan as a result, Zhang said. By the end of 2024, the cumulative balance of medical insurance funds was 3.86 trillion yuan, Zhang revealed.

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JAPAN: Trade Ministry to Support Rakuten's Next-Generation AI Model

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has decided to support Rakuten Group’s development of a next-generation generative AI base model, according to reporting by TV Tokyo. Rakuten is expected to begin developing a large language model in August with 700 billion parameters—one of the largest in Japan. The model will reportedly be trained using data from the so-called Rakuten ecosystem, which has over 2 billion users worldwide, with the aim of creating a proprietary AI agent capable of offering personalized recommendations. The ministry plans to support the AI development efforts of 24 companies in total, including Rakuten.

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Living Conditions Index Hits Lowest Level in 15 Yrs in Japan

The proportion of people in Japan who think that their living conditions are more comfortable than a year before has fallen to the lowest level in over 15 years, according to a Bank of Japan quarterly survey for June. The diffusion index on living conditions, or the percentage of respondents who said their living conditions improved from a year before minus that of those who said the opposite stood at minus 57.2, the worst level since the September 2009 survey. The figure worsened from minus 52.0 in the previous March survey, according to the latest survey released Monday. The share of respondents who said they have become worse off came to 61.0 pct, up 5.1 percentage points from the previous survey. By contrast, the proportion of people who said they have become better off fell by 0.1 point to 3.8 pct.

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How One Japanese Town Succeeded in AI Transformation

Japan continues to lag behind other countries in digital transformation (DX), including in the use of generative AI. However, one local government has emerged as a leader in implementing effective DX initiatives, offering valuable lessons for overcoming the nation’s status as an AI laggard. On a recent program, Heiwako Okudaira of Tech Note spoke with Heiwako Okuda, an editorial board member at Tech Keizai Shimbun, to explore why Japan has fallen behind and what can be learned from local successes. According to a survey published in June by PwC Japan Group, Japan ranked last among major countries when it came to formally integrating generative AI into workplace operations. While some Japanese companies, such as LINE Yahoo, have recently mandated AI use among employees, the nation as a whole remains behind. Underlying the AI delay is Japan's broader lag in digitalization. To understand this issue, the program looked at the town of Konojo in Miyazaki Prefecture—one of the few municipalities recognized for outstanding digital reform.

Konojo has received multiple awards for its achievements, including top rankings in hometown tax donations and My Number Card issuance. One notable initiative is the town’s “paperless one-stop service desk.” Traditionally, residents are required to fill out numerous forms at city hall. Konojo eliminated this by having staff retrieve necessary information from the resident’s My Number Card, drastically reducing wait times. Tasks that previously took around three hours are now completed in just 45 minutes. Residents have praised the improvements. This efficiency does not come at the expense of city staff. Behind the scenes, Konojo has implemented systems such as robotic process automation (RPA) to automate data entry and reduce staff workload. These changes have lightened the administrative burden, enabling smoother service delivery. So why can Konojo achieve what other cities cannot? Okuda identified one key: understanding that analog reform is essential for successful digitalization. For example, many government forms originate from central ministries and include outdated or unnecessary fields.

Konojo first reviewed and eliminated such redundancies before proceeding with digital implementation. An analogy shared during the segment involved a robotic vacuum cleaner. Just as a cluttered room must be tidied before using a robot vacuum, so too must bureaucratic processes be cleaned up before digitization. Mayor Takahisa Ikeda of Konojo emphasized the importance of human leadership in digital reform. "Technology is just a tool. Whether it's used for good or bad depends on the people behind it," he said. To drive change, Konojo created a new digital coordination division and appointed younger staff to key roles, including in My Number Card promotion. By putting people at the center of DX and carefully rethinking outdated systems, Konojo has become a model for municipalities across Japan—and possibly a key to helping the country break free from its reputation as a digital laggard.

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Parties Struggling with False Info on Social Media

While Japanese ruling and opposition parties utilize social media in their campaigns for Sunday's House of Councillors election, they are struggling to tackle posts spreading false information. Efforts to counter misinformation and disinformation are left to parties and social media platform operators after parliamentary discussions on the issue were shelved during this year's ordinary Diet session that ended last month. A post recently made the rounds on social media, featuring a video falsely claiming that Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, who heads the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, "threatened" a newscaster with a warning not to mess with him, during a commercial break on a Nippon Television Network Corp. program July 1. Japan Fact-Check Center, a nonprofit organization established to fact-check online information, concluded that the post was "false." The video was based on edited footage. An Upper House incumbent of the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan running in the election took to social media to criticize a YouTube video, saying that an artificial intelligence-generated voice resembling the candidate's voice was saying things that were not actually said.

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Political Leadership Sought to Fight Poverty

With rice shortages hitting vulnerable people especially hard in Japan, many are emphasizing the need for political leadership capable of taking effective measures against poverty, in Sunday's House of Councillors election. Food banks are struggling to secure rice and other food items to distribute to people in need as inflation has put a dent in donations. With measures to fight inflation high on the agenda in the Upper House election, food bank officials are calling for steps to tackle poverty amid growing economic gaps and a rising number of people having difficulties making a living. About 100 people waited in line in Tokyo's Sumida Park on June 15 to receive "bento" boxed meals with ingredients including donated food items. "I feel that poverty is spreading," said Mitsuo Nakamura, a 74-year-old member of Asile, a general incorporated association based in Tokyo's Arakawa Ward that distributed bento boxes in the park that day. "Political parties should create places to listen to the voices of people in need."

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Japan Govt Urged to Lead Wage Hikes

The Japanese government should take the lead so that the country's economy can achieve wage hikes that outpace inflation, nongovernmental members of a key panel said Monday. The members made the proposal at a meeting of the government's Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy held to discuss a fiscal 2026 budget outline. "We must strengthen the growth potential all over the country to defeat deflation and ensure the transition to a growth-oriented economy," Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, head of the council, told the meeting. "We will draw up a well-balanced budget by allocating necessary funds to important policy areas while maintaining spending reform efforts" in order not to affect market confidence, he added. The nongovernmental members said the government should appropriately reflect price movements in its budget by reviewing standard prices adopted by publicly financed institutions, raising government-administered prices and having prices for public orders reflect increased labor costs.

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Japan Prefectural Chiefs Seek to Promote Multicultural Society

A group of Japanese prefectural governors called on the central government on Wednesday to work toward a multicultural society in which foreign and Japanese nationals live together. The project team of the National Governors' Association asked the central government to help the country accept more foreigners to address labor shortages in regional areas. The team also urged the government to establish an organization to oversee policies toward a multicultural society. The proposal was handed to Justice Minister Keisuke Suzuki and Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Kazuhiko Aoki by Shizuoka Governor Yasutomo Suzuki. The minister said, "We'll work toward creating a multicultural society." Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa

Hayashi said at a press conference that the central government "will continue to work with local governments" toward an inclusive society.

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SOUTH KOREA: Developing World's 1st Recombinant Anthrax Vaccine

South Korea has developed the world's first recombinant protein-based anthrax vaccine, a major step toward self-sufficiency that could also open export markets for the new vaccine with fewer side effects, the government said. The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) partnered with private firm GC Biopharma Corp. to develop the vaccine that, unlike conventional versions, eliminates the risk of exposure to toxins produced by Bacillus anthracis, a high-risk pathogen considered a potential bioterrorism agent. The new vaccine, Barythrax inj., received regulatory approval from the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety in April. The approval allows South Korea to produce its own supply for the first time, ending its reliance on imports, the KDCA said at a press conference held last week. "As demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, infectious diseases can spread rapidly and cause massive damage in a short period of time. This underscores the importance of securing proactive response capabilities at the national level," said Kim Gab-jung, director general of the KDCA's department of disease diagnosis and analysis.

Kim said the achievement would help reduce vaccine import costs and enable faster, more stable responses in the event of national emergencies such as bioterrorism. "Beyond infectious disease preparedness, the vaccine's development represents a major contribution to strengthening the country's overall public health security," the official said. When asked whether tensions with North Korea factored into the vaccine's development, she said it was not specifically aimed at a potential attack from the North, but rather designed for national public health crisis preparedness. "But one thing is clear: more thorough preparedness is required, as South Korea faces a different geopolitical situation compared to many other countries," she said. Until now, South Korea had relied on imports of Biothrax, the U.S.-made anthrax vaccine produced by Emergent BioSolutions Inc. Regarding future stockpiles, the official said, "All newly secured doses will come from domestic vaccines, although specific plans cannot be disclosed at this stage."

On top of domestic stockpiling, the KDCA and GC Biopharma expect some overseas demand for Barythrax from countries without the capability to produce their own anthrax vaccines. Demand is expected to rise globally, as anthrax remains a public health concern -- particularly in regions experiencing recent outbreaks. In 2023, Zambia reported more than 600 cases, while Uganda confirmed 251 in 2024. Laos, Thailand and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have also reported fatalities in recent years. "To replace existing anthrax vaccine products on the market, we will focus on further improving product competitiveness and strengthening marketing activities to export Barythrax," said Lee Jae-woo, chief development officer at GC Biopharma's Development Division. He added that the anthrax vaccine is part of GC Biopharma's social contribution efforts, noting that the company has earned significant profits from its varicella and influenza vaccines, its major revenue drivers.

The KDCA began basic research on anthrax vaccines in 1997, and GC Biopharma, formerly Green Cross, joined the development effort in 2002. Together, they invested a combined 30 billion won (US$22 million) in the project. Unlike traditional anthrax vaccines, Barythrax uses a non-toxin-producing strain of Bacillus brevis to produce only the protective antigen (PA), the key to immunity. This method significantly reduces exposure to toxins and side effects, making the vaccine safer and more cost-effective than existing options. No anthrax cases have been reported in South Korea since it was designated a notifiable disease in 2000. GC Biopharma primarily exports varicella and influenza vaccines, as well as specialty drugs, such as Alyglo for treating immunodeficiency and Hunterase for treating Hunter syndrome. The company's sales rose 3.3 percent on-year to 1.68 trillion won last year, with exports accounting for 380 billion won, or 23 percent of the annual revenue.

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Seoul to Offer 31 Bln Won to Support Development of Smart Port Technologies

The government will invest 31 billion won (US$22.7 million) by 2028 in developing core technologies for smart ports as part of efforts to strengthen the competitiveness of South Korea's shipping industry, the oceans ministry said Monday. The investment will be directed toward developing key equipment and technologies for building smart port facilities, such as automated cargo handling machinery and unmanned vehicles for cargo transport, according to the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries. The country has been working to transform traditional ports into smart ports to bolster its shipping capabilities, opening a fully automated terminal at a port in the southeastern city of Busan last year. "The smart port technology is essential for ensuring the sustainable development of the port industry," Oceans Minister Kang Do-hyung said, vowing government efforts to provide technological support for the expansion of smart ports in Korea.

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Finance Minister Nominee Says Will Form Project Team for 'Ultra-Innovation Items' in AI Era

Finance Minister nominee Koo Yun-cheol vowed Thursday to assemble a team of top experts to develop "ultra-innovative" items as part of efforts to create a new engine for economic growth. Koo made the pledge during his parliamentary confirmation hearing while highlighting weak growth potential as the country's most pressing challenge amid demographic shifts and other structural issues. "For the artificial intelligence-driven great transformation and ultra-innovative economy to achieve meaningful results, we should identify specific core items and concentrate all national capabilities on them to produce a greater number of world-class products and services," the nominee said. "We will bring together the nation's top experts to create a project team dedicated to such ultra-innovative items and provide all tangible and intangible resources to support it," he added. Koo also pledged to establish a new AI bureau within the ministry, in line with President Lee Jae Myung's pledge during his campaign to invest 100 trillion won (US$71.87 billion) in the AI sector through the combination of public funds and private sector capital. "AI can be applied not only to the country's key industries, such as shipbuilding and automobiles, but also to emerging fields like drones and digital court systems," Koo said, insisting the country needs to "standardize and integrate data to support AI applications across sectors." For the goals, Koo emphasized the importance of strengthening economic fundamentals and stabilizing the people's livelihoods, calling for efforts to ensure price stability and to boost domestic demand through the swift implementation of supplementary budgets. The nominee also pledged to actively manage external risks, such as tariff negotiations with the United States, and to respond proactively to demographic challenges, including the low birth rate and population aging. If appointed, Koo will become the first finance minister under the Lee administration.

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New Science Minister Pledges to Make Korea AI Powerhouse

Science and ICT Minister Bae Kyung-hoon officially began his tenure on Thursday, becoming the first Cabinet minister to take office under the Lee Jae Myung administration. In his inaugural speech at Sejong Government Complex, Bae pledged to lead a national transformation powered by artificial intelligence and advanced science and technology. “The future of our nation will depend on how we design strategies and respond to the coming wave of innovation and change,” he said. Bae is one of Korea’s leading private-sector AI experts. As the founding president of LG AI Research, the artificial intelligence arm of LG Group, he played a key role in spearheading the development of the conglomerate's hyperscale language model Exaone from December 2020 until he was nominated as the new minister. He also served in key government advisory roles related to AI governance and privacy.

He previously held the chief position of the AI technology division at LG Uplus and practiced various AI applications at SK Telecom. Bae has earned a Ph.D. in electronic engineering from Kwangwoon University and completed an executive program for AI: Implications for Business Strategy from the Sloan School of

Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The new minister emphasized that Korea, now standing among the ranks of advanced nations, must break away from outdated approaches to achieve its next goals, including raising the country's potential growth rate to 3 percent and joining the world's top five economic powers. He went on to emphasize the need for a bold transformation, saying, "We must secure a unique competitive edge that no other country can replicate, and bring about a groundbreaking shift through a national transition rooted in AI and cutting-edge science and technology to enhance efficiency and productivity."

Highlighting AI as the driving force of the new era, Bae said its influence is rapidly permeating all aspects of society beyond industry and the economy. To navigate the shift, he proposed fostering top-tier talent, building an innovation-friendly ecosystem and spearheading a nationwide transformation centered on AI and cutting-edge technologies. He outlined four key policy directions: establishing a robust AI ecosystem, revitalizing the research and development innovation landscape, nurturing world-class talent in AI and science, and addressing pressing challenges closely tied to people's daily lives. "To achieve the vision of becoming one of the world's top three AI powerhouses — the first pledge of the People's Sovereignty Government — we will build a robust AI ecosystem and create an environment where AI is accessible to all," the minister said.

He emphasized the importance of establishing AI and digital infrastructure, enhancing cybersecurity systems, securing foundational AI models, promoting AI transformation and supporting AI semiconductors. Bae also announced plans to restore the grassroots-level basic research initiatives that had been phased out, ensuring stable and sufficient R&D funding. "We will support the adoption of AI within scientific research itself," he said. In terms of talent development, Bae proposed enhancing support for young scientists, establishing AI-centered universities, and improving working conditions at government-funded research institutes. He further pledged to expand consumer rights in telecommunications services and foster a universally accessible AI environment.

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Lee Calls for Building Next-Generation Power Grid with Focus on Renewable Energy

President Lee Jae Myung on Thursday called for establishing a next-generation power grid as he underscored the importance of shifting the country's power supply infrastructure to one that centers on renewable energy. "Energy transition has become an essential task," Lee said as he presided over a meeting of senior presidential aides. "On top of an artificial intelligence (AI) revolution, the supply of renewable energy through power grid improvement has become very urgent." Lee instructed the government to draw up measures to establish a next-generation power grid that lowers the inefficiency of long-distance power transmissions and makes use of cutting-edge AI technology. The presidential office said the government will turn South Jeolla Province into a hub for such a plan, noting the region's potential for supplying renewable energy. Kim Yong-beom, the presidential chief of staff for policy, said in a press briefing that the government plans to establish industrial complexes for renewable energy micro grids by using steel and petrochemical industrial complexes in the region. The government will allocate about 200 billion won (US$143 million) next year for a pilot project to establish a next-generation power grid by building microgrids in the region's university, airport and military units, and connecting them, according to Kim. The presidential official said Lee aims to nurture the country's energy industry into one akin to the chip industry, and eventually seek to export electricity technology and products.

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Foiling Illegal Online Trade of Rare Insects

Officials from the Ministry of Forestry have successfully foiled an illegal trade operation involving hundreds of rare insects on the brink of extinction, Fredrik E. Tumbel, head of the Forestry Law Enforcement Agency for the Maluku and Papua Regions, said Wednesday. Tumbel said the case was uncovered following a cyber patrol conducted by the agency's intelligence unit in early June, which identified an online account posting images of various protected butterfly and beetle specimens. In coordination with the Southwest Papua Natural Resources Conservation Agency, the authorities arrested a suspect and confiscated multiple specimens of protected insects. In total, officials seized 170 preserved specimens of butterflies and beetles. "The agency remains committed to taking firm action against any violations of wildlife protection, including illegal online trade," Tumbel said. He also urged the public to avoid buying or selling wildlife, whether alive or dead.

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Indonesia Pushes for Incentives for Improved Waste Management

The Indonesian Ministry of Environment/Environmental Control Agency (BPLH) is encouraging incentives for local administrators who have improved waste management, but is considering budget reductions for those failing to make progress, a senior official said on Thursday. The main secretary of the ministry/BPLH, Rosa Vivien Ratnawati, said that the ministry is pushing for incentives for regions that have successfully improved waste management. However, Rosa said that the ministry is considering disincentives, such as budget cuts, for regions that received the "Dirty City" title and failed to make improvements despite warnings. The Indonesian government has made waste management one of its main priorities and has set a target of 100 percent waste management by 2029.

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Indonesia Targets 10,000 Village Cooperatives Operational Soon

The Indonesian government was aiming to have 10,000 village cooperatives operational by August 2025, a move expected to shorten product distribution chains, according to a minister on Tuesday. Coordinating Minister for Food Affairs and Head of the Red and White Village/Sub-district Cooperative Task Force, Zulkifli Hasan, said members of the task force have been deployed across all provinces to accelerate the establishment and operation of the cooperatives. "Soon, this August, we will complete approximately 10,000 units. 10,000 village cooperatives will already be operating at least by August," Hasan said at a press conference. He said that the number would continue to grow. The government has also scheduled visits to various regions in Indonesia to ensure the cooperatives' operational readiness. Hasan said that the cooperatives will contribute positively to the product supply chain by shortening distribution channels and increasing profits. In addition, they will facilitate community access to essential resources and services, and support local business development.

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MALAYSIA: Regulator Seeks Feedback on Digital Asset Exchange Enhancements

The Securities Commission Malaysia has published a consultation paper to seek public feedback on proposed enhancements to its regulatory framework for Digital Asset Exchange (DAX). The regulator said in a statement that the proposals aimed to enhance competitiveness of Malaysia's regulated digital asset market, improve investor protection and strengthen the resilience and integrity of DAX operators. Since the introduction of the DAX framework in 2019, the commission has observed steady growth in Malaysia's digital asset industry with 2024 being the highest total trading value of 13.9 billion ringgit (3.32 billion U.S. dollars), an increase of 2.6 times from 2023. According to the statement, the public consultation period will run through Aug. 11, 2025.

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Malaysia to Retain Digital Infrastructure Lead in Southeast Asia

BMI Country Risk and Industry Research expects Malaysia to maintain its lead as a hub for digital infrastructure investment in Southeast Asia, with the state of Johor remaining a prominent destination for data center investment driven by its strategic location. The Fitch Solutions research unit said in a recent note that this will likely lead to an increase in industrial parks and data center developments in the region. It noted that power procurement will remain the primary challenge for Southeast Asian data centers, prompting more companies to secure renewable energy deals and potentially sponsor their own power projects.

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Malaysia Launches Hybrid Hydro Floating Solar, Green Hydrogen Hub in Terengganu

Malaysia has launched a hybrid hydro floating solar and green hydrogen hub in Terengganu state on the country's east coast. The initiatives aimed to position Malaysia as a regional leader in the green hydrogen value chain while supporting the National Energy Transition Roadmap and the Hydrogen Economy and Technology Roadmap, said Malaysia's utility firm Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB), state-owned oil and gas firm Petroliam Nasional Berhad (Petronas), and state-owned investment firm Terengganu Inc. in a statement. The green hydrogen hub in Terengganu will be part of an integrated end-to-end value chain that encompasses round-the-clock renewable energy generation from resources such as the Kenyir HHFS facility, green hydrogen production, and derivatives including green methanol and green ammonia. The initiative was believed to strengthen TNB's and Petronas' roles as key government-linked companies in driving Malaysia's energy transition through collaboration with ASEAN and global partners. It will support the ASEAN Power Grid, advance sustainable solutions, foster knowledge transfer, and promote research and development.

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THAILAND: Imposing Temporary Nationwide Drone Ban

The Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand (CAAT) on Wednesday imposed a temporary nationwide ban on all drone operations, citing national security concerns amid tensions along the border with Cambodia. The measure aims to prevent drone interference with security forces' operations and will be in effect from July 30 to Aug. 15, or until further notice, the CAAT said in a statement. This prohibition is a necessary step to mitigate risks to national security and public safety arising from the situation at the border, said Manat Chavanaprayoon, director general of the CAAT. Manat said violators will be subject to legal penalties, including fines or imprisonment. He added that military personnel are authorized to destroy any unmanned aircraft deemed a threat to national security.

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VIETNAM: Stepping Up Efforts to Promote Cashless Payment

The Vietnamese government has called on ministries, sectors, and localities to intensify efforts to promote cashless payments in a bid to prevent tax evasion and combat criminal activities, Vietnam News Agency reported Thursday. Deputy Prime Minister Ho Duc Phoc said encouraging non-cash transactions aims to meet the payment needs of citizens and businesses while ensuring strict enforcement of laws against violators. The State Bank of Vietnam will continue to upgrade payment infrastructure and financial technologies to facilitate the expansion of cashless transactions nationwide. A recent survey by local web browser Coc Coc showed that about 59 percent of daily transactions in Vietnam are conducted without cash, rising to 72 percent among people aged 25 to 44.

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South Asia

INDIA: Digital India Turns 10 - PM Hails Decade of Empowerment and Technological Transformation

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has commended the milestone of 10 years of the Digital India initiative, celebrating a decade of transformative impact on the nation. Reflecting on the journey, the Prime Minister emphasized how the initiative has profoundly touched millions of lives and ushered in a new era of empowerment through technology. Marking the occasion on social media platform X, the Prime Minister shared a thread by MyGovIndia, stating, “Today is a historic day as we mark #10YearsOfDigitalIndia! Ten years ago, Digital India began as an initiative to transform our nation into a digitally empowered and technologically advanced society.” Highlighting the initiative’s wide-reaching success, he remarked, “A decade later, we stand witness to a journey that has touched countless lives and ushered in a new era of empowerment. India has made many strides in digital payments, powered by the collective resolve of 140 crore Indians. Sectors like health and education have also benefitted from this initiative.” Digital India is a flagship programme of the Government of India with a vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. The programme was launched on July 1, 2015 by Hon’ Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.

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Digital India Turns 10 as a People's Movement Empowering Innovation

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated that Digital India has evolved into a people-driven movement, central to building an Aatmanirbhar Bharat. With initiatives like UPI, DBT, ONDC, and eNAM, India has transitioned from digital governance to becoming a global digital innovation leader. From empowering 1.7 crore farmers through eNAM to leading nearly half of the world’s real-time digital payments via UPI, Digital India has transformed services, access, and inclusion across the country. As the ‘Digital India’ initiative marks a decade of transformative impact, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman hailed it as more than just a government programme calling it a 'people’s movement' that has become the foundation of an Aatmanirbhar Bharat. In a post on X, Sitharaman emphasized that the initiative, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015, has bridged the digital divide by bringing internet access to remote areas and digitizing government services. “Scan. Pay. Done. India’s UPI revolution powers nearly half of the world’s real-time digital transactions", she noted. Prime Minister Modi, in a post on LinkedIn, reflected on the decade-long journey, stating, “Ten years ago, India embarked on a bold journey into uncharted territory with great conviction. While decades were spent doubting Indians' ability to use technology, we trusted their potential and they delivered”. He also called on global innovators and entrepreneurs, saying, “The world is looking at India for the next digital breakthrough”. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal added that initiatives such as UPI, DBT, GeM, ONDC, and SVAMITVA have elevated India from digital governance to a position of global digital leadership. “When the intent is right, innovation empowers the less empowered”, he quoted from the Prime Minister’s vision. Union Minister Pralhad Joshi highlighted the agricultural transformation brought by eNAM, which now connects over 1.7 crore farmers to buyers across 1,400+ mandis. “With Rs 4 lakh crore in trade, the impact is real”, he stated. As ‘Digital India’ completes 10 years, its influence spans from fintech and e-governance to agriculture and entrepreneurship establishing India as a global digital force driven by innovation, inclusion, and empowerment.

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DoT and RBI Join Forces to Fight Financial Cybercrime with New Risk Tool

In a strategic move to counter the rising tide of cyber-enabled financial frauds, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued an advisory on June 30, 2025, mandating all Scheduled Commercial Banks, Small Finance Banks, Payments Banks, and Co-operative Banks to integrate the Department of Telecommunications’ (DoT) Financial Fraud Risk Indicator (FRI) into their systems. This landmark advisory marks a pivotal step in India’s efforts to fortify its digital financial ecosystem and prevent cyber fraud through inter-agency coordination and real-time data exchange. The Financial Fraud Risk Indicator (FRI), developed by DoT’s Digital Intelligence Unit (DIU), was officially launched in May 2025. The FRI acts as a dynamic, risk-based tool that classifies mobile numbers as Medium, High, or Very High risk, based on their potential association with financial fraud. The classification draws on a combination of intelligence sources, including inputs from the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre's (I4C) National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP), DoT's Chakshu platform, and feedback from banks and financial institutions. By adopting FRI, banks and financial service providers can proactively enhance their fraud prevention frameworks. The tool enables institutions to take real-time decisions, such as blocking or delaying high-risk transactions, alerting customers about suspicious activity, or flagging potentially fraudulent mobile numbers during digital transactions. This integration is designed to drastically reduce instances of cyber fraud, especially those targeting the increasingly popular Unified Payments Interface (UPI).

Notably, several leading institutions, including HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Punjab National Bank, Paytm, PhonePe, and India Post Payments Bank, have already integrated the FRI into their systems. These early adopters have witnessed significant improvements in the speed and accuracy of fraud detection and intervention. With mobile numbers often acting as the entry point for fraudsters, the FRI enables swift, data-driven responses that safeguard users and enhance institutional resilience. In addition to the FRI, the DIU also disseminates the Mobile Number Revocation List (MNRL) to financial stakeholders. This list includes mobile numbers that have been deactivated due to links with cybercrime, verification failures, or misuse. These efforts collectively reinforce the country's capacity to identify and respond to cyber threats across both the telecom and banking sectors. The RBI's endorsement of the FRI reflects growing recognition of the need for cross-sectoral collaboration in addressing cybercrime. This development is aligned with the Government of India's broader Digital India vision, aiming to build a secure, transparent, and trustworthy digital ecosystem. The Department of Telecommunications reaffirmed its commitment to supporting the financial sector by advancing technology-driven, API-based integrations that enable continuous feedback and real-time responsiveness. As the FRI gains traction across the banking and fintech ecosystem, it is poised to become a sector-wide standard in digital fraud prevention.

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C-DOT Unveils SAKSHAM-3000, Marking a Major Leap in India's Telecom Technology

In a strategic advancement for India's digital infrastructure, the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT) unveiled the high-capacity SAKSHAM-3000 switch-cum-router at its Delhi campus on July 3, 2025. The launch was officiated by Dr. Pemmasani Chandra Sekhar, Minister of State for Communications and Rural Development. With an impressive throughput of 25.6 terabits per second, SAKSHAM-3000 marks a significant milestone in India's journey towards technological self-reliance and global leadership in telecom. SAKSHAM-3000 is engineered to cater to modern and next-generation digital ecosystems. The compact, energy-efficient platform is designed to meet the demanding requirements of cloud infrastructure, large-scale data centres, AI workloads, and 5G/6G networks. Supporting 32 ports of 400G and multiple Ethernet speeds ranging from 1G to 400G, the device is equipped to function across diverse network roles, including leaf, spine, and super-spine configurations. The product is powered by C-DOT's modular Router Operating System (CROS), which offers comprehensive support for Layer-2, IP, and MPLS protocols, as well as precision timing via PTP and Sync-E technologies. During his address, Dr. Sekhar emphasised the national importance of the innovation, describing the work of C-DOT engineers as "not just technical, but nation-building." Applauding the institution's role in developing indigenous 4G/5G core technologies, cybersecurity solutions, quantum communications, and disaster management systems, he observed that C-DOT has entered a "phase of delivery, deployment, and global ambition."

Calling for a transformative mindset, Dr. Sekhar urged engineers to think beyond immediate tasks and plan with a long-term vision. "The ambition must come from within," he remarked. "Let's move from success to significance. Let's build a C-DOT that is trusted not just in India, but across the world." Setting a bold vision for the future, he stated, "By 2047, C-DOT should stand shoulder to shoulder with global leaders like Nokia, Ericsson, and Huawei." The Minister also assured full government support in the form of autonomy, funding, and international collaborations, and encouraged active participation in global standard-setting organisations like 3GPP, ITU, and ETSI. Dr. Rajkumar Upadhyay, CEO of C-DOT, extended heartfelt thanks to the Minister for his encouragement and insights. He reaffirmed the institution's commitment to advancing the Prime Minister's vision of AtmaNirbhar Bharat, stating that SAKSHAM-3000 represents C-DOT's readiness to shape the global telecom narrative. SAKSHAM-3000, with its robust technical capabilities and future-ready architecture, is poised to serve as a key enabler for India's digital growth, enterprise connectivity, and global competitiveness in the years ahead.

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Bihar Becomes First State in India to Launch Mobile Voting System

In a landmark move for Indian democracy, Bihar has launched the nation's first mobile-based e-voting system during municipal elections held across six urban local bodies. This innovative approach, aimed at enhancing electoral participation, primarily targets voters who face challenges reaching physical polling stations, such as senior citizens, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, migrant workers, and seriously ill individuals. The pilot initiative was officially implemented on June 28, 2025, in three councils within Patna and two others in Rohtas and East Champaran districts. Bihar State Election Commissioner Deepak Prasad, while announcing the launch, described it as a significant milestone in India's electoral reforms. "This is the first time voters in India can cast their votes using a mobile phone," stated Prasad. "Strong digital security measures have been implemented to ensure the process is safe, transparent, and tamper-proof." Technology Behind the E-Voting System. Developed by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), the mobile e-voting platform—named e-SECBHR—is currently available for Android users. It incorporates several layers of advanced technology to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process:

Blockchain integration ensures that each vote is recorded in a secure and immutable digital ledger.

Facial recognition and biometric matching confirm the identity of voters during login and vote casting.

Digital scanning and Optical Character Recognition (OCR) facilitate accurate vote counting.

Audit trails akin to VVPATs offer verification and traceability of every vote cast.

Digital locks have also been implemented in EVM strongrooms to reinforce parallel security for traditional ballots.

To curb any potential misuse, the system allows only two registered voters to log in from a single mobile number, and every vote is linked and verified through the voter's unique ID credentials.

Registration and Voting Procedure

Voters willing to opt for mobile e-voting need to follow a simple process:

Download the e-SECBHR app from the Google Play Store.

Link the app to the mobile number registered in the electoral roll.

Upon successful verification, voters can cast their ballot via the app or the official website of the State Election Commission on polling day.

Officials have assured that the interface is user-friendly and inclusive, ensuring ease of use even for first-time digital voters.

Impact and Future Implications

As of June 27 evening, approximately 10,000 voters had registered for mobile e-voting, with expectations that around 50,000 individuals could cast their vote through the system. The initiative not only demonstrates the growing potential of digital transformation in governance but also signals a future where technology could bridge the gap in electoral access. While the pilot has generated significant interest, it remains unclear whether the mobile e-voting facility will be extended to the upcoming Bihar Assembly elections slated for October–November 2025. By setting a national precedent, Bihar's move may inspire other states to explore digital voting avenues to strengthen participatory democracy across the country.

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Bengaluru Launches City's First Mobility-as-a-Service Apps to

Boost Public Transport Adoption

In a pioneering step towards transforming urban mobility, Bengaluru launched its first-ever Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) applications, Tummoc and Namma Yatri on July 10. These innovative platforms have been developed as part of the Enroute Open Data Startup Challenge, spearheaded by Mercedes-Benz Research and Development India (MBRDI) in collaboration with WRI India. The launch marks a significant milestone in the city’s journey towards seamless, integrated and sustainable urban transportation. For the first time, commuters will be able to plan, book, and pay for their entire journey, spanning BMTC buses, metro trains, and autorickshaws, through a single digital interface, eliminating the need to switch between multiple apps. This integration has been made possible by the decision of Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Ltd (BMRCL) and Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) to release their General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) data. GTFS is an internationally accepted open data format that includes detailed information on public transport schedules, routes, and stops. The move addresses a longstanding demand from tech developers and urban mobility experts, who have for years advocated for open transit data to enable smarter, commuter-centric solutions. “This is a breakthrough for the city. In Bengaluru, we don’t measure distances in kilometres but in hours. And we lose nearly ₹20,000 crore annually in productivity due to time lost in traffic,” said Priyank M. Kharge, Karnataka’s Minister for Electronics, IT, BT, and Rural Development & Panchayat Raj. He underscored the importance of integrated solutions in alleviating last-mile connectivity challenges and promoting public transport usage.

Currently, less than 50% of daily trips in Bengaluru are made using public transportation. The state government aims to increase this figure to 70% by 2030, and initiatives like Tummoc and Namma Yatri are critical to achieving that goal. Tummoc, which was an Elevate 2018 winner under Karnataka’s grant-in-aid program for startups, has already rolled out its services. It also features a unique carbon emissions tracker, encouraging users to make eco-conscious transport choices. Namma Yatri, which is set to go live soon, will initially offer integrated trip planning for metro and autorickshaw services. The apps use real-time data from BMTC buses and metro trains to optimise travel routes, allowing commuters to transition efficiently from one mode of transport to another. While actual travel timings may still vary due to traffic conditions, the availability of dynamic data significantly enhances user planning and convenience. Both apps were declared joint winners of a ₹30 lakh grant during the Enroute MaaS Challenge in August 2024, reinforcing the government’s and industry’s commitment to local innovation. As homegrown platforms built by Bengaluru and for Bengaluru, Tummoc and Namma Yatri represent a promising shift in how India’s tech capital envisions and executes urban mobility.

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Delhi to Deploy 3,500 AI-Enabled Cameras Under Safe City Project from October 1

From October 1, 2025, Delhi will see the rollout of 3,500 Artificial Intelligence (AI)-enabled surveillance cameras, advanced gunshot detection systems, and public alert mechanisms under the first phase of the Safe City Project. This initiative aims to enhance city-wide safety, with a strong emphasis on protecting women in public spaces and improving emergency responsiveness. The decision to accelerate surveillance efforts follows a comprehensive audit of vulnerable areas across the National Capital Territory. The audit was commissioned in response to past safety lapses and revealed the need for approximately 10,000 additional cameras to ensure better visibility and quicker intervention capabilities. The first phase focuses on high-risk zones and densely populated areas identified during the study. The project involves the deployment of various high-tech camera systems: 6,121 bullet cameras, 1,622 Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras, 370 Facial Recognition System (FRS) units, and 1,876 Pan-Tilt-Zoom (PTZ) cameras. These will be supported by 200 gunshot detection units, each comprising three acoustic sensors, and 300 public address systems to support real-time communication with the public. Unlike conventional surveillance systems, these AI-driven devices will use Artificial Intelligence Video Analytics (AIVA) to detect gunshots, monitor abnormal crowd gatherings, track stolen or hotlisted vehicles, and identify suspicious activities. Real-time alerts generated through these analytics will be processed at the Integrated Command, Control, Communication and Computer Centre (C4i) for swift verification and escalation.

Once validated, alerts will be relayed to Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) offices and local police stations for immediate action. This tiered system ensures that security personnel are equipped with timely, actionable information to respond efficiently to incidents. A major feature of the Safe City initiative is its focus on women's safety. The AI software is designed to detect distress patterns, such as a woman being isolated, encircled by a group, or showing signs of panic. These events trigger high-priority alerts, prompting Police Control Room (PCR) vans to respond proactively, even in the absence of a formal complaint. Areas such as hostels, PG accommodations, college campuses, and workplaces with high female footfall are being prioritised. In addition, the system monitors crowd density, flagging gatherings of more than 50 people as high-priority and smaller groups as lower-risk, enabling the police to respond accordingly. AI capabilities will also be used to monitor abandoned objects, activate PTZ cameras in response to gunshots, and match vehicle license plates with law enforcement databases. Each event is recorded with a timestamp and high-definition visuals, aiding evidence collection and court proceedings. The system also enables post-incident audits, allowing senior officials to review footage, assess response times, and improve future training and accountability. Alerts determined to be false are discarded with documented reasons, while valid alerts are logged and responded to in real time. This technology-driven approach is expected to revolutionise urban policing. The remaining phases of the project are expected to be implemented by the end of 2026, eventually covering the entire city under a unified AI-backed security framework.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 07/14/2025

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Semicon India 2025 to Showcase Global Collaboration and Innovation in Chips

India is set to host the fourth edition of Semicon India 2025 from September 2 – 4, 2025, at the Yashobhoomi (India International Convention and Expo Centre – IICC), New Delhi. The event, jointly organised by the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) and SEMI, marks a significant step in the nation's journey towards becoming a global semiconductor manufacturing hub. Announced by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Semicon India 2025 is poised to become the largest edition to date, attracting over 300 companies from 18 countries. Themed "Building the Next Semiconductor Powerhouse," this year's event will showcase India's evolving capabilities in the semiconductor value chain, including design, manufacturing, equipment, and systems. A key focus of the event is to catalyse India's role in the global chip ecosystem by encouraging industry collaboration, innovation, and policy alignment. The platform will unite global CEOs, technology leaders, policymakers, and academia to deliberate on emerging technologies, resilient supply chain strategies, and semiconductor trends. The 2025 edition will also introduce several firsts to its lineup. For the first time, four International Pavilions—representing Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Malaysia—will showcase global advancements in the semiconductor domain. In addition, eight Country Roundtables will facilitate bilateral discussions aimed at fostering cross-border collaboration and investment. Another highlight is the Semiconductor Design Startup Pavilion, offering innovation-driven chip design firms a platform to showcase their ideas and solutions. The number of participating State Government Pavilions has also grown from six to nine, signalling increased national alignment with the semiconductor mission.

