



CACCI Profile

Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry

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PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

Understanding the S (Sustainability) in helping business get SET for the future

Dear friends,

Earlier this year I had the privilege of launching the APAC Green Alliance together with the Singapore Manufacturing Federation. It is a great initiative and very timely in my opinion.

For our CACCI members to better understand what the APAC Green Alliance is and how you can benefit from it there will be a webinar on this topic on May 23 at SGT 5pm. Please put this important date in your diary. I look forward to seeing many of you online then.

Beyond the Green Alliance initiative, I have directed my Chief of Staff, Stuart Thomson to reach out to some of you to better understand the challenges you may be facing in meeting the Net-Zero imperative. I am keen to talk more directly with you about how CACCI can better support you and your business in meeting this challenge. I know from my own experience that running a small and medium sized business doesn't leave much time and resources over to address some of the big challenges like the climate transition.

If you would like to be involved in these 1:1 discussions that I plan to hold over the coming month then please reach out to Stuart on stuart@cacci.biz.

In the same vein, next week I will be meeting with the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) CEO Paul Guerra to talk to him about



CACCI's involvement in next year's World Chamber Congress in my hometown of Melbourne. The focus of next year's congress is Environment, Social and Governance (ESG). I look forward to showcasing much of what CACCI and its members have and are doing in this regard.

Better understanding how we can meet the needs of our members in helping them truly get SET for the future is critical.

I wish you all a prosperous and productive month ahead.

Yours,

Peter McMullin AM
CACCI President

CACCI joins 20th Joint Meeting of CIECA and MNCCI



On March 20, 2024, the Chinese International Economic Cooperation Association (CIECA) and the Mongolian National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MNCCI), both active Primary Members of CACCI, held their 20th Joint Meeting at the Taipei International Convention Center (TICC).

The Joint Meeting gathered several dozen businesspeople, company representatives, leaders of both national chambers of commerce, and government representatives interested in fostering business activities between Taiwan and Mongolia.

The one-day meeting started with remarks from Ms. Carol Cheng, COO, Taiwan Research-based

Biopharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (TRPMA); Mr. Uuganbayar Bat-Ochir, CEO, Uvurkhngai Province Branch of the Mongolian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MNCCI); H.E. Bill Keh-Ming Chen, Ambassador on Home Assignment, Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and Mr. Tumurbaatar Gankhuyag, Representative, Ulaanbaatar Trade and Economic Representative Office in Taipei.

The Joint Meeting's morning events continued with four short, specialized business sessions on: (1) Medicine and Medical Devices featuring Uni-Shinmed Co. Ltd., Odi Tan LLC, and Regional Diagnostic at Uvurkhngai Province; (2) Food Processing featuring ANKO Food Machine Co.; (3) Tourism featuring JIN HE International Travel Service Co., Ltd. and Khovd Province MNCCI; and (4) Building Materials featuring Supperline International Enterprise.

After lunch, a series of B2B meetings were held to match businesspeople interested in other industries not covered by the morning session, such as textiles, import/trade, education & training, agriculture & environment, and smart equipment.

CACCI Delegation visits Ulaanbaatar Trade and Economic Representative Office in Taipei



On March 5, 2024, CACCI Director-General David Hsu (third from right) paid a courtesy visit to

the Ulaanbaatar Trade and Economic Representative Office in Taipei, where he was welcomed by Representative Gankhuyag Tumurbaatar (third from left), and Deputy Representative Ulziibat Altandush (rightmost)

Mr. Hsu was joined by CACCI Deputy Director General Mig Moreno (second from right), CTBC Financial Holding Senior VP Stephen Wang (second from left), and CTBC Financial Holding Senior Associate Ting Ting Wang (leftmost).

During the visit, Mr. Hsu briefly talked about the history of CACCI, which was established in 1966 to serve as a platform to connect businesses in the

region. He mentioned the activities and events that CACCI has done over the years, and then elaborated on plans for 2024.

Mr. Hsu explained that CACCI works closely with the Mongolian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MNCCI), an active member chamber, in enhancing business activities and training opportunities for Mongolian businesses. He said he hoped to likewise establish a good relationship with

the Mongolian Representative Office in Taipei to further support this cause. Mr. Hsu also informed Representative Tumurbaatar of the CACCI's annual conference, which this year will be held in Singapore on November 11 and 12, 2024.

For his part, Representative Tumurbaatar expressed his support to CACCI's efforts promoting Mongolian businesses in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.



CACCI Deputy DG Meets with CIB.O Executive Director



CACCI Deputy Director-General Mr. Amador R. Honrado Jr. (right) meets with Mr. Buddy Villasis, Executive Director of the Cebu IT BPM Organization (CIB.O) (left) on April 6 during the former's recent visit to Cebu City in the Philippines. Mr. Honrado and Mr. Villasis had a follow-up discussion on matters that were taken up during the meeting of Mr. Villasis and Dr. Dennis Hu, Chairman of the CACCI ICT Council, when the former visited the CACCI Secretariat in late March 2024 during his Taiwan trip to attend the Taiwan Smart City Forum as part of the official delegation of the Mayor of Cebu City Mr. Mike Rama.



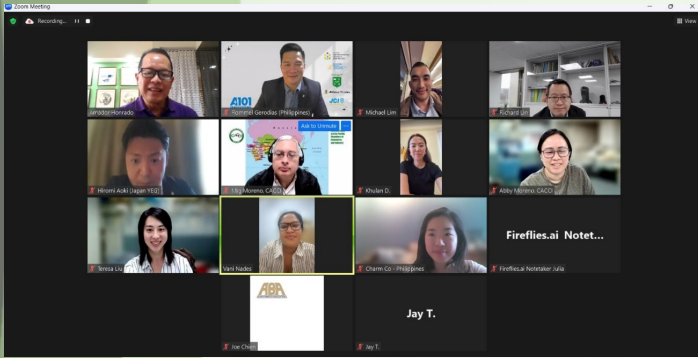
CACCI Deputy Director-General Calls on PCCI Officers



Mr. Amador Honrado Jr., Deputy Director-General of CACCI (2nd from left) meets with the officers of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) led by Mr. Raymond Jude Aguilar, Vice President for International Affairs (2nd from right), PCCI Secretary-General Mr. Edwin Glindro (right) and PCCI Manager Ms. Lyn Gabionza (left), at the PCCI headquarters in Makati, Philippines. Mr. Honrado, Mr. Aguilar, and Mr. Glindro discussed the participation of PCCI in the upcoming 38th CACCI Conference in Singapore in November, CACCI's participation in the 50th Philippine Business Conference & Expo (PBC&E 2024), the annual gathering of

PCCI officers and members, to be held on October 22-23, and PCCI's participation in the various webinars and other activities lined up by CACCI during the rest of the year.

YEGAP Executive Committee Meets on Activities for the Year



Members of the Executive Committee of the Young Entrepreneurs Group of the Asia-Pacific (YEGAP) met online on April 10 to discuss its recent and upcoming activities for 2024. Chaired by YEGAP Chairman Mr. Rommel Gerodias from the Philippines (2nd from left, top row), the EC members were briefed and exchanged views on the latest YEGAP activities, works in progress, and proposed activities for the year. They also discussed plans for YEGAP's participation in the upcoming 38th CACCI Conference to be held on November 11-12, 2024 to be hosted by the Singapore Manufacturing Federation in Singapore.

CACCI Chief of Staff visits YEGAP's Vani Nades in Port Moresby



Photo: Mr. Mkojera-Thomson (right), Ms. Vani Nades (center), Ms. Anna Moegerlein from The Difference Incubator (left).

CACCI Chief of Staff to the President Mr. Stuart Mkojera-Thomson met recently with Ms. Vani Nades in Port Moresby. Ms. Nades is the Papua New Guinea Chamber of Commerce & Industry representative on the Young Entrepreneurs Group of the Asia Pacific (YEGAP) Executive Committee.

Mr. Mkojera-Thomson was visiting PNG to discuss how CACCI could better support young entrepreneurs in places like PNG. Despite the challenging environment in which PNG currently finds itself, Ms. Nades was upbeat about the potential young people in PNG can contribute to the Asia-Pacific economy.

NEWS UPDATES

Uzbek Ambassador Oybek Arif Usmanov calls on FPCCI President Atif Ikram Sheikh



Ambassador of The Republic of Uzbekistan Oybek Arif Usmanov called on FPCCI President Atif Ikram Sheikh at the capital office in Islamabad and discussed various issues including bilateral trade, mutual cooperation, investment, Pakistan Uzbekistan Business Council, and exchange of trade delegations. The Uzbek ambassador was accompanied by Bakurum Yusov, Economic and Trade Consul of Uzbekistan.

FPCCI President Atif Ikram Sheikh said that Pakistan is a brotherly country of Uzbekistan. Pakistan's exports with Uzbekistan have increased gradually in the last years, and bilateral trade can be promoted in textile, pharmaceutical, rice, machinery, agriculture machinery, electro-technical and other sectors. There is a need to explore different avenues to further promote this bilateral trade.

Atif Ikram added that "we will participate in the single country exhibition to be held in Uz-

bekistan on June 28. Pakistanis have the problem of business visa, tourist visa, flights to Uzbekistan which should be solved. The first Gems and Jewellery Exhibition is being held in Pakistan in collaboration with TDAP and Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in which Uzbek businessmen who belong to this sector should participate and you provide us their names too."

Uzbek Ambassador Oybek Arif Usmanov said that Uzbekistan is organizing an International Business Forum on May 3 and 4, in which FPCCI and the business community are invited to participate; while the Minister of Uzbek Foreign Affairs will visit Pakistan on May 9-10. There will be G2B and B2B meetings. Trade between Pakistan and Uzbekistan is suffering due to Afghanistan, so there is a need to start the Afghanistan-Pakistan Corridor. Direct flights will be started from Islamabad and Lahore, resolving visa issues soon.

Pakistan should open up deep sea fishing to foreign investors: CACCI VP



A delegation led by Mr. Khurram Tariq Sayeed, CACCI Vice President and Former Vice President of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), called on Pakistan's Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Mr. Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh.

Mr. Sayeed briefed the Minister that CACCI is a powerful and influential non-governmental organisation composed of the National Chambers

of 27 countries of Asia and Western Pacific region, granted consultative status under the United Nations. CACCI's objective is to cut across national boundaries to link Asia-Pacific businesspersons and promote economic growth of member countries, which account for 40% of the World population and 20% of the world's GDP with a trade volume of US\$ 11 Trillion.

