



# CACCI Profile

Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry

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# Peter McMullin AM elected CACCI President for 2023-2024

Mr. Peter McMullin AM has taken over the helm of the Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CACCI), assuming the position from Mr. Samir Modi, who served as CACCI President for four years from 2018 to 2022.

Mr. McMullin was elected as head of the Confederation during the 95th CACCI Council Meeting held on November 29 in Melbourne, Australia in conjunction with the 36th CACCI Conference. He is a former President of the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), and currently sits on the International Chamber of Commerce (ICVC) Board in Australia. He was CACCI Vice President from 2014 until his election as President in November this year.

In his acceptance speech, Mr. McMullin said that “Despite the challenges we have in front of us, there is also great opportunity – the opportunity for chambers of commerce to support their members and the wider business community to truly build back better.”

“As economies emerge from the pandemic, the business community will be critical in ensuring peace, prosperity, prosperity, inclusion, and planetary health. We must make a just transition to a new economy,” Mr. McMullin said. “As a representative body of businesses in both developing and developed countries, CACCI will be at the forefront in an enabling business ecosystem that fosters greater partnership and collaboration,” the newly elected CACCI President pointed out.

Mr. Peter McMullin AM has an extensive legal and business career encompassing prominent roles in both the public and private sectors. Currently, he is Chairman and Director of McMullin Group, which provides strategic direction and financial management across a range of industries. He is also Special Counsel for Cornwall specializing in improving outcomes for the firm and its clients and facilitating meaningful connections between like-minded people in the area of business, politics, philanthropy and the arts within Melbourne and throughout Australia.



As an active philanthropist, Peter seeks to collaborate with other individuals and organizations to maximize the impact of his contributions.

Other representatives of CACCI Primary

Members were also elected as CACCI Office-Bearers for the next two years. These included:

## ***As Vice Presidents:***

- Hiroshi Oshima, President, Sembikiya Fruit Co. (Japan)
- Henry Kao, Chairman, I-Mei Foods Co. Ltd. (Taiwan)
- Ernest Yuen, Chairman, Kowloon CC (Hong Kong)
- Alireza Yavari, Deputy President, Int'l Affairs, ICCIMA (Iran)
- Sheikh Fazle Fahim, Chairman, Euro-Petro Product Ltd. (Bangladesh)
- Khurram Sayeed, CEO/Director M/s. Planet Energy Ltd. (Pakistan)
- Pradeep Kumar Shrestha, Managing Director, Panchakanya Group (Nepal)
- Rifat Hisarciklioglu, Chairman, Eskihsar Group of Companies (Turkey)

## ***Honorary Treasurer***

- Dr. Leslie Wong, Permanent VP, Kowloon CC (Hong Kong)

## ***Budget Commission***

- Morris Li, Chairman, CTBC Bank (Taiwan)
- Sheikh Sultan Rehman, CEO, SR Twisting, SR Enterprises and Success Route (Pakistan)





Wishing our CACCI Members & Friends

*Happy Holidays &  
a Spectacular New Year!*



## New Year's Message from the President

**It is a great pleasure for me, as the newly-elected President of CACCI, to convey my New Year's greetings to all members of CACCI and readers of the CACCI Profile. I sincerely wish that the incoming year brings you better prospects and prosperity in all your undertakings.**

**As we leave behind 2022 with its continued difficulties brought about by the lingering impact of Covid-19 pandemic, and enter 2023, I hope that, despite the uncertainties that may still prevail during the incoming year, we will all keep our resolve to serve our respective communities and remain relevant and of value to them.**

**As I embark on my first year of CACCI Presidency, I am confident that with the unwavering support of all officers and members, CACCI - given its diverse talents and resources - will be in a position to adapt to and meet the various challenges we may continue to face in 2023, and to identify the reforms needed to drive our Confederation - and our members - in our ongoing transformation towards a stronger, more resilient post-COVID business environment.**

**I wish everyone a productive and bountiful year ahead!**

**Peter McMullin  
President**

## CACCI Immediate Past President Modi calls on Singapore Manufacturers Federation



CACCI Immediate Past President Mr. Samir Modi called on Mr. Lennon Tan, President of the Singapore Manufacturers Federation (SMF) at the SMF headquarters in Singapore on November 22. He was accompanied by Mr. George Abraham, Chairman of the CACCI SME Development Council. Mr. Modi and Mr. Abraham briefed Mr. Tan and his colleagues on CACCI and its activities and encouraged them to take an active part in the various meetings, events and programs held by CACCI for the benefit of its member chambers and businessmen in the region as a whole.

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## CACCI Secretariat Calls on Philippine Representative Office in Taipei



CACCI Director- General Mr. David Hsu (Left photo, left) calls on Members of the Board of Directors of the Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) in Taipei led by Chairman and Chief Representative Atty. Silvestre H. Bello III. Mr. Hsu introduced CACCI to Atty Bello and other MECO Board Members, highlighting the active role that the Philippine business community – through the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry and its leaders and members – has played in the growth and the development of CACCI since its establishment in 1966. Atty. Bellow expressed interest in collaborating with CACCI and the Secretariat in pursuing trade and investment opportunities for the Philippines not just in Taiwan but also in other Asia-Pacific countries that are part of the CACCI membership.



## Former CACCI Presidents given citations during Melbourne conference



*Kenneth Court*



*Harvey Chang*



*Amb. Benedicto Yujuico*



*Jemal Inaishvili*

Special citations were presented to former CACCI Presidents for their exemplary commitment to and continued involvement in the Confederation. They were honored during the Gala Dinner of the 36th CACCI Conference held on November 29, 2022 in Melbourne, Australia.

The honorees included the following:

- a. A Distinguished Service Award was given to Mr. Kenneth W. Court, outgoing Chairman of the CACCI Advisory Board, in recognition of his outstanding accomplishments during his tenure in CACCI in various capacities, including as CACCI President from 1988 to 1990, as CACCI President Emeritus since 2010, and as Chairman of the CACCI Advisory Board since 2013.
- b. The title of President Emeritus was

conferred on former CACCI Presidents who have remained active in CACCI even after their term as President has ended. The conferees included:

- Mr. Harvey Chang from Taiwan, who served as CACCI president from 2006 to 2010
  - Amb. Benedicto Yujuico from the Philippines, who served as CACCI President from 2010 to 2014
  - Mr. Jemal Inaishvili from Georgia, who served as CACCI President from 2014 to 2018
- c. Mr. Harvey Chang was also named the new Chairman of the CACCI Advisory Board for 2023-2024, taking over the position from Mr. Ken Court.

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## CACCI Issues 2022 Year-End Review

The 2022 Year-End Review has been recently issued by the Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CACCI) summarizing the activities of the Confederation during the year.

In the introduction chapter of the Year-End Review, CACCI observes that as thoughts turn to a world beyond the pandemic and towards the so-called new economy, a strong business sector will be needed for a strong economic recovery

and sustainable growth. CACCI strongly believes that chambers of commerce and business organizations will have an important role to play in helping their respective members address the challenges before us. However, for Chambers of Commerce to effectively assume this role, they must recognize that the speed of change for technology, business and society is accelerating.

Member chambers therefore need to review their purpose, structure, and strategy, with the view to enabling their organization not only to survive but also to thrive going forward amidst current changes and challenges in the regional and world markets.

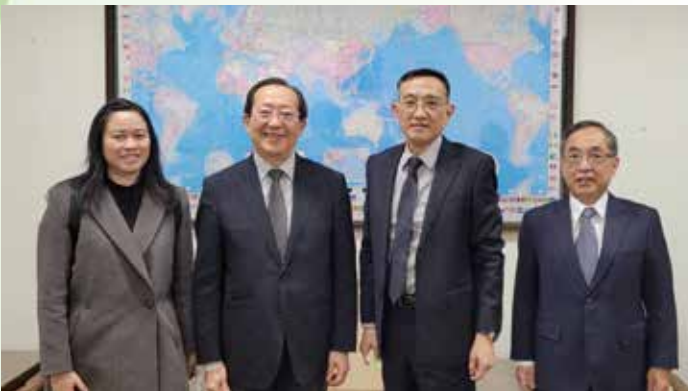
“As we set our sights towards 2023, let us review and assess our accomplishments in 2022, and see how we can build on them with



the view to making CACCI even more relevant to our members in the years ahead,” the Year-End Review points out.

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## CACCI Director-General pays visit to MOFA officers



CACCI Director-General David Hsu (2nd from left), along with Senior Officer Abby Moreno (left), paid a visit to the Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) on December 20, where he met with Director-General Y.C. Tsai (2nd from right) and Deputy Director-General Isaac M. Chiu (right) of the Department of International Cooperation and Economic Affairs.

Mr. Hsu congratulated the two gentlemen on their new posts abroad. Director-General Tsai will be heading to Italy in January to assume

his new post as Ambassador of the Taipei Representative Office in Italy. Deputy Director-General Chiu, meanwhile, will be serving as Director-General of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (TECO) in Surabaya, Indonesia from February.

Mr. Hsu relayed the news of the recently concluded 36th CACCI Conference in Melbourne, as well as CACCI’s newly elected President Mr. Peter McMullin, who is based in Australia. They then touched on potential forums and activities that CACCI can spearhead under the new leadership, and also briefly discussed the important role of CACCI in bridging trade networks between Europe and Asia.

# ICC and Google Release Survey Results on MSME Digital Exports in Southeast Asia



The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and Google have recently released the results of the survey that was primarily aimed at studying the digital exports of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in Southeast Asia. The two organizations plan to use the survey results to inform policy discussions and develop tailored training programmes to upskill and empower MSMEs in the region.

According to ICC and Google, MSMEs form the backbone of economies of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Yet, despite their contribution to ASEAN economies and society, participation in exports and global markets remain relatively low. MSMEs account for a small proportion of exports relative to their share of activity and employment in the region. Against this backdrop, the MSME Digital Exports in Southeast Asia report assesses and paints an accurate picture of ASEAN MSME exports, identifies key barriers that prevent MSMEs from exporting, and analyses how MSMEs leverage digital technologies to help drive exports in the region.

“Smaller businesses and entrepreneurs are the backbone of the real economy. Through this partnership with Google, ICC is committed to delivering trusted, quality training to help SMEs harness the opportunities of digital trade. The goal is to ensure our global know-how and solutions benefit business communities and the communities they serve, in Asia and beyond,” John W.H. Denton AO, Secretary General of the International Chamber of Commerce, said.

On her part, Karan Bhatia, Vice President, Government Affairs and Public Policy at Google, said. “Digital technologies are creating opportunities for small businesses to trade and reach international markets in ways impossible a generation ago, but those opportunities are not always easy to seize. Google is excited to collaborate with ICC and the International Trade Centre to develop a train-

ing curriculum to help address this gap in ASEAN – and better enable MSMEs to fully benefit from the growing digital economy.”

The MSME Digital Exports in Southeast Asia report is underpinned by a survey of 1,560 MSMEs in the 10 ASEAN markets. Key insights from the report include:

- MSMEs in the ASEAN markets express a strong interest in exporting in the region and internationally – over 60% of surveyed enterprises are looking to expand their export footprint;
- MSMEs in the ASEAN markets have drastically increased their use of digital tools and technologies – 80% of surveyed enterprises have expanded their use of digital tools in the past two years;
- 70% of surveyed MSMEs in the ASEAN markets see digital tools and technologies as a way to identify access new markets;
- MSMEs in the ASEAN markets continue to be hampered by significant Internet coverage and affordability gaps – 65% of surveyed MSMEs reported issues with Internet accessibility (patchy service or slow connection) and affordability;
- E-commerce growth is severely constrained by: (i) high cost of delivery of return, (ii) issues associated with complaints or disputes, (iii) issues with payments online;
- MSMEs in the ASEAN markets are seeking tailored support to increase their skills and capabilities in digital marketing and in leveraging digital tools and technologies to access market information – 75% of surveyed MSMEs expressed an interest in developing these capabilities.

Building on the report, ICC, Google and the International Trade Centre are co-designing a curriculum and creating a network of trainers to train 1,000 ASEAN MSMEs in digital export-relevant skills. The ICC Centre of Entrepreneurship in Indonesia will play a leading role in deploying and coordinating the implementation of the training programme.



# NEWS UPDATES

## Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry secures 2025 World Chambers Congress bid



The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry will co-organise the 14th World Chambers Congress, the largest global gathering of chambers of commerce.

Organised by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and its World Chambers Federation (WCF), the World Chambers Congress is a unique thought leadership forum for chamber leaders and business professionals to collaborate on new projects, exchange ideas on best-practices, expand global networks and discuss the latest issues facing the private sector worldwide.

Every two years, this global event rotates between Africa and the Middle East, the Americas, Asia-Pacific and Europe to ensure wide and diverse regional participation from chamber and business communities around the world. The 14th World Chambers Congress will mark the fourth time that the event has been held in the Asia-Pacific Region, having previously taken place in Seoul in 2001, Kuala Lumpur in 2009 and Sydney in 2017.

Commenting on the success of the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, ICC Chair Maria Fernanda Garza said: “The World Chambers Congress is a one-of-a-kind business dialogue that promotes exchange of best practices to make business work for everyone, everywhere. I trust the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry will host and co-organise a flagship event for ESG opportunities worldwide.”

Melbourne, the second biggest city of Australia will host Congress delegates in September 2025. The proposed theme is “ESG change starts here”, as the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry firmly believes in the power of ESG criteria for prosperous cooperation among nations. Speaking on the importance of the chamber con-

tributions, ICC WCF’s Chair Nicolás Uribe Rueda said: “Under the unprecedented world economic order we find ourselves in, chamber leaders are called upon to guide a new generation of more conscious businesses that seek to create value beyond financial profits. Therefore, now more than ever, we play a crucial role in coming together to shape the post-pandemic world for good through dialogue and cooperation. And we believe there is no better way to achieve this than through the World Chambers Congress.