A strong emphasis will be placed on workforce development and skill-building. Training, upskilling sessions, and career counselling programmes will be conducted for students and professionals, reinforcing India's push to strengthen its semiconductor talent pipeline. The government's commitment to the sector is further underlined by the ₹76,000 crore Semicon India Programme, designed to create a robust semiconductor and display ecosystem. In addition to financial incentives, recent amendments to Special Economic Zone (SEZ) rules aim to attract capital-intensive investments and accelerate project execution. In a notable development, the sixth semiconductor fabrication unit has been approved near Jewar Airport, Uttar Pradesh, through a joint venture between HCL Group and Taiwan's Foxconn. This facility, with a capacity to manufacture 20,000 wafers monthly, is projected to produce 36 million chips per month and generate employment for around 2,000 people. With over 1.5 million professionals connected globally through SEMI, and India's increasingly favourable investment landscape, Semicon India 2025 is expected to be a landmark event in advancing India's ambitions of becoming a trusted and scalable semiconductor leader.

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IndiaAI Mission Offers Free AI Training to 5.5 Lakh Village Entrepreneurs

The Government of India has announced a nationwide initiative to provide free Artificial Intelligence (AI) training to 5.5 lakh Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) under the Common Services Centres (CSCs) framework. The training, part of the ambitious IndiaAI Mission, seeks to upskill India's rural workforce and equip them to drive innovation at the last mile. The initiative is being spearheaded by the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY) in collaboration with CSC e-Governance Services India Ltd., and aims to bridge the urban-rural digital divide by introducing advanced tech training in rural India. Under this program, rural entrepreneurs will receive certified training in cutting-edge domains, including

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Machine Learning (ML)

Data Analytics

Cybersecurity

Cloud Computing

Internet of Things (IoT)

These trainings are envisioned not only to improve digital literacy but also to enable hyperlocal problem-solving by empowering VLEs to develop, deploy, and support AI-driven solutions tailored for their communities.

This initiative also cements India's status as the world's number one country in AI skilling, a title recently recognised by global platforms tracking technology education metrics. As part of the broader IndiaAI Mission, the government plans to skill 10 lakh citizens across the country in the next two years in emerging technologies, thereby creating a strong base of future-ready professionals and micro-entrepreneurs. The CSC network – with over 5 lakh active centres across India – is already playing a pivotal role in delivering government services, digital education, and financial inclusion to the remotest parts of the country. With AI and other advanced technologies now entering this ecosystem, CSCs are poised to become local innovation hubs, helping in tasks like

AI-based crop prediction and agri-advisory

Localised weather forecasting

Smart healthcare and telemedicine services

Document verification and e-governance support

Rural fintech innovations

This initiative will create a rural tech-savvy workforce, enabling digital services for citizens in their native languages while promoting entrepreneurship among youth, especially women and marginalised communities.

Speaking on the launch, Minister for Electronics & Information Technology, Ashwini Vaishnaw shared, “This is not just a skilling initiative. It’s a mission to empower our rural entrepreneurs with tools to participate in India’s digital economy with dignity and autonomy. AI should not be a metro-city privilege. We are ensuring it becomes a village strength.” The training modules will be available both online and through CSCs, and will include hands-on labs, vernacular content, and project-based learning, in collaboration with technology partners and industry experts. Aligned with this mission, platforms like Prarambh have also opened doors for rural innovators to build AI-based solutions for Bharat. Entrepreneurs looking to create impactful digital tools, especially those that address rural challenges, can apply for incubation, funding, and mentorship via Start with Prarambh here.
5.5 lakh VLEs to get free AI training
10 lakh citizens to be skilled in advanced tech under IndiaAI Mission
India: #1 in global AI skilling rankings
CSCs to act as rural AI labs and innovation centres
India’s digital transformation story is no longer confined to cities. With this bold step, the government is ensuring that AI reaches from “server farms to small farms,” enabling grassroots entrepreneurs to lead a new era of inclusive, tech-enabled growth.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 07/21/2025

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Enqurious Launches Academy and Showcases AI for Learning at the Fifth Elephant Annual Conference 2025

Enqurious joined as a Bronze Sponsor and official Swag Partner at The Fifth Elephant Annual Conference 2025 by Hasgeek, engaging the data and AI community with high-energy presence. They launched Enqurious Academy at the event, introducing a scenario-first, role-driven learning platform. Amit Choudhary’s flashtalk on agentic AI received an enthusiastic response, highlighting how proactive, intelligent systems can personalize and transform the learning experience. The Fifth Elephant 2025 wrapped up its two-day run at the Bangalore International Centre on July 18 – 19, bringing together a vibrant mix of AI researchers, data engineers, product builders, and tech leaders from across India. As a Bronze Sponsor and official Swag Partner, Enqurious proudly marked a key milestone — the public launch of the Enqurious Academy, a platform reimagining how today’s data professionals learn and grow. The event kicked off on July 18 with hands-on workshops covering topics ranging from real-time LLM applications to open-source tooling. The Enqurious team engaged deeply, aligning with the Academy’s focus on experiential, scenario-based learning tailored to roles like data analyst, data engineer, and AI product owner. On July 19, the event shifted gears to a day packed with conversations, community-led sessions, technical talks, and interactive engagements. The Enqurious booth quickly became a hotspot for attendees, offering not just free swag but genuine conversations, learning resources, and exciting activities. The booth welcomed professionals from startups, mid-sized companies, and enterprises — each curious to explore how they could level up their learning journey with greater clarity and direction.

As part of its engagement, Enqurious distributed a variety of custom-designed merchandise, including badges, mobile pop sockets, comic books, mousepads, and stickers. But more than the giveaways, it was the spirit of interaction that stood out. Attendees participated in a set of thoughtfully designed activities, such as 'Truth or Bluff, where they had to identify whether a given statement about data or AI was true or not, and 'Hit the Bullseye,' a dart-based challenge. These activities brought fun to the booth but also sparked deeper discussions around myths in the AI world, responsible practices in data handling, and the evolving role of engineers and analysts. A standout moment was the flashtalk by Amit Choudhary, Founder & CEO of Enqurious, on 'How AI Could Make Learning Better.' He introduced the concept of agentic AI — systems that proactively support learners by identifying gaps, guiding discovery, and personalizing feedback. Amit emphasized the shift from static content to dynamic, role-relevant learning as the future of education. Throughout the day, the Enqurious team actively interacted with the broader community — answering questions, sharing stories behind the Academy's design, and exchanging insights with fellow professionals. Representing the company at the event were Amit Choudhary (Founder & CEO), Prateek Kumar (Co-Founder & COO), Sourabh Kumar (Lead Product Engineer), Sai Somanadha Sastry Konduri (Data + AI Architect), and Soham Saha (Senior Growth Marketer). Each brought a unique perspective, whether from a product, engineering, architecture, or growth lens. They didn't just present their work — they listened. The team attended several talk sessions and breakout conversations across the day, covering everything from data stack design and LLM deployment strategies to ethical machine learning and AI product scalability. The two-way exchange of knowledge — both given and received — highlighted the collaborative energy that The Fifth Elephant is known for. The team left the event with valuable takeaways, including common pain points shared by professionals when learning new tools, navigating AI-related challenges, or designing scalable data solutions. The launch of Enqurious Academy at this event wasn't accidental — it was intentional. Built for practitioners, by practitioners, the Academy provides a curated experience for those who want to move beyond theory and learn through hands-on practice. Each skill path in the Academy mirrors a real-world role, and each module is tied to a scenario — whether it's building a real-time dashboard, setting up an automated pipeline, evaluating a GenAI model, or improving observability in a data mesh.

What sets the Academy apart is its strong foundation in relevance. Learners aren't just asked to consume content — they are encouraged to engage with it, enquire into its use, explore variations, experiment with applications, and reflect on their experiences. This E5 learning framework — Engage, Enquire, Explore, Experiment, Experience — serves as the backbone of the platform. Through this structure, professionals can pick up skills not as isolated concepts but as part of a larger system of understanding that supports on-the-job decision-making. The Academy also brings in mentor support, peer learning communities, Slack-based guidance, and reflective dashboards — all powered with AI-led nudges and contextual feedback. The feedback from attendees at The Fifth Elephant 2025 was overwhelmingly positive. Many visitors expressed that the Enqurious Academy fills a long-standing gap in the learning ecosystem — offering a bridge between traditional MOOCs and project-based mentorship. Several professionals from leading data teams also showed interest in piloting the platform for internal upskilling and onboarding. Adding to its flexibility, the Academy's 'pay as you go' model allows learners to access content based on their individual needs, without the burden of long-term commitments — delivering both value and convenience. Enqurious offers curated skill paths for roles like Data Analyst, Data Engineer, AI Engineer, BI Engineer, and DevOps Engineer. More than just listing tools, the platform provides deep context, real-world use cases, project flows, and mentoring checkpoints to support meaningful learner progression. With its clean interface, modular design, and outcome-driven structure, the Academy enables professionals to focus on what matters most: solving real problems with confidence. The Fifth Elephant 2025 was more than just a tech conference — it was a powerful reminder that in today's fast-paced world, true empowerment comes not from mere access to information, but from the ability to connect ideas, reflect on insights, and apply knowledge with impact. To everyone who visited the Enqurious booth, engaged in conversations, tried out activities, or simply took time to learn about the platform — thank you. The team came to share knowledge and left with fresh ideas, meaningful feedback, and strong validation. This is just the beginning. For data and AI professionals seeking meaningful growth, or organizations looking to scale their team's skills with clarity — the Enqurious Academy offers a compelling way forward.

From https://www.siliconindia.com/ 07/24/2025

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India's Edge Data Centre Capacity Set to Triple to 210 MW by 2027

India's edge data centre capacity is projected to triple from 60–70 MW in 2024 to 200–210 MW by 2027, driven by rising demand for real-time data processing. Higher rentals and capex for edge data centres are expected, especially in Tier II and III cities, creating new opportunities in the commercial real estate sector. Edge and traditional data centres will operate in a hub-and-spoke model, supporting sectors like healthcare, banking, and manufacturing with increased need for decentralised infrastructure. India's edge data centre capacity is projected to witness a threefold surge, reaching 200–210 Megawatts (MW) by 2027, up from 60–70 MW in 2024, according to a report released by credit rating agency ICRA. The rapid expansion is attributed to the growing adoption of emerging technologies and the increasing demand for real-time data processing. Edge data centres, smaller in size and strategically located closer to end-users, offer decentralised and low-latency data processing. Unlike traditional, centralised data centres that handle bulk data workloads, edge data centres provide critical support for applications requiring immediate computing, such as IoT, AI, autonomous vehicles, and real-time analytics. Globally, the data centre industry stood at around 50 Gigawatts (GW) as of December 2024. Edge data centres comprise approximately 10% of this capacity. The United States leads the global edge data centre market, accounting for over 44% of the share, followed by Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) at 32%, and the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region at 24%. India currently holds a modest share, with edge data centres forming about 5% of its overall data centre capacity and just 1% excluding captive edge deployments by large operators. “Edge data centres differ from traditional data centres in several aspects such as location, scale, build time, capex cost per MW, and proximity to the end user”, explained Anupama Reddy, Vice President and Co-Group Head, Corporate Ratings, ICRA. She emphasised that in India, edge and traditional data centres act as complementary infrastructure pillars and are expected to follow a hub-and-spoke operational model.

“With India’s growing digital economy and cloud ecosystem, traditional data centres will continue to handle mass-scale computing, AI, and cloud workloads, while edge data centres will enable real-time processing and localised services across sectors like healthcare, banking, agriculture, Defence, and manufacturing”, Reddy added. Despite the optimistic outlook, edge data centres face certain challenges, especially due to their deployment in tier II and III cities. These include potential security vulnerabilities, rapid technological advancements that can lead to quick obsolescence, a shortage of skilled professionals in remote areas, and difficulties in integrating with traditional data centre infrastructure. Moreover, the capex per MW for edge data centres is relatively higher compared to traditional ones. However, this is expected to be balanced by higher rental yields, as edge centres will largely serve retail customers instead of enterprise or hyperscale clients. As per ICRA, the rental structures for edge centres will reflect the premium for proximity, speed, and service reliability. Reddy further noted that major data centre players and public sector entities such as RailTel and telecom operators are poised to play a pivotal role in driving edge data centre expansion in India. As the nation advances towards a more connected future, edge data centres are set to be a crucial enabler for bridging digital divides and supporting India's digital infrastructure ambitions.

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SRI LANKA: SLT-MOBITEL Partners AI Pazz, First AI-Powered Legal Research Platform

Image Caption: Parakrama Ratnayake – Chief Executive Officer, RedBlocks AI (Pvt) Ltd. exchanges the MoU with Sudharshana Geeganage – Chief Operating Officer, Mobitel (Pvt) Ltd, in the presence of (L-R): Pradeep Hettiarachchi – Executive, Digital Services Marketing, Mobitel (Pvt) Ltd., Isuru Heshan – Software Engineer, RedBlocks AI (Pvt) Ltd., Namal Ratnayake – Chief Legal Officer, Mobitel (Pvt) Ltd., Isuru Dissanayake - Senior General Manager – Product Marketing, Mobitel (Pvt) Ltd. and Chief Commercial Officer at eChannelling PLC, Madura Hewage - Senior Manager- Value Added Services, Mobitel (Pvt) Ltd., and Isuru Senadeera – Manger, Value Added Services, Mobitel (Pvt) Ltd. In a landmark move set to redefine legal research in Sri Lanka, SLT-MOBITEL Mobile has partnered with Redblocks AI (Pvt) Ltd to launch AI Pazz, the country's first-ever AI-powered legal research platform featuring Sri Lanka's largest and the most up-to-date digital legal library, to offer unprecedented access to advanced legal research tools. This revolutionary platform integrates artificial intelligence with comprehensive legal content, delivering smart, fast, and reliable legal research capabilities to law students, practicing lawyers, legal educators, and institutions. Designed to address the longstanding challenges of traditional legal research methods, AI Pazz provides users with instant access to thousands of legal documents, including case law, legislation, and judicial decisions. The platform covers all NLR and SLR volumes, Supreme Court and Court of Appeal judgments, and features advanced tools such as overrule detection, AI-assisted legal drafting, and real-time updates within 48 hours.

As part of its ongoing commitment to driving digital transformation across key sectors, SLT-MOBITEL's partnership with AI Pazz empowers professionals with cutting-edge legal research tools. Customers can now enjoy an exclusive 20% discount on all AI Pazz subscription plans by visiting www.aipazz.com. This special offer enables SLT-MOBITEL Mobile customers to seamlessly subscribe to AI Pazz and gain access to cutting-edge, AI-powered legal research capabilities. The initiative is aimed at making high-quality, AI-driven legal research tools more accessible and affordable to a broader audience, particularly the growing legal community, which includes law students, legal practitioners, and academic institutions. SLT-MOBITEL Mobile users can also enjoy a 14-day free trial of the Basic tier of the AI Pazz service. By partnering with Redblocks AI to deliver AI Pazz, SLT-MOBITEL continues to drive digital innovation across critical sectors. The launch of AI Pazz marks a transformative moment for Sri Lanka's legal community, laying the foundation for a more efficient, intelligent, and accessible legal research environment. With AI Pazz, Sri Lanka's legal professionals and students now have a powerful ally in their pursuit of knowledge, efficiency, and justice. As the legal profession embraces the future, SLT-MOBITEL stands at the forefront, enabling progress through technology.

From https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/ 07/02/2025

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Setting Scope of Reviews for Construction Projects Producing Agricultural Products

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, has signed a decree on determining the scope of opinions issued within the framework of the construction permit procedure for the construction and installation of construction facilities for the manufacturing and processing of agricultural products, Trend reports. According to the decree, the scope of opinions issued within the framework of the construction permit procedure for the construction and installation of construction facilities for the production and processing of agricultural products (hereinafter referred to as the construction facility) has been determined as follows, taking into account subparagraph 3.5.1 of the "Rules for issuing construction permits for certain construction facilities and permits for the operation of construction facilities", approved by decree No. 460 of the President of Azerbaijan dated December 28, 2018: Placement of the construction facility on the land plot under the quality indicators of the land and taking into account the principle of concentration if other buildings are present on the same land plot; Assessment of the suitability of the construction facility for the declared agricultural activity. The authority issuing the construction permit must ensure that, during the construction permit procedure, taking into account the functional purpose and characteristics of each construction object, requests are sent to the relevant bodies that are deemed necessary to provide an opinion under this decree and the Urban Planning and Construction Code of Azerbaijan. The Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan must resolve the issues arising from this decree.

From https://www.trend.az/ 07/24/2025

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KAZAKHSTAN: President Opens First and Central Asia's Most Powerful Supercomputer

President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev paid a visit to the National Supercomputer Center Alemcloud, where he rolled up his sleeves and participated in the ceremony to kick off a supercomputer powered by NVIDIA H200 graphics processors, Trend reports, citing the press service of Kazakhstan. The installation and launch of the system took place in the new data center of the Ministry of Digital Development, Innovations, and Aerospace Industry in collaboration with international partners. During the ceremony, Tokayev pointed out that the launch of the supercomputer will be a significant leap forward in the digitalization of crucial sectors. “The supercomputer will allow Kazakhstan to achieve significant progress in the development of digital technologies. Access to high-performance computing will be granted to startups engaged in the development of neural network solutions, universities, and research centers, as well as government and private companies,” the statement reads. The latest supercomputing cluster boasts the capability of achieving performance levels reaching 2 exaflops through the utilization of the FP8 computational paradigm, positioning it as the preeminent computing solution within the Central Asian landscape.

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UZBEKISTAN: Enabling MSOL Digital to Expand in AI and Cloud Technologies

Sherzod Shermatov, Minister of Digital Technologies, and Makhliyo Muksinova, Director of Services Export Development, recently met with Kosei Sakamoto, CEO of MSOL Digital, to discuss the prospects of launching operations in Uzbekistan and expanding further into the CIS market through the country, Trend reports. In the course of the meeting, the parties explored potential areas of cooperation focused on IT talent acquisition. Representatives from MSOL Digital expressed strong interest in recruiting Uzbek specialists, particularly in fields such as artificial intelligence, Microsoft-based solutions, and game development. Makhliyo Muksinova highlighted Uzbekistan's rapidly growing pool of skilled IT professionals, emphasizing their robust technical expertise and multilingual capabilities, including fluency in Japanese and English. She also underscored IT Park Uzbekistan's role in fostering a supportive ecosystem for international technology companies aiming to penetrate the CIS region. The collaboration with MSOL Digital underscores Uzbekistan's appeal as a strategic hub for launching digital initiatives in artificial intelligence, cloud technologies, and software development. IT Park stands ready to offer comprehensive support to facilitate the global expansion of innovative companies. MSOL Digital, a subsidiary of the Japanese consulting group Management Solutions (MSOL), was established in Tokyo in 2022. The company specializes in digital transformation, artificial intelligence solutions—including generative AI—and Microsoft cloud technologies such as Azure, Power Platform, and Copilot Studio. As the technology arm of MSOL Group, which employs approximately 2,000 specialists and reports annual revenue of USD 203 million, MSOL Digital complements the group's consulting expertise in project management (PMO), business analytics, and digital strategy.

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Oceania

NEW ZEALAND: Supporting New Zealanders into Work

Social Development and Employment Minister Louise Upston says a strong turnout for the first in a series of regional employment events reinforces a cross-sector commitment to get Kiwis into jobs, boost employment and grow the economy. Kicking off the MSD-led series in Levin, Minister Upston and officials met with representatives of around 30 employers and other stakeholders, reinforcing job opportunities across the Horowhenua and Kāpiti Coast regions. “It was great to attend this event, acknowledge the commitment of MSD and recognise the partnership with local employers,” Louise Upston says. “That's because this Government is focused on a Going for Growth strategy which includes a key emphasis on developing the talent of our people.

"These events reinforce that. They're about people, about maximising the potential of Kiwis, about raising their earning potential while also ensuring businesses can access the people they need to help them compete globally and grow. "The Government has an ambitious target to reduce the number of people on the Jobseeker Benefit by 50,000 by 2030. MSD and employers are key to this. “We know we can’t do it alone, and need support from the community, employers and training organisations to achieve this goal. “To continue discussions about how we can work together to achieve the Jobseeker reduction target, MSD will host a number of events to bring together employers, providers and community organisations.

“The focus for the Levin/Horowhenua Supporting New Zealanders Into Work event was ensuring employers and partners are motivated to invest in the good of their communities by training or employing MSD clients, and that they know how MSDs products and services can support them. “It provided a great opportunity for local employers and organisations to discuss how we can all work together to understand workforce needs and address workforce challenges. “This week, I’m attending two more MSD-hosted events in the Hutt Valley and in Gisborne, with additional dates to be confirmed around the country. “Again, I want to acknowledge the work of MSD staff in getting people into jobs, with work exits up 11 per cent on the same time a year ago. As we saw in Levin last night, MSD are doing a great job engaging proactively with both Jobseekers and with employers.

“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. “That’s why we’ve introduced more early intervention through a new phone-based employment case management service which includes 6,000 18-24-year-old clients in this 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.”

From https://www.beehive.govt.nz 07/03/2025

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Backing Innovation to Grow King Salmon Exports

The Government is backing innovation to grow New Zealand's high-value aquaculture exports, with a $455,000 investment from the new Primary Sector Growth Fund to support the development of specialised feed for King salmon, Agriculture, Trade and Investment Minister Todd McClay announced today. The $1.2 million project—led by global aquafeed company Skretting—will design feed tailored specifically for New Zealand's King salmon, supporting the growth of open ocean farming and helping reduce costs for local producers. "This funding comes from the Primary Sector Growth Fund, announced in Budget 2025 to support forward-leaning, high-impact projects that will drive productivity, innovation and export growth across the sector," Mr McClay says."Feed is the biggest cost for salmon farmers. Getting it right is essential if we want to scale production and lift farmgate returns."

"This is part of our plan to grow aquaculture into a $3 billion industry. With the launch of Invest New Zealand this month, we're also making it easier for world-leading innovators like Skretting to invest and grow here." The initiative comes as New Zealand's first open ocean salmon farm—Blue Endeavour—receives final resource consent. Once operational, it is expected to produce 10,000 tonnes of salmon annually and generate up to $300 million in export revenue each year. "This is about backing technology and expertise to lift productivity and strengthen the global competitiveness of our salmon industry," Mr McClay says. Research will focus on optimising feed for King salmon in New Zealand's unique conditions—supporting sustainable, low-impact farming while boosting returns at the farm gate. "This is another practical step in our wider plan to double the value of New Zealand's exports over the next decade. We're backing sectors with high growth potential and supporting the science that will help get them there," Mr McClay says.

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

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Encouraging Signs for Mental Health Workforce

When someone is making the brave step of reaching out for help whether it's you, your child, a friend or family member, this Government is committed to ensuring we have the right support in place to answer that call, Minister for Mental Health Matt Doocey says. "It is promising to see reports showing New Zealand's mental health and addiction workforce is growing. This will help us ensure that people are getting the support they need, when they need it and no one's call is going unanswered," Mr Doocey says. "Over the past two years, there has been substantial progress in building up the mental health and addiction workforce. We have more mental health nurses, psychologists, support workers and addiction counsellors working on the ground, and overall vacancy rates are starting to ease.

"Behind every one of those new psychologists, nurses, support workers or counsellors are hundreds of people at what can be the lowest time of their life, now able to be seen, heard and supported. “I’ve been very clear that increasing access to support is a top priority. The Auditor General called for a specific mental health workforce plan in response to wait-times and vacancy rates increasing under the previous Government. We treated this as a priority and delivered the first dedicated mental health workforce plan in New Zealand within the first year. “It’s pleasing to see HNZ payroll data shows total full-time staff employed in mental health grew by more than 9 per cent year-on-year between Quarter 3 in 2023 and Quarter 1 2025.” While challenges remain, particularly in psychiatry vacancies, HNZ Payroll data also shows there has been 9.5 percent growth in the number of full-time staff employed as Senior Medical Officers – Psychiatry between Quarter 1 2024 and Quarter 1 2025.

“We know we need more psychiatrists in New Zealand. That’s why we’ve increased training places and funding to support more people into the field. We’ve lifted the number of funded registrar positions from 33 in 2024 to 54 a year after Budget 2025,” Mr Doocey says. “I’ve also written to both Health New Zealand and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatry to encourage them to do everything they can to remove any additional barriers to grow the psychiatry workforce. “It is heartening to see that the Government’s focus on growing the workforce and our commitment to addressing long-standing workforce gaps is starting to pay off because at the end of the day, hen someone is making the brave step of reaching out to get well, workforce should never be a barrier.”

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Getting More Kiwis into Jobs

Jobseeker beneficiaries will be the focus of the Government’s employment programmes over the next three years, says Minister Louise Upston. Minister Upston has welcomed an updated Ministry of Social Development employment investment strategy which runs through to June 2028, describing it as overdue.“Prioritising beneficiaries into jobs should always be the employment focus for MSD but unfortunately that hasn’t always been the case,” Louise Upston says. “This updated strategy makes it crystal clear MSD needs to be consistently focused on the job seekers already on benefits and getting them sorted first because that’s where they can make the most impact. “I’ve also instructed MSD that it needs to work in more targeted ways, particularly when it comes to young people. “That’s important because recent forecasts show that people under the age of 25 on Jobseeker Support are estimated to spend an average of 18 or more years on a benefit over their lifetimes - 49 per cent longer than in 2017. “This is a human tragedy. We need to focus on the potential of one of New Zealand’s most powerful assets - our young people - and get them straight into first jobs. “Frontline MSD staff do work hard in this area, and I know case managers working directly with clients is where MSD can make a real difference. This strategy reinforces that approach. “Employment case management is important and should also be straightforward and practical. It can include something as simple as helping someone get an up-to-date CV, through to passing a driver licence.

“The Government continues to support MSD’s frontline staff - this year, Budget 2025 invested in retaining 490 frontline staff to help deliver vital employment services. “Preventing young people getting stuck on a benefit will also be vitally important as we go on. Already in this term, we’ve introduced a new phone-based employment case management service which includes 6,000 18-24-year-old clients, 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. “And just in the past weeks, MSD has kicked off a series of regional employment events, bringing together employers, providers and community organisations focused on a common goal – getting people into work. “I’m also attending those events and hearing first-hand what’s needed to support employers, and job seekers. Our Government is determined to get Kiwis into jobs, grow New Zealand businesses, and grow the economy.”

From https://www.beehive.govt.nz 07/16/2025

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Government Welcomes First Medical Conferences Following Rule Change

Regulation Minister David Seymour and Health Minister Simeon Brown are welcoming confirmation that two of Australasia’s largest medical conferences are coming to New Zealand in 2026, with a combined total of 3300 delegates expected to attend and generating millions of dollars in economic activity. The Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO) will hold conferences in New Zealand. ANZCA is expected to attract 1500 delegates from around the world and inject more than $3 million into the local economy. RANZCO’s Annual Scientific Congress is expected to attract 1800 delegates in November and contribute more than $2 million in economic activity.

“By ending New Zealand’s prohibition on advertising medicines at medical conferences and trade shows, we’ve sent a message that New Zealand is open for business,” Mr Seymour says. “Prohibition was introduced in response to the perceived risk that pharmaceutical companies may attempt to circumvent formal medicine approval processes. The Ministry for Regulation investigated this, found the overly cautious approach was out of step with other recognised jurisdictions, and the Government acted fast to fix it. “As well as the millions of dollars this is expected to inject into the economy, allowing these products to be advertised provides medical professionals with more knowledge and skills to prescribe these treatments to Kiwis who need them.”

“This Government is committed to removing regulatory barriers so that we can drive economic growth. Removing the red tape around medical conferences has made New Zealand a better destination for conference organisers, while also making it easier for our own healthcare professionals to keep up with the latest innovations in health products and medicines,” Mr Brown says. “New Zealand’s current health regulations can be overly bureaucratic, and this is slowing down access to care, increasing costs, and making it harder for patients to get the services they need. "We are looking forward to welcoming more medical conferences to New Zealand, and we have great facilities to host them.”

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Innovation and Optimisation to Improve Medicines Access

Associate Health Minister David Seymour has today announced more clear expectations for Pharmac to innovate and optimise to further build on expectations set last year; to deliver the medicines and medical technology that Kiwis need. “Increasing medicines access is one of my greatest priorities. For many New Zealanders, funding for pharmaceuticals is life or death, or the difference between a life of pain and suffering or living freely,” Mr Seymour says. Since my last letter of expectations Pharmac has: Improved overall consultation Added additional consultation to the annual tender process Changed funding criteria based on public feedback, such as the decision to fund two types of oestradiol patches

Appointed Natalie McMurtry as the incoming Chief Executive to cement positive change, and continue to move towards a more transparent, inclusive, and people-focused organisation Conducted, and published a report on, the Consumer Engagement Workshop to help reset the Patient-Pharmac relationship Appointed a Consumer Working Group to help reset the Patient-Pharmac relationship Funded access to 66 additional medicines using the Government’s $604 million budget boost over four years which will benefit over 200,000 New Zealanders “This is a good start. My letter of expectations for this year makes it very clear that there is still more work to be done. I expect this positive culture shift to continue,” Mr Seymour says. “Pharmac must modernise, or it will fall behind. It needs to adopt faster, smarter processes and explore the use of AI to lift performance.”

My expectations for this year are that Pharmac should: Explore how it can optimise medicines assessment and procurement processes to make them more efficient Explore ways to utilise AI to make their processes more efficient Consider the fiscal impacts to the government of funding medicines and medical devices, including costs of societal impacts of funding or not funding a medicine or medical device Be more proactive in engaging with stakeholders Look for new and additional funding opportunities for medicines and medical devices Publish measurable performance metrics and timely decisions to increase transparency Continue to involve patients early in the process and engage with them meaningfully “We’re committed to ensuring that the regulatory system for pharmaceuticals is not unreasonably holding back access. It will lead to more Kiwis being able to access the medicines they need to live a fulfilling life,” Mr Seymour says. “I am looking forward to continuing to work with Pharmac as we continue to ensure Kiwis get timely access to medicines and medical devices.”

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Government Delivers Further Cost of Living Support

The Government is focused on growing the economy to create jobs, lift incomes and help Kiwis with the cost-of-living, Prime Minister Christopher Luxon and Minister of Finance Nicola Willis say. “We know things are still tough for a lot of families and that’s why we are focused on growing the economy to help Kiwis get ahead,” Mr Luxon says. “The economy is expected to grow on average 2.7 per cent per year creating 240,000 jobs over the next four years, but in the short term we are pulling every lever we can to help Kiwi families with the cost of living. “Today we have announced that we are scrapping surcharges at the till. New Zealanders are paying up to $150 million in surcharges every year. That’s money that could be saved or spent elsewhere,” Mr Luxon says. “This week marks one year of tax relief meaning the average household is $1,560 better off,” Nicola Willis says. “We have also introduced FamilyBoost, which with the latest expansion gives families up to 40 per cent off their childcare costs. We have removed the Auckland fuel tax, introduced 12-month prescriptions, increased the rates rebate for 66,000 seniors and increased Working for Families payments. “Most importantly we have stopped wasteful government spending and got inflation under control. Inflation has dropped from a peak of 7.3 per cent under the previous government to 2.7 per cent under ours. “This has meant lower interest rates, so a family re-fixing a $500,000 mortgage today will save around $320 per fortnight compared to September 2023. We have also driven rent inflation down. “Long term, we know the most important thing we can do is to increase wages, and the way to do that is by growing the economy. “That is why this Government is focusing on five key areas: developing talent, ensuring business settings are competitive, promoting global trade and investment, supporting innovation, technology and science; and providing a pipeline of infrastructure for growth. “Ultimately, the way to grow people’s incomes is to grow the economy. That is why this Government is working so hard to do just that,” Nicola Willis says.

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Asia-Pacific

Tax Inspectors Without Borders Present Plans to Expand International Tax Co-Operation for Sustainable Development Over the Coming Decade

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have presented today a new plan to expand the scope and global coverage of their shared Tax Inspectors Without Borders (TIWB) programme, marking a new phase in the flagship capacity-building initiative. **Tax Inspectors Without Borders 2.0**, presented during the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4), in Sevilla, Spain, will build on a decade of impactful collaboration between OECD, UNDP and governments worldwide while adapting its activities to the evolving challenges of international taxation. To date, the initiative has enabled countries to mobilise an additional USD 2.4 billion in revenue, of which USD 1.91 billion has been raised across Africa alone. TIWB will continue its signature mission – the deployment of experienced tax experts to work side-by-side with domestic audit teams in developing countries, strengthening local capacity through real-time support in concrete audits and investigations. This distinctive model will continue to enhance technical skills while enabling developing countries to address complex tax issues, such as transfer pricing and base erosion and profit shifting.

As part of FFD4, TIWB was selected to be a part of the Sevilla Platform for Action, a group of initiatives aimed at achieving measurable progress by advancing the renewed financing framework of the Sevilla outcome document, supported by a set of concrete actions. **Mathias Cormann, Secretary-General of the OECD**, welcomed the launch of TIWB 2.0: “Looking ahead, we are optimistic that the Tax Inspectors Without Borders initiative will continue to adapt and respond to each jurisdiction’s specific needs and **objectives, delivering responsive, country-led support that will improve tax administrations and boost domestic resource mobilisation**. With ongoing donor engagement and reinforced partnerships, TIWB 2.0 is positioned to help developing countries strengthen tax capacity and meet the demands of a rapidly shifting global tax environment.” With TIWB 2.0, the initiative will deepen its commitment to tailored assistance and institutional strengthening, while expanding into new areas of support. This will include helping developing countries address key emerging challenges, such as the digitalisation of the economy, complex cross-border transactions and new drivers of illicit financial flows.

Haoliang Xu, Acting Administrator of UNDP, said: “Over the past decade, Tax Inspectors Without Borders has shown how strengthening tax capacity at the national level unlocks domestic finance for sustainable development. By providing technical expertise in tax administrations, TIWB has helped countries reclaim billions to advance the Sustainable Development Goals. When tax systems are fair, efficient, and inclusive, they do more than fund public services, they rebuild trust, strengthen the social contract, and weave sustainability into the fabric of governance. But we need to scale up. Continued investment in TIWB will be essential to sustain this momentum and mobilise domestic resources to advance sustainability." The new developments were presented at FFD4 in Sevilla during an event, *"Tax Inspectors Without Borders: A Decade of Impact and the Road Ahead"*, together with partners from the OECD's Forum on Tax Administration (FTA), the African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF), the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development (IGF), and the International Centre for Tax and Development (ICTD).

Commissioner Edward Kieswetter of South Africa, Vice-Chair of the OECD FTA, which brings together over 50 of the world's leading tax administrations, also attended the event, highlighting the vital role tax administrations play in supporting TIWB programmes through the provision of world-class experts. These strategic partnerships will be scaled up under TIWB 2.0, enhancing triangular co-operation and expanding engagement with international and regional institutions. Since its launch in 2015, TIWB has supported 70 developing jurisdictions, securing USD 6.39 billion in tax assessments, including disallowed losses and deferred taxes, and collecting over USD 2.4 billion in additional tax revenues. In Africa alone, through its close collaboration with ATAF, 39 countries have raised more than USD 1.9 billion in additional revenues. A **10-year retrospective report** outlining these results and the initiative's future direction was launched today, capturing a decade of achievements and lessons learned. To read the full progress report and find out more about TIWB, visit: https://read.oecd.org/10.1787/e9762366-en.

From https://www.oecd.org/ 07/02/2025

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OECD Job Markets Remain Resilient but Population Ageing Will Cause Significant Labour Shortages and Fiscal Pressures

Job markets remain resilient, with labour force participation reaching record highs in many OECD countries and unemployment at historically low levels. However, there are signs of a slowdown as geopolitical and trade policy uncertainties dampen economic activity, according to a new OECD report. The ***OECD Employment Outlook 2025*** reports that OECD-wide employment, which reached 668 million in May 2025 – up by about 26% since 2001 – is expected to grow by around 1.1% in 2025 and 0.7% in 2026. Having been at or below 5.0% for more than 3 years, the OECD-wide unemployment rate stood at 4.9% in May 2025 and is projected to remain near this low level through 2026. It was 0.5 percentage points higher for women than for men. Gender gaps in employment and labour force participation are narrowing in many countries. Between the first quarter of 2024 and the first quarter of 2025, on average across OECD countries, the employment rate of women rose by around 0.2 percentage points more than that of men. The gender gap in the participation rate narrowed by 0.3 percentage points over the same period, largely driven by more women entering the labour force.

Real wages are growing across most of the OECD, but remain below the levels seen in early 2021, just before the post-pandemic inflation surge, in around half of countries. The wages of the lowest-paid workers have held up well, as the real statutory minimum wage has increased since then in nearly all the 30 OECD countries with a national minimum wage. This year's edition also includes new analysis on the significant impact that declining birth rates and increasing life expectancy across the OECD will have on economic growth and employment. "OECD labour markets continue to be resilient: employment rates have risen further over the past year to 72.1% in the average OECD country, the highest level since at least 2005," **OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann** said. "But population ageing is set to lead to significant labour shortages and fiscal pressures. We estimate that, by 2060, the working-age population will decline by 8% in the OECD and annual public spending on pensions and health will rise by 3% of GDP. Ambitious policy action is needed to improve job opportunities for older workers, unlock the untapped labour market potential of women and young people, and revive productivity growth, including by ensuring that workers have the right skills to benefit from new AI tools."