While congratulating Mr. Sheikh on assuming charge as Federal Minister, Mr. Sayeed emphasized that Pakistan must create a conducive environment for foreign investment, stating that no country can flourish without FDI. The delegation discussed in detail the potential of foreign investment in the deep-sea fishing sector enabling Pakistan to earn

much-needed foreign exchange and increase its export base by tapping the vast potential that exists in this sector. He stated that in order to achieve this, Pakistan must open up deep-sea fishing to foreign investors and re-visit its policy by issuing deep sea fishing licenses to foreign companies.

Mr. Sheikh assured the delegation that the Government will look into these suggestions seriously and in order to create a consensus, a moot of all stakeholders will be called shortly.

In the end, Mr. Sayeed thanked the Minister for Maritime Affairs for meeting with CACCI delegation and presented him with a CACCI memento.

Productivity and competitive policy key to future prosperity: ACCI



Australia needs a sovereign manufacturing capability, so focused government attention on meeting that objective is welcome. However, Australia's largest and most representative business network says careful consideration of the details is needed.

"Recent experience has starkly demonstrated how the narrowing of our industrial base has exposed the Australian economy to high levels of risk," ACCI chief executive officer Andrew McKellar said.

"We support the objective. Promoting the idea of Australia having a sovereign manufacturing and industry capability is important.

"Most importantly, the Prime Minister's speech reflects the fundamental importance of boosting productivity and improving competition for our future prosperity.

"We can't achieve that without a competitive tax system or by handing more power to trade unions to tie businesses in ever-tighter knots."

The proposed Future Made in Australia Act announced today will combine several previously announced initiatives, including the National Reconstruction Fund and energy transition initiatives, under one umbrella.

"We see benefit in drawing together those existing threads and building on that to better coordinate and manage the rollout of this government investment," Mr. McKellar said.

"There are significant opportunities in decarbonisation and the energy transition. We should seek to maximise those advantages.

"If the government is to invest in driving emerging Australian industry capabilities, that investment needs appropriate consideration and scrutiny."

ACCI Newsroom

Manufacturing body calls for innovation to stay competitive



Amid a manpower crunch and global crises that have disrupted supply chains, the Singapore Manufacturing Federation (SMF) has called on the sector to innovate or risk falling short of its 10-year growth target.

The decade-long plan to grow Singapore's manufacturing sector by 50 per cent, as well as maintain its share of about 20 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), was announced in January 2021.

At the time, the sector – Singapore's largest industry – contributed about 21 per cent, or around S\$106 billion (US\$78.7 billion), of the total GDP. It hired 450,000 workers, or around 12 per cent of the workforce.

The sector has since grown by 17 per cent to about S\$125 billion, or 18.6 per cent of the total GDP, in 2023.

However, firms told CNA that despite their best efforts to keep up with the latest trends and technology, external factors and a lack of manpower have made it tougher for them to stay competitive globally.

The Israel-Hamas war as well as the Red Sea crisis, which have been going on for six months, have caused import costs to rise by about 20 per cent. This has in turn led to higher production costs.

Delay in Shipment

Homegrown gourmet tea brand Gryphon Tea pumped in S\$250,000 to upgrade its packaging process and cater to an eco-friendlier population.

It now uses recyclable paper and plastics to make its tea bags, which can biodegrade in a shorter period of time compared to conventional

plastics. It also uses compostable tea bags, which are plant-based and more environmentally friendly.

The company also installed solar panels to use more renewable energy and save costs in the long run. It has invested in automation, including robotics, in its production line, saving an average of 30 per cent in manpower costs that it can plough back into retraining workers.

However, the brand's founder and executive director, Mr. Lim Tian Wee, said a typical shipment coming from Europe now takes two months – up from the typical one month.

"I think with the Red Sea crisis and what's happening in the Middle East, Singapore companies are having to deal with a much more complex supply chain," he added.

"(Shipment delay) is a big problem for companies like us who are buying raw materials that are plant-based, so we are trying to solve this problem as best as we can. But we understand that this situation may last much longer than we would like it to."

Mr. Lim estimated that the company's supply chain costs will increase by about 15 to 20 per cent.

"Overall, it's not a great time ... for food manufacturers, but we will do our best in terms of managing the whole issue," he said.

"Full Array" of Govt Support

SMF president Lennon Tan said the challenge of rising costs is not new or unique to Singapore. But in Singapore's context, there is a "full array" of government support to help manufacturing firms.

Manufacturers can also look at diversifying their supply chain and digitising processes, so they are less dependent on human labour and just one source, said Mr. Tan.

He noted that the sector has always faced a lack of skilled labour, with many engineers choosing to go to other industries like IT and finance.

"We need to also let engineers have more opportunity to be a little bit more on your entrepreneur side, so they can also have that vision to have innovation to create products of their own. I think this will help the overall manufacturing sector," he said.

New schemes to pair up multinational corporations (MNCs) with local firms could help to ease some of these pressures, Mr Tan noted.

Bigger companies can parachute their talent in and train Singaporeans, for instance, or invest in research and development to drive the manufacturing sector forward.

“The MNCs come in bringing billions of dollars of investment, bringing in the technology, bringing jobs, bringing know-how. I think the impact for the manufacturing sector is larger compared to

a SME trying to expand, or grow organically into the region and so on,” Mr. Tan said.

The association has been pushing its members to look overseas due to the small size of Singapore’s market, he added.

“Scary it might be, but I think it’s necessary to go out there, establish yourself and do business there as a manufacturer contributing towards that country and that market.”

Channel News Asia

Revamp needed for TVET ecosystem to reduce mismatch, says FMM president



Malaysia needs to restructure the whole ecosystem of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes, so that it can effectively meet the industry’s requirements, said Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM) president Tan Sri Soh Thian Lai.

“The issue now is about how we can reduce the mismatch [between the syllabus and industry needs]. There are too many TVET institutions currently, where only some can meet the needs of the industry, while others cannot. If the syllabus is not relevant, we can inform the government.

“Let us say in Penang and northern regions, where the industries are more focused on electrical and electronics (E&E), the TVET institutions should focus more on relevant courses related to E&E. In

Tanjung Malim, Perak, they should focus more on the automotive industry, while Selangor can focus on data centres,” Soh said at a press conference on Thursday.

Soh was speaking at the event hosted by the Government-Industry TVET Coordination Body (GITC), which he chairs. Notably, this was the body’s first press conference since its establishment in October 2022.

The GITC’s role is to drive the industry-led TVET empowerment agenda, and play the key role of being a unified source of inputs from the industry towards the development of TVET in the country. The organisation acts as a coordinator and facilitator for inputs to be channelled to ministries or agencies and TVET providers.

Soh also highlighted several shortcomings in the current TVET ecosystem, among them a lack of sustainable coordination and collaboration mechanisms between industries at the national level, insufficient industry response to TVET initiatives, and limited industry engagement across each state.

In addition, he takes the view that TVET students should have a more “work-based approach”.

“Sixty per cent of TVET students’ syllabus should prioritise industry experience, with the remaining 40% on the academic aspects,” he explained.

The GITC chairman also added that Malaysia had been slow in enhancing its skilled workforce, as compared to neighbouring countries.

Despite that, he added, Malaysia is still among the top 20 trading nations, and its economic growth is projected to be positive this year.

Other members of the GITC board include Datuk Dr Megat Sany Megat Ahmad Supian from the Ministry of Higher Education, Datuk P'ng Soo Hong from the Malaysia Semiconductor Industry Association, and Datuk Astaman Abdul Aziz from the Master Builders Association of Malaysia.

Changing parental beliefs to tackle low TVET enrolment

Soh further pointed out that TVET institutions face challenges of low enrolment. This issue stems from parental beliefs that TVET does not offer opportunities for high-paying careers, and is primarily for students who are unable to get an admittance into universities.

“The GITC aims to shift this mindset, particularly among parents, by portraying TVET as a pathway to valuable skills and professions. We are striving to create a future where TVET is embraced and seen as a viable option. We admit that we are running out of time, but we are now moving to the execution phase,” he said.

Among the initiatives that will be undertaken by the GITC is the establishment of the GITC Placement Centre by September, which is intended to facilitate internships and job opportunities for TVET graduates.

Additionally, industry leaders will conduct career talks and job fairs in October to develop more dynamic internship programmes.

GITC's strategic action plan

The GITC has outlined five primary agendas in its strategic action plan in a move to revamp TVET programmes.

Firstly, the body will advise the government on the formulation of TVET-related policies, including proposals for consolidating TVET funds within the national budget and establishing a single TVET regulatory body. Additionally, it advocates for the creation of a comprehensive labour market intelligence report and the development of TVET certification policies and regulations.

Secondly, the plan focuses on fostering strategic collaborations with employers, TVET institutions, and professional bodies. This involves

the establishment of a TVET co-ownership model between the government and industry for sharing equipment, technology, expertise, and innovation. Furthermore, it includes efforts to collaborate on international skills accreditation methodologies to ensure alignment with global standards, such as the NQRF developed by Unesco Unevoc standards.

The third agenda involves planning manpower requirements through engagement sessions with relevant agencies and ministries. This entails the development of a digital data sharing platform to match supply and demand in the labour market.

Furthermore, the GITC aims to promote TVET programmes and enhance career advocacy through active collaborations between public and private institutions. A key initiative in this regard is the creation and piloting of a cooperation scheme for internships and apprenticeships between large corporations and small and medium enterprises.

The fifth agenda, meanwhile, is to recommend incentives to encourage industry participation in TVET development to the government. This includes incentivising TVET valued industry partners (TVET VIPs) and developing multiple joint-incentive systems for lifelong learning among various stakeholders.

The Edge Malaysia



Vietnam delegation on agriculture, fisheries, meets Sri Lanka chamber

A roundtable discussion between a delegation from Vietnam's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, looked for collaboration opportunities in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries.

The delegation led by Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of Vietnam Le Minh Hoan, comprised Ministry officials and entrepreneurs of Vietnam's agriculture sector.

‘Sri Lanka is strong in several agricultural sectors, with tea, fruit and vegetables especially, having strong export potential to Vietnam. Similarly,

Vietnam's progressive technology can strengthen the agriculture sector in Sri Lanka,' Chairman of the Ceylon Chamber Duminda Hulangamuwa said in a statement.