For this reason, after a thorough bidding process, I congratulate the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry for being selected as the co-organizer of the 14th World Chambers Congress in 2025. I’m convinced they will deliver a world-class event that will mark the perfect occasion to rethink how businesses of all sizes need to incorporate ESG criteria in their practices.

I would also like to congratulate the China Chamber of International Commerce (CCOIC) for its outstanding candidacy and its commitment to the success of the ICC WCF. Given the high level of interest from the jury members, ICC WCF and CCOIC will discuss future opportunities to work together and welcome the chamber community in China.”

The Victorian Chamber of Commerce was in the race to co-organise the Congress alongside the China Chamber of International Commerce (CCOIC), a strong contender to the 14WCC bidding process.

The next edition of the World Chambers Congress is set to take place from 21-23 June 2023 in Geneva and is co-organised by the Geneva Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Services.

**ICC**



# How new technologies can help global supply chains build resilience



It's been a harrowing few years for the logistics industry. While the situation has somewhat improved, companies around the world are now confronting rising fuel costs, a worsening climate crisis and increasing inflation. All just in time for the holiday season, a period that stresses supply chains even in normal conditions.

As with any crisis, there are lessons and opportunities that emerge in the aftermath. Companies have begun analyzing their operations and preparing them to be more resilient, hoping new technologies for manufacturing and operating supply chains might prevent widespread delays, bottlenecks and frustrations. Venture capitalists have taken notice of this activity and are scrambling to fund any idea that might ease logistical pain points. This year alone, supply chain startups received over \$7 billion from investors globally, including a \$935 million raise by supply chain software provider Flexport. It's estimated that before the end of this decade, VC funding for "supply tech" will overtake that for fintech.

While every industry is different, many improvements to global supply chains involve methods to increase efficiency, cut down on human labor and keep costs low, using tools like warehouse management, matching freight loads to transportation capacity and cost-effective routing. Here are examples of how several industries are approaching supply chain transformations.

## **1. Retail**

Retailers are uniquely vulnerable to supply chain problems, often burdened with excess inventory that requires "deal days" to make room.

A successful retail strategy includes "demand forecasting"—careful analysis of what customers will want, where they'll want it and when.

But according to McKinsey, "the pandemic has rendered traditional techniques ineffective, since those techniques rely heavily on a company's historical sales data rather than on forward-looking external data. Some manufacturers, therefore, couldn't react fast enough when consumers shifted most of their spending away from brick-and-mortar stores toward e-commerce."

The solution, as McKinsey notes, may lie in autonomous planning. This allows machines to do advanced analytical work while humans can spend their time on higher-value activities, resulting in a faster, more streamlined process.

## **2. Energy**

A Gartner study, as cited by VenureBeat, found that "84% of chief supply chain officers reported they could service their customers better with data-driven insights. And an equal number stated that they needed more accurate data to predict future conditions and make better decisions.

For oil and gas companies, most contract management, risk negotiation and vendor management are multi-step processes involving a lot of data. Leaders in the industry are updating their data management capabilities to provide increased visibility into their systems.

## **3. Hospitality**

Suppliers are facing increased scrutiny over their emissions, and supply chain efficiency is now balanced with environmental responsibility. Among the ways technology is helping hospitality companies maintain a responsible supply chain are: supply chain mapping (allowing companies to rapidly react when a supplier faces a shortage, an order gets lost or there's a demand surge), monitoring ESG metrics (analyzing supplier practices) and coordinating transportation flows (ensuring a minimal carbon footprint).

## **4. Healthcare**

In healthcare, the supply chain is responsible for issues like medical supply procurement,

inventory management and overall spend management. According to Deloitte, many healthcare companies are not only improving their supply chains; they're digitizing them.

Digital supply chains have many benefits for healthcare companies, including optimizing costs, reducing poor outcomes due to error and variability and enhancing patient care and engagement (i.e., reducing wait times and reducing rescheduled appointments).

### ***Best Practices: Things To Consider On The Road Ahead***

Companies interested in updating, digitizing or overhauling their supply chain operations have to consider how to balance challenges. Simply bringing on new technology is not a cure-all, and any change comes with risk.

With that in mind, here are practical steps organizations can take to get started.

- **New supply-chain technology has a learning curve.** Companies struggle to integrate new technologies for many reasons, and the supply chain is not immune. How companies engage employees during a transition is a big indicator of success, and it's also important to educate the team along the way. Predictive analytics, automation and digitized platforms are already making supply chains more efficient and cost-effective—but employees need to know how to use the tech. When deciding on how/if to implement supply chain technology, look for servant leaders who can reduce the learning curve for others. A common mistake is bringing on vendors or consultants with no stake in the mission. By fostering an atmosphere of continuous learning, companies stand a greater chance of creating long-term value.
- **Team engagement is crucial, and re-skilling/hiring will be necessary.** Rapid technology advancements and an increasingly globalized world have accelerated the need for skilled workers. A study from Deloitte found that less than 40% of supply chain leaders were confident in their current team's abilities. And demand has only increased as companies continue to go digital. Before any transformation, it's

important to have a solid understanding of where skills gaps exist. By engaging with everyone from the C-suite to the support team, companies can gain critical insights into their ability to manage new supply chain technology. Begin the process early because it will take some time to audit, recruit, hire and onboard new talent.

- **Digitizing the supply chain can impact different parts of the business.** Supply chain leaders need to understand how their current infrastructure operates in order to bring on new technology. While that may sound intuitive, companies can be siloed or blind to how their function interacts with other parts of the business. Because the supply chain touches many different areas, companies should set up key performance indicators (KPIs) to analyze strengths and identify inefficiencies. Be honest about the goals for any transformation, and align the KPIs to parts of the business that are likely to show impact.

We've been shown just how fragile our interconnected global marketplace can be when unexpected events occur, and supply chains are growing increasingly complex. The hope is that with logistics investments and innovation, companies will be better prepared to provide the products that consumers want and need, even in times of crisis.

*Forbes*

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## **Rebuilding Australia's workforce demands continued skills investment**

A surge in the number of apprentices and trainees continues the positive trajectory of rebuilding our local skills base; but maintaining this strong growth and realising further gains will require continued investment.

Figures released today by the National





Centre for Vocational Education Research reveal that apprenticeship and traineeship commencements grew nationally by 66,885 in

the June quarter 2022. This represents a 36.5 per cent increase when compared with the same quarter in 2021.

Apprenticeship and traineeship completion rates also increased by 16.6 per cent over the same period.

“The strong increase in apprentice commencements and completions is a very positive sign. However, we cannot take the outstanding growth in apprenticeship numbers for granted,” ACCI chief executive Andrew McKellar said.

“To ensure those looking for work have the skills and training required for the jobs of

today and tomorrow, we must get the incentives right. Continued investment will guarantee that employers see the value in taking on an apprentice or trainee.

“The government should commit to establishing a 30 per cent wage subsidy in the first year of an apprenticeship or traineeships to provide greater certainty for employers. Reinstating completion incentives of \$2,500 for businesses and up to \$5,000 for apprentices and trainees will also encourage more to finish their training.

“Locking in long-term investment is absolutely essential to put more Australians in work and support our growing economy that is in dire need of a skilled workforce.

“We are excited by the direction apprenticeship numbers are headed. With apprenticeships requiring a longer-term investment, government must work to ensure that it is more viable for many employers to commit to skills development.

**ACCI Media Release**



## FPCCI head office building in Karachi named after late Tariq Sayeed, former CACCI VP



In recognition of the pivotal role played by the late Tariq Sayeed for shaping the business community of Pakistan for last five decades and in bringing Islamic Chamber, SAARC Chamber & Asia Pacific region together; the President Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI) Irfan Iqbal Shaikh named the FPCCI Head Office Building Karachi to “Tariq Sayeed Complex”.

The late Tariq Sayeed was former Vice President of CACCI, Founder President of the

SAARC Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Former President of FPCCI, Karachi Chamber of Commerce & Industry, as well as Former Vice President of the Islamic Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

Irfan Iqbal Shaikh, President FPCCI signed the notification to name FPCCI Head Office Building Karachi after Late Tariq Sayeed. Also present on the occasion were Khurram Tariq Sayeed, Vice President of CACCI, Suleman Chawla, Senior Vice President of FPCCI, Nadeem Qureshi, Shabbir Hassan Mansha & Shaukat Omerson Vice Presidents of FPCCI, Mian Nasser Hyatt Maggo, Immediate Past President of FPCCI, Sheikh Sultan Rahman, Budget Commission Member of CACCI and Former Vice President FPCCI among others.

# FICCI, McKinsey whitepaper outlines path to 600 million jobs, ₹10 lakh per capita income by 2047



The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), in partnership with management consulting firm McKinsey & Company, has outlined how India can achieve 600 million jobs and ₹10 lakh per capita income by 2047, in a whitepaper named 'India's Century – Achieving sustainable, inclusive growth' initiative.

The multi-stakeholder initiative took inputs from 200 companies to identify the 10 priority sectors for growth in India.

The initiative also lists a roadmap with a 50-step action plan that companies and industry bodies across these sectors can take to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth along key metrics by 2047.

This could potentially help in increasing the per capita income sixfold to ₹10 lakh, achieving 600 million jobs, doubling female participation in the labour force to 45-50%, cutting carbon emissions, and providing access to clean water for all.

"India is at an inflection point in its journey of becoming the third largest and an upper-middle income economy. The industry will have to lead the way and build innovative solutions with a lens of people and planet approach, while the government plays the role of an enabler to nurture the growth and ensure global competitiveness," said Sanjiv Mehta, president, FICCI.

The initiative lists over 50 important actions across the ten identified priority sectors — agriculture, manufacturing, consumer tech, information and communication technology, financial services, healthcare, infrastructure and logistics, energy, water and education — to grow and account for bulk job creation over the next 25 years.

Some of these actions within the healthcare sector are doubling the number of doctors, nurses, and allied healthcare professionals per capita, leveraging digital healthcare solutions, increasing the intake of MBBS graduates, and reducing insurance premium costs.

Similarly, for financial services, the roadmap suggests doubling the credit penetration of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) to 80%, promoting co-lending, and creating digital securities for physical collaterals among other actions.

Within the Information and Communication Technology sector, the roadmap focuses on positioning India as a 'global factory for digital and cloud' and increasing share in global SaaS revenue.

Developing broader capabilities key for growth in the near-term

Apart from the sector-specific actions, the initiative also listed four important capabilities – building India's innovation muscle, scaling up India's SMEs to grow, strengthening the skills of its future workforce, and shaping India into the preferred destination for foreign investment – that could determine growth momentum over the next 12 to 18 months.

"Companies in India can now create millions of jobs and value through innovations that capture the full potential of digital transformation, energy transition, modern infrastructure development, and realignment of global supply chains," said Alok Kshirsagar, senior partner, McKinsey & Company.

***Business Insider India***



## FNCCI requests Finance Minister to protect economy

The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) has requested Finance Minister Janardan Sharma for cooperation and coordination to protect the country's economy.

A team led by FNCCI President Shekhar Golcha met Finance Minister Sharma and said that the current financial year's monetary policy could not address the existing problems. He also requested the minister to protect the economy, saying that there are multi-faceted effects on the economy.

Golcha said that the revenue cannot cover even the recurrent expenses and the price increase is the highest since seven years and the private sector is shrinking. He said that the government and the central bank should take steps to protect the economy as the multifaceted risks increased during the period of about a year after they started to control the market directly and indirectly.

According to the FNCCI, the guidelines implemented at a time when private sector investment is shrinking and revenues are continuously decreasing, putting pressure on the country's economy, have added complexity to business. Fluctuations in interest rates, national and international financial discomfort, internationally raised fuel and raw material prices, and logistics and freight charges have also increased. The Federation claims that there is a mismatch between the determination of the estimated financial statement, the determination of the actual required limit of working capital and the lack of working capital has caused difficulties in the operation of the industry. The Federation demands that the implementation of current capital guidelines 2079BS be postponed for at least two years. It is also requested to continue the initiative of reforming the system that affects the private sector in guidance for two years.

The FNCCI believes that the central bank will be positive as the economy is demanding promotional rather than punitive reforms from the regulatory bodies. Through the monetary policy review, the average interest rate difference of

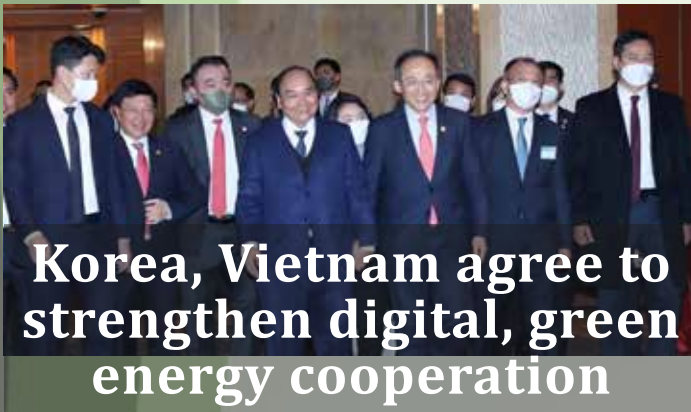
commercial banks should be maintained between 4.4 percent and 4 percent and the average interest rate difference of development banks and finance companies should be maintained at 5 percent to 4.6 percent, according to the Federation. Businessmen say that if the interest rates do not decrease, it will be difficult to save the economy.

