

Apple may launch NFC features with nextgen 'iOS 12'

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Apple staff are already using NFC

IAN S | San Francisco

With Apple Worldwide Developers Conference 2018 (WWDC) set to kick-off on June 4, the company is likely to announce a change in near-field communication (NFC) policies when it releases its next-generation 'iOS 12' operating system (OS).

"The change to the near-field communication, or NFC, chip, which is expected to be announced next month, could pave the way for people to use iPhones for other security-sensitive interactions, from paying transit fares and opening car doors to verifying their identity in other ways," tech website *The Information* reported late on Friday.

Notably, since Apple first launched NFC-capable devices iPhone 6 and 6s in 2014, its implementation of NFC has been primarily restricted to "Apple Pay" transactions. "Apple employees are already using their iPhones to unlock doors at Apple Park, likely via custom badge readers detailed in Federal Communications Commission filings last year,"

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THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY WEBSITE

the report added. With the new capabilities, iPhones would be able to unlock NFC-enabled doors and potentially transmit data to transit systems, personal authentication devices and more.

US reach deal to put China's ZTE back in business

● ZTE was banned in April from buying US technology components for seven years for breaking an agreement reached after it violated US sanctions against Iran and North Korea

Reuters | Washington

The Trump administration told lawmakers the US government has reached a deal to put Chinese telecommunications company ZTE Corp back in business after it pays a significant fine and makes management changes, a senior congressional aide has said.

US President Donald Trump appeared to confirm the deal in a tweet late on Friday. "I closed it down then let it reopen with high level security guarantees, change of management and board, must purchase US parts and pay a \$1.3 billion fine."

The reported deal involving China's second-largest telecommunications equipment maker ran into immediate resistance



After ZTE makes a series of changes it will be allowed to do business in US

in Congress, where Democrats and Trump's fellow Republicans accused him of bending to pressure from Beijing to ease up on a company that US intelligence officials have suggested poses a significant risk to US national security.

ZTE was banned in April from buying US technology components for seven years for breaking an agreement reached after it violated US sanctions against Iran and North Korea. After ZTE makes a series of changes it would now be allowed to re-

sume business with U.S. companies, including chipmaker Qualcomm Inc.

The deal, earlier communicated to officials on Capitol Hill by the Commerce Department, requires ZTE to pay a substantial fine, place U.S. compliance officers at the company and change its management team, the aide said.

The Commerce Department would then lift an order issued in April preventing ZTE from buying US products. ZTE shut down most of its production af-

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DONALD TRUMP

ter the ruling was announced.

Fox News said Trump told them on Thursday that he had negotiated the \$1.3 billion fine with Chinese President Xi Jinping in a phone call.

ZTE, which is publicly traded but whose largest shareholder is a Chinese state-owned enterprise, agreed last year to pay a nearly \$900 million penalty and open its books to a U.S. monitor. The penalty stemmed from breaking an agreement after it was caught illegally shipping U.S. goods to Iran and North Korea, in an investigation dating to the Obama administration.

Kenya to rein in mobile lending craze

Reuters | Nairobi

Kenya built a reputation as a pioneer of financial inclusion through its early adoption of a mobile money system that enables people to transfer cash and make payments on cell-phones without a bank account.

Now, a proliferation of lenders are using the same technology to extend credit to the banked and unbanked alike, saddling borrowers with high interest rates and leaving regulators scrambling to keep up.

This week, the finance ministry published a draft bill on financial regulation which covers digital lenders for the first time. A key aim is to ensure that providers treat retail customers fairly, it said.

"We have a lot of predatory lending out here, which we want

to regulate," Geoffrey Mwau, director general of budget, fiscal and economic affairs at the treasury, told reporters on Thursday. As it was for mobile cash, Kenya is something of a test case for the new lending platforms. Several of the companies involved, including US fintech startups, have plans to expand in other frontier markets, meaning Kenya's regulation will be closely watched.

From having had little or no access to credit, many Kenyans now find they can get loans in minutes.

George Ombelli, a salesman for a company importing bicycles who also owns a hair salon and cosmetics shop with his wife, has borrowed simultaneously from four providers over the past year.

He took small loans from two



Some fintech lenders are expanding

Silicon Valley-backed US fintech firms, Branch and Tala, to see what rates he would get, as well as from a new mobile app launched by Barclays Kenya in March and a business loan from Kenya's Equity Bank.

Citing a slowdown in his business due to elections-related political turmoil last year, Ombelli said he has fallen behind on some of his payments. He fears he will be reported to one of Kenya's three credit bureaux,



From having had little or no access to credit, many Kenyans now find they can get loans in minutes. 2.7 million people have been negatively listed on Kenya's Credit Reference Bureaux

jeopardizing his chances of being able to borrow more to grow his business.

"I've realized having too many loans is a problem," the 38-year-

old father of three said in an interview in a coffee shop in Nairobi's business district.

He is not alone. In the last three years, 2.7 million people out of a population of around 45 million have been negatively listed on Kenya's Credit Reference Bureaux, according to a study by Microsave, a consultancy which advises lenders on sustainable financial services. For 400,000 of them, it was for an amount less than two dollars.

Global implications

Some of the fintech lenders are expanding into other African countries and into Latin America and Asia, saying their aim is to help some of the billions of people who lack bank accounts, assets or formal employment climb the economic ladder.

US adds 15,000 visas for non-farm workers



Kirstjen Nielsen

Reuters | Washington

The Trump administration will make available an additional 15,000 H-2B visas, meant for temporary non-agricultural workers, this fiscal year, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security said on Friday. The increase would help relieve U.S. businesses that depend on seasonal labour during the busy summer tourist season.

Many of them had complained that a visa shortage was pushing them toward economic ruin.

The U.S. government had issued 66,000 such visas this year, through a lottery for the first time, versus the usual first-come, first-served basis.

"The limitations on H-2B visas were originally meant to protect American workers, but when we enter a situation where the program unintentionally harms American businesses it needs to be reformed," DHS Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen said in a statement.

Microsoft starts building tool to spot bias in AI algorithms

IAN S | San Francisco

After Facebook announced its own tool to detect bias in an algorithm earlier this month, a new report suggests that Microsoft is also building a tool to automate the identification of bias in a range of different Artificial Intelligence (AI) algorithms.

The Microsoft tool has the potential to help businesses make use of AI without inadvertently discriminating against certain groups of people, MIT Technol-



The new tool can stop discrimination against certain people

ogy Review reported on Friday.

Although Microsoft's new tool may not eliminate the problem of bias that may creep into Machine-Learning models altogether, it will help AI researchers catch more instances of unfairness, Rich Caruna, a senior researcher at Microsoft who is working on the bias-detection dashboard, was quoted as saying.

"Of course, we can't expect perfection -- there's always going to be some bias undetected

or that can't be eliminated -- the goal is to do as well as we can," he said.

The issue of bias will become crucial as more customers make use of these algorithms to take important decisions.

At its annual developer conference on May 2, Facebook announced its own bias-catching tool, called Fairness Flow, as the social network has found that the number of people using AI to make important decisions is increasing at the company.