Minister Le Minh Hoan said that "bilateral agricultural trade between Vietnam and Sri Lanka has potential for growth," and highlighted "the respective strengths of the two countries to complement mutual progress and development."

Given the similarities in topography and climate between the two countries, partnerships to develop the agriculture sector were particularly relevant, the Ambassador of Vietnam to Sri Lanka Ho Thi Thanh Truc said, inviting delegates from

both countries to make use of the opportunity to forge connections.

The event was followed by B2B sessions providing a platform for Sri Lankan companies to interact with their Vietnamese counterparts. It was organized in association with the Sri Lanka – Greater Mekong Business Council and the Embassy of Vietnam in Sri Lanka.

President of the Council S M D Suriyakumara said they would facilitate trade and investment cooperation in the agricultural sectors of Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

Economy Next

MNCCI President, Cuba Ambassador meet in Ulaanbaatar



The ambassador of Cuba to Mongolia, Jorge Ferrer, met again with the president of the Mongolian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mr. Enkhtuvshin Dashtseren. The head of the Department of Foreign Relations and Cooperation of the organization, Ms. Ariun Ch. and the Head of the Exhibitions Department, Battulga Ch., also attended

The Ambassador delivered a letter to the President of the Chamber of Mongolia, sent by his Cuban counterpart, Antonio Carricarte, inviting him to attend the XXXX International Fair of Havana (FIHAV 2024), from November 5 to 9, 2024. The President of the Mongolian Chamber thanked and welcomed the invitation.

Both parties discussed the potential and actions to promote economic-commercial relations

between both countries, agreeing on some specific activities.

The Cuban ambassador mentioned other international fairs that will take place in Cuba such as the Cuban International Tourism Fair FITCuba 2024, from May 2 to 5 and the XIX ExpoCaribe 2024 Fair from June 26 to 29, 2024, in Santiago de Cuba.

They also talked about the Mongolian Chamber Project "International Business Training" through which some 1,000 entrepreneurs will receive short training in other countries and the possibility that the program includes some interested parties traveling to Cuba.

The Directors of the Mongolian Chamber invited Cuba to be represented at the Ulaanbaatar International Spring Fair that will take place from May 16 to 18, 2024, as well as at the Autumn Fair from September 26 to 29.

The XXXIX International Fair of Havana (FIHAV 2023) had the participation of more than 800 firms from some 60 countries and during it, 24 export contracts, 10 import contracts and 3 foreign investment agreements were signed. The FITCuba 2023 International Tourism Fair in Havana was attended by 5,000 professionals, more than 570 businessmen and some 51 airlines.

Cuba Representative Office Abroad

MEMBER PERSONALITIES



Hasanzadeh elected as ICCIMA head

Samad Hasanzadeh was appointed as the new head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA).

He was elected as the new head of ICCIMA, in the extraordinary meeting of the ICCIMA board of representatives held at the place of the chamber on January 21.

Hasanzadeh was one of the four final candidates of this election. He was previously the third deputy head of the chamber.

Hossein Selahvarzi, the previous head of IC-

CIMA, was the first speaker in the mentioned meeting. He said that ICCIMA will remain the house of private sector as before.

Mohammadreza Bahraman, the deputy head of the chamber, for his part, said: "Our goal in these meetings is to participate in the economic development of the country, and this meeting was held with the presence of more than 350 members of the ICCIMA board of representatives."

Tehran Times

Joyshree Das Verma takes over as FICCI Ladies Organisation president



Joyshree Das Verma took over as the 41st National president of FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO), the oldest women-led and women-centric business chamber of South East Asia for 2024-25.

She has been appointed by Israel as its Honorary Consul for Northeast India. Verma is also the Director of HR firm Kaapro Management Solutions Pvt Ltd.

"I am honoured to lead FICCI FLO as the 41st National President. Under the theme 'Collective Vision, Collaborative Action for the year 2024-25, our endeavour is to build a strong, inclusive community dedicated to sustainable progress, fostering individual growth, and inspiring impactful change," she said.

Business Standard

PRODUCT & SERVICE COUNCILS

Asian Council on Food and Agriculture

Why Asia must solve food waste to hit its environmental goals

You may think the peas, potatoes or the smidgen of rice you line up by the side of your plate because you just can't manage another bite are perfectly harmless, but they contribute to one of the most pressing global concerns and could keep Asia from reaching its environmental goals.

The UN environment programme's (UNEP) Food Waste Index report of 2024 shows the sheer magnitude of the problem that is the link between food waste and the environment. When we waste food, we also waste the resources it took to produce, harvest, transport and package it.

The food that goes into landfills rots and produces methane, a greenhouse gas more potent than carbon dioxide. The UNEP estimates suggest food waste around the world generates as much as 8-10 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

While food waste is a global problem, it's particularly of concern in Asia, which ironically is home to upwards of 370 million undernourished people – about half the world total. While not all of them are starving, the 2021 Asia and the Pacific Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition indicated that more than a billion people in Asia did not have access to adequate food in 2020.

Food security worsened as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in places such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

A European Commission report on Asia's food retail and food service channels states that re-



gion's food waste is primarily driven by China and India, whereas South Korea and Singapore have made significant interventions to curtail food waste. China accounts for more than 40 per cent of Asia's food waste, nearly two-thirds of the food waste generated by the entire region. If left unchecked, food waste across China, India and Southeast Asia could rise by an average of 24 per cent in the next decade.

From farm to fork and even when you order in a restaurant, waste is built into the system and defined by Asia's changing consumption. Global climate change mitigation project Project Drawdown says that not only does food waste matter, our ability to stop climate change could hinge on what we eat and how we grow it.

The food we end up throwing away from an unfinished plate is just the tip of the iceberg. Much of the food loss in Asia occurs in the agricultural fields run by small farmers who operate most of the continent's farmland. These farmers do agriculture in parcels of land that are usually smaller than 2 hectares. However, they also tend to struggle the most, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Nearly 500 million small hold farmers around the world are generating a third of edible food that is wasted globally as a result of damaged soil and crops, water-starved fields and severe labour shortages that affect harvesting. Of these, 350 million small hold farmers are located in Asia.

A lack of cold storage and transport facilities makes the problem worse, especially in India. The country throws away as much as 30 per cent of its fresh produce each year, wasting fruit and vegetables worth about US\$13 billion.

Moderating food demand, improving food distribution and reducing waste have become an urgent priority at both the political and personal



level. In moving to achieve this, those who are the most passionate about food are stepping up to the plate in Asia.

Chefs in Asia have made the news for tackling food waste in their communities. On platforms such as Instagram, popular chefs hold sway on this subject. One case in point is chef Koushik Shankar from India. His tips on how to transform what we normally think of as waste, from fish scales to egg shells, have created much needed awareness.

Asian start-up firms are also harnessing technology and employing artificial intelligence-powered apps to help cut back on food waste. A Singapore-based company called Lumitics has developed a food waste tracker called Insight, which is also called a “smart dustbin” because it provides a deeper look into the food people are discarding. The app found that hotel kitchens alone were throwing away 25 per cent of the food they purchase.

Other apps have sprang up across Asia that are taking these restaurant leftovers and turning them into cheap meals that people can order over phone apps. In Malaysia, for instance, the ReMeal app can help people find surplus food from cafes, bakeries and supermarkets at a discounted price.

Apps are not doing enough in the view of some countries, where instead they are starting to impose wide-ranging fines for food waste. It is illegal in South Korea to throw away food, which must be composted instead. Illegally discarding any food can result in penalties of up to 300,000 won (US\$220).

In 2021, China instituted a new law where restaurant owners could collect a disposal fee from customers who left a large amount of food on their plates. Restaurants that encourage excessive ordering by their clients, either by lavishing deep

discounts or by serving enormous portion sizes so they can charge customers more to cover overhead costs, will receive a warning and then a fine of up to 10,000 yuan (US\$1,400) if the behaviour persists.

Food waste remains a pressing concern in Asia in spite of all of these measures, but one promising sign is that the world is waking up to the fact that we can combat climate change by curbing our consumption. For a start, Food Waste Prevention Week, which is celebrated in early April, is gaining traction and growing into a powerful global movement.

South China Morning Post

Asian Council of Health and Education

The Impact of Transnational Higher Education on Regional Development



If ASEAN were a country, it would be the fifth largest economy in the world. In 2021, ASEAN citizens in the middle class comprised 24 per cent of the region’s population and this is set to grow to 51 per cent by 2030. In 2020, more than 12 million students were enrolled in 7,000 higher education institutes throughout ASEAN, with the largest number attending UK-founded institutes, followed by Australian ones. This economic trajectory positions Southeast Asia as an increasingly appealing hub for international universities seeking to provide higher

education opportunities to cultivate the next wave of ASEAN's skilled professionals.

Since the opening of Monash University Malaysia in 1998, the region has witnessed a rise in the establishment of foreign university campuses, known as international branch campuses (IBCs). These campuses may either be wholly owned or established through joint ventures with local universities and institutions, representing a form of transnational education (TNE). TNE is where students in their home country receive education from an institution founded and based overseas. With the rise in ASEAN's middle-income families, higher education attainment is seen as a ticket to secure better-paying jobs for young Southeast Asians.

This was the case in Malaysia when demand for higher education swelled during the 1990s, as Malaysia transitioned to an upper-middle income country. However, the number of higher education spaces was limited, compounded by the government's implementation of a 55:45 Bumiputera quota, which reserved a higher proportion of slots for indigenous Malaysians. To cope with the shortfall, the government liberalised higher education, including enacting the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act (1996) to allow foreign universities to set up IBCs in Malaysia. Monash University was the pioneer in Malaysia and has now become one of the nation's premier private universities.

Presently, the higher education market in Malaysia is one of the most developed in Southeast Asia. Nine other universities, including the University of Nottingham and University of Southampton, have set up IBCs in Malaysia. This expansion can help to ease the rising aspirations of young Malaysians seeking access to university education. However, not all Malaysians have the money nor a sponsor to finance their education at IBCs should they fail to make it to local universities. In this author's view, affirmative policies should not come at the expense of minority applicants who are denied entry to local universities despite receiving higher test scores than protected groups.