As about 60 billion rupees of re-loan withdrawal from banks and financial institutions in the middle of January will cause problems for entrepreneurs and the lack of liquidity in the market will be more complicated, it has been requested to facilitate re-loan renewal for at least one year. The Federation suggests that the mandatory cash ratio should be reduced by one percentage point, the policy rate should be reduced, liquidity management measures should be adopted by transferring the funds in the government treasury, and the amount going to the local level should be calculated at 100% for a certain period. Lack of capital expenditure is a long-standing problem of the country and there is a lack of liquidity in the market due to the lack of expenditure, so special initiatives have been taken to increase expenditure. The Ministry of Finance has requested the immediate implementation of the plan to increase the expenditure in the context of the fact that there is no capital expenditure. The federation has suggested implementing the automatic process mentioned in the budget to attract foreign investment.

It has been said that country rating, which has been included in the government's policies and programs, should be done immediately, and bonds and other instruments can be used to bring in international funds. The federation has requested that the private sector and banks should facilitate and encourage borrowing from abroad, and the provision of loans to manufacturing industries at lower interest rates than other businesses mentioned in the budget statement should be implemented immediately.

During the meeting, Finance Minister Sharma said that he has taken very positively the continuous initiatives taken by the Federation to reduce the risks facing the economy. The finance minister said that according to the suggestions given by the Federation, the government, the central bank and the private sector will cooperate with the ministry to move forward.

*My Republica*



## Korea, Vietnam agree to strengthen digital, green energy cooperation

Business people from Korea and Vietnam gathered Tuesday to strengthen future cooperation between the two countries to commemorate the 30th anniversary of economic ties, according to the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI).

The KCCI held the Korea-Vietnam Business Forum at Lotte Hotel in Seoul, Tuesday, with around 300 businesspeople from both countries in attendance, including Vietnamese President Nguyen Xuan Phuc and Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Strategy and Finance Choo Kyung-ho.

The event was held under the theme, "The 30th Anniversary of Korea-Vietnam Diplomatic Relations, New Business Opportunities and Paradigm Change," and the two countries discussed ways to cooperate in the digital and green energy fields, as well as sustainable future cooperation.

"The trade volume between the two countries exceeded \$80 billion last year, and Korea is Vietnam's third-largest trading partner and largest investor. Amidst this deepening economic crisis, close joint efforts between the two countries are needed." Joo Si-bo, CEO of POSCO International and chairman of the Korea-Vietnam Economic Cooperation, said in his opening remarks.

"In order to turn a crisis into an opportunity in the midst of a paradigm shift in the world economy and open up a sustainable future, the two countries must pool their wisdom and passion together," Joo added.

A business agreement ceremony was also held at the forum to strengthen trade cooperation between companies and the governments of the two countries as well as collaboration in digital and green businesses.

"It is true that Vietnam, which is growing mainly in the manufacturing industry, is struggling

to achieve carbon reduction measures," said Jung In-sup, CEO of Hanwha Energy. "Korea's energy industry has experience in infrastructure investments and construction, financial investment capacity using pension funds, and solutions for various energy sources such as LNG, solar power, hydrogen, and Energy Storage System (ESS) to contribute to Vietnam's energy transition."

Fourteen individual memorandums of understanding (MOUs) have been signed, including an MOU between Korean Air and Vietnam Airlines on air route cooperation.

"Vietnam is an important business partner that accompanies economic and industrial development and is a partner that will accompany us in the future in a global transition period, including not only economic cooperation, but also a joint response to climate change, cultural and human exchanges," KCCI Vice Chairman Woo Tae-hee said.

"I hope that we can prepare together for the next 30 years across all industries, including digital and green energy, based on solid economic cooperation centered on the manufacturing industry," Woo added.

*Korea Times*

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## FBCCI recommends integrated role of govt, private sector

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) recommended an integrated participation of the private sector entrepreneurs and the related government institutions for flourishing the tourism sector.

It said the local tourism industry is growing rapidly, and hotels, motels, resorts and tourist spots are being developed in the country to fulfill the growing demand.

There is no alternative but to ensure coordination and integrated participation of the entrepreneurs of this sector and the related government institutions to improve the quality of tourism here, it mentioned.

FBCCI President Md. Jashim Uddin said





these in the third meeting of the FBCCI's Standing Committee on Tourism Development (in-bound, outbound, domestic and civil aviation).

While speaking as the chief guest, he said, "Tourism is a very promising sector of the country's economy. While there are some problems in this sector, there are many possibilities as well. We have to work more closely on these issues."

The FBCCI president urged the tourism-related associations to play more active role, and also emphasised ensuring better services for foreign tourists as well as local tourists.

He urged the entrepreneurs concerned to organise a seminar on the tourism sector with the tourism corporation, NBR, related ministries, and other stakeholders.

FBCCI Vice President Md. Amin Helaly said apart from attracting foreigners to Bangladesh, the sector insiders should also focus on the big local market with a large population.

To ensure discipline and coordination in this potential sector, participation of all the government and private sector entities concerned (including associations) is essential.

He also mentioned that on the occasion of the FBCCI's 50th anniversary celebration, the three-day Bangladesh Business Summit would be held in next March, where the tourism sector would be highlighted.

Nasir Majumder, director-in-charge of the FBCCI standing committee, said tourism is always one of the priority sectors to the prime minister.

The meeting was presided over by committee co-chairman Jalal Uddin Tipu.

FBCCI directors Hafez Harun, Bijoy Kumar Kejriwal, Abu Hossain Bhuiyan and Akkash Mahmood, former director Khandaker Ruhul Amin, secretary general Mohammad Mahfuzul Hoque, and co-chairmen and members of the standing committee were also present in the meeting.

**Financial Express**

## Businesses support communities affected by November earthquake in Indonesia

Following the strong earthquake that struck the province of West Java in late November, The Connecting Business initiative Member Network in Indonesia, the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KADIN) has been engaged in the humanitarian response. KADIN has mobilized cash and in-kind contributions from local businesses and supported the humanitarian country team.

On 21 November, an earthquake of 5.6 magnitude at a depth of 10 km occurred in Cianjur, in the West Java Province of Indonesia. More than 300 people have died due to the earthquake, according to the latest reports. The National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) also estimated that around 7,700 people were injured, 73,000 people displaced while 368 schools and about 62,000 houses were either damaged or destroyed.

CBI Member Network in Indonesia, the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Kamar Dagang dan Industri Indonesia, or KADIN) is actively responding to the earthquake.

The network is mapping affected businesses in Cianjur after the earthquake.

The network is engaging its partners to gather relief assistance. Operating in 9 districts, KADIN is helping more than 2,600 households. Families receive food, medicine, hygiene kits, and shelter support such as tents, blankets, mats and clothes.

KADIN is also deploying heavy equipment to clean up debris and levelling affected areas.

Finally, the network is planning to work on an economic recovery project, which will include the resettlement of 1,800 houses to a safer area.

Looking forward, KADIN is planning to improve its response capacity by launching a virtual Business Disasters Operations Centre, a project supported by the Connecting Business initiative.

**Relief Web**



Economic experts and scholars with the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) have called on the government to set economic stability and development as priorities in drafting the country's seventh five-year National Development Plan (NDP).

Members of the ICCIMA Department of Commissions, Assemblies, and Councils held a meeting with the head of the Seventh National Development Plan Secretariat at the Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) to discuss the process of preparing the plan, the ICCIMA portal reported.

In the meeting, the attendees reviewed a report on the shortcomings and challenges of the sixth National Development Plan by the ICCIMA Research Center and made some constructive proposals for the preparation of the new plan.

Speaking in this gathering, ICCIMA Deputy Head for Commissions, Assemblies and Councils Affairs Ali Cheraghvand also mentioned a report by the parliament research center on the implementation of the last six national development plans, saying that only 10 percent of the goals set in those plans have been realized.

"These statistics and information about the implementation of development plans show that, unfortunately, instead of a comprehensive plan, so far, we have only compiled some notebooks on our wishes and hopes," the official said.

Referring to the process of preparing the seventh National Development Plan he called on the government to try to place more attention to its main beneficiaries, the private sector, in this plan, considering the special conditions governing the social, economic and political aspects of the country.

To help the government, a series of expert and detailed studies have been carried out by the ICCIMA committees and research center since 2019 which can be a good guide for the government in formulating this plan, Cheraghvand said.

In mid-September, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei outlined the general policies of the country's Seventh Five-year National Development Plan (2022-2026).

The mentioned policies were determined with a focus on economic development and the promotion of justice as the major priorities.

The leader set an average economic growth of eight percent as the goal for the duration of the mentioned plan, emphasizing the increase in the efficiency of all production factors including human resources, capital, technology, and management.

Following the announcement of the general policies of the plan by the leader, President Ebrahim Raisi tasked the country's Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) to officially start the compilation of the plan on September 14.

Establishing stability in the prices of consumer items and forex rates, reaching a single-digit inflation rate, as well as directing liquidity and bank credits toward productive sectors are among the major policies set by the plan.

Reforming the structure of the government budget was also among the major policies stressed in the Seventh National Development Plan.

Transforming the country's tax system with the approach of turning taxes into the main source of government revenues is also another major policy set by the plan.

Establishing a comprehensive social security system that encompasses relief, support, and insurance at the basic, surplus, and supplementary levels to provide fair services was the final economic policy that the executive bodies are obliged to follow in the said five years.

***Tehran Times***





## MEMBER PERSONALITIES

### Subhrakant Panda formally takes over as FICCI President



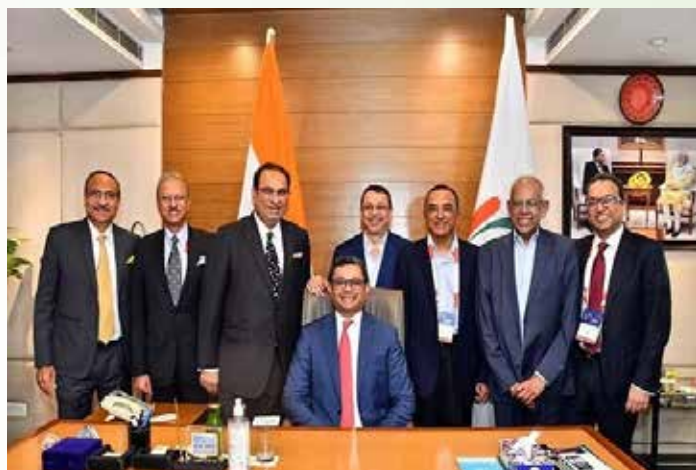
Industrialist Subhrakant Panda on December 17 formally took over as President of the leading industry body Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).

Panda, who was the Senior Vice President of FICCI, succeeded Sanjiv Mehta as President of the apex chamber during the conclusion of the 95th Annual General Meeting held today in New Delhi.

Panda is the Managing Director of Indian Metals and Ferro Alloys Ltd, which is the country's leading, fully integrated producer of ferroalloys with captive mining and power generation.

He has been active in FICCI for two decades and was the first Chairman of the FICCI Odisha State Council besides heading the FICCI National Manufacturing Committee.

Panda graduated from the Questrom School of Business, Boston University in 1993 with a dual concentration in Finance and Operations Management.



Besides, FICCI in a statement said Anish Shah, Managing Director and CEO of Mahindra and Mahindra Ltd has been elevated as Senior Vice President, and Harsha Vardhan Agarwal, Vice Chairman and Managing Director, Emami Limited has joined FICCI leadership as Vice President.

*The Print India*

### Outspoken leader of key Japanese business organization steps down after long tenure

Key business leader Akio Mimura stepped down as chairman of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, one of the nation's three leading business organizations, at the end of October. The honorary chairman of the steel

giant now known as Nippon Steel Corp., Mimura's statements over the years had a tremendous impact on the Japanese government and business community.

The JCCI's membership is dominated by small and midsize businesses, but Mimura, 81, tackled not only matters affecting small businesses but also more comprehensive issues involving both the government and private sectors.

Mimura led the organization for nine years and stepped down once his third term expired, an unusually long tenure for a JCCI chair. Many



JCCI officials regard him as one of their greatest leaders.

He was succeeded by Ken Kobayashi, the 73-year-old former head of Mitsubishi Corp. and the first JCCI chairperson from a major trading company.

Mimura became JCCI chairman in November 2013 as an internationalist leader at a point when small and midsize Japanese businesses faced the significant challenge of strengthening their competitiveness. He had previously served as president and chairman of Nippon Steel.

"I spent nine years worrying and thinking about what I should do in my role," Mimura said at his last regular press conference as the chairman on Oct. 20 in Tokyo. The answer, he said, was to "once again reconstruction the Japanese economy."

Since becoming the head of the JCCI, Mimura has repeatedly made unreserved statements criticizing both government administrations and industries. This made him unique among the heads of business organizations, which were criticized for their declining ability to assert themselves.

When Mimura became a member of important government councils, such as the National Council for Promoting the Dynamic Engagement of All Citizens presided by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, he repeatedly demanded measures he thought necessary regarding a wide range of policies, including taxes, fiscal matters and energy.

Mimura demanded, for example, that the government take measures to ensure that large firms and smaller businesses could trade with each other at fair prices and that companies could pass costs into sales prices. Both these positions were ultimately reflected in government policy.

As the economy has shifted from deflation in which prices steadily fell, to an era of rising prices caused by the high cost of resources, Mimura has worked hard to ensure the profitability of small and midsize companies.

"His remarks at key moments have had an impact," a senior figure in the business world said.

*The Japan News*

## SPECIAL FEATURE

### What Happens to Worker Productivity After a Minimum Wage Increase?



*By Sachin Waikar, Writer for the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University*



For many years, raising the minimum wage has been a hot-button topic debated vigorously by politicians, business owners, and economists, with strong disagreement over how an increased wage would affect employment and profits.