The Outlook forecasts that the working-age population will decline by more than 30% in a quarter of OECD countries by 2060. The old-age dependency ratio – defined as the ratio of individuals aged 65 years and above to the working-age population – increased massively from 19% in 1980 to 31% in 2023 and is projected to rise further to 52% by 2060. Without decisive policy action, GDP per capita growth would slow down by about 40% in the OECD area – from 1% per year in 2006-19 to 0.6% per year in 2024-60 on average. All but two OECD countries would see their per-capita growth declining. By reducing the rate of labour market departures by older workers to the level in the 10% of OECD countries with the lowest departure rates, the Outlook shows that OECD countries could significantly reduce the projected loss in GDP per capita growth from demographic ageing. This will involve promoting career mobility for mid-career and older workers and fostering lifelong learning to ensure that older workers have the relevant skills and can adapt to new labour market needs and opportunities. Reviving productivity growth will also need to be part of the solution, including by promoting the trustworthy use of AI and other digital technologies. Full data and projections from the *Employment Outlook 2025* are available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-employment-outlook-2025_194a947b-en.html.

From https://www.oecd.org/ 07/09/2025

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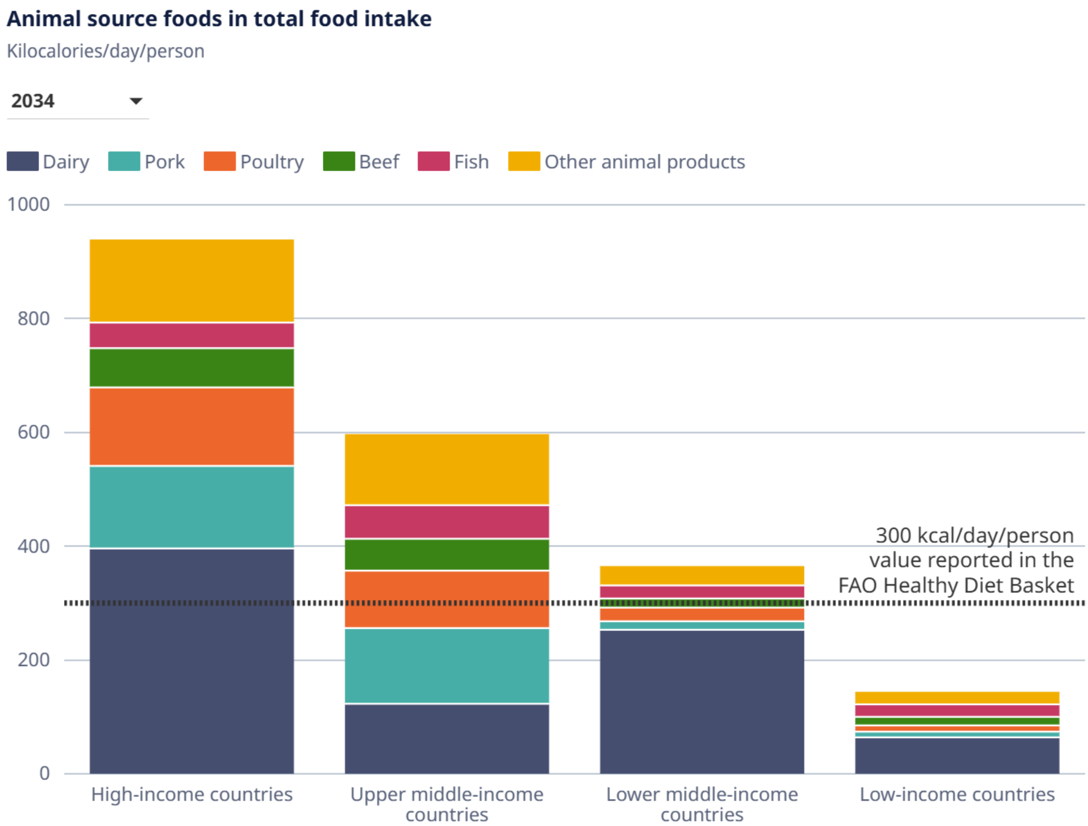
Emerging Economies Expected to Drive Growth in Animal-Source Food Consumption and Production Over the Coming Decade, According to OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2025-2034

Production and calorie intake of animal-source products are expected to increase as incomes rise in middle-income countries, but further increases in food production through improvements in agricultural productivity will be necessary to reduce under-nourishment and agricultural greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions at a global level, according to a new report released today by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The ***OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2025-2034*** serves as a key global reference on medium-term prospects for agricultural and fish markets at national, regional and global levels. The 21st edition of the joint analysis projects that global per capita calorie intake of livestock and fish products will increase by 6 percent over the next decade, driven largely by a rapid rise in lower-middle-income countries, where growth is anticipated to reach 24 percent, nearly four times faster than the global average. While this rise in intake of nutrient-rich food in lower-middle-income countries will bring average per capita intake to 364 kcal daily, persistent inequalities within and across countries will remain challenging. In low-income countries, average daily per capita intake of animal-source foods is projected at 143 kcal, well below the 300 kcal benchmark used by FAO to analyse the cost and affordability of a healthy diet.



Source : OECD/FAO (2025), OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2025-2034.

"We have the tools to end hunger and boost global food security," **OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann** said. "Well-coordinated policies are needed to keep global food markets open, while fostering long-term productivity improvements and sustainability in the agriculture sector. The OECD and FAO can support policymakers around the world in these efforts with our data, analysis and evidence-based recommendations." "These projections point to better nutrition for many people in developing countries, a welcome outcome that needs to be scaled up to reach those in the lowest-income countries," **FAO Director-General QU Dongyu** said. "Lower carbon intensity of agrifood systems is also welcome, but we can do better, and FAO and OECD stand ready to help drive it down even more." Global production of agricultural and fish commodities is projected to expand by about 14 percent through to 2034, mainly enabled by productivity gains in middle-income countries. But this growth entails expanded animal herds and cropland areas. While the output of meat, dairy products and eggs is set to increase by 17 percent, total global inventories of cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry will expand by 7 percent. These developments will lead to a 6 percent increase in direct agricultural GHG emissions over the next decade, reflecting a declining carbon intensity of global direct emissions associated with on-farm production.

Projected productivity improvements are expected to put downward pressure on real agricultural commodity prices. This could pose significant challenges for smallholder farmers who are vulnerable to market volatility and have limited capacity to adopt the innovative technologies needed to increase productivity. In addition to supporting efforts to improve productivity growth, governments must also ensure that farmers have better access to markets and locally tailored support programmes. Increased efforts to improve agricultural productivity are needed to tackle the dual challenges of reducing undernourishment and agricultural GHG emissions, according to the Outlook. A scenario analysis suggests that global undernourishment could be eradicated and direct agricultural GHG emissions reduced by 7 percent from current levels if combined investments are made in emissions-reduction technologies and in increased food production through a 15 percent productivity improvement. Widespread adoption of currently available emissions-reducing technologies, including precision farming, livestock feed enhancements, improved nutrient and water management, and scalable low-cost practices such as crop rotations and intercropping, will be required to achieve these objectives. In the face of potential supply chain disruptions, multilateral co-operation and a rule-based agricultural trade system are also key, as the Outlook projects that 22 percent of all calories will cross international borders before final consumption. Facilitating agricultural trade flows will benefit balancing food deficits and surpluses, stabilising prices and enhancing food security and sustainability.

Main takeaways

- Global cereal production is projected to grow at an average annual rate of 1.1%, driven largely by a 0.9 percent annual increase in yields. Harvested area is projected to expand by just 0.14 percent annually, less than half the 0.33 percent rate of the previous decade.

- By 2034, 40 percent of all cereals will be consumed directly by humans, while 33 percent will be used for animal feed. Biofuel production and other industrial uses are projected to account for the rest.
- Global demand for biofuels is projected to grow at an average annual rate of 0.9 percent, driven primarily by increases in Brazil, India and Indonesia.
- Sub-Saharan Africa illustrates the significant opportunities for a robust set of initiatives to improve productivity: the region's beef cattle herd is three times larger than in North America and is projected to grow by 15 percent, while output per animal is only about one-tenth as high.
- India and Southeast Asian countries are projected to account for 39 percent of global consumption growth by 2034, compared to 32 percent over the past decade, while China's share is projected at 13 percent, down from 32 percent over the past decade.
- In high-income countries, per capita consumption of fats and sweeteners is projected to decline due to shifting preferences, policy changes, and emerging health concerns.

Information and data from the Outlook, including the main conclusions, is freely accessible at: www.agri-outlook.org. Journalists are invited to include this Internet link in reports on the Outlook.

From https://www.oecd.org/ 07/15/2025

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Global Gas Flaring Hits Highest Level Since 2007, Undermining Energy Security, Access, and Emissions Goals

Global gas flaring surged for a second year in a row, wasting about $63 billion in lost energy and setting back efforts to manage emissions and boost energy security and access. Flaring, the practice of burning natural gas during oil extraction, reached 151 billion cubic meters (bcm) in 2024, up 3 bcm from the previous year and the highest level in almost two decades. An estimated 389 million tonnes of CO_2 equivalent—46 million of that from unburnt methane, one of the most potent greenhouse gases—was needlessly emitted. While some countries have reduced flaring, the top nine largest-flaring countries continue to account for three-quarters of all flaring, but less than half of global oil production. Satellite data compiled and analyzed in the World Bank's annual **Global Gas Flaring Tracker** shows that flaring intensity—the amount of gas flared per barrel of oil produced—has remained stubbornly high for the last 15 years. *"When more than a billion people still don't have access to reliable energy and numerous countries are seeking more sources of energy to meet higher demand, it's very frustrating to see this natural resource wasted,"* said **Demetrios Papathanasiou, World Bank Global Director for Energy and Extractives.**

The report highlights that countries committed to the Zero Routine Flaring by 2030 (ZRF) initiative have performed significantly better than countries that have not made the commitment. Since 2012, countries that endorsed ZRF achieved an average 12% reduction in flaring intensity, whereas those that did not saw a 25% increase. To accelerate progress, the World Bank's Global Flaring and Methane Reduction (GFMR) Partnership is supporting methane and flaring reduction projects through catalytic grants, technical assistance, policy and regulatory reform advisory services, capacity building, and institutional strengthening. For example, in Uzbekistan, GFMR allocated $11 million to identify and fix methane leaks in the gas transportation network, cutting methane emissions by 9,000 tonnes annually, and potentially reaching up to 100,000 tonnes each year. *"Governments and operators must make flaring reduction a priority, or this practice will persist. The solutions exist. With effective policies we can create favorable conditions that incentivize flaring reduction projects and lead to sustainable, scalable action. We should turn this wasted gas into an engine for economic development."* said **Zubin Bamji, World Bank Manager for the Global Flaring & Methane Reduction (GFMR) Partnership.**

From https://www.worldbank.org/ 07/18/2025

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AI Advances Spur Growth of Internet

China's internet sector is gaining robust growth momentum, driven by technological advances in artificial intelligence, which has become a vital force bolstering the country's high-quality economic development and industrial upgrades, said officials, experts and company executives. Highlighting China's great achievements in the development of internet infrastructure, they said bolstering application of cutting-edge AI in a wider range of sectors is crucial for nurturing new quality productive forces and establishing a modern industrial system. They made the remarks at the opening ceremony of the 2025 China Internet Conference, which started on Wednesday in Beijing. According to the Internet Society of China, the user base of generative AI products has reached 249 million, accounting for 17.7 percent of the total population, which highlights the country's widespread adoption of AI across various sectors. As the country is advancing the deep integration of digital technologies with the real economy, the popularization rate of digital research and design tools in key industry enterprises now stands at 80.1 percent, significantly improving production efficiency and lowering operational costs of enterprises.

Zhang Yunming, vice-minister of industry and information technology, said more efforts are needed to promote original and disruptive technological innovations, with a focus on key areas such as advanced computing, AI and quantum information. China will push ahead with the construction of new-type information infrastructure, vigorously upgrade traditional industries, bolster the development of emerging industries and future-oriented industries, and accelerate the cultivation of new quality productive forces. Shang Bing, president of the Internet Society of China, emphasized the importance of speeding up the establishment of computing power infrastructure, achieving breakthroughs in crucial technologies, such as

5G-Advanced and 6G, and quantum communication, and leveraging AI technology to promote the transformation and upgrading of manufacturing. The AI agent — a system that autonomously performs actions by designing workflows using related tools — has gained worldwide attention and witnessed explosive growth since the start of this year. It is more advanced than a chatbot because it not only provides suggestions or answers, but also executes complex tasks across a multitude of industries, delivering tangible results.

Wu Hequan, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said AI has contributed to 48 percent of global internet traffic growth, and is driving disruptive changes in network architecture, adding that the development direction of AI will shift from generative AI to AI agents, and the internet sector will enter into the era of AI agents. China boasts abundant application scenarios, and all industries have the opportunity to be reshaped by AI agents, which can serve as digital partners and digital employees to analyze people's working processes and enhance efficiency, said Zhou Hongyi, founder of Chinese internet enterprise 360 Security Group, estimating the next two years will be a crucial period for the implementation of such technology. He said currently, large language models have some limitations, while calling for more efforts to create AI agents with different specialties by combining different industries and professional fields. These agents will look like virtual advisors or experts with specialized expertise, he added.

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Digital Humans Show Future of Livestreaming E-Commerce

What happens when a livestreaming session is hosted by a digital human who can interact with viewers in real time? Last month, I watched a livestreaming show presided over by the virtual avatar of Luo Yonghao, founder of smartphone maker Smartisan Technology and a key online opinion leader on Chinese social media platforms. Throughout the live broadcast lasting over six hours, Luo's digital human along with a cohosting avatar garnered more than 13 million views, generating over 55 million yuan ($7.7 million) in gross merchandise value, or GMV. In key product categories such as consumer electronics and food, order volumes surpassed Luo's real-person livestream debut on the same platform earlier in May. What impressed me the most was that Luo's digital avatar and the supporting avatar interacted naturally, exhibiting detailed gestures — such as making eye contact and speaking in unison — that mirrored real human hosts, while engaging with viewers in real time. Powered by Chinese tech heavyweight Baidu Inc's Ernie foundation model, the livestreaming was the first to feature dual digital avatars as cohosts. Baidu described the new generation of AI digital human as super-intelligent AI agents that closely resemble real people, with coordinated expressions, speech, gestures and behavior. These digital humans are capable of thinking, making decisions and collaborating to complete specific tasks.

AI-powered digital human hosts that bear a close resemblance to real humans in appearance as well as behavior are being increasingly utilized in livestreaming e-commerce to unveil a variety of products and bolster sales. I noticed that several brands preferred to use virtual anchors to attract digitally savvy and novelty-seeking young consumers, as they cost less than employing real human hosts and don't cause celebrity scandals that could potentially hurt brand image. A digital human of Liu Qiangdong, Chinese e-commerce giant JD's founder and chairman, appeared in the company's livestreaming rooms in last April to promote a variety of products, including meat, edible oil, eggs, milk, air conditioners and TV sets. The virtual anchor almost perfectly replicated Liu's expressions, body language, gestures, voice and accent, capturing even the subtlest movement of his fingers. Liu's avatar generated over 20 million views within the first hour and raked in 50 million yuan in sales throughout the entire real-time broadcast session. The size of China's virtual human market is forecast to reach 270 billion yuan by 2030, according to a report released by QbitAI, an industry services platform focusing on AI and other cutting-edge technologies.

With continuous technological advancements in large language models and multimodal capabilities, the appearance, gestures and actions of digital humans will be more refined and closer to that of real humans, experts said. However, the virtual human industry is still in its infancy, and the major challenges lie in how to allow virtual anchors to better interact with users and understand their demands more precisely. The application of virtual hosts in livestreaming e-commerce will likely see speedy growth fueled by user demand, advances in AI technology and policy support, said Zhang Yi, CEO and chief analyst at consultancy iiMedia Research. Compared to humans, the biggest advantage of digital avatars is that they can significantly cut operating costs of livestreaming for merchants, and work 24 hours a day without coffee and restroom breaks, thus pushing up sales, Zhang said. Mo Daiqing, a senior analyst at the Internet Economy Institute, a domestic consultancy, said the use of AI-powered virtual hosts in e-commerce livestreaming sessions can bring a feeling of freshness to users, while brand owners can appeal to new consumers via this innovative method. Virtual livestreamers can play an important role in finishing tedious and repetitive tasks, improving the consumer shopping experience and boosting product sales, thus allowing human hosts to devote more time to creative work, Mo said. "However, they will not totally replace real human hosts, as it is difficult for virtual anchors to fully establish real emotional connections with fans."

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Integration of Cognitive Intel in AI Progressing at Unprecedented Speed

Cognitive intelligence research experts and scholars from around the globe gathered at the 2025 World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) in Shanghai on Sunday to explore the latest advancements in AI. Themed "Cognition of the World, Innovation for Future", exchanges focused on cutting-edge meta-rationality, AI for mathematics, intelligent agent platforms, large model evolution, and consciousness Turing machines, hosted by UniDT (Shanghai) Co Ltd. Discussions among scholars and experts from countries, including China, Norway, Brazil, Spain, the United States and South Africa, revolved around core frontiers of cognitive intelligence: cognitive reasoning, autonomous decision-making and causal learning. Experts highlighted that cognitive intelligence represents an advanced stage in AI development, currently progressing at an unprecedented speed and breadth. The deep integration of cognitive intelligence in large model technology is expanding its application prospects. Xuan Xiaohua, founder and chairman of UniDT, said that AI is rapidly transitioning from lab research to industrial applications, moving from the conceptual validation stage to large-scale implementation.

"The company will be committed to promoting independent innovation of key technologies and their applications, with a strong presence in intelligent manufacturing, social governance, digital culture and tourism, biomedicine, and other fields. Such efforts aim to deeply integrate AI technology with industrial scenarios, injecting innovative energy into the new industrial revolution and the development of new quality productive forces," he said. On Saturday, an academic conference focusing on mathematics and AI, which is also part of this year's WAIC, convened influential scholars in the relevant fields from home and abroad. The academic conference was jointly organized by the Smale Institute for Mathematics and Computation and the China Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics, and was co-hosted by UniDT (Shanghai) Co Ltd. During his address, Zhang Hongtao, deputy director of the Shanghai Commission of Economy and Informatization, expressed Shanghai's high regard for the integration of mathematics and AI. The city aims to propel innovation in mathematical foundations and the development of the AI industry to new heights, while establishing various platforms for industry-academia collaboration, and fostering an environment conducive to the development of innovative talent, he said.

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ADB Launches Regional Network to Accelerate Universal Health Coverage in Asia and the Pacific

Asian Development Bank (ADB) President Masato Kanda announced the launch of the Universal Health Coverage Practitioners and Experts Knowledge Exchange and Resources (UHC PEERS), a regional peer-to-peer learning network to accelerate universal health coverage across Asia and the Pacific. The announcement was made during ADB's INclusive, Sustainable, Prosperous, and REsilient (INSPIRE)

Health Systems in Asia and the Pacific Health Forum, bringing together more than 25 developing member countries, including health ministers from nine countries. "Achieving universal health coverage is not something that we can delay further, and it is within our reach if we work together to build a region where everyone, everywhere, has access to the care they need, without financial hardship," said Mr. Kanda. "Universal health coverage lies at the heart of resilient, sustainable, and inclusive development." The UHC PEERS network addresses a gap in regional health cooperation by providing a platform for countries to share solutions for extending coverage to underserved populations. More than 1 billion people across Asia and the Pacific still lack access to basic health services, with millions pushed into poverty due to health-care costs. UHC PEERS will complement the UHC Knowledge Hub in Tokyo and enable countries to learn from health financing reforms, service delivery innovations, and coverage expansion. The network will facilitate exchanges on reaching remote populations, integrating private sector providers, and developing sustainable financing. Through peer learning, countries can adapt successful approaches while avoiding common pitfalls.

Mr. Kanda emphasized the economic imperative of health investments, noting that "every $1 invested in primary health care yields up to $10 in economic growth." The launch reflects growing regional consensus on UHC as a development priority, as health systems face pressures from aging populations, rising noncommunicable diseases, and persistent infectious diseases. Beyond UHC PEERS, the five-day INSPIRE Health Forum marks an expansion of ADB's health engagement, also addressing pandemic preparedness and health system resilience, drawing lessons from COVID-19. Through ministerial exchanges, innovation showcases, and financing partnerships, the forum will document best practices for ADB's future programming. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting inclusive, resilient, and sustainable growth across Asia and the Pacific. Working with its members and partners to solve complex challenges together, ADB harnesses innovative financial tools and strategic partnerships to transform lives, build quality infrastructure, and safeguard our planet.

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Business Leaders Urge Recommitment to Open, Rules-based and Predictable Trade, Call for Bold Action to Secure Future Growth

Representatives of the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) met in Hai Phong, Viet Nam to finalize their recommendations to APEC Leaders and seven Sectoral Ministerial Meetings to be held in Korea later this year. During the meeting, ABAC members reiterated an urgent call to APEC Leaders to reaffirm their commitment to open, rules-based, non-discriminatory, predictable and competitive markets in the face of mounting trade tensions, policy volatility and global uncertainty. APEC's prosperity has long rested on reducing distortions and opening markets, anchored by transparent, rules-based trade but today, that foundation is under threat. Escalating trade frictions and uncertainty are disrupting supply chains, inflating costs, shaking business confidence and threatening jobs and living standards. This is throttling growth and distracting from the critical work of revitalizing businesses and our economies. In a '[Statement on Open Markets]', ABAC underscored that the business community needs a return to the stable trade and economic environment that has underpinned decades of prosperity for every APEC economy. As leaders of the Asia-Pacific business community, ABAC recognizes that artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping our economies, societies and daily lives. Yet the full benefits of AI cannot be realized without robust, efficient and sustainable infrastructure to support its development and deployment. In its Declaration on Sustainable AI Infrastructure and Investment, ABAC reaffirmed its commitment to shaping an AI-powered future that is not only innovative and inclusive, but also environmentally responsible.

Priorities for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth

In the 2025 Report to APEC Leaders, ABAC finalized the recommendations it will present later this year to drive sustainable and inclusive growth in the region including the following:

- Accelerating the realization of the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP), with early deliverables like the APEC Centre of Excellence on Paperless Trade, a new equal pay framework and a Greener Trade Framework.
- Reforming and modernizing the WTO including making permanent the E-Commerce Moratorium for digital products.
- Mobilizing investment to fund energy transitions, digital infrastructure, and disaster response.
- Leading in Digital Transformation by ensuring equitable access to secure, sustainable digital infrastructure, shaping responsible AI deployment and governance and developing interoperable digital trade rules.
- Strengthening healthcare supply chains and market access for innovations like genomics and AI.
- Tackling demographic shifts by promoting workforce participation, labor mobility, skills recognition, pensions reform and leveraging emerging technologies.

ABAC's work and recommendations are guided by the theme this year—"Bridge. Business. Beyond." This reflects what is needed to deliver ABAC's vision: bridge divides, empower businesses to drive growth and look beyond short-term challenges to long-term prosperity. ABAC stands ready to work with APEC Leaders to shape a future of inclusive, sustainable growth for all. ABAC 2025 Chairman H.S. Cho thanked His Excellency Luong Cuong, President of Viet Nam, who opened the ABAC meeting. ABAC expressed its appreciation to ABAC Viet Nam for the excellent arrangements and the leaders of Hai Phong City for supporting the meeting. Prior to the start of the ABAC meeting, members joined participants to the Hai Phong Investment Promotion Conference held prior to their Meeting where they engaged with H.E. President of Viet Nam, Hai Phong City Leaders and local business owners.

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ADB Lowers Economic Growth Forecast for Asia and the Pacific

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has lowered its growth forecasts for economies in developing Asia and the Pacific this year and next year. The downgrades are driven by expectations of reduced exports amid higher United States (U.S.) tariffs and global trade uncertainty, as well as weaker domestic demand. ADB forecasts the region's economies will grow by 4.7% this year, a 0.2 percentage point decline from the projection issued in April. The forecast for next year has been lowered to 4.6% from 4.7%, according to *Asian Development Outlook (ADO) July 2025* released today. Prospects for developing Asia and the Pacific could be dented further by an escalation of U.S. tariffs and trade tensions. Other risks include conflicts and geopolitical tensions that could disrupt global supply chains and raise energy prices, and a worse-than-expected deterioration in the property market of the People's Republic of China (PRC). "Asia and the Pacific has weathered an increasingly challenging external environment this year. But the economic outlook has weakened amid intensifying risks and global uncertainty," said ADB Chief Economist Albert Park. "Economies in the region should continue strengthening their fundamentals and promoting open trade and regional integration to support investment, employment, and growth." Growth projections for the PRC, the region's largest economy, are maintained at 4.7% this year and 4.3% next year. Policy stimulus for consumption and industrial activity is expected to offset continuing property market weakness and softening exports. India, the region's second-largest economy, is forecast to grow by 6.5% this year and 6.7% next year—down 0.2 and 0.1 percentage points, respectively, from April projections—as trade uncertainty and higher U.S. tariffs affect exports and investment. Economies in Southeast Asia will likely be hardest hit by worsened trade conditions and uncertainty.

ADB now predicts the subregion's economies will grow 4.2% this year and 4.3% next year, down roughly half a percentage point from April forecasts for each year. Bucking the downward trend are economies in Caucasus and Central Asia. The subregion's growth projections have been raised by 0.1 percentage points for both this year and next to 5.5% and 5.1%, respectively, largely reflecting an anticipated boost in oil production. Inflation in developing Asia and the Pacific is projected to continue slowing, amid easing oil prices and strong farm output reducing food price pressures. ADB forecasts regional inflation of 2.0% this year and 2.1% next year, compared with its April projections of 2.3% and 2.2%, respectively. ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting inclusive, resilient, and sustainable growth across Asia and the Pacific. Working with its members and partners to solve complex challenges together, ADB harnesses innovative financial tools and strategic partnerships to transform lives, build quality infrastructure, and safeguard our planet.

Developing Asia's growth is expected to ease in 2025 and 2026.

	GDP Growth					Inflation				
	2024	2025		2026		2024	2025		2026	
Subregion/Economy		April	July	April	July		April	July	April	July
Developing Asia	**5.1**	**4.9**	**4.7**	**4.7**	**4.6**	**2.6**	**2.3**	**2.0**	**2.2**	**2.1**
Developing Asia excluding the PRC	**5.1**	**5.0**	**4.8**	**5.1**	**4.9**	**4.8**	**4.0**	**3.6**	**3.7**	**3.7**
Caucasus and Central Asia	**5.7**	**5.4**	**5.5**	**5.0**	**5.1**	**6.8**	**6.9**	**7.8**	**5.9**	**6.7**
Kazakhstan	4.8	4.9	5.1	4.1	4.3	8.7	8.2	10.2	6.5	8.4
East Asia	**4.7**	**4.4**	**4.3**	**4.0**	**4.0**	**0.5**	**0.6**	**0.4**	**0.9**	**0.6**
People's Republic of China	5.0	4.7	4.7	4.3	4.3	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.7	0.4
Hong Kong, China	2.5	2.3	2.0	2.5	2.1	1.7	1.9	1.6	2.0	1.6
Republic of Korea	2.0	1.5	0.8	1.9	1.6	2.3	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9
Taipei,China	4.8	3.3	3.5	3.0	3.0	2.2	2.0	1.8	1.8	1.5
South Asia	**5.9**	**6.0**	**5.9**	**6.2**	**6.2**	**6.5**	**4.9**	**4.4**	**4.5**	**4.5**
India	6.5	6.7	6.5	6.8	6.7	4.6	4.3	3.8	4.0	4.0
Southeast Asia	**4.8**	**4.7**	**4.2**	**4.7**	**4.3**	**3.0**	**3.0**	**2.6**	**2.8**	**2.7**
Indonesia	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.1	5.1	2.3	2.0	1.5	2.0	2.0
Malaysia	5.1	4.9	4.3	4.8	4.2	1.8	2.5	2.4	2.5	2.4
Philippines	5.6	6.0	5.6	6.1	5.8	3.2	3.0	2.2	3.0	3.0
Singapore	4.4	2.6	1.6	2.4	1.5	2.4	2.0	1.0	1.7	1.2
Thailand	2.5	2.8	1.8	2.9	1.6	0.4	1.0	0.5	1.1	0.8
Viet Nam	7.1	6.6	6.3	6.5	6.0	3.6	4.0	3.9	4.2	3.8
The Pacific	**4.1**	**3.9**	**3.9**	**3.6**	**3.5**	**2.0**	**3.4**	**3.4**	**3.7**	**3.7**

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

Note: **Developing Asia** refers to the following 46 members of the Asian Development Bank. The **Caucasus and Central Asia** comprises Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. **East Asia** comprises People's Republic of China; Hong Kong, China; Republic of Korea, Mongolia, and Taipei,China. **South Asia** comprises Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. **Southeast Asia** comprises Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam. **The Pacific** comprises Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

Source: *Asian Development Outlook* database.

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ABAC Issued Declaration on Sustainable AI Infrastructure and Investment

The APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) released its Declaration on Sustainable Artificial Intelligence (AI) Infrastructure and Investment, underscoring the business community's commitment to a sustainable AI future. AI is rapidly transforming economies and societies across the region. It holds immense potential to unlock innovation, drive productivity, and promote inclusive growth. However, none of this works without infrastructure—underpinned by data centers and the electricity grids that support them. The full benefits of AI cannot be realized without resilient, efficient, and sustainable infrastructure to support its development and deployment. "Energy gaps are deepening inequality and limiting participation in the digital economy. The digital divide isn't just about tech anymore—it's about capital access, grid resilience and human capacity. Our declaration reaffirms our commitment to APEC's 2025 vision of 'Building a Sustainable Tomorrow'," said Jan De Silva, Chair of ABAC's AI and Digital Innovation Working Group.

This meeting took place in advance of APEC's first Digital and AI Ministerial meeting taking place August 4-6 in Incheon, Korea. ABAC has committed to four priority actions:

- Accelerating Investment in Sustainable AI Infrastructure
- Embedding Sustainability into the AI Lifecycle
- Fostering Cross-Economy Collaboration and Investment
- Advocating for Enabling Policies and Standards

“ABAC reaffirms its commitment to shaping an AI-powered future that is not only innovative and inclusive but also sustainable and resilient. We invite governments, industry, academia, and civil society to join us in this shared effort to build responsible AI across the APEC region," said ABAC Chair, HS Cho. The full declaration can be found here.

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East Asia

CHINA: Traditional Industries Bloom Anew in Modernization Push

From steel mills adopting AI-powered systems to textile factories deploying cutting-edge automation, China's traditional industries are undergoing a significant transformation. Spearheaded by President Xi Jinping, this drive is injecting fresh vitality into traditional sectors that underpin the country's modern industrial base. Under Xi's watch, China is doubling down on boosting the competitiveness and sustainability in these sectors, which generate about 80 percent of the country's manufacturing output and play a vital role in supporting employment and broader economic growth. "The real economy should not be neglected. Nor should the traditional industries within it. And industrial transformation and upgrading must be realized through sci-tech innovation," Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, said while visiting Yangquan Valve Co., Ltd., a century-old enterprise, during an inspection tour in north China's Shanxi Province this week.

By focusing on innovation and boosting investment in research and development, the company has earned the designation of a "little giant" enterprise, a title for outstanding specialized, high-tech small and medium-sized firms. It has obtained dozens of patents and expanded its global footprint through exports to countries including the United States, India and Pakistan. During this visit to the company, Xi emphasized that traditional manufacturing is an important part of the real economy, and called for efforts to respond to market demand and enhance sci-tech innovation to breathe new life into traditional industries. Boosting the development of traditional industries has been high on the agenda of Xi. During his domestic inspections in recent years, Xi has regularly visited enterprises and factories. He inspects production lines and engages in conversations with frontline workers, gaining a firsthand understanding of the products and the progress involving transformation and upgrading.

These on-the-ground surveys have reinforced China's push for transformation and upgrading tailored to regional strengths, rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all approach. This emphasis was highlighted during an inspection tour of southwest China's Yunnan Province in March, where Xi urged all regions to pursue industrial transformation and upgrading based on local conditions, in line with economic principles, while making full use of their unique strengths. "Old enterprises can also pursue high-end, smart and green transformation. It is crucial not to dismiss traditional industries as uniformly 'low-end' or 'backward' and simply phase them out, as doing so could lead to a disruption in the transition from old to new growth drivers, cause a loss of momentum, and exacerbate the pains of structural adjustment," Xi said during an inspection tour in Liaoning Province in January. Since introducing the concept of new quality productive forces in 2023, Xi has consistently highlighted that traditional industries are the cornerstone for developing advanced productive capabilities.

During a deliberation at the annual national legislative session last year, Xi noted that developing new quality productive forces "does not mean neglecting or abandoning traditional industries." This point was further reiterated in May last year when he visited Shandong Province and commended Rizhao Port for its successful transformation from a traditional port into a modern one. "The port has not only achieved top-tier cargo throughput nationwide but has also gained valuable insights into fostering new quality productive forces through the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries," Xi said. Guided by his vision, China has made significant progress in accelerating the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries, steering them toward more advanced, intelligent and greener development.

Technologies like industrial internet, 5G and AI have been extensively applied in traditional industries. In 2024, investment in technological upgrades in the manufacturing sector increased by 8 percent year on year, outpacing the overall investment growth. In key energy-consuming industries such as chemicals, building materials, steel and non-ferrous metals, energy consumption per unit of value-added output fell in 2024 from the previous year. Looking ahead, China will take comprehensive measures, including pushing technological advances as well as large-scale equipment renewal projects in the manufacturing sector, and accelerating the digitalization of manufacturing, to promote traditional industry transformation and upgrading, according to this year's government work report. "In the past, Chinese workers made arduous manual efforts to hammer away at the country's industrial development. Today, it must be upgraded through advanced technologies and equipment," Xi said, stressing that the real economy makes the country prosperous and solid work makes it flourishing.

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China's Property Market Stabilizes Further as Price Declines Ease, Inventory Falls

China's property market showed further signs of stabilization in June, with home price declines continuing to narrow and housing inventory falling for a fourth straight month. In the four first-tier cities, namely, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, new home prices dropped 1.4 percent from a year earlier in June, with the pace of decline narrowing by 0.3 percentage points from May, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed Tuesday. Notably, Shanghai, the country's economic hub, recorded a 6 percent year-on-year increase in new home prices last month, the NBS said. Second and third-tier cities saw new home prices fall by 3 percent and 4.6 percent year on year in June, with the declines narrowing by 0.5 and 0.3 percentage points, respectively. Tuesday's data also showed that the total floor area of unsold commercial housing nationwide dropped by 4.79 million square meters at the end of June compared with the end of May, marking the fourth consecutive month of decline.

The latest figures reinforce signs of recovery in the property sector, as local authorities implemented city-specific measures to support the real estate market. "While the property market experienced some fluctuations in the first half of the year, it has generally been moving toward stabilization," said Sheng Laiyun, deputy head of the NBS, at a press conference on Tuesday. Sheng highlighted several positive trends, including improved market sales, narrowing price declines, improved funding channels for the sector, and a continued drop in unsold housing stock. In the first half of the year, sales of newly built commercial housing fell 3.5 percent by floor area, narrowing by 15.5 percentage points from a year earlier. The total sales value dropped 5.5 percent, with the rate of decline narrowing by an even wider margin of 19.5 percentage points. "Property transactions remained relatively active, particularly in the second-hand market, where sales volume increased year on year," Sheng said.

Supported by the "white list" mechanism and improved sales, property firms made steady progress in debt reduction in the first half, Sheng added. In the first half of the year, the decline in funds raised by developers narrowed by 16.4 percentage points year on year. Notably, domestic loans to developers rose 0.6 percent year on year, reversing a drop of around 6 percent last year. "Efforts to reduce housing inventory have also delivered positive results," Sheng said, citing the ongoing decline in unsold properties. However, Sheng cautioned that both the sales area and value of commercial housing continue to decline. "The sector's bottoming-out process takes time, and it is normal for key indicators to fluctuate during this phase of adjustment and transition," Sheng said. Looking ahead, Sheng added that more vigorous efforts are needed to curb the downturn and stabilize the property market.

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China's Top Financial Regulator Pledges Strengthened Support for Economic Growth

China's top financial regulator on Friday pledged strengthened support for economic growth and the achievement of the country's full-year economic and social development goals in 2025. In a statement on its website, the National Financial Regulatory Administration said that it will enhance financial support for high-quality urban development and the implementation of consumption-boosting initiatives. Measures will also be taken to boost support for effective investment and financing, improve financial services to stabilize businesses and foreign trade, and step up support for the development of new quality productive forces, according to the statement. The administration called for the coordination of work to guard against risks, strengthen regulation and promote high-quality development, and the prevention and defusion of risks in key sectors.

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China's AI Tech Boosts Global Trade Efficiency, Facilitates Supply Chain

To provide a quick overview of what its digital technology can do for China's many small and medium-sized exporters, a Nanjing-based software firm put up nine striking Q&A posters at an ongoing trade fair in Beijing. "Where is my product most in-demand overseas?" "How can I ensure my product passes customs compliance?" "Customers want low carbon and what should I do?" "How can I make global supply chain more cost-effective?" -- SKYTECH's AI tools can quickly provide tailored solutions to these questions. During discussions about fragile global supply chains at the third China International Supply Chain Expo (CISCE), participants noted that China's AI technology is a source of confidence and a promising avenue for building resilience in global trade. Qiu Weiwen, a manager from SKYTECH, demonstrated the intelligent system in front of a large screen. "China has the most complete industrial chain in the world, which makes its export product system rather complex, and that's why we've designed an AI system," he explained.