Demand for higher education is projected to increase in other significant Southeast Asian markets such as Indonesia, whose higher education enrolment is forecast to be among the world's top ten by 2035. Some higher education providers in

the UK view Indonesia as a market with one of the highest growth potentials for TNE. The number of top-tier universities in Indonesia is not keeping pace with the projected increase in demand and enrolment. Indonesia lacks top-quality universities and has precious few IBCs; its permanent teaching positions in state universities were opened up to foreigners only in 2018. Just five of Indonesia's domestic campuses placed in the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings 2024. They are Universitas Indonesia (237th), Gadjah Mada University (263rd), Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) (281st), Airlangga University (345th), and Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB) (489th).

The Indonesian government has taken measures to improve the quality of higher education to ensure that its youth are better prepared for the future workforce. In 2018, lawmakers passed a law allowing foreign universities to operate within Indonesia, where previously, these institutions could operate only by collaborating with local institutions. This law targets highly ranked overseas universities. The government hoped to spur competition and push local universities to improve by inviting reputable foreign universities to set up IBCs in Indonesia.

However, liberalising higher education in Indonesia may not be able to solve the country's higher education challenges. One issue is a lack of qualified lecturers and professors. According to the World Bank, only 16 per cent of Indonesian lecturers have a doctorate. This is half the percentage of tertiary teaching staff with equivalent qualifications compared to other regional countries like Malaysia. In addition, rote learning is still widely used in Indonesia even at the tertiary level. This could be a reason for Indonesia's graduates remaining unemployed four to eight months after graduation or being under-employed, as they may lack critical thinking, analysis, and problem solving skills, which are desired by companies.

The Benefits and Drawbacks of IBCs

IBCs may help their home countries extend their soft power, such as by supporting the development goals of the host country. The donor country can leverage the research capabilities and know-how of their university to transfer knowledge and expertise, to the host country of the IBC.

This was arguably the case for RMIT Vietnam, an IBC operated by RMIT Australia, which hosted

Asian Council on Water, Energy, and Environment

All HDB households to get S\$300 in Climate Vouchers to buy energy- and water-efficient appliances

Australian Prime Minister (PM) Anthony Albanese in June 2023. During his visit, PM Albanese pledged a AU\$250 million strategic investment fund to contribute to Vietnam's development. Part of the funds would go to creating the Hanoi Industry and Innovation Hub to facilitate collaboration between the public and private sectors on projects such as smart cities and social innovation.

While the presence of IBCs in the region may be beneficial, their detractors are critical of inequality and access issues, among others. Most students enrolled in IBCs come from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds and can afford the tuition fees, which can be five times more expensive compared to those for local universities (for courses like engineering). Individuals from lower-income groups, who might be unable to secure placements in local institutions, might find themselves doubly denied further education and consequently miss out on social mobility opportunities. To address this issue, some IBCs like RMIT Vietnam have a scholarship fund for disadvantaged students.

Critics in Indonesia have also expressed reservations about the proliferation of IBCs, viewing education as crucial for developing and preserving the nation's culture and values. They have raised concerns regarding the alleged absence of government regulation and oversight, potentially leading to curricula in IBCs that neglect Indonesian values. As a compromise, the Indonesian government mandated that 15 per cent of IBCs' curriculum must include religious studies and instruction on the national ideology, Pancasila. While this may extend students' candidature periods at such IBCs, it addresses officials' concerns about Indonesian students' insufficient knowledge of national values. Similar concerns have been raised by officials in Malaysia and Vietnam, prompting their governments to introduce compulsory courses in their TNE programmes.

The role of IBCs extends beyond youth education; they also contribute to fostering development in host countries through capacity-building. While the globalisation of education in Southeast Asia has expanded some citizens' access to tertiary schooling, it is imperative to balance this against broader opportunities for social equality, mobility, and preservation of cultural and national identities.

Fulcrum



Families living in Housing Board (HDB) flats will receive S\$300 (US\$223) in Climate Vouchers to purchase more efficient appliances, said Senior Minister of State for Sustainability and the Environment Amy Khor on March 4.

The vouchers are part of the enhanced Climate Friendly Households Programme and come after an initial set of vouchers was given to households in smaller flats.

"With these enhancements, we hope to incentivise more households to choose resource-efficient options from the outset, or when their appliances and fittings are due for replacement," Dr Khor said in parliament during her ministry's budget debate.

The new e-vouchers will be available to all 1.1 million HDB households from Apr 15 this year until Dec 31, 2027. They will come in a mix of denominations and can be used to buy 10 types of energy- and water-efficient household products.

New products – such as direct current fans, washing machines, air-conditioners and heat pump water heaters – have been added to the mix.

HDB households consisting of Singaporeans and permanent residents can claim their Climate

Vouchers online at RedeemSG with their Singpass accounts from Apr 15.

Those who require assistance can contact the National Environment Agency (NEA) through its hotline, Dr Khor said. To redeem the vouchers, customers have to provide proof of address at participating retail outlets.

Participating retailers include Audio House, Bathroom Warehouse, Best Denki, Chuan Heng Hardware Trading, Courts, FairPrice, Gain City, Harvey Norman, Mega Discount Store, Sheng Siong and TS Yong Trading.

New retailers that have joined the scheme this year include Giant, Cold Storage and Woodlands Domestic Electrical, taking the total number of participating retailers to 14. Together, they have around 300 stores islandwide.

“By switching to more efficient appliances and fittings, households can reduce their energy (and) water consumption, lower their utility bills, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and play their part in slowing down climate change,” the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment said in a joint press release with NEA and national water agency PUB.

The first round of the Climate Vouchers was given out in 2020 to households in one-, two- and three-room HDB flats.

Worth S\$225, the vouchers comprised S\$150 for refrigerators, S\$50 for shower fittings and S\$25 for LED lights. These were valid from Nov 28, 2020, and will remain so until Mar 20 this year.

As of January, more than 141,000 households out of more than 300,000 had registered for the first round of vouchers. Around 54,000 vouchers have been used, according to Dr Khor.

The authorities attributed the slow take-up rate to households deciding when to replace their appliances.

They added that the 10 product types chosen for the enhanced programme take up 60 per cent of an average household’s electricity consumption, and around 90 per cent of water consumption.

More Energy-Efficient Appliances for Homes And Businesses

The Mandatory Energy Labelling Scheme and Minimum Energy Performance Standards will also be extended to household water heaters and commercial refrigerators from Apr 1, 2025.

NEA will develop minimum energy stan-

dards to phase out the least energy-efficient water heaters and commercial fridges, and introduce an energy label with a five-tick rating scale for both appliances.

The Mandatory Energy Labelling Scheme was implemented in 2008 and the Minimum Energy Performance Standards in 2011 – starting with air-conditioners and refrigerators – to improve the energy efficiency of home and commercial appliances.

Dr Khor said the average energy efficiency of household air-conditioners and refrigerators has improved by 59 per cent and 42 per cent respectively since the introduction of the schemes.

“This is equivalent to the annual energy consumption of about 405,000 four-room housing units, and translates to annual overall household energy savings of more than S\$500 million,” said Dr Khor.

The regulations have been extended to water heaters as they are the third most energy-intensive appliances in households after air-conditioners and refrigerators, NEA said. Water heaters use about 10 per cent of a typical household’s energy.

“There are more energy-efficient options, such as instantaneous water heaters, which on average consume about 50 per cent less electricity than electric storage water heaters. This enables homeowners to save on energy bills,” said Dr Khor.

Consumers can save up to S\$115 a year by switching from a one-tick water heater to a five-tick water heater, NEA said.

Similarly, commercial fridges in food establishments are among the most energy-intensive appliances in the kitchen.

Used in hawker centres, food courts and restaurants, these fridges can account for about one-third of hawkers’ electricity usage, said Dr Khor.

Channel News Asia

CACCI Women Entrepreneurs Council

Empowering women entrepreneurs across Southeast Asia



Lazada is dedicated to supporting female-led businesses, driving economic empowerment, and fostering gender equality in the region.

Arianne Amante, 27, has always dreamed of helping women look and feel their most beautiful. Makeup and skincare products boosted her confidence, and this inspired her to empower more Filipinas to unlock their full potential. In 2021, she launched Cloche flame, a beauty brand designed for the modern Filipina, and started selling on Lazada.

For Arianne, Cloche flame is not just about selling products, it's also building a community of women empowering and inspiring each other. "I'm thrilled to be part of a generation where women are shaping the future. Being in the industry has also introduced me to other female sellers, and I love that we have a unique bond because, really, there shouldn't be any competition," she says. "Help freely, and don't be afraid to ask for help. When we're kind to others and ourselves, that's when our beauty lights up."

In a dynamic e-commerce landscape, Lazada has emerged as a platform that not only fosters business growth but also empowers individuals like Arianne to push their vision and advocacies forward through entrepreneurial pursuits. This

Women's Month, Lazada celebrates inspiring stories like hers and of other women leaders in Southeast Asia like Vanda Monica, owner of a sports and outdoor equipment brand in Indonesia and Teh Qiu Xian in Malaysia who owns KOMIC, an authorized distributor of licensed character merchandise for both local and international brands. Also featured are Antoinette Wong from Singapore who started selling arts and crafts and Singapore souvenirs on The Little Dröm Store, Merge, a denim brand that caters to the diverse needs and lifestyles of women founded by Pornpavee Darnmingyen of Thailand, and Vietnam's Nguyen Hoai Nhi who owns home and lifestyle brand, Decosa Homedecor.

At the core of Lazada's seller enablement throughout the region is its comprehensive Lazada University. This interactive hub offers self-paced training, live-streamed and on-demand videos, as well as offline workshops. These resources ensure access to crucial tools and knowledge, covering various aspects such as basic store operations, leveraging campaigns, promotional strategies, and industry insights. This equips entrepreneurs to reach their target audience and thrive in today's increasingly competitive landscape.

Business Mirror

Asian Textiles and Garments Council

JCCI keen to expand investment in textile OEMs in Cambodia

The Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) recently expressed interest in expanding investment in original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) for the textile sector in Cambodia.

Yoshihisa Suzuki, chairman of JCCI's Japan-Mekong Business Cooperation Committee, put forward the proposal during a meeting with



Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet in Phnom Penh.

Suzuki also briefed Manet about existing investment activities in Cambodia in the textile, gas supply and agricultural sectors.