But there's another area of disagreement that gets less attention: how raising the minimum wage might affect worker productivity.

"The average person would imagine once wages go up, including the minimum wage, workers would become more attached to their employer and they might become more productive because they are more interested in keeping their job," says Nicola Persico, Kellogg professor of managerial economics and decision sciences. That could be a win for employees and employers alike.

The problem is that economists don't know much about the impacts of a higher wage on productivity. There simply hasn't been much research on the question, in part due to lack of relevant data.

"There's very limited evidence on the effect of minimum wage on individual employees," says Erika Deserranno, associate professor of managerial economics and decision sciences at Kellogg. "A lot of the research is on broad trends like whether the minimum wage results in more people being employed, but there is very little on what actually happens to those employees. Do they work more? Do they work less?"

In order to explore this question, the Kellogg researchers, along with collaborator Decio Coviello at HEC Montreal, were able to secure a massive dataset for worker productivity from a major U.S. retailer. Importantly, the retailer has stores in areas both with and without higher mandated minimum wages, allowing the researchers to compare worker productivity between stores.

The study finds that while a higher wage improved individual-worker productivity overall, the effect wasn't spread evenly across workers or locations. Additionally, store profits tended to go down with a higher wage.

Still, the researchers suggest a higher wage is worth considering. "It partially pays for itself because you get workers who are more productive and more attached to the firm," Deserranno says.

### ***A Natural Experiment***

To study the impact of a higher minimum wage on productivity, the researchers took ad-

vantage of the fact that different cities, counties, and states implemented different minimum-wage laws at different times. That makes it possible to compare productivity in stores on one side of the jurisdictional border with productivity in stores on the other side.

"We are able to compare these two stores that are very close geographically and therefore presumably similar in all respects, except the change of minimum wage," Persico says. "It provides a natural experiment."

The major U.S. retailer they study operates over 2,000 stores in all 50 states, employing over 40,000 salespeople. They analyzed data from February 2012 to June 2015, during which time there were more than 70 minimum-wage increases at state and local levels. The researchers were interested in how individual-worker productivity, as measured by the value of sales they made, changed between locations.

Importantly, the workers studied weren't paid a set wage, but one based partly on performance. They earned a base rate of pay that varied by location, averaging \$6.12/hour across stores, with commission-based compensation on top of that to incentivize productivity, such as for up-selling to higher-margin products or selling product warranties and other optional items. In other words, while earnings varied by worker based on performance, all workers in a given area had to earn at least the minimum rate for that area. For the company, this meant that it had to "top off" the weekly compensation of any workers whose pay fell below that minimum threshold.

This could conceivably have a couple very different effects on workers. "If you're a worker who's not that good at selling, the higher minimum wage may actually incentivize you to work less, because you're going to be topped up to a certain level no matter what," Deserranno says.

At the same time, higher guaranteed compensation could make workers more attached to their jobs, especially if employment options outside their current workplace are limited. "The increased wage can provide a kind of insurance for workers about compensation, and if they lose that job, they lose that insurance," Deserranno says. "So maybe they are more productive now because they don't want to get fired. That makes them more attached to the employer."

The researchers analyzed productivity, along with other data from the retailer, such store profits, the number of supervisors in the store, and turnover of employees.

### ***Greater Productivity, But . . .***

Broadly, the study found that a higher minimum wage led to greater productivity. “Employees work harder per hour,” Persico says. “They sell more goods” — about 4.5 percent more across all workers.

And importantly, this boost in sales really did seem to be in response to an uptick in employee effort. The researchers were able to use satellite photos of parking lots to determine that stores saw no additional traffic after the minimum-wage boost, suggesting that an increase in local demand was not responsible.

But the takeaways for companies and policymakers aren’t simple.

First, the effects were driven largely by lower-performance workers, whose productivity increased. “We didn’t see much happening for workers who were already well above minimum wage [due to their commissions],” Deserranno says. For example, while a \$1 increase in minimum wage improved low performers’ productivity by 22.6 percent, it had no observable effect on high performers.

Moreover, the link between wage and productivity is observed only in stores with more supervisors to monitor employees. In the presence of a higher minimum wage, high monitoring led to 6.6 percent more productivity across workers, while low monitoring led to a 9.4 percent decrease in productivity.

“If you’re in a store where there is very little monitoring and where low effort doesn’t necessarily cause you to be fired, a higher minimum wage actually reduces productivity,” Deserranno says. After all, why hustle if nobody’s watching and you’re guaranteed a certain amount of pay? “But in stores where you can get caught, people work harder because they don’t want to lose the job.”

Another twist is that increased productivity doesn’t necessarily mean greater profits, especially in the short term. Across stores, a \$1 increase in the minimum wage decreased profits per hour by 16 percent. That helps explain why many businesses are reluctant to increase wages — they believe, justifiably, it will erode their margins.

Still, the researchers argue that higher minimum compensation likely drives some longer-term economic benefits for businesses. Specifically, they found higher wages lead to lower turnover for lower-performing employees, with 19 percent fewer terminations in that group.

“Reduced turnover is a good thing because departure of employees at any performance level has a cost for businesses,” Persico says. The study didn’t estimate the potential value of reduced turnover, so it’s hard to say whether it’s sufficient to offset the lower profits, but that remains a possibility.

### ***A Policy Worth Considering***

So how should employers and policymakers interpret these findings?

In some situations — particularly when the long-term value of retention offsets any loss of profit from the higher wage — a higher minimum wage can be a boon for workers and companies.

“Raising minimum wage is a cost for businesses, but it works well as long as outside employment options aren’t great and if there’s good monitoring of workers within the firm,” Deserranno says. “Productivity goes up and departures go down.”

Persico adds, “A higher minimum wage creates greater attachment of workers to employers, more stickiness. That’s good from a policy level because in the United States, when people lose their jobs, they also often lose their health benefits, which creates other costs for individuals and society. So you want to keep them in their jobs.”

In the future, the researchers hope to continue their investigation into employee productivity by collaborating with more companies.

“We can do lots of things with this kind of data, including measuring what makes a worker more productive or what makes managers more effective. We have lots of statistical methods for doing that and invite companies with HR data to share to come to us for this kind of collaboration. The business insights can be very valuable.”

***Brink News***





# PRODUCT & SERVICE COUNCILS

## **CACCI Women Entrepreneurs Council**

### **Microfinance turns India's rural women into budding entrepreneurs**

Pulling out a shirt from a shelf at her shop in central India, Chandrawati Rajpoot recalls the sleepless nights she had after borrowing money from a loan shark - twice to pay for her sons' college tuition and once for a medical emergency.

Unable to pay the 5 per cent daily interest on her last loan of 20,000 rupees (\$245) in 2019, she was forced to give away her gold bangles - a family heirloom - to stop the moneylender from harassing her.

"In desperate times, (loan sharks) are the only option ... but they are ruthless," said Rajpoot, 44, in her village of Narela in Madhya Pradesh state, recounting how lenders showed up at her home, shouting abuse and threats of violence.

But those days came to an end in late 2020 when she signed up for a low-cost loan programme with a group of local women, in which they act as guarantors for each other - highlighting a growing shift towards formal microfinance among Indian women.

With the help of a loan of about 30,000 rupees, Rajpoot is now the owner of a small dairy herd comprising seven cows and one buffalo, and a shop selling children's clothing.

They earn her about 90,000 rupees a month - or nearly three times what she made two years ago as a farm labourer.

Rajpoot said she was left with enough to easily pay the 1,660-rupee monthly instalment to



Spandana Sphoorty Financial Limited, a microfinance company.

"For the first time, I don't constantly worry about how to make ends meet," said Rajpoot, adding that she plans to expand her own businesses, and help her children start their own.

Formal micro lenders are playing an increasingly important financing role in remote and rural areas where banks have limited reach or are unwilling to lend to the poor, industry analysts say.

Nearly two dozen women told Context they did not go to banks for loans because they were either asked to provide collateral, which they could not manage without any assets in their name, or do lengthy paperwork - a challenge for those with little to no literacy skills.

More than 75 per cent of adults - and over 80 per cent of women - are financially illiterate in India, according to the National Centre for Financial Education.

Shalini Sinha, the India representative for WIEGO, a network which helps informal workers, warned that if poor women were not offered adequate financial knowledge and insurance, it could force them to turn to loan sharks.

From shop owners and jewellers to subcontractors, many locals operate as private moneylenders, who, compared to banks, are more easily accessible and do not bother with documentation.

"(But) the interest charged is so very high ... that she cannot repay the loan, so she takes another one and it becomes a vicious cycle of poverty," Sinha said.

#### **'Borrow with pride'**

Loan sharks have monopolised the rural credit market for generations in India, often charging abnormally high interest rates of up to 10 per cent a day, financial experts say.

They rarely spare defaulters, using

heavy-handed means to collect debts.

In September, a married couple in southern Andhra Pradesh state died by suicide after loan app agents threatened them by saying their intimate photos would be posted on social media.

Andhra Pradesh, once known as the centre of India's microfinance sector, curbed micro lending activities more than a decade ago after a spate of suicides by borrowers, and in 2015 it banned moneylenders from operating without a licence after arresting some 200 people over harassment complaints.

Vivek Tiwari, the managing director and chief executive officer of New Delhi-based Satya MicroCapital Limited, said one of the main challenges for his teams was battling informal lenders in new places.

"They don't want us in these markets," he said, recalling an incident in which his colleagues were held at gunpoint in a northern village by local moneylenders.

Tiwari, also the vice chair of Microfinance Institutions Network (MFIN), a self-regulatory organisation for the sector, said that despite obstacles MFIs were making significant inroads in unbanked and financially unserved parts of India.

More than 60 million Indian women currently hold small, collateral-free loans, impacting as many as 300 million families in the country of some 1.4 billion people, according to the MFIN.

"We are giving more freedom to people. They can borrow and repay with pride. That's why they don't want to get into the traps set by moneylenders again," Tiwari said.

### **'Big dreams'**

MFIs offer doorstep credit and also financial literacy training, which includes how to access banking services and repay loans responsibly as well as planning future investments and savings.

All of the women interviewed said such programmes not only helped them dodge loan sharks and break debt cycles, but had also equipped them to start small businesses that had eased their cash flow problems, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

They highlighted the benefits for household budgeting, their children's education and nutrition, and during emergencies.

Several women said they were most thrilled about generating jobs and incomes for fellow vil-

lagers.

"After I bought two sewing machines, I hired a young man to help keep up with the demand," said Kiran Devi, who pays her sole employee 7,000 rupees at her home-based tailor shop, which she started last year with a 50,000-loan in northern Uttar Pradesh state.

Such accomplishments encourage disciplined repayment by women - with timely collections recorded at nearly 99 per cent - which in turn brings other benefits such as access to bigger loan amounts and better terms, industry experts say.

Anshukant Taneja, head of the micro finance programme at the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which has supported more than 8 million female borrowers in India, said such initiatives also boost women's community roles.

With more economic progress and regulatory easing in the country, he hopes to see MFIs deliver other financial products such as micro-insurance, small mortgages and a channel to mobilise savings.

In the meantime MFIs face a series of challenges, he said, including how to manage their portfolios and ensure borrowers have loans that match their income levels to prevent excessive lending, and expanding their programme to remote areas where costs may be high and there are fewer borrowers.

For now, women like Mithilesh Yadav are chalking out future goals with the aid of micro loans. From being a housewife to becoming the owner of small grocery and a tailor shop, the 26-year-old said she had never imagined "living so comfortably".

Over the last seven years, Yadav has taken a series of loans to fulfil some of her childhood ambitions, including owning a home and a car. But she said she was not done yet, with plans to open a beauty salon and buy land for her children.

"My siblings and I struggled a lot. We had to drop out of school early and help our parents with labour work," said the mother-of-two at her store in Madhya Pradesh, where she taught herself how to sew by watching YouTube videos.

"But I still have big dreams. I want to be a successful businesswoman who my children look up to."

**Eco-Business**



## ***Asian Council on Food and Agriculture***

### **Adapt or perish: Adaptation imperatives for a food-secure Asia**

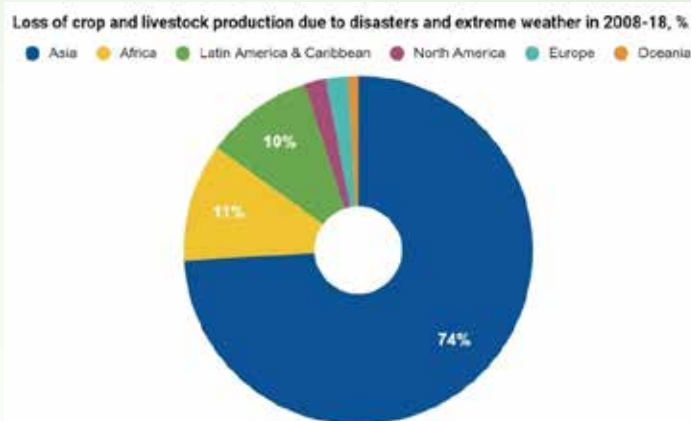


“Adaptation and Agriculture” was a key area of discussion at COP27, the UN climate summit which concluded on November 18th. The conference hosted the first-ever Food and Agriculture Pavilion, in line with global calls for transforming existing agrifood systems to make them more resilient to climate change. Agricultural production also needs to become more productive to meet rising food demand.

A study in April 2021 indicated that global farming productivity was 21% lower than it could have been without climate change. Climate variability and extreme weather events, such as droughts, floods and heatwaves, severely impact agricultural productivity by hurting crop yields and causing land degradation.

Soaring temperatures will also make it difficult for farmers to work in open fields. Agricultural workers in countries with low or medium human development (according to the UN’s Human Development Index) were among the worst affected by exposure to extreme temperatures, suffering almost half of the 295bn potential work hours lost due to heat in 2020.