For new energy vehicle products, it is necessary to input the origins of components like tires, bearings, and battery cells. Even small changes in parameters can result in different solutions from the large model. "The country where the product is assembled might be different from where its components are produced. We can help you analyze which scenario is more advantageous," Qiu said. Another service from the Nanjing firm in east China supports European Union-bound exporters by automating carbon footprint reporting and carbon tariff calculations. Beyond compliance, SKYTECH further delivers strategic guidance enabling clients to capture revenue opportunities through carbon trading schemes. At a CISCE roundtable on

Friday, SKYTECH spotlighted a success story. Under its support, Chinese solar-panel maker Trina Solar built a low-carbon, digitally optimized line that slashes the carbon footprint of its modules well below France's entry threshold, unlocking instant access to the European market.

In the neighboring booth, tech stars from east China's Zhejiang Province were unveiling their smart new products, and one of them was NetEase's AI agent for foreign trade firms. The NetEase Foreign Trade Express uses "AI employees" to develop overseas customers, with precise inquiries increasing by 30 percent. The AI can automatically identify target customers with an accuracy rate of over 95 percent, saving foreign trade companies up to 1.5 working days per week in customer search time. Last October, Alibaba International updated its "AI Business Assistant," enabling real-time optimization of product titles, keywords, images and selling points to drive more online exposure for home-made products for overseas market. Veteran Chinese mechanics maker Xu Jingqian recalled a puzzling challenge with his screw compressors: strong website traffic in the United States but poor buyer inquiries on Alibaba.

As an early adopter of Alibaba's AI tool launched in 2023, he received targeted recommendations: Add U.S. specifications, showcase product certifications and clarify door-to-door delivery costs. After implementing these changes, Xu saw his sales more than double. "AI now auto-translates Chinese small enterprises' product descriptions into export-ready visuals and listings, making global sales as easy as domestic ones," said Fan Min, general manager of public affairs at Alibaba 1688, at a CISCE event.

OPEN SOURCE

The introduction of these new products underscores China's ongoing efforts to sustain the global trade system via digital tools despite increasing uncertainties. Empowered especially by AI technology, the thriving digital trade is emerging as a bright spot in global trade landscape. At the five-day expo, Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang praised China's global leadership in AI models, engineering talent and industrial applications. "The supply chain of China is a miracle. It is the largest and most complex in the world, not just about labor, but built on deep technology, AI and software," said Huang. In a dialogue event on Thursday, Huang said China is clever about open-source engineering. "Open source has many global implications. It's not just helping the Chinese ecosystem; it's helping ecosystems around the world." China's open-source AI models like DeepSeek, Kimi and Qwen are powering supply chains across China and the rest of the world.

In February, the NetEase Foreign Trade Express fully integrated with DeepSeek. China's digitally deliverable service import and export value in 2024 grew by nearly 40 percent compared to 2020, as shown by figures released by the country's Ministry of Commerce. Last year, China's digital economy core industries contributed about

10 percent of its GDP, while cross-border e-commerce exports grew by 16.9 percent year on year, according to China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, who organized the CISCE. An initiative launched at the expo calls for the digitalization and intelligent upgrading of supply chains, promoting interconnected data across the entire chain to create better conditions for international trade and investment cooperation.

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More Imported Products to Enjoy Zero-tariff Policy in Hainan Free Trade Port

The proportion of tariff lines with zero-tariff products in Hainan Free Trade Port will increase from 21 percent to 74 percent, according to a press conference held on Wednesday. Wang Changlin, deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission, announced that the free trade port will launch island-wide independent customs operation on Dec. 18, 2025. Vice Minister of Finance Liao Min noted that duty-free items in Hainan will increase from about 1,900 to around 6,600, marking a significant boost in openness. Imported products that undergo at least 30 percent value-added processing in Hainan can enter the mainland tariff-free. Certain goods currently banned or restricted nationwide will enjoy open policies in Hainan. "We will take a targeted regulatory approach of low-intervention and high-efficiency for zero-tariff and relaxed management goods, ensuring smooth implementation of the opening-up policies," Wang said.

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China's Tax Data Offers Snapshot of Economic Achievements in 2021-2025

China's economy has made remarkable strides during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), with steady industrial upgrades and continued opening up, according to data from the State Taxation Administration (STA). Speaking at a press conference on Monday, Hu Jinglin, director of the STA, said the country's total tax revenue is expected to surpass 85 trillion yuan (about 11.89 trillion U.S. dollars) in the 2021-2025 period, marking an increase of 13 trillion yuan compared to the previous five-year period. The number of tax-paying business entities in China had exceeded 100 million as of the end of June this year, representing a net increase of 30 million since 2020 and underscoring the strong market dynamism and resilience, Hu added.

HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

A key driver of this economic progress has been the wide-ranging tax and fee reduction policies, which are expected to save businesses and individuals a cumulative 10.5 trillion yuan nationwide from 2021 to 2025. From 2021 to the first half of this year, 3.6 trillion yuan in tax and fee cuts has been directed toward technological innovation and advanced manufacturing. The private sector, including self-employed households, benefited from 7.2 trillion yuan in cuts, while small and medium-sized enterprises received 6.3 trillion yuan in relief. These policies have brought substantial benefits to market entities and households, providing sustained momentum for high-quality economic development, said Cai Zili, deputy director of the STA. Thanks to robust policy support, China's economy has achieved notable progress.

High-tech industries have achieved an average annual sales revenue growth of 13.9 percent in recent years. In the first half of 2025, the private sector accounted for 71.7 percent of the country's total sales, up 2.8 percentage points from 2020. Green transition in the country has also gained momentum, with clean energy power generation, including wind, solar, and hydropower, recording an average annual sales revenue growth of 13.1 percent between 2021 and 2024. In addition to fostering growth, the STA recovered 571 billion yuan in tax losses through strengthened law enforcement, reinforcing public awareness in taxation.

GREATER OPENING UP TO THE WORLD

According to the press conference, China has vigorously expanded its opening up, with the number of foreign-invested tax-paying enterprises rising by 12.7 percent from 2020 to June this year. Foreign-invested companies reported stable growth in sales revenue, with profits exceeding 630 billion yuan due to favorable reinvestment tax policies. Tax data further underscored China's increasing attractiveness to global tourists. By the end of June, the number of tax refund stores catering to foreign visitors had surpassed 7,200. In the first half of 2025, the number of tourists claiming tax refunds surged by 186 percent, while sales of tax-free goods and total refund amounts nearly doubled year on year. At the press conference, Wang Daoshu, also a deputy director of the STA, said that China has been actively involved in international tax cooperation. China has participated in global taxation governance through multilateral platforms such as the United Nations and the OECD, becoming a key participant and contributor, Wang said, adding that the country's tax treaty network has expanded to 114 countries and regions.

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Global Exhibitors Drawn to China's Open, Innovative, Opportunity-rich Market

With themes ranging from cutting-edge technologies to cross-border cooperation, a series of energetic trade fairs in China this year have drawn global participation, underscoring the international recognition of the country's commitment to openness, innovation and mutually beneficial growth. China has become a core engine for Honeywell China's innovation and growth, said Yu Feng, the company's president. Following the recent China International Supply Chain Expo (CISCE) in Beijing, where Honeywell unveiled a smart shipping solution developed by its China team, the company is now preparing for the upcoming China International Import Expo in Shanghai. Over the years, Honeywell has been a regular presence at these major national expos. Its continued participation reflects the enterprise's rapid growth in China and its deepening ties with the local market, Yu said. Like Honeywell, many other multinationals have continued to expand their footprint in China through active engagement in major expos, which they view as key platforms to tap into the country's vast market opportunities and dynamic innovation ecosystem. This year's CISCE attracted more than 650 exhibitors from 75 countries and regions. The China-CEEC Expo & International Consumer Goods Fair gathered over 3,000 overseas buyers from 72 countries and regions.

And the China-Africa Economic and Trade Expo drew nearly 4,700 Chinese and African companies, as well as more than 30,000 participants from home and abroad. At the just-concluded CISCE, highlights of China's global supply chain integration were on full display, including Yili's digitized "from pasture to table" dairy supply chain, Apple's innovations with three of its key Chinese suppliers, and Nvidia's launch of a robot series co-developed with local partners. "China's supply chain is a miracle," said Jensen Huang, founder and CEO of Nvidia, who attended the expo for the first time. Technological innovation has also emerged as a prominent theme at recent trade events in China, with a range of cutting-edge achievements drawing international attention. In a recent interview with Xinhua, World Economic Forum Managing Director Mirek Dusek highlighted the increasing global interest in China's innovation ecosystems, particularly in areas such as new energy and artificial intelligence (AI). A key platform showcasing China's technological innovation to the world, the 2025 World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) was held from July 26 to 28 in Shanghai, themed "Global Solidarity in the AI Era."

With a record-breaking 70,000-square-meter exhibition area, the 2025 WAIC unveiled more than 3,000 AI innovations, including over 100 global and China-first debuts, showcasing a dynamic vision for global AI cooperation. The event brought together cutting-edge technologies such as the Optimus humanoid robot from Tesla and an AI-powered industrial operations assistant from Siemens, as well as robots from Chinese firm Unitree that staged a boxing match, highlighting the rising convergence of AI and real-world applications across industries. China-initiated trade expos are becoming important international public goods, facilitating mutually beneficial cooperation and win-win outcomes. At the third CISCE alone, more than 6,000 agreements and letters of intent were inked.

At the fifth China International Consumer Products Expo, supply-and-demand matchmaking activities generated intended deals worth an approximate total of 92 billion yuan (about 12.82 billion U.S. dollars), while the 137th Canton Fair gave rise to intended export deals totaling 25.44 billion U.S. dollars. Through lively negotiations and signing events, exhibits are turning into marketable products and exhibitors are becoming long-term investors, fueling the growing global consensus that investing in China means sharing in future prosperity. Cui Fan, a professor at the University of International Business and Economics, said that China's major expos in recent years have significantly advanced inclusive economic globalization and opened up new space for shared development. "With its super-sized market, China is poised to offer broader opportunities to the world," he said.

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Scorching Heat Fuels China's Booming Nighttime Tourism

As sweltering heat waves sweep across China, a recent tourist trend has emerged after dark. In ancient towns and even mountain parks, travelers are escaping the heat and heading out after sunset, boosting "nighttime tourism." At the famed Tianmen Mountain National Forest Park in Zhangjiajie, central China's Hunan Province, the iconic 999-step stairway leading to Tianmen Cave is illuminated with kaleidoscopic hues, with the whole mountain drenched in lights, transforming the attraction into a nighttime spectacle. "I came in the afternoon to escape the heat, but I did not expect the night view to be such a wonderful sight," said Mauricio Olvera, a visitor from Mexico. Ding Yunjuan, a staff member at the park, said that due to the scorching sun in the daytime, most visitors come as late as possible in the afternoon, sometimes staying until 9 p.m., and then go down in moonlight.

"In response to the demand, the park has introduced evening light shows to display the landscape in the dark," Ding said. Since the summer vacation began, the park has drawn over 20,000 visitors daily, with night tours emerging as a major new highlight. In recent years, China has introduced a series of measures to boost its nighttime economy. In January, the State Council released a policy document calling for the expansion of nighttime cultural and tourism activities. According to a report by the country's Ministry of Commerce, 60 percent of consumer spending now occurs at night. The per capita nighttime tourism spending is more than three times that of daytime consumption. In late 2024, the China Tourism Academy estimated that domestic night tourism spending hit about 1.91 trillion yuan (roughly 267 billion U.S. dollars) during the year.

In the provincial capital Changsha, known as one of China's "fire stoves," night markets, immersive light shows and after-dark performances have made the city a hot tourist destination in summer. At a theme park featuring the Tang Dynasty (618-907) culture near the ruins of a 1,200-year-old Tongguan Kiln in the city, light shows, fireworks, street food, live music and other activities have attracted tourists after sunset, with opening hours extended to midnight. Visitors can savor spicy crayfish, participate in beer competitions and learn about intangible cultural heritage at night, said Zhang Ning, deputy general manager of the theme park, adding that the number of nighttime visits has surged by almost 20 percent since the beginning of July. In addition to tourist attractions, nightlife in Chinese theaters is experiencing a boom.

In Tianxin District, downtown Changsha, the comedy theater "Laugh Factory" welcomes audiences every night during summer vacation instead of only opening on weekends. "Here, our actors incorporate Chinese crosstalk with hip-hop and improvisation, and the audience can sip tea and munch snacks between their giggles," said Xiong Zhuang, manager of the theater. Zhang Ling, head of the district's culture and tourism bureau, said theaters draw visitors to the commercial area and, meanwhile, many of the shopping crowds swarm into the theaters for shows, thereby forming a virtuous cycle. "In the future, we will also promote a themed route combining theater shows, food, and night tours, allowing more people to enjoy delightful nighttime experiences and continuously boost the vitality of the summer nighttime economy," she said.

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JAPAN: Diamond Semiconductors to Revive as Tech Power

Aiming to revive Japan's status as a semiconductor powerhouse, Hoshikawa Naohisa, CEO of Okuma Diamond Devices, is leading the development of what is being called the "ultimate semiconductor"—a diamond-based device capable of withstanding extreme heat and radiation. Unlike conventional silicon semiconductors, diamond semiconductors can operate in harsh conditions such as temperatures of 500°C and are said to offer radiation resistance up to 10,000 times greater than existing materials. Hoshikawa's devices are expected to become critical components in the decommissioning of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, considered one of the most challenging environments in the world. Mass production is set to begin shortly, with an eye not only on nuclear applications but also on broader sectors including space exploration and next-generation industries. These semiconductors are developed from synthetic diamonds produced at a repurposed elementary school in Okuma Town, Fukushima Prefecture—an area deeply affected by the 2011 nuclear disaster. Hoshikawa and his team have established a fully integrated system, designing and manufacturing diamond semiconductors in-house.

In a guided tour of the lab, Hoshikawa showed how silicon is replaced with diamond in the core of the semiconductor. Because traditional silicon-based semiconductors begin to fail at around 150°C, the ability of diamond to withstand roughly 500°C opens the door to applications in extreme environments. One of the primary missions of this technology is its use in the removal of highly radioactive fuel debris at the Fukushima plant. Hoshikawa demonstrated a prototype device, highlighting how diamond semiconductors will be essential in building equipment that can function under intense radiation—up to 10,000 times more resistant than current materials. As Japan faces increasing global competition in the so-called "semiconductor war," next-generation technologies such as diamond semiconductors may offer the country a vital breakthrough. With an eye toward rebuilding both Fukushima and Japan's high-tech reputation, Hoshikawa envisions a future where such advanced technologies contribute to the emergence of "future cities" powered by resilient infrastructure. His bold vision reflects the broader hope that disaster recovery can become a catalyst for industrial reinvention—turning the site of a national crisis into a hub of futuristic innovation.

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Japan Lagging in Generative AI Use with 26.7% Adoption in FY2024

Japan is lagging behind in the use of generative artificial intelligence, with only 26.7 percent of individuals saying they had used such tools in fiscal 2024, the internal affairs ministry said Tuesday in its 2025 white paper. The figure, around three times higher than fiscal 2023, remained far lower than in AI leaders such as the United States and China, where usage rates stood at 68.8 percent and 81.2 percent, respectively, the ministry said. The white paper describes AI as a fundamental pillar of the future digital society, calling for greater efforts to promote its application across industry and everyday life. The technology is viewed as convenient by younger people, with usage highest among those in their 20s at 44.7 percent. Common uses included searches, summarization and translation. Many nonusers said it was unnecessary in their daily lives or work, or that they did not know how to use generative AI. The global competition to develop generative AI based on large language models, which can understand context and produce natural responses, is being led by major U.S. tech companies and Chinese startups. The white paper said Japan is also advancing in the field, with smaller yet highly capable models under development.

From https://japantoday.com 07/09/2025

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BOJ Keeps Economic Views Intact for All Regions

The Bank of Japan kept unchanged its economic assessments for all nine regions of the country in a quarterly report released Thursday, as the impact of U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs seems to have been limited so far. The regional economic report was adopted at the day's meeting of the central bank's branch managers. In the previous April report, the central bank also maintained its assessments for all regions. In the latest report, the BOJ said the regional economies are "recovering moderately," "picking up," "picking up moderately," or "on a moderate recovery trend." Regarding the impact of Trump's tariffs, the report quoted a production machinery maker in the Kinki western region as saying that the investment attitude of its U.S. clients is weakening, pushing down its sales. An electrical machinery maker in the Kanto-Koshinetsu eastern region said that it is postponing investments for about six months.

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Japanese, Overseas Economies at Critical Juncture

Japanese and overseas economies seem to be at a critical juncture, Bank of Japan Deputy Governor Shinichi Uchida said Wednesday, citing extremely high uncertainty over U.S. tariff measures. In a speech in the western city of Kochi, he also said, "Profits in the corporate sector overall will continue to be at a high level" on the assumption that U.S. tariff talks with trade partners will progress to some extent. On monetary policy, he stated that the BOJ "will continue to raise the policy interest rate and adjust the degree of monetary accommodation" in accordance with improvement in economic activity and prices. Still, as the outlook for economic activity and prices entails high uncertainty, Uchida said that the central bank "needs to adjust monetary policy to best balance the upside and downside risks." He also emphasized the need for "a certain degree of flexibility to prepare for unexpected developments" over the reduction in the BOJ's purchases of Japanese government bonds that has been implemented since last August as part of its monetary policy normalization.

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SOUTH KOREA: Finance Minister Nominee Vows Investments in AI, Biohealth to Tackle Economic Crisis

Finance minister nominee Koo Yun-cheol said Tuesday he will push for big investments in artificial intelligence (AI) and biohealth industries to help revitalize the South Korean economy currently in a "structural crisis." "The government will work to fundamentally strengthen the country's job creation capacity by making big investments in AI and biohealth ... and create new growth engines for the economy," Koo said in a written response to lawmakers' questions for his confirmation hearing, slated for Thursday. South Korea must push for "technology-driven growth," such as AI transformation and energy transition, while fostering "inclusive growth" by supporting small and medium-sized enterprises and startups, and promoting balanced regional development, he added. "The Korean economy is facing a complex and structural crisis," he explained, calling for structural reforms to fundamentally improve the economy's resilience. Regarding the effects of U.S. tariffs on the Korean economy, Koo said they will likely increase downward pressure on

Seoul's exports, adding he will do his "utmost" in trade negotiations with Washington if he becomes the finance minister. "I will actively review possible measures to support companies suffering damage from high (U.S.) tariffs," he said, noting that the measures, however, should be "prudently" considered as such incentives may fall under prohibited subsidies under the World Trade Organization's rules. On consumer prices, the nominee vowed measures to stabilize food prices, which have recently soared, and respond to possible volatility in energy prices amid geopolitical uncertainties across the world and climate change. Koo said he will also work to advance the Korean financial market by fostering the growth of local industries and establishing a "fair" and "transparent" market order based on a stern response to unfair transactions. "We will do our utmost to enhance corporate value by promoting a shift toward productive finance and establish a system in which corporate value is properly reflected in stock prices," he emphasized.

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AMCHAM Hosts Cybersecurity Seminar, Urges Global Cooperation amid Rising Digital Threats

The American Chamber of Commerce in Korea (AMCHAM) held a cybersecurity seminar Wednesday in Seoul, bringing together senior government officials, business leaders and cybersecurity experts to address the growing digital threats in areas of cybersecurity and national security. Under the theme of cybersecurity, participants explored strategic responses to evolving digital threats, as the United States and South Korea continue to deepen their technology alliance, AMCHAM said. "Cybersecurity must be recognized not just as a corporate concern, but as a cornerstone of national and economic security," said AMCHAM Chairman James Kim. "The recent SK Telecom incident is a stark reminder of how real and immediate these risks are -- impacting daily life, business operations and public trust." Choi Woo-hyuk, director general of the cybersecurity bureau at South Korea's Ministry of Science and ICT, echoed such concerns. "With the rapid advancement of technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), new threats are emerging across every aspect of society, from critical infrastructure to our daily lives," Choi said. Justin Chang, legal attache of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, underscored the need for international collaboration in combating increasingly complex threats. "Cyberattacks today are not just a corporate risk -- they are a national and global security threat. In a world where the line between cyber criminals and nation-state actors is increasingly blurred, no single entity can face this challenge alone," Chang said.

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IMF Lowers S. Korea's 2025 Growth Outlook to 0.8 Pct on Global Trade Uncertainty

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Tuesday revised down its growth forecast for South Korea's economy to 0.8 percent for 2025, citing lingering global uncertainty despite the potential easing of U.S. tariff measures. In its latest World Economic Outlook (WEO) report, the IMF trimmed its projection for Asia's fourth-largest economy by 0.2 percentage point from its previous forecast released in April. Meanwhile, the IMF revised its 2026 outlook for South Korea upward by 0.4 percentage point to 1.8 percent. "Risks to the outlook are tilted to the downside, as they were in the April 2025 WEO," the IMF said. "On the upside, global growth could be lifted if trade negotiations lead to a predictable framework and to a decline in tariffs." Major economies have recently reached agreements with the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, aimed at scaling back Washington's "reciprocal" tariffs and sector-specific duties. Seoul officials have also been accelerating their diplomatic outreach to clinch a last-minute deal as the U.S. is set to start imposing reciprocal tariffs Friday.

The IMF's latest forecast for South Korea is slightly more pessimistic than, or roughly in line with, projections from other major economic institutions. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) projects a 1 percent expansion for the South Korean economy in 2025, while the Bank of Korea (BOK), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the state-run Korea Development Institute (KDI) have each forecast 0.8 percent growth. The IMF emphasized the need for nations to reduce policy-driven uncertainty by establishing transparent and consistent trade frameworks. "Pragmatic cooperation is paramount in instances in which some rules of the international trading system, in their current form, may not be functioning as intended," the report said. "This entails the pursuit of multilateral initiatives on the global commons and modernizing trade rules." Meanwhile, the IMF revised up its global growth forecast to 3 percent for 2025, up 0.2 percentage point from its earlier projection.

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Korea's Enhans Makes Global Top 3 in AI Agent Benchmark

Enhans, a South Korean startup specializing in vertical commerce AI agents, said Tuesday that its artificial intelligence model, ACT-1, ranked third in the global benchmark for web-based AI agents, Online Mind2Web. The model placed just behind global tech giants OpenAI and Anthropic. The Online Mind2Web benchmark assesses AI agents on their ability to perform complex tasks on the web, emulating human behavior. The evaluation covers 300 real-world tasks across 136 actively operating websites, assessing how effectively AI agents can navigate and interact with diverse web environments. ACT-1 is a behavior-based AI model tailored for web automation. It can execute sophisticated actions such as clicking buttons and navigating menus. The company emphasized that, unlike conventional approaches that rely on screenshots and coordinate-based controls, ACT-1 employs a document object model-based method to directly access and manipulate webpage structures. Enhans highlighted its No. 1 ranking in the commerce domain among global competitors, underscoring the potential of Korean-developed AI agents on the world stage. Building on this momentum, the company plans to evolve ACT-1 into a next-generation agent by integrating imitation learning, enabling it to perform tasks traditionally limited to human users. Additionally, Enhans intends to expand its enterprise-level web automation solutions, seeking to differentiate itself from global AI firms and secure a unique competitive edge. “Being able to stand alongside global AI leaders like OpenAI and Anthropic is profoundly meaningful. We will continue to strengthen the development of our web AI agent technologies to lead the global market in vertical industries,” Enhans CEO Lee Seung-hyun said.

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Raising 2026 Rice Production Target to 33.8 Mln Tons

The Indonesian government has raised its rice production projection for 2026 to 33.8 million tons, up from the earlier estimate of 32 million tons made at the beginning of this year, Minister of Agriculture Andi Amran Sulaiman announced on Monday. The increased projection reflects the government's continued efforts to improve agricultural productivity, the minister said. "The Ministry of Agriculture targets rice production in 2026 at 33.8 million tons," Sulaiman said during a working meeting with lawmakers at the parliament building. To achieve this target, the government will prioritize several strategic programs next year, including land optimization, the expansion of rice fields, the preparation of superior seed varieties, and the advancement of downstream agricultural initiatives. National rice production has recently reached its highest level in the past seven years, positioning Indonesia as one of the most productive rice-producing countries in the ASEAN region.

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Indonesia Launches 80,000 Village Cooperatives to Drive Grassroots Economic Development

The Indonesian government launched the operation of more than 80,000 village cooperatives on Monday to strengthen grassroots economic development across the country. The launch ceremony was led by President Prabowo Subianto in a village in Klaten regency, Central Java province. Prabowo described the village cooperatives program as a large-scale strategic initiative designed to boost national economic growth starting from the village level. "Many say cooperatives are for the weak.

Indeed, a single cooperative may not be strong enough. But when there are hundreds of them, together they become a powerful tool to support us. This is the idea, from a weak economy to a strong economic force," Prabowo said during the ceremony. These village cooperatives are largely formed by revitalizing existing, yet often inactive, community cooperatives. Many of them had been overlooked as people increasingly turned to large corporations for goods and services. The current administration has moved to strengthen and modernize these cooperatives, recognizing the untapped potential of small communities to serve as engines of local economic activity. Typically managed at the village level, Indonesian cooperatives provide a range of services including grocery stores, savings and loan units, clinics, pharmacies, cold storage, and logistics distribution. By improving access to essential goods and services at more affordable prices, the village cooperatives are expected to play a key role in supporting community welfare and inclusive economic growth.

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MYANMAR: Population Data to Help Development

Myanmar observed World Population Day with a ceremony in Nay Pyi Taw, emphasizing the role of population data in national development, the state-run daily Myanma Alinn reported on Saturday. Speaking at the event, Vice Chairman of Myanmar's State Administration Council Vice Senior General Soe Win said that Myanmar will soon hold free and fair multi-party general elections, and population data obtained from the 2024 census will make a major contribution to ensuring that the rights of all eligible voters are not violated, the report said. Soe Win added that the data will help ensure that the general elections are held in a fair and orderly manner, and basic requirements for the accuracy of the voter list are met. The data will also be useful for relief efforts in cities affected by a strong earthquake in March. Soe Win urged an analysis of the birth rate, death rate, and migration rate, which directly affect the population growth rate, saying that according to the 2024 census, there has been no population growth over the past 10 years. The 2014 census recorded a population of over 51.4 million people, and the 2024 census indicated that the current population was just over 51.3 million.

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Myanmar to Strengthen Digital Economy with 2030 Roadmap

Myanmar is working to accelerate its digital transformation with the implementation of the Myanmar Digital Economy Roadmap 2030, the state-owned daily Myanma Alinn reported on Saturday. A working coordination meeting of the country's Digital Economy Development Committee (DEDC) was held at the Ministry of Commerce in Nay Pyi Taw on Friday to review progress and set priorities for the coming years, the report said. Speaking at the meeting, patron of the committee Union Minister for

Transport and Communications General Mya Tun Oo said that the rapid acceleration of growth through digital means is a key factor for developing countries to achieve progress, it said. Citing World Economic Forum data, Mya Tun Oo said that the digital economy currently contributes at least 15 percent of global GDP and is expected to rise above 25 percent by 2030, urging the participating committee members to take coordinated action across all sectors to build a digital future for Myanmar, the report said. The DEDC, a national-level body formed to spearhead the country's digital transformation, launched the Myanmar Digital Economy Roadmap 2030 in December last year, the report said. The roadmap includes a strategic vision, six core objectives, nine priority sectors, nine strategic pillars, 22 strategic goals, and 77 action plans to be implemented over the next five years, the report said.

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MALAYSIA: Digital Investments Surge in Q2 on Strong Data Center, Cloud Demand

Malaysia's digital investments under the Malaysia Digital (MD) national strategic initiative surged by 125 percent to 29.47 billion ringgit (6.95 billion U.S. dollars) in the second quarter from the first quarter, underpinned by strong data center and cloud demand, official data showed Monday. The Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) said in a statement that as of June 2025, a total of 261 companies approved under the MD initiative have collectively committed 42.58 billion ringgit in investments, with the potential to generate 17,495 knowledge workers over the next five years. Leading the investment landscape is the data center and cloud vertical, which contributed 30.95 billion ringgit and is expected to generate 1,440 knowledge workers due to strong demand for regional data infrastructure. Notably, data center companies alone committed 13.45 billion ringgit, highlighting investor confidence in Malaysia's digital infrastructure and regional connectivity. Other high-growth sectors include artificial intelligence, which attracted 3.29 billion ringgit in investments, with an estimated 6,920 jobs created, representing 40 percent of the total projected employment. Meanwhile, global business services, with investment amounting to 4.99 billion ringgit, is expected to create 5,632 jobs, or 32 percent of total job creation. Digital Minister Gobind Singh Deo described the strong upward momentum as "exceptional growth which speaks volumes about our nation's digital readiness, the strength of our innovation ecosystem, and the confidence that global investors have in Malaysia's future." "Beyond numbers, these investments represent thousands of opportunities for the Malaysian workforce and a long-term uplift for our digital economy. The MD initiative is a proven platform to drive inclusive innovation and elevate our regional leadership in the digital space," he added.

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Malaysia Leads Southeast Asia IPO Performance in First Half of

Year

Despite broader regional challenges, Malaysia leads Southeast Asia's initial public offering (IPO) performance in the first half, Deloitte data showed. The firm said in a recent report that Malaysia recorded approximately 48 percent year-on-year increase in the number of listings to 32, with IPO amount raised increasing by approximately 109 percent to 940 million U.S. dollars, along with a corresponding uptick in total IPO market capitalization by approximately 165 percent to 4.04 billion dollars. "The IPO outlook in Malaysia remains optimistic for the remainder of 2025, with 32 listings recorded as of 30 June 2025, putting Bursa Malaysia on track toward its full year target of 60 listings," said Deloitte Malaysia Transactions Accounting Support Partner Wong Kar Choon. However, he noted the recent U.S. trade tariffs and geopolitical tension have introduced uncertainty, and he foresees that there could be an impact to the IPO market. According to him, this situation may lead to cautious investor sentiments as investors may adopt a more cautious approach and favor less risky assets during this uncertain period. Additionally, he opined that companies may delay their IPO plans, especially for export-driven companies that is affected by supply chain disruptions and cost pressures. He also anticipates that the consumer industry with well-established brand names will continue to be the cornerstone of Malaysia's economic landscape and are poised to leverage their strong market presence to tap on the IPO capital market opportunities. Overall, the Southeast Asia IPO capital market remained resilient in the first half of 2025. It saw 53 IPOs, with over 1.4 billion dollars in IPO proceeds raised and an IPO market capitalization of 7.7 billion dollars as compared to the first half of 2024, which saw 67 IPOs, just under 1.4 billion dollars in IPO proceeds and IPO market capitalization of 5.8 billion dollars. This represents a 3 percent increase in IPO amount raised and an increase of 33 percent in IPO market capitalization, despite a 21 percent decrease in the number of IPOs across Southeast Asia, compared to the first half of 2024.

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Digital Payments to Surge in Malaysia

Digital payment adoption is set to surge in Malaysia, with more consumers likely to use emerging digital payment methods in the next year, a new research conducted by Mastercard showed. The research, which surveyed consumers across the globe on payment preferences, has found that some 63 percent of Malaysian consumers prefer using new and innovative methods such as Tap & Go mobile payments, biometric payments, QR codes and mobile wallets, over traditional methods like cash or manual card entry, reflecting a widespread appetite for innovation. The research showed that Malaysian consumers are among the most enthusiastic to embrace payment innovation, as 93 percent are likely to use five or more payment methods in the next 12 months. While cash is still Malaysia's most used payment method, 70 percent of consumers used it in the last year, narrowly edging out QR code payments with 64 percent, usage of digital payment methods is set to rise in the next year. This preference for innovation applies to other emerging technologies as well, with 89 percent of Malaysian consumers saying they are keen to use artificial intelligence (AI) to manage their finances, particularly for fraud detection, payment automation, product personalization, and predicting financial outcomes. Meanwhile, as payment options grow, consumers are seeking hyper-convenient ways to manage money that fit seamlessly with their digital usage habits, the research revealed. It highlighted they want flexibility to customize how they pay, tapping into digitally native methods like peer-to-peer or peer-to-merchant payments, QR codes, wearables, and social commerce. "These findings reaffirm that the digital evolution in payments has firmly taken center stage in Malaysia. With digital-first and mobile-first lifestyles shaping consumer behavior, innovation and security in payments will be key to sustaining this momentum," said Beena Pothen, country manager of Malaysia & Brunei at Mastercard.

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Malaysia's Trade Surges to New High of 696 Bln USD in 2024

Malaysia's trade surged 9.2 percent year-on-year to a new high of 2.9 trillion ringgit (696 billion U.S. dollars) in 2024, official data showed Tuesday. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) said in a statement that Malaysia's trade performance in 2024 showed strong momentum, reflecting the country's adaptability and robust trade. The year-on-year trade growth was in tandem with the increases in both exports (5.8 percent) and imports (13.1 percent).

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Malaysia's Population Estimated to Reach 34.2 Mln in 2025

Malaysia's total population in 2025 was estimated at 34.2 million, compared to 34.1 million in 2024, official data showed Thursday. The citizen population increased from 30.7 million in 2024 to 30.9 million in 2025, the Department of Statistics Malaysia said in a statement. The composition of the population aged 15-64 years increased to 70.4 percent in 2025 from 70.2 percent in 2024, while the ratio of the population aged 65 years and over increased to 8 percent from 7.6 percent. Meanwhile, the composition of population aged 0-14 years in 2025 decreased to 21.6 percent from 22.2 percent in 2024. The median age of Malaysia's population reached 31.3 years in 2025, up from 30.9 years in the previous year.

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PHILIPPINES: Sustaining Growth in Digital Payments Usage

The Philippines continues to expand the use of digital payments, with electronic transactions accounting for 57.4 percent of monthly retail payments by volume and 59.0 percent by value in 2024, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said Monday. The figures, published in the BSP's 2024 Report on the Status of Digital Payments in the Philippines, reflect an increase from 52.8 percent in volume and 55.3 percent in value recorded in 2023. The central bank noted that the steady growth builds on the momentum generated after surpassing its 2023 digitalization target of 50 percent for transaction volume.

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VIETNAM: To Complete 900 KM of Expressways in 2025

Vietnam's Ministry of Construction aims to complete nearly 900 km of expressways in 2025, Vietnam News Agency reported Tuesday. The ministry will also oversee investment preparations for the Lao Cai-Hanoi-Hai Phong railway project and the North-South high-speed railway project to ensure construction begins on schedule. Minister of Construction Tran Hong Minh said site clearance and resettlement work for upcoming railway projects must begin promptly and be accelerated to meet the timeline. He noted that the Lao Cai-Hanoi-Hai Phong railway project is scheduled to break ground on Dec. 19 this year.

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Vietnam Aims for 70 Pct of Adults to Have Digital Signatures by 2030

Around 70 percent of Vietnam's adult population is expected to possess digital signatures by 2030, according to a target set by the National Electronic Authentication Center under the Ministry of Science and Technology, local media outlet VnExpress reported Monday. As of the end of June, Vietnam had more than 18 million active digital signatures, four times higher than the figure recorded during the same period last year, said To Thi Thu Huong, director of the center. Currently, about 28.4 percent of the country's adult population has a digital signature, she said. Digital signatures in Vietnam are being increasingly used across various sectors, including tax declarations, contract signings and online transactions, contributing to time savings and greater transparency, according to the center.

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Vietnam's Major Cities Intensify Efforts to Combat Dengue Fever Surge

Vietnam's two largest cities, Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, are stepping up measures to tackle a sharp rise in dengue fever cases in recent weeks, Vietnam News Agency reported Monday. In Hanoi, 34 new infections were reported last week, marking an increase of 13 cases from the previous week, according to the capital's Center for Disease Control. The center has identified several outbreak clusters with high mosquito density and warned that infections are likely to rise as the city enters its annual peak season for the disease. Meanwhile, health authorities in Ho Chi Minh City have issued an urgent alert after six dengue-related deaths were recorded since the beginning of the year. The southern metropolis registered 838 new cases in the past week alone, bringing the total to 14,370 cases this year, a surge of more than 153 percent compared to the same period last year, the state-owned media reported. Local residents have been urged to eliminate standing water, regularly clean water containers and report potential mosquito breeding grounds via a designated health app.

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Vietnamese PM Calls for Completion of 3,000 Km of Expressways by End-2025

Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh on Thursday reaffirmed the government's determination to complete 3,000 kilometers of expressways nationwide by the end of 2025, Vietnam News Agency reported. Chairing the 19th meeting of the State Steering Committee for Key National Transport Projects, Chinh stressed the strategic importance of infrastructure in boosting economic growth and regional connectivity, the report said. He called on ministries, agencies, and localities to accelerate progress, overcome obstacles, and act more boldly to meet the expressway target as part of the national 500-day emulation campaign, according to the report. Chinh also urged local authorities to resolve issues related to site clearance, construction materials, and administrative procedures to ensure smooth project execution and help achieve the country's 2025 socio-economic goals.

From https://english.news.cn/ 07/31/2025

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South Asia

INDIA: How Smart Payment Infrastructure Enables Global Business Expansion

Expanding beyond home borders quickly exposes companies to a maze of currencies, regulations, and customer preferences. Choosing a robust online payment platform early in the journey often means the difference between seamless scaling and stalled roll-outs.

Fragmented Payment Landscape: Obstacles to Cross-Border Sales

E-commerce demand may be global, but payment habits remain stubbornly local. Customers in Brazil expect boleto bancário, Germans lean on Sofortüberweisung, and Indonesians prefer bank transfers over cards. Supporting each method piecemeal forces businesses to juggle multiple contracts, dashboards, and settlement cycles. The result is higher operational cost, lower authorization rates, and frustrated shoppers who abandon carts when a trusted option is missing.