“The visit of the delegation will further increase the potential and expansion of Japanese investments in Cambodia,” the prime minister was quoted as saying by Cambodian media reports.

Cambodia is ready to coordinate with Japanese investors to turn itself into a major investment destination and a regional hub, he added.

Fibre2Fashion

INVESTMENT & JOINT VENTURES

Microsoft to invest US\$2.9 billion in AI and cloud infrastructure in Japan



Microsoft announced it will invest US\$2.9 billion over the next two years to increase its hyperscale cloud computing and AI infrastructure in Japan. It will also expand its digital skilling programs with the goal of providing AI skilling to more than 3 million people over the next three years, open its first Microsoft Research Asia lab in Japan, and deepen its cybersecurity collaboration with the Government of Japan.

These investments aim to support Japan’s key pillar to tackle deflation and stimulate the economy by expanding the infrastructure, skilled talent, and security required to accelerate Japan’s digital transformation and adoption of AI. The announcement coincides with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s state visit to the United States, where he was joined by Microsoft Vice Chair

and President Brad Smith, and Microsoft Japan President Miki Tsusaka.

Expanding Japan’s AI and cloud infrastructure capacity

The US\$2.9 billion commitment is Microsoft’s single largest investment in its 46-year history in Japan, also the site of its first international office. It effectively doubles the company’s existing financial commitment to expand its AI and cloud infrastructure across Japan.

This significant enhancement in digital capacity will enable Microsoft to provide more advanced computing resources in Japan, including the latest graphics processing units (GPUs), which are crucial for speeding up AI workloads. It builds on Microsoft’s support for the Generative AI Accelerator Challenge (GENIAC), a program led

by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry which helps innovative startups and established enterprises develop foundation models as a core technology of generative AI in Japan.

Building Japan's AI capability by training 3 million people

Microsoft will also invest in training 3 million full-time and part-time workers across Japan over the next three years, giving them the skills they need to build and work with AI technologies. This investment will be delivered through programs focused on assisting organizations and society at large, including women in general and also with a focus on developers and students.

Microsoft will expand its Code; Without Barriers program to Japan and provide dedicated training for women looking to participate in AI-enabled work. It will also provide free and widely accessible content on AI, cybersecurity, and digital skills in partnership with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).

Nurturing advanced AI professionals who can drive further AI integration, Microsoft will offer courses and reference architectures for AI developers and technology companies in Japan. These will be augmented by Microsoft's AI coding assistant, GitHub Copilot. The company will also support startups with resources through the Microsoft for Startups Founders Hub and help implement AI-centric programs in vocational high schools.

To advance the societal benefits offered by AI through companies of all sizes, governments, and public entities – including the Tokyo Metropolitan Government – Microsoft will continue with established programs that support the widespread adoption and application of AI tools. Furthermore, Microsoft provides support in developing customers' internal AI policies, including data management and security to ensure its responsible and safe use.

Opening Japan's first Microsoft Research Asia lab in Tokyo

Microsoft Research Asia is extending its research leadership in the Asia-Pacific region with the opening of a lab in Tokyo.

The new lab will have a unique focus on areas including embodied AI and robotics, societal AI and wellbeing, and scientific discovery that align with Japan's socioeconomic priorities. Its establishment

reflects Microsoft's long-term commitment to Japan and its belief in the nation's potential to lead the world in innovation.

Microsoft Research is a division of Microsoft that pursues bold ideas and technical breakthroughs in AI, while building on a legacy of foundational computer science advances. As its fundamental research arm in the Asia-Pacific region, Microsoft Research Asia has collaborated with Japanese academia for more than two decades which have been instrumental in propelling cross-disciplinary research and fostering talent.


To foster enhanced research collaboration, Microsoft will provide US\$10 million resource grants over the next five years to both The University of Tokyo and to the Partnership on Artificial Intelligence Research between Keio University and Carnegie Mellon University.

Partnering to strengthen Japan's cybersecurity defenses

Microsoft will collaborate with Japan's Cabinet Secretariat to strengthen cybersecurity resilience for the government, business, and society, as the nation enhances its cybersecurity approach under the government's updated National Security Strategy.

The collaboration will build on the services Microsoft provides to protect thousands of Japanese organizations every day. It will focus on areas such as information sharing, talent development, and technology solutions, with Microsoft to provide its expertise and advanced cloud and AI-driven security services as part of joint efforts to tackle cybersecurity threats.

Microsoft Stories Asia



Chipmaker TSMC boosts US investment to \$65b with \$6.6b grant

Supported by a US\$6.6 billion federal grant, chipmaking giant Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC) is planning to boost its US investment by over 60%, driving up its total to exceed US\$65 billion, Nikkei Asia reported.



Nvidia plans to build a \$200 million AI center in Indonesia amid push into Southeast Asia

This marks the largest foreign direct investment (FDI) in the US for a greenfield project, the report said, citing US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo. Bolstered by the added funds, the US would be on pace to make around 20% of the world's top-tier chips by 2030.

The Taiwan-based company is building three facilities in the US. Located in Arizona, TSMC's inaugural plant is expected to churn out 4-nanometer chips and will start making them in 2025.

The second plant, initially designated to manufacture 3-nanometer chips, will now also accommodate the production of 2-nanometer chips. Production at this facility is scheduled to commence by 2028.

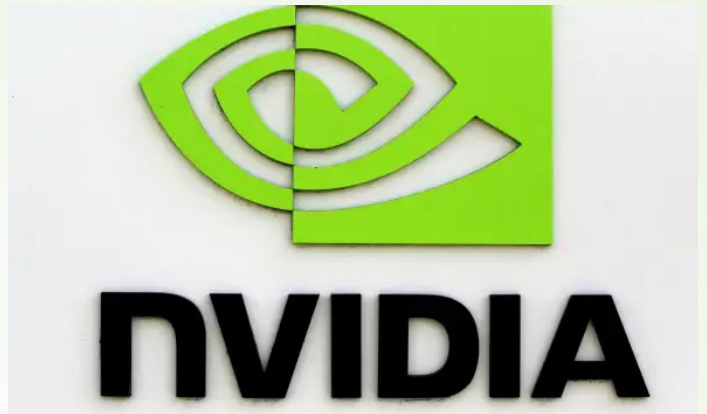
A third plant is also in the works. Estimated to be functional by 2030, it will produce more advanced 2-nanometer chips.

Despite these plans, issues like labor shortages and lengthy approval periods for permits have delayed the first factory's production by a year. To address these problems, TSMC is considering importing Taiwanese talent.

TSMC is the biggest contract chip manufacturer globally and supplies to major chip developers such as Apple, Nvidia, Qualcomm, and Amazon. As tech firms race to catch generative AI wave, TSMC said its revenue could surge by 26%.

The company also announced in January that its net revenue grew by 14.4% quarter over quarter to US\$19.6 billion in Q4, fueled by recent advancements in semiconductor tech. However, its overall 2023 revenue is still down 8.7% year on year at US\$69.3 billion.

Tech in Asia



Nvidia is planning to build a \$200 million artificial intelligence center in Indonesia in partnership with local telco giant Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison, as the U.S. tech darling continues its push into Southeast Asia.

According to Indonesia's Communication and Information Technology Minister, Budi Arie Setiadi, the new facility will be based in the city of Surakarta in the Central Java province and will bolster local telecommunications infrastructure, human resources, and digital talent.

In March, Indosat announced that it was ready to integrate Nvidia's next-generation chip architecture, Blackwell, into its infrastructure, with "the goal of propelling Indonesia into a new era of sovereign AI and technological advancement."

Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison is Indonesia's second-largest mobile telco after a 2022 merger between Qatar's Ooredoo and Hong Kong's CK Hutchison.

Nvidia's increased presence in Indonesia represents a broader push into Southeast Asia this year as data demand in the region booms on the back of the growing digital economy.

Nvidia is experiencing a once in a generation tech advancement, says Gabelli's Howard Ward

In January, Singapore telco provider Singtel announced its partnership with Nvidia to deploy artificial intelligence capabilities in its data centers across Southeast Asia.

Singtel said in March that the initiative

would provide businesses in the region with access to Nvidia's cutting-edge AI computing power by this year, without the need for clients to invest in and manage their own expensive data center infrastructure.

Southeast Asia has proved to be a major revenue driver for Nvidia. A U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission filing last year showed that about 15% or \$2.7 billion of the company's revenue for the quarter ended October came from Singapore.

Singapore trailed the U.S., which generated 34.77% of Nvidia revenue, Taiwan with 23.91%, and China and Hong Kong, at 22.24% in sales rankings that quarter.

Revenue from the small nation-state that quarter represented a 404.1% increase from the \$562 million recorded in the same period the previous year, outpacing Nvidia's overall revenue growth and putting it as the company's fourth largest market.

According to Nvidia's latest blowout quarterly earnings report, data centers comprised the majority of its revenue, generating \$18.40 billion on the back of global AI euphoria.

CNBC



Noventiq Announces Strategic Joint Venture with Net One Asia in Singapore



Noventiq Holdings PLC (Noventiq), a global leader in digital transformation and cybersecurity solutions and services provider, is excited to announce a strategic joint venture with Net One Asia, a premier provider of IT services in Singapore.

This partnership marks a significant milestone in Noventiq's expansion strategy in the Asia Pacific region, leveraging the strengths of both companies to bring comprehensive Microsoft technology solutions to the Singapore market.

The joint venture, operating under Noventiq Singapore Pte Ltd, is a testament to both companies' commitment to driving digital innovation. With a focus on cybersecurity and Data&AI, including Microsoft Copilot, Noventiq Singapore will offer the full spectrum of Microsoft technologies and solutions that

Noventiq delivers in 60 countries worldwide. This initiative is designed to accelerate Noventiq's presence in Singapore and across the APAC region, providing local organizations with advanced cybersecurity and Microsoft offerings.

Noventiq's contribution to the joint venture encompasses its extensive relationship with Microsoft as one of its global partners, 15 Advanced Specializations, and a dedicated team of 300 people in the APAC region operating in 8 countries around Asia, supported by resources from Noventiq's Global Delivery Centers. Net One Asia brings to the table a team of 180, its operational prowess, a robust salesforce, and a clientele of over 1000 customers across Asia. This partnership is uniquely positioned to deliver growth through the synergistic combination of both companies' strengths.

The joint venture is expected to fast-track Noventiq's success in Singapore, mirroring its achievements in other new markets.

