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An ode to our Readers

Greetings from The Global Economics!

We are proud to present the 16th issue of our magazine and are sure you will have a good time reading it. The past months marked a new hopeful beginning for the global economy as the world rang in the new year. With global economic growth having its fair share of unpredictability, the past year has also seen many positive developments in the business sector.

The world is working together to stabilize the economy after a series of rate hikes by the central banks to bring inflation under control. This situation brought with it its own set of changed dynamics and many economies are still trying to recover from the lingering effects of the pandemic.

Followed by the same, much-talked-about issue in the past few months has been the climate crisis and its impact on food security in the Middle East. The entertainment industry on the other hand is about to have a major reshuffle with a potential Warner Bros and Paramount merger. From President Milei's Push for Dollarization to Decoding Vibeconomy, the last months of 2023 have been unbridled for the business world and the global economy.

Sectors like real estate have had their portion of ups and downs. All in all, the past months have seen many interesting advancements in the global economic environment which we have tried to include in this edition. We hope that you enjoy this issue of our magazine as much as we enjoyed bringing it to you.

Cheers!

The Global Economics Family



About The Global Economics Ltd.

The Global Economics Limited stands as a distinguished and esteemed digital and print business magazine, with its headquarters situated in the heart of London. Renowned for its insightful analysis, our publication delves into the intricate currents of global business, offering comprehensive coverage of diverse sectors that define the contemporary economic landscape.

At the core of our mission is the commitment to provide our discerning readership, composed of C-level executives, Directors, and key decision-makers from medium and large-scale enterprises, with thought-provoking and in-depth insights. Subscribers to our magazine gain access to a wealth of knowledge, ranging from nuanced discussions on banking, wealth management, cryptocurrencies, and fintech to broader explorations of technology, real estate, hospitality, energy, and other pivotal industries. Our editorial content ensures that our readers are consistently informed with cutting-edge analyses, positioning them at the forefront of informed decision-making.

The Global Economics Limited also hosts a distinguished Annual Awards Program. This program is meticulously designed to acknowledge and honour key market players across diverse business sectors worldwide. Our prestigious awards not only confer distinction upon the recipients but also amplify their global visibility and recognition.

Open to companies on a global scale, our awards program spans sectors such as Banking, Insurance, Finance, Technology, Hospitality, and Real Estate, among others. Participation in our Annual Awards Program is open and free, embodying our commitment to fostering a culture of recognition and celebration within the global business community.

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GCI and Bboxx Collaborate for Groundbreaking Clean Cooking Initiative in Pakistan

In a groundbreaking move to address energy poverty in Pakistan, Global Carbon Investments (GCI) and Bboxx have announced a strategic partnership to bring clean cooking solutions to millions. GCI, a UAE-based investment vehicle committed to scaling climate finance, and Bboxx, a super platform specializing in innovative products, especially in Africa, are set to launch one of the world's largest clean cooking initiatives.

The initiative aims to leverage smart Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) technology, providing efficient and affordable cooking solutions to combat the critical issue of energy poverty in Pakistan.

Bboxx, known for its expertise in technology and innovative products, joins forces with GCI to tackle this challenge, particularly in a region where access to clean energy and cooking solutions is limited. Pakistan faces seasonal gas shortages, further exacerbated by the depletion of natural gas fields at a rate of approximate-

ly 9% each year. To address this issue, the partnership will roll out millions of LPG cooking solutions, introducing a revolutionary **"Pay As You Cook"** technology embedded in LPG gas tanks, ensuring affordable access to efficient cooking practices. The global demand for LPG is expected to increase eightfold in the next decade, highlighting the necessity for cleaner and more efficient cooking solutions.

The project in Pakistan aims to meet this rising demand by providing affordable, faster, and cleaner LPG cooking solutions, particularly targeting low-income households. Shiekh Ahmed Dalmouk Al Maktoum, the visionary behind GCI, expressed the significance of the partnership, stating,

"The partnership between GCI and Bboxx marks a significant milestone in the global effort to combat energy poverty and access to essential services. Together, we are pioneering scalable solutions that address both social and environmental challenges, setting a new standard for clean cooking initiatives worldwide."

Presently, 114 million households in Pakistan rely on harmful and inefficient fuels for cooking, leading to significant health issues and environmental degradation. The prevalent use of charcoal and wood, which have significantly larger carbon footprints than LPG, underscores the environmental benefits of transitioning to more efficient cooking solutions. Mansoor Hamayun, Co-founder and CEO of Bboxx emphasized the transformative impact of the partnership, saying,

"This partnership with GCI is game-changing for millions of people in Pakistan – improving health while cutting emissions – which is a win-win. As I was born in Pakistan, this is also personal as through technology and partnerships like this, we are able to improve people's lives for the better."

Bboxx has a proven track record, deploying smart solutions in over 11 countries across Africa and benefiting more than 3.6 million people. This includes the successful provision of clean cooking solutions in Rwanda

and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Through its vast network of over 2,000 committed agents, the Bboxx data-driven super platform facilitates approximately 56 million digital payments annually. The company has established strategic partnerships with global entities such as Mitsubishi, Shell Foundation, the United Nations Foundation, and Trafigura. To enhance the affordability of these smart cooking solutions for consum-

ers, Blue Carbon, a UAE-based subsidiary of GCI, is exploring the potential of linking enhanced cooking efficiency to carbon finance through carbon credits under Article 6 compliant methodologies.

As negotiations under Article 6 gain clarity at COP28, this potential avenue will be further explored. The GCI and Bboxx partnership heralds a transformative era for Pakistan, where

millions will gain access to clean and efficient cooking solutions. Beyond the immediate impact on health and emissions, the initiative sets a global standard for scalable and sustainable solutions to combat energy poverty. As innovative technologies converge with strategic partnerships, the prospect of a cleaner, more sustainable future for households in Pakistan becomes increasingly tangible.

Adani's Ambuja Cements Accelerates Green Energy Transition with \$723 Million Investment

Ambuja Cements Ltd., under the stewardship of billionaire Gautam Adani, has unveiled ambitious plans to invest 60 billion rupees (\$723 million) in developing 1,000 megawatts of renewable power projects. The move aligns with the broader strategy of the Adani Group, the Mumbai-based conglomerate, to rapidly advance towards its net-zero goals.

Acquired by the Adani Group from Holcim Ltd. last year, Ambuja Cements outlined its commitment to funding this significant investment through internal accruals, as revealed in an exchange filing on Monday. The cement maker aims to propel green energy to account for 60% of its planned 140 million ton capacity per year, a notable increase from the current 19%.

The planned renewable energy projects include a 600 MW solar power and a 150 MW wind power plant situated in the western state of Gujarat, India. Additionally, a 250 MW solar plant in the neighbouring state of Rajasthan is in the pipeline and is

expected to be operational by March 2026. These initiatives complement Ambuja Cements' existing 84 MW of green energy capacity.

The company envisions a 20% reduction in the cost of green energy generation, dropping from 6.46 rupees per kilowatt-hour to 5.16 rupees per kWh, while simultaneously boosting the supply of green cement.

Gautam Adani, the driving force behind the Adani Group and Asia's second-richest person, has set a grand vision of investing \$100 billion in the conglomerate's green energy transition over the next decade. Five of the group's entities, including Ambuja Cements, Adani Green Energy Ltd., Adani Energy Solutions Ltd., Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone Ltd., and ACC Ltd., have committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

This strategic move places Adani alongside another Indian billionaire, Mukesh Ambani, in championing renewable energy initiatives. Both Adani and Ambani, who initially amassed wealth from fossil fuels, are

now pivotal figures in supporting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's mission to decarbonize and make India carbon neutral by 2070. The conglomerate's commitment extends beyond Ambuja Cements, with various group companies actively engaging in the transition.

Adani Green Energy Ltd., Adani Energy Solutions Ltd., Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone Ltd., and ACC Ltd. are aligning their operations with the 2050 carbon net-zero target, reinforcing the conglomerate's dedication to sustainability.

In a recent statement, the Adani Group emphasized that its businesses are actively adopting renewable sources, electrifying operations, embracing biofuels, and deploying innovative technologies such as waste heat recovery and energy storage to accelerate the transition.

This holistic approach underscores the conglomerate's commitment to environmental responsibility while reshaping its energy portfolio for a sustainable future.

Japan's Ammonia Dilemma: Greenwashing or Green Energy Strategy?

As Japan positions itself at the forefront of the global clean energy transition, its recent foray into ammonia-based energy solutions has sparked controversy and accusations of greenwashing. Despite being a developed nation and the fifth-largest greenhouse gas emitter globally, Japan's energy strategy appears to be deviating from the straightforward path of renewables, raising concerns about the sincerity of its commitment to decarbonization.

Japan's Ammonia Plans

In January 2022, Japan's Energy for New Era (JERA), responsible for over 10% of the country's emissions, unveiled plans to invest nearly \$600 million in ammonia technology development. While the green innovation fund is expected to cover 70% of the investment, the move has raised eyebrows due to its association with coal by March 2029, a choice that seems to extend a lifeline to fossil fuels rather than embracing a future without them.

The decision to import significant amounts of ammonia as part of Japan's net-zero strategy has been met with skepticism, especially when more direct, renewable options are available. Critics argue that this move is more about delaying real decarbonization efforts than making substantial progress.

Why Ammonia?

Japan's pursuit of ammonia as a key component in its net-zero pathway, along with the focus on hydrogen, suggests a sense of desperation, according to Paul Martin, co-founder of Hydrogen Science Coalition. While the reasons behind Japan's ammonia push may range from slow decarbonization to a perceived lack of alternatives, it has not escaped criticism for sidestepping more direct and proven solutions, such as renewables.

The accusations of greenwashing stem from the fact that, despite the "green" association, the ammonia strategy primarily relies on blue ammonia – produced from hydrogen sourced from fossil fuels. JERA contends that carbon emissions from this process will be captured, but the effectiveness of such carbon capture initiatives remains questionable, with

concerns about methane leakage.

Green Ammonia: A Grey Reality?

Similar to hydrogen, green ammonia carries the promise of environmentally friendly energy. However, the reality is different, as the costs of producing green ammonia from renewable energy remain high and largely impractical for widespread use. JERA's reliance on blue ammonia adds another layer of doubt, as this variant is produced from fossil fuel-derived hydrogen.

The concept of greenwashing is further fueled by the ambiguity surrounding carbon capture effectiveness, with examples from Saudi Arabia's blue ammonia projects raising doubts about the net environmental impact. The intention to use captured carbon for enhanced oil recovery, potentially leading to more fossil fuel production, contradicts the green image associated with ammonia.

Financial Rationality of Burning Ammonia

The economic fundamentals of Japan's decision to mix ammonia with coal in inefficient plants have been criticized as "wasteful greenwashing." Paul Martin emphasizes the high cost of the entire process, suggesting that the expenses involved make it economically unviable compared to using electricity directly. Estimates indicate that Japan could incur at least five times the cost per joule of energy compared to other countries.

Furthermore, the low efficiency of ammonia for electricity production, especially when burned in coal plants, adds another layer of concern. The cycle efficiency of using ammonia as fuel is reported to be between 11 and 19%, making it a less attrac-

tive option compared to direct electricity use from renewables.

Import Dependency and Supply Risks

Japan's plan to co-fire coal power plants with ammonia would substantially increase its imports, presenting challenges in terms of supply and pricing risks. The lack of a diversified ammonia export market could expose Japan to potential vulnerabilities, mirroring past experiences with gas imports.

The import dependency on ammonia raises questions about Japan's strategic energy security, especially considering the volatile nature of global energy markets. The country's previous experiences, such as the spike in wholesale power prices in 2021, underscore the risks associated with over-reliance on imports.

Japan's Detour from Net-Zero Goals

Japan's venture into ammonia-based energy solutions appears to be a detour from its stated net-zero goals. Critics argue that the focus on ammonia, especially in conjunction with coal, is a distraction from more direct and efficient solutions, such as renewables.

The financial and environmental costs, coupled with concerns about import dependency, raise questions about the viability and sincerity of Japan's ammonia strategy. As the world grapples with the urgent need for decarbonization, Japan's choices will undoubtedly be closely scrutinized, emphasizing the importance of transparent and effective energy transition strategies.

UAE's BEEAH Break Ground with World's First Large-Scale Waste-to-Hydrogen Project

BEEAH, a leading environmental management company based in Sharjah, in a historic stride towards sustainable energy innovation, has joined hands with Chinook Hydrogen and Air Water Gas Solutions to develop the world's maiden commercial-scale waste-to-hydrogen plant in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The joint development agreement (JDA), signed at the UAE Pavilion during COP28, signifies a transformative collaboration aimed at harnessing green hydrogen from organic-based waste, setting new benchmarks for carbon-negative solutions. BEEAH's waste-to-hydrogen demonstration plant has been a harbinger of success, demonstrating a compelling and environmentally friendly approach to producing super green hydrogen from various waste streams. This demonstration plant is a testament to BEEAH's commitment to achieving zero-waste to landfill while addressing the pressing issues of waste management and carbon emissions.

Khaled Al Huraimel, Group CEO of BEEAH, expressed the significance of this achievement, stating, "With the launch of this waste-to-hydrogen demonstration plant, we have achieved a solution that can address the challenge of waste and carbon emissions. It can also be scaled and replicated in countries around the world, and together, we will now begin with a commercial-scale plant in Sharjah."

The waste-to-hydrogen demonstration plant, connected to a Toyota fuel-cell unit, exemplifies a circular economy approach, transforming organic-based waste, including Municipal Solid Waste (MSW), non-recyclable plastics, and wood waste, into high-purity fuel-cell grade hydrogen. This innovative process aligns with BEEAH's broader objective of contributing to net-zero emissions while efficiently managing waste resources.

Chinook Hydrogen's RODECS pyrolysis technology plays a pivotal role in this breakthrough. Developed and optimized over 23 years, the technology employs "Active-Hydropyrolysis" to process various post-consumer organic-based wastes, generating syngas. What sets Chinook Hydrogen's RODECS system apart is its ability to process waste with low energy content, yielding syngas with hydrogen concentrations of around 50%vol.

This hydrogen-rich syngas is further refined by Air Water's advanced technology to produce high-purity fuel-cell grade hydrogen. Dr Rifat Chalabi, CEO and Co-Founder of Chinook Hydrogen, expressed pride in the innovation achieved, stating,

"In the realm of green hydrogen technology, we have not only advanced or pushed boundaries; we have pioneered the world's first plant that produces Super-Green-Hydrogen that can fuel hydrogen fuel cells for power generation or emissions-free mobility."



The waste-to-hydrogen plant in Sharjah is more than a technological marvel; it represents a holistic approach to sustainability. The plant is designed to be carbon-negative, capturing and storing carbon dioxide from the syngas, contributing to a net reduction in carbon emissions. Moreover, the plant is envisaged as a catalyst for community engagement, with plans for workshops, school programs, and more. The success of BEEAH's waste-to-hydrogen demonstration plant builds upon the company's track record of sustainability initiatives.

BEEAH's integrated waste management complex, comprising 12 facilities, has been pivotal in processing diverse waste types, producing recyclables, alternative fuels, and raw ma-

terials. The inauguration of the Sharjah Waste-to-Energy plant in May 2022, a joint venture with global renewable energy leader Masdar, achieved a regional record of 90% landfill waste diversion, displacing 450,000 tonnes of CO2 annually.

The waste-to-hydrogen project in Sharjah also aligns strategically with the UAE National Hydrogen Strategy 2050, which aims to produce 1.4 million tonnes of hydrogen per annum by 2031.

This aligns with the UAE's broader commitment to becoming a major global hydrogen hub, contributing to the global transition towards cleaner energy sources. The collaborative efforts of BEEAH, Chinook Hydrogen,

and Air Water Gas Solutions exemplify the UAE's leadership in pioneering sustainable technologies. Beyond the local impact, this venture positions the UAE as a beacon for scalable and replicable waste-to-hydrogen solutions worldwide.

The commitment to innovation and sustainability showcased in this initiative sets the stage for a greener, more sustainable future, where waste is not just managed but transformed into a valuable resource for clean energy production. As the global community grapples with the challenges of climate change, the UAE's strides in green hydrogen from waste serve as an inspiring example of how ingenuity and collaboration can drive transformative change.

Breakthrough Energy Ventures Expands Portfolio with Fourth Power’s Innovative Thermal Storage

In a bid to revolutionize the renewable energy landscape, Bill Gates’ Breakthrough Energy Ventures continues to make strategic investments, this time diversifying into thermal storage and lithium exploration

These ventures signal a pivotal moment in sustainable energy development, aiming to address critical challenges like intermittency and the demand for essential metals.