Economist Impact’s 2022 Global Food Security Index (GFSI) highlights a year-on-year weakening of food-system resilience, which threatens food security. If production does not keep pace with increasing demand, the food-security environment will continue to deteriorate. Currently, 60% of the world’s 7.9bn people live in



the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region, which correlates closely to the proportion who are malnourished globally.

#### ***Mapping the productivity challenge in Asia***

APAC accounts for 19% of all food and agricultural exports globally. Asia’s two major staple crops, rice and wheat, are highly water-dependent. Extreme weather threatens the production of these crops as climate-related heat stress increases the likelihood of drought and exacerbates water scarcity. Climate change-induced agricultural loss will drive up the cost of food. Soaring temperatures in India led the country to ban wheat exports to stave off shortages, causing a spike in global prices.

In addition, supply-chain disruptions due to the war in Ukraine have pushed up the prices of food, fuel and fertiliser, hurting developing economies. Major agricultural producers in the region such as India and China are likely to struggle to maintain productivity to fill food-supply gaps in the face of increasing prices of chemical fertilisers from Russia.

A decline in agricultural productivity amid growing food demand and rampant poverty will have serious consequences for food security in Asia. About 80% of the global population most at risk from crop failures and hunger due to climate change is in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and South-East Asia, where agricultural workers are disproportionately poor and vulnerable. Even in the relatively high-income countries of Asia, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, much of the farming community lives on the edge of poverty and food inflation has a significant impact on the urban poor. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, 418m Asians suffered from extreme hunger in 2021, up from 375m in 2020. In addi-



tion, Asia recorded the highest food inflation rate in the second quarter of 2022, across regions.

These conditions underscore the urgent need to accelerate adaptation efforts for more resilient food systems, equipped to withstand future shocks.

### ***Turning the tide on adaptation efforts in Asia***

The UN Environment Programme's 2022 Adaptation Gap Report notes that 84% of the nearly 200 countries globally have established adaptation plans, up by 5% from the previous year. However, income inequality and poverty constrain adaptation efforts. Particularly in low-income countries in Asia, there is an urgent need for wider adoption of low-cost adaptation strategies, and for more climate finance from richer nations.

Climate-smart agriculture (CSA) is one such adaptation approach that can increase farm productivity and improve food security, while also supporting climate mitigation. A common CSA technique is crop diversification (eg, intercropping and crop rotation), which can improve agricultural resilience to climate change. Agroforestry is another way of managing agricultural land efficiently and improving crop yields. While agroforestry techniques like intercropping with trees (alley-cropping) and linear planting of trees and shrubs designed to enhance crop production and soil protection (windbreaks) are becoming popular in South-East Asia, addressing gaps in agroforestry education programmes for smallholders could further increase adoption.

Other adaptation efforts can be unlocked by harnessing the power of technology. For example, precision agriculture uses IoT sensors and drones to analyse farm data and optimise the use of resources. Global crop yield could increase by



10-15% by 2030 if 15-25% of farms adopted precision agriculture. Indoor-farming techniques such as vertical farming, which grows crops on multiple levels using electric lighting, could boost productivity in densely populated places like Singapore, where space is limited.

### ***Current ag-adaptation finance is inadequate***

Despite increasing implementation of adaptation actions in developing countries, the adaptation finance gap is widening. Less than 2% of climate finance is geared towards smallholder farmers—too little to bring about substantial changes in agricultural production and resilience. The 2022 GFSI highlights that more than half of APAC receives weak climate-finance flows. Sustained investment is needed to adapt and transform agricultural production for a food-secure future.

At COP27, a Loss and Damage fund was established for the first time. This is a promising move towards addressing climate-related losses of crops and agricultural livelihoods (among other types of losses). Details of who will contribute to the fund, and how the financial arrangements will be accessed, remain to be thrashed out. Importantly, climate talks recognised the need for transforming the financial system in order to finance the energy transition and resilience needs of developing countries.

However, there was little new money on the table. So far, the US\$100bn pledged by developed nations as annual climate finance has not been delivered in full, and global climate finance for 2019-20 was around 30% of the required amount. This remains woefully inadequate, but a call for reform is a step in the right direction.

### ***Economist Impact***



## ***Asian Council on Health and Education***



Many Asian countries introduced tougher Covid-19 restrictions than in other continents, a reality that has caused concerns about elevated levels of stress, anxiety and isolation. Now, a number of young entrepreneurs are leveraging technology to provide greater access to mental healthcare there.

In July, Singapore-based Intellect raised \$20 million in its Series A funding, the largest amount raised by a mental health start-up in Asia.

Founded in 2019, Intellect runs a mobile app that regularly checks in on users' mood, provides rescue sessions and exercises that tailor to their needs, and allows them to connect with therapists in real time if needed.

"The traditional form of therapy is in-person and on-on-one, and it is hard to scale," said Theodoric Chew, the 26-year-old co-founder of Intellect. "When technology comes in, we can scale access to mental care to everyone."

The start-up now serves more than 3 million users across the Asia-Pacific region in 15 languages since services began in early 2020.

### ***Mental health as a spectrum***

Chew said he was inspired to try to popularize mental healthcare after battling a panic attack when he was 16 years old.

"I saw first-hand how therapy and working with professionals helped me become better," he said. "On the flip side, I saw a lot of people strug-

gling across the region – not clinically, but not having the right tools or know-how to access care."

While Intellect was founded before the pandemic, it quickly grew in popularity as companies became aware of their employees' mental health as Covid-19 related lockdown and quarantine measures were imposed.

"A lot of people were thrown into an array of things – anxiety of the pandemic, being locked up, and getting stay-home notices," he said. "What has changed fundamentally was that mental health is no longer just a nice-to-have element that companies should consider, it's something that's needed across the board today."

"It does benefit companies in very real ways ... because if you're not feeling well mentally, you tend to not perform as well," he said.

Justin Kim, CEO and co-founder of Ami, another digital mental healthcare start-up based in Singapore and Jakarta, agreed that there's a need to scale mental health offerings.

"Many companies are spending millions of dollars a year and paying for gym memberships. But why don't people invest into their mental health the same way? It's because there are no resources that are being offered to them, that's just as accessible and affordable," he added.

Since the start-up was founded in January this year, it has raised at least \$3 million from a number of investors, including Meta, the owner of Facebook.

Kim's team has been working on developing an app that would allow users to text or call mental health coaches confidentially at any time – without having to make prior appointments. He said this allows users to seek professional help whenever they need it in the most efficient way.

### ***Creating a happier workforce***

Both Chew and Kim are targeting employers in their business models – companies can pay for a subscription and workers will have unlimited access to their services, which are kept private from their bosses.

Alistair Carmichael, an associate partner at McKinsey & Company, said employers will benefit from better mental health in their workforce. "The impacts of poor mental health outcomes are significant. ... If we focus on the employment and organizational level, those impacts can be things like presenteeism, absenteeism, lost productivity,



lost engagement and attrition,” he said.

Depression and anxiety disorders have cost the global economy \$1 trillion each year in lost productivity, the World Health Organization has estimated. And a report by the WHO in March showed the global prevalence of anxiety and depression increased by 25% during the first year of the pandemic.

Chew said Intellect is attempting to close the gap by proactively safeguarding mental wellbeing before symptoms get worse. When employees open the app, the system asks them how they feel at the moment. Mini “rescue sessions” are also provided to users who are experiencing a rough time, while live therapy sessions are also available for those who require them.

The app features numerous learning programs for users to overcome mental roadblocks, such as self-esteem issues, depression or procrastination. A journal function guides users through writing what’s on their mind, while a “mood timeline” keeps track of their stress levels.

Since launching the app, Intellect has served a number of high-profile corporate clients such as Dell, Foodpanda, and Singaporean communications conglomerate Singtel, Chew said, which allowed Intellect to expand from a team of two to 80.

Kim, whose start-up has been building a prototype, said employers could also benefit by identifying trends and general concerns among their workforces.

“With employees’ consent, we do share aggregated levels of data. And that offers employers a birds’ eye perspective of what their employees are actually struggling with, that they need to deep dive on,” he said.

“But we never identify who said that, because we don’t want employees to feel like this isn’t a safe space where they can freely address

concerns they have.”

### ***Breaking social stigma***

Karen Lau, a Hong Kong-based clinical psychologist with mental health initiative Mind HK, said addressing mental health in Asia comes with unique challenges.

“In Asian contexts, many cultures tend to uphold values such as honor, pride, and a concept of face,” she said. “Mental illness is usually viewed and judged as a sign of weakness and a source of shame for the family.”

“I think when it comes to mental health, just like your physical health, every issue is easier to prevent than fixed,” Kim said. “If people get out there and admit and celebrate the fact that they’re receiving coaching or services to invest in their mental health, it’s going to normalize the practice.”

Chew said one of his goals is to break social stigma and build a new mental healthcare system for the Asia-Pacific region.

“Mental health has long had a stigma across Asia, whereby traditionally we’ve seen it as a clinical issue, a crisis,” he said. “We see mental health just as important as physical health. You and I face things like stress, burnout, sleep issues, and relationship struggle as well. That’s where actually a lot of us should start working on our mental well-being.”

***CNN Business***

## ***Asian Council on Water, Energy and Environment***



## **Ocean power: a running tide for renewables in Asia**



If there is one certainty in today's changeable world, it is that tides will rise and fall. You only need to gaze towards the ocean to be reminded of the power of the seas, the backdrop for an abundance of stories, both fact and fiction.

Southeast Asia is blessed with ocean space, largely comprising islands or ocean-bound states – known either as Mainland or Maritime Southeast Asia – in the Indian and Pacific oceans. The region is increasingly interesting to academics, who consider how renewable power techniques and technologies can be utilised for the more than 660 million people living there. Among them are ocean thermal energy, salinity gradient technologies, wave and tidal power generation, collectively known as ocean renewable energy (ORE).

"Oceans contain vast renewable energy potential", according to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), "theoretically equivalent to more than double the world's current electricity demand." In a 2020 report, "Innovation Outlook: Ocean Energy Technologies", it concluded ocean energy could provide "affordable, reliable electricity" for small island developing states, as well as "boosting potable water supplies via seawater desalination"; arguably highly attractive to Southeast Asia given its geographical make-up.

Additionally the report said exploitation would create jobs, improves livelihoods and provide other socio-economic benefits whilst delivering "predictability" in energy supply.

#### ***More than a drop in the ocean***

However, of all the renewable power generation sources, ocean-based energy is arguably the least advanced, with technologies largely not commercially available today, at least not on an industrial scale. In a late 2021 market report, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said globally policies promoting research and development are needed to achieve further cost reductions and large-scale development.

The IEA said: "Electricity generation from marine technologies increased an estimated 33% in 2020, mainly owing to Denmark's capacity increase of 200 MW. However, marine power's status remains 'not on track' because it is far from being aligned with the Net Zero Scenario's sustained annual growth of 33% through 2030, which is not expected to be achieved in the years ahead."

IRENA adds that barriers to the technol-

ogy's development remain, and include the technology itself, infrastructure, and financial and regulatory concerns. Among the infrastructure challenges is the lack of grid connectivity, leading to significantly increased costs. It adds: "Grids in ocean energy markets can be small and unstable, especially in islands or sparsely populated coastal areas."

However, globally some countries are managing to address many of these concerns, at least enough to make a success of some projects. IRENA said its 2020 analysis found the largest concentration of ocean energy technologies were being developed in 31 countries, with a large concentration in Europe. Accounting for 98% of the total installed ocean energy capacity globally, the main markets were South Korea, France and Canada. "These countries hold the largest number of projects tested, deployed and planned, as well as the most project developers and device manufacturers," it said.

Based on IRENA's analysis, the global cumulative resource potential ranges from 45,000TWh to well above 130,000 annually. "Therefore, ocean energy alone has the potential to meet more than twice the current global electricity demand," it said. Tidal energy technologies represent "the majority of the global installed ocean energy capacity", with around 512MW, of which 501.5MW is operational tidal barrage plants.

#### ***Supply and demand, demand, demand***

Like a growing list of nations around the world, many within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have committed to reducing their carbon emissions; however, they face challenges unique to their geographies, economies and even socio-political will. By the middle of this decade ASEAN aims to meet 23% of its primary energy demands via renewable sources, an ambition it is well on the way to achieving. But demand is outpacing supply and looks set to do so for the foreseeable future.

In a report published by the IEA as early as 2019, it was concluded energy demand across the region had increased by more than 80% from where it was two decades prior, making the need to find alternative sources of energy even more critical. IRENA, though, says that countries in Asia and south-east Asia do have tidal power potential, but it has not yet been fully harnessed and lever-

aged.

The environment – figuratively speaking – is not yet matured enough. “There is a lack of ocean energy networks and umbrella organisations that have the resources and experience in developing ocean energy regulatory frameworks and discussing potential policies with authorities,” IRENA said in 2020. “In addition, there is often a lack of clarity and information on the permitting process. Strategic government plans and policy mechanisms are further lacking to enhance the grid, obtain investments, support revenue streams and conduct marine spatial planning due to the novelty of these technologies.”

Yet the circumstances may be changing – both in Southeast Asia and around the world – as countries look to enhance their sustainable energy portfolios as the impact of climate change and growing energy insecurity become ever more apparent. ASEAN members, particularly Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines, are taking a much more considered approach to green energy than ever before. All are positively encouraging project investments – both technological and infrastructure – by introducing new laws, funding and other financial incentives and the creation of attractive foreign investment environments to promote investment.