The main goal is to focus on the Singapore market, with plans to explore new initiatives in the Asia Pacific region in the future. The joint venture will introduce products, services, and solutions from Noventiq's own IPs such as Weaver AI, Fintense, or Selecta as well as our offerings on Microsoft technologies, including Copilot. The partnership will also expand into other partners' solutions.

Business Wire

Goldman Sachs, Mubadala sign \$1 billion private credit Asia-Pacific partnership deal



Abu Dhabi's sovereign wealth fund Mubadala Investment Company (MUDEV.UL) has struck a \$1 billion deal with Goldman Sachs (GS.N), opens new tab to go after private credit deals in Asia, the companies said.

Mubadala and the U.S. bank agreed on a partnership to co-invest in private credit opportunities in the Asia Pacific region, with a particular focus on India, the companies said in a statement.

The partnership will be managed by Private Credit at Goldman Sachs Alternatives, with a dedicated on-the-ground team across multiple Asia Pacific markets, Mubadala and Goldman said.

The Abu Dhabi sovereign investor has been building up its exposure to private credit markets through partnerships, leveraging on opportunities in distressed debt amid a high interest rate environment.

Last year, Goldman Sachs announced it was opening a new office in Abu Dhabi, marking a significant milestone for the Wall Street bank since it was sidelined from any new business in the capital of the United Arab Emirates for its involvement in the 1MDB scandal.

The bank said the new office will complement the firm's growing regional presence, allowing the firm to deepen relationships with clients and meet them where they are.

Money managers are vying for a slice of the

growing private credit market that emerged after the 2008 financial crisis. Private credit funds are increasingly competing with banks, including for financing large company buyouts.

That has attracted the attention of sovereign wealth funds in the Gulf, including the \$300 billion Mubadala, one of Abu Dhabi's three main sovereign wealth funds, alongside Abu Dhabi Investment Authority and ADQ.

Wall Street's main indexes plummeted on Friday, capping a week marked by hotter-than-expected inflation and jobs data that forced investors to reset expectations for the timing of interest rate cuts.

In March last year, Mubadala forged a joint venture with Ares to invest in global credit markets opportunities, starting with an initial target of \$1 billion.

In the same year, it committed another \$1 billion to U.S.-based Blue Owl Capital's credit platform that will initially focus on providing financing for technology companies.

Mubadala and UAE-based conglomerate Alpha Dhabi last year announced plans to deploy up to 9 billion dirhams (\$2.5 billion) over five years in credit markets, with the two companies leveraging on Mubadala's relationship with U.S. asset manager Apollo (APO.N), opens new tab, "to access high-quality private credit investment opportunities".

Mubadala has been investing in private debt opportunities through its credit investment unit since 2009, mostly in North America and Europe, but has recently strengthened its exposure in the Asia Pacific. Late last year, Mubadala's CEO said the firm's investment focus would increasingly shift towards Asia.

Reuters

ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Gulf and Central Asian countries discuss strengthening 'comprehensive cooperation'



Members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Central Asian countries met in Tashkent to discuss ways to strengthen “comprehensive cooperation” between the two regions, Anadolu has reported.

Uzbekistan’s First Deputy Foreign Minister Bakhromjon Aloyev told journalists following the 2nd Foreign Ministerial Meeting of the Central Asia-GCC Strategic Dialogue that, “At the meeting, issues of strengthening mutually beneficial and comprehensive cooperation... in political, security, trade, economic, investment, transport and logistics, environmental protection, green energy, cultural and humanitarian and other spheres were discussed in detail.”

The high-level participation in Monday’s ministerial meeting is a testament to the growing prestige of the strategic dialogue format between Central Asia and the GCC, Aloyev pointed out. He

said that the meeting assessed the implementation of agreements reached during the first summit held in Jeddah in July last year.

The deputy minister added that all parties analysed the situation with regard to the implementation of the joint action plan agreed in Jeddah for the 2023-2027 period. He also said that the participants at Monday’s meeting noted that the results will set the stage for preparations for the 2nd Central Asia-GCC Summit at head of state level, which is scheduled to take place in Samarkand next year.

“The ministers also exchanged views on current international and regional issues, in particular Afghanistan, the situation in the Middle East, the Palestine-Israel conflict, and a number of other topics.” He explained that the next ministerial meeting of the Strategic Dialogue will be held in Kuwait in 2026.

Middle East Monitor

Indonesia, China to deepen cooperation

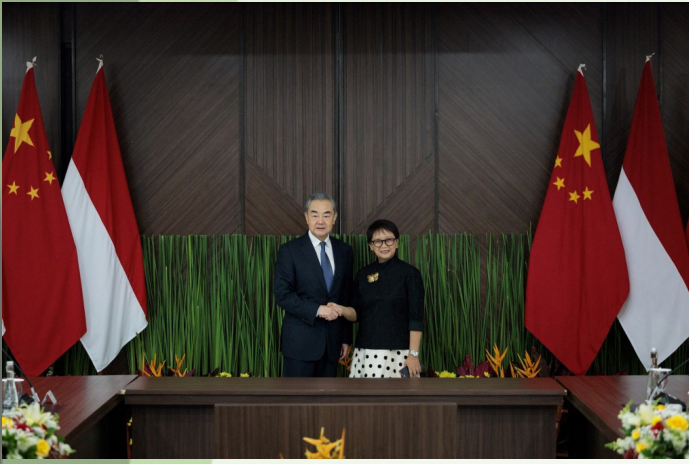
Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said China and Indonesia had agreed to strengthen cooperation and bilateral relations, after a meeting with China Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Jakarta on April 18.

Meanwhile Wang said that China and Indonesia want to maintain peace and stability in the region.

Wang also called for all parties in the Gaza conflict to exercise restraint.

During his visit to Jakarta, Wang is also scheduled to chair the fourth meeting of the China-Indonesia High-Level Dialogue Cooperation Mechanism.

Wang kicks off his visit to Indonesia, Cambodia and Papua New Guinea on April 23 and



will wrap up on April 23.

After chairing a session of the China-Indonesia High-level Dialogue Cooperation Mechanism, Wang will lead two meetings of the China-Cambodia Intergovernmental Coordination Committee.

He will finish the tour in Papua New Guinea, where in recent years Beijing has tried to chip away at US and Australian influence.

President-elect Prabowo Subianto visited China at the beginning of April, where President Xi Jinping praised their ties and laid out a vision for regional peace.

China is one of the biggest sources of foreign direct investment in Indonesia and has poured billions of dollars into projects in the archipelago nation.

Jakarta Post



Washington a day after meeting President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in the nations' first trilateral summit.

"It is going to change the dynamic, the dynamic that we see in the region, in ASEAN in Asia, around the South China Sea," Marcos said, referring to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The three leaders expressed "serious concerns" about China's "dangerous and aggressive behavior" in the South China Sea, a conduit for more than \$3 trillion of annual ship-borne commerce with various maritime disputes among China and other countries.

Still, Marcos said the summit was "not against any country" but had focused on deepening economic and security relations among Manila, Washington and Tokyo.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea despite a 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration found Beijing's sweeping claims had no legal basis.

Philippine and Chinese ships have had a series of run-ins in the past month that included the use of water cannon and heated verbal exchanges.

Beijing on April 11 summoned Manila's ambassador to the country and a Japanese embassy official to oppose what its foreign ministry described as "negative comments" against China.

The deepening China-Philippines row coincides with an increase in security engagements with the United States under Marcos, including expansion of U.S. access to Philippine bases, as well as with Japan, which is expected to sign a reciprocal troop pact with Manila.

Biden has asked Congress for an additional \$128 million for infrastructure projects at the Philippine bases.

US, Japan, Philippines trilateral deal to change dynamic in South China Sea, Marcos says

A cooperation agreement by the Philippines, the United States and Japan will change the dynamic in the South China Sea and the region, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said on April 12, while seeking to assure China it was not a target.

"I think the trilateral agreement is extremely important," Marcos told a press conference in

Marcos also expressed confidence that around \$100 billion in possible investment deals over the next five to 10 years from the summit will come into fruition.

While in Washington, Marcos also met with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who assured him of continued U.S. support.

“This whole cooperation is critical to our collective security and continued prosperity across the region,” Austin said, reiterating Biden’s strong defense commitment.

Reuters



PH, New Zealand eye visiting forces pact, strengthened economic ties



The Philippines and New Zealand have taken steps toward deeper defense cooperation, including the possible establishment of a visiting forces agreement, as President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. and New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon met in Malacañang on April 18.

In a joint statement released after the two leaders’ bilateral meeting, Marcos and Luxon committed to “maintaining and strengthening defense engagements while exploring new frameworks of cooperation to deepen defense ties.”

“Both sides committed to the signing of a Mutual Logistics Supporting Arrangement (MLSA) by the end of 2024, and to concluding a Status of

Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA),” the leaders said.

Aside from the United States, the Philippines also has a SOVFA with Australia and is currently developing a similar defense pact with Japan, known as the Reciprocal Access Agreement.

These types of military partnerships allow Filipino and foreign soldiers to train in each other’s territory, as well as share military equipment and assets.

Marcos and Luxon both shared serious concern over recent developments in the South China Sea, reaffirming the right of freedom of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the seas under international law, particularly the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The two leaders also expressed commitment to sustaining maritime security cooperation, including bilateral and multilateral activities at sea, port calls/visits, and capacity-building efforts.

Recognizing that the Philippines and New Zealand have a shared interest as Pacific maritime nations, Marcos and Luxon also pledged to cooperate on maritime law enforcement, including addressing common threats, such as piracy, maritime terrorism, contraband smuggling, wildlife trafficking, and irregular human migration.

Meanwhile, Marcos and Luxon also welcomed the development of stronger economic linkages between the Philippines and New Zealand and reaffirmed their shared commitment to upholding the rules-based trading system.

Both Leaders welcomed the upgrade of the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA) and the successful implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and acknowledged the strong collaboration between the two countries through the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

Luxon acknowledged the Philippines’ interest in developing the export capability of its agricultural sector and pledged to further discussions between officials on this initiative.

Additionally, the two leaders also committed to eliminating “unnecessary barriers to trade” and promised to ensure that exporters could fully utilize the comprehensive suite of free trade agreements, to achieve a “mutually beneficial increase of 50 percent in two-way trade by 2030.”

