

Foreign Direct Investment

Clubhouse to launch Android version in S. Korea

Android operating system in South Korea, its U.S.-based developer Alpha Exploration Co. said May 18, in a move to expand its growing user base.

While the app had previously been available only on iPhones, the company said it has uploaded a beta version of the app available for download on Google Play in South Korea on May 19.

The audio social media app, in which users enter rooms to chat with one another by voice, was one of the most downloaded iPhone apps

in South Korea earlier this year, with celebrities and politicians alike using the platform to communicate with fans and supporters.

The move is expected to boost Clubhouse's presence in the country, dominated by Android smartphones.

In the final quarter of last year, Apple Inc.'s share of the local smartphone market reached 31 percent, compared with a 58 percent stake held by Samsung Electronics Co., which makes Android phones, according to industry tracker Counterpoint Research.

Gucci opens 2nd flagship store in central Seoul

Italian fashion house Gucci will open a second flagship store in Seoul 23 years after its first store in Gangnam.

Gucci's 10-story second exclusive store will be sited at Hannam-dong, central Seoul,

which is emerging as a luxury fashion trendsetter among wealthy young Koreans.

Gucci is estimated to have raised KRW 1 trillion won (USD 883.15 million) in revenue in Korea in the year of pandemic.

Trade & Commerce

Exports surge 53.3 pct in first 20 days of May

South Korea's exports jumped 53.3 percent on-year in the first 20 days of May on the back of robust demand for chips and automobiles, data showed May 21.

The country's outbound shipments stood at USD 31.1 billion in the May 1-20 period, compared with USD 20 billion a year earlier, according to the data from the Korea Customs Service.

Over the period, imports also moved up 36 percent to reach USD 31.4 billion.

By sectors, South Korea's outbound shipments of chips, the mainstay export product, advanced 26 percent.

Overseas shipments of automobiles more than doubled by advancing 146 percent in

line with the global economic recovery. Exports of auto parts more than tripled.

By destinations, exports to China rose 25.2 percent over the period, and those to the United States gained 87.3 percent. The two countries represent around 40 percent of South Korea's total outbound shipments.

Exports to the European Union gained 78.1 percent, and those to Vietnam, the largest trading partner of Southeast Asia, increased 61 percent.

South Korea's exports jumped 41.1 percent in April on-year, also led by chips and autos. It marked the sharpest on-year monthly growth since January 2011.

Industry

Samsung confirms smartwatch OS partnership with Google

Samsung Electronics Co. said on May 20 that it will team up with Google LLC to deliver a new smartwatch operating system (OS), as they seek to better compete with Apple Inc. in the wearables market.

Yoon Jang-hyun, who heads Samsung's software development team, said in an editorial that the South Korean tech giant will develop a unified smartwatch platform with Google. Samsung currently uses Tizen OS for its Galaxy smartwatches, while Google offers Wear OS.

Their OS partnership was first unveiled at Google's developer conference on May 18

(local time). The new OS will offer "industry-leading health experience" and "best possible connected experiences" between Galaxy smartwatches and smartphones, according to Yoon. He added that the OS partnership between Samsung and Google will also bolster the developer ecosystem.

Industry insiders said that their integrated platform could be applied to Samsung's Galaxy Watch4 expected to be launched this fall. Samsung hopes the latest OS partnership can beef up its presence in the smartwatch sector that is dominated by Apple.

S. Korea launches metaverse alliance

South Korea's ICT ministry said on May 18 the country has launched an industry alliance to bolster the development of "metaverse" technology and ecosystems.

The metaverse refers to a shared virtual space, in which users interact with each other through digital avatars and experience a virtual reality (VR) world.

The new alliance is composed of 17 companies, including major wireless carrier SK Telecom Co, as well as auto giant Hyundai Motor Co., and eight industry groups, such as the Korea Mobile Internet Business Association, according to the Ministry of Science and ICT.

The companies and industry groups will work together to share metaverse trends and technology, and form a consultative group for ethical and cultural issues related to the metaverse market. The alliance will also undertake joint metaverse development projects.

The ministry said it will provide support to the alliance, especially in helping companies establish an open metaverse platform.

The technology remains in the early stages of development in South Korea, with SK Telecom currently operating its Jump VR app, which allows users to interact with others in a virtual space.

Government & Policy

BOK sharply ups 2021 growth outlook to 4 pct as recovery gathers pace

South Korea's central bank on May 27 sharply raised its 2021 growth outlook to 4 percent, while holding its benchmark policy rate unchanged at a record low of 0.5 percent, amid a strong rebound in exports.

Buoyed by signs of a robust recovery in exports, the Bank of Korea (BOK) raised its growth outlook to 4 percent for this year, and to 3 percent for next year. The BOK's February forecast was that South Korea's economy would grow 3 percent this year.

"The recovery of the Korean economy has strengthened. Exports have sustained their buoyancy and facilities investment has continued to recover robustly, while private consumption has gradually emerged from its slump," the BOK said in a statement.

"Going forward, the recovery of the Korean economy is likely to strengthen thanks to the

buoyancy of exports and investment as well as the improvement in private consumption," it said.

So far this year, South Korea's economic recovery has shown signs of gaining pace, helped by a strong rebound in exports. Exports, which account for about half of the nation's gross domestic production, jumped 41.1 percent in April from a year earlier, extending their gains for a sixth month, as demand for chips and automobiles stayed strong amid the improving global economy. Outbound shipments came to USD 51.1 billion last month, compared with USD 36.2 billion a year earlier, according to government data. In the first 20 days of May, exports soared 53.3 percent on-year on the back of robust demand for chips and automobiles.