### ***Southeast Asia could lead the world in tidal power***

As part of that push to attract international partners, in August 2022 the Philippines Department of Energy opened the door to new renewable energy projects with 100% foreign investment, something that was initially prohibited by its 1987 Constitution. Speaking at a committee meeting, Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla said the country needed to move towards indigenous sources of power to secure energy and not be at the mercy of volatile markets.

“We need to address the industry’s needs and, definitely, one way of doing that is to open up renewable energy,” he said. “We must end this overdependence on petroleum and petroleum-based fuels because otherwise we’ll always experience volatility in prices. We would have to invest in solar, wind and even newer technologies.” He added that in the longer-term, ocean, thermal, hydrogen and offshore wind would be the goal; but accepted that regulatory reform is needed and that



tidal was still relatively costly.

The Philippines isn’t alone in Asia with its renewable, and tidal, power ambitions. Indonesia is actively pursuing marine energy as part of its longer-term renewable ambitions. Marine renewables are recognised as part of the country’s renewable energy development plan, making funding available for pilot testing in preparation for full-scale commercialisation.

Southeast Asia is big on energy transition, and tidal power may have a role to play. Currently, the region is largely reliant on fossil fuels and as such exposed to the vagaries of this increasingly unpredictable market. Renewables are a huge part of the answer, and the region knows it; but it’s difficult to get a clear picture of where it is in renewable power. It’s among the top renewable generators in the world when breaking the market down into subcategories – such as geothermal and to a degree solar – but it lags significantly behind in many others.

However, given the undeveloped nature of the marine, specifically tidal, renewable energy, the region has the potential to be a global powerhouse. To do so it needs to ensure it’s geared to attracting foreign interest – bringing with it technical expertise and funding. If it can do that, Southeast Asia could be sailing the high seas in a new age of renewable power.

***Power Technology***





# INVESTMENT & JOINT VENTURES

## AirAsia confirms JV in Cambodia

AirAsia Aviation Group Limited, the aviation arm of Capital A Berhad, has signed a joint venture agreement with Sivilai Asia to establish AirAsia Cambodia.

The new airline will cement AirAsia's brand in Cambodia and Indochina, providing AirAsia with greater access to its domestic market and, most importantly, connecting it to the international markets across ASEAN, North Asia and beyond.

Establishing a new low-cost airline in Cambodia will allow AAAGL to build network connectivity and further reduce operational costs. Subject to obtaining the relevant regulatory approvals, the JV should be up and running in late 2023.

The JV was signed by Capital A CEO Tony Fernandes and Sivilai Asia director Vissoth Nam witnessed by Cambodia's Minister in Charge of State Secretariat of Civil Aviation Mao Havannal.

Fernandes said: "Cambodia is the fifth ASEAN country where we are continuing our march of being the region's number one mover of people and cargo. 2022 was about restarting our airline to pre-Covid levels. That machine is in place and will be completed by the second quarter of 2023. The second half of 2023 will be when we focus on our continued efforts in growth.

"We are confident of profitability in the first year. Cambodia is a market that is familiar to us and where we have the infrastructure in place. That's why all our future airlines will be based in ASEAN. As this is an area we know well and can derive quick profitability and connect our very large network to the main points of Cambodia, namely Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville.

Pre-pandemic, AirAsia operated 90 weekly flights from Malaysia and Thailand and is currently flying about 49 weekly flights to Cambodia.

AAAGL operates five routes to Cambodia



from Kuala Lumpur to Siem Reap and Phnom Penh, from Penang to Phnom Penh (starting 23 January 2023) and Bangkok (Don Mueang) to Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. Since entering the Cambodian market in 2005, AirAsia has carried over 10 million guests to and from Cambodia.

*TTR Weekly*

## Ashurst establishes JV with HwaHyun in Korea

Ashurst and law firm HwaHyun has established a joint venture, which secured the Ministry of Justice's approval on 29 November 2022, to expand its outbound Korean practice.

Paul Jenkins, Global CEO of Ashurst in Sydney, said Asia is a critically important part of the firm's strategy and the joint venture in South Korea reflects its ambitions in the market.

"Over the past 12 months, we have seen a strong performance in Asia, which we expect to continue," said Jenkins. "By combining Ashurst's global strength with HwaHyun's local expertise, the joint venture will help us serve our clients with their inbound and outbound business opportunities."

HwaHyun is a full-service Korean law firm that specialises in corporate, IP, technology and dispute resolution.

Co-managing partners Shin Kyung-Shik and Seong Nak-Song lead the firm. Shin spent 27 years in public service, including as the chief prosecutor of the Suwon District Prosecutors' Office, while Seong served as a judge for more than 30 years.

*Asia Business Law Journal*

## L'Oréal launches North Asia cosmetics brand via joint venture



L'Oréal has launched Shihyo, a cosmetics brand specifically designed for North Asian consumers. The new luxury cosmetics brand has been developed through a joint venture with Hotel Shilla, a Korean high-end hotel chain, the parent company of The Shilla Duty Free store chain, and with Anchor Equity Partners, a private equity firm specialised in investing on Asian markets that owns shares in online grocery retailer Market Kurly and local cryptocurrency platform Dunamu. This is the first time that L'Oréal has developed a new brand through a joint venture.

The products commercialised by Shihyo, which means “the wisdom of time” in Korean, are made from 24 ingredients sourced from local farmers, inspired by the 24 solar subdivisions of the traditional far-eastern calendar. All the formulations also include an ingredient called ShiHyo24, described as a patented, nutrient-rich concentrate infused in fermented rice water and ginseng water. The line consists of facial cleansers and creams, as well as shampoos and conditioners.

The first Shihyo store, called the Seoul Garden, will open in the coming months inside the Shilla Seoul hotel, in South Korea's capital Seoul, before expanding into other countries in the region.

In Q3 of fiscal 2022, sales for the L'Oréal group in the North Asia region grew by 11.3% to reach €2.41 billion.

***Fashion Network***

## AWC and Accor sign the first strategic multiple-property framework agreement



Global hospitality leader, Accor, has signed its first multiple-property framework agreement with Asset World Corporation (AWC), Thailand's leading integrated lifestyle real-estate group.

The Framework Agreement with AWC signals Accor's continued rapid expansion across Thailand, a strategic market which continues to shine on the world stage. Under the partnership, Accor and AWC will develop more than 1,000 room keys across multiple Accor-branded hotels in key tourism destinations throughout the country, providing unique offerings and experiences for guests.

“Accor has always been a pioneer in expanding into new frontiers, working with owner partners that understand our vision for the future of hospitality”, says Garth Simmons, Chief Executive Officer, Accor Southeast Asia, Japan & South Korea. “We're delighted to be entering into this partnership with Asset World Corporation, and I believe that Accor's expertise and strength within the hospitality sector will complement AWC's leadership position within the lifestyle real estate business in Thailand. We look forward to bringing some of the world's most renowned hotel brands to Thailand with this milestone partnership”.

As part of the agreement, AWC will develop the properties under Accor's various luxury and lifestyle brands. The hotels will further strengthen both the real estate and tourism industries in the country, and further enhance



Thailand as a unique sustainable destination of the world.

Wallapa Traisorat, Chief Executive Officer and President, Asset World Corp Public Company Limited or AWC, states, "We are delighted to announce this first strategic partnership with Accor, a world-leading hospitality group, to expand our portfolio in strategic locations across Thailand. The collaboration to develop a number of a world-class hotels will mark the beginning of more exciting projects in the future to support the growth of the Thai tourism industry while pursuing AWC's mission of Building a Better Future".

Accor currently operates 373 hotels in Southeast Asia, Japan and South Korea, with 83 hotels operating in Thailand under 11 brands. The Group has a strong pipeline of 20 hotels currently under development in Thailand.

*Accor*



development and climate change mitigation.

This collaboration agreement between AGRA and Grow Asia was announced during the Grow Asia Forum in Singapore on Tuesday 18 October, Grow Asia's annual summit co-hosted with the World Economic Forum.

"Grow Asia provided us with the opportunity to bring our continents [Africa and Asia] together to take advantage of the best they each have to offer. This is the perfect time to strengthen South-South Cooperation and to learn from each other. We are going to demonstrate that international cooperation continues to be an important pillar to help us feed more people and take better care of our planet. This meeting serves as the launch pad for a series of commitments between our two institutions and countries across continents in the south," said Dr. Agnes Kalibata, President of AGRA.

"South-South Cooperation is at the heart of how Grow Asia operates, bringing together over 600 partners across Southeast Asia to co-develop, pilot, and scale solutions to some of the region's most pressing food system challenges," says Beverley Postma, Executive Director of Grow Asia. "Food systems in Africa and Asia share many similarities and challenges. We know that intra-regional cooperation serves as an important enabler of economic development, resulting in increased trade, technology transfer, foreign direct investment and, critically, trust. We welcome AGRA's partnership and look forward to the many synergies this agreement will bring."

*Eco Business*

## AGRA, Grow Asia enter collaboration agreement to drive South-South cooperation between Africa, Asia

The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and Grow Asia have signed a collaboration agreement to accelerate food system transformation in Africa and Asia. Grounded in the spirit of South-South Cooperation between the leading agri-food platforms in Africa and Asia respectfully, the agreement will pave the way for the co-development of knowledge exchange and training programs, joint case studies, and research, and, where appropriate, the pooling and sharing of tools and resources.

South-South cooperation is characterised by technical collaboration by developing countries in the Global South. It is a tool most typically deployed by international organisations, civil society, and the private sector to share knowledge and skills in specific areas such as agricultural

# ECONOMIC COOPERATION

## Pakistan, Tajikistan sign multiple cooperation MOUs



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that Pakistan wanted the establishment of energy, rail and road connectivity with the diverse energy resources rich Central Asian Republics (CARs) for the development and prosperity of the entire region.

During a joint press stakeout with President of Tajikistan Emamoli Rahmon, the prime minister said Pakistan desired early completion of the Central Asia-South Asia (CASA-1000) power project to meet its energy needs. He said Pakistan had been the first country that established ties with Tajikistan some 31 years back. Since then both countries had been enjoying excellent cordial and friendly ties. Pakistan wanted to further strengthen the bilateral cooperation and ties in all fields including energy, trade, joint ventures in agriculture and food etc, he added.

Prime Minister Sharif further said Pakistan attached immense importance to its bilateral ties with Tajikistan as it was a gateway to the CARs. He informed that they held very productive meetings to further strengthen the bilateral relations and promote trade, investment and culture between the people of two brotherly nations.

The prime minister expressed the hope that Tajik President Emomali Rahmon's visit to Pakistan 'would usher in new era of cooperation and development between the two countries. He also welcomed the Tajik president and his delegation and said that the people of Pakistan were overwhelmed with joy and pleasure over their visit. President Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon, reciprocating the warm feelings for the government and people of Pakistan, said that his country attached high priority to its ties with Pakistan. He said both countries had been making joint efforts to further promote the friendly ties and expressed the opti-

mism that the MoUs signed between the two countries would give new impetus to these relations. He said during their delegation-level deliberations, they had discussed government-to-government level contacts, security, economic situation, global economic decay, energy and connectivity activities and linking of port city of Karachi.

He said they also had useful exchange of views on CASA-1000, cooperation in agriculture, energy connectivity, joint ventures in food technology, trade, science and technology and cooperation between the business communities of the two countries. President Rahmon further said that both countries shared commonalities which served to further strengthen these ties. The two sides also expressed satisfaction over cooperation in security and reaffirmed to face contemporary challenges jointly like extremism, terrorism and radicalism, he added.

He said that they also acknowledged the significance of concerted global efforts for a stable and peaceful Afghanistan, adding Tajikistan and Pakistan were also closely cooperating at the global level including UN, Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and other multilateral foras. He also wished for progress and prosperity of Pakistan and its people. Earlier, Tajik President and the Prime Minister of Pakistan witnessed the inking of a number of MoUs and agreements to boost bilateral cooperation in diverse fields.

These MoUs and agreements included MoU for establishment of Sister Cities Relations between Dushanbe and Islamabad, Agreement over cooperation in industries and technology, Agreement over Transit Trade, Agreement between Tajik Drug Control Agency and Anti-Narcotics Force



Pakistan to control illicit trade of narcotics drugs, and psychotropic material etc; agreement for cooperation between Tajikistan Agency of Standardization, Meteorology, Certification and Trade Inspection and Pakistan's Standards and Quality Control Authority, MoU between Customs Service of Tajikistan and Federal Board of Revenue (FBR).

*Daily Times*



## Vietnam PM affirms resolve to join hands with Netherlands in promoting comprehensive partnership

Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh held talks with his Dutch counterpart Mark Rutte in The Hague on December 12, affirming his determination to join hands with the Netherlands in promoting the two countries' comprehensive partnership.

Welcoming his guest's official visit, PM Rutte stated that the Netherlands attaches importance to Vietnam's important stature and role in its policy towards the Indo-Pacific region.

The two PMs expressed their delight at the progress in their countries' comprehensive partnership as seen in frequent visits and discussions between senior leaders of Vietnam and the Netherlands.

They agreed to increase the exchange of all-level delegations between the States, Governments, and parliaments of the two countries, and effectively implement bilateral cooperation mechanisms.

They noted with satisfaction the vigorous growth of bilateral trade and investment ties, which has turned the Netherlands into the second largest European trading partner and the biggest EU investor of Vietnam.

Both host and guest concurred in continuing to effectively implement the EU - Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) and developing the two countries into transit centres for goods in their

respective regions.

PM Chinh proposed the Netherlands to soon ratify the EU - Vietnam Investment Protection Agreement (EVIPA); encourage Dutch businesses to step up investment in the fields they are strong at in Vietnam such as seaport, shipbuilding, logistics, and infrastructure connectivity; support the European Commission's removal of its IUU "yellow card" warning against Vietnam's aquatic product exports; and assist the Southeast Asian nation to build seaports, airports, and innovation centres.