Likewise, the two leaders vowed to continue strengthening people-to-people cooperation and ensure the welfare of Filipino migrant workers, especially nurses.

Marcos and Luxon looked forward to the review of the existing bilateral migrant worker arrangement, which will facilitate the recruitment of Filipino workers to New Zealand and other initiatives.

During their meeting, Marcos and Luxon also discussed the relations of the Philippines and New Zealand in terms of environment, climate change, people-to-people exchanges, and other multilateral endeavors.

Philippine News Agency

Turkiye and Gulf states to launch talks for free trade agreement



Turkiye and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have signed a deal to launch negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), Turkish Trade Minister Omer Bolat said. The move comes as Ankara steps up efforts to expand economic ties with Gulf region, Reuters has reported.

After years of tension, Turkiye launched a diplomatic charm offensive in 2020 to mend ties with Gulf countries, namely the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Ankara already has a trade agreement, dubbed a comprehensive economic partnership agreement,

with the UAE.

Since then, Ankara has signed deals worth billions with Gulf nations, including Qatar, with which it enjoys strong ties.

“The agreement will liberalise trade in goods and services, facilitate investments and trade, and increase our country’s trade with the region,” Bolat said on social media platform X.

Ankara believes that the talks will be completed as soon as possible, he added, saying the pact would lead to one of the world’s largest free trade areas, between Turkiye and members of the GCC, with a total value of \$2.4 trillion.

The GCC is made up of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain. Its Secretary General Jasem Al-Budaiwi said that the accord to launch FTA talks “is a demonstration of the robust and strategic partnership between the GCC countries and Turkiye.” He added that it showcased successful cooperation between the GCC and Turkiye across various fields, including commerce, economics and finance.

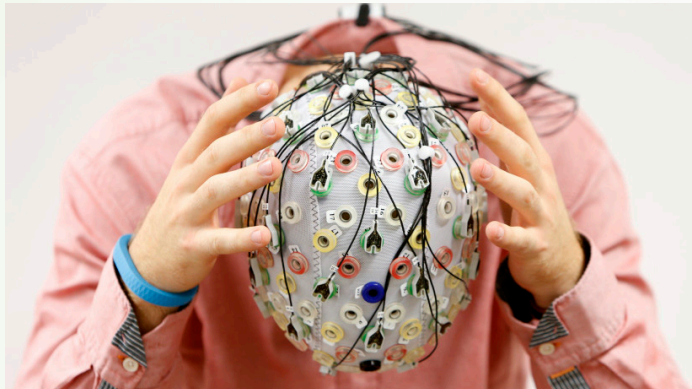
As ties have improved, Gulf Arab nations are looking to Turkiye for help developing local industries and technology transfer in their ambitious effort to diversify their economies away from oil and gas.

Last week, Turkiye and Britain said that they would launch talks on an expanded FTA to include goods and services in the deal.

Middle East Monitor

TECHNOLOGY

New brain-computer interface allows people to play games with their thoughts



Test person Niklas Thiel poses with an electroencephalography (EEG) cap which measures brain activity, at the Technische Universitaet Muenchen (TUM) in Garching near Munich (credit: REUTERS/Michaela Rehle)

Playing a video racing game using only your brain to carry out complex movements is no longer a fantasy but a real program that engineers at the University of Texas at Austin have created as part of their research into brain-computer interfaces to help improve the lives of people with motor disabilities. The team impressively included machine-learning capabilities along with their brain-computer interface (BCI), making it a one-size-fits-all solution.

One major obstacle to its widespread adoption is that these devices typically require extensive calibration for each user, whether healthy or disabled because each human brain is unique. However, with repetition, this new solution can quickly understand the person's needs and self-calibrate. This means that multiple patients can use the device without any need to tune it to the individual, said Satyam Kumar, a graduate student in the lab of Prof. José del Millán in the electrical and computer engineering department.

"When we think about this in a clinical setting, this technology will make it so we won't

need a specialized team to do this calibration process, which is long and tedious," Kumar said. "It will be much faster to move from patient to patient."

The research on the calibration-free interface is published in the journal PNAS Nexus under the title "Transfer learning promotes acquisition of individual BCI skills."

In the experiment, the subjects wear a cap packed with electrodes that is hooked up to a computer. The electrodes gather data by measuring electrical signals from the brain, and the decoder interprets that information and translates it into game action.

Revolutionizing brain-computer interfaces

Millán's work on brain-computer interfaces helps users guide and strengthen their neural plasticity and improves the brain's ability to change, grow, and reorganize over time. These experiments are designed to improve brain function for patients and use the devices controlled by brain-computer interfaces to make their lives easier.

In this case, the actions involved the car racing game and the simpler task of balancing the left and right sides of a digital bar. The project used 18 subjects with no motor impairments; eventually, as they continue down this road, the researchers will test people with motor impairments to apply it to larger groups in clinical settings.

An expert was trained to develop a "decoder" for the simpler bar task that makes it possible for the interface to translate brain waves into commands. The decoder serves as a base for the other users and is the key to avoiding the long calibration process. The decoder worked well enough for subjects to train simultaneously for the bar game and the more complicated car racing game, which requires thinking several steps ahead to make turns.

The researchers called this work

revolutionary in that it sets the stage for further brain-computer interface innovation. “On the one hand, we want to translate the BCI to the clinical realm to help people with disabilities; on the other, we need to improve our technology to make it easier to use so that the impact for these people with disabilities is stronger,” Millán said.

The team is also working on a wheelchair that users can drive with the brain-computer interface. They also present another potential use

of the technology – controlling two rehabilitation robots for the hand and arm. Several people volunteered and succeeded in operating the brain-controlled robots within minutes.

“The point of this technology is to help people, help them in their everyday lives,” Millán concluded. “We’ll continue down this path wherever it takes us in the pursuit of helping people.”

The Jerusalem Post

Ultraviolet tech boosts Vitamin D content in mushrooms



Scientists at the ICAR-Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR) have developed a technology to enhance the Vitamin D content in mushrooms by exposing them to Ultraviolet-B (UVB) radiation.

“Mushrooms naturally represent a source of ergosterol that can be converted into Vitamin B. The conversion requires either natural sunlight or ultraviolet light,” said a scientist at ICAR-IIHR in Hesaraghatta in northern Bengaluru outskirts.

To ensure consistent results despite varying weather conditions, an indigenous UVB exposure device was designed. Elm Oyster mushrooms were utilised for the study.

This technology is one of six innovations developed by ICAR-IIHR in the field of horticulture, all of which will be showcased at their seventh three-day National Horticulture Fair (NHF), starting from March 5.

The theme for this year’s fair is “NextGen Technology Led Horticulture for Sustainable De-

velopment”. ICAR, NABARD, and the Department of Horticulture of Chhattisgarh are among the 25 sponsors and collaborators for the event, which is open to all.

The fair will feature 320 stalls across 13 categories, exhibiting and demonstrating the latest technologies such as smart irrigation, controlled environment farming, vertical farming, and optimising resource use to enhance crop yields. Seeds, planting materials, farm implements, and other accessories will also be available for purchase. More than 500 attendees are expected.

Dr Dhananjaya MV, the organising secretary of NHF 2024, highlighted that in addition to farmer consultations, training, and workshops on various topics, including urban horticulture, soilless cultivation, hi-tech horticulture, value addition, and waste utilisation of flowers, there will be sessions on farm/kitchen waste composting and home-scale packaging and storage of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The fair will also feature over 37 fresh horticulture-related technologies developed across the country. Notably, all exhibits will be accompanied by a QR code linking to information sources about the exhibit, available in nine languages.

Among the breakthroughs to be showcased is a new hybrid of chilli, Arka Bihira F1, which is resistant to Phytophthora Root Rot and Chilli Leaf Curl Virus.

Deccan Herald

POLICY UPDATES

Australia

New EV design rule introduced in Australia



The Australian Federal Government has introduced a new design rule in order to, as it claims, make electric vehicles safer.

With pedestrians set to increasingly be around quieter battery electric cars, trucks and buses, the Acoustic Vehicle Alerting Systems (AVAS) is a safety alert or sound, emitted when an electric vehicle is travelling at low speeds in car parks, intersections, and driveways.

Quiet vehicles such as electric, hybrid and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles travelling at low speeds are harder for pedestrians to hear compared to noisier vehicles with conventional petrol or diesel engines.

This increases the risk of being involved in a collision, and this risk is greater for people who are blind or have poor vision who rely on sound to negotiate the road network independently.

The new Australian Design Rule (ADR) will require new electric, hybrid and hydrogen fuel cell cars,

trucks and buses to be fitted with an AVAS from November 2025.

AVAS will make these vehicles easier to hear by emitting a sound when the vehicle is travelling at low speeds in car parks, intersections and driveways.

A vehicle fitted with an AVAS will not be any noisier than a conventional petrol or diesel vehicle.

"I'm thrilled the Albanese Labor Government is now mandating this vital safety technology to Australian vehicles, as part of our transition to low and zero emission vehicles," said Carol Brown, Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Transport.

"AVAS technology is already mandated in the European Union, United Kingdom, Japan, Korea and the United States. This is our opportunity to catch up with the developed world.

"This technology will go a long way to preventing pedestrian crashes, especially for our most vulnerable."

The Government consulted on a draft Impact Analysis proposing a mandate for AVAS for light vehicles and it was strongly supported by state and territory governments, the blind and low-vision community, and vehicle manufacturers.

The new ADR is expected to avoid around 68 fatalities, 2,675 serious injuries and 2,962 minor injuries by 2060 and is estimated it will save the Australian community \$208 million.

Prime Mover Magazine

Hong Kong

Hong Kong's ban on single-use plastics begins, but businesses have 6 months to adapt



Hong Kong's ban on single-use plastics began on April 22, coinciding with Earth Day. A variety of disposable plastic tableware and other plastic products are now prohibited from being sold or taken away.

The first six months following the roll-out will be an "adaptation period," which means the government will not take enforcement action against non-compliant businesses.

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) said in an April briefing session that it will focus on "promotion and education" during this period, and send staff to inspect around 20,000 restaurants and 20,000 retail stores as well as hotels.

Following the adaptation period, the department will give advice – or issue warnings – to those who disobey the ban. "For businesses with repeated non-compliance records, enforcement actions will be taken after taking into consideration the actual circumstances," the department said in a statement.