Fourth Power, a groundbreaking thermal storage startup, has garnered significant attention with its unique approach to renewable energy storage.

The company’s innovative technology converts renewable power into heat, utilizing liquid tin and carbon blocks to store energy. This method offers a promising solution to the intermittency issues that plague renewable energy sources like solar and wind.

Breakthrough Energy Ventures, along with other prominent investors like DCVC and Black Venture Capital Consortium, has shown confidence in Fourth Power’s potential. The recent Series A funding round of \$19 million underscores the market’s enthusiasm for long-duration power backup solutions.

Fourth Power’s ambitious plan to build a prototype facility in Boston, capable of storing 1 megawatt-hour of energy, aims to meet the needs of approximately 1,000 homes by 2026.

Carmicheal Roberts, co-leader of Breakthrough’s investment committee, highlighted the cost-efficiency of Fourth Power’s technology, stating that it could be up to ten times cheaper than existing lithium-ion alternatives.

This endorsement underscores the urgency and potential impact of advancing thermal storage technologies to facilitate a genuinely renewable grid.

While lithium-ion batteries remain dominant in energy storage, their limitations in long-duration applications have spurred interest in alternative technologies like thermal storage.

BloombergNEF analyst Stephanie Diaz emphasized the attractiveness of thermal storage due to its flexibility in siting, energy density, and ability to provide ancillary services. According to BNEF data, startups in this sector raised a staggering \$96 million in the last quarter, indicating growing investor confidence in thermal storage solutions.

Breakthrough Energy Ventures has consistently shown its commitment to advancing low-cost utility-scale renewable grids. Alongside Fourth Power, the fund has backed other startups like Antora Energy, Malta, and Rondo, each contributing unique innovations to the thermal energy storage landscape.

Parallel to its thermal storage investments, Breakthrough Energy Ventures has extended its reach into

the critical metals sector through its backing of KoBold Metals. This California-based startup, supported by industry titans like Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos, focuses on discovering lithium deposits across four continents.

Utilizing advanced artificial intelligence, KoBold Metals strategically identifies lithium deposits in regions including South Korea, Quebec, the United States, Australia, and Africa. The company’s expanded focus on lithium exploration aligns with the global shift toward cleaner energy sources, recognizing the pivotal role of essential metals in this transition.

KoBold Metals’ collaboration with mining giants like BHP Group and Rio Tinto further solidifies its position in the sustainable exploration landscape. As the demand for critical metals escalates, particularly for electric vehicles and renewable energy infrastructure, KoBold’s proactive exploration initiatives present a promising solution to potential supply constraints.

Breakthrough Energy Ventures’ recent investments in Fourth Power and KoBold Metals exemplify a forward-thinking approach to the energy challenges, laying the groundwork for a cleaner, more sustainable future.

These ventures represent more than financial commitments; they signify a collective effort to address the complex challenges associated with renewable energy adoption and sustainable resource extraction.

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Vietnam to Raise Tax Rate for Multinationals from 2024

In a move that will align with a global agreement to crack down on corporate tax avoidance that could hit foreign direct investments in the country, Vietnam is set to raise its tax rate in effect on multinational companies, including Intel and Samsung.

Amid the rising geopolitical tensions, global companies search for manufacturing alternatives to China, a popular strategy known as “China plus one”. This resulted in Vietnam’s FDI to hit records as the country is among the top exporters of electronics and textiles.

In recent years, technology companies such as Apple, Sony and many more, as well as clothing and footwear companies such as Crocs, Adidas, and others, have been substantially focusing on increasing their factory presence in the south-east Asian countries.

Even though Vietnam’s corporate income tax was at 20%, the country has offered tax breaks and holidays to big foreign investors for years, that benefits companies such as Samsung to pay only 5% tax. In October, the parliament of Vietnam voted to raise its corporate levy to 15%. This move would affect hundreds of multinational companies and the country would be able to generate a whopping 1.6tn dong (\$603mn) in state revenue, as estimated by the Finance Ministry of the country.

Some companies noted that the long-planned change that would be enforced in January 2024, may result

in foreign investors having a negative outlook of the country. Government funds, direct financial support for high-tech groups or any such mitigating measures were expected to offset the impact of the tax raise, but no official comments were made regarding this by the country in October.

This move made Vietnam to established itself among the countries that have a global minimum tax rate and is being backed by the U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen as well as being agreed by nearly 140 countries at the OECD in 2021.

The rules will have large-scale companies with annual global turnover of €750mn or more, paying less than 15% in a low-tax jurisdiction, will now be facing a top-up levy either there or in their home country. Thailand and other countries that are being benefitted from the “China plus one” trend, are expected to follow suit. According to research conducted by HSBC, FDI accounts for 4 to 6% of gross domestic product and totaling \$438bn as of December last year; showcasing that FDI is a pillar of Vietnam’s economic growth.

According to official data, Vietnam’s second biggest source of investment was South Korea, in the first seven months of 2023, trailing behind Singapore. Half of Samsung’s smartphones are assembled in Vietnam. In addition, Intel has established its largest global factory at Vietnam for assembling, packaging, and testing chips. The U.S.-based company has even been considering to expand its

operations in the country.

An employee of a foreign company that has its major part of operations in Vietnam, had given a statement to the press like the Financial Times, that the company was paying around 5% tax and was “watching closely” for alternate incentives that the government may provide.

Furthermore, the employee also noted that such sharp increase in taxes will affect the companies investing in the country and that it is likely for the country to create a state-run fund that can support foreign investors and to prevent them from abandoning the country.

Nguyen Thanh Vinh, a partner at Baker Mc Kenzie in Ho Chi Minh City, had stated that the government needs to modify its new alternative incentives to attract foreign investments that can maintain Vietnam’s attractiveness to FDI in the short term. Few other analysts have stated that FDI is not expected to have a major impact due to the higher taxes being levied on the large-scale companies.

Trinh Nguyen, a Senior Economist at Natixis, explained that Vietnam is not just being invested for tax benefits, but also because of other advantages such as low input costs, including electricity and wages as well as easy access to large markets. In addition, Trinh said that despite the tax changes which was under discussion since the previous year, Vietnam’s FDI is held against its regional rivals such as Thailand, India and the Philippines.

Egypt’s El Sisi Landslide Victory Secures Third Term



Abdel Fattah El Sisi, the Egyptian President has been reelected for the third time in a landslide victory and will serve as the head of the country till 2030. Sisi was first elected in 2014 and was a former army general. He secured 89.6 percent votes according to the National Election Commission. *“Dear sons of Egypt, my pride in you has no end or boundaries. Your choice of me to lead the nation is a mandate that I shoulder before God and you,”* Abdel Fattah El Sisi addressed after the results were declared.

Election Details

The election turnout was at an all-time high of 66.8 percent, Hazem Badawy, the election commission chairman told the media. The other politicians who challenged Abdel Fattah El Sisi were Hazem Omar, Abdel Sanad Yamamah, and Farid Zahrán and they collectively gathered a total of 4.5 million votes, according to official figures. There are about 67 million registered voters in the country out of a total population of 105 million people. *“It’s a historic day on which we harvest our nation’s democratic fruit,”* the commission’s executive director, Ahmed El Bendary. He also added that the election had *“reflected the sincerity and devotion for the nation”*.

Abdel Fattah El Sisi’s current term will end on April 2 under the constitution, and he’s expected to take oath the following day. The re-election comes at a time when Egypt is in the terrible grip of a crushing economic crisis and the effects of the Israel-Gaza war are a cause of panic for the country. The election turnout, however, is in sharp opposition to the jade label the vote had received

based on Egypt’s fixation with the Israel-Hamas war, a wobbly economy, and above all, the outcome of an election which known before voting happened. The recent election campaign of El Sisi, even though his victory was beyond doubt, was mainly focused on producing a safe turnout that could give brand-new consent for the president to take drastic steps to stabilize the economy.

The election was not supposed to happen till 2024 and was preponed for this very same reason. The election booths brought forward the spirit of nationalism on election day. During the three days, voters queued outside the polling stations waving Egyptian flags and enjoying patriotic music. Similar scenes were recalled from the past elections in 2014 and 2018. Both these elections were won by the current president with more than 95 percent of the vote.

Economic Uncertainties

The elections were conducted at a time when the nation was economically struggling, especially during a time when it *“faced a host of challenges on a multitude of levels, foremost of which is the [Israel-Gaza] war raging beyond our eastern border, and which requires our utmost efforts to stop it because of the threat it poses to our national security,”* stated Mr. El Sisi.

“Let me tell you with the customary openness between us that I am consciously aware of the magnitude of the crises we went and still going through,” he said of his nation’s economic woes. *“I would like to stress my realization that the hero in confronting all these challenges is the glorious Egyptian citizen,”*

- Abdel Fattah El Sisi.

The individual who designs and directs economic policy, Mr. El Sisi, remained silent on his plans to correct course. Reviving the economy, which has been severely impacted by the coronavirus pandemic and the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine war, seems to be Mr. El Sisi’s top priority after winning the election.

Critics argue that excessive borrowing and huge, needless projects costing billions of dollars were the main causes of Egypt’s economic catastrophe. Since March 2022, the value of the Egyptian pound has dropped by more than 50%, and the ongoing shortage of foreign exchange has severely harmed local companies that depend on imported goods and reduced imports. Additionally, it is anticipated that the president will prioritize industrial projects over infrastructural ones in an effort to reduce the country’s enormous import bill and to finish megaprojects that have already started while postponing others.

The constitutional changes that Mr. El Sisi’s allies stuffed the parliament with in 2018 are what allowed him to serve a third term in government. The next year, a referendum was held to approve the amendments, which increased the length of presidential terms from four to six years while capping the number of terms at two. But a specially crafted provision was inserted by the constitution, ignoring the four years he served from 2014 to 2018.

Surat Emerges as the Global Diamond Capital with the Inauguration of the World's Largest Diamond Bourse

The glittering cityscape of Surat, India's western gem, is set to shimmer even brighter with the inauguration of the Surat Diamond Bourse (SDB). Scheduled for a grand unveiling on November 17, the SDB is not just another architectural marvel; it's a strategic move aimed at catapulting Surat into the global limelight as the undisputed diamond capital of the world. This ambitious venture, valued at 32 billion rupees (\$384 million), aims to centralize a sector that drives a significant chunk of India's export economy.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's presence at the inauguration symbolizes more than just political optics.

For Modi, it's a home-state triumph, a tangible manifestation of his broader economic vision for Gujarat.

His administration's efforts to curtail bureaucratic red tape have transformed the state into a magnet for business investments, and the SDB stands as a testament to these efforts. Historically, Surat's narrative as a pivotal trading post is well-documented. Its strategic location on the Arabian Sea coast once made it a bustling hub for trade between India and European powers like Britain, the Netherlands, and Portugal. Over time, however, Bombay eclipsed Surat, evolving into a major port by the 17th and 18th centuries. Yet, Surat's destiny was rewritten with the advent of the diamond in-

dustry approximately six decades ago. Despite setbacks like the 1994 pneumonic plague, Surat's resilience and governance reforms have transformed it into one of India's cleanest and most progressive cities.

While Mumbai has long been revered as India's diamond trading hub, Surat carved its niche in diamond processing. Remarkably, an astounding 90% of the world's rough diamonds undergo the delicate processes of cutting and polishing in Surat's workshops. The SDB, nestled within the expansive Diamond Research and Mercantile City, is not merely an architectural marvel but a strategic consolidation of this dispersed industry. Eli Izhakoff, the esteemed honorary

president of the World Federation of Diamond Bourses, succinctly encapsulated the industry sentiment: *"Surat is a major cutting center, and a diamond exchange is long overdue."*

The Surat Diamond Bourse's sheer magnitude is staggering. Spanning 6.7 million square feet, it eclipses iconic global landmarks like the Pentagon, underscoring India's ambitions to redefine its economic footprint. This monumental complex, comprising nine 15-story towers and approximately 4,700 offices, promises to revolutionize the diamond trading landscape.

Already, 130 offices are operational, signalling the industry's enthusiasm for this centralized trading hub. However, the SDB's ascendancy is not devoid of challenges. Traditional traders, deeply entrenched in

Surat's historic Mahidarpura bazaar, may exhibit resistance to relocating to a modernized complex. Mumbai's Bharat Diamond Bourse experienced analogous teething problems, exacerbated by unfortunate events like the 2011 terrorist attacks. Additionally, Mumbai's diamond community might be deterred by Surat's relative remoteness and limited amenities.

Geopolitical intricacies further complicate Surat's diamond narrative. Recent sanctions against a Russian diamond miner, a significant supplier for Surat, present potential supply chain disruptions. With the Group of Seven nations poised to enforce a ban on Russian diamond imports from January 1, Surat's diamond industry braces for unprecedented challenges. Yet, Nagjibhai Sakariya, the visionary president of the Surat Diamond Bourse, remains sanguine, emphasizing

the industry's cyclical resilience. In a broader global context, the SDB's inauguration resonates beyond Surat's city limits. It signals India's aspirations to consolidate its position in the global diamond industry, valued at billions of dollars. With geopolitical tensions and market dynamics in constant flux, the SDB's success hinges on adaptability, innovation, and strategic foresight.

Moreover, Surat's evolving narrative as a diamond processing hub offers invaluable lessons in urban development and economic diversification. The city's transformation, from a historical trade nexus to a contemporary industrial powerhouse, epitomizes India's broader economic metamorphosis. As the bourse opens its doors, all eyes are on Surat, poised to shape the future of the diamond industry and redefine global trade dynamics.

Image Source: www.suratdiamondbourse.in



Somalia’s Long-Awaited Integration Into the East African Community

In a historic chapter for its war-torn economy, Somalia has officially become the eighth member of the East African Community (EAC). The decision, announced during the 23rd Ordinary Summit of the EAC Heads of State in Arusha, Tanzania, holds immense significance for Somalia, which has endured three decades of conflict since 1991.

The integration is expected to bring about more economic opportunities, but concerns have also been raised about the country’s readiness in the areas of governance, democracy, and security.

The EAC, established in 2000, has been a key player in promoting economic integration among member states, fostering trade, and removing customs duties. The country’s journey to join the EAC started back in 2012 when it first expressed its interest in becoming a member.

However, due to internal troubles, including the presence of the al-Shabaab eco-jihadist group and a lack of political stability, Somalia’s application faced initial setbacks.

The recent approval of Somali membership came after a renewed diplomatic effort by the country, coming just a year after the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) also joined the EAC. The country’s accession to the EAC is a pivotal step toward economic rejuvenation, offering access to a larger market and opportunities for cross-border collaboration.

Economic Implications and Trade Opportunities

The nation’s admission into the EAC opens up new avenues for economic growth and regional cooperation. With a population of around 17 million, Somalia’s inclusion expands the EAC market to more than 300 million people, boosting the bloc’s economic potential.

The EAC, comprising Burundi, DRC, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda, is a unique experiment in Africa. The establishment of a common market in 2010 has facilitated economic integration, and Somalia’s entry is expected to further contribute to the bloc’s combined gross domestic product, which already stood at \$305 billion, excluding it.

Somalia’s strategic location and its possession of the longest coastline on the African mainland, stretching over 3,000 kilometres, bring unique trade opportunities. The country’s coastline opens up access to the Arabian Peninsula, offering the EAC better trade routes and economic connectivity.

Entrepreneurs in the country are expected to greatly benefit from increased investment opportunities, as the EAC provides a platform for economic growth and trade expansion.

The EAC’s Customs Union will benefit Somalia economically by reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers, fostering cross-border trade, and integrating the country into regional infrastructure projects.

Security Challenges and Governance Concerns

While the integration of The country into the EAC holds immense economic promise, there are legitimate concerns and challenges that need to be addressed. Somalia’s internal security situation, marked by the constant threat of al-Shabaab, is a risk for the entire bloc.

EAC members, particularly Kenya and Uganda, have thus been actively involved in supporting the fight against al-Shabab in Somalia. The fear is that easier movement of individuals within the EAC will facilitate the movement of militants.

The country’s governance track record, marked by corruption and political instability, has also raised eyebrows within the EAC. Transparency International ranked Somalia as the most corrupt country in the world last year and questioned its adherence to the principles of good governance, democracy, and the rule of law – essential criteria for EAC membership.

The country has also been mired in diplomatic disputes with its neighbours, including Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya. Repairing regional ties and addressing governance issues will be critical for Somalia’s smooth integration into the EAC.

Regional Stability and Security Cooperation

Managing the nation’s security challenges will be crucial for maintaining regional stability as the EAC expands. The withdrawal of the African

Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and ongoing counter-insurgency operations by the Somali National Army are strong incentives for the bloc’s intervention.