Unified Processing, Local Experience

Modern platforms aggregate dozens of methods under a single integration while still surfacing a checkout that feels native in every market. Automatic currency conversion, multi-currency settlement, and transparent pricing help finance teams reconcile revenue without nightly spreadsheet gymnastics. Meanwhile, developers work with one API and merchants preview upcoming schemes—like India's UPI or Europe's instant transfers—through a sandbox long before they go mainstream.

Scalability and Risk Management

Growth attracts fraud. Rule-based filters alone struggle with evolving attack vectors such as bot-driven card testing or triangulation schemes. Advanced providers combine device fingerprinting, velocity checks, and machine-learning scoring to catch anomalies before authorization, reducing chargebacks without harming genuine shoppers. Mass payout modules handle creator royalties, marketplace vendor balances, and gig-economy salaries with the same rigor, automatically generating regulatory reports for PSD2 or OFAC when thresholds are crossed.

Key Takeaways

Consolidation saves resources: One contract and dashboard streamline finance and tech workloads. Localization lifts conversion: Offering familiar payment rails boosts trust and purchase completion rates. Built-in compliance future-proofs expansion: Continuous monitoring for AML, sanctions, and SCA keeps operations on the right side of local law. For firms plotting the next region on their roadmap, investing in flexible, security-focused payment infrastructure early pays dividends long after the first overseas sale.

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How Online Trading Apps Are Empowering First-Time Investors?

Investing in the share market was once seen as a complicated task, best left to experienced traders. But times have changed. The rise of mobile-first solutions has allowed more people to take control of their financial futures without needing deep technical knowledge. An online trading app today does more than execute trades—it guides, informs, and supports. For those opening a demat account for the first time, this digital support can make a significant difference. The process of investing has evolved into something more approachable, efficient, and user-focused. This article explores how online trading platforms are helping new investors grow in confidence and skill.

Simple and Quick Account Opening

One of the biggest barriers for new investors used to be the long paperwork and delays involved in starting a trading journey. Now, with an online trading app, opening a demat account is a digital process that takes just a few minutes.

Minimal documentation is required.
eKYC verification can be completed using Aadhaar and PAN.
Video KYC adds an extra layer of security.
Most platforms offer a user-friendly interface with step-by-step guidance.

Real-Time Market Data and Insights

Making informed choices is essential in trading. Modern apps provide real-time market data that helps new investors analyse before they act.

Live stock prices
Technical and fundamental charts
News alerts
Sector-wise performance breakdowns

For someone new, having this information in one place is highly valuable. They can follow trends, spot opportunities, and avoid risky moves. This builds market awareness with every trade.

Seamless Transaction Process

Gone are the days when investing required coordination with brokers or visits to physical offices. Once a demat account is linked with a bank account, most online trading apps allow:

Instant fund transfers
Quick order placement
Tracking of pending and completed trades
Easy viewing of portfolio performance

This level of convenience encourages regular activity and keeps new investors engaged. It also teaches the habit of monitoring investments consistently.

Personalised Alerts and Custom Watchlists

New investors may not know what to track. That’s why customised notifications help them stay alert without being overwhelmed.

Price movement alerts
Stock recommendation notifications
Updates based on news that affects their chosen companies
Earnings announcements and dividend notices

Users can also build their own watchlist and follow particular stocks. This builds market knowledge over time and improves decision-making.

Support for Small Investments

A major reason many people hold back from investing is the worry that they might lose their savings. Online trading apps today make it possible to start small.

No minimum balance requirements

Fractional investment in ETFs or mutual funds

Simple order types like ‘buy at market’

Portfolio suggestions based on risk preference

This flexibility lowers the entry barrier. It encourages people to start investing early and build experience gradually.

Integration with Research Tools

Many new platforms now offer basic tools that help beginners compare stocks, track performance, and view analyst ratings.

Peer comparison charts

Company financials with summaries

Analyst target prices and confidence scores

Trending stocks based on popularity

Instead of depending on others, users can now form their own opinions. One such platform that includes several of these features, while remaining beginner-friendly, is Torus Digital. It offers research support within its mobile platform, making it easier for users to take informed steps.

Enhanced Security and Transparency

First-time investors are rightly concerned about safety. Online platforms have strengthened digital security to protect personal and financial data.

Two-factor authentication (2FA)

Biometric logins on mobile

Auto logout features

Encrypted transaction systems

Apps also provide order history, contract notes, and portfolio performance in a clear, accessible format. This builds trust and keeps investors fully informed.

Guidance for Tax and Compliance

Another area where first-time investors often struggle is tax reporting and compliance.

New trading platforms simplify this by:

Providing capital gain summaries

Sending yearly transaction reports

Offering tools to calculate tax liability

Reminding users of tax-saving investment options

Online trading apps have opened the doors to investing for many who once found it confusing or difficult. From instant demat account setup to real-time data and educational support, these platforms are making trading accessible, secure, and efficient for everyone. For new investors, the right tools can mean the difference between hesitation and confident participation. Platforms like Torus Digital are not only simplifying investing but also offering a space where learning, analysis, and trading go hand in hand. As more people begin their journey, the shift towards technology-led investing will only grow stronger—bringing with it greater financial inclusion and awareness.

From https://www.siliconindia.com/ 07/03/2025

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Markets Edge Up as IT, Banking Stocks Shine amid Global Jitters

Sensex and Nifty ended higher after a volatile session, driven by buying in IT and banking stocks. Mixed global cues and the upcoming US tariff deadline kept investors in a wait-and-watch mode. Nifty IT, Bank Nifty, and Financial Services posted gains, while mid- and small-cap stocks remained largely flat. After a choppy trading session, Indian equity markets ended in positive territory, buoyed by value buying in IT and banking stocks amid optimism surrounding an interim India-US trade deal. The benchmark BSE Sensex, after plunging to an intra-day low of 83,015, rebounded sharply to close at 83,432.89, gaining 193.42 points or 0.23%. Meanwhile, the NSE Nifty advanced 55.70 points or 0.22% to settle at 25,461. Analysts attributed the market's choppy behaviour to mixed global cues and investor caution ahead of a crucial US tariff deadline. "The Indian market is experiencing a pause as investors adopt a wait-and-watch strategy amid global uncertainty", said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. Gains were led by IT heavyweights and private banking counters. Among Sensex constituents, Bajaj Finance, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever, HCL Technologies, UltraTech Cement, Bajaj Finserv, and TCS ended higher. On the flip side, Sun Pharma, ITC, Tata Motors, Asian Paints, Mahindra & Mahindra, and Maruti Suzuki closed in the red. On the Nifty, 31 stocks advanced while 19 declined. Sectorally, Nifty IT rose by 0.80%, followed by Bank Nifty (up 0.42%) and Nifty Financial Services (up 0.49%). Broader market indices including the Nifty Midcap 100 and Nifty Smallcap 100 closed flat, suggesting a stock-specific approach in the mid- and small-cap segments. Ajit Mishra, SVP – Research at Religare Broking Ltd., noted that the tone was negative in the first half but a late rebound in index heavyweights helped trim losses. "The index closed near the day's high, signalling resilience despite volatility". Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) continued to pull out funds, reflecting a risk-off sentiment, while domestic institutional investors (DIIs) offered partial support. Analysts believe the market's upside remains capped due to high valuations and awaits cues from Q1 earnings and trade developments.

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Chandigarh Administration to Launch Unified Mobile App for Over 700 Citizen Services

In a major leap toward digitising public service delivery, the Chandigarh Administration is preparing to launch a comprehensive mobile application that will integrate more than 700 services offered by various departments. The initiative aims to streamline government-citizen interaction by providing a single digital platform for availing essential public services. At present, residents must navigate a combination of multiple departmental mobile apps and a centralised web portal to access government services. These services include applications for certificates, license renewals, bill payments, and more, spread across various administrative domains. The new mobile app is expected to centralise these offerings, creating a unified digital interface that simplifies user access and enhances efficiency. The upcoming app will include services provided by departments such as the Deputy Commissioner's Office, Municipal Corporation, Health Department, Transport Department, Estate Office, E-Sampark, and the Food and Supplies Department. Users will be able to apply for services, make online payments, check the status of their requests, and download forms or official documents directly through the app. Additionally, the platform will offer step-by-step procedural guides, service-specific timelines, and video tutorials to help users navigate the application process with ease. For instance, individuals will be able to apply for income, caste, or marriage certificates, renew driving licenses, register births and deaths, and pay electricity and water bills, all from a single interface.

The mobile app is being developed under a centralised national framework that aims to promote digital governance across India. Chandigarh's adoption of this framework reflects its commitment to aligning with the broader Digital India vision, which prioritises accessibility, transparency, and citizen empowerment through technology. According to senior officials, the app will not only consolidate services but also reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks and promote faster service delivery. It will inherit the core functionalities of the existing web platform while offering the added convenience of mobile access, catering to the growing demand for on-the-go digital solutions. In parallel with the launch of the app, the Chandigarh Administration is also working on digitising estate records, a task that has been attempted multiple times in the past. The current effort includes scanning and cataloguing thousands of property files and integrating them into a real-time digital tracking system. Once completed, users will be able to monitor the status of their estate-related applications and the movement of files through a dedicated website and mobile application. To avoid past setbacks, a structured approach with standard operating procedures has been put in place. The administration expects this digitisation drive to enhance transparency in property management and reduce manual intervention, thereby increasing accountability.

These interconnected initiatives, unified mobile service delivery and digitised property records mark a transformative shift in Chandigarh’s approach to governance. By leveraging technology to bring government services closer to citizens, the administration aims to improve the ease of living, strengthen institutional trust, and set a benchmark for other regions in digital public service innovation.

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PM Modi Emphasizes Ethical AI and Financial Reform at BRICS Brazil Summit

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, addressing the BRICS Outreach Summit in Brazil, emphasized the urgent need for global cooperation in Artificial Intelligence (AI) governance, stronger multilateralism, and deepened ties among Global South nations. Speaking at the session titled “Strengthening Multilateralism, Economic-Financial Matters, and Artificial Intelligence,” the Prime Minister reaffirmed India’s commitment to inclusive global development and technological responsibility. Expressing gratitude to Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva for the invitation, Prime Minister Modi underscored the rising importance of the BRICS alliance amid an evolving global landscape. “Our shared belief in diversity and multipolarity is the BRICS group’s greatest asset,” he noted, pointing to the increasing global relevance of the platform as a response to geopolitical and economic uncertainties. In his address, Prime Minister Modi proposed four core areas for deepening BRICS cooperation. Firstly, he highlighted the steady growth of intra-BRICS economic engagement, crediting institutions like the BRICS Business Council and BRICS Women Business Alliance for facilitating economic integration. He welcomed Brazil’s focus on international financial reforms and urged the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) to adopt demand-driven, sustainable, and credit-conscious financing models to support development in the Global South. Secondly, the Prime Minister emphasized the BRICS bloc’s unique potential to respond to the aspirations of the Global South. Citing the BRICS Agricultural Research Platform—established in India—as a vital tool, he proposed expanding collaboration in agri-biotech, precision farming, and climate resilience. He further suggested the establishment of a BRICS Science and Research Repository and highlighted India’s ‘One Nation, One Subscription’ initiative to promote academic equity.

Thirdly, Modi called for collective action to safeguard supply chains for critical minerals and emerging technologies, warning against their misuse for geopolitical leverage. He emphasized the need for transparent, secure, and resilient supply networks to support global technological advancement. The fourth and central pillar of his address focused on Artificial Intelligence. Prime Minister Modi underlined AI’s transformative potential across sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, education, and governance, while simultaneously cautioning against its associated risks, bias, ethics, and misinformation. “India’s vision is clear—AI must amplify human values and potential. We follow the principle of ‘AI for All’,” he stated. To advance global cooperation on AI governance, he called for the development of international standards to ensure digital authenticity and prevent the misuse of content. Welcoming the Leaders’ Statement on the Global Governance of AI adopted at the summit, Modi announced that India would host the AI Impact Summit in 2026, inviting all BRICS and partner nations to participate. Reaffirming India’s role as a responsible stakeholder in global progress, Prime Minister Modi concluded by stating, “To meet the aspirations of the Global South, we must lead by example. India stands ready to work in partnership with all like-minded countries to shape a more inclusive and resilient future.”

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A Decade of CSC Connecting Citizens Through Technology

CSC SPV celebrates 10 years of Digital India with nationwide events and recognition of top-performing VLEs. Union Ministers announce new initiatives, including free AI training for 10 lakh individuals and expansion of CSC services. CSC network reaches 5.5 lakh centres, empowering rural citizens with digital services and bridging the digital divide. In a grand celebration marking a decade of transformative digital governance, the Common Service Centre e-Governance Services India Limited (CSC SPV), under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), commemorated 10 years of the Digital India initiative at the Yashobhoomi Convention Centre, Dwarka, New Delhi. The event underscored India’s journey in digital empowerment and its success in bridging the digital divide through grassroots-level interventions. Graced by the presence of Union Minister of Electronics & Information Technology, Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw, and Minister of State for Electronics & IT, Shri Jitin Prasada, the event brought together key stakeholders from across the country, including thousands of Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) who serve as the driving force behind the CSC model. Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw, inaugurating the celebrations as Chief Guest, lauded the contributions of VLEs in taking digital services to the remotest corners of India. “Our VLE brothers and sisters have proven that India’s digital dream is not confined to urban boundaries. Today, digital transactions through UPI have overtaken even Visa, showing the power of 1.4 billion Indians. From tea sellers to vegetable vendors, digital is the new normal”, he stated. He highlighted that CSC has now reached nearly 90% of India’s villages and praised it as the only medium with the potential to connect every village with the digital world. Citing inspiring stories of VLEs like Manjulata from Odisha and Rose Angelina from Meghalaya, the Minister emphasized how women across remote regions are becoming symbols of change and empowerment by leveraging digital platforms.

“In the East West Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, VLE Rose Angelina has become a beacon of digital empowerment. From her CSC centre in Mairang, she is not just delivering services but driving social change", the Minister noted. Marking the decade of progress, Shri Vaishnaw announced several key initiatives, including free AI training for 10 lakh individuals with priority given to VLEs encouraging VLEs to begin IRCTC ticketing services, and a commitment to integrate CSC-SPV with state-level IT agencies through discussions with Chief Ministers. Shri Jitin Prasada, Union Minister of State for Electronics & IT, in his address, reaffirmed the government's commitment to inclusive digital growth. "Ten years ago, Digital India was a vision. Today, it is a reality thanks to the relentless dedication of our VLEs. From just 83,000 centres in 2014, we now have close to 5.5 lakh CSCs across the country", he shared. He highlighted the role of CSCs in empowering rural India, especially through the integration of Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACS). A special mention was made of over 74,000 women VLEs, who are setting new standards in digital inclusion. "With the rise of AI and evolving technologies, it's critical that we use these tools to uplift communities, especially in sectors like agriculture, health, and education. Cybersecurity, digital literacy, and service diversification will be crucial in this journey", Prasada added. Welcoming the dignitaries, Shri Sanjay Rakesh, MD & CEO of CSC SPV, remarked, "There is no longer a need to travel to cities for basic services. CSCs have become the digital doorway for rural India, delivering both government (G2C) and business (B2B) services at people's doorsteps. In the last 10 years, CSC has become a symbol of India's digital evolution and rural empowerment".

As part of the celebrations, CSC Diwas was marked with nationwide fervor. In Delhi, a two-day event was held from July 15 to 16, with the first day witnessing deliberations by IT Secretaries from all states at Bharat Mandapam on themes like rural digital empowerment and future governance models. Between July 1 and 15, CSC centres across the country actively participated in the celebrations, organizing local events with community involvement. Top-performing VLEs were felicitated for their outstanding contributions to digital inclusion and innovation at the grassroots level. Since the launch of the Digital India program by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in 2015, the country has undergone a major transformation in e-governance, financial inclusion, and online service delivery. India has emerged as the world's third-largest digital economy, with platforms like UPI, Aadhaar, and CSC playing a pivotal role. Established in 2009, CSC SPV has grown to become one of the world's largest digital service delivery ecosystems. Each CSC is run by a VLE who offers a wide range of services including Aadhaar enrollment, PAN and passport services, banking and insurance, telemedicine, education, skill training, legal aid through Tele-Law, and e-commerce via the Grameen eStore. As India celebrates 10 years of Digital India, the CSC model stands as a shining example of how technology, when democratized and localized, can transform lives. From empowering individuals to building a digitally inclusive nation, the journey has just begun.

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CSC SPV Celebrates a Decade of Digital India; Announces Free AI Training for 10 Lakh Citizens

In a landmark celebration of Digital India's 10-year journey, the Common Service Centre e-Governance Services India Limited (CSC SPV), operating under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), organised the CSC Diwas event at Yashobhoomi Convention Centre, Dwarka, New Delhi. The event, held on July 16, 2025, highlighted the progress of digital inclusion and community empowerment across rural India. Gracing the occasion, Union Minister for Electronics & Information Technology, Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw, lauded the transformative role of Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) in bringing digital services to the grassroots. "VLEs have helped fulfil the dream of a digitally empowered India. Today, digital payments through UPI are more prevalent than global alternatives like Visa. This shows the true strength of 1.4 billion Indians," he said. In a major announcement, Shri Vaishnaw declared that 10 lakh citizens will receive free Artificial Intelligence (AI) training, with priority given to VLEs. He also encouraged VLEs to begin offering IRCTC services and assured that efforts would be made to integrate state IT agencies with the CSC network. The Minister highlighted the inspiring journeys of women VLEs like Manjulata from Odisha and Rose Angelina M. Kharsyntiew from Meghalaya. Despite difficult terrains and limited infrastructure, these entrepreneurs have successfully delivered digital services to remote communities, setting new benchmarks in digital empowerment.

Shri Jitin Prasada, Union Minister of State for Commerce & Industry and Electronics & Information Technology, emphasised the vast expansion of the CSC network—from 83,000 centres in 2014 to over 5.5 lakh in 2025. He underlined the importance of integrating Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) with CSCs to strengthen rural outreach. "Over 74,000 women VLEs are driving change across the country, contributing to a truly inclusive Digital India," he added. Speaking about the AI revolution, Shri Prasada stressed the need for capacity building, cybersecurity, and the use of emerging technologies in agriculture, healthcare, and education. He recommended expanding the scope of services offered by VLEs to include Update Client Lite and various state government services, thereby enhancing their revenue potential. Shri Sanjay Rakesh, Managing Director & CEO of CSC SPV, welcomed the dignitaries and reiterated CSC's role in last-mile service delivery. "In the last decade, CSCs have evolved into a model of empowerment and self-reliance, ensuring access to G2C and B2B services even in the most remote regions," he said. The CSC Diwas celebrations included a national-level conclave with IT Secretaries from all states, as well as local events across CSCs nationwide. Top-performing VLEs were honoured for their contributions to digital empowerment. Launched in 2015, the Digital India initiative has revolutionised service delivery and financial inclusion. With over 5.5 lakh operational centres today, CSC SPV represents a global model for grassroots digitisation and citizen engagement.

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India Logs Rs 12,000 Lakh Crore in Digital Transactions over 6 Years

Rs 12,000 lakh crore worth of digital transactions recorded across 65,000 crore transactions between FY20 and FY25. 4.77 crore digital touchpoints deployed under RBI’s PIDF to boost digital payment infrastructure in rural and remote areas. UPI and government initiatives like MDR rationalisation and BHIM-UPI incentives are driving financial inclusion and MSME adoption. In a significant milestone for India's digital economy, more than Rs 12,000 lakh crore worth of digital transactions have taken place in the last six financial years (FY20 to FY25), covering over 65,000 crore transactions, the Parliament was informed. Minister of State for Finance, Pankaj Chaudhary, in a written reply to the Lok Sabha, highlighted the government’s continuous efforts to boost digital payment adoption across the country, including in tier-2 and tier-3 cities. This has been achieved through collaborations with key stakeholders like the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), fintech companies, banks, and state governments. One of the major initiatives supporting this digital push is the Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF), set up by the RBI in 2021. The fund aims to enhance the deployment of digital payment acceptance infrastructure in tier-3 to tier-6 cities, northeastern states, and Jammu & Kashmir. As of May 31, 2025, around 4.77 crore digital touchpoints have been installed under PIDF.

To track and measure the country’s digital payment progress, the RBI has introduced the Digital Payments Index (RBI-DPI), which reflects adoption, infrastructure development, and performance. The latest RBI-DPI score for September 2024 stood at 465.33, indicating strong growth and deepening penetration of digital transactions. Chaudhary pointed out that platforms like UPI have played a pivotal role in enabling citizens, especially small vendors and rural users, to transact digitally. This shift has reduced cash dependency and significantly increased participation in the formal financial ecosystem. To further support MSMEs and small businesses in embracing digital payments, several initiatives have been rolled out. These include the rationalisation of the Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) for debit card transactions, the Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS) to offer better invoice discounting for MSMEs, and incentive programmes to promote low-value BHIM-UPI transactions. The minister emphasized that the growing use of digital payments has revolutionised access to formal credit and financial services, empowering individuals and businesses particularly in underserved and remote areas and driving India toward a more inclusive digital economy.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Inching Closer to Supercomputer Infrastructure Completion, Economy Minister Says

A major project led by the Ministry of Economy and aimed at supporting the development of Azerbaijan's digital economy, the creation of a national supercomputer infrastructure, is nearing completion, said the Minister of Economy, Mikayil Jabbarov, Trend reports. Speaking at the Industry 4.0 Forum – The Industry of the Future: Technology and Human Power in Baku, Jabbarov noted that the supercomputer platform will enhance the speed and accuracy of economic forecasting, expand simulation capabilities in decision-making processes, and enable data-driven, analytically grounded approaches. "Technological solutions not only boost production efficiency but also help reduce environmental impact. Therefore, every step we take in the direction of Industry 4.0 is part of a broader national strategic goal—achieving inclusive and sustainable development," the minister said.

From https://www.trend.az/ 07/11/2025

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ICTA Drives Action on Internet Speed and Infrastructure Gaps with Providers

The latest meeting between internet service operators and providers was held at the Information and Communication Technologies Agency (ICTA), Trend reports via ICTA. The first meeting in this direction took place on May 22 of this year. The meeting discussed the goals of bringing Internet speed to the level of developed countries, technological renewal of networks, and the overall development of the industry. At the same time, the priorities arising from the "Strategic Roadmap for the Development of Telecommunications and Information Technologies in the Republic of Azerbaijan", approved by Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated December 6, 2016, No. 1138, were brought to the attention of the public. Following the meeting, it was decided to hold such meetings, seminars, and trainings regularly. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the state of the preparatory work done by operators and providers to achieve their goals over the past period, the problems they had to face, as well as the current technological situation.

Speaking at the meeting, ICTA representatives stressed the importance of bringing Internet speeds to the level of developed countries and made a presentation on international positions and relevant statistics on the Ookla Global Index. The need to modernize networks, replace Ethernet connections (ETTH - Ethernet to the Home), and wireless technologies with new generation technologies was also emphasized. ICTA noted a recurring issue in new buildings, where some construction firms install only four-fiber Ethernet cables inside apartments, limiting internet speed to under 100 Mbps. "Higher speeds such as 300, 500, or even 1000 Mbps require at least eight-fiber cables," representatives explained. The agency urged both providers and residents to pay close attention to the technical compatibility of Ethernet cables to ensure access to high-speed internet. "The physical infrastructure of the network is the foundation for consumers to benefit from high-speed internet services," ICTA emphasized. The meeting concluded with a Q&A session, where the views and suggestions of operator and provider representatives were heard and addressed.

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Application of AI in State Auditing Will Contribute to the Further Development of Auditing as an Independent Supervisory Institution

“Today, sustainable development - which encompasses implementing new mechanisms to achieve economic, social, and environmental balance, reconciling local and global interests, and ensuring the efficient use of natural resources - holds vital importance for humanity. Effectively and promptly responding to these challenges requires us to assume responsibility, mobilize financial resources, ensure their preservation, and strengthen discipline for the purposeful, economical, and efficient use of those resources. It also necessitates the advancement of state audit institutions,” said President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev in his address to the participants of the Joint Meeting of ASOSAI and ARABOSAI organizations, Trend reports. “In this regard, I commend the focus of this Meeting on both the study and application of international experience related to sustainable development and the transition to a digital economy. The development of artificial intelligence technologies plays a crucial role in securing advantages in economic and social development as well as in the global competitive environment.

Artificial intelligence is transforming public administration, the economy, social sectors, education, healthcare, defense, security, and other fields. To foster the formation and development of an artificial intelligence ecosystem, special attention must be given to cooperation between the public and private sectors, strengthening scientific research, and supporting an innovation-friendly environment. I believe that the application of artificial intelligence in state auditing will contribute to the further development of auditing as an independent supervisory institution and to the sustainable development of audit services. It will also create broad opportunities for studying and applying progressive global experience in this field,” President Ilham Aliyev emphasized. The President Ilham Aliyev added: “The second topic of the Meeting is equally important. Mitigating the impacts of climate change and continuing adaptation efforts require substantial financial resources. The purposeful use of these funds, as well as ensuring transparency and accountability, necessitates the active involvement of supreme audit institutions. Azerbaijan’s commitment to this issue was once again confirmed by the prestigious COP29 event held in our country last year.”

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Azerbaijan Expects Rapid Growth in E-Commerce - Visa's Senior

Azerbaijan is on the verge of rapid growth in the digital commerce sector, in line with global trends, said Yevgen Lisnyak, senior director of Visa for strategic partnerships and fintech, and Joint Projects for Ukraine, Georgia, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and Southeast Europe, in an interview with Trend. Lisnyak noted that the COVID-19 pandemic played a key role in accelerating the development of e-commerce worldwide. “Due to restrictions on movement and self-isolation, the demand for remote services and online shopping surged,” he said. According to Lssnyak, the global e-commerce market currently stands at $6-7 trillion and accounts for 20 percent of total global trade. Annual growth is estimated at 8-9 percent, and the sector could reach up to $9-10 trillion by 2030. He highlighted that countries like the United Kingdom and China have emerged as leaders, with e-commerce making up over a third of retail trade. While Central Asia, including Azerbaijan, is still below the global average, Lesnyak emphasized that the region holds significant growth potential.

“We’re witnessing steady double-digit annual growth in e-commerce in Azerbaijan. A favorable environment has been created for the development and implementation of new digital payment services,” he explained. The official underscored the key role of regulatory institutions in shaping the digital economy. “The Central Bank of Azerbaijan has taken essential steps to stimulate this process, including the adoption of the Law on Payment Services and Payment Systems in 2023, the launch of a regulatory sandbox, and the implementation of consecutive three-year financial sector development strategies. The 2021–2023 strategy has been completed, and the 2024–2026 strategy is now underway. These efforts are advancing not only e-commerce and digital payments but the entire fintech market,” he stated. On global trends, Lisnyak stated that artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming a core focus, automating operations and offering personalized solutions. “We already see AI technology in Azerbaijan – from chatbots to personalized product recommendations on marketplaces.

Globally, AI agents are also being actively explored. Visa recently launched the Visa Intelligent Commerce initiative, which redefines buyer-seller interactions. Smart agents can handle tasks such as product searches, price comparisons, and cart creation, leaving the final purchase decision to the user. We’re actively working to scale this with our partners,” he said. Visa’s AI-powered commerce tools bring value to both businesses and consumers. “Visa’s solutions help businesses streamline operations while assisting consumers with product selection and checkout. For instance, when users are faced with multiple offers, AI helps them build a cart faster, saving time and enhancing the experience. Seamless payment is also essential. Studies show some users abandon purchases during checkout if their preferred payment method isn’t available,” he added. As omnichannel commerce grows, with interactions happening through websites, mobile apps, physical stores, and social media, it’s crucial to ensure consistency behind the scenes," Lisnyak explained.

“The goal is to deliver a smooth customer experience across all channels. In this case, AI can act either as a passive responder or an active assistant, suggesting solutions based on purchase history, location, and other data points,” he noted. Lisnyak further stressed that AI can transform company operations at all levels. “More than half of marketing directors in the United States already use AI tools to generate content. And this is just the beginning — smart technologies are now applied in everything from text and image creation to augmented reality, which lets users visualize products in real-life settings,” he said. He added that combining AI with augmented and virtual reality opens up new horizons for businesses. “The key is not to be afraid to experiment,” Lesnyak advised. Mobile commerce is another strong trend. Lesnyak noted that in Azerbaijan, more users are shopping via mobile apps rather than traditional web browsers. “To meet this demand, local players are actively adapting their services to mobile platforms,” he said.

Another global trend is direct-to-consumer (D2C) sales, where manufacturers engage directly with consumers through platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, bypassing intermediaries. “A significant number of Azerbaijani businesses already utilize these channels. However, payment methods often rely on simple transfers, which are inconvenient. Visa and its partners are ready to provide solutions that help small and medium-sized enterprises accept payments seamlessly,” Lisnyak noted. The official highlighted Visa’s technologies that simplify payments, such as Visa Click to Pay — which stores encrypted card data for one-click checkout — and Visa Payment Passkey, which enables biometric confirmation. The Tap to Phone solution turns smartphones into contactless payment terminals without additional hardware. Lisnyak also mentioned the Cybersource platform, which allows businesses to rapidly deploy electronic acquiring systems with minimal technical effort while accessing a wide range of modern payment services. Among global trends with relevance for Azerbaijan, he pointed to the rapid growth of business-to-business (B2B) commerce and platforms, as well as “quick commerce,” a model where speed of delivery is critical.

“Often, long wait times discourage buyers. Rather than wait days for delivery, consumers prefer to go to a store and buy the product right away. That’s why fast-growing express delivery services and AI-driven logistics are becoming increasingly vital. In some countries, drone delivery is already being tested,” he explained. Lesnyak emphasized that logistics remain a challenge for e-commerce growth in Azerbaijan, as delivering goods to regions can take time. He cited the state-backed Online Azerbaijan project, which aims to bring internet access to even the most remote parts of the country. “Internet infrastructure is the foundation for digital services and the online economy. As far as I know, the program is progressing well, and we will soon see real results, which will drive e-commerce growth in Azerbaijan,” Lisnyak concluded.

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KAZAKHSTAN: Narrating Good Digitalization Co-op Prospects with Azerbaijan

Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan have good prospects for cooperation in the field of digitalization, the head of the office of the Chamber of Commerce of Kazakhstan Asan Zhakishev told reporters on the sidelines of the 6th ECO Business Forum on the topic "Investment and Trade Promotion as a Catalyst for Sustainable Development in the ECO region", Trend's special correspondent reports. "Kazakhstan has advantages in the field of digitalization, and we call on the Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan to develop this area more actively. Digital solutions simplify governance, improve the quality of life of citizens, and open up new opportunities for cooperation. Therefore, in this area, I see prospects for cooperation between Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan," he also said. According to Zhakishev, positive dynamics can be confidently noted in trade and economic relations with Azerbaijan. "We traditionally cooperate in such key sectors as the food industry, agro-industrial complex, and energy. At the same time, incentives are emerging for the development of new areas, especially in the IT sector," he pointed out. Zhakishev added that today's ECO forum is an effective platform for discussing all pressing issues.

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TAJIKISTAN: AI Resolution Gains Global Backing at UN General Assembly

The United Nations General Assembly unanimously approved a resolution titled "Role of artificial intelligence (AI) in creating new opportunities for sustainable development in Central Asia", initiated by Tajikistan, Trend reports via the country's Ministry of Industry and New Technologies. The proposal was originally presented by President Emomali Rahmon during the General Debate of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly on 24 September 2024. Backed by consensus among UN Member States, the resolution represents an important step toward establishing a global framework for the ethical and secure use of AI. It calls for the development of self-regulation mechanisms and responsible governance of AI technologies at both regional and national levels. The resolution also highlights key strategies to harness AI technologies to promote sustainable development in Central Asia. A central element is the proposed creation of a Regional Artificial Intelligence Center in Dushanbe to coordinate collaborative AI initiatives across the region. These measures aim to foster safe, reliable, and trustworthy AI systems by balancing regulation, innovation, and internal oversight mechanisms. The Regional AI Center is expected to facilitate several initiatives, including: Supporting joint AI education programs and regional technology parks for AI startups; Promoting collaborative AI research among universities, scientists, and laboratories in Central Asia; Creating a shared network of data centers to improve access to AI computing resources across countries; Harmonizing national AI monitoring efforts to adopt common principles for coordinated and responsible AI governance; Advancing global AI projects in partnership with international organizations.

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UZBEKISTAN: IT Park, VSaaS Global Set Sights on Tech Base and Venture Capital Push

Representatives of IT Park Uzbekistan, led by CEO Abdulahad Kuchkarov, held talks with Ghanshyam Ahuja, CEO of Singapore-based VSaaS Global and co-founder of the investment platform Thinkuvate Venture, Trend reports. In the course of the meeting, the sides discussed the potential for opening a VSaaS Global office in Uzbekistan and recruiting a local team of developers to drive the company's projects. Ghanshyam Ahuja also expressed interest in partnering with IT Park Ventures on venture financing initiatives. Specifically, the parties explored the creation of a joint fund to support startups from both Uzbekistan and Singapore. Uzbekistan continues to attract international investors and technology firms. IT Park remains dedicated to offering comprehensive support to foreign partners looking to establish and scale their businesses in the country, foster job creation, and nurture local innovation. VSaaS Global, founded in 2010 and headquartered in Singapore, specializes in digital transformation, business process automation, and SaaS development. The company operates offices in the USA, the UK, and India, employing approximately 100 professionals. Thinkuvate Venture, also established in Singapore in 2010, manages a $20 million investment fund focused on early-stage startups in Southeast Asia. The Thinkuvate team consists of around 100 experts.

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AUSTRALIA: Future Jobs and Investment Authority Model to Secure Jobs and Economic Opportunities in Coal Mining Communities

The Minns Labor Government is partnering with coal-producing regions across NSW to deliver on its election commitment to establish the Future Jobs and Investment Authority. The Authority will help guide the future economic development of the four coal mining regions – the Hunter, Central West, Illawarra, and North West – from coal production towards other economic opportunities and employment. The 2025-26

NSW Budget will include $27.3 million over four years to fund the Authority, initially focussing on the Hunter and Central West regions. This initiative will be backed by the Future Jobs and Investment Fund to unlock more than $100 million in funding held back under the previous Liberal-National Government's Royalties for Rejuvenation scheme.

As part of its remit, the Future Jobs and Investment Authority will develop a framework to allow the funding to be spent on projects like infrastructure and post-mining land use planning, skills mapping, feasibility assessments and training programs. This will be done in concert with the Federal Government's Net Zero Economy Authority. The Minns Labor Government will also continue its existing commitment to deliver $22.5 million into the fund each year. The model of the Future Jobs and Investment Authority follows the release of a proposed structure in mid-2024, and ongoing consultation with workers, communities and industry. The final Authority model integrates much of the feedback received by the government.

The Future Jobs and Investment Authority will include: Establishing a coordinating Authority to be led by a Chief Executive Officer. The Authority will have a clear mandate to deliver tangible outcomes for coal-reliant regions. Establishing four local Divisions in the Hunter, Illawarra, Central West and North West to support the Authority. This will ensure direct representation to the Authority and that all decisions are informed by local needs and priorities. Local Divisions will include representatives of industry, workers, local government and community groups to ensure local voices are guiding government action. Assuring accountability and governance through an advisory board reporting to the Minister for Natural Resources. The advisory board will be chaired by an independent Chair/Advocate and membership will include the chairs of each Local Division.

Collaborating with the Net Zero Economy Authority and the Commonwealth Government to streamline projects and strengthen delivery. Enshrining the Authority in legislation, providing long-term certainty for communities. Currently, around 25,000 people are directly employed in coal mines. While coal mining will continue for decades to come this, highlights the importance of establishing the Authority to begin planning for a future beyond coal. The Future Jobs and Investment Authority will prioritise: Facilitating strategic land use planning, land prioritisation and activation, including land previously used for mining. This will enable new and emerging employment-generating industries. Driving investment attraction activities to support the development of new industries in coal-producing communities.

Developing new initiatives to ensure workers are equipped with necessary training to create a stable and secure future for them, their families and their communities. Undertaking detailed data collection and analysis to inform the timing of impacts on workers and the economy and drive a strong evidence-based approach to government action. Leading effective consultation, collaboration and partnership with local communities, and sharing that engagement across NSW Government agencies, and all three levels of government. While coal will remain an important regional employer and economic driver for decades, global demand is forecast to decrease in coming decades. Under current planning approvals, by 2040 all four of the state's coal-fired power stations, and 32 of the state's 39 coal mines will close.

The NSW Government will legislate these changes over the coming months. Quotes attributable to Minister for the Illawarra & the South Coast Ryan Park: "Beyond its natural beauty, the Illawarra is a hub of economic activity and jobs from a diverse range of industries. "The NSW Government is determined to ensure our region and its families continue to prosper, remain agile and seize on the opportunities of the future. "I am particularly pleased that this Authority will have a local presence right here in the Illawarra." Quotes attributable to Minister for the Hunter Yasmin Catley: "The Future Jobs & Investment Authority will play a key role in driving job creation in this region, including in the future energy sector. The Hunter has always been the engine room of NSW – now it's time to position ourselves as a national leader in clean energy and advanced manufacturing as well. "We need innovative, creative job opportunities, and the Authority opens up new possibilities, setting a clear pathway for growth. The Authority will work hand-in-hand with our local communities, industry and education providers to ensure our region is at the forefront of this transformation – not left behind by it.

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More Paramedics, More Nurses & More Doctors Join the NSW Health System

More paramedics, more nurses and more doctors will be joining the NSW health system including almost 70 new paramedic interns from today. It comes as 24 NSW public hospitals have either achieved or are in the process of implementing safe staffing ratios in their emergency departments, with the NSW Government announcing yesterday that Campbelltown Hospital had been the latest to complete its rollout. The NSW Government has also recruited more doctors for the bush, and will soon commence its campaign inviting junior doctors to join the NSW health system. Paramedics NSW Ambulance will today welcome 67 new paramedic interns and 6 new paramedic inductees following an official ceremony at the State Operations Centre, Sydney Olympic Park.