All Expanded Polystyrene (EPS) tableware, as well as plastic straws, stirrers, forks, knives, spoons and plates are now banned.

The Legislative Council

passed the Product Eco-responsibility (Amendment) Bill 2023 last October, with the ban introduced in two phases.

The second phase is tentatively set to begin in 2025, with more items set to be banned. It will depend on the availability and affordability of non-plastic or reusable alternatives and will see the sale and distribution of multipack rings, tablecloths, and plastic-stemmed dental floss prohibited.

Hong Kong Free Press

India

India's new EV policy allows imports from any country, including China, official says



India has no restrictions on the import of electric vehicles from any country, including China, under a new EV policy, a senior government official told broadcaster CNBC-TV18 on April 2.

Last month, India announced lowering import taxes on certain electric vehicles produced by carmakers who commit to invest at least \$500 million and start domestic manufacturing within three years.

Reuters

Indonesia

Indonesia amends import rules after business group complaints



Indonesia is revising a regulation designed to control imports of more than 3,000 products, amid concerns from business groups that the rule could disrupt domestic supply chains and exports, the country's trade minister said on April 17.

Southeast Asia's biggest economy issued a regulation late last year to tighten monitoring for many imported goods, from food ingredients to electronic equipment to chemicals, due to concern about an influx.

Importers are required to obtain import permits for various goods, including footwear, textiles and washing machines, and a technical recommendation from other government institutions is needed to secure such a permit.

"Business players, associations, and stakeholders have conveyed that they were having difficulties in obtaining technical documents from related institutions," Trade Minister Zulkifli Hasan said in a statement.

In a separate statement, Indonesia's Coordinating Ministry of Economic Affairs said the government is also suspending the requirement for the technical documents to obtain permits. The ministry did not elaborate the timeline for the suspension.

The coordinating ministry said the Trade Ministry will allow a transition period for the new reg-

ulation once the revision has been issued.

Business groups have said the new rules, which took effect on March 10, have restricted their access to some raw materials.

Following complaints and warnings of shortages, the trade ministry last month eased restrictions for aircraft spare parts and raw materials for the plastics industry. But business groups demanded further relaxation.

The Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry said inappropriately targeted restrictions could disrupt operations in export-oriented industries, including automotive, mineral smelting and electronic manufacturing, as well as the food and beverage sector.

Channel News Asia

Malaysia

Malaysia strengthens natural product regulation with new guidelines

The implementation of natural products based on the Guideline on Natural Products with Modern Claim has been approved to strengthen the regulatory system for natural products in Malaysia, and took effect from April 4.

In a statement on April 6, the Health Ministry said the matter was approved at the 395th Drug Control Authority meeting (PBKD) which took place on April 4.

"The implementation of this registration is a holistic step by the Health Ministry to strengthen the regulatory system for natural products in Malaysia," said the statement.

According to the MOH, the registration of natural products or traditional medicines began in 1992.

It said the claims allowed for natural products were initially for traditional uses such as for general health care and relief of mild symptoms, based on traditional usage information for the products.

In June 2020, the National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency (NPRA) issued another guideline for the registration of natural products, namely the Guideline on Natural Products with Therapeutic Claim to allow the registration of natural products with therapeutic claims.

“Applications for the registration of natural products with therapeutic claims to treat diseases must be accompanied by evidence of the effectiveness and safety of the product based on clinical studies to support the application,” it said.

The MOH said that nowadays, research on plant or herbal products to be commercialised is growing.

It said there is new information and data that can support the use of natural products to control the symptoms of more specific diseases as well as for uses other than traditional use.

“However, based on the existing guidelines, such natural products can only be registered under the traditional product category because they do not have enough clinical study evidence to make therapeutic claims.

Therefore, the MOH said there is a need to create another category of intermediate natural products with modern claim.

Modern claims refer to claims made based on scientific evidence to improve health, reduce the risk of disease or help treat disease symptoms.

Scientific studies to validate modern claims need to show a link between product formulation and health effects whereas the level of claims allowed for modern claims does not exceed the level of claims allowed for therapeutic claims.

The guidelines describe in details the types of evidence or references that are acceptable to support the registration of natural products with modern claims.

Therefore, the MOH is committed to efforts to improve Malaysians’ access to quality, safe and effective medicines.

The production of these guidelines is expected to encourage more local natural product operators and researchers to conduct related studies and subsequently submit scientific evidence to support registration applications.

“MOH, through NPRA, will continue to monitor the quality, safety and effectiveness of the products that have been registered,” it added.

New Straits Times

Pakistan

Pakistan sets cannabis rules, eyes sales to help balance books



Pakistan is establishing a legal framework for cannabis trade after the government approved the herb for industrial uses nearly four years ago, hoping to capitalize on the booming market to increase its foreign exchange reserves.

A presidential order passed in February delineated rules for the formation of Pakistan’s first Cannabis Control and Regulatory Authority. The government approved cannabis for industrial use in September 2020 but had not established a regulatory framework due to internal conflict.

The new coalition govern-

ment -- formed of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) -- is setting up the regulatory body to formulate policies, such as issuing licenses to growers and sellers, and earmarking regions for cultivation, the official added.

Pakistan hopes to take advantage of its conducive growing conditions to enter the global cannabis market, that according to Indian research company MarketsandMarkets, will grow to \$82.3 billion by 2027 from \$27.2 billion in 2022. The country is seeking ways to increase exports and raise taxes to break its dependency on foreign loans and bailouts from the International Monetary Fund.

The herb is cultivated and openly sold in regions close to the Afghan border, while the plant grows in the wild in northern and western Pakistan. Local marijuana shops were once popular stops on the “hippie trail” up until the 1970s. But military ruler Gen. Zia-ul-Haq outlawed the use and possession of cannabis in the 1980s during U.S. President Ronald Reagan’s global war on drugs.

The latest move paves the way for cannabis derivatives, such as tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD) products, to be sold to patients suffering from chronic pain and diseases such as fibromyalgia and epilepsy. Industrial hemp, on the other hand, is used in making rope, fabrics, paper and building materials.

THC is the compound in cannabis that produces a “high” and can be abused. To this end, the regulatory body is laying down strict penalties. Companies can be fined up to 200 million Pakistani rupees (\$718,400) while individuals can face penalties of up to 10 million rupees for breaking rules.

“Prescription drugs should be encouraged, but not over the counter,” said Rawalpindi-based doctor Rashid Iqbal, who prescribes

CBD oil to his patients and also advocates for cannabis legalization. “The DRAP (Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan) should ensure this.”

Nikkei Asia

Taiwan

Legislature passes new pedestrian sidewalk safety rule



The Legislative Yuan approved regulations aimed at enhancing pedestrian safety as part of Taiwan’s efforts to redeem its reputation tarnished by an article that called its traffic a “living hell.”

The new regulations require both the central and local governments to develop guidelines to enhance pedestrian safety by building, improving, and maintaining safe, unobstructed, and continuous pedestrian spaces along sidewalks.

Under the new rules, if local government officials find sidewalks or walkways obstructed by fixed equipment (such as transformer boxes) or other objects, they should notify the responsible party in writing and give the party at least three months to resolve the issue.

Failure to comply within the specified period may result in a fine ranging from NT\$30,000 (US\$922) to NT\$150,000.

In addition, if the ground level of covered and uncovered pedestrian walkways are not of a single uniform level, local governments can order those sections to be rebuilt.

If there are unauthorized changes that impede pedestrian traffic after the rebuilding process, those who made the changes will be required to change the walkway back within a fixed time period or face a fine ranging from NT\$5,000 to NT\$25,000 each time.

Local governments, meanwhile, are required to establish pedestrian-friendly areas near congested places such as medical institutions, schools, and mass transportation stops, and to install sidewalks on roads of a certain width.

In a statement, Interior Minister Lin Yu-chang said the regulation focuses on redesigning road layouts, connecting sidewalks, increasing pedestrian walking spaces, and removing obstacles from roads and accessible facilities.

The central government has launched a four-year NT\$40 billion project to improve pedestrian safety, he said.

These measures were in part a reaction to an article by CNN published in December 2022 that focused on Taiwan’s “dangerous roads” that are bad for both drivers and pedestrians.

CNA

Vietnam

Vietnam regulates criteria for traceability of products and goods

Vietnam’s Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST) has issued Circular 02/2024/TT-BKHCN regulating the management of traceability of products and goods.

The circular takes effect on June 1 and consists of five chapters with 14 articles. Of which, it requires organisations and individuals



producing, trading and providing services to trace the origin of goods when creating data to ensure at least the name of product and goods; images of products and goods; name of production and business unit; and address of production and business unit.

Along with that are stages in production and business; production and business time; codes to trace the origin of products and goods; brand, trademark, code, product serial number (if any); shelf life of products and goods (if any); national standards and technical regulations, international standards, regional standards and facility standards applied.

This information is printed with a code attached to the product packaging, connected to the National Product and Goods Traceability Portal. Consumers can look up the expiration date and origin of the product.

The circular applies to organisations and individuals producing, doing business and providing services that trace the origin of products and goods; organisations and individuals providing services and solutions related to traceability of products and goods; State management agencies and other organisations and individuals involved in implementing traceability of products and goods.

The portal is invested by the National Numbering and Barcodes Centre and was completed in 2022. It is expected to be officially put into operation in the second quarter of this year.

Vietnam News



About CACCI

The Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CACCI) is a regional grouping of apex national chambers of commerce and industry, business associations and business enterprises in Asia and the Western Pacific.

It is a non-governmental organization serving as a forum for promoting the vital role of businessmen in the region, increasing regional business interaction, and enhancing regional economic growth. Since its establishment in 1996, CACCI has grown into a network of national chamber of commerce with a total now of 29 primary Members from 27 Asian countries and independent economies. It cuts across national boundaries to link businessmen and promote economic growth throughout the Asia-Pacific region. CACCI is a non-governmental organization (NGO) granted consultative status, Roster category, under the United Nations. It is a member of the Conference on NGOs (CoNGO), an association of NGOs with UN consultative status.

Membership in CACCI provides businessmen the opportunity for networking with their counterparts in other countries in the region and globally, participation in CACCI annual conferences and training programs, interaction in product and service councils on various industry and service sectors, access to CACCI publications, and participation in policy advocacy work to create a policy environment conducive to private sector growth.