The EAC has a proactive approach to these issues, as seen in its deployment of regional forces to the Democratic Republic of Congo after its admission last year. Negotiations and cooperation will be essential to ensure that Somalia’s security challenges do

not undermine the stability of the entire EAC. The post-ATMIS landscape requires careful consideration of the EAC’s capacity to contribute to Somalia’s security and regional stability.

Somalia’s entry into the East African Community is a historic book-mark in the nation’s search for stability and economic growth. While the move will bring about economic opportunities, multifaceted challenges such as security concerns and gov-

ernance issues demand a careful and collaborative approach. Striking a delicate balance between economic growth and regional security, addressing governance issues, and fostering diplomatic relations are imperative for the success of Somalia’s integration into the EAC. As Somalia embraces this new chapter, the EAC faces the responsibility of guiding the nation toward a future of stability, prosperity, and harmonious regional cooperation.

Technology

Google Faces Legal Setback: Epic Games’ Victory And The Future Of App Stores

Google, the tech behemoth, recently faced a significant setback as a California jury ruled in favour of Epic Games, the developer of “Fortnite,” determining that Google’s Play app store operates as an illegal monopoly. This verdict has far-reaching implications, potentially reshaping the dynamics of the Android app market.

However, the road to change may be prolonged due to an expected lengthy appeals process. Here, we explore the aftermath of the legal battle, potential transformations in Google’s Play Store, and the broader landscape of antitrust challenges confronting major tech players.

The Verdict and Immediate Ramifications

The unanimous decision by the jury declared Google’s Play Store an illegal monopoly, alleging anti-competitive practices and exorbitant fees levied on app developers, reaching up to 30%. Epic Games now has the opportunity to submit recommendations on how Google should rectify its Play Store. Possible remedies could include permitting alternative payment systems and reconsidering the high fees, which, according to Wells Fargo estimates, contribute around \$10 billion to Google’s annual revenue.

The Impact on Google’s Lucrative Business Model

While the revenue from digital purchases forms a fraction of Google’s total sales, it constitutes a lucrative and high-margin segment. The proposed remedies, if implemented, could force Google to open its Android system to rival app stores or reevaluate its fee structure. Such changes would have a profound impact on the existing app ecosystem and could challenge Google’s current business model.

Antitrust Implications

This legal blow adds to Google’s antitrust challenges, including a parallel battle with the US Justice Department over the alleged antitrust violations. The decision may embolden the Justice Department, currently engaged in a jury trial regarding ad tech complexities. The implications extend beyond Google, casting a shadow over Apple’s market dominance. While Apple emerged victorious in a similar case against Epic, this ruling intensifies scrutiny of the App Store’s practices.

Appeals and Anticipated Delays

In response to the verdict, Google has announced its intention to appeal, initiating a legal process that is expected to reach the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals. Analysts foresee a protracted appeals timeline, poten-

tially lasting until Q2 2025, mirroring the duration of Epic Games’ legal battle against Apple. This extended legal process could delay any tangible changes mandated by the court. Google’s recent legal setback underscores the increasing scrutiny of the practices of major tech companies.



The ruling opens avenues for potential reforms in app store policies, promising a more competitive landscape. However, the anticipated lengthy appeals process suggests that immediate changes may be elusive. As the tech industry grapples with mounting antitrust challenges, this case against Google establishes a precedent that could reverberate in future legal battles. The outcome will not only influence Google’s strategic decisions but may trigger a broader reassessment of app store dynamics and antitrust regulations within the tech ecosystem.

Redefining Rental Excellence – Lumi Rental's CEO on Crafting Success

Lumi Rental has recently been listed. And the response was quite good. So, what do you think- what made Lumi appear appealing to investors?

Being one of the largest and rapidly growing auto rental firms in the Kingdom with a market share of 7% based on our 2021 fleet size alone, we foresaw the huge response that came our way. We were 94.5 times oversubscribed with the IPO generating an order book of about 102.9 billion riyals.

The market clearly showed there was a strong appetite for Saudi flotations and the confidence is reflective of the strong brand identity we have been able to create in the market and among our stakeholders. Lumi's application for an IPO of 16,500,000 shares representing 30 of our issued share capital was historic.

Our long-term leasing segment locks in future revenue, our short-term rentals, can capitalize on high margins. At the same time, our used vehicle auction section allows us to maximize purchase price recovery. A robust market with a sensible business model has been our USP over the years and continues to drive our success today.

How are you planning to compete against established players in the same field? What is the moat of Lumi Rental?

We have been able to grow exponentially in the highly competitive car rental and leasing segment

in Saudi Arabia, purely due to our razor-sharp focus on providing cutting-edge services to our highly discerning clients. The end user always comes first in our brand strategy and by investing equally in our human as well as tech capital, we have ensured providing leading services to our clients.

We were among the first to jump on the tech bandwagon and offer our customers a seamless experience through our website and app that makes it easy for anyone to rent or lease our vehicles with a few clicks. Our Motorcycle rentals and Used Vehicle Auction sites are one-of-a-kind services that set us apart from the competition.

But at the end of the day if I had to pick two things that are key to our success – it would be the ease with which we embraced tech and our well-trained service staff who can support and amplify our brand's core essence – which is to serve our customers to the best of our ability.

Does Lumi cover the entirety of KSA? Can anyone use your services from anywhere in Saudi Arabia?

Lumi operates in over 36 locations across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including 14 airports. Every year we expand our reach by opening new branches keeping the requirements of the Kingdom's mobile population in mind. Saudi Arabia is currently going through one of its most dynamic phases; with tourists coming in for leisure and pilgrimage as well as many

businesses shifting base to the Kingdom attracted by the economic incentives. There is also a growing demand to meet the rising population's automotive needs. With a fleet of 30,000 well-maintained vehicles spread across 36 branches within Saudi Arabia, Lumi is well-equipped to service every need.

Coming to the aspect of sustainable transport, does Lumi offer electric vehicle rental services as well?

Currently, we do not have electric vehicle rental services, but we are fully geared to support the Saudi government's endeavor to move towards a sustainable future for all. Sustainability is a key focus for the automotive industry and with the launch of CEER, the Kingdom's first Electric Vehicle brand expected to roll out in 2025, the country has shown its readiness to walk the talk.

The Kingdom is committed to setting up an extensive infrastructure network to support EVs and has ambitious plans to increase the number of EVs on Saudi roads by 30 percent by 2030. We at Lumi are keen to adapt to the times and lead the dynamic land mobility industry with our in-depth knowledge and expertise in the field.

Tell us more about your vehicle auction service. How does this fit into the bigger scheme of things that your company is in?

We inaugurated our first used car showroom in Riyadh in 2022.

The response since then has been phenomenal. We are committed to maintaining a young fleet of well-serviced vehicles for our clients and providing them with the latest models in the market as well.

At the same time, we realized there is a huge demand for used cars in the local market and by strategically offering up our well-maintained vehicles, we have ensured a circular economy where the end beneficiary is our customer – be it the rental market or the used car buyer. By auctioning off our vehicles after 2-3 years of rental and lease operations, we are also able to maximize purchase price recovery and that's a win-win for all.

How has the expertise of the parent company, Seera Group empowered Lumi Rental?

Seera Group's ambitious growth strategy has empowered and propelled Lumi's rapid growth in the industry. As a strategic investor and engaged owner, underpinned by their robust financial results for Q3 2023, Seera Group has steered us to greater heights. And while

generating attractive returns for our shareholders remains a priority, we also believe in investing back into our operations which is key to our growth today.

On the personal front, how have you as the CEO set your professional roadmap in terms of enabling Lumi to prosper more? Also, we would like to know how Lumi helped YOU grow professionally?

With over 28 years of experience working across blue chip multinationals, I have headed the Finance and Operations teams of large organizations, during the

boom period as well as recession time. Therefore, I believe I have the pulse of the industry. Look at the automobile industry today; ever since I came into this sector, it has transformed so drastically. Did we ever imagine that a time would come when EVs would take over the roads?

As far as my professional growth is concerned about Lumi's rapid rise, if this segment has taught me one thing, it is that one must always be prepared to move with the times. Imagine if we had remained adamant that we would only deal in rental cars, and not branch out to leasing or auctions, we would have been left far behind.

As a brand and equally as an individual it is important to keep an eye on the future even as you enjoy the present to ensure you are always ready to embrace the new. As market leaders, we must view everything with a periscope and not a microscope. And that is where Lumi's growth lies.

Syed Mohammed Azfar Shakeel
CEO, Lumi Rental



Launch of Vietnam MarTech Network – Boosting Innovation and Growth in Marketing

The Vietnam MarTech Network was officially inaugurated on November 1 at the Vietnam Martech Innovation 2023 Forum held at the National Innovation Center in Hanoi's Hoa Lac Hi-Tech Park. The event, themed “From Mindset to Mastery - The Rise & Shine of Martech in Vietnam,” marked a milestone in the development of the country's marketing sector.

The global MarTech industry is experiencing rapid growth, with a projected revenue of \$1.7 trillion by 2032, up from \$329 billion in 2022. As a new industry that has been around for more than 12 years, MarTech has developed very quickly. Back in 2011, there were only around 120 companies in this field globally. By 2023, there will be more than 11,000 companies, including many Vietnamese companies, providing MarTech solutions for businesses.

Revolutionising Marketing

The advent of MarTech is poised to revolutionise marketing and advertising services in Vietnam (as in the rest of the world), empowering businesses to harness the latest technology for marketing goals. The Vietnam MarTech Network is envisioned as a crucial conduit, serving as a bridge between the government, investment funds, and MarTech enterprises nationwide.

The network aims to foster their development and safeguard the legitimate benefits of its members. In a rapidly changing netscape, the Vietnam MarTech Network recognises the importance of staying abreast of global trends and challenges. As global MarTech giants enter the Vietnamese market, domestic enterprises have the dual opportunity of learning from them

while simultaneously making their own innovations in the new competitive atmosphere.

The Vietnam MarTech Network has received official sponsorship from the National Innovation Center (NIC) under the Ministry of Planning and Investment. This partnership is proof of the government's recognition of the major role MarTech plays in the country's economic development. The network pledges to establish close relationships with relevant government agencies and ministries, particularly the NIC, with a collaborative approach to driving innovation and fostering a robust MarTech ecosystem in Vietnam.

Empowering Businesses

The primary objective of the Vietnam MarTech Network is to enhance cooperation and mutual support among its members. It seeks to protect the legitimate rights of MarTech businesses while promoting their development, innovation activities, strategic planning, and competitiveness. The network aims to capitalise on these opportunities to shape a stable MarTech ecosystem within the country.

Khoi Le, Meta country director for Vietnam, emphasised the need for a stable MarTech ecosystem in Vietnam to support companies in navigating these challenges and seizing opportunities. According to him, MarTech has accelerated the revolution of marketing and advertising activities in Vietnam while opening up opportunities for enterprises to capitalise on MarTech through data analysis and improve advertising performance.

Inaugural Event and Future Prospects

The launch of the Vietnam Mar-

Tech Network was commemorated at the Vietnam Martech Innovation 2023 conference, a component of the Vietnam International Innovation Exhibition 2023.

The conference featured over 30 speakers across three discussion sessions, addressing new trends in MarTech, applications in public services, personalisation of products and experiences, data-driven marketing strategies, and maximising customer satisfaction. The conference drew famous speakers and delegates from the region, including Claudian Navin Stanislaus, President of the Malaysian Advertisers Association, Eileen Ooi, President of the Malaysian Digital Association,

Eakchai Parichatikanon, founding member of the MarTech Association of Thailand, Michihiko Suganuma, Senior Executive Officer of D.A. Consortium Inc, and Dian Gemiano, Chairman of the Indonesia Digital Association. This international presence provided a platform for knowledge exchange and strengthened regional ties. November 1 is now officially designated as the traditional day of Vietnam's MarTech industry. Furthermore, the MarTech exhibition was also arranged with 80 standout technologies and prestigious brands of tech giants such as Meta, MarTech, Tribe, KPMG and Goldsun Media on display.

In an era where technology, data, and innovation intersect to shape the future of marketing and advertising, the Vietnam MarTech Network stands as a beacon, guiding businesses toward success. By fostering collaboration, supporting local enterprises, and embracing global innovations, the network aims to position Vietnam as a major player in the global MarTech sector.

Toshiba Delists After 74 Years, Enters The Era Of Private Ownership

Toshiba, one of Japan's most famous brands, has bid adieu to the Tokyo Stock Exchange after 74 years. The company, identical to Japan's 20th-century electronic dominance, has taken the significant step of going private in an \$11 billion deal conducted by Japan Industrial Partners (JIP), a private equity giant.

This momentous shift in Toshiba's trajectory is not merely a corporate maneuver; it signifies a profound shift in Japan's corporate governance landscape and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for the conglomerate.

Toshiba's origins trace back to 1875, emerging from the backdrop of Japan's 250-year cultural and economic isolation. By 1978, through several evolutions and mergers, it became Toshiba that we see today, dealing with the ever-changing dynamics of the global economy. The company grew along with the growth of the Japanese economy, which ascended to be the world's second-largest economy.

The Years of Transformation

The fractures in Toshiba's empire became seemingly evident in 2015, with revelations of profits overstatements and subsequent crises within its nuclear technology arm. These chaotic events demanded a series of strategic shifts which included share sales and divestments.

The company's vulnerabilities attracted foreign activist investors, which triggered debates about Japan's

insular corporate government model. Amidst this backdrop, JIP's consortium, backed by financial stalwarts like Orix, Chubu Electric Power, and chipmaker Rohm, emerged as Toshiba's savior.

As Toshiba begins a new phase, questions and speculations regarding its plans are gaining momentum. Chief Executive Taro Shimada remains at the top and will be focusing more on high-margin digital services. However, experts suggest that Toshiba's revival might necessitate radical strategies, possibly including a break-up to unlock latent value.

Ulrike Schaeede, a professor of Japanese business, emphasizes the imperative for Toshiba to pivot toward breakthrough innovations and exit lower-margin businesses.

The Japanese government's vigilant gaze underscores Toshiba's significance beyond its corporate boundaries. With a workforce of approximately 106,000 employees and operations deemed critical to national security, Toshiba's future have an impact on the national level.

The inclusion of JIP executives, along with the representatives from Orix and Chubu Electric, in the new management structure ensures a blend of expertise and oversight.

Furthermore, the participation of a senior adviser from Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group adds another layer of analysis and strategic guidance. Toshiba's partnership with Rohm to invest \$2.7 billion in power chip manufactur-

ing facilities signals its intent to employ advanced technologies effectively. But there are still challenges ahead.

The multinational conglomerate must face geopolitical complexities, such as sanctions affecting its supply chains, and adjust its commercial strategies to remain competitive. While the present buyout offers Toshiba some relief, the main responsibility rests on the company's leadership to guide it to a prosperous and sustainable future.

Toshiba's partnership with Rohm to invest \$2.7 billion in power chip manufacturing facilities signals its intent to harness advanced technologies effectively. Yet, challenges loom large. The conglomerate must navigate geopolitical complexities, such as sanctions affecting its supply chains, and recalibrate its commercial strategies to remain competitive.

While JIP's buyout offers Toshiba a lifeline, the onus rests on the conglomerate's leadership to chart a sustainable and prosperous future. As a new change is brought forward with Toshiba's transition, challenges are expected but it would also bring forward new opportunities.

Visionary leadership, strategic agility, and an unwavering commitment will help Toshiba in rediscovering and restoring to its former glory. As Toshiba navigates this transformative phase, its journey serves as a poignant reminder of corporate resilience, adaptability, and the enduring quest for excellence in an ever-evolving global landscape.

Tech, Trade, and Beyond: The Agenda for South Korean President Yoon's U.K. Trip



Image Credit: Office of the President of the Republic of Korea

Yoon Suk Yeol
President of South Korea

In a diplomatic overture aimed at fortifying international relations, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol arrived in the U.K. for a crucial three-day visit. The primary agenda of this visit is to launch negotiations on a new free trade agreement, symbolizing a concerted effort by both President Yoon and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to bolster their global standing ahead of looming general elections in their respective countries.

President Yoon's diplomatic sojourn includes a carriage ride with his wife to Buckingham Palace, where he is set to meet King Charles III. Following this regal encounter, he is scheduled to address the Houses of Parliament, marking the commencement of his official visit. Subsequent engagements involve meetings with business leaders from the U.K. and South Korea, culminating in discussions with Prime Minister Sunak.