The Vietnamese Government leader also suggested the two sides ink a labour cooperation agreement soon.

PM Rutte described the EVFTA as an important impetus for bilateral economic relations, stressing that Dutch businesses are paying more and more attention to Vietnam, which boasts political stability and an optimal investment and business climate.

He also spoke highly of Vietnam's efforts to sustainably develop the fishery industry and also voiced his support for the European Commission's early removal of the "yellow-card" warning.

The two leaders agreed to intensify cooperation within the framework of the strategic partnerships in climate change adaptation and sustainable agriculture.

The Netherlands is ready to share experience, knowledge, technology, and concessional loans to help Vietnam develop sustainable agriculture and the logistics system, boost green transition, protect biodiversity, and manage water resources, especially in the Mekong Delta, the Dutch PM said.

PM Chinh proposed the Netherlands to assist Vietnam to develop eco-friendly, modern, and smart agriculture; provide aid in terms of finance,



technology, and manpower training within the Just Energy Transition Partnership on the basis of harmonious interests to help Vietnam effectively cope with climate change and realise climate commitments; and support the country in developing a circular economy.

PM Rutte pledged to foster cooperation in renewable energy development and give assistance in term of offshore sand mining technology, land erosion prevention, and amendment of the Law on Water Resources.

He also welcomed his guest's proposal on the establishment of a trilateral cooperation mechanism on agriculture and food security to deal with supply chain disruptions and contribute to common efforts to resolve the global issue of food security.

The two sides agreed to expand cooperation in security-defence, culture-tourism, transport, science-technology, and education-training while continuing to support each other at multilateral forums like the ASEAN-EU cooperation, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), and the United Nations.

The Vietnamese leader also called for stronger locality-to-locality collaboration such as between Hanoi and Amsterdam, and between Ho Chi Minh City and Rotterdam. He asked the Netherlands to increase scholarships for Vietnamese students learning at its universities.

Regarding the East Sea issue, the two PMs reaffirmed the importance of ensuring peace, stability, security, safety, and freedom of navigation and overflight in the East Sea, and resolving disputes by peaceful measures on the basis of international law. They also underlined the significance of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Also at the talks, PM Chinh suggested the Dutch Government to create more favourable conditions for the Vietnamese community so that they can contribute to the two countries' friendship and the Netherlands' socio-economic development.

Following the talks, the PMs witnessed the signing of some cooperation documents, including a joint action plan on water resources management between the Vietnamese Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, and the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Resources, and a joint statement on emission reduction in manufacturing and consumption between the Vietnamese Ministry of Industry and Trade, and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

*Vietnam Plus*



## MEP Anna Fotyga in Taiwan to discuss economic, trade cooperation

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) on Dec. 15 welcomed the arrival of European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs member Anna Fotyga.

This was the second visit by a senior member of the European Parliament following Vice President Nicola Beer's trip in July, per a MOFA press release. Fotyga, the former Polish foreign minister, has long supported Taiwan and is concerned about China's military threat, the foreign ministry said.

She has spoken publicly in the European Parliament many times in support of maintaining



peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and has actively pushed for deeper Taiwan-EU relations, MOFA added.

During her four-day trip, Fotyga and her delegation visited the foreign ministry, the Mainland Affairs Council, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and the European Economic and Trade Office, and attended a banquet hosted by Deputy Foreign Minister Tsai Ming-yen. The group also had talks with Taiwan government ministries on Taiwan-EU and Taiwan-Poland economic and trade cooperation.

“As the Russia-Ukraine war is still ongoing and China continues to threaten Taiwan with its military, the foreign minister welcomes Fotyga’s visit as an act of support for Taiwan and regional peace and stability,” MOFA said.

The foreign ministry said it hoped this visit would accumulate more momentum for bolstering the democratic partnership between Taiwan and the EU and bilateral cooperation in multiple areas based on shared values including freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

*Taiwan News*



sary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia, adding that the relations between the two countries raised to the level of strategic partnership.

The sides praised the development of relations between the two countries in the politics, economic, investment, energy, transport, cultural and humanitarian areas. They also stressed the importance of providing mutual support within the international organizations.

The sides also hailed the contributions of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum, Southern Gas Corridor projects to the economic development of both Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Touching upon the importance of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, PM Ali Asadov said that the launch of the railway at full capacity will contribute to the further prosperity and economic progress of both countries.

The sides also highlighted the significance of the Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route), stressing the importance of increasing joint efforts to attract more cargo on this route.

Following the meeting, Prime Minister Ali Asadov and Georgian PM Irakli Garibashvili signed the Protocol of the 9th meeting of the Azerbaijan-Georgia Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation.

The event also featured the signing of a number of agreements by heads of the relevant public institutions of the two countries on the development of cooperation in the fields of agriculture, ecology and small and medium-sized businesses.

*News.Az*

## Azerbaijan-Georgia Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation holds 9th meeting

The 9th meeting of the Azerbaijan-Georgia Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation has been held in the Georgian capital Tbilisi, News.Az reports.

The meeting, chaired by Prime Minister of Azerbaijan Ali Asadov and Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili, was attended by heads of relevant public institutions.

In his opening remarks, Prime Minister Ali Asadov said that this year marks the 30th anniver-

## Georgia, UAE hold second round of comprehensive economic cooperation talks



Georgia and the United Arab Emirates have held the second round of negotiations on a comprehensive economic cooperation agreement

between the countries as part of a visit of Georgian officials, led by Deputy Economy Minister Genadi Arveladze, in Dubai, the Economy Ministry announced, Trend reports citing Agenda.

The parties discussed trade liberalisation of goods and services between the countries and the directions of cooperation in customs, intellectual property rights, technical trade barriers and the promotion of small and medium enterprises.

Significant progress has been achieved between the parties on the text of the agreement, with the next round of negotiations scheduled for March 2023 in Georgia.

The Economy Ministers of Georgia and the UAE agreed to launch negotiations on the free trade agreement in December 2020, aimed at promoting economic, trade and investment relations. The first round of negotiations on establishing the free trade agreement between the countries was held in Georgia's capital Tbilisi in September 2022.

*Azer News*

## Pakistan, Tajikistan need to work very closely to strengthen economic cooperation: PM Sharif

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that there was a vast scope for cooperation between Pakistan and Tajikistan in the areas of economy and energy, and the two countries need to work very closely to enhance their bilateral trade.

Addressing a press conference alongside Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, who was in Islamabad on a two-day visit, Sharif said Pakistan will work closely with Tajikistan for early completion of the Casa-1000 power project and also for setting up rail, road and energy connectivity with the Central Asian countries.

"We need to work very closely with each other to strengthen our economic cooperation and enhance our bilateral trade in the fields of industry, agriculture, joint ventures and energy cooperation," Sharif said after meeting the Tajik leader.

Terming Tajikistan as an important country in Central Asia which served as a "gateway" to the region, he hoped that the visit of Rahmon would result in a "new era of cooperation and development" with Pakistan.

The two leaders earlier held a one-on-one meeting at the Prime Minister's House, which Sharif termed as "very productive and useful". He said the focus of their talks was on the strengthening of bilateral ties and the promotion of investment, trade and cultural exchanges.

President Rahmon arrived in Pakistan for a two-day official visit and was received by Minister for Commerce Naveed Qamar on December 14. He was accorded a red-carpet welcome upon his arrival at the Prime Minister's House, where he was received by the premier.



He was presented with a guard of honour. Later, he also planted a sapling in the lawns of the Prime Minister's House.

The Tajik president's visit to Pakistan is expected to impart a renewed impetus to deepening cooperation between the two countries.

The Foreign Office in a statement before his

arrival said that Pakistan and Tajikistan ties were marked by mutual respect and exceptional cordiality.

"The two countries have a commonality of views on various regional and international issues," it said. PTI SH MRJ

***The Print***

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## TECHNOLOGY

### New tech offers ecologists high-quality health checks



In the rivers of the Peruvian Amazon, manatees wallow in the murky water, making them very hard to spot.

If you are lucky, you might see their nostrils poking out above the surface, British ecologist Kat Bruce said.

A few years ago, she joined conservationists from the WWF who were traveling a 1,000-km stretch of river to study manatees and other species.

"You basically can't survey them apart from by going to communities and asking if they've seen any manatees recently," said Bruce, who in 2014

set up a monitoring company called NatureMetrics Ltd.

However, the aim of this trip was not a rare sighting. Instead, the researchers were taking water samples.

NatureMetrics pushes the water through a filter to collect traces of DNA, which are analyzed in a lab to understand which species are active in the area — in the water and on nearby land.

In Peru, they found 675 vertebrate species — from manatees and river dolphins to night monkeys living high in the trees.

As countries negotiate a global pact to halt and reverse nature loss at the COP15 summit in Montreal this month, researchers and companies such as NatureMetrics hope their new technologies can help track progress on protecting biodiversity more accurately than ever before.

They are in a race against time, as up to 1 million of Earth's estimated 8 million plant, insect and animal species are at risk of extinction, many within decades, an international scientific report showed in 2019.

On December 9, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) released an update to its Red List of endangered species, flagging a "barrage of threats" affecting marine wildlife, including illegal fishing, pollution and climate change.

While success in curbing global warming can be measured in terms of reductions in planet-heating greenhouse gas emissions, understanding what advances in biodiversity protection mean for governments and companies tends to be more complex.

"You can't actually measure ecosystem health just by monitoring what you can see,"



NatureMetrics CEO Katie Critchlow said.

Using environmental DNA, or “eDNA”, NatureMetrics says it can gather more biodiversity data far faster than traditional surveys, including the presence of IUCN Red List species.

This can be tracked by small DNA filters. Water from an ecosystem is pushed by a syringe through the small discs, which are then sent to specialist labs in the UK and Canada, much like DNA tests to find out people’s ancestry.

NatureMetrics, which has grown to more than 140 employees, serves non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and companies that are looking to monitor progress in restoring a degraded ecosystem or measure whether development projects such as mining are causing harm.

“All of a sudden, now you can know whether things are getting better or not — and that’s just not been possible before,” Critchlow said. “We feel that this is quite revolutionary.”

The eDNA method is just one of a number of innovative new techniques, said Karl Burkart, co-founder and deputy director of US-based nonprofit One Earth, which is working to scale up biodiversity mapping technologies.

“In the next three to five years, we’re going to have a lot of breakthroughs in direct observation measuring,” he said.

For example, tiny cameras have been trained with artificial intelligence to collect and interpret what they capture in the field, such as detecting humans and animal species.

TrailGuard AI, created by the NGO Resolve and chipmaker Intel Corp, is developing this technology to create an alert system against animal poachers in Africa.

Another approach is acoustic sensors, which can monitor sounds from species such as birds and even insects, and is an “incredibly effective” way of determining the overall health of an ecosystem, Burkart said.

Some forests might look good from satellite images, but inside, their biodiversity can be severely degraded, a phenomenon known as “zombie forests,” he said. “It looks good from space, and inside it’s deathly silent.”

Burkart added that a “mesh” of these techniques together with remote sensing technology, deployed on planes and satellites, can provide a fuller picture of an ecosystem and how its complex parts interact.

One leader in remote sensing technologies is Arizona State University, whose scientists have created a method called “spectranomics,” whereby images taken from the air can show the complexity of species.

Used across the Andes and Amazon regions, advanced sensors can detect the unique chemical signatures of tree species based on how they interact with sunlight and illustrate the results in colorful maps.

Greg Asner, director of the school’s Center for Global Discovery and Conservation Science, said the approach, which he codeveloped, can help improve protection of tropical forests beyond broad strategic plans.

“Monitoring changes to the composition of those forests helps us to inject specific actions to save what is most unique, or what is different in one forest from another,” he said.

As these solutions begin to make their way from scientific papers to equipment used on the front lines of the natural world, investors are taking biodiversity more seriously — and could help expand the techniques for use by businesses, Burkart said.

A World Economic Forum report in 2020 showed that more than half of the world’s total GDP is dependent on nature and its services, meaning that nature loss poses a significant risk to global economic health.

***Thomson Reuters Foundation***



# POLICY UPDATES

## Australia

### Australia passes law to cap energy prices against 'wartime whims'



Australia's parliament passed a new law capping its domestic gas price and some states' coal prices, a move the government said would protect consumers from the "wartime whims" of the world.

The move comes as tens of millions of Australians grapple with a surge in utility bills this year, despite the country being one of the world's top coal and natural gas producers.

"The price of Australian gas for Australian customers should have a connection to the cost of producing it, allowing for a reasonable return on capital, rather than being solely subject to the wartime whims of the international market," Treasurer Jim Chalmers said in parliament Thursday.

The law caps the domestic gas price at 12 Australian dollars (\$8) a gigajoule. It also limits domestic coal prices to 125 Australian dollars (\$86) per metric ton in

the states of New South Wales and Queensland, which have the largest share of the nation's total identified coal resources.

The price caps run for 12 months, effective immediately. The government will then have the power to set what it deems a "reasonable price" for energy, though it says it will factor in an "appropriate return on capital" for fossil fuel producers.

The law includes measures to authorize 1.5 billion Australian dollars (\$1 billion) in power subsidies for Australian households and small businesses.

CNN

## Hong Kong

### Hong Kong scraps Covid-19 curbs for arriving travelers, drops contact tracing app requirement

Hong Kong has announced that international passengers arriving in the territory would no longer face Covid-19 movement controls or be barred from certain venues, and that it was also scrapping a mandatory Covid-19 mobile application.

The news of a further loosening of Covid-19 curbs in the global financial hub, which has trailed most of the world in easing them, may boost resumption of travel and business.