They join almost 600 new paramedics who have entered the service since the beginning of the year. The new recruits come from a range of backgrounds and experiences, including Rylie Muirhead who was inspired to join NSW Ambulance after being a carer for her mum and experiencing frequent interactions with paramedics, and Carissa Johnson who is following in her paramedic father's footsteps. The 67 paramedic interns will be posted across NSW to complete the on-road portion of their 12-month internships, before taking permanent positions in metropolitan and regional areas. The 6 paramedic inductees, who previously worked as paramedics interstate or overseas, will be posted across metropolitan and regional locations in NSW for nine weeks, prior to becoming registered paramedics with NSW Ambulance.

Safe staffing in emergency departments Campbelltown Hospital became the latest hospital to achieve safe staffing ratios, the government announced. It joins 9 other NSW public hospitals to complete the rollout of safe staffing ratios, including: •Gosford •Liverpool •John Hunter •Nepean •Royal North Shore •Royal Prince Alfred •Tamworth •Tweed •Westmead Children's This is in addition to the 14 NSW public hospitals which are in the process of implementing safe staffing ratios, including: •Port Macquarie •Lismore •Coffs Harbour •Bankstown •Wollongong •St George •Wagga Wagga •Orange •Westmead •Blacktown •Hornsby Ku-ring-gai •Sutherland •Concord •Prince of Wales Rural doctors The NSW Government will also welcome more doctors to boost the regional health workforce.

The Rural Generalist Single Employer Pathway (RGSEP) supports future rural generalists in their training across both primary care and hospital settings, through a length-of-training contract which allows them to keep and accrue entitlements across both settings; as well as receive the same pay and conditions as their hospital trained counterparts. Last year, the program recruited 29 trainees across regional local health districts, joining a broader cohort of 142 working in regional NSW. Positions for the 2026 clinical year are available in Far West, Illawarra Shoalhaven, Hunter New England, Mid North Coast, Murrumbidgee, Northern NSW, Southern NSW and Western NSW LHDs. Applications for the Rural Generalist Single Employer Pathway program open on 15 July and close on 5 August 2025.

Junior doctors Junior doctors from Australia and abroad are being encouraged to become part of the country's leading public health system, with the 2025 NSW Health Junior Medical Officer (JMO) recruitment campaign opening next Tuesday, 15 July 2025. NSW Health is inviting junior doctors who have completed their first two postgraduate years of medical practice to apply to develop their skills in the country's largest and most advanced public health system. Junior doctors are encouraged to consider roles in rural and regional areas, with incentive packages available for those looking to support these communities and gain experience in a different setting. Junior Medical Officers provide essential frontline medical care to the millions of people who use health services across the state.

Those recruited will start in their new roles at the beginning of the 2026 clinical year and will be offered positions in a range of specialties including general medicine, intensive and emergency care, pain management, psychiatry, pathology and more. Rebuilding the health workforce The Minns Labor Government is rebuilding an engaged, capable and supported workforce, by: •Saving 1,112 nurses which the Liberal Government planned to sack; •Abolishing the wages cap and delivering the largest wage increase to healthcare workers in a decade; •Supporting our future health workforce through providing them with study subsidies; •Investing $274 million to deliver an additional 250 healthcare workers at upgraded hospitals left with inadequate staff by the previous government; •Deploying 500 regional paramedics to the bush; and •Bringing more health workers to country NSW through the Rural Health Worker Incentive Scheme.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health, Ryan Park: “From day one, we said that our top priority was to rebuild a capable and supported health workforce. “We abolished the wages cap, undoing a decade of wage suppression; rolled out safe staffing ratios; recruited more paramedics; and brought more health workers out to the bush. “Under the Minns Labor Government, the NSW health workforce is experiencing the most significant structural reform in its history.” Quotes attributable to NSW Ambulance Chief Executive Dr Dominic Morgan: “These new paramedics have learned to think fast, act fast, and to deliver the clinical expertise they have learned. Today, they are graduates – but from tomorrow, they are clinicians ready to think clinically, treat confidently, and care completely. With every call, assessment and intervention, these recruits will become part of a patient’s journey.” Quotes attributable to paramedic intern Rylie Muirhead: “As a child observing paramedics tend to my mum, I was inspired by their compassion and kindness. Being part of a patient’s journey through healthcare will be very rewarding Quotes attributable to paramedic intern Carissa Johnson: “To be a paramedic and continue a family legacy is the culmination of a long-held ambition. The training has been intense but fun, and I am looking forward to putting my skills into practice”.

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NEW ZEALAND: Unlocking Economic Growth on Conservation Land

A targeted effort to reduce the backlog of applications for use of conservation land is accelerating economic growth without compromising conservation values, says Conservation Minister Tama Potaka. “Over the years, decision makers at the Department of Conservation – Te Papa Atawhai became wrapped and trapped in a sticky ball of red tape unnecessarily slowing the success of tourism operators, researchers, major infrastructure project developers, among many others. “The department is doing a great job delivering on my expectation to crack on with the mahi. The total number of applications awaiting decisions has dropped from around 1300 last September to now under 550. The processing of these applications in April and May this year were nearly three times faster than the same time last year - up by 180 per cent.

“We’re achieving these results through a data-driven approach and smarter, more efficient systems and processes, including new technology such as AI tools helping to scan statutory documents. “A standout example is the new one-off drone permits process: previously taking weeks, these applications are now processed within five working days. “Around a third of the applications DOC has processed since February are related to tourism, the country’s second-largest export earner, where more than 380 tourism related applications in the last three months were processed, including guiding activities in Fiordland and Heli hunt and fish concessions for helicopter landings in the North Island. “This month, DOC has approved Kokiri Lime’s application to quarry 1ha of rock needed for critical roading and flood protection infrastructure projects in South Westland having first received the application more than five years ago.

“Processing applications quicker means businesses get certainty faster. DOC is enabling a wide range of activities that connect people with nature and support local economies, while more quickly declining proposals where the effects on nature or heritage cannot be avoided, remedied, or mitigated. “The conservation estate covers a third of our country. It’s not just a sanctuary, it’s a shared space where tourism, science, infrastructure, and community projects intersect with nature. We’re now managing that balance faster and smarter. “We are ensuring activity on conservation land is lawful and sustainable while protecting the natural environment that is the lifeblood of our economy.”

From https://www.beehive.govt.nz 07/08/2025

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Childhood Immunisation Rates Continue to Climb

New figures released today show childhood immunisation rates at 24 months continue to rise, reflecting the Government’s strong commitment to improving health outcomes for Kiwi children, Health Minister Simeon Brown says. “Protecting children from preventable illnesses like measles and whooping cough is a priority, so it’s heartening to see more children across the country now fully immunised,” Mr Brown says. National coverage at 24 months has climbed to 79.3 per cent in the third quarter of 2024/25 – up 2.4 percentage points compared to the same quarter last year. “These results show that our clear focus on health targets, combined with the efforts of our frontline workforce, is delivering real improvements for children.” The gains have been widespread across the country, with several districts showing strong improvement compared to the last quarter.

“Auckland lifted its coverage by 5.7 percentage points, Counties Manukau by 5.5, and Lakes by 5.2. Capital and Coast rose by 4.4 points, while Whanganui achieved a 5.8-point gain.” The South Island also recorded excellent progress. “Nelson Marlborough saw a 5.2-point increase, and South Canterbury delivered a remarkable 12.1-point gain this quarter.” Mr Brown says the rise in immunisation coverage is especially important following the recent cases of measles in Wairarapa. “These cases are a timely reminder of why staying on top of immunisations is so important. Measles is highly infectious, and vaccination remains the most effective way to protect our children and communities. “Every additional child immunised lowers the chance of outbreaks, helping to keep our families, schools, and communities safe and healthy.

“Childhood immunisations are a key priority for this Government. We want to see 95 per cent of children fully immunised by 2030, and we know GPs play a critical role in achieving that,” Mr Brown says. “That’s why this Government has introduced performance payments for GP clinics that lift childhood immunisation rates by up to ten percentage points, or reach 95 per cent of their enrolled population – with partial payments for partial achievement.” Mr Brown says the Government is backing local services and frontline staff to keep building momentum. “Putting patients first means giving every child the healthiest possible start to life. We’re continuing to invest in community outreach, local services, and the workforce needed to lift immunisation coverage even further. “There’s still more work to do, but this latest data shows we’re heading in the right direction,” Mr Brown says.

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Reinforcing Commitment to Disability Community

Information about steps the Government will take to improve the rights of disabled people in line with international obligations is now publicly available, Disability Minister Louise Upston has announced. Reinforcing New Zealand’s strong commitment to human rights, Cabinet late last year agreed the Government’s approach to address the 63 concluding observations (recommendations) made by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Information about the recommendations, the actions that Government agencies have committed to, and how progress will be tracked, is now public on the Human Rights Monitor. “Ensuring we make clear and demonstrable progress is important, for both the disability community and our Government,” Louise Upston says. “Having this information publicly available shows our commitment to disability rights and being transparent about the work we are doing to deliver results. “Multiple agencies are leading work on 30 of the recommendations we have committed to, while a further 17 are being considered as part of the work being done by the Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha on the refreshed New Zealand Disability Strategy.” An additional 16 recommendations were considered and noted, with the Government retaining flexibility to reconsider the response to these recommendations at any time. “We are making good progress, but we know there is still plenty of work to do. “As part of this, I recently re-established a Ministerial Disability Leadership Group to drive action for disabled people across government and to oversee the work to implement the UNCRPD recommendations. “This is one of the ways we are delivering real results for the disabled community, alongside work such as the refreshed disability and sign language strategies."

From https://www.beehive.govt.nz 07/17/2025

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Infrastructure Projects to Drive Jobs and Growth

Billions of dollars worth of infrastructure projects getting underway in the next few months will drive economic activity and create thousands of jobs across the country, Economic Growth Minister Nicola Willis and Infrastructure Minister Chris Bishop say. The Ministers today released an infrastructure update showing $6 billion of government-funded construction is due to start between now and Christmas. "The projects getting underway include new roads, hospitals, schools, high-tech laboratories and other government buildings," Nicola Willis says. "That means spades in the ground, jobs throughout the country and a stronger economy. "Improving the quality of New Zealand's infrastructure is critical to growing the economy and helping Kiwis with the cost of living.

"Good roads, schools and hospitals help business to move goods and services to market quickly and efficiently, children to learn and doctors and nurses to get patients back on their feet." Chris Bishop says the projects getting underway will create thousands of employment opportunities for New Zealanders. "Numbers vary according to the nature of projects, but data sourced from the Infrastructure Commission suggests each billion dollars of infrastructure investment per year equates to about 4500 jobs. "In total, workers are expected to start construction on $3.9 billion worth of roading projects in the next few months. They include the Ōtaki to north of Levin expressway, the Melling interchange, the Waihoehoe Road upgrade, and the new Ōmanawa bridge on SH29. All will help to lift productivity by getting people and freight to their destinations quickly and safely.

"Health projects kicking off include upgrades to Auckland City Hospital, Middlemore Hospital, and the construction of a new acute mental health unit at Hutt Valley Hospital. Construction work on the new inpatients building at the new Dunedin Hospital has also just begun. "Between now and the end of this year, school property projects valued at nearly $800 million will get underway across the country. "Other Government infrastructure projects due to start before the end of this year include a massive new state-of-the-art biosecurity facility in Auckland for the Ministry of Primary Industries and the Papakura District Court interim courthouse. "Importantly, this is just the start. The National Infrastructure Pipeline, managed by the Infrastructure Commission, now shows planned future projects totalling $207 billion across central government, local government and the private sector."

Alongside the infrastructure update, Nicola Willis today released an update on the Government's Infrastructure for Growth work programme. The update is the first refresh of the Going for Growth agenda launched in February to drive economic growth by backing business, improving infrastructure and skills, and removing barriers to innovation. The update shows that since February the Government has delivered on 14 actions to build a stronger infrastructure pipeline and drive better value for money. They include: streamlining land acquisition processes for major infrastructure projects agreeing to fund more than $550 million of water, energy, Māori development and other projects through the Regional Infrastructure Fund; and consulting on a draft National Infrastructure Plan due to become final by the end of the year that will give investors and businesses confidence and drive better value for money from public investment.

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New Investment to Drive AI and Biotech Innovation

The Government is investing $24 million in smart, practical science that will help New Zealanders live healthier lives and support the development of sustainable food industries. Science, Innovation and Technology Minister Dr Shane Reti today announced two major research programmes in partnership with Singapore, focusing on artificial intelligence (AI) tools for healthy ageing and biotechnology for future food production. “Science and innovation are critical to building a high-growth, high-value economy. That’s why we’re investing in research with a clear line of sight to commercial outcomes and real public benefit,” Dr Reti says. “This Government is focused on backing the technologies that will deliver real-world results for New Zealanders – not just in the lab, but in our hospitals, homes, and businesses.

“Whether it’s supporting older Kiwis to live well for longer or developing smarter food production systems, these projects are about practical applications of advanced science to solve problems and grow our economy.” Funded through the Catalyst Fund, designed to facilitate international collaboration, the investment will support seven joint research projects over the next three years, deepening New Zealand’s research ties with Singapore and building capability in AI and biotechnology. The AI programme, delivered alongside AI Singapore, directly supports the Government’s Artificial Intelligence Strategy – a plan to use AI to safely and effectively boost productivity and deliver better public services. “Our AI Strategy is about encouraging the uptake of AI to improve productivity and realise its potential to deliver faster, smarter, and more personalised services, including in healthcare,” says Dr Reti.

“These projects will help develop tools that support clinicians and improve care for our ageing population. Our collaboration with Singapore, a country well advanced in their use and development of AI, will help grow Kiwi capability to explore future practical uses of AI.” The biotechnology programme will focus on turning scientific research into scalable food solutions, including alternative proteins and new food ingredients, in partnership with Singapore’s A*STAR. “These partnerships are about future-proofing our economy and our communities — tackling global challenges with New Zealand science at the forefront,” Dr Reti says.

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New Zealand Joins Fight Against Cybercrime

New Zealanders will be better protected from cybercrime following legislation passing third reading in Parliament today, Justice Minister Paul Goldsmith says. “11 per cent of New Zealanders were victims of fraud and cybercrime in 2024, and the National Cyber Security Centre estimates $1.6 billion was lost to online threats. “The emotional and financial harm caused by cybercrime is significant, and such a quickly evolving threat warrants a coordinated response. “The Budapest Convention, also known as the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime, is the only binding international treaty on cybercrime. “It aligns member countries’ laws and makes it easier for them to cooperate on criminal investigations. “By joining the convention, we are signalling to the other like-minded countries that we take cybercrime seriously and we are prepared to do our part to eliminate it. “It will help our law enforcement agencies to protect New Zealanders, by providing the tools they need to detect, investigate, and prosecute criminal offending, even when it happens online.” The Bill contains provisions to ensure our domestic laws meet the requirements of the Convention. These include; New ‘preservation directions’ in the Search and Surveillance Act, to enable law enforcement agencies to require companies to preserve records that could be evidence of offending. Amendments to the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act to enhance our ability to seek assistance from foreign countries for criminal investigations, and to provide assistance in return. Minor amendments to the Crimes Act to ensure offences related to cybercrime and the use of computers are comprehensive and fully align with the Convention.

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Key Youth Employment Programme Hits 27% Success Rate

One of the Government's key programmes to get young people into work is currently having a 27% success rate according to a response to a written question from Social Development Minister Louise Upston. Last year, Upston revealed she had secured $9.45 million to expand the number of places for young job seekers in community-led employment programmes by 2100, taking the number from 5400 to 7500. In a press release last August, she said: "Under our Welfare that Works programme, more young people will get a needs assessment, a job plan and tailored support, including job coaching, to help them access education, training and employment opportunities." Of those 2100 places that were funded, however, only 1071 had been taken up to date, with 292 of those 1071 individuals ending up in employment.

Asked by 1News whether Upston believed the programme was a failure, she said: "No it's not, and that number also includes people who are still in the programme who haven't completed and, as I said, some people have more challenges than others." Upston did, however, acknowledge that it was tough for many to find a job at the moment. "Well they're challenging to find, and as I said the labour market's really tight. "At the end of a recession it's the final thing to come right. "If I think about the work that I'm doing in tourism to attract more visitors here, that's about getting more Kiwis into tourism and hospitality careers." Upston backed the Government's job creation efforts. "The Government is creating the conditions where jobs are created, absolutely.

"Then, in terms of the infrastructure work, the $6 billion of infrastructure projects that will start before Christmas, absolutely, that's creating jobs. If you create, there will be some people who are trying incredibly hard to get a job. There will be others at the other end of the spectrum that perhaps need to try harder." Greens: '27% is a failure mark' The Green Party's social development spokesperson Ricardo Menendez-March said jobs were disappearing, not being created. "We've been told by people on the ground that the jobs are not there, and you just got to look at the statistics where more people are applying for less jobs they can see out there. It's really tough for young people out there. This is why the Government needs to stop cutting jobs and sanctioning unemployed people." Menendez-March said 27% was "a straight up failure mark".

"This is why we need a government that is committed to creating jobs as opposed to cutting them." He said he believed the Government was making conditions tougher for young people looking for employment. "More people are applying for fewer job vacancies. After cutting thousands of jobs that our young people could have gone into, they've now decided to punch down on the unemployed while increasing benefit sanctions. "It's no surprise that our young people are looking overseas for opportunities when they've cut thousands of jobs, and the Government has no plan to guarantee a job for every unemployed person. "Louise Upston needs to face up to the fact that she's left young people with no opportunities." Manaaki Rangatahi — an organisation with a stated mission to end youth homelessness — said it was not a positive environment for young people at the moment.

Spokesperson Brooke Stanley said: "Often the work that is offered to rangatahi is work that's considered low value and therefore low paid. And so, it's not like a super inspiring space to kind of be putting yourself out there because there is a lack of jobs in this space — it's super competitive." She said the Government needed to listen to providers more. "[They] think that the intervention is a programme that's going to get rangatahi ready for work, without actually addressing some of those structural issues that need to be addressed before they can even be prepared to find work. Jobs are either being cut [or] funding is being cut across the board."

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Strengthening Primary Care to Better Meet Patient Needs

The Government is taking further action to ensure Kiwis can see a doctor, focusing on improved funding for rural practices, faster access to primary care, and a stronger pipeline of locally trained GPs, Health Minister Simeon Brown says. Updating GP funding to better reflect patient needs Setting a new health target for faster GP access Backing GP training and retention “We want all New Zealanders to be able to see a GP when they need one, regardless of where they live,” Mr Brown says. “In rural areas especially, GP clinics with only one doctor or closed books makes it harder for patients to get timely appointments. We’re committed to changing that. “The health system should reflect the needs of patients, wherever they live in New Zealand. That’s why we’re making changes to the way GP clinics are funded to ensure money goes where it’s needed most.”

The government’s funding method for GP clinics, known as capitation, will be updated for the first time in more than 20 years. This is proposed to take effect from 1 July 2026. “The current model is outdated and doesn’t reflect the needs of patients. The revised formula will go beyond just age and sex, to also include multimorbidity, rurality, and socioeconomic deprivation. “These changes will better distribute funding to where it’s needed most, so that GP clinics with a higher needs population of enrolled patients will receive more funding to care for them.” The Government is also introducing a new national health target to drive timely access to primary care. “People shouldn’t have to wait weeks to see a doctor. Delays can lead to poorer health outcomes, more pressure on hospitals, and growing frustration for patients. We’re focused on delivering timely, quality care that puts patients first.”

“This new target will be developed in partnership with the primary care sector and is proposed to ensure that more than 80 per cent of people can see a primary care provider within one week, taking effect from 1 July 2026. It will take effect from 1 July 2026 and aligns with the target of ensuring 80 percent of people receive faster access to primary mental health and addiction services within one week.” The Government is also making targeted investments in general practice training to strengthen the GP workforce and support long-term retention. “The General Practice Education Programme (GPEP), delivered by the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners, is the only accredited training and education pathway in New Zealand for doctors wanting to specialise as GPs. Vocational training through GPEP takes a minimum of three years to complete, but currently only the first year of training is funded.

“We are increasing funding for this programme to ensure it is valued and supported in the same way as other medical specialist training programmes.” As part of this investment, the Government is funding: Training fees in 2025 for doctors in their second, third, and post-third year of GPEP to encourage completion of their training Exam and preparation costs for around 200 GPEP trainees who have completed, or nearly completed, training but not yet taken the fellowship exam Full ongoing training and education costs for approximately 400 GPEP year 2 and 3 trainees each year "Our goal is to make general practice a more attractive and sustainable career path, especially in rural and high-needs communities, so we can bring more doctors into the areas that need them most.

"By fully covering training and exam costs, we'll enable hundreds of doctors to complete the pathway to becoming GPs, giving them the support they need to finish their training and enter the health workforce – building a stronger pipeline of experienced GPs who can train and mentor the next generation. "This Government knows that primary care is the cornerstone of the health system, which is why we're committed to making it more accessible and responsive to the unique needs of communities. "Improving access, particularly in rural and underserved areas, will help ease pressure on hospitals and ensure New Zealanders get timely, quality care when and where they need it," Mr Brown says.

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5、Public Finance

Asia-Pacific

World Bank Opens 2026 Funding Year with GBP 1.5 Billion 5-Year Benchmark

The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD, Aaa/AAA) today priced a 5-year British pound sterling (GBP) benchmark maturing in October 2030. The Sustainable Development Bond raised GBP 1.5 billion from investors globally to support the financing of the World Bank's sustainable development activities in member countries. The bond offers an annual coupon of 4.125% and an annual yield of 4.146%. It was priced at +19.4 basis points over the 0.375% UK Gilt due 22 October 2030. Bank of Montreal, NatWest, Nomura, and Santander are joint lead managers for the transaction. The bond will be listed on the Luxembourg Stock Exchange. *"This GBP 1.5 billion benchmark transaction marks an excellent start to our fiscal year 2026 funding program. The 2026 program will feature issuances across a range of currencies and maturities, tailored to meet the diverse needs of our global investor base. As always, we appreciate investors' continuous support for World Bank bonds, which enable financing for development projects aimed at promoting prosperous and resilient economies in middle-income countries,"* said **Jorge Familiar Vice President and Treasurer, World Bank.**

Investor Breakdown by Type

By Geography		By Investor Type	
United Kingdom	68%	Banks/Bank Treasuries/Corporates	79%
Europe / Middle East / Africa	24%	Asset Managers/Insurance/Pension Funds	11%
Asia	7%	Central Banks/Official Institutions	10%
Americas	1%		

Lead Manager Quotes

"We are thrilled to have been involved in World Bank's successful return to the sterling market. Kicking off IBRD's new fiscal year in style, the rare GBP 1.5 billion benchmark issue size highlights the synergy between World Bank and its global investor base. Congratulations to the World Bank team on a stellar outcome!" said **Sean Hayes, Managing Director, Global Head of Syndicate, Bank of Montreal.** *"The World Bank team kicked off their new fiscal year in spectacular Sterling style. Against a market backdrop of large June 2025 redemptions and a lack of supply, the World Bank benefitted from a first mover advantage in summer markets and achieved one of IBRD's largest 5-year GBP transactions ever, and the largest 5-year GBP print in the Sovereign, Supranational and Agency (SSA) market year to date. Our participation with this deal reflects NatWest's wider commitment and focus on supporting sustainable development and we are proud to have been involved,"* said **Damien Carde, Managing Director, Head of FBG DCM, NatWest.** *"We commend the World Bank team on a highly successful return to the GBP market with this GBP 5-year Sustainable Development Bond. The consistency and commitment to the Sterling market have once again been rewarded, resulting in robust investor demand and a rapid bookbuild, demonstrating IBRD's leading position in the Sterling market. We are delighted to have been involved",* said **Spencer Dove, Managing Director and Head of DCM SSA, Nomura.** *"Congratulations to the World Bank team on a landmark transaction to commence its new funding year. The GBP 1.5 billion issuance matches IBRD's size record for a 5-year GBP transaction set in January last year. A one basis point tightening in the GBP market further underscores the strength of the World Bank's name in the capital markets. The diversity of investors reflects the success of the World Bank's commitment and strategy in the GBP market,"* said **Thibault George, SSA Syndicate, Santander.**

Transaction Summary

Issuer:	World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and

	Development, IBRD)
Issuer rating:	Aaa /AAA
Amount:	GBP 1,500,000,000
Settlement date:	July 14, 2025
Maturity date:	October 22, 2030
Issue price:	99.919%
Issue yield:	4.146% annual
Denomination:	GBP 1,000
Coupon:	4.125% annually
Coupon payment dates:	Annually on October 22
ISIN:	XS3119443557
Listing:	Luxembourg Stock Exchange
Clearing system:	Euroclear / Clearstream
Lead managers:	Bank of Montreal London Branch, NatWest Markets Plc, Nomura International Plc, Banco Santander, S.A.

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World Bank Prices USD 1.5 billion Increase to SOFR-Linked Floating Rate Bond

Today, the World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD, Aaa/AAA) priced its first USD transaction of the of the 2026 fiscal year, adding USD 1.5 billion to its October 2030 bond referencing the Secured Overnight Financing Rate (SOFR) Index, bringing the total outstanding amount to USD 2.25 billion. The original SOFR-linked transaction was USD 500 million, issued in September 2023, and was increased in May 2025 to USD 750 million. This reopening reflects strong investor demand for high-quality, liquid assets and underscores IBRD's ongoing commitment to the floating rate market linked to SOFR. SOFR is a rate based on transactions in the U.S. Treasury repurchase market and an alternative reference rate to USD LIBOR. The bond matures on October 4, 2030, and pays a coupon of Compounded SOFR + 46 basis points (resetting daily and paid quarterly). BMO Capital Markets, CIBC Capital Markets, and Scotiabank acted as joint lead managers of the transaction.

Investor Breakdown by Type

By Geography		By Investor Type	
Europe, Middle East, Asia	49%	Banks/Bank Treasuries/Corporates	91%
Americas	38%	Asset Managers/Insurance/Pension Funds	6%
Asia	13%	Central Banks/Official Institutions	3%

Transaction Summary

Issuer:	World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD)
Issuer rating:	Aaa /AAA
Notional amount:	USD 1,500,000,000 (new outstanding amount USD 2,250,000,000)
Settlement date:	July 17, 2025
Maturity date:	October 4, 2030
Issue price:	100.145%
Coupon:	Compounded SOFR + 46 bps
Coupon Payment Dates:	January 4, April 4, July 4, October 4
Re-Offer Spread:	SOFR + 43 bps
ISIN:	US459058KX08
Listing:	Luxembourg Stock Exchange
Clearing system:	Fedwire, Euroclear, Clearstream
Lead managers:	BMO Capital Markets, CIBC Capital Markets, Scotiabank

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World Bank Achieves Record Orderbook for EUR 3 Billion 10-Year Sustainable Development Bond

The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD, Aaa/AAA) today priced a 10-year EUR benchmark maturing in July 2035. The Sustainable Development Bond raised EUR 3 billion from investors globally to support the financing of the World Bank's sustainable development activities in member countries. The bond priced with a final spread to euro of mid-swaps +38 basis points and an equivalent annual yield of 3.037%. This equates to a spread versus the reference Bund of +34.4 basis points. Barclays, Goldman Sachs, LBBW, and Morgan Stanley are joint lead managers for the transaction. The bond will be listed on the Luxembourg Stock Exchange. "*This EUR 3 billion benchmark bond caps off a tremendous start to our new fiscal year with transactions across four markets allowing IBRD to mobilize over USD 8 billion in support of the World Bank's mission. Investor support is crucial, and our first EUR benchmark of the fiscal year saw the largest order book for a EUR-denominated IBRD benchmark bond and benefitted from exceptional demand from investors seeking high quality, liquid investments to finance sustainable development,"* said **Jorge Familiar, Vice President and Treasurer, World Bank**.

Investor Breakdown by Type

By Geography		By Investor Type	
Europe, Middle East, Africa	76%	Central Banks/Official Institutions	39%
Americas	13%	Banks/Bank Treasuries/Corporates	37%
Asia	11%	Asset Managers/Insurance/Pension Funds	24%

Lead Manager Quotes

"Congratulations to the World Bank on the first EUR benchmark of its 2025/26 fiscal year. This new issue not only achieved IBRD's largest-ever EUR orderbook, exceeding EUR 11 billion, but also matched its largest EUR transaction size, raising EUR 3 billion. These milestones reaffirm IBRD's robust credit quality and its leadership in the SSA sector. With participation from over 165 investors, the transaction clearly demonstrates the global investor community's support for IBRD's

critical mission of advancing sustainable development. Barclays is proud to have partnered with the World Bank on this transaction," said **Alex Paterson, Head of SSA DCM, Barclays.**

"Congratulations to the World Bank who very successfully issued a new EUR 3 billion 10-year benchmark and continue to demonstrate their strategic prowess in the EUR market. This issuance garnered the World Bank's largest EUR orderbook of over EUR 11 billion, showcasing the robust support and high-quality demand from its diverse investor base across international markets. Goldman Sachs is thrilled to have been a part of the World Bank's first EUR transaction in their new fiscal year, aiding them in their global mission to finance sustainable development," said **Dorothee Amar, Managing Director, Co-Head of SSA, Goldman Sachs International.** *"Heartfelt congratulations to the World Bank team for this outstanding 10-year Sustainable Development Bond. Returning to the EUR market in size of EUR 3 billion with minimal new issue concession contributes to the issuer's lightning start to their new fiscal year. With investor demand exceeding EUR 11 billion, IBRD once again demonstrated its global appeal, immaculate timing, and highly relevant development mandate in an uncertain world,"* said **Patrick Seifert, Global Head of Corporates & DCM, LBBW.** *"Huge congratulations to the World Bank for the first EUR benchmark of the 2025/26 funding year! The orderbook composition highlights, once again, the global support IBRD has developed across currencies, but particularly in EUR. Morgan Stanley was proud to have supported today's issuance,"* said **Robert Matthews, Executive Director SSA DCM, Morgan Stanley**

Transaction Summary

Issuer:	World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD)
Issuer rating:	Aaa /AAA
Amount:	EUR 3,000,000,000
Settlement date:	23 July 2025
Maturity date:	23 July 2035
Issue price:	99.685%
Issue yield:	3.037%
Denomination:	EUR 1,000 and multiples thereof
Coupon:	3.00%
Coupon payment dates:	Annually on 23 July

ISIN:	XS3129375732
Listing:	Luxembourg Stock Exchange
Clearing system:	Euroclear/Clearstream
Lead managers:	Barclays, Goldman Sachs, LBBW, and Morgan Stanley

From https://www.worldbank.org/ 07/16/2025

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East Asia

CHINA: CPC Allocates Party Membership Fees to Flood Control, Relief Work

The Communist Party of China (CPC) has earmarked from membership fees 140 million yuan (about 19.58 million U.S. dollars) for flood control and disaster relief in nine regions, including Beijing, Hebei, Jilin and Shandong. The funds have been allocated from membership fees collected and administered by the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee on behalf of the CPC Central Committee. The department has called for the swift disbursement of funds to support Party members, officials and residents on the front line of flood control and relief work, as well as those in difficulty due to natural disasters, and for the repair of educational facilities for Party members. The department has called on Party organizations to serve as strongholds in the fight against natural disasters, and urged Party members to lead by example. Officials at all levels have been told to shoulder their responsibilities and prioritize the safety of people's lives and property. The performance of officials in carrying out urgent, difficult, high-risk and heavy tasks should be a key criterion in their evaluation, the department said. Heavy rains have lashed eastern, northern and northeastern regions of China, triggering floods and geological disasters, and causing heavy casualties.

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JAPAN: BOJ Dragged into Prolonged Struggle with Deflation in 2015

Bank of Japan policymakers were dragged into a prolonged struggle with deflation in the first half of 2015, two years after the central bank's introduction of its massive monetary easing policy, transcripts from their meetings showed Wednesday. The BOJ introduced its quantitative and qualitative monetary easing policy in April 2013, aiming to achieve 2 pct inflation in about two years. The policy pushed up inflation, measured by the year-on-year rise in the core consumer price index, which excludes volatile fresh food prices, to around 1.5 pct briefly. But the measure was nearly flat in 2015 following a consumption tax increase in April 2014 and lower crude oil prices. At a meeting on April 8, 2015, then BOJ Deputy Governor Hiroshi Nakaso praised the massive easing policy, saying that it was demonstrating its intended initial effects. But some other members of the BOJ's policy board raised concerns about adverse impacts if the policy remained in place for a prolonged period.

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BOJ Seen Raising Interest Rates Gradually IMF Economist

The Bank of Japan is expected to raise interest rates gradually until the end of 2026 amid rising inflation in the country, International Monetary Fund chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said Tuesday. In its World Economic Outlook report released the same day, the IMF said that Japan's consumer inflation is seen reaching 3.3 pct in 2025, exceeding the Japanese central bank's target of 2 pct. Noting that Japan's current inflation "is related to things like an increase in the price of processed foods or rice," Gourinchas told a press conference that the higher prices are forecast to prove "temporary." Still, he said, "In this environment of inflation above central bank targets for some time now, the expectation is that the Bank of Japan will continue to gradually raise interest rates...in the course of...the end of next year." He also said that Japan's economic growth rate has been raised slightly after the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump last week set his country's tariffs on Japan at a level lower than planned in April, when the IMF estimated Japan's growth for 2025 at 0.6 pct.

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SOUTH KOREA: BOK Freezes Key Rate Amid Surging Household Debt, Home Prices

South Korea's central bank kept its benchmark interest rate unchanged Thursday to ensure financial stability amid concerns about rapid increases in housing prices and household debt. In a widely expected decision, the Monetary Policy Board of the Bank of Korea (BOK) held its key rate steady at 2.5 percent during a rate-setting meeting in Seoul. The move followed a rate cut in May, when the BOK lowered the policy rate by 25 basis points to support economic growth amid sluggish domestic demand and uncertainty stemming from the United States' sweeping tariff measures. Thursday's decision underscores the BOK's focus on maintaining financial stability, despite ongoing pressure to support economic growth. Housing prices in Seoul and parts of the greater capital area have surged, fueled by easing financial conditions and expectations of further price increases under the new liberal government. Household loans extended by South Korean banks rose by 6.2 trillion won (US$4.51 billion) in June from the previous month, marking the largest monthly gain since

August 2024. The BOK expects the upward trend to continue in the coming months. In response, the government implemented stricter mortgage regulations late last month, capping mortgage loans for home purchases in the capital region at 600 million won and suspending home-backed loans for multi-homeowners.

BOK Gov. Rhee Chang-yong earlier signaled that the pace of rate cuts would be adjusted based on housing market conditions, despite the ongoing monetary easing cycle that began in October 2024. Following the rate cut announcement in May, he warned, "Lowering the base rate too quickly could fuel asset prices, such as real estate. We must not repeat the mistakes made during the COVID-19 period." The on-hold decision will give the central bank time to assess the impact of the government's supplementary budget, according to analysts. Last week, the National Assembly passed an extra budget of 31.8 trillion won aimed at stimulating the economy and supporting the people's livelihoods. The latest package follows a 13.8 trillion-won stimulus approved in May. Also under consideration for the BOK was the interest rate gap between South Korea and the United States, which currently stands at up to 2 percentage points. A further widening of the gap could increase volatility in the foreign exchange market. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has taken a cautious stance on adjusting interest rates, citing the resilience of the U.S. economy and various uncertainties.

From https://en.yna.co.kr 07/10/2025

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S. Korea to Spend 484 Bln Won on Developing Next-Gen iLED Display Tech

The government will invest a combined 484 billion won (US$350 million) by 2032 to develop inorganic light-emitting diode (iLED) display technologies, with an aim to find new growth engines for the local display sector, the industry ministry said Tuesday. The investment will be funneled into developing iLED technologies, including micro LED, quantum dot and nano LED, and cultivating the local industrial ecosystem, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. Considered a next-generation display technology, iLED offers enhanced lifespan, brightness and power efficiency compared with current organic light-emitting diode (OLED) displays. The ministry said South Korea maintains a global lead in the OLED market but is lagging behind in the iLED technology, heavily dependent on foreign-made LED chips and materials for the iLED display. The global iLED market is expected to grow to $32 billion by 2035 from $1 billion in 2026.

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BOK to Sell 8 Tln Won Monetary Stabilization Bonds in August

South Korea's central bank said Thursday it will sell up to 8 trillion won (US$5.83

billion) worth of monetary stabilization bonds (MSBs) next month. The planned issuance represents an 800 billion-won increase from a month earlier, according to the Bank of Korea (BOK). As policy tools devised to absorb excess liquidity in the market, MSBs are sold to financial institutions and individuals.

From https://en.yna.co.kr 07/24/2025

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Bank Indonesia Signals Possible Further Rate Cuts to Spur Growth, Stabilize Inflation

Indonesia's central bank may lower its benchmark interest rate again to control inflation and stimulate economic growth, Bank Indonesia (BI) Governor Perry Warjiyo said on Thursday. Bank Indonesia previously cut the benchmark rate by 25 basis points each in January and May, bringing it to 5.50 percent. For 2026, inflation is projected to range between 1.5 percent and 3.5 percent, while national economic growth is expected to reach between 4.7 percent and 5.5 percent.