The focal point of President Yoon's trip is the launch of negotiations on an updated free trade agreement between South Korea and the U.K. This endeavour aligns with Prime Minister Sunak's broader strategy to cultivate stronger ties with international partners in the post-Brexit landscape. The negotiations represent a continuum of similar talks between the U.K. and other nations, with a much-anticipated deal with India still pending finalization.

For Prime Minister Sunak, advancing trade negotiations with South Korea serves as a strategic move to underscore his commitment to fostering economic growth – a crucial narrative as the Conservative Party grapples with a significant lag in opinion polls compared to the Labour opposition.

As the U.K. seeks to redefine its economic relationships in the aftermath of Brexit, these negotiations become pivotal for Sunak's political narrative and the Conservative Party's electoral prospects in 2024.

President Yoon, leading the People Power Party, views foreign policy as a cornerstone of his presidency. Notably, efforts to deepen South Korea's relationship with the U.S. and a diplomatic rapprochement with Japan have been integral to his administration.

While this visit provides President Yoon with a platform to showcase his statesman-like credentials, the tangible outcomes are expected to be relatively modest compared to his diplomatic endeavours in Washington and Tokyo.

A critical backdrop to President Yoon's diplomatic initiative is the upcoming parliamentary election in April, where his party aims to secure a majority. Winning a majority is imperative for President Yoon to effectively push through his policy agenda and avoid being hamstrung as a lame-duck leader.

The scheduled signing of an accord between the U.K. and South Korea is poised to encourage in-

vestment and foster collaboration in critical technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and semiconductors. The accord includes a commitment of up to £4.5 million (\$5.6 million) in joint research funding, spearheaded by the Royal Society.

The existing free trade agreement between the U.K. and South Korea, a legacy of the EU-South Korea deal in 2011, is deemed one of the most utilized trade deals by the U.K.

As officials gear up for renegotiation, there is a concerted effort to "future-proof" the arrangement by incorporating provisions for digital services. Given that almost 80% of the U.K.'s services exports were digitally delivered in 2021, this adaptation reflects the evolving nature of international trade.

South Korea holds strategic significance for the U.K., being the seventh-largest export market for British-made cars and the third-largest supplier of new cars to Britain.

With negotiations set to address the intricacies of supply chains for electric vehicle production, the talks are poised to shape the trajectory of the automotive industry in both nations. The first formal round of talks is scheduled for January in Korea, with subsequent rounds alternating between the two countries.

Amid the heightened geopolitical tensions, defense cooperation will be a prominent feature of President Yoon's visit. Both

nations' militaries are expected to intensify joint training and operations, aiming to create "the most comprehensive exercise regime between the U.K. and any partner other than the U.S.," according to a statement from No.10.

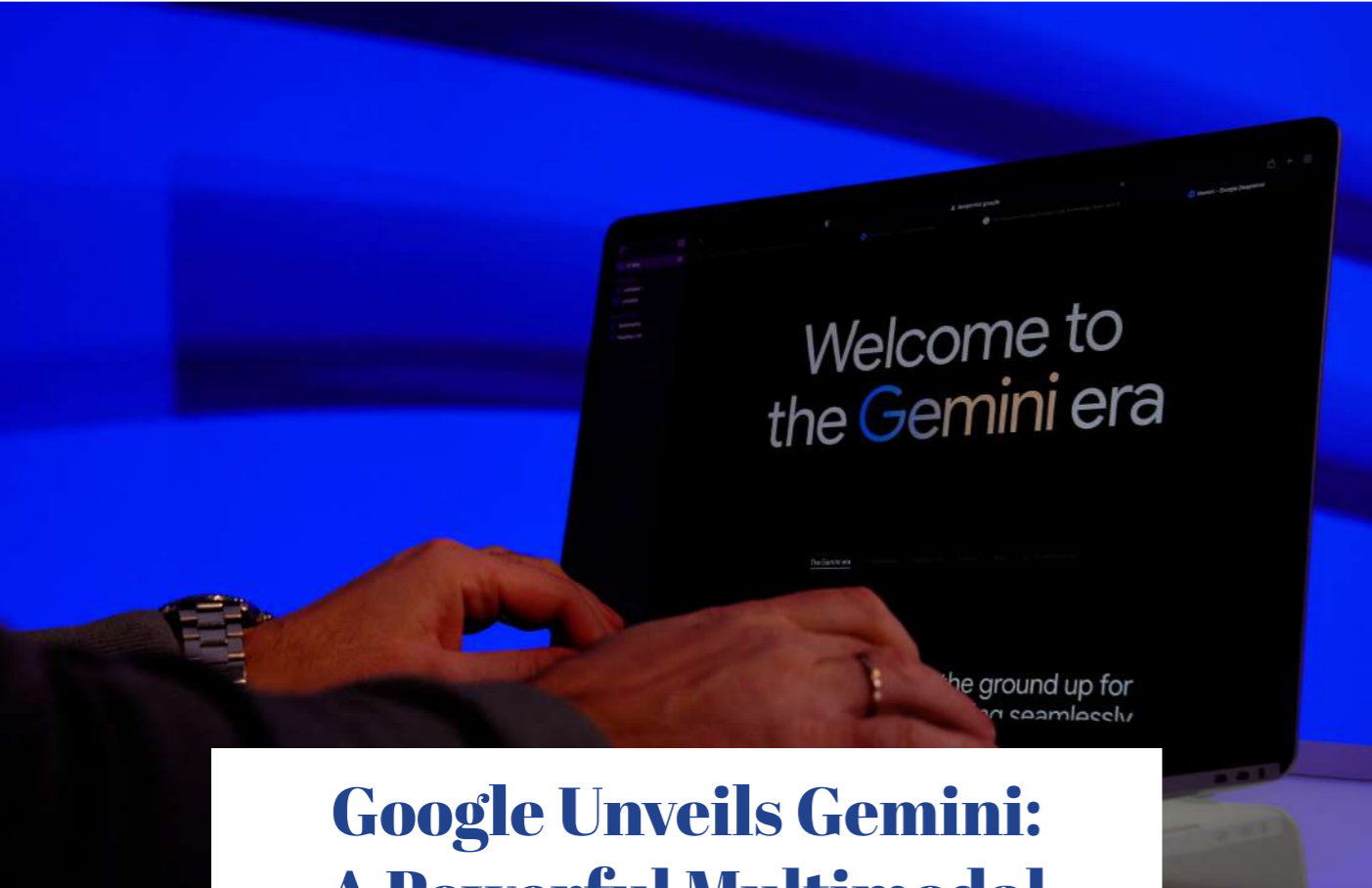
President Yoon's visit unfolds against a tumultuous backdrop in the U.K., with Prime Minister Sunak navigating leadership challenges following the sacking of Home Secretary Suella Braverman and the unexpected return of former Prime Minister David Cameron to the Cabinet.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt's upcoming autumn economic and fiscal statement adds to the political turbulence as the Conservative Party seeks to sway public sentiment.

For Prime Minister Sunak, the visit offers an opportune moment to emphasize the recently announced Bletchley Declaration, aimed at fostering collaboration among 28 countries to address the challenges of artificial intelligence.

South Korea's commitment to hosting a mini-virtual summit on AI aligns with the broader objectives of international cooperation in technological innovation.

As both nations navigate the complexities of post-Brexit geopolitics, these negotiations hold the potential to shape the trajectory of their economic interdependence and technological collaboration.



Google Unveils Gemini: A Powerful Multimodal AI Model

Google has rolled out its most sophisticated artificial intelligence (AI) model yet, named Gemini. This unveiling comes at a time when the tech giant faces increasing pressure to elucidate its plans for monetizing AI. Gemini, positioned as Google’s most extensive and capable language model, introduces three variations:

Gemini Ultra – The largest and most powerful, exceeding human performance in benchmark tests and excellence at complex reasoning and nuanced understanding.

Gemini Pro – Strikes a balance between capabilities and resource efficiency, ideal for a wider range of tasks within companies and research institutions.

Gemini Nano – Compact and efficient, specially designed for mobile devices and focused on specific tasks like code generation or meeting summarization.

Set to be licensed through Google Cloud, Gemini is poised to revolutionize various applications. The plan is to make Gemini Pro accessible to developers and enterprise clients through the Gemini API in Google AI Studio or Google Cloud Vertex AI, starting from December 13.

Additionally, Android developers will harness the capabilities of Gemini Nano, contributing to the model’s versatility. Beyond external applications, Gemini will play a pivotal role in enhancing Google’s own products, including the Bard chatbot and Search Generative Experience.

Gemini holds significant potential for companies and enterprises, offering advanced capabilities for customer service engagement, chatbots, product recommendations, trend identification, and even content creation for marketing campaigns and blog content. Notably, the model could streamline tasks such as summarizing meetings or generating code for developers.

The groundbreaking aspect of Gemini lies in its Ultra model, which surpasses human experts in Massive Multitask Language Understanding (MMLU). This evaluation method spans 57 subjects, including math, physics, history, law, medicine, and ethics. This underscores Gemini’s proficiency in understanding nuanced and complex subjects, showcasing its problem-solving abilities.

According to Sundar Pichai, Google’s CEO, Gemini is a result of extensive collaboration across Google teams, designed to be multimodal, seamlessly integrating different types of information, including text, code, audio, image, and video.

Gemini will not only serve as a tool for external applications but will also be employed in-house, enhancing Google’s products. For instance, the Bard chatbot will use Gemini Pro for advanced reasoning, planning, and understanding. A future update, “Bard Advanced,” utilizing Gemini Ultra, is set to launch early next year, marking a significant upgrade to Google’s ChatGPT-like chatbot.

This move comes eight months after the introduction of Bard and one year after OpenAI’s launch of ChatGPT on GPT-3.5. While Google executives claim Gemini Pro outperforms GPT-3.5, they remain tight-lipped about its performance compared to GPT-4.

Despite initial reports of a delayed launch, Google asserts that thorough testing of advanced models is time-consuming. Gemini underwent extensive testing, with Eli Collins, Vice President of Product at Google DeepMind, stating it’s the most rigorously evaluated AI model Google has built.

Gemini Ultra, despite being the largest model, is surprisingly cost-effective to serve, highlighting improved efficiency in training these models. Collins emphasizes that Gemini is not only more capable but also more efficient, marking a significant step in Google’s AI development.

While Gemini holds immense

promise, questions about its novel capabilities compared to current-generation Large Language Models (LLMs) remain. Google executives acknowledge the uniqueness of Gemini Ultra but express ongoing efforts to fully understand its novel capabilities.

In terms of monetization, Google remains focused on creating a positive user experience for now, deferring detailed monetization plans. The emphasis is on delivering value before exploring revenue streams.

In addition to Gemini, Google introduced its next-gen Tensor Processing Unit, TPU v5p, for training AI models. This chip offers improved performance for the price compared to its predecessor, TPU v4. However, specific performance comparisons with market leader Nvidia were not provided.

As the AI landscape evolves, Google’s strategic moves with Gemini signal a new era in AI capabilities and potential monetization strategies. The success of Gemini will not only impact Google’s position but could also influence broader trends in AI development and its integration into various sectors.

The financial implications and the ability to capitalize on AI remain key areas to watch as Google navigates this new frontier with Gemini. The launch represents a significant milestone, and stakeholders are keenly observing how Google will leverage Gemini for future growth and innovation.

Moreover, the broader implications of this move extend beyond Google’s immediate sphere. Gemini is poised to influence the trajectory of

AI development, setting a benchmark for capabilities and integration across diverse applications. The competitive dynamics in the AI landscape are likely to shift, with other tech giants and AI developers responding to the challenge posed by Gemini.

Gemini’s impact on businesses and enterprises is another facet to explore. The model’s application in customer service engagement, chatbots, product recommendations, and content creation have the potential to reshape how businesses leverage AI for efficiency and innovation.

The adaptability of Gemini Nano for mobile devices opens new possibilities for integrating AI into everyday applications, influencing user experiences across various industries.

The financial sector, in particular, stands to benefit from Gemini’s advanced capabilities. The potential applications in data analysis, risk assessment, and customer interactions could usher in a new era of efficiency and precision. Businesses that rely on data-driven strategies will likely explore ways to integrate Gemini into their operations, seeking a competitive edge in the market.

However, the success of Gemini hinges not only on its technological prowess but also on Google’s ability to navigate the complex landscape of AI ethics and regulations.

As AI models become more sophisticated, concerns about privacy, bias, and responsible use become paramount. Google’s commitment to comprehensive safety evaluations is a step in the right direction, but ongoing vigilance and collaboration with regulatory bodies will be essential to ensure ethical AI development.



The Chaebol Chronicles: South Korea’s Corporate Epics

In the intricate tapestry of South Korea’s economic narrative, the chaebols emerge as central protagonists, weaving narratives of prosperity and influence. These colossal family-controlled conglomerates, with global giants like Hyundai, LG, and Samsung at the forefront, have not only defined the nation’s economic landscape but have also etched an indelible mark on the global stage.

Understanding Chaebols

The term “chaebol” translates to “rich clan”, and these conglomerates are indeed pillars of the South Korean economy. They are large groups of interconnected companies, typically

dominated by a wealthy family. While there are several chaebols in South Korea, the most globally recognized ones include Hyundai, LG, and Samsung. These entities have played a pivotal role in South Korea’s economic ascent since the aftermath of the Korean War.

The rise of chaebols is intricately linked to the post-war reconstruction period. After the Korean War, relief funds and loans were directed to businessmen committed to rebuilding the nation. This approach, coupled with protectionist measures shielding local industries from foreign competition, laid the foundation for the chaebols’ dominance. By the end of the 1990s, chaebols held nearly two-thirds of the

market share in South Korean manufacturing.

The Economic Juggernauts: Samsung’s Saga

Samsung, led by the Lee family, exemplifies the reach of these conglomerates. Lee Jae-yong, also known as Jay Y. Lee, became the de facto leader of Samsung after his father, Lee Kun-hee, Samsung’s chairman, suffered a heart attack in 2014. The sprawling business empire of Samsung encompasses a diverse range of sectors, including electronics, construction, shipbuilding, insurance, and more. Samsung Electronics alone accounts for a significant portion of South Korea’s exports.

However, this economic might has not come without controversies. The arrest of Lee Jae-yong in 2017, involved allegations of paying bribes to a confidante of South Korea’s president, shedding light on the intertwined relationships between chaebols and political figures.

Political Influence and Historical Context

Chaebols did not only play a central economic role but also became deeply entwined with the political landscape of South Korea. During the developmental era, leaders like Park Chung-hee, a general who came to power in 1961, utilized these conglomerates to propel economic growth. The government directed funds to companies aligned with its economic goals, emphasizing exports as a driving force.

As South Korea transitioned to democracy in the 1980s, chaebols retained significant economic and political influence. Politicians relied on the financial support of these conglomerates for electoral success, creating a symbiotic relationship.



Public Sentiment and Challenges

While chaebols contributed significantly to South Korea’s economic miracle, public sentiment towards them is complex. There is pride in their economic success, but there is also widespread resentment. The Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s

raised concerns about the potential catastrophic consequences if a highly leveraged chaebol were to fail.

Moreover, there is a perception that the immense wealth accumulated by these families came at the expense of the public. Chaebols have faced criticism for issues such as white-collar crime and corruption. Successive governments have attempted to curb chaebol dominance, implementing measures such as heavy estate taxes.

Evolving Dynamics

In recent years, there has been a shift in how chaebols are perceived and governed. Activist investors, like the Korea Corporate Governance Improvement (KCGI) Fund and the National Pension Service, have been actively building equity stakes in chaebol firms.

They play a crucial role in defending the interests of minority shareholders and challenging self-serving decisions by family majority owners.

The succession plans within chaebols are also undergoing transformations. The practice of dynastic succession, where leadership passes from father to son, is being challenged. Successive generations are facing hurdles, including hefty estate taxes that limit the smooth transfer of control within the family.

Hanjin’s Fall and Chaebol’s Future

The case of Hanjin, a chaebol involved in diverse sectors like aviation and shipbuilding, exemplifies the challenges faced by these conglomerates.

Hanjin’s bankruptcy in 2019, following risky investments and internal controversies, showcased the vulnerability of even the most prominent chaebols.

While Samsung remains a global giant, the precarious situations faced by some chaebols indicate a shifting landscape.

The traditional dominance of chaebols in manufacturing is being challenged by international competition, particularly from China. The delicate balance between government support and constraints aims to redefine the role of chaebols in South Korea’s evolving economy.



Navigating the Chaebol Landscape

The arrest of Lee Jae-yong and the evolving dynamics within chaebols signal a critical juncture for South Korea’s economic powerhouses. The delicate interplay between economic, political, and societal factors will shape the future of chaebols.

The challenges they face, from activist investors advocating for transparency to succession struggles within families, underscore the need for adaptability.