An amber code issued to



international arrivals for their first three days in Hong Kong meant they were not allowed to eat or drink inside bars and restaurants.

From December 13, travelers and all residents coming from overseas will be allowed into all locales, provided they test negative for Covid-19 on arrival, Chief Executive John Lee said in a televised briefing on Tuesday.

They will still need to show a photograph or paper record of their Covid-19 vaccines at some venues which require it, Health Secretary Lo Chung Mau told a separate press briefing the same day, but arrivals face no restrictions on moving around.

"After arriving in Hong Kong, international arrivals don't have any restrictions. So the same day they step off the aircraft, they are free to enter any premises," he said.

The government's move to scrap its mobility tracking app, which grants access to restaurants and venues such as gyms, clubs and salons, comes after China dropped the requirement.

Business groups, diplomats and many residents had slammed Hong Kong's Covid-19 rules, saying they threatened the city's competitiveness and standing as an international financial centre.

The rules have weighed on Hong Kong's economy since early 2020, speeding up an exodus of businesses, expatriates and local families who departed amid a drive by Beijing to more closely control the territory.

Hong Kong has closely followed China's zero-Covid policy

since 2020, but began gradually easing restrictions in August, cutting mandated hotel quarantine to three days before scrapping it completely in September, more than 2½ years after the virus emerged.

The amber code was the last remaining restriction on arrivals, who will still be subjected to a mandatory Covid-19 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test on arrival and one more later on.

Masks are still mandated across the city, unless one is exercising. Group gatherings of more than 12 are banned, but one can still go to nightclubs and attend banquets where hundreds of people are present.

Health Secretary Lo added that infected patients isolating at home would no longer be required to wear an electronic tag restricting them to their residences.

*The Straits Times*

## India

### Facial recognition wielded in India to enforce COVID policy



After a pair of Islamist bombings rocked the south-central Indian city of Hyderabad in 2013, officials rushed to install 5,000 CCTV cameras to bolster security. Now there are nearly 700,000 in and around the metropolis.

The most striking symbol of the city's rise as a surveillance

hotspot is the gleaming new Command and Control Center in the posh Banjara Hills neighborhood. The 20-story tower replaces a campus where swarms of officers already had access to 24-hour, real-time CCTV and cell phone tower data that geolocates reported crimes. The technology triggers any available camera in the area, pops up a mugshot database of criminals and can pair images with facial recognition software to scan CCTV footage for known criminals in the vicinity.

The Associated Press was given rare access to the operations earlier this year as part of an investigation into the proliferation of artificial intelligence tools used by law enforcement around the world.

Police Commissioner C.V. Anand said the new command center, inaugurated in August, encourages using technologies across government departments, not just police. It cost \$75 million, according to Mahender Reddy, director general of the Telangana State Police.

Facial recognition and artificial intelligence have exploded in India in recent years, becoming key law enforcement tools for monitoring big gatherings.

Police aren't just using technology to solve murders or catch armed robbers. Hyderabad was among the first local police forces in India to use a mobile application to dole out traffic fines and take pictures of people flaunting mask mandates. Officers also can use facial recognition software to scan pictures against a criminal database. Police officers have access to an app, called TSCOP, on their smartphones and tablets that includes facial recognition scanning capabilities. The app also connects almost all police officers in the city to a host of government and emergency services.

Anand said photos of traffic violators and mask-mandate offenders are kept only long enough to be

sure they aren't needed in court and are then expunged.

Hyderabad has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on patrol vehicles, CCTV cameras, facial recognition and geo-tracking applications and several hundred facial recognition cameras, among other technologies, Anand said. The investment has helped the state attract more private and foreign investment, he said, including Apple's development center, inaugurated in 2016; and a major Microsoft data center announced in March.

*Associated Press*

## Indonesia

### New mining rules lay groundwork for Indonesia's atomic aspirations

President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo has signed a regulation that details new safety and security requirements for businesses seeking to mine nuclear materials in the country.

Government Regulation (PP) No. 52/2022, which came into effect on Dec. 12, requires businesses to complete a safety analysis before beginning to mine for nuclear materials. This includes a feasibility study, a design and construction plan for the mine, as well as emergency responses and countermeasures in case of a nuclear accident. In addition, businesses are required to manage their nuclear waste and conduct radiation exposure training programs.

Mining firms are also required to avow, in a formal document, that they will not work in service of the development of nuclear arms. They must submit a business and development plan and regularly provide authorities with an updat-





ed inventory of nuclear materials mined and imports of any special equipment.

Those that fail to comply with the safety and security procedures will face administrative sanctions, ranging from written reprimands and administrative fines to license revocations.

The new regulation comes a month after Jokowi reworked the Nuclear Energy Regulatory Agency's (Bapeten) non-tax revenue streams through the issuance of another government regulation.

The new policy allows Bapeten to receive non-tax revenue in the form of administrative sanctions from businesses that fail to follow prevailing regulations.

The new regulations may work in service of a government plan to build the country's first nuclear power plant by 2040.

The country currently has three nuclear reactors – the 2-MW Triga 2000 reactor in Bandung, West Java, the 30-MW GA Siwabessy reactor in Serpong, Banten, and the 100-kW Kartini reactor in Yogyakarta – all of which are for research purposes.

The Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry's director general for new, renewable energy and energy conservation, Dadan Kusdiana, said in September that his office had prepared a road map to help realize the 2040 target.

Dadan also claimed nuclear plants would help Indonesia reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2060, adding that global technological advancements had made the plants more profitable.

**Jakarta Post**

## Japan

### Japan's parliament enacts law to prohibit malicious donation solicitations



Parliament has enacted a law to ban organizations from maliciously soliciting donations following controversy over the fundraising practices of the Unification Church.

Aiming to prevent more people from being victimized by controversial religious groups, the House of Councillors passed the bill with the support of the ruling bloc and most of the opposition parties on the final day of the 69-day extraordinary parliamentary session. The passing of the bill comes after the Cabinet made concessions on key issues with the opposition camp.

The bill cleared parliament five months after former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was fatally shot by the son of a follower of the Unification Church. Often labeled as a religious cult.

It is rare for Japanese lawmakers to hold a weekend plenary session to adopt a law.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government scrambled to enact the law in an apparent attempt to stave off a plunge in the approval ratings for his Cabinet due partly to issues surrounding the Unification Church, which was established by a staunch anti-communist in South Korea in 1954.

The legislation prohibits

organizations from "confusing" people into making donations through tactics such as "stoking fear," but the lawyers have argued some believers are "willing" to offer massive donations to them.

While the new law was prepared with the Unification Church's fundraising practices in mind, including claims made about spirits, it actually covers all corporations, not just religious ones.

The legislation prohibits organizations from requesting donors to borrow money by selling real estate and other assets. Members of groups engaged in unfair solicitation could face a prison sentence of up to one year or a fine of up to ¥1 million (\$7,300).

Moreover, if donations are made in ways that are banned under the new law, spouses and dependent children of donors would be allowed to cancel donations on their behalf through legal procedures.

Some opposition parties and lawyers, meanwhile, called for a clause that would allow for the cancellation of donations and the punishment of members of suspicious organizations if the money was paid as the result of "brainwashing."

In response to such calls, the Kishida administration decided to incorporate a clause asking groups "not to suppress the free will" of donors to dissuade them from receiving donations maliciously.

The clause will also enable the government to make public the names of organizations that do not abide by the rule. The lawyers, however, have lambasted it as ineffective because it does not involve prison terms or fines.

Amid mounting criticism of the legislation, a provision stipulates that the law will be reviewed by the government around two years after taking effect.

The scope of the legislation was eventually narrowed in light of property rights, which allow

individuals to use their money as they want, and freedom of religion, government sources have said. Both rights are guaranteed by the Constitution.

*Japan Times*

## **Korea**

### **All South Koreans to become younger as traditional age system scrapped**



South Korea is to scrap its traditional method of counting ages and adopt the international standard – a change that that will knock one or two years off people’s ages on official documents but could take time to seep into daily life.

South Koreans are deemed to be a year old when they are born, and a year is added every 1 January. The unusual – and increasingly unpopular – custom means a baby born on New Year’s Eve becomes two years old as soon as the clock strikes midnight.

The complications do not end there: a separate system exists for calculating the age of men entering national service and the legal age to drink alcohol and smoke. In those cases, a person’s age is calculated from zero at birth and a year is added on New Year’s Day.

The tradition has attracted criticism from politicians who believe it makes South Korea, a big Asian economy and global techno-

logical and cultural power, appear behind the times. The president, Yoon Suk-yeol, has criticised the multiple methods for calculating ages as a drain on resources.

The confusion should end in June – at least on official documents – when laws stipulating the use of only the international method of counting ages take effect.

“The revision is aimed at reducing unnecessary socioeconomic costs because legal and social disputes as well as confusion persist due to the different ways of calculating age,” Yoo Sang-bum of the ruling People Power party told parliament.

*The Guardian*

## **New Zealand**

### **New Zealand passes legislation banning cigarettes for future generations**



Legislation passed by parliament on December 13 means that anyone born after 2008 will never be able to buy cigarettes or tobacco products.

It will mean the number of people able to buy tobacco will shrink each year. By 2050, for example, 40-year-olds will be too young to buy cigarettes.

Health Minister Ayesha Verrall, who introduced the bill, said it was a step “towards a smoke-free future”.

“Thousands of people will live longer, healthier lives and the health system will be NZ\$5 billion (US\$3.2 billion) better off from not needing to treat the illnesses caused by smoking,” Dr Verrall said.

New Zealand’s smoking rate is already at historic lows, with just 8% of adults smoking daily according to government statistic released in November - down from 9.4% last year.

It is hoped that the Smoke-free Environments Bill will reduce that number to less than 5% by 2025, with the eventual aim of eliminating the practice altogether.

The bill is also designed to limit the number of retailers able to sell smoked tobacco products to 600 nationwide - down from 6,000 currently - and reduce nicotine levels in products to make them less addictive.

The new legislation does not ban vape products, which have become far more popular among younger generations than cigarettes.

*BBC*

## **Philippines**

### **Department of Agriculture sets stricter rules for importing fish**

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has intensified the requirements for importing certain fish products including pompano to prevent their sale in wet markets.

The action was made after lawmakers urged the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) to focus its efforts against smugglers and importers who are diverting fish products to the wet market in violation of existing regulations.

Senators also called for more



roads from fish facilities to markets, pre-border inspections and in-country laboratory tests for fish imports.

"We support the various recommendations of Senators Cynthia Villar, Nancy Binay, Grace Poe, Raffy Tulfo and Robin Padilla that would ensure steady fish supply at stable prices in the country," Tugon Kabuhayan convenor Asis Perez said.

"All these recommendations will improve the industry and benefit fisherfolk and consumers alike," he said.

In an administrative circular, the DA suspended the issuance of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Import Clearance (SPSIC) for roundscad (galunggong), bonito (tulingan), mackerel (alumahan), moonfish (bilang-bilong), pompano and tuna by-products.

This is to prevent diversion of fish products imported under Fisheries Administrative Order No. 195, Series of 1999 (FAO 195), DA Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban said in the circular.

The agency issued exceptions for processors and importers who supply raw materials to processors with license to operate issued by the Food and Drug Administration, compliant with the Food Safety Standards provided under the Food Safety Act, and with a verifiable recording system of production.

Meanwhile, the DA also suspended the issuance of import clearance for roundscad, bonito, mackerel and moonfish for institutional buyers.

But institutional buyers can import pompano and tuna byproducts if they have a verifiable recording system.

As a requirement, importers supplying raw materials to processors need to indicate the species and volume of the products to be imported while the receiving processors must be pre-identified in the application of the SPSIC and should not be allowed to be supplied to any

other processor.

For new processors, they can import only once the BFAR verifies its production capacity and maintains a verifiable recording system for all its importation.

The DA will automatically revoke the accreditation of importers found in violation.

*Philippine Star*

## Taiwan

### Electric bikes enter new era of regulation in Taiwan



Owners of new electric bicycles in Taiwan are required to register their vehicle, obtain a license plate and buy insurance before hitting the road from November 30, as revisions to traffic rules covering the vehicles take effect.

According to revisions to the Road Traffic Management and Penalty Act, e-bikes, now formally called "mini electric two-wheel vehicles," cannot be operated without a license plate.

Owners of new e-bikes will have to formally register their vehicle and purchase a minimum of three years of compulsory automobile liability insurance at a cost of NT\$1,358 (US\$44).

For e-bikes purchased before Nov. 1, 2022, owners will have a grace period of two years to complete registration of their vehicles and purchase insurance.

There are about 200,000 e-bikes currently in circulation, and those who fail to register their vehicles within the required time will be subject to a fine of NT\$1,200-NT\$3,600 and a ban on the e-bike's use.

Insurance coverage for existing e-bikes will depend on their age. E-bikes used for less than a year, for instance, will be required to have a two-year insurance policy costing NT\$971.

Beyond those basics, only people aged 14 or older can ride an e-bike, and they must wear a helmet and ride at a speed of no more than 25 kilometers per hour, according to the new rules.

E-bike riders are also forbidden to carry passengers, conduct unauthorized modification of their vehicles, or ride them on sidewalks or regular bike lanes (except for river park bike lanes).

The new regulations are being instituted following a rising number of road accidents involving e-bikes and concerns that they pose a heightened risk to minors, lawmakers have said.

A clearer legal status for electric bikes can also address possible confusion related to thefts or road accidents, while helping the vehicles find a market niche, according to experts.

Ko Chun-pin, chairman of the Taiwan Transportation Vehicle Manufacturers Association's motorcycle manufacturing division, said the government may provide additional subsidies for e-bikes as part of its campaign to promote environmentally friendly vehicles.

*CNA*