From https://english.news.cn/ 07/04/2025

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Indonesian President Urges Budget Reform, Deregulation to Spur Economic Growth

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto has called for reforms in state revenues, stricter control of the budget deficit, and focused spending on priority sectors, aiming to make the state budget a driving force for economic growth, a minister said in a statement issued on Wednesday. In a fiscal policy meeting held at the State Palace that concluded on Tuesday night, Prabowo emphasized the need for deregulatory measures to foster a conducive business climate and promote sustainable economic growth, according to Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati. "The president's directives are very comprehensive. Reforms on the state revenue side will continue so that we can ensure adequate state revenue. Spending will be focused on key programs," she stated. Mulyani added that the president stressed the importance of reducing excessive regulations to support economic growth beyond reliance on state spending alone. She also highlighted the need for regulatory improvements to facilitate business, investment, and trade, particularly in strengthening the role and governance of the national superholding agency, Danantara. "The president stated that if market confidence is maintained, our economy will remain strong, and support for the economy through the state budget, including countercyclical measures, can be effectively implemented," said Mulyani.

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Indonesia Allocates 38 Mln USD to Build 63 Suspension Bridges Next Year

The Indonesian government plans to allocate 630 billion rupiah (around 38.69 million U.S. dollars) to build 63 suspension bridges in 2026 to promote equitable development and improve connectivity between villages and remote areas and economic centers, the Ministry of Public Works said on Thursday. "Suspension bridges offer an accessibility solution for communities, especially those living in remote areas with challenging geographic conditions," said Minister of Public Works Dody Hanggodo. He added that the bridges are also expected to speed up daily activities, particularly economic, educational, and public service-related activities. This year, the ministry aims to complete the construction of 50 suspension bridges, including eight in South Sulawesi.

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Indonesia Allocates 130 Mln USD for School Program

Indonesia has allocated 2.14 trillion rupiahs (around 130 million U.S. dollars) to fund the implementation and operation of President Prabowo Subianto's flagship education initiative, known as the People's School program, throughout this year, a minister announced on Wednesday. The program aimed to redefine educational equity in Indonesia by offering fully free, full-boarding schools for children from the nation's poorest families. Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati said that of the 159 People's Schools to be operational by 2025, 63 have already begun operating since July 14, enrolling over 9,000 students. The remaining 96 schools will open in phases: 37 on Aug. 1, and 59 in early September. The minister added that the government intended to increase the program's funding in the 2026 state budget. "This is a real commitment to supporting children from underprivileged families, providing them with the opportunity to learn and grow through quality education, and preparing them for a better future," she said.

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CAMBODIA: Collecting 1.47 Bln USD in Customs Revenue in H1

Cambodia collected 1.47 billion U.S. dollars in customs revenue in the first half of 2025, a year-on-year increase of 21 percent, the General Department of Customs and Excise (GDCE) said on Saturday. "The GDCE has achieved 58.6 percent of the revenue target set for the entirety of 2025," GDCE Director-General Kun Nhem said in a press release. He said that 36.2 percent of the customs revenue during the January-June period was from vehicles and machinery, as mixed consumer goods accounted for 32.2 percent of the total, petroleum products for 23.7 percent, and construction materials for 7.9 percent. The GDCE collects tariffs on goods entering and leaving the country. Its revenue does not include the one earned by the General Department of Taxation, which collects interior taxes such as value added tax, tax on profits, salary tax, turnover tax, and property tax.

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MALAYSIA: Central Bank Cuts Interest Rates amid External Uncertainties

The Malaysian central bank said on Wednesday that it has decided to reduce the overnight policy rate (OPR) by 25 basis points to 2.75 percent, amid global uncertainties. Bank Negara Malaysia said in a statement that the ceiling and floor rates of the corridor of the OPR are correspondingly reduced to 3 percent and 2.5 percent respectively.

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PHILIPPINES: Urging Reform of Global Financial System to Aid Middle-Income Countries

The Philippines has called for urgent reform of the international financial system to better support middle-income countries (MICs) amid mounting global challenges, the Department of Finance (DOF) said Wednesday. Speaking at the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development held on July 2 in Seville, Spain, DOF Undersecretary Joven Balbosa urged enhanced representation of developing countries, a review of surcharge and special drawing rights policies, and increased quota shares within the global financial architecture. The conference, which convened global leaders and development stakeholders, adopted the Sevilla Commitment, a renewed global financing framework emphasizing the role of multilateral development banks, expanded development cooperation, debt sustainability, and governance reform. Representing the Group of 77 as well as the Like-Minded Group for MICs, the Philippines played a role in negotiations on the conference outcome document. Balbosa underscored the need to move "beyond GDP" in measuring development, advocating for indicators that better reflect MICs' specific challenges. "To overcome the middle-income trap, tailored support is essential," Balbosa said, welcoming Spain's proposal to launch a Beyond GDP Global Alliance and expressing readiness to engage with the UN secretary-general's expert group on new development indicators. He also backed the creation of a UN-led process for a more inclusive global debt architecture and emphasized the importance of concessional finance, climate funding, and technical assistance without compromising Official Development Assistance commitments. Balbosa concluded by calling for increased capacity-building to ensure that financing for development leads to tangible progress.

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VIETNAM: Public Investment Disbursement in H1 Reaches 32.5 Pct of Annual Plan

Vietnam disbursed more than 268.1 trillion Vietnamese dong (about 10.2 billion U.S. dollars) in public investment during the first half of 2025, fulfilling 32.5 percent of the annual target, Vietnam News Agency reported Friday, citing the Ministry of Finance. The ministry said that to accelerate the pace, it has established seven teams to inspect and resolve bottlenecks at ministries, central agencies, and localities with slow disbursement progress. Vietnam has set a public investment disbursement goal of nearly 829.4 trillion dong (about 31.7 billion dollars) for the entire year, according to the government.

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South Asia

INDIA: Piyush Goyal Announces ₹10,000 Crore Deep Tech Boost at Sangam 2025

Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal announced the second tranche of the government’s Deep Tech Fund, committing ₹10,000 crore under the ‘Fund of Funds’ initiative to foster India’s deep tech ecosystem. The announcement was made during the sixth edition of ‘Sangam 2025’, the flagship global innovation and alumni summit organised by the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT Madras) and its alumni association (IITMAA) in Bengaluru on July 4 – 5. Addressing an audience of over 500 participants comprising alumni, faculty, entrepreneurs, investors, and students, Goyal highlighted the fund’s objective to support the entire technology value chain. “This money goes to promote innovation, absorption of newer technologies and development of contemporary fields,” he stated, adding that the guidelines for deployment are being finalised to ensure capital infusion across the entire innovation lifecycle — from research to commercial scale-up. Goyal also referred to a landmark decision by the Union Cabinet, which recently approved a $12 billion (₹1 lakh crore) fund for the Department of Science and Technology in the form of a zero-interest loan with a 50-year tenure. He emphasised that this provision offers greater flexibility in delivering equity, grant-based, and low-cost financial support to promising technologies. Underlining the strategic cost advantage of innovation in India, Goyal remarked, “When we work on new technologies in India, our cost is nearly one-sixth, one-seventh of what it would cost in Switzerland or America.” He reiterated the government’s commitment to developing sectors such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data analytics, framing them as cornerstones of a “future-ready India.”

Charting a vision for the country’s economic ascent, the Minister projected India’s rise in global rankings. “From the 11th largest GDP in the world, we are today the fifth largest. By the end of the Calendar Year 2025, or anytime during the year, we will be the fourth-largest GDP. By 2027, we will be the third largest,” he said. Sangam 2025 showcased cutting-edge innovation, including a pitch fest where 20 deep tech and AI startups presented to over 250 investors and venture capitalists. These startups will also receive continued institutional support from the IIT Madras Innovation Ecosystem, which has nurtured over 500 ventures in the past decade. Distinguished speakers at the summit included Aparna Chennapragada (Chief Product Officer, Microsoft), Srinivas Narayanan (VP Engineering, OpenAI), and Tarun Mehta (CEO, Ather Energy), all alumni of IIT Madras. Other notable guests were Kris Gopalakrishnan (Axilor Ventures), Dr. S. Somanath (former ISRO Chairman), and Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya. Prof. V. Kamakoti, Director of IIT Madras, said the institute is committed to building “Viksit Bharat 2047” through innovation and entrepreneurship. Ms. Shyamala Rajaram, President of IITMAA" Prof. Ashwin Mahalingam, Dean of Alumni and Corporate Relations, credited the success of the summit to the alumni network’s continuous support.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 07/07/2025

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Economic Reforms Ensure Upgrade of Moody's Rating to Investment Grade

Azerbaijan's economic reforms have ensured an upgrade of its Moody's rating to investment grade, Azerbaijani Economy Minister Mikayil Jabbarov wrote on his X page, Trend reports.. "The achievements of Azerbaijan’s economic and financial bodies under the leadership of President Ilham Aliyev continue to gain recognition at the international level. The recent upgrade of Azerbaijan’s sovereign credit rating to investment grade (Baa3) by Moody’s is a testament to the effectiveness of reforms aimed at fostering non-oil sector growth, increasing revenue #diversification, and significantly reducing the state budget’s dependence on hydrocarbon revenues," he said. Minister stressed that the wide-ranging reforms implemented across the country have ensured macroeconomic stability and fiscal sustainability, deepened economic diversification, accelerated the reconstruction of the liberated territories, and mobilized their economic potential. "Azerbaijan’s emergence as a key strategic transport hub in both regional and global contexts also generates tangible socio-economic benefits. Robust stability has been established through systematic reforms in the banking and financial sectors and in monetary policy; the disciplined application of budget rules; and comprehensive tax reforms underpinned by transparency and accountability. At the same time, strategic foreign-exchange reserves have grown significantly, bolstered by transparent public procurement practices and the digitalization of related processes - together, these measures have driven a marked improvement in Azerbaijan’s sovereign credit metrics," Jabbarov added. According to him, beyond macro-fiscal consolidation, improvements in the investment climate and business environment are attracting increasing foreign interest. "The strengthened regulatory framework, investor-friendly policies, and overall economic resilience are laying the foundation for large-scale investment projects that support long-term sustainable growth and further economic diversification," he said.

From https://www.trend.az/ 07/06/2025

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Azerbaijani Currency to World Currency Rates for July 7

The Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) has published the official exchange rates for July 7, Trend reports. According to the CBA, the official rate of the US dollar remains unchanged at 1.7 manat. The euro is set at 2.0001 manat, while the Turkish lira stands at 0.0426 manat. Meanwhile, 100 Russian rubles are valued at 2.1587 manat.

Currencies	Code	Exchange rate
1 US dollar	USD	1.7
1 euro	EUR	2.0001
1 Australian dollar	AUD	1.1057
1 Belarusian ruble	BYN	0.5728
1 Bulgarian Lev	BGN	1.0234
1 UAE dirham	AED	0.4628
100 South Korean won	KRW	0.1244
1 Czech koruna	CZK	0.0812
1 Chinese yuan	CNY	0.2370
1 Danish krone	DKK	0.2681
1 Georgian lari	GEL	0.6259
1 Hong Kong dollar	HKD	0.2166
1 Indian rupee	INR	0.0198
1 British pound sterling	GBP	2.315
10,000 Iranian rials	IRR	0.0283
1 Swedish krona	SEK	0.1775
1 Swiss franc	CHF	2.1385
1 Israeli shekel	ILS	0.5081
1 Canadian dollar	CAD	1.2468
1 Kuwaiti dinar	KWD	5.5688
100 Kazakh tenge	KZT	0.3272
1 Qatari rial	QAR	0.4664
1 Kyrgyz som	KGS	0.0195
100 Hungarian forints	HUF	0.5016

1 Moldovan leu	MDL	0.1009
1 Norwegian krone	NOK	0.1683
100 Uzbek som	UZS	0.0134
100 Pakistani rupees	PKR	0.5978
1 Polish zloty	PLN	0.4713
1 Romanian leu	RON	0.3954
100 Russian rubles	RUB	2.1587
1 Serbian dinar	RSD	0.0171
1 Singapore dollar	SGD	1.3315
1 Saudi rial	SAR	0.4533
1 SDR (Special Drawing Rights of the IMF)	XDR	2.3401
1 Turkish lira	TRY	0.0426
1 Turkmen manat	TMT	0.4857
1 Ukrainian hryvnia	UAH	0.0407
100 Japanese yen	JPY	1.1725
1 New Zealand dollar	NZD	1.0217

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Azerbaijani Central Bank Reveals Date of Its Next Ruling on Refinancing Rate

The Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) will announce the next decision on the interest rate corridor parameters on September 10, 2025, Trend reports via the CBA statement. The statement pointed out that the next decisions on the parameters of the interest rate corridor will be made depending on the dynamics of actual and forecasted inflation, external and internal risk factors. "The Central Bank will continue to use all the tools at its disposal to ensure price stability," the statement emphasized. By decision of the CBA Management Board, all parameters of the interest rate corridor were lowered by 0.25 percentage points. The policy rate was reduced to seven percent, the lower bound of the corridor to eight percent, and the upper bound to eight percent.

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Azerbaijan, IMF Set Stage for Broader Economic Partnership

Azerbaijan discussed the cooperation priorities, macroeconomic indicators, forecasts, and economic diversification with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the country's minister of economy, Mikayil Jabbarov, wrote on X, Trend reports. "Partnership with international financial institutions is of great importance in supporting a sustainable economic development model in our country. During our meeting with Anna Bordon, the head of the IMF mission in Azerbaijan, we highly appreciated the development of cooperation with the fund. We held discussions on the priorities of interaction, our country's macroeconomic indicators and forecasts, economic diversification, and tax reforms," the publication reads.

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KAZAKHSTAN: Reporting Remarkable Growth in Interbank Clearing System for 5M2025

The interbank clearing system (ICS) processed 31.5 million electronic payment messages totaling 5.8 trillion tenge (approximately $11.02 billion) in the first five months of 2025. The data obtained by Trend from the country's National Bank shows that this is 9.2 million messages and 1.3 trillion tenge (about $2.47 billion) more than in the same period of 2024, representing an increase of 41.2 percent and 30.2 percent, respectively. The growth in activity within the ICS highlights the demand for a fast and accessible tool for mass and retail payments, especially between banks and small and medium business clients. Such dynamic growth indicates increasing trust in the system and its key role in ensuring uninterrupted financial interaction among market participants. It is expected that, amid further digitalization of the economy, ICS indicators will continue to grow, contributing to the development of the country's financial infrastructure.

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Uzbekistan: TBC Introduces Life Insurance to Broaden Financial Services

TBC Uzbekistan has officially launched its insurance services under the brand TBC Insurance, Trend reports. The insurance solution is seamlessly embedded within the TBC UZ mobile platform and initially provides a credit life insurance offering. Per the organization's disclosure, upwards of 140,000 insurance contracts have been disseminated since the service's preliminary rollout in April 2025. The strategic diversification into an expanded portfolio of personal insurance offerings is slated for imminent execution. The insurance credential was conferred by the National Agency of Perspective Projects of Uzbekistan in March 2025. The organization articulated that the insurance initiative constitutes a pivotal component of its overarching strategy to cultivate a holistic digital banking ecosystem. Over the preceding fiscal year, TBC Uzbekistan has launched a suite of innovative financial instruments, encompassing both debit and credit card offerings, as well as tailored banking solutions specifically designed for small and medium-sized enterprises. TBC Uzbekistan functions as a strategic subsidiary under the umbrella of the London-listed TBC Bank Group, establishing itself as a pivotal player within the digital financial ecosystem of Central Asia.

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: NSW Budget Investing in Healthier Families and Communities

The Minns Labor Government is supporting healthier families and communities with more than $83 million to boost maternity care and $37.5 million to expand the NSW Mobile Dental Van program, as part of the 2025-26 NSW Budget. Increased maternity support Women and their babies will benefit from expanded support with an investment of more than $83 million for maternity care, family care centres and vaccination. This investment in the 2025-26 Budget includes: •$44.8 million to increase access to midwifery continuity of care models, including an additional 53 full-time equivalent midwives in regional NSW. •Enhanced training for clinicians in respectful maternity care. •Enhanced antenatal education and consumer information for patients. •$26.8 million to maintain seven family care centres, five mobile services and the Macksville residential unit, all in regional and rural NSW.

•$5.7 million to support free vaccination to pregnant women to protect them and their babies from whooping cough, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus infection. •$250,000 for virtual paediatrician support to general practitioners across NSW. Approximately 90,000 women give birth in NSW each year. This investment in maternity care will improve experiences for women and their children during pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period and lead to better lifelong outcomes. Expanded public dental services The Minns Labor Government is increasing access to dental care for people in rural and regional communities through a $37.5 million investment in the state's Mobile Dental Van program. People in regional NSW, Aboriginal people, disadvantaged children and communities with a high-risk of dental disease will receive free education, dental care and oral health hygiene products as part of this investment.

As many as 7,500 additional people per year are expected to receive care from the expanded NSW Health Mobile Dental Van program, which will run in addition to the popular NSW Health Primary School Mobile Dental Program and other NSW public dental services. Mobile dental vans are staffed by experienced NSW Health oral health clinicians and are fully equipped dental clinics which can deliver a broad scope of dental treatment closer to home for patients who don't live close to a public dental clinic. The vans are already operational across 11 local health districts in NSW, with the additional vans to be provided to targeted areas with higher levels of disadvantage, further distance to travel for dental treatment and poor oral health outcomes.

Supporting healthier families and communities continues the Minns Labor Government's plan to build a better NSW in the 2025-26 NSW Budget. Increasing access to dental care and supporting women and their babies are key to the Minns Labor Government's comprehensive plan to deliver better essential services that people rely on and build a better NSW. Quotes attributable to Treasurer, Daniel Mookhey: "This is a critical investment to ensure every family can access the care they need, when they need it, no matter where they live. "These investments will expand care to the people who need it most, improving outcomes for families across NSW. "The Minns Government's third Budget reflects our commitment to rebuilding essential health services, to ensure the highest quality of care."

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health, Ryan Park "The first 2000 days of life, from conception to age five, is a critical time for physical, cognitive, social and emotional health, and development and can have a lifelong impact on a child's wellbeing and quality of life. "The Minns Labor Government's investment in maternity care, regional parenting support services and vaccination programs for pregnant women, will help all babies born in NSW w get the very best start to life. "By also investing $37.5 million dollars to expand the highly regarded NSW Health Mobile Dental Van Program, we are demonstrating our commitment to preventive care and early intervention. "Since being elected, we have had a strong focus on delivering better essential services people rely on. While there's much more work to do, these important investments are critical to building better health services right across NSW."

From https://afndaily.com.au 07/05/2025

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NEW ZEALAND: Business Gives Clear Backing to RSB

Regulation Minister David Seymour is welcoming BusinessNZ's strong support for the Regulatory Standards Bill as a means to deal with red tape and regulation. "After all the misinformed opposition we've heard, the people who get up in the morning to make an honest buck and deliver goods and services to New Zealanders want red tape and regulation dealt to and believe this Bill will help them do that. "Submitting on the Bill at select committee today, BusinessNZ said it was an important step towards improving the quality of regulation and reducing the compliance burden on businesses by putting more scrutiny on politicians when law is made. "The academics who have been so loud about this Bill are so far removed from reality partly because many of Parliament's damaging laws don't frustrate their ability to make a living. If they were held back by red tape and regulation on a daily basis, like many businesses are, they would support this Bill. "Too often, politicians find regulating politically rewarding, and we need to make it less rewarding by putting more sunlight on their activities. "The Bill doesn't stop politicians or their officials making bad laws, but it makes it transparent that they're doing it. It makes it easier for voters to identify those responsible for making bad rules. Over time, it will improve the quality of rules we all have to live under by changing how politicians behave. “In a high-cost economy, regulation isn’t neutral – it’s a tax on growth. This Government is committed to clearing the path of needless regulations by improving how laws are made.”

From https://www.beehive.govt.nz 07/08/2025

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Government Announces $600,000 Support Package for Flood-Affected Farmers, Growers and Foresters

The Government is increasing its financial contribution to support rural communities in the Nelson Tasman Region, with additional funding to help farmers, foresters, growers and rural contractors recover from recent severe weather events. Agriculture and Forestry Minister Todd McClay speaking during a visit to the Tasman District today announced an additional $600,000 in Government and industry support, bringing the total Government financial contribution for the affected primary sector to $500,000. “These regions have experienced significant damage to forests, farms and rural infrastructure. This funding will help meet immediate recovery needs and help rural businesses get back on their feet,” Mr McClay says.

The support package includes: A $300,000 Government contribution to the Mayoral Relief Fund tagged to the rural sector. $100,000 contribution by the Government and Federated Farmers to the Farmers Adverse Events Trust to support with the immediate recovery needs for the most impacted pastoral farmers in the Nelson Tasman region. $100,000 contribution by the Government and Horticulture New Zealand, to help the horticulture sector across the Top of the South. $100,000 announced by Government in June to support and coordinate recovery efforts, including $20,000 for the Top of the South Rural Support Trust. “We continue to work with New Zealand Winegrowers to ensure appropriate support for affected vineyards, including the potential use of Enhanced Taskforce Green,” Mr McClay said.

“Many farmers and growers are facing their second clean-up in a fortnight from floods and storm damage. Rural communities are resilient, but the relentless wet weather conditions have taken a toll. This support is designed to provide meaningful and direct assistance quickly,” Mr McClay says. MPI staff are on the ground working with the Rural Support Trust and industry groups assessing damage and coordinating assistance. “Farmers, foresters and growers will face many, many months of work to repair damage to their land and get their businesses back on track. We will continue to assess what further assistance might be required.” “Farmers and growers who need help or assistance should in the first instance contact their local Rural Support Trust on 0800 787 254,” Mr McClay said.

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Inflation Remains Within Target Range

New data released today shows inflation remains under control, Finance Minister Nicola Willis says. Stats NZ released the Consumers Price Index today, showing inflation increased slightly to 2.7 per cent in the 12 months to the June 2025 quarter, remaining in the Reserve Bank's target range. "It's the fourth consecutive quarter inflation has remained within the target range – a stark contrast to under the previous government, where inflation raged on unchecked, reaching 7.3 per cent in 2022," Nicola Willis says. "New Zealanders can be assured it now has a Government that is paying attention to forces that affect their cost of living. "It's pleasing to see non-tradeables inflation – which paints a picture of domestic demand and supply conditions – continues to fall. "However, the effect of council rates on inflation is a concern." Stats NZ noted the largest single contributor to annual inflation was local authority rates and payments, which rose 12.2 per cent in the year. "That's why this Government has also been clear in its call to councils to focus on the basics and keep rates under control. We look forward to councils taking heed of this and playing their role as stewards of ratepayers' money better in the future. "External pressures on inflation remain, and we must remain cautious – it's a reminder that the economic recovery is not to be taken for granted. "That's why this Government is focused on economic growth, because that is New Zealand's pathway to more jobs, higher incomes and the money to pay for schools, hospitals and safer communities."

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6、Private Sector

Asia-Pacific

Low-Altitude Economy Attracts More Aero Firms

Eyeing China's booming low-altitude mobility sector, a number of companies unveiled their latest cutting-edge products and solutions at the first International Advanced Air Mobility Expo, which kicked off on Wednesday in Shanghai and will run through Saturday. With participation of nearly 300 exhibitors from around the globe, the event is expected to attract over 50,000 visitors, event organizers said. A variety of electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft are on display. For example, Vector5 — the world's first large payload eVTOL aircraft designed by Vision Aero Ltd for emergency medical service and search and rescue — was unveiled at the event. With a maximum payload of 680 kilograms and takeoff weight of 3,180 kg, the seven-seat eVTOL aircraft developed by the Xi'an, Shaanxi province-based company is equipped with sufficient medical devices and fixation systems for stretchers. Compared with existing medevac helicopters, the eco-friendly aircraft can greatly reduce costs and improve efficiency when dealing with emergency rescue demands. "We expect to roll out a more cost-effective model compared to traditional helicopters with Vector5, by cutting the purchase cost by about 50 percent, thanks to the complete supply chain in China," said Hu Yiqiang, general manager of the company. "The low-altitude economy is booming in China, and we see potential market demand for eVTOL aircraft in the medical service sector."

Also eyeing overseas markets, Vision Aeronautics is expanding its layout worldwide in regions such as Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. During the expo, unmanned aircraft designed for logistics and transportation also attracted large crowds. Among them, the "Air Jeep" AI-101 — a super short take-off and landing (SuperSTOL) intelligent aircraft developed by McLean (Shanghai) Intelligent Technology Co Ltd — made its world debut at the expo. With a take-off and landing distance shorter than 40 meters and a minimum takeoff distance of 7 meters, the large fixed-wing unmanned aircraft is tailored for courier services within 600 kilometers, said the company. "The number of deliveries soared over 160-fold from 2010 to 2024 in China. Our aircraft can carry 500 kg of goods, and require no general aviation airports or long runways to take off or land. Logistics firms are in urgent need of such aircraft, which has been rushing us forward," said Ma Liqi, co-founder and CEO of McLean. Big names from overseas are also at the expo. Sky Enterprises Inc from the United States is displaying its amphibious aircraft RC-3 Seabee for the first time in China. The model can adapt to complex take-off and landing scenarios such as water surfaces, grasslands, snowy fields and sandy areas. Its first version was produced in 1946, and since then, it has been widely applied in over 30 countries in fields such as tourism, transportation, emergency rescue, logistics and express delivery, forest fire fighting and border patrols.

The aircraft has been through comprehensive upgrades to improve its load and endurance performance so as to tap into the Chinese market. Planning to obtain Chinese certificates within 10 months, the company said it is looking to launch a manufacturing base in the country, and deliver its upgraded aircraft around the end of next year. Celia Chen, CEO of the company, said: "We believe this is the best time for us to enter China as we see the nation's great efforts in promoting the low-altitude economy, which gives us full confidence and solid support. The nation has a well-developed supply chain and advanced artificial intelligence technologies, and we hope to take such advantages to carry the classic aircraft forward."

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WIC Hosts Training on Digital Economy for Member Enterprises

During the 2025 World Internet Conference Digital Silk Road Development Forum, the World Internet Conference Digital Academy, in collaboration with the Data and Technical Support Center of the Cyberspace Administration of China, successfully organized and held two advanced training sessions on digital economy innovation and development. On July 24, WIC member units and Quanzhou's representative enterprises were invited to attend a dedicated session on issues concerning enterprises, and personal privacy protection. As a key initiative to enhance the capacity-building services for its members, the World Internet Conference launched this training program, which was carefully designed to address the urgent and common needs voiced by enterprises in multiple member symposiums and research visits. Authoritative experts from the Data and Technical Support Center of the Cyberspace Administration of China and China Electronics Standardization Institute delivered lectures on-site. They provided participants with the latest policy interpretations, analysis of international rules, and practical case guidance, helping enterprises tackle challenges such as the refinement of cross-border data flow regulations and the strengthening of compliance responsibility systems.

At the opening ceremony of the training, Liang Hao, the executive deputy secretary-general of the WIC and executive vice dean of the WICDA said amidst the vigorous global development of the digital economy, policy environments both domestically and internationally are undergoing profound changes, raising a series of requirements on enterprises in areas such as compliance management, security technology, risk assessment, and cross-border collaboration. The official expressed hope that participants would gain valuable knowledge through the training, apply what they have learned—to "come with questions and leave with solutions. "The official also hoped that enterprise representatives, embracing the responsibility of industry leaders, would translate their learning into concrete actions and elevate best practices into industry standards, thereby promoting substantial industry development in the era of the digital economy. A senior official from the Data and Technical Support Center of the Cyberspace Administration of China said that the Communist Party of China Central Committee attaches great importance to data security. In recent years, China has enacted laws, issued departmental rules, and launched a series of enforcement actions against illegal data practices to safeguard national data security and citizens' legitimate rights. Data compliance has become a "compulsory course" for enterprises—essential for lawful operations, key to enhancing competitiveness, and a core aspect of international soft power. The official expressed the hope that the training session would serve as a platform for industry-enterprise dialogue, setting the stage for innovation while balancing data development and security.

Many participants expressed that the training was not only highly forward-looking, instructive, and practical but also offered new strategic perspectives and actionable insights for enterprise development. In addition, it contributed wisdom and experience to advancing global data governance. Moving forward, the World Internet Conference Digital Academy will closely monitor the development trends of member enterprises. It will continue to organize specialized training activities centered on policy frontiers and enterprise concerns, offering precise and practical guidance to help enterprises navigate the wave of the digital economy steadily and achieve sustainable growth.

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ABAC Calls for Open, Predictable and Rules-Based Trade in Standalone Statement

At its meeting this week in Hai Phong, Viet Nam, the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) calls on APEC Leaders to reaffirm their commitment to open, predictable, rules-based, non-discriminatory and competitive markets. The Chair of ABAC's Regional Economic Integration Working Group, Anna Curzon of ABAC New Zealand, noted the region's remarkable success in raising living standards and creating jobs and opportunities has been grounded in open markets and underpinned by the global system of trade rules. But that is now in jeopardy in the face of mounting trade tensions, policy volatility and global uncertainty. "The current turmoil, including rising protectionism, is a distraction from the critical work of revitalizing businesses and our economies, and tackling critical challenges to achieving a prosperous, sustainable future. It poses substantial threats to the international economic outlook," said Curzon. "In our Open Markets Statement, we are presenting our Leaders with more than recommendations—we are offering a strategic roadmap to restore the economic dynamism that defines our region. Our ask is simple. We are urging our Leaders to help create the breathing room we need to get back to work," concluded Curzon. The statement can be found here.

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East Asia

CHINA: Vice Premier Stresses High-quality Development of Manufacturing Industry

Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing has called for efforts to empower the manufacturing sector with science and technology, accelerate industrial innovation, and continue to promote the high-quality development of the manufacturing industry. Zhang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during an inspection tour in central China's Hubei Province from Tuesday to Wednesday. He urged efforts to advance new industrialization and promote the high-end, intelligent, and green development of the manufacturing industry. The deep integration of technological innovation and industrial innovation should be vigorously promoted, and the in-depth integration of the digital economy with the real economy should be further advanced, he said. Efforts are needed to focus on smart manufacturing and accelerate the cultivation of vertical models in various industries, so as to transform artificial intelligence into new quality productive forces through its wide application in the manufacturing sector, Zhang said. Recently, some regions in China have been hit by heavy rain. The vice premier stressed that top priority should always be given to ensuring people's lives and safety and minimizing casualties.

From http://www.news.cn/ 07/02/2025

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Chinese Companies Embrace AI-driven Industrial Upgrades

When picturing a steel factory, words like "heavy," "smoky," and "arduous" often come to mind. But a technological breakthrough is proving that the iron and steel industry can be smart and sophisticated, thanks to the power of artificial intelligence (AI). Shougang Group, one of China's largest steelmakers, is leading the way with an AI-powered visual system that is transforming the entire steelmaking process from labor-driven to model-driven. With this cutting-edge technology in place, the steel giant has boosted production efficiency by over 20 percent and reduced defects by 35 percent. Exemplifying the shift toward digital and intelligent industrial transformation, the AI-powered system was named one of the top 10 benchmark applications at the 2025 Global Digital Economy Conference, which wrapped up in Beijing on Saturday. During the event, business leaders and industry representatives discussed the growing impact of AI across industries, highlighting China's broader push toward smart manufacturing.

"For a company of our size, the top priority in the face of the ongoing AI revolution is to explore how this technology can deliver better solutions to our challenges, and how it improves quality, increases efficiency and reduces cost," said Jiang Xingqun, senior vice president of BOE Technology Group Co., Ltd., one of the world's largest display panel manufacturers. "Traditional visual technology has been widely used for quality checks, but it still falls short in addressing some issues," Jiang said. "This is why we employ AI for data labeling, model training, and detection of defects and abnormalities." He noted that in recent years, BOE has also developed its own automated decision-making system, which is already being used in production. The company has been actively seeking ways to integrate AI into display panel manufacturing, a comprehensive process that encompasses quality inspection, monitoring and analysis, defect repairs, and equipment maintenance.

With the help of AI, BOE has effectively improved graphic processing efficiency, shortened defect handling cycles, and reduced labor costs. Similarly, numerous companies across the country are accelerating their digital transformation efforts. According to the China Internet Development Report 2024, the country now has nearly 10,000 digitalized workshops and intelligent factories. Of these, more than 400 have been recognized as national-level benchmark factories in smart manufacturing, utilizing technologies such as AI and digital twins. Industry insiders highlighted that the costs of large models have dropped sharply over the past year, creating favorable conditions for the application of AI technologies. Ruan Yu, vice president of Baidu, noted that as costs continue to fall, large AI models are becoming a core productivity tool for an increasing number of enterprises. According to Zhang Di, vice president of Kuaishou Technology and head of Kling AI, AI video generator technology will continue to evolve.

By providing interactive and lifelike environments, it will further boost the development of the industrial internet and accelerate the digital transformation of manufacturing and other traditional industries, Zhang said. In recent years, the Chinese government has introduced a wide range of measures to accelerate AI innovation and promote its application, intending to support new industrialization and the development of the industrial sector. "The industrial sector is a cornerstone of China's economy, characterized by its large scale, wide scope and diverse scenarios. It is a primary arena for AI applications," said Zhao Chaofan, an official with the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. Zhao added that the ministry will continue to actively advance AI adoption, organize regular initiatives to integrate AI with new industrialization, and promote model solutions for AI applications.

These efforts aim to ensure that the technology more effectively supports the real economy, Zhao said. Looking ahead, Gu Weixi, researcher at the China Academy of Industrial Internet, noted that several challenges remain for AI applications in the industrial sector. For instance, AI service providers lack sufficient channels to reach customers, while manufacturing companies have limited knowledge of cutting-edge AI technologies. To address these challenges, several analysts have called for better alignment between supply and demand, which would help AI products enhance performance while reducing costs and increasing efficiency in the industrial sector. "China is equipped with a comprehensive range of industrial categories, which provide access to diverse application scenarios and abundant data," said Mao Shengbo, partner at MiraclePlus, a startup incubator. "By fully leveraging China's strengths in its industrial chain, application scenarios and market size, we can create an entirely new AI supply chain and ecosystem."

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Global Companies Eye Digital, Green Supply Chain

At the Siemens' booth at the third China International Supply Chain Expo in Beijing, the German conglomerate is exhibiting digital solutions powered by the latest technologies, including artificial intelligence and the industrial metaverse. These solutions, along with numerous others from Siemens' partners, on its open digital platform called Xcelerator, aim to facilitate digital transformation and low-carbon growth of enterprises. The platform will deliver innovative solutions to the global market and match Chinese suppliers with international opportunities, helping accelerate their integration into the global value chain, according to Siemens. Xiao

Song, chairman, president and CEO of Siemens China, emphasized the company's commitment to helping Chinese firms upgrade advanced manufacturing capabilities with digital and low-carbon technologies on its open platform.

Siemens aims to help Chinese firms "build green competitiveness globally as well as more resilient and sustainable global industrial and supply chains," Xiao said. As the global industrial landscape undergoes rapid restructuring, Xiao noted that the expo is becoming an important platform for promoting the deep integration of the whole industrial chain and supporting Chinese firms to go overseas while meeting green standards. Siemens is just one of the multinational companies that are displaying their latest digital and green technologies at the expo, underlining their efforts to build resilient, low-carbon supply networks and deepen ties with Chinese partners. The supply chain expo, which runs from Wednesday to Sunday, is seen as a key platform for multinational firms to strengthen collaboration with Chinese partners amid global economic uncertainties. The event has attracted 651 companies and institutions from 75 countries and regions.

Overseas exhibitors account for 35 percent, a three-percentage-point increase from last year. Bosch, another German industrial giant, is concentrating on intelligent and electric vehicle components at the expo, tapping into China's rapidly expanding new energy vehicle market, which is also the largest in the world. Chinese consumers are highly receptive to new technologies in electric and intelligent-connected vehicles, with automotive models evolving at an incredible pace. Bosch highlighted the importance of cooperation and localization for long-term growth. "During this critical period of accelerated transformation in the global automotive supply chain, open cooperation and strengthened local manufacturing and innovation capability are key to long-term sustainable growth," said Xu Daquan, president of Bosch China.

"Bosch will continue to work with local partners in China to help build a more resilient, flexible and globally oriented smart mobility supply ecosystem," Xu said. Amid digital transformation, Bosch's industrial internet solutions empower both upstream and downstream suppliers while Bosch itself is widely adopting AI technologies to better predict demand and manage inventory amid efforts to build a flexible and resilient supply chain. Schneider Electric, a first-time participant at the expo, exhibits both hardware products and digital green solutions. The company is working to build an efficient and resilient green supply chain capable of responding swiftly to market shifts. "The supply chain expo provides an important platform for global enterprises, especially in green supply chain construction," said Yin Zheng, executive vice-president of Schneider Electric and president of its China and East Asia operations.

Yin added that Schneider Electric hopes to share its experience and seek more cooperation opportunities through the event. Aerospace giant Airbus also eyes greener development while boosting localization for a more resilient supply chain.

Erik Buschmann, chief operating officer of Airbus China, stated the company's commitment to transforming the aviation industry into a greener industry while ensuring the sustainable use of resources. At a forum of the expo, Buschmann said many parts of its A320 aircraft assembled in Tianjin are from Chinese suppliers, which is underlying Airbus' intention that "we want to be more local." "We try to have a very strong local footprint. We're working to increase that in order to put more emphasis on resilience," Buschmann said.

From http://www.news.cn/ 07/19/2025

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Foreign Investment Expands Southwest China's "Sweet" Industry Chain

In the industrial park of Mile City, Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture of southwest China's Yunnan Province, Japanese firm Rexxam Co., Ltd. is nurturing a "sweet harvest," turning local abundant molasses resources into a thriving yeast industry. The company has recently broken ground on a new factory, which is set to produce 20,000 tonnes of yeast annually for food and pharmaceuticals. Yeast, a microorganism, has long been a key player in human activities such as brewing and baking. Rich in protein, vitamins and minerals, yeast offers many health benefits and is now widely used in food, medicine, health care and cosmetics. Molasses, a by-product of sugar production from sugarcane, is the primary raw material for yeast production. It takes about 5 tonnes of molasses to produce 1 tonne of yeast. Yunnan is China's second-largest sugarcane production base, accounting for about 20 percent of the country's total sugar output.

According to statistics from Kunming Customs, in 2024, Yunnan exported nearly 22,000 tonnes of active yeast, a year-on-year increase of 11.8 percent, to 59 countries and regions worldwide. "Yunnan's rich and low-cost molasses resources offer Rexxam a stable and sustainable raw material advantage. This not only supports industrial waste valorization but also brings both economic and environmental benefits," said Jia Yankun, representative of Rexxam's Kunming office. Founded in 1960, Rexxam has been operating in China for nearly three decades since its entry in 1995. It is one of the longest-standing and most active Japanese investors in the region. Starting with wood processing and flower cultivation, the company gradually shifted its focus to the biofermentation industry, aiming to develop a "sweet industry chain" centered on molasses.

In 2014, Rexxam built a yeast production line in Baoshan City, Yunnan, with an annual capacity of 5,000 tonnes. The factory primarily produces yeast products as feed, supplying yeast hydrolysates and yeast selenium to several large domestic feed companies. These products are also exported to Japan, Southeast Asia, Europe and other countries and regions. The success of the Baoshan project has strengthened Rexxam's confidence in expanding its yeast business in China. "We value not only Yunnan's raw material resources but also the increasingly open and inclusive business environment and the improving industrial infrastructure here," Jia added. In June, at the 9th China-South Asia Expo, Rexxam signed a cooperation agreement with Mile City to invest 700 million yuan (about 98 million U.S. dollars) in the new plant. The first phase, with a capacity of 5,000 tonnes, is expected to start production in early 2027.

"The new plant will represent a significant upgrade in terms of production scale, product variety and overall facilities compared to our existing Baoshan factory," Jia said. In the overall plan for the new Mile factory, Rexxam also intends to recycle the organic wastewater generated during yeast production into high-efficiency organic fertilizer, which will then be provided free of charge to local farmers for the cultivation of sugarcane and other crops. Not just Rexxam from Japan, but an increasing number of foreign-invested enterprises from countries and regions such as the United States, Australia and Thailand are choosing to take root in China's southwestern region, driving rural revitalization.

Statistics show that, as of now, enterprises from 114 countries and regions around the world have invested in Yunnan, establishing a total of 7,105 foreign-invested enterprises and utilizing 24.98 billion U.S. dollars in actual foreign capital. China's determination to open up has boosted foreign investment. According to data from the Ministry of Commerce, from January to May 2025, China saw 24,018 new foreign-invested enterprises established, representing a 10.4 percent year-on-year increase. A survey by the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in China shows that more than half of the surveyed companies plan to "increase" or "maintain" their investment in China in 2025.

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China's Economic Planner Holds Symposium on State-owned, Private Enterprise Development

China's top economic planner on Wednesday held a symposium with business representatives to solicit opinions and suggestions on the collaborative development of state-owned and private enterprises for the upcoming 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030). Zheng Shanjie, head of the National Development and Reform Commission, chaired the symposium and engaged in in-depth discussions with participating business leaders. He pledged to take practical measures to improve systems and mechanisms for the collaborative development of state-owned and private enterprises, address the rat race competition, expand industrial and supply chain cooperation, promote technological innovation, and optimize corporate governance and international business services. Zheng also promised to maintain and improve regular communication channels with businesses and provide full support to private enterprises in resolving practical difficulties, promoting their healthy and high-quality development.

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China's Major Industrial Firms Report Narrower June Profit Decline amid Policy Support

Profits of China's major industrial firms saw a smaller decline in June 2025, with the manufacturing sector showing significant improvement, official data showed Sunday. Industrial firms with an annual main business revenue of at least 20 million yuan (about 2.8 million U.S. dollars) saw their combined profits reach 3.44 trillion yuan during the January-June period, down 1.8 percent year on year, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). In June, profits of China's major industrial firms slipped 4.3 percent year on year, 4.8 percentage points narrower than the decline seen in May. Notably, profits of major firms in the manufacturing sector reversed from a drop of 4.1 percent to grow by 1.4 percent in June. The operating revenue of these firms increased by 1 percent year on year in June, maintaining the same growth rate as in May. "This sustained revenue growth has created favorable conditions for the recovery of corporate profits," said NBS statistician Yu Weining.

Among the manufacturing sectors, equipment manufacturing saw rapid growth in profits last month. The automotive industry stood out in this regard -- achieving a profit surge of 96.8 percent in June, driven both by automakers' sales promotions and increased investment returns from major enterprises. Profits in the electrical machinery, instrument manufacturing and metal products industries grew by 18.7 percent, 12.3 percent and 6.2 percent, respectively, in June, said Yu. Industries related to China's industrial transformation and upgrading endeavors reported outstanding profit growth in June -- with the aircraft manufacturing sector seeing profits increase by 19 percent, lithium-ion battery manufacturing recording a profit surge of 72.8 percent, and biomass power generation profits up by 24.5 percent. Since the beginning of 2025, China has expanded the coverage scope of its equipment upgrades and consumer goods trade-in program, leading to notable profit improvements in relevant industries, said Yu.

Boosted by this policy, the medical equipment manufacturing sector saw profits increase by 12.1 percent in June, while companies on the industrial chain of goods such as consumer electronics and home appliances also enjoyed noteworthy profit increases. Despite rising challenges and external uncertainties, China achieved steady economic growth in the first half of 2025 -- with its gross domestic product growing by 5.3 percent year on year, NBS data released earlier this month revealed. The data showed that China's value-added industrial output increased by 6.4 percent compared to the same period last year, fueled by rapid growth in the equipment manufacturing and high-tech manufacturing sectors. Looking ahead, Yu emphasized the need to advance the building of a unified national market and steadfastly promote the high-quality development of the industrial economy. "These efforts will continuously consolidate the foundation for the recovery of industrial enterprises' performance," Yu said.

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China Honors Outstanding Builders of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in Non-public Sector

China's top political advisor Wang Huning on Tuesday called on individuals from the non-public sector of the economy and new social strata to stay committed to serving as builders of socialism with Chinese characteristics and contributors to Chinese modernization. Wang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, made the remarks while addressing a ceremony in Beijing, where 100 individuals from the non-public sector and new social strata were honored with the title "Outstanding Builders of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics." Wang emphasized the importance of giving full play to the exemplary role of the awardees to encourage more people from these sectors to work in unity and strive to achieve success. Recognizing their contributions in advancing the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, Wang expressed the hope that people from the non-public sector and new social strata will dedicate themselves to serving the nation, focus on development, abide by the law, and promote common prosperity while pursuing wealth. Party committees and governments at all levels should earnestly implement policies and measures that support the development of the private sector, and protect the legitimate rights and interests of private enterprises and entrepreneurs in accordance with the law, Wang said.

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JAPAN: Mizuho Partners with SoftBank on AI to Boost Efficiency

Mizuho Financial Group Inc. said Friday that it has signed a strategic partnership agreement with SoftBank Corp. to introduce cutting-edge artificial intelligence to streamline operations and improve customer services. Mizuho will be the first in the financial sector to introduce "Cristal intelligence," which is being developed jointly by SoftBank and OpenAI, the U.S. developer of the ChatGPT generative AI tool. Mizuho expects the latest AI technology, which optimizes corporate tasks, to help the company increase revenue and cut costs, resulting in positive effects totaling 300 billion yen by fiscal 2030. Using the technology, Mizuho plans to analyze transaction data and market trends to quickly provide corporate customers with management advice. The financial group also expects the technology to help boost productivity in its sales activities more than twofold and reduce low-value operations by up to 50 pct.

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Japan's SMEs Ready to Adapt to Trump Tariffs

Small and medium-sized firms like Mitsuwa Electric that form the backbone of Japan's economy have weathered many storms over the decades, and company president Yuji Miyazaki is hopeful they will also withstand Donald Trump. As part of a campaign against friend and foe, the U.S. president has threatened 25 percent tariffs on imports of Japanese goods from August 1, having already imposed tough levies on its vehicles, steel and aluminium. However, Miyazaki told AFP that he was confident. "We are providing very specialised products for specialised industries, where it is difficult to change suppliers or supplying countries just because of boosted tariffs," he said on a tour of the 92-year-old firm. "I'm not worried too much, because if American companies can't produce parts on their own, they have no choice but to import those parts regardless of tariffs," the descendant of the firm's founder said. With 100 employees, Mitsuwa Electric is not a household name.

But like millions of other SMEs that account for 99.7 percent of Japan's companies, it is world-class in its specialist niche. It began making light bulb filaments and now produces coils, rods, needles, plates, pipes and wires for a range of goods including car lights, photocopiers and X-ray machines. In 2022 it won a Guinness World Record for the smallest commercially available metal coil, with a diameter around half that of a human hair. Mitsuwa's customers are across Asia, Europe and North America and include Japanese engineering giant Toshiba and Toyota-affiliated parts maker Koito Manufacturing. Miyazaki said the impact of U.S. tariffs on the company's business is limited so far, with one auto sector customer asking it to lower prices. "All we can do is to adapt to any changes in the business environment," Miyazaki said. Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba has sent his tariffs envoy Ryosei Akazawa to Washington seven times since April to try to win relief from the tariffs.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent was due to meet Ishiba and Akazawa on Friday in Tokyo. But the prime minister's apparently maximalist strategy of insisting all tariffs are cut to zero have been criticized in some parts, especially as August 1 approaches. U.S.-bound exports of Japanese vehicles -- a sector tied to eight percent of Japanese jobs -- tumbled around 25 percent in May and June. The lack of a deal isn't helping Ishiba's popularity ahead of upper house elections on Sunday that may end Ishiba's premiership after less than a year. What bothers Japanese firms is Trump's unpredictability and the complexity of the tariffs, according to government-backed SME support organization JETRO. Since February, the group has received more than 2,000 enquiries from members about U.S. tariffs, with a flood of requests since June asking for "the latest information" as the deadline approaches. Mitsuwa Electric boss Miyazaki admits worrying about Trump's threat of pharmaceuticals tariffs of 200 percent, or if medical equipment is targeted.

Together with its broad product range, the diversification of its customer base has shielded it so far, he said. This is also vital for other firms to survive, said Zenkai Inoue, an SME expert and professor at the Kyushu Institute of Information Sciences. "I'm proposing a 'tricycle strategy', which means you have to have (at least) three customers in different regions," he told AFP. "For SMEs, securing financial stability by asking banks for their funding is important to survive for the time being, then the next step would be expanding their sales channels to other markets," he said. Inoue added that some Japanese firms had been slow to prepare for Trump's tariffs, even after he said he would during his 2024 election campaign. "There was a time when Japanese companies, having heavily relied on the Chinese market, (were) hurt badly by a sudden change in China's policy. But some of them have not learnt a lesson enough from that experience," he said.

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SOUTH KOREA: Major Firms Spend 0.1 Pct of Revenue on Cybersecurity Data

Major companies in South Korea allocated only about 0.1 percent of their total revenues for investments in cybersecurity over the past three years, a corporate data tracker said Wednesday. According to data compiled by CEO Score, 585 companies that disclosed their cybersecurity spending on a public portal run by the Korea Internet & Security Agency (KISA) invested a combined 2.24 trillion won (US$1.63 billion) in information security in 2024. This figure represents a 28.4 percent increase from 1.77 trillion won in 2022. Despite the increase, cybersecurity investment accounted for just 0.13 percent of the companies' total revenue of 1,787.3 trillion won in 2024, up slightly from 0.1 percent in 2022 and 0.12 percent in 2023. By contrast, their investments in information technology, including artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, rose from 28.8 trillion won in 2022 to 36.1 trillion won last year. Cybersecurity consistently made up only about 6.1 percent of that IT spending during the cited period. By company, Samsung Electronics Co. spent most on cybersecurity, investing 356.2 billion won last year. Major mobile carrier KT Corp. came next with 125 billion won. E-commerce giant Coupang invested 86.1 billion won, followed by LG Uplus Corp. with 82.8 billion won and SK Telecom Co., which reported a massive data breach in April, with 65.2 billion won.

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SK Telecom Joins State-Led Project to Advance Korean AI Models

SK Telecom announced Thursday that it has joined the Ministry of Science and ICT's "AI Foundation Model" project, furthering its strategy to build independent artificial intelligence optimized for the Korean language. Since 2018, SKT has focused on developing large language models tailored to Korean. It launched KoBERT, Korea's first deep-learning language model, in 2019, followed by KoGPT2 and KoBART, contributing to the advancement of Korea's AI ecosystem. These models have supported both customer-facing services and open-source collaboration. The company's proprietary A.X series, developed entirely from scratch, has been integrated into real-world services via its AI assistant platform "A." A.X 1 focused on emotional conversation, A.X 2 introduced knowledge-based responses, and A.X 3.0 improved reasoning speed and performance. These models have powered features like call summarization and AI agents. The latest version, A.X 4.0, enhances reasoning with external knowledge and employs continual pre-training, offering greater data security and improved Korean-language processing. It is already being used in SKT's commercial services, including enhanced call summaries. Notably, SKT also unveiled the A.X 3.1, with both standard (34 billion parameters) and lightweight (7 billion parameters) versions developed from scratch.

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South-East Asia

MALAYSIA: MSME Co-Investment Fund Reaches 280 Mln USD as of End-2024

The Malaysia Co-Investment Fund (MyCIF) has reached 1.19 billion ringgit (280 million U.S. dollars) in total co-investments as of end-2024 since its inception, supporting the growth of more than 9,500 micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the country, official data showed Monday. In its Annual Performance Report 2024 released on Monday, MyCIF said that 264 million ringgit were invested in 2024 alone. According to the statement, MyCIF has attracted 4.1 times the amount in private sector funding for every ringgit invested, demonstrating a strong crowding-in effect. This saw a 21.4 percent increase in total private investment. "The total co-investments by MyCIF represent 4.6 times of 260 million ringgit total funds disbursed from the government to date into the program, demonstrating efficient use of public funds," it noted. MyCIF, set up by the Ministry of Finance of Malaysia under Budget 2019, utilizes equity crowdfunding and peer-to-peer financing platforms to channel funds into MSMEs.

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Malaysia's Regulator Launches Greenhouse Gas Emission Calculator for SMEs

Capital Markets Malaysia (CMM), an affiliate of the Securities Commission Malaysia (SC), on Tuesday launched the Simplified ESG Disclosure Guide Greenhouse Gas Emission Calculator for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The CMM said in a statement that the user-friendly tool is designed to help Malaysian companies measure and report their Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions based on the globally recognized Greenhouse Gas Protocol. To ensure consistency and credibility, the tool utilizes a methodology which follows widely accepted international standards that are also used by the Malaysian government in the Biennial National Communications to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). "The calculator simplifies a complex process, making emissions reporting accessible even to first-time users. Beyond reporting, it also enables companies to pinpoint key emission sources across operations, allowing them to make informed decisions and move towards meaningful climate action," said Mohammad Faiz Azmi, executive chairman of the SC and chairman of CMM. He added that the calculator further complements efforts by the SC to promote consistent and credible sustainability disclosures and supports the adoption of the National Sustainability Reporting Framework by Malaysian companies.

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Malaysian PM Vows to Prioritize Strengthening Resilience in Semiconductor Sector

Malaysia will prioritize working with reliable partners and strengthening resilience in its semiconductor sector to shield it against external disruptions and trade tensions, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has said. Deepening regional cooperation through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other mechanisms will also help the sector resist external shocks and facilitate development through research and development, as well as by creating demand as companies in the region upskill and improve their own capabilities, Anwar on Thursday said in his keynote speech at the ASEAN Semiconductor Summit 2025. "True supply chain resilience means eliminating weak links, either by producing what we need effectively or securing reliable partnerships to access what lies beyond our domestic capabilities. In these volatile times, diversifying our options is not just wise, it is essential," he said. "Our established semiconductor ecosystem is well poised to help us move beyond an FDI-first model and focus on building homegrown champions. This does not mean turning away investors, but being more strategic and prudent. We want long-term collaborators who grow with us, and we will continue to welcome partners who strengthen our supply chains, transfer their knowledge and technologies," he added. Anwar added that Malaysia is working to expand its pool of trained engineers to address shortages, and that the country is also contributing to a broader ASEAN-wide effort -- leveraging the grouping's collective strengths rather than acting individually -- to more effectively address shared challenges. "Malaysia must build on its local strengths to serve a larger regional and global purpose. By strengthening our domestic ecosystem, we are also helping to raise ASEAN's industrial capacity," he said.

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SINGAPORE: Unveiling Grant to Help Firms Weather Tariff Challenges

Singapore will launch a new Business Adaptation Grant by October to help eligible enterprises adjust to the evolving tariff landscape, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong announced Thursday. The grant, available for a time-bound period of two years, will support enterprises that export to or operate in overseas markets and are affected by tariff measures. It will fund services such as free trade agreement and trade compliance advisory, legal and contractual guidance, as well as supply chain optimization and market diversification. Enterprises with manufacturing operations, whether abroad or within Singapore, may also receive support for reconfiguration costs, including logistics and inventory holding expenses. The initiative was announced at a press conference on the latest progress of the Singapore Economic Resilience Taskforce, a body established in April to help businesses and workers navigate the uncertainties arising from U.S. tariffs. Additional measures included expanded access to career guidance services and temporary enhanced funding support for basic human resource certification. Speaking at the press conference, Gan, who chairs the taskforce, warned that the latest round of U.S. tariffs would prolong global uncertainty and challenges to economies worldwide, further dampening trade flows and weighing on economic growth.

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VIETNAM: Retail Sales, Service Revenues Rise 9.3 Pct in 1st Half of Year

Vietnam's total retail sales of goods and consumer service revenues rose by 9.3 percent year on year in the first half of 2025, reaching over 3.4 quadrillion Vietnamese dong (approximately 130 billion U.S. dollars), Vietnam News Agency reported Monday, citing data from the Ministry of Finance. Revenues from accommodation and catering services grew by 14.7 percent during the period to 409.5 trillion dong (15.6 billion dollars), while tourism revenues surged by 23.2 percent to 46 trillion dong (1.7 billion dollars). Nguyen Thi Huong, director general of the ministry's National Statistics Office, said the commerce and service sector is expected to maintain strong momentum in the coming months. She attributed the positive outlook to supportive domestic consumption policies, tourism promotion campaigns, inflation control measures, and improved household incomes.

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South Asia

INDIA: Esri India in Noida Leads the Charge in GeoAI-Powered Solutions

Esri India Technologies is strengthening its position as a vital enabler of the nation’s digital transformation by supplying critical geospatial intelligence across sectors such as smart cities, disaster resilience, and national security. With over 6,500 organisational clients and around 1.2 million users engaging daily, Esri India is solidifying its role as a silent yet powerful backbone of India’s location-driven modernisation. Under the leadership of Managing Director Agendra Kumar since 2013, the company has transcended its traditional role as a GIS software vendor to become a pioneer of innovation. It has introduced initiatives like the Living Atlas, a cloud-based repository that compiles and curates geospatial data sourced from government entities. This platform allows spatial data previously trapped in PDFs or Excel files to be geo-referenced and transformed into over a thousand usable spatial layers. These resources support critical applications such as flood management and forest fire response. sri India has leveraged a blend of conventional GIS, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and three-dimensional visualisation to enhance its offerings. From urban traffic flow analysis and facial recognition to defence-grade simulations, these capabilities deliver cutting-edge functionality to a range of industries. One of the most discreet yet significant segments of Esri India’s portfolio is its work with defence and national security agencies. Here, geo-spatial data is maintained on client premises with stringent confidentiality. Esri’s teams often collaborate on-site under controlled conditions to preserve data integrity and security.

The company’s rapid expansion has been catalysed by recent policy reforms, including the National Geospatial Policy and revised drone regulations introduced in 2021. These changes have established a more stable and conducive environment for geospatial businesses, helping companies like Esri India accelerate adoption across industries. Demand is growing rapidly across manufacturing, logistics, banking, financial services, insurance, and retail. Emerging trends such as digital twins, 3D mapping, and location-intelligent planning are placing Esri India at the core of India’s digital economy. Agendra Kumar notes that the combination of policy support and technological evolution “has created a conducive ecosystem for business”. Today, Esri India stands at a pivotal junction. Its technology platforms serve both public and private sectors: municipalities deploying smart-city applications, environmental agencies managing natural hazards, and critical infrastructure providers optimising logistics. This strategic reach—not typically visible to the public—is what earns Esri India its reputation as the “invisible backbone” of India’s digital transformation. Moving forward, Esri India plans to deepen its presence. The company will continue expanding the Living Atlas dataset and introduce even more advanced tools involving AI, IoT integration, and real‑time spatial analytics. Collaboration with startups, government bodies, and academic institutions is expected to drive localised, cutting-edge geospatial solutions that serve both regional and national priorities. Esri India's evolution—transitioning from a GIS vendor to a central pillar of India's digital infrastructure—reflects the country's growing recognition of the strategic value of geospatial data. With supportive policies, a vast talent base, and escalating demand, Esri India is poised to light the spark for the next wave of geospatial innovation, ensuring that location intelligence becomes a critical asset for economic growth, governance, and social impact.

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CERT-In & BITS Pilani Join Forces to Launch Cybersecurity Programme

CERT-In and BITS Pilani have launched an 8-week professional development programme in cybersecurity for government, PSU, and industry professionals. The programme, starting July 19, aims to build cyber capacity through structured, practical training open to all domains, even without coding experience. Participants will receive a co-branded certificate from CERT-In and BITS Pilani, reflecting academic excellence and national institutional endorsement. In a landmark initiative aimed at strengthening India's cyber defence ecosystem, the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) has partnered with the Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS) Pilani to launch professional development programmes in cybersecurity. This strategic collaboration underscores a shared commitment to building a skilled and resilient cybersecurity workforce across government, public sector undertakings (PSUs), and industry. Set to commence on July 19, the 8-week programme has been specifically designed for working professionals, even those without prior coding experience. It will be delivered by BITS Pilani through its Centre for Research Excellence in National Security (CRENS) at the Hyderabad Campus, in collaboration with technology partner Rapifuzz, and under the guidance of CERT-In. Upon successful completion, participants will receive a Professional Development Certificate in Cybersecurity, co-branded by CERT-In and BITS Pilani underscoring both institutional credibility and national recognition. The programme is a direct response to the escalating global cyber threat landscape and the pressing need for advanced capacity-building in cybersecurity. It aims to equip professionals with practical knowledge and skills, aligned with current industry demands and national security priorities.

"India's cyber resilience finds its true strength not only in using and developing indigenous cutting-edge technology, but also in nurturing a vibrant, highly skilled talent pool ready to meet the challenges of the digital and quantum era", said Dr. Sanjay Bahl, Director General, CERT-In. He emphasized that this collaboration is a key milestone in aligning academic excellence with evolving cybersecurity needs. Professor V. Ramgopal Rao, Group Vice-Chancellor of BITS Pilani, echoed the sentiment, noting that cybersecurity is not merely a technical issue, but a national imperative. “This program reflects the strength of our academia-industry-government triad, and we are proud to offer it under CERT-In’s guidance”, he stated. CERT-In, operating under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, is India’s nodal agency for cyber incident response. Its initiatives are central to safeguarding the nation’s digital infrastructure, enhancing cyber resilience, and ensuring robust incident prevention and threat mitigation.

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HYCU Recognized for Organizational Excellence at 2025 GCC Workplace Awards India

HYCU named finalist in the 2025 GCC Workplace Awards India under the Organizational Excellence category, highlighting its people-first culture and operational excellence. Rapid growth in India operations with strong engineering and customer success teams, mentorship, and cross-functional collaboration. Recognition reflects core values of trust, accountability, and resilience, with a focus on sustainable workplace practices and long-term impact. HYCU, Inc., the world’s fastest-growing multi-cloud data protection company, has been named a finalist in the prestigious 2025 GCC Workplace Awards India under the category of Organizational Excellence. This recognition highlights HYCU’s commitment to building a people-first culture and driving operational excellence across its global operations. The GCC Workplace Awards celebrate organizations that are redefining the future of work through connection, recognition, and inspiration. HYCU's nomination underscores the strength of its thoughtful, values-driven systems and dedication to fostering an environment where employees thrive. “At HYCU, our mission is to build a safer world through universal data protection, but it starts with creating an environment where all HYCUers can do their best work”, said Simon Taylor, Founder and CEO of HYCU, Inc. “Being recognized for Organizational Excellence reflects the systems we’ve built to scale with purpose and integrity, while keeping our teams connected. Since our launch in India two years ago, it’s been incredible to see the progress Amar and the team have achieved”.

Over the past year, HYCU’s India operations have experienced rapid growth and transformation. The company has expanded its engineering and customer success teams, enhanced mentorship programs, and strengthened cross-functional collaboration. These initiatives are anchored in the company’s core values of trust, accountability, and resilience. Now in its second year, the GCC Workplace Awards recognize companies that demonstrate leadership alignment, culture-building, learning and development, and sustainable workplace practices. Finalists are chosen based on their long-term impact and commitment to workplace excellence. “We’re proud of what this team has accomplished and even more excited about where we're headed", said Amarnath Rampratap, Senior Director - R-Cloud & Bengaluru Site Leader - India R&D, HYCU, Inc. "This recognition is a powerful reminder that how we work matters just as much as what we build".

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Central-West Asia

IRAN: Launching Installation of Solar Panels Through Private Sector

The process of installing solar panels in eight provinces of Iran with the support of the private sector has begun, Reza Amani, executor of the project for the construction of private solar power plants in Iran, told local media, Trend reports. According to him, with the construction of 15 solar power plants in the mentioned number of provinces, the electrical potential of the country's solar power plants will increase to 3,000 megawatts. Amani noted that a solar power plant with a capacity of 420 megawatts is currently being built in the Sirjan County of Kerman Province, located in the southeast of Iran. He said that a total investment of $1.2 billion by Iran's "Tourism" Bank is planned for the construction of solar power plants with a capacity of 920 megawatts in Kerman Province. He further articulated that two plants with a capacity of 300 megawatts will be built in the south of Kerman province, and one plant with a capacity of 200 megawatts in Kahnuj County. "The main part of the funds for the construction of solar power plants is provided through loans from the National Development Fund of Iran," he added. The electricity generation landscape in Iran encompasses a diverse portfolio, integrating thermal, nuclear, solar, and wind energy sources, alongside hydropower facilities, to optimize energy output and sustainability. The proportion of thermal generation facilities in the national energy output surpasses 77,000 megawatt hours.

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KAZAKHSTAN: Launching Cybersecurity Consortium for Energy Sector

A technological consortium for cybersecurity has begun operations in Kazakhstan's energy sector, Trend reports via the Ministry of Energy of Kazakhstan. In alignment with national strategic priorities for digital transformation and the protection of critical infrastructure in the fuel and energy sector, the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Kazakhstan has initiated a non-profit technological Consortium. Operating under the "Situational and Analytical Center of the Fuel and Energy Complex," the Consortium integrates major cybersecurity operations centers across the country. The Consortium includes the country's leading cybersecurity operations centers, which have expressed their readiness to allocate resources and join forces with the government in protecting FEC facilities from modern cyber threats. “The main tasks of the Consortium at the current stage will be to conduct a comprehensive cybersecurity audit of all critical energy sector facilities and to develop unified regulatory requirements and protection standards. This will lay the groundwork for creating a resilient and adaptive system to counter cyber threats, ensuring a high level of readiness to meet modern digital security challenges,” the statement said. The Ministry also noted that the Consortium's activities will be carried out in strict compliance with the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the principles of collegiality. Particular attention will be paid to transparency in decision-making and effective collaboration among all participants.

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TAJIKISTAN: Putting Industry in Spotlight with New Operational Data

A total of 3,849 industrial enterprises were operating in Tajikistan from January through June 2025. The data obtained by Trend from the Statistical Agency under the President of Tajikistan indicates that out of this number, 3,323 enterprises were involved in the manufacturing industry, 351 in the mining sector, 72 in electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning supply, and 103 in water supply, waste treatment, and recycling. The regional breakdown shows that 1,272 enterprises (33 percent of the total) were located in Sughd region, 873 (22.7 percent) in Khatlon region, 824 (21.5 percent) in the capital city Dushanbe, 697 (18.1 percent) in the Districts of Republican Subordination, and 183 (4.7 percent) in the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region. During the same period, Tajikistan’s industrial output reached 29.617 billion somoni (approximately $3.1 billion), marking a 24 percent increase in comparable prices compared to the first half of 2024. The main driver of this growth was a 1.7-fold increase in production in the mining sector. Manufacturing grew by 5 percent, electricity and gas supply rose by 13.2 percent, and water supply, waste management, and recycling increased by 15.9 percent.

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UZBEKISTAN: Uzbek-Oman Investment Company Eyes Future Projects in Energy and Digital Tech

Laziz Kudratov, Minister of Investment, Industry and Trade of Uzbekistan, met with Omar Bahram, CEO of the Uzbek-Oman investment company discussed future projects in energy and digital technologies, Trend reports. The parties discussed ways to further strengthen their mutually beneficial cooperation. Special attention was given to the current status of ongoing projects involving the company, as well as plans. In particular, they explored opportunities for new investment initiatives across key sectors, including industry, agriculture, food and chemical industries, energy, digital technologies, and other priority areas. The Uzbek-Oman Investment Company plays a leading role in enhancing Uzbekistan's investment climate by fostering sustainable growth, attracting strategic investments, and supporting key industries that drive economic development and innovation.

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Oceania

NEW ZEALAND: Electricity Sector Changes Create More Ways to Save

Kiwi households and businesses will be able to save more on their electricity bills as a result of changes announced by the Electricity Authority (EA) today, Energy Minister Simon Watts and Associate Energy Minister Shane Jones say. "The changes today are welcome developments for consumers who are not getting a fair deal at present from the energy market," Mr Watts says. "First, solar is getting another big boost – energy companies must now pay households with rooftop solar and battery who export their electricity to the grid at peak times a fair price for that electricity – this will help reduce power bills and encourage more solar installations and electricity generation.

"The large energy companies will also need to offer time of use plans by 30 June 2026 to provide better options for customers to save money by moving their electricity use from peak periods." Mr Watts says these simple solutions will help Kiwis with the cost-of-living impacts driven in part by rising electricity costs. "New Zealand needs more electricity generation to power our economy, and Kiwis rightly expect abundant and affordable energy, which this government is taking action to deliver. "The Government is working on a review of the electricity sector, with a focus on ensuring Kiwis get a fair price and aren't hit in their pockets, and on addressing energy shortages." "The new rules announced today will give New Zealanders more ways to reduce their costs and will incentivise uptake of solar and battery systems, as well as drive power prices down over the long term.

Ensuring energy companies pay a fair price for consumers exporting electricity to the network is one of the single best ways to help boost solar uptake to date. "I want to see more New Zealanders benefitting from the smarter use of electricity. For this to happen, the electricity sector must appropriately reward consumers for the benefits they provide when they shift their power use away from peak times. Mr Jones says that as our electricity market evolves, these small-scale systems will play an increasingly important role in enabling peak morning and evening demand to be met with local supply. "With new, fairer rebates in place, there will be better opportunities for people to receive income from solar electricity they sell back to the grid." The Task

Force was established by the Electricity Authority and Commerce Commission, with MBIE as an observer in August last year in response to the winter power crisis. The Task Force is focused on enabling new generators and independent retailers to enter, and fairly compete, in the market as well as providing more options for consumers. “I thank the Task Force members and the Authority for their work in reaching these decisions. There is more work to do, and I look forward to further Task Force decisions in coming weeks,” Mr Watts says.

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Retailers Say Prices May Go Up After Paywave Surcharge Ban

The Finance Minister says when a ban on contactless card payment surcharges comes into effect, businesses should pass on the cost to customers as they would any other business cost, if they can't absorb the bill. The government plans to ban surcharges on contactless card payments no later than May 2026. Commerce and Consumer Affairs Minister Scott Simpson announced the change on Monday afternoon, declaring: "That pesky note or sticker on the payment machine will become a thing of the past." "Shoppers will no longer be penalised for their choice of payment method, whether that's tapping, swiping or using their phone's digital wallet." The ban builds on the Commerce Commission's recent decision to reduce the interchange fees imposed on businesses for accepting Visa and Mastercard payments.

Finance Minister Nicola Willis told First Up that change has led to an average reduction in costs for a typical retailer - a small business — of about $500 each week. "So our concern has been, now that reduction has happened, how do we make sure that gets passed through to you, when you're at the shop. What's to stop the retailer just charging you the same fee even though their costs has dropped." Banning the payway fee was the simplest and most transparent thing to do, Willis said. Businesses need to treat the interchange fee like any other cost in their business "and just include it in the price tag on the shelf", she said. "It'll make it easier for people to compare what they're really having to pay. Just think about how many times you've been at the counter and then suddenly you learn that it's a 2.5% or a 3.5% surcharge and that gets added to the price of whatever it is you're buying. That's not very transparent." The sector is warning prices may need to rise at restaurants and cafes due the ban.

Retail New Zealand chief executive Carolyn Young told Morning Report retailers were not happy with the change and have told them they will increase prices as a result. More people will use contactless payments as a result of the change, she said. "It means that a retailer, a higher percentage of their transactions will incur a fee so any savings that they may have seen from the interchange fee, they'll be countered by the fact that a higher percentage of transactions will incur a fee anyway." Young said retailers were already having a hard time trying to stay open. Asked if she thinks the ban will lead to inflationary prices, the minister said "I think that overall, people will charge the price that they think they can get away with". The change doesn't include international credit card payments or online payments. Willis said these payments were usually much more expensive to process and people using these systems have to pay a bit more because they are protected from things like online scams and fraud. Commerce and Consumer Affairs Minister Scott Simpson told Morning Report the interchange fee was a cost of business.

"I think that the price you pay at the tills should be the same price that's on the shelf when you go to buy something." The "vast majority" of businesses don't currently charge surcharges, he said. When questioned on that statement, the minister said this was something he knew from his personal experience when shopping and information from the Commerce Commission. Consumer NZ chief executive Jon Duffy told Morning Report with a reduction in the interchange fee, businesses would be making a profit off the surcharges if they remained in place. "Retailers still pay a small amount ot offer those services, we think that once... the decrease comes into effect it will be less than 1% of the total cost of the transaction," Duffy said. Many businesses would absorb this into the prices though there may be some who need to increase prices to cover the cost, he said. "But it would be just the same as if their... power bill or their rent went up."

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Regulatory Relief for ,Manufacturing Sector

Workplace Relations and Safety Minister Brooke van Velden is consulting with manufacturers, including wood processors, bakers, and millers to help businesses focus on managing genuine risks rather than navigating red tape. “We’re simplifying machine guarding rules and reviewing exposure standards to reduce complexity and improve consistency in the manufacturing sector,” says Ms van Velden. The proposed changes aim to ensure standards reflect real-world risks and align with international benchmarks. Manufacturers have said that the current rules are unclear and difficult to apply, leading to unnecessary costs and compliance burden. As an example of the law’s confusion, a business owner told me they got conflicting advice from WorkSafe inspectors on identical machinery guarding in Auckland and Christchurch, deeming the same machine guarding to be compliant in one city but non-compliant in another city.

“During my nationwide consultation and roadshow, businesses described the law as full of grey areas, with outdated guidance that creates confusion and unnecessary cost. We’re acting on that feedback, with changes designed to address the specific pain points raised.” One key change is the simplification of machine guarding rules, which support the safe use of machinery, in the Health and Safety in Employment

Regulations. As an example of how out of date the machine guarding rules are, there are some in the meat industry who believe that machine guarding rules conflict with food safety cleaning requirements. We will be consulting on replacing the requirements with a more flexible, risk-based approach. WorkSafe guidance will continue to support businesses in applying appropriate controls.

Although this will be a great help to the manufacturing sector, it will be beneficial for a range of sectors working with machinery including agriculture, horticulture, construction and food production. “Feedback on machine guarding has highlighted the need for greater consistency when using machinery. These changes will enable businesses to use a wider range of tools while applying updated safety measures to keep their staff safe.” Wood processors and manufacturers also gave feedback that they feel constrained by Workplace Exposure Standards that don’t reflect operational realities or international benchmarks. “Many described the current approach as overly rigid and unclear, with one participant saying the standards are ‘an overreaction to risk which will cripple the industry’.” The Workplace Exposure Standards for soft wood dust, hard wood dust, and welding fumes will be reviewed, with an aim to improve clarity and better align with international standards.

“Businesses expressed frustration that the wood dust standard is impractical and not based on realistic risk assessments. They want a system that is both protective and practical, and these changes aim to provide that.” WorkSafe will also look at updating the Workplace Exposure Standard for flour dust, which is designed to minimise the risk of respiratory problems. “This is an example of the Red Tape Tipline making a difference, addressing regulations that increase the price of food,” says Mr Seymour. “Concerned bakers made a submission to the Ministry for Regulation, raising concerns that the permitted concentration of flour dust was so stringent it would ruin their business. “One commercial stakeholder said they had invested millions in retrofitted air conditioning units, purchasing new industrial vacuum cleaners, and additional controls in bakeries including deep cleaning, but it was still almost impossible to comply with the regulation.

“These costs eventually flow down to prices at the checkout. It’s another example of how permissive regulations, no matter how small they might seem on paper, make a difference to the cost of everything in New Zealand. “The review will consider international benchmarks and feasibility considerations, such as measurability. This will provide bakers and millers with more confidence that they have met safety standards, reducing the cost and stress of overcompliance and price of food,” says Mr Seymour. This review will be undertaken in consultation with those in the manufacturing sector over the coming months to ensure they are practical and effective. “Simplifying machine guarding rules and reviewing the Workplace Exposure Standards will make it easier for people to do the right thing, without compromising safety,” says Ms van Velden. “These changes will save time and costs for businesses and workers as we cut-red-tape to make it easier to do business.

When our Kiwi businesses thrive, there are more jobs and lower prices for all New Zealanders."

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