As South Korea navigates this landscape, finding the right balance between nurturing these conglomerates for global competitiveness and addressing the concerns of the public will be paramount. The story of chaebols is not just about economic prowess; it’s a multifaceted narrative that encapsulates the complexities of modern South Korea.

Amazon’s \$1.4 Billion iRobot Deal Faces EU Hurdles Amid Antitrust Concerns

Amazon’s ambitious \$1.4 billion acquisition of iRobot Corp., the maker of Roomba, has hit a roadblock as the European Union’s anti-trust arm, the European Commission, raised serious competition concerns. The EU’s move threatens to derail the deal unless Amazon and iRobot address the highlighted issues, posing potential challenges for the e-commerce giant’s foray into the growing market for smart-home gadgets.

EU Antitrust Arm’s Warning and Market Reaction

On Monday, the European Commission issued a statement of objections, outlining concerns that Amazon’s proposed acquisition could negatively impact the robot vacuum cleaner market. The EU watchdog expressed worries that the deal might allow Amazon to strengthen its position not only in the robot vacuum cleaner sector but also in online marketplaces and other data-related services. In response to the news, iRobot shares experienced a sharp decline of 17%, hitting \$34.35, marking the largest drop in almost three years. The stock had surged last week following a Reuters report that suggested the deal would be cleared unconditionally.

Concerns Raised by the European Commission

The European Commission’s objections center around the potential misuse of Amazon’s market dominance. The watchdog warned that Amazon might prioritize its own products over competitors on its platform, leveraging labels like “Amazon’s choice” or “Works with Alexa” to promote its offerings. There are fears that Amazon could engage in practices that make it economically advantageous to shut out rival products, limiting consumer choice in the market.

The EU’s statement of objections does not necessarily spell doom for the deal, as companies often have the opportunity to address competition concerns and avert a veto. Amazon and iRobot can either challenge the preliminary findings in writing or present their case at a hearing.

iRobot’s Response and Continued Cooperation

Colin Angle, Chairman and CEO of iRobot, expressed disappointment

with the European Commission’s concerns. He emphasized that, given the intense competition iRobot faces, the company is disheartened by the issuance of a statement of objections. Angle affirmed that iRobot continues to collaborate with the European Commission and other regulators to address the competition issues raised.

Amazon’s Focus on Addressing Concerns

An Amazon spokesperson stated that the company is focused on addressing the concerns highlighted by the European Commission. This signals a commitment from Amazon to work towards a resolution that could satisfy regulatory authorities.

Amazon’s Strategic Move and iRobot Appeal

Amazon’s interest in iRobot was initially seen as a strategic move to expand its presence in the smart-home gadget market. The deal would potentially allow Amazon to integrate iRobot’s technology into its array of devices, complementing its Alexa voice assistant. However, iRobot’s appeal extended beyond smart-home gadgets, as the company witnessed a surge in sales during the pandemic with increased demand for its robotic cleaning machines.



Regulatory Landscape and Global Scrutiny

The European Commission’s move puts it in opposition to Britain’s Competition and Markets Authority, which previously approved the deal, albeit with certain conditions. The US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has also been scrutinizing the transaction since September 2022, citing competition concerns and privacy activists’ worries about Amazon gaining excessive control over the smart-home device market and valuable consumer data.

Potential Implications and Deadline Ahead

The failure to address the European Commission’s concerns could lead to the deal facing challenges similar to other recent instances where the EU blocked major acquisitions, such as Booking Holdings’ deal for Etraveli Group and concerns raised over Adobe’s buyout of Figma Inc. The commission has set a deadline of February 14 to decide whether to approve the iRobot deal with concessions or to block it, highlighting the urgency and significance of the pending decision in the global business landscape.

Amazon’s pursuit of iRobot faces a pivotal moment as it navigates through the complexities of global antitrust scrutiny, with the European Commission’s objections adding a layer of uncertainty to the deal’s fate. The outcome will not only impact the companies involved but will also have broader implications for competition dynamics in the smart-home technology sector.

Saudi Arabia and China Bolster Economic Ties With \$25 Billion Agreements

Saudi Arabia and China have solidified their economic partnership by signing agreements valued at more than \$25 billion during the China-Saudi Investment Conference held in Beijing. The significant deals cover a spectrum of key sectors, showcasing the commitment of both nations to deepen their economic collaboration.

The extensive agreements, numbering more than 60, span critical areas such as energy, agriculture, tourism, mining, financial services, logistics, infrastructure, technology, and healthcare. Leading Saudi companies, including Aramco, Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (Sabic), and Acwa Power, participated in the conference, reflecting the breadth of industries involved.

The China-Saudi Investment Conference, a culmination of Saudi Minister of Investment Khalid Al-Falih’s six-day visit to China, exemplifies the dedication to fostering economic ties between the two nations. The sectors covered in the agreements range from cleaner energy, investment, and financing to mining, tourism, agriculture, digital economy, artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, and special economic zones. In the realm of information and communications technology, a notable agreement worth \$8.5 billion was inked between the Saudi E-Sports Federation and VSPO, a Chinese startup. This strategic collaboration aims to unlock new opportunities in the rapidly growing field of e-sports.

Ajlan and Bros Holding Group Company, a conglomerate based in Riyadh, teamed up with Oriental Energy Company in a \$7.5 billion venture to explore collaborative opportunities within the manufacturing sector. Additionally, a substantial \$2 billion energy agreement was signed between

the Saudi Ministry of Investment and China’s CRRC Group, focusing on the development of renewable energy and sustainable mobility initiatives in Saudi Arabia.

China stands as the largest importer of oil from Saudi Arabia, purchasing approximately 1.75 million barrels per day in 2022. As Saudi Arabia continues to diversify its economy beyond oil, the nation actively seeks to deepen economic and trade relationships globally. The conference marks a significant milestone following the 10th Arab-China Business Conference in June. It builds on the momentum generated during Chinese President Xi Jinping’s visit to Saudi Arabia in December of the previous year.

Nine Chinese companies, including Huawei, Dahua, China Railway Construction Corporation, China Comservice, China Harbour Engineering Company, China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation, BGI, Nutech, and iMile, were granted new regional headquarters licences. This initiative, driven by the Ministry of Investment and the Royal Commission for Riyadh City, is designed to attract multinational companies by offering various benefits and premium support services, including a recently announced 30-year tax break. Since its inception in 2021, the program has successfully licensed more than 200 companies.

Saudi Arabia, aligning with its Vision 2030 agenda to diversify its economy, aims to boost foreign direct investment. The ambitious goal is to have 480 global companies establish headquarters in the kingdom by 2030, contributing to efforts to enhance economic output. As part of his visit, Minister Al Falih explored various cities in China, including Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, further solidifying the multifaceted collaboration between the two nations.

China and France Agree on Deepening Comprehensive Cooperation

The relationship between China and France have recently gained a strong momentum due to high-level exchanges between the two countries. To tackle the challenges faced globally, the countries have agreed to deepen their comprehensive and high-quality co-operation.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi conversed with French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna and was part of the 6th meeting held between China and France for a high-level discussion on people-to-people exchanges. According to the Ministry’s spokesperson Wang Wenbin, France and China agreed to take several tasks to the next stage; including the celebration planned for the 60th anniversary of China-France diplomatic relations and the Year of Culture and Tourism in 2024.

With an aim to deepen comprehensive, high-quality cooperation for creating new channels as well as the exchange and dialogue of economic, strategic, financial, and cultural dialogue mechanisms, both China and France are joining forces.

Wang Wenbin said that the two countries also aim to expand their cooperation to the traditional fields of power such as civil nuclear energy and aerospace. In addition, the countries aim to further explore new areas

such as education, energy transition and sustainable development, scientific research, promotion of high-quality Belt and Road Initiative Development and active exploration of third-party market cooperation.

“With China agreeing to work with France to make the “From French farms to Chinese tables” mechanisms” — A benchmark achievement of cooperation between China and France, they also agreed on expanding mutual openness. High-quality development and other high-level opportunities are being pursued extensively by China. With a hope that France will proceed to provide an open business environment for Chinese enterprises, China offers opportunities for more French companies to establish their businesses in China.

Along with jointly addressing global challenges, China and France are also uniting to safeguard the Paris Agreement framework and assist in the success of the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Dubai.

Catherine Colonna embarked on a 2-day visit to China and co-hosted the 6th meeting of China and France with Wang Yi, paving the way for more co-operation in 2024 to mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of China-France diplomatic relationship. During the visit to China, Colonna officially launched the China-France

carbon neutrality center. The inauguration ceremony was attended by foreign ministers of both China and France. The event displayed the power of China-France cooperation in green technology and their combined efforts in tackling climate change.

The foreign ministers witnessed the signing of cooperation documents in education, culture, scientific research, tourism, health, and many more at the high-level cultural exchange mechanism meeting. The list of premium cultural exchange activities scheduled for 2024 was jointly released at the meeting.

The logos for the 60th anniversary of China-France diplomatic relations and the Year of Culture and Tourism was also unveiled during the meeting. A 15-day visa exemption policy for French short-term visitors to China is being implemented by China, while long-term visas are being offered by France to the Chinese graduate students.

The French Foreign Minister had previously stated that France staunchly advocates for safeguarding the charter of the United Nations. He further said that the country also respects the sovereignty principle and recognizes the importance to the role China has played in maintaining world stability.



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The World's Poorest Countries Struggle with \$3.5 trillion in Debt

The finance minister of Nigeria, Adebayo Olawale Edun, recently pledged that their country would cut short their spending along with collecting more taxes to find a way to repay the debts owed to foreign investors. This is not just the situation of Nigeria, but most of the poor countries are planning to do the same to unburden their debt load. Nigeria's present condition has worsened. Nigeria's 2022 debt payments, which were \$7.5 billion, topped its revenue by \$900 million. So technically, the country just kept borrowing again and again to pay off its already existing debts.

The poor countries are in deep trouble as the decade-old debt burdens are finally catching up to them. The coming year is very crucial for them

as these "frontier markets" (as the rich world investors call them) will have to repay about \$200 billion in bonds and other loans. The bonds issued by countries such as Tunisia, Ethiopia, and Bolivia are either already in default or are at trading levels which suggests that investors are highly likely to miss payments.

How bad is it?

The situation in poor countries is worsening as they have small domestic markets and require help from global lenders for their infrastructural developments. The US interest rates are being kept higher for longer by the Federal Reserve which could help these countries from drying up.

The crisis was further deepened by several global crises. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the poor coun-

tries drastically. When the rich nations printed more money to hand out stimulus cheques, the poor nations had to borrow to sustain their economies.

Then at the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war, food shortages became more rampant, and the crisis was worsened by inflation. The Institute of International Finance mentions that the frontier markets reached \$3.5 trillion in 2023. This is twice as much as they had a decade ago.

Currently, many governments are reducing their spending as the debt payments are overeating their budget. Nearly 3.3 billion people are already living in countries that spend more on debt payments than on education, health, and other infrastructure, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

Borrowing Frenzy

"Right now, developing countries are diverting the resources that are needed for development to service their debt", says Penelope Hawkins, a senior economist at the UN trade agency. What makes events harder for frontier countries is that they cannot print their own money and ease their burden through inflation like the US. What they usually do is issue debt payable in another country's currency through Eurobonds. This could also be seen as the worst crisis for these countries in the last 30 years.

Nigeria had access to the World Bank for a loan. That would be an additional burden but will give a momentary relief. Edun, in an interview, mentioned that foreign direct investments and transfer of funds from families living abroad could stabilize naira, Nigeria's currency. "There is more to be done, but Nigeria is definitely on the right path," said Adebayo Olawale Edun. The country is still struggling, the naira has plunged, and inflation increased to an 18-year high as the government started to limit a popular but pricey subsidy.

The healthcare system in the country is also breathing hard. Nigeria, Africa's most populous country spends less on health care as a part of its budget than it did 10 years ago according to Bloomberg reports. The maternal death rate is one of the world's worst and is more than 30 times higher than in the USA.

Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Health, in a statement, called the infant and maternity mortality rates "a huge concern" for the government, mentioning they "stem from poor health infrastructure due to limited fiscal capacity and resources". The government plans to give more importance

to funding critical areas, including immunization and maternal and child health and nutrition, thus increasing spending on healthcare in 2024.

Like Nigeria, Pakistan spends nearly eight times as much on interest payments, presently they pay about \$28 billion a year. The government can't afford ambulance services, the people have to depend on private services. The situation in Honduras is no different either. Their healthcare system is also collapsing. Water leaks, falling ceilings, and rodent infestations are increasing the plight of the patients, according to a study conducted by the National Anti-Corruption Council.



Frontier Markets

Economist Frida Khambata in the 1990s brought up the idea of splitting the poorest countries from the wider category of emerging markets that includes nations like India and Mexico. The World Bank's International Finance Corp. (IFC), which encourages private-sector investment in develop-

ing markets, Khambata maintained the emerging markets database. To describe the poorest nations, she selected the term 'frontier'. "These were countries that were on the edge of becoming emerging markets but not quite there yet. They were on the frontier," she said.

Risks in frontier markets are now more apparent due to inflation and growing interest rates. In 2023, the value of Bolivia's notes dropped by over thirty percent, and Ecuador's debt experienced a double-digit decline. Ethiopia stated this week that due to its "fragile external position," it would be unable to make a Monday interest payment. The country, like its rivals, had been shut out of markets. In fact, the IMF stated in its October outlook that no nation in sub-Saharan Africa has issued a Eurobond since April 2022.

Seen as an opportunity, some investors are searching the globe for nations where the market has exaggerated the possibility of default. In 2023, El Salvador's bond value more than doubled. "Those who find it easier to access markets and those who find it harder to do so clearly differ," states Philip Fielding, a money manager at MacKay Shields, a division of New York Life Insurance Co.

The former finance minister, Aganga, is no longer as certain about the validity of debt to foreign nations. He claims that "Africans would say the global financial system is biased toward the US." Aganga yearns to return to the times when Wall Street was enamored with the debt of developing nations. He claims that "everything is the reverse now." "Inflation and interest rates are high globally, and frontier markets, especially those in Africa, are suffering."

From Subsidies to Restrictions: Cuba's Economic Transformation in 2024

In 2024, Cuba stands on the precipice of significant economic transformation, as announced measures signal some of the most drastic shifts in its economic landscape in recent years. These reforms, introduced by the Cuban government, encompass a range of measures from raising fuel and basic service prices to imposing constraints on the burgeoning private sector. The implications of these changes are multi-faceted, impacting ordinary Cubans, private enterprises, and the overarching economy.

Fuelling the concerns of everyday Cubans are the impending price hikes on essential commodities like water, electricity, liquid gas, transportation, and fuel. For instance, homes with higher electricity consumption face a daunting 25% increase in rates. Additionally, certain households could witness a tripling of water prices, adding strain to already tight budgets. Such measures cast a shadow of uncertainty, especially for small businesses operating from homes, which may find operational costs spiralling out of control.

The repercussions of these economic shifts are palpable on the streets of Havana, where citizens grapple with long queues at gas stations, anticipating the inevitable rise in gasoline prices. Jorge Castro, a state-employed driver, encapsulates the sentiments of many, lamenting the enduring hardships despite impending price hikes. His sentiments echo those of Alexis Veliz, a private-sector worker, who fears a cascading effect on inflation, making everyday essentials less accessible for a broad swath of the population. A cornerstone of Cuba's economic policy since the 1959 revolution has

been the distribution of heavily subsidized staples through the iconic "libreta" or monthly ration book. However, the new measures herald a departure from this longstanding tradition. Instead of universally subsidized staples like rice and sugar, the focus shifts to targeted subsidies for the most vulnerable segments of society. While this approach may rationalize state expenditures, it raises questions about its impact on those who rely on these subsidies as a lifeline.

Ricardo Torres, a Cuban economist affiliated with American University in Washington, D.C., contends that these changes signify a departure from Cuba's traditionally centrally planned economy. He underscores the paradox of the state's role, which historically positioned itself as the omnipotent provider, yet now seems poised to relinquish some responsibilities. However, Torres remains skeptical about the extent of freedom the government will accord to private enterprises, given prevailing restrictions.

Prime Minister Manuel Marrero's unveiling of the Macroeconomic Stabilization Plan before the National Assembly marks a critical juncture. While Marrero reaffirms the government's commitment to fostering private enterprises, he also issues cautionary remarks about the need for stricter controls. Such ambivalence underscores the Cuban government's delicate balancing act: fostering economic growth while ensuring political stability. Omar Everleny, another Cuban economist, paints a nuanced picture of the challenges ahead. He posits that the multifaceted economic distortions and imbalances in Cuba necessitate a more comprehensive

developmental approach, cautioning against over-optimism about achieving rapid economic recovery. Everleny's insights resonate with Economy Minister Alejandro Gil's assessment, suggesting a contraction in Cuba's GDP by approximately 1% to 2% in the current year, following an 11% decline in 2020.

