

Foreign Direct Investment

Umicore to establish largest research facility in Asia in Cheonan

The world's top producer of rechargeable battery materials is set to build a large scale research facility in the city of Cheonan, South Chungcheong Province.

The provincial authorities signed an investment deal on July 20 with Umicore, a Belgium-based multinational company specializing in materials technology.

Pumping USD 30 million into the R&D center, Umicore unleashed its plan to newly establish a research lab on a 19,296 m² site, located near the Cheonan Foreign Investment Zone (FEZ), which

is expected to help them gain more traction on R&D to meet the soaring demand for greener cars.

The research center set to move into Cheonan City boasts the largest size ever of all of the company's Asian offices.

Umicore, a multinational materials technology company headquartered in Brussels, Belgium, is one of the world's leading suppliers of rechargeable battery materials. It has over 11,100 employees working in 14 countries across the world and made KRW 4.5 trillion in sales last year.

Trade & Commerce

S. Korean trade minister announces bid to become next WTO chief

On June 24, South Korean Trade Minister Yoo Myung-hee announced her bid for the top job of the World Trade Organization (WTO), saying she would make her utmost efforts to reshape the final arbiter in trade disputes if she is elected.

Yoo's bid comes as the WTO is mired in its biggest crisis since it was created in 1995 over growing uncertainties in global rules on trade between nations and fragile collaboration among member nations.

"I will vow to restore the WTO system that faces the biggest crisis since it was launched," Yoo told reporters. Yoo said S. Korea could help

reduce friction between trading nations at a time when the global economy is hit by a trade dispute between the U.S. and China.

S. Korea's foreign ministry said it would "actively" support Yoo's bid.

Yoo, a veteran negotiator in trade talks, was appointed as S. Korea's trade minister in February last year. Yoo is fluent in English and served as the presidential office's spokesperson for foreign correspondents. She was the first woman to become a first-rank staff in the 70-year history of the trade ministry in 2018.

S. Korea to expand FTA network to overcome virus pandemic

S. Korea said on July 21 it will speed up efforts to expand its free trade agreement (FTA) networks to overcome the economic jitters sparked by the new coronavirus pandemic.

"S. Korea will not only focus on opening markets but seek to build a sustainable partnership with developing nations on the back of FTAs," Industry Minister Sung Yun-mo said during a conference with business organizations and companies held in Seoul.

With exports to the world's top two economies accounting for roughly 40 percent of its outbound shipments, the country has been making

efforts to diversify its trade portfolio and create deeper ties with Southeast Asian countries.

Earlier this month, S. Korea and Cambodia agreed to launch official negotiations for an FTA. In January, Seoul and Manila held the fifth round of official negotiations for their FTA. Talks with Malaysia are also in progress.

The FTAs will also help S. Korea to speed up its exports of medical supplies, whose global demand has shot up due to the virus pandemic, according to the ministry. Shipments of bio-health products jumped a whopping 53 percent in June from a year earlier.

Government & Policy

S. Korea to invest 160 tln won in 'New Deal' projects, create 1.9 mln jobs

S. Korea will invest KRW 160 trillion (USD 133 billion) by 2025 under its bold stimulus step, the "Korean New Deal," projects that will help create 1.9 million jobs and kick-start the coronavirus-hit economy, Finance Minister Hong Namki said on July 14.

Hong unveiled what the government calls "Digital and Green New Deals" following a meeting of Cabinet ministers to stimulate Asia's fourth-largest economy, which was presided over by President Moon Jae-in.

Unlike conventional infrastructure projects, the deals feature 28 projects that will transform

the nation's fossil fuel-reliant economy into an eco-friendly one and increase state investment in artificial intelligence and fifth-generation (5G) telecommunication services, Hong said.

The projects are aimed at laying the groundwork for economic growth in the long term, while cushioning the economic blow from the pandemic and hastening an economic recovery, Hong said.

"The Korean New Deal is a national development strategy to overcome the COVID-19 crisis and lead the global economy once the crisis wanes," Hong said.

S. Korea to spend 5 tln won on R&D in new growth-engine sectors

S. Korea plans to invest KRW 5 trillion (USD 4.2 billion) in research and development (R&D) for new growth-engine sectors, including semiconductor and biotechnology, the trade ministry said on July 9.

The ministry also expanded a list of materials, parts and equipment to 338 to reduce the country's reliance on Japanese imports and cope with changes in global supply chains after the coronavirus pandemic.

In particular, the government will invest KRW 2 trillion in R&D for semiconductor, biotechnology and electric vehicles, the ministry said. It will also set up a fund of KRW 400 billion to support 100 firms in the materials, parts and equipment industry over the next five years.

Minister of Trade, Industry and Energy Sung Yun-mo said the plan will help S. Korea become a global hub for new industries.

Industry

BTS sets new Guinness record for most-watched online concert

K-pop superstars BTS' latest online concert has set a new Guinness world record for most viewers.

"BTS have achieved a new Guinness World Records title for most viewers for a music concert livestream," the Guinness World Records website said on July 23. "756,000 fans from over 100 countries tuned in to the online performance on June 14."

"Bang Bang Con: The Live" was streamed

live for around 100 minutes remotely from a studio in Seoul last month. The septet canceled its world tour schedule for this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Bit Hit Entertainment, the boy band's agency, it was the world's biggest paid online music event in terms of number of viewers.

The size of the online crowd roughly amounted to the combined audience of 15 stadium concerts, it added.

Korea's chipmaking equipment spending likely to be 3rd largest this year: report

S. Korea's spending on chipmaking equipment is likely to be the third largest of any country this year, industry data showed on July 22, amid solid global chip demand sparked by the pandemic-driven stay-at-home economy.

S. Korea, home to major memory chip producers Samsung Electronics Co. and SK hynix Inc., is estimated to invest USD 12.3 billion in chipmaking equipment this year, according to a report from SEMI, a global industry association representing companies in the electronics design

and manufacturing supply chain.

SEMI said global fab equipment spending is expected to reach USD 63.2 billion this year, up 6 percent from USD 59.6 billion in 2019.

S. Korea is projected to share the second spot with Taiwan in equipment investment in 2021 at USD 15.9 billion.

"Korea equipment spending is projected to grow 30 percent in 2021 powered by the memory investment recovery," SEMI said.