Cuba's economic woes are further exacerbated by external factors, including stringent economic sanctions and the enduring repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. The resultant strain on food, medicine, fuel, and power supplies has precipitated unprecedented public demonstrations and mass emigrations, with nearly 425,000 Cubans seeking refuge across borders.

In response to mounting criticism, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel has emphasized the government's unwavering commitment to economic recovery. In a recent communication on X, formerly Twitter, he articulated the measures as essential catalysts for revitalizing the economy, promising a renewed commitment to revolution and socialism. Cuba's economic measures for 2024 herald a paradigmatic shift, characterized by a move away from universal subsidies and centralized economic planning. While these reforms aim to address fiscal deficits and rein in inflation, their broader ramifications remain a subject of intense debate.

As Cuba navigates this precarious economic terrain, the government's ability to strike a delicate balance between state control and private enterprise will determine its future trajectory.

Turkey's War Against Inflation: A Look at Anti-Inflation Measures & Economic Realities

Turkey finds itself at a critical juncture as it grapples with an economic crisis of soaring inflation, reaching 62% in September. In response to an even worse inflation crisis last year, the government, led by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, implemented a series of anti-inflation measures, including a sharp interest rate hike.

These were major changes in economic thinking, marking a departure from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's previous, unconventional monetary policies.

This article explores the intricacies of Turkey's currency challenges, the recent anti-inflation measures, the impact on its citizens and businesses, and the overall state of the Turkish economy.

Inflation, Economic Crisis, and the Interest Rate Hike

Turkey's economy is in the throes of a cost-of-living crisis, as inflation hovers around 50-60%, causing immense strain on the people. The country's forex reserves have dwindled to almost nothing, and foreign investment has plummeted, exacerbating the economic crisis. However, this is a noticeable improvement over last year, when inflation crossed a whopping 85%.

After the national elections, which Erdogan had to work hard to win, Turkey's central bank, led by newly appointed governor Hafize Gaye Erkan, raised the principal interest rate from 8.5% to a staggering 25%. The decision to raise interest rates aimed to sta-

bilise the Turkish lira, which has lost 80% of its value in the past five years.

This shift was a sharp reversal from Erdogan's previous insistence on keeping interest rates ultra-low, signaling his recognition of the urgent need to tackle rampant inflation plaguing the country. Despite economists' expectations of an even higher increase, the hike still signified a marked policy shift.

Erdogan's New Economic Policy

President Erdogan's economic policies, once characterised by highly unorthodox approaches, faced heavy criticism as inflation stayed stubbornly high. The appointment of finance minister Mehmet Simsek, along with the previously mentioned central bank governor Hafize Gaye Erkan, suggests a return to more conventional economic principles.

The stated objective is to slowly bring inflation down to a targeted 5% through a gradual process of monetary tightening. The shift towards orthodox economic policies presents challenges for Erdogan.

The policy shift towards more orthodox economics does present political challenges for Erdogan, as it may impact a large portion of the population. Mr Erdogan, who has been in power for more than two decades, faces the delicate and unenviable task of addressing this economic crisis (which is of his own making) without alienating his voters, especially with local elections looming on the horizon.

Impact on Citizens and Businesses

The interest rate hike was expect-

ed to have immediate repercussions on Turkish households, leading to higher loan instalments and a much more conservative fiscal policy, which would lead to economic distress for many.

The short-term pain was going to be intense, but economists argued (and continue to do so) that it is necessary to extinguish the inflationary spiral once and for all over the next two to three years. Businesses, particularly in the tourism sector (which is a vital sector of the Turkish economy in terms of employment and foreign exchange), would particularly feel the impact of reduced consumer spending.

Recent data revealed a recent jump in Turkey's inflation rate to 62% in September, ending a period of slowing price index growth. The central bank's forecast anticipates reaching 58% by the end of the year. However, scepticism still persists about Erdogan's commitment to allowing interest rates to rise sufficiently to curb inflation, given his historical opposition to high borrowing costs.

Looking Ahead: Turkey's Future Outlook

As Turkey grapples with its many economic challenges, the success of its anti-inflation measures remains uncertain. The government's staunch commitment to a more orthodox economic approach, coupled with the resilience of the Turkish people and businesses, will play a crucial role in determining the efficacy of these measures and the nation's economic trajectory. International observers are closely monitoring Turkey's economic decisions as it faces this critical juncture.



President Milei's Push for Dollarization: Evaluating its Impact on Argentina's Economy

Argentina, a nation that historically suffered from constant economic turmoil, has begun a new pioneering journey under the leadership of Javier Milei. As he assumes office, Javier Milei is seeking a radical economic change, promising what he sees as a *“shock treatment”* to rescue the nation from its economic problems. Along with other proposals, one significant plan of Milei is to discard the Argentine peso entirely and replace it with the US dollar.

A Tumultuous Economy

In the early 20th century, Argentina stood among the wealthiest nations globally, surpassing economic powerhouses like Germany, France, and Spain. However, the subsequent decades witnessed a stark change, a reversal to be accurate, with economic decline and, more recently, caught in the loop of inflation.

The official inflation rate exceeded a staggering 124 percent year-over-year as of September, according to

official figures. This economic uncertainty made the Argentinian people choose unconventional measures, such as hoarding essentials like food and household goods, fearing other sharp price hikes.

Milei is an admittedly libertarian leader with far-right leanings. He has entered the political arena with promises of a swift and drastic economic revival. The decision to replace the peso with the dollar is not just an economic move, but rather a fundamental change in the country's monetary policy.

Dollarization: A Debated proposal

Milei's proposal to dollarize Argentina's economy has brought with it many controversies, within the nation and among economists globally. The plan involves scrapping the Argentinian peso and officially adopting the US dollar as the sole currency. But Argentina is not the first country to adopt the dollar. El Salvador, Ecuador, Zimbabwe, and Panama have previously embraced dollarization.

Dollarization offers stability by

pegging a nation's currency to the US dollar, a historically robust currency. While this can curb hyperinflation and provide economic stability, it also entails relinquishing control over an independent monetary policy. For Argentina, a move of this magnitude carries both potential benefits and risks.

Even before Milei's proposal, the dollar was widely used in Argentina. Exchanging pesos for dollars allowed citizens to circumvent the rapid devaluation of the peso, providing a hedge against inflation. The recent devaluation of the peso, with \$1 now equaling 800 pesos at the official rate, is expected to heighten the demand for US dollars.

The devaluation move by Argentina's economy minister, Luis Caputo, seeks to narrow the gap between the official exchange rate and the black-market rate, where \$1 currently equals approximately 1000 Argentinian pesos. This adjustment is anticipated to impact various facets of the economy, from everyday transactions to larger financial dealings.

Highs and Lows of Dollarization

Milei's push for dollarization has garnered both support and opposition from economists and experts. Advocates argue that tying Argentina's currency to the US dollar can provide stability, attract foreign investment, and foster economic growth.

However, dollarization could aggravate inflation, warn economists. They say that a shortage of foreign reserves might result in an unfavourable exchange rate. This will cause a sharp decline in real wages and place the burden on working-class citizens. The complexity of modern economies, the lessons from historical crises, and the possibility of heightening the existing crisis are raised by experts.

Challenges Ahead

Milei faces significant challenges in implementing dollarization. He lacks a majority in Argentina's congress, raising doubts about his ability to push through such a transformative policy. The process of dollarization requires Argentine banks to hold substantial reserves of US dollars to assist in the conversion of pesos. There is widespread skepticism about Argentine banks having the necessary dollar reserves. If the banks fall short, Argentina's central bank would require substantial US dollars to lend them. The International Monetary Fund could potentially serve as a source, but Argentina is already the IMF's largest debtor. They owe nearly \$31.1 billion.

The global economy carefully watches the unraveling of new economic measures in Argentina. This decision could have far-reaching effects outside the geographical borders. Kristalina Georgieva, the managing director of the IMF has engaged in discussions with Milei, recognizing the decisive policy actions required to address Argentina's economic challenges.

Chile Rejects Second Attempt for New Constitution, Prolonging Political Uncertainty

Chile faces continued political uncertainty as the nation rejected, for the second time in as many years, a proposed new constitution. With 99% of votes counted in Sunday's referendum, 56% of Chileans opposed the text, while 44% supported it. This outcome underscores the failure of the political system to channel social discontent into a new set of fundamental laws. The current constitution, dating back to the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship, will remain in place. While providing short-term certainty for market-friendly rules in one of Latin America's wealthiest nations, the result reflects a broader discontent with politics. Thousands had taken to the streets advocating for a new constitution, viewing it as a necessary step towards addressing issues of inequality and governance.

President Gabriel Boric's administration has pledged not to pursue a third attempt at a new charter, offering some reassurance for investors. However, the rejection also signals frustration and weariness with the constitutional process. Boric emphasized this in a televised speech and declared the closure of the constitutional process during his mandate. He urged political parties to focus on key legislation, such as pension and tax reforms. Political analysts view the result as a significant blow to the country's governance. Jennifer Pribble, a professor of political science at the University of Richmond, noted, *“It deals a devastating blow to the country's political class.”*

Chile's political parties are perceived as out-of-touch with large sections of society, struggling to effectively address citizen demands and provide a consensus democratic solution to national challenges. The proposed constitution, crafted by a right-leaning Constitutional Council, faced criticism for its divisiveness. Detractors argued that it would jeopardize limited abortion rights, strengthen the private sector's influence in

healthcare and education, and fall short of protecting the environment and worker's rights.

Supporters, on the other hand, believed it would fuel economic growth and address issues like clandestine migration and crime. Jose Antonio Kast, whose Partido Republicano was the largest party in the Constitutional Council, expressed disappointment, stating, *“We failed in our efforts to convince the Chilean people that it was a better charter than the one we have currently.”*

While Fitch Ratings Inc. reaffirmed Chile's sovereign credit rating last week, dismissing concerns about economic model changes, the rejection keeps the risks of social unrest alive. Analysts don't rule out another push for a new constitution in the future, possibly gaining momentum before the 2025 presidential election.

Last year, Chileans rejected a separate charter proposed largely by leftists and independents, criticizing its radical proposed changes. This included the elimination of the Senate and the creation of a parallel justice system for indigenous communities.

The process of drafting a new charter was initiated in response to widespread social unrest in 2019, starting with protests against increased subway fares and evolving into demands for fighting inequality, improving public services, and reforming the political system. Kenneth Bunker, a professor at Universidad San Sebastian in Santiago, expressed disappointment, stating, *“For anyone who thinks the country's stability and guarantees are going to return, I don't believe this will happen.”*

The rejection of a new constitution leaves Chile grappling with the same set of laws that many deemed problematic, prolonging the quest for a comprehensive solution to the nation's challenges.



Mohammed Malki
Chief Executive Officer at Total Care Saudi

Insuring Tomorrow: A Glimpse into the Future with Total Care Saudi

The healthcare industry, especially the risk and healthcare management sector, has witnessed transformative shifts over the years. How has Total Care Saudi adapted to these changes, and what's the vision for the next decade?

Our vision is centered around delivering top-notch customer service while maintaining and reduce the portfolio loss ratio. Additionally, we focus on digital transformation developing and

training of our national workforce for the upcoming phase.

In what ways is Total Care Saudi pushing the boundaries when it comes to offering innovative risk and healthcare management services? Are there any groundbreaking solutions in the pipeline?

Total Care Saudi is at the forefront of innovation in risk and healthcare management services. Leveraging artificial in-

telligence in our operations has allowed us to enhance efficiency and precision in various aspects of our services.

Our proactive approach to risk containment involves the development of advanced algorithms that can predict and mitigate potential risks before they escalate.

As for groundbreaking solutions, we continuously invest in research and development.

While we don't have specific details on upcoming releases, we're committed to exploring new technologies and methodologies to elevate our services further and stay ahead in the ever-evolving landscape of healthcare management.

Collaboration is often key in the healthcare sector. Can you shed light on some of the strategic partnerships that Total Care Saudi has embarked upon to enhance its service delivery?

Total Care Saudi has established several strategic partnerships to bolster its service delivery in the healthcare sector. These collaborations encompass a range of support services and artificial intelligence solutions, as well as a significant alliance with SMH for providing global healthcare solutions.

Through these partnerships, Total Care Saudi leverages the expertise and resources of its collaborators to enhance the quality and scope of its services, ultimately benefiting its clients and stakeholders in the healthcare and insurance industry. These collaborations serve as a testament to Total Care Saudi's commitment to innovation and excellence in healthcare management.

The potential of data-driven decision making in healthcare is immense. How is Total Care Saudi leveraging the power of data and analytics to improve patient outcomes and risk management?

Total Care Saudi recognizes the transformative potential of data-driven decision making in healthcare. Leveraging advanced

data analytics and artificial intelligence, we are able to derive meaningful insights from large datasets. These insights play a crucial role in enhancing patient outcomes and refining our risk management strategies.

By harnessing the power of data, we can identify trends, predict potential issues, and optimize treatment plans. This leads to more personalized and effective care for our patients. Moreover, data-driven risk management allows us to proactively address potential challenges, minimizing adverse events and ensuring a safer healthcare environment.

In addition to our focus on improving patient outcomes and risk management through data-driven decision making, we also place a strong emphasis on ensuring the profitability and satisfaction of our clients (insurance companies). This dual approach allows us to deliver high-quality healthcare services while also ensuring the financial stability and success of our partners in the insurance industry.

How has Total Care Saudi responded to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic? Were there any new services or innovations introduced in light of the changing healthcare landscape?

Total Care Saudi has responded to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic with agility and innovation. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, we swiftly implemented remote services to ensure continuity of care for our patients. Additionally, we provided accommodation for insured individuals in hotels at our

expense during quarantine periods, ensuring their well-being and comfort.

In response to the evolving healthcare landscape, we introduced a range of new services and innovations. This included the facilitation of air evacuations for patients in need of urgent medical attention, demonstrating our commitment to delivering timely and efficient care.

Furthermore, Total Care Saudi leveraged advanced technologies and data-driven approaches to optimize patient outcomes and risk management during this critical period. These initiatives reflect our dedication to adapting and innovating in order to meet the unique challenges presented by the pandemic.

Total Care Saudi emphasizes a comprehensive and integrated approach to healthcare management. How do you ensure a seamless collaboration between various healthcare providers and stakeholders for the benefit of the patient?

Total Care Saudi ensures a seamless collaboration between various healthcare providers and stakeholders through several key strategies:

Public Relations Teams: We have dedicated care coordination teams responsible for facilitating communication and collaboration among healthcare providers.

These teams work closely with hospitals, clinics, and specialists to ensure that each patient receives the necessary care and that all stakeholders are informed and aligned.

Regular Communication Channels: We establish regular communication channels, including meetings, conferences, and digital platforms, to facilitate discussions and updates between healthcare providers. This ensures that all parties involved are informed about the patient's progress and any changes in their treatment plan.

Performance Monitoring and Feedback: We closely monitor the performance of healthcare providers, track key performance indicators, and provide constructive feedback. This ensures accountability and helps in identifying areas for improvement in the collaborative process.

By implementing these strategies, Total Care Saudi aims to create a healthcare ecosystem where all providers and stakeholders work together cohesively, ultimately leading to improved patient outcomes and a higher quality of care.

▶ **With the rapid advent of digital technologies in the healthcare sector, how is Total Care Saudi positioning itself in the digital health revolution?**

Total Care Saudi is at the forefront of embracing the digital health revolution, leveraging advanced technologies to enhance healthcare delivery. Our approach includes several key initiatives:

AI and Predictive Analytics: Total Care Saudi harnesses the power of artificial intelligence and predictive analytics to derive valuable insights from healthcare data. This aids in proactive risk management, personalized

treatment plans, and optimizing healthcare outcomes.

Cybersecurity and Data Privacy: We prioritize the security and privacy of patient data in the digital realm. Robust cybersecurity measures are in place to safeguard against potential threats and breaches.

Collaboration with Tech Innovators: Total Care Saudi actively collaborates with technology partners and innovators to stay abreast of the latest advancements in digital health and insurance. This ensures that we can integrate cutting-edge solutions into our healthcare ecosystem.

Patient Education and Empowerment: We believe in educating patients about digital health tools and empowering them to take an active role in managing their own health. This includes providing resources and guidance on utilizing digital health solutions effectively.

By adopting these strategies, Total Care Saudi aims to not only keep pace with the digital transformation in healthcare but to lead the way in delivering high-quality, patient-centered care through innovative and technology-driven approaches.

▶ **The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been proactive in updating its healthcare policies and regulations. How does Total Care Saudi navigate this evolving regulatory landscape to ensure compliance while driving innovation?**

Total Care Saudi maintains compliance with evolving healthcare regulations in Saudi Arabia

through a dedicated regulatory affairs team, ongoing staff training, and proactive engagement with authorities. We conduct regular audits.

Our innovations are designed with strict adherence to legal frameworks, ensuring both compliance and progress in healthcare delivery. Legal counsel is also sought to ensure all initiatives align with regulations. This approach allows us to drive innovation while meeting regulatory standards.

▶ **Where do you see the future of risk and healthcare management services heading in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia over the next five years? What role does Total Care Saudi envision for itself?**

Over the next five years, the future of risk and healthcare management services in Saudi Arabia is poised for remarkable growth and transformation. With the influx of global partnerships, the establishment of a specialized insurance authority, and rapid technological advancements, the industry will experience unprecedented progress. Total Care Saudi envisions itself at the forefront of this evolution. We anticipate playing a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of risk and healthcare management services.

By heavily investing in artificial intelligence and prioritizing the development of our national workforce, we aim to lead the way in delivering innovative, high-quality healthcare solutions. Our commitment is to continue providing exceptional services while adapting to the dynamic changes in the industry.



Alaska Air Group Acquires Hawaiian Holdings in a \$1.9 Billion Deal

Alaska Air Group Inc. has made waves by announcing its strategic intent to acquire rival Hawaiian Holdings Inc. This cash and debt deal, valued at a substantial \$1.9 billion, marks a pivotal moment in the industry, challenging the regulatory landscape under the Biden administration that has shown a propensity for stringent stances on mergers.

This acquisition, at \$18 per share in cash, encompasses approximately \$900 million of Hawaiian's debt, presenting a significant premium compared to Hawaiian Holdings' recent closing share price of \$4.86. The move is not just a financial transaction; it's a lifeline for Hawaiian, which has grappled with a decline of over 52% in its stock value this year. Factors such as a sluggish return of tourism between Asia and Hawaii post-pandemic and intensified competition, especially from Southwest Airlines Co., have added to Hawaiian's challenges.

Despite the Justice Department's intensified scrutiny of corporate mergers and an ongoing antitrust challenge in the airline sector, Alaska Air Group has boldly proceeded with this acquisition. Currently, a federal antitrust lawsuit related to JetBlue Airways Corp.'s acquisition of Spirit Airlines Inc. is approaching resolution. Alaska's Chief Financial Officer, Shane

Tackett, has expressed confidence in the deal's pro-competitive and pro-consumer nature, highlighting the minimal overlap between Alaska and Hawaiian Airlines on only 12 routes, constituting a mere 3% of their total seats.

Under the terms of the acquisition, Alaska Air Group will become the parent holding company, allowing Alaska Airlines and Hawaiian Airlines to continue operating independently under their distinctive brands. This move is anticipated to optimize fares and introduce a level of complexity due to the integration of long-haul operations from Hawaii to U.S. cities and into Asia. While this might pose operational challenges, analysts suggest that the limited overlap between the two airlines could work in favour of regulatory approval.

At \$1.9 billion, the total cost of the deal is deemed financially manageable by Alaska Air Group. Tackett remarked, "We feel very good about the price. We are getting a market leadership position in a really attractive premium market in Hawaiian." With more than 50% of the Hawaiian market and an annual revenue of \$8 billion, Alaska aspires to establish a robust presence in this lucrative market.

Alaska Air Group's track record in acquisitions includes the successful bid for Virgin America Inc. in 2016,

a \$2.6 billion cash deal that outbid JetBlue. The acquisition of Hawaiian is expected to contribute to Alaska's earnings within two years of closing and generate annual run-rate savings of \$235 million. While the boards of both airlines have given their nod to the acquisition, the deal awaits approval from Hawaiian Holdings shareholders and regulatory bodies. The anticipated timeline for the deal's closure is within 12 to 18 months, contingent on securing these approvals.

This strategic move by Alaska Air Group underscores the dynamic landscape of the airline industry, where companies seek synergies through strategic alliances to navigate the challenges posed by the aftermath of the pandemic and shifting market conditions. The success of this acquisition will not only reshape the competitive landscape but will also be closely monitored in the context of evolving regulatory attitudes towards mergers and acquisitions in the sector.

As this development unfolds, it signals a new chapter for both Alaska and Hawaiian, setting the stage for an intriguing period of integration, competition, and potential industry-wide shifts. The aviation industry, known for its resilience and adaptability, is once again at the forefront of change, and stakeholders are keenly watching how this narrative unfolds in the months to come.

TikTok’s Strategic \$1.5 Billion Investment in Indonesia’s GoTo Group Signals a Bold Move into E-commerce

TikTok, the popular social media giant owned by ByteDance Ltd., has announced a substantial investment of \$1.5 billion in a joint venture with Indonesia’s GoTo Group. This strategic collaboration allows TikTok to regain control of its shopping app in Indonesia, its largest online retail market, following regulatory challenges.

The deal involves the integration of TikTok’s Indonesian TikTok Shop business with GoTo’s e-commerce unit, Tokopedia. TikTok will acquire a 75% stake in this combined venture, which will be responsible for overseeing the shopping features integrated into TikTok’s social media app in Indonesia.

What makes this agreement noteworthy is ByteDance’s unconventional approach of effectively taking over a prominent local online-commerce player in a significant overseas market. By partnering with GoTo and acquiring a majority stake in Tokopedia, TikTok aims to navigate regulatory complexities and resume its Indonesian operations after regulatory changes forced the suspension of its online retail service, just as it was gaining traction against competitors like Sea Ltd. and GoTo.

In response to the announcement, GoTo Group experienced a 5.6% decline in Jakarta as investors assessed the implication of TikTok gaining control of its e-commerce business. Conversely, PT Bank Jago, a top Indonesian digital lender in which GoTo holds a stake, observed an uptick of up to 7.9%. This collaboration is expected to have a ripple effect on various sectors, potentially enhancing payments and e-commerce transactions for platforms operated by Jago. The Indonesian government, which has

been proactive in safeguarding local enterprises, has signalled its approval for TikTok and GoTo’s new pact. Notably, Jakarta introduced regulations in September mandating the separation of payment services from content for social media players like TikTok.

TikTok’s move to invest in Tokopedia aligns with its broader strategy of diversifying revenue streams beyond its core social media service. TikTok Shop, the company’s fastest-growing feature, has become a key focus for ByteDance. Indonesia, with its population of 278 million, serves as a pivotal market for TikTok’s foray into online shopping, providing a potential blueprint for global expansion from the United States to Europe.

TikTok initiated its shopping feature in Indonesia in 2021, and its rapid success prompted an expansion into online retailing in other markets, including the United States. This year, TikTok has expressed its commitment to invest billions of dollars in Indonesia and the broader Southeast Asian region, underscoring the region’s strategic importance in its global expansion plans.

For GoTo, Indonesia’s largest internet company, the collaboration with TikTok represents both an opportunity and a challenge. While it aids a major online retail rival in continuing operations in the country, it also establishes GoTo as a formidable global social media partner. This alignment could potentially boost shopping and payment volumes for both companies. In a notable aspect of the agreements, GoTo will not be required to provide further funding for Tokopedia, and its 25% stake in the joint venture will not be diluted by additional funding from TikTok. This arrangement reflects a strategic decision by GoTo to align



with TikTok’s global ambitions without compromising its stake in Tokopedia.

Patrick Walujo, CEO of GoTo Group, has been actively steering the company towards profitability on an adjusted basis, aiming to demonstrate its long-term earnings potential by the end of the year. This includes a concerted effort to reduce losses through measures such as job cuts, promotional adjustments, and stringent expense controls.

The geopolitical landscape for TikTok has been challenging, with Indonesia being one of the first countries in Southeast Asia to impose restrictions on the platform. These restrictions compelled TikTok to separate its payment services from content, a move mirrored by nearby Malaysia, which is also considering regulations on TikTok and its e-commerce operations. TikTok faces global scrutiny and potential bans on national security grounds in the United States, Europe, and India.

This collaboration not only allows TikTok to navigate regulatory hurdles and resume its Indonesian operations but also positions GoTo as a key player in a global alliance. As both companies capitalize on synergies, this partnership could redefine the dynamics of e-commerce and social media integration, setting the stage for future collaborations in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

Warner Bros. Discovery and Paramount Global – A Potential Merger Shaking Up the Media Landscape

Warner Bros. Discovery and Paramount Global are reportedly in preliminary talks about a potential merger, a move that could redefine the media landscape. The discussions, which surfaced after a recent lunch meeting between CEOs David Zaslav and Bob Bakish in New York, signal a significant shift in the entertainment industry, aiming to create a formidable contender against streaming giants like Netflix and Disney+.



Both entities boast impressive portfolios, encompassing television, film, sports, and streaming services. Warner Bros. Discovery, a product of Discovery Inc’s acquisition of WarnerMedia from AT&T in April 2022, has an array of assets ranging from CNN, HBO, and TNT, to the iconic Warner Bros. Pictures table, including DC Extended Universe films and Harry Potter franchises.

On the other hand, Paramount Global, a merger of CBS and Viacom, brings to the table renowned film franchises such as Mission: Impossible, Transformers, and Star Trek, along

with a suite of networks like CBS, Comedy Central, and MTV.

The potential merger is not just a consolidation of assets but also a strategic move to navigate the evolving digital landscape. As streaming platforms continue to dominate consumer preferences, traditional media companies like Warner and Paramount are under pressure to adapt and compete effectively. By combining forces, both companies aim to leverage their Max and Paramount+ premium streaming services to create a compelling alternative to established players like Netflix and Disney+.

Financially, the merger presents a complex picture. While Paramount Global reported a long-term debt of \$15.6 billion as of Q3, considerably less than Warner Bros. Discovery’s \$43.5 billion, the latter boasts a higher market capitalization of \$28.4 billion compared to Paramount’s \$10.3 billion. These figures highlight the potential synergies and challenges that both companies must navigate to ensure a successful merger.

Beyond financial considerations, the merger would enable a seamless integration of complementary assets. Warner Bros. Discovery’s extensive cable lineup, including CNN, HBO, and Cartoon Network, could synergize effectively with Paramount’s networks like CBS, MTV, and Nickelodeon. Furthermore, a combined entity would possess a diversified content library, spanning from Warner Bros.’ DC Universe to Paramount’s Mission: Impossible and Star Trek franchises.

However, the merger talks come at a time of significant industry consolidation and technological disruption. Streaming giants like Netflix continue to expand their global footprint, amassing millions of subscribers worldwide.

According to Statista, Netflix added 5.9 million paid subscriptions between March and June 2023 alone, bringing its total subscriber base to a staggering 247.2 million globally. In contrast, Paramount Plus and Warner Bros. Discovery reported 63.4 million and 95 million subscribers, respectively, emphasizing the imperative for strategic partnerships to enhance competitiveness.

Despite the potential benefits, the merger’s success hinges on addressing regulatory hurdles, cultural integration, and strategic alignment. Moreover, other external factors, such as Shari Redstone’s discussions to sell her shares in NAI and Paramount’s consideration to lay off over 1,000 staffers in 2024, could influence the merger’s dynamics.

The reported talks about the merger signal a transformative moment in the media industry. As traditional players grapple with evolving consumer preferences and intensifying competition from streaming behemoths like Netflix and Disney+, strategic mergers offer a pathway to enhance scale, operational efficiencies, and content offerings. While challenges lie ahead, the potential synergy between Warner and Paramount underscores a shared vision to navigate the digital future collectively.

UAE Banks Pledge \$272 Billion in Sustainable Financing by 2030

The UAE Banks Federation, representing 56 banks in the country, recently made a groundbreaking commitment during the COP28 UN climate summit held in Dubai.

The federation pledged a substantial Dh1 trillion (\$272 billion) in sustainable financing by 2030, reflecting a resolute dedication to the UAE’s ambitious goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. This commitment, announced during a finance-themed day at COP28, serves as a significant milestone, demonstrating the banking sector’s pivotal role in steering sustainable finance and fostering green initiatives.

Setting the Stage at COP28

Abdulaziz Al Ghurair, Chairman of the UAE Banks Federation, took center stage to unveil this transformative commitment. He emphasized the role of COP28 as an empowering platform, providing an opportunity for the federation to unite and deliver on sustainable finance objectives. Al Ghurair sees the federation as a catalyst for action, inspiring and urging banking institutions to pledge their financial and strategic commitment.

The overarching aim is to propel the UAE towards the 2050 net-zero milestone, aligning seamlessly with the nation’s climate agenda. This commitment isn’t merely symbolic; it represents a proactive stance, showcasing the banking sector’s recognition of its responsibility in steering financial resources towards green, responsible, and sustainable solutions and technol-

ogies. The pledge comes at a crucial time when the global financial sector grapples with the imperative of addressing climate change through concrete actions.

Leading Banks at the Forefront

Eleven prominent UAE banks emerged as key players in this monumental commitment. Among them were major financial institutions such as First Abu Dhabi Bank, Mashreq Bank, Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank, Emirates NBD, Dubai Islamic Bank, RAK Bank, National Bank of Fujairah, and Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank.

The participation of these leading banks underlines the collaborative nature of the commitment, with each institution pledging to contribute to the Dh1 trillion sustainable financing goal. This financial commitment isn’t just a demonstration of environmental responsibility but also a strategic move by the banks. It aligns with the UAE government’s climate agenda and the broader Year of Sustainability, emphasizing the importance of forging a path that aligns finance with a greener future. The commitment sig-

nals a departure from conventional financial models, highlighting a paradigm shift towards sustainable finance as a core element of banking strategies.

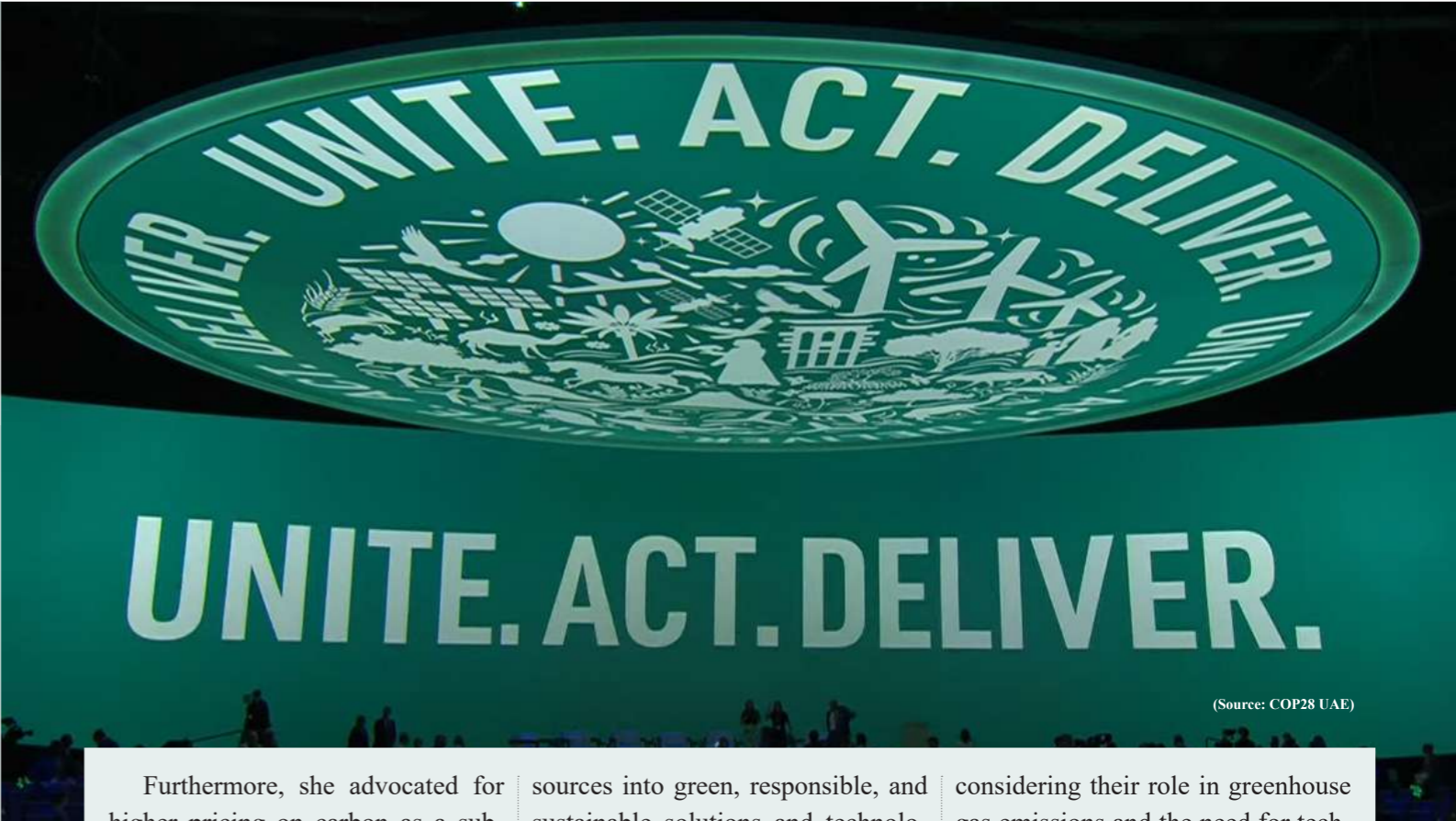
Addressing the Global Financing Gap at COP28

The announcement took place during COP28’s finance-themed day, where leaders from international financial institutions converged to address climate action and the critical role of sustainable finance. The event aimed to bridge the vast gap between available financial resources and the escalating need for support in the global fight against climate change.

IMF Chief Kristalina Georgieva played a central role in the discussions, calling on governments to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies, which amounted to a staggering \$7.1 trillion last year. Georgieva emphasized the need to build social protection for vulnerable populations affected by the removal of subsidies.



(Source: Firstpost)



(Source: COP28 UAE)

Furthermore, she advocated for higher pricing on carbon as a substantial incentive for decarbonization, urging countries to pledge more and take concrete actions.

The focus on financing during COP28 underscores the integral role of central banks globally. Ravi Menon, Managing Director of the Monetary Authority of Singapore, highlighted the need for central banks to ensure the resilience of financial systems to climate shocks. He stressed the importance of stress-testing balance sheets under different climate scenarios and planning for an orderly green transition.

UAE Banks as Global Trailblazers

The UAE Banks Federation’s Dh1 trillion commitment is not only a transformative step for the nation but also positions UAE banks as global trailblazers in sustainable finance. The move underscores the significant efforts not only in the UAE but globally, signalling a proactive approach to setting ambitious targets for redirecting financial re-

sources into green, responsible, and sustainable solutions and technologies. UAE Central Bank Governor Khaled Balama commended the commitment, highlighting its significance amid the challenges posed by climate change.

As the COP28 finance discussions stressed, the financial sector plays a pivotal role in fostering innovative solutions and ensuring resilience in the face of climate-related risks. The commitment is not isolated but part of a series of climate finance pledges made by the UAE during COP28. This aligns with the broader narrative of the summit, where nations and institutions come together to address the urgent need for climate action.

COP28 as a Catalyst for Change

The COP28 finance discussions emphasized the urgent need to direct substantial financing towards emerging economies and developing countries. IMF Chief Kristalina Georgieva stressed the critical importance of redirecting capital to these regions,

considering their role in greenhouse gas emissions and the need for technology and financing.

The UAE Banks Federation’s commitment during COP28 serves as a catalyst for change, setting a strong precedent for other global actors. Collaboration on this scale is pivotal in creating the necessary momentum to confront the challenges of climate change. The commitment not only meets the immediate needs of sustainable finance but also positions UAE banks as leaders in driving the global transition towards a greener and more sustainable future.

As the world grapples with the urgency of climate action, the commitment serves as a beacon, guiding the financial sector towards a future where sustainable finance is not just an option but a strategic imperative.

The COP28 summit, with its focus on finance, emerges as a pivotal moment, signalling a collective commitment to building a more sustainable and resilient global economy.

A Look at Brazil's Journey Towards Digital Currency and Financial Inclusion

Brazil is set to launch its forthcoming digital currency, named DREX, in 2024. DREX will be issued by the Central Bank of Brazil and is an extension of its real physical currency. Brazilians largely rely on trust while making purchases and a digital currency environment would help in automating the entire process. Citizens would have two accounts eventually, one with physical money and another with digital currency.

The Origin of DREX

The origin of DREX dates back to 2016 when Brazil introduced its agenda to digitize the country's economy. The m plan, led by the Central Bank, aims to modernize financial services, making them more accessible, affordable, and at the same time up-to-date. DREX thus not only brings forward a digital revolution in the country but also redefines the nature of financial transactions.

How does it work?

The functioning of DREX lies in the utilization of smart contracts, which is facilitated by blockchain technology. This not only records transactions but establishes the rules governing them. For instance, now people can conduct business transactions like buying a car with complete confidence, from payment to ownership, without much hassle.

DREX, with its reliance on automation, looks forward to eliminating the need for intermediaries, thus leading an era of efficient transactions, which seemed impossible before. DREX, a Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC), however, is not just a digital representation of physical money. It serves as a platform upon which businesses, including banks and fintech, can build a diverse array of prod-

ucts. Tokenization is another concept that is currently being tested that aims to represent real-world assets, such as houses and cars, as digital tokens on the blockchain. This transformative step is expected to streamline processes, reduce costs, and lead a new era of financial products.

Digital Currency as a way to achieve financial inclusion

The introduction of DREX will help in achieving financial inclusion to a large extent. With the success of Pix, Brazil's instant payments platform, and the rollout of Open Finance, DREX becomes the logical next step. A digital wallet, a prerequisite for DREX transactions, is not just a technological necessity but a tool for encouraging financial education. Brazil aims to have a future where engaging in financial transactions is as simple as using a mobile app, empowering individuals to navigate the financial landscape effortlessly. Even though the global trend stands in favor of Central Bank Digital Currencies, challenges still exist.

Brazil acknowledges the prevalence of physical currency in certain contexts and the need to balance technological advancements with the preferences of society. The ongoing surveys and tests mainly look forward to estimating the acceptance and readiness of DREX. The Brazilian authorities, however, remain optimistic, foreseeing a future where DREX gains popularity, driven by increasing applications and a growing acceptance of digital finance.

DREX helps in bringing a broader societal change. By incorporating DREX into benefit distribution, the Brazilian government could propel digital currency adoption to new heights. The transformative impact of DREX not only lies in its technologi-



cal prowess but also in its potential to democratize financial services. As Brazilians embrace digital assets, the democratization of credit and financing opportunities becomes more tangible.

DREX: The future of finance

DREX will emerge as an integral part of shaping the future of the financial landscape in Brazil. DREX could be seen as a fusion of technology and finance which will revolutionize the sector. This will bring forward not only a mere transition, but a commitment to inclusivity, efficiency, and innovation. DREX will also help in accelerating financial education. With a digital wallet as a gateway, individuals gain not only access to seamless transactions but also a gateway to understanding minute details and complexities of personal finance. Investing in crypto becomes as easy as making a payment, and the once-daunting world of traditional investments becomes navigable.

DREX becomes a catalyst for financial literacy, empowering individuals to make informed decisions in a rapidly evolving financial landscape. In the global context, Brazil's venture into CBDCs places it among the leaders of financial innovation. While over 130 countries explore digital currency projects, Brazil's approach stands out for its commitment to transparency, security, and financial inclusion. DREX becomes a case study for nations aspiring to leverage technology for societal progress, setting a benchmark for the responsible adoption of digital currencies.

نحو قطاع عقاري موثوق

A Trusted and Transparent Real Estate Sector

The National Real Estate Registration Services Company (Real Estate Registry - RER) is the exclusive operator of real estate registration activities in Saudi Arabia. The Company undertakes the task of establishing and maintaining the Real Estate Registry in Saudi Arabia using modern geospatial technologies to enhance trust and transparency in the real estate sector and achieve the goals of Saudi Vision 2030 in developing real estate wealth



The Cost-of-Living Crisis and How Ramen Noodles are Becoming a Lifeline

The cost-of-living crisis is more rampant now than ever, hurting the pockets of middle and lower-income families. With food prices shooting through the roof, a cheap and convenient alternative is the most viable option. So, it is not surprising to see sales of instant ramen skyrocketing and almost becoming a global food staple. The global craving for regular ramen has

been widespread for quite some time now, but instant ramen’s popularity is growing and leading to the second ramen boom. The Osaka-based World Instant Noodle Association gave rather surprising numbers. Consumers in more than 50 countries had a record 121.2 bn servings of instant noodles in 2022. Asian countries that have a long history of eating noodles, or coun-

tries that consume noodles as their staple diet top the list led by China, Hong Kong, and Indonesia. Vietnam and Japan are in the fourth and fifth position, but a new country that has no relation to noodles being in their staple diet bagged the third position and it’s India. This can be viewed as a sign of the food’s increasing popularity in countries where we do not closely associate with eating noodles.

The pandemic could be blamed for the initial rise in the consumption of instant ramen but according to data collected last year, the consumption has remained consistent and even increased after the restrictions were lifted and the world returned to normalcy. In Mexico, the demand for it increased by 17.2% in 2021, when the restrictions were tighter but still expanded by 11% in 2022. Quite remarkable numbers for a country where tacos and Quesadillas rule the food industry.

The United States too had its newfound love for instant ramen, mostly to get relief from the blazing food prices. “Middle-class consumers who did not eat instant noodles before are now incorporating them into their daily lives”, Nissin Foods, the Japanese noodle giant said, according to the reports of Nikkei.

Leveraging the Noodle Interest

The spiking sales of instant noodles have given new growth opportunities for the companies. Nissin and its rival Toyo Suisan announced their plans to begin the construction of production facilities in Mexico and the US by 2025. “The number of consumers who regularly eat instant noodles is going up, and we will increase our variety of flavours,” said Toyo Suisan to the Nikkei Business paper.

Nissin is planning to spend nearly \$228 million on broadening its presence in the United States. They plan on building a new plant in Carolina, adding to its existing fleet of plants in Pennsylvania and California.

“Nissin Foods has seen sustained sales growth year-over-year, especially over the last five years, driven by unprecedented demand for our products. As we developed the company’s

expansion plans, we determined early on that Greenville, South Carolina was the ideal location for our newest manufacturing facility, knowing it’s among the fastest-growing manufacturing cities in the country and that some other top brands are produced there”, said Micheal Prince Nissin Foods President and CEO.

Slurping History

Insutanto Ramen was invented by Momofuku Ando in 1958 as a way to provide ample food for Japan which was affected by the war. Food shortages led people to wait in long lines to get ramen. Amidst all this, Ando was experimenting and working on creating instant ramen, and in 1958, the world’s first instant noodles were born.

Ando’s chicken ramen became an instant hit and could be cooked in just under 3 minutes. The noodles were cooked, and then soaked in chicken soup, seasoned, and then deep-fried in palm oil. After one year of successful business, ‘chickin ramen’ started its journey around the world.

Now years later, they have become a global favorite with consumption increasing among the younger generation specifically. Ichiro Yamato, an instant ramen expert told The Guardian that the instant ramen boom happened during the postwar economic miracle, “when the workforce grew, and baby boomers started eating instant ramen and giving them to their children.”

But ramen was not untouched by the cost-of-living crisis, rather the price increased 20% during the last two years while some foods escaped the inflation in Japan. However, packet noodles and cup noodles are still cheaper options for many even

if their nutritional benefits remain in question.

In 2022, the Japanese population had 6 billion servings of instant noodles, according to the Japan Instant Food Industry Association. These numbers are proof of continuing trends since cup noodles arrived in 1971. Since then, thousands of new flavours have been stocked in convenience stores. Several other brands emerged but only a few survived in a rather competitive market. The Cup Noodle Museum in Osaka has nearly 900,000 annual visitors and people can make their version of the company’s signature cup noodles, which have sold more than 50 billion units since its launch around 50 years back, reports The Guardian.

What’s the secret recipe?

For instant noodles to compete with the growing market competition, they must be innovative not just in their looks but also in flavours. From the cheapest snack cum mini-meal option favourite for college students to having a global fan base across all age groups, instant ramen companies have stepped up their game by focusing on local culinary flavours and tastes.

They have a halal version for Muslim countries, a spicy Chettinad curry flavour for India, a nam pla fish sauce flavour in Thailand, and even seasonal flavours like pumpkin spice in the United States. The companies are also bringing innovative packing methods that make consumers nostalgic. Consumer trends are also shifting to more range of thicker instant noodles. Instant ramen nevertheless has come a long way since its inception and will continue to satisfy the tastebuds without hurting pockets.



No Time to Lose: The Impact of Climate Change on Food Security in the Middle East

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has long faced complex challenges, including water scarcity, political unrest, and overwhelming economic disparities. Climate change and its impact has added an ominous layer to the region’s woes, particularly concerning food security. Even a cursory look at the intersection of climate change and food security across the region will make it amply evident that urgent actions are needed to address these complications. There can be no more sleepwalking- the time for action is now.

A Brief Historical Context

The MENA region has been a hotspot for geopolitical conflicts and civil unrest, with some wounds still festering from the uprisings of 2011. The catalyst for these popular uprisings were the 2008-2009 and 2010-2011 food price crises, which aggravated pre-existing vexing economic and political grievances. These events underscored the vulnerability of the region’s food supply chains and the dire consequences of food insecurity.

A glancing blow to this already fragile situation was struck when Russia began its “special military operation” or SOM in Ukraine. This de facto war will continue, and neither military tacticians nor diplomats see

it ending soon. This particular conflict has disrupted longstanding global food supply chains and exacerbated food insecurity across some of the world’s poorest nations. The MENA region heavily depends on supplies from both Ukraine and Russia, particularly for wheat—a staple food.

Ukraine and Russia together account for 27% and 53% of the world’s trade in wheat and sunflower oil and seeds, respectively. Consequently, over 50% of wheat imports in countries like Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen come from these two sources, rising to 75% and over 80% in Egypt, respectively.

The Consequences of Food Insecurity

The protraction of the Ukraine war has the potential to exacerbate food price inflation in MENA markets, deepen poverty, and raise the risks of social unrest. Even before the pandemic, poverty rates were significant in several MENA countries. While there is a paucity of data when it comes to the MENA region, some facts are very plain.

The poverty headcount ratio (percentage of a population living below a nation’s poverty line) was 15.7% in Jordan (2018), 32.5% in Egypt (2017), while it stood at 15.2% in Tunisia (2015). Sudan and Yemen had

even higher poverty rates at 44% and 48.6%, respectively, in 2014. Yemen, in particular, is experiencing a humanitarian catastrophe, with at least two-thirds of its population affected. Meanwhile, Syria, scarred by conflict since 2011, faces a humanitarian emergency, the scale of which can’t be determined with certainty because official poverty data is unavailable.

Climate Change as a Threat Multiplier

A report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) serves as a reminder of the urgency of addressing climate change. For MENA, the most arid region on Earth, the hydrological impacts of climate change are disastrous. Increasing aridity in North Africa and droughts in West Asia pose unthinkable challenges. Many parts of the region, including Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, and Jordan, are among the world’s driest areas, even within their transboundary river basins.

Moreover, global warming brings unprecedented heatwaves and sea-level rise, which threaten fertile lands crucial for agriculture—a pillar of food security in countries like Egypt, Sudan, Morocco, and Iraq. The impacts of climate change are not a distant concern but a clear and present reality, amplifying existing vulnerabilities. When the Ukrainian War is factored

in, it’s a massive double whammy for the region.

The Ramifications of the Ukraine War

The ongoing Ukraine war has further exacerbated food security conditions in MENA by disrupting global food supply chains. During a United Nations (UN) Security Council session addressing the Ukraine humanitarian crisis, UN Chief António Guterres warned of the diversion of attention and funds from MENA’s existing hotspots, particularly Yemen and Syria. António Guterres also stressed upon how these cascading challenges could “plant the seeds for political instability and unrest around the globe”.

This diversion threatens to worsen the humanitarian crises in these regions. At the same time, global food prices remain high, despite a slight decline in recent months. This situation compounds the food inflation crisis in MENA countries that are already grappling with currency devaluation, public debt, and high levels of inflation. Lebanon and Syria, in particular, face triple-digit food inflation at 138% and 105%, respectively. Iran, Turkey, and Egypt report annual food inflation rates exceeding 61%, making essential food items increasingly unaffordable for families.

The MENA region’s heavy reliance on food imports exposes it to fluctuations in global food prices, which have been hit hard by the Ukraine conflict and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Compounding these issues are deepening climate crises, characterized by prolonged droughts, heatwaves, wildfires, flooding, erratic rainfall, and landslides.

An Urgent & Unequivocal Need for Action

Governments, international organizations, and donor countries must take immediate action to address food security across the MENA region. This includes hikes in funds for humanitarian assistance, supporting local farmers to boost food production, and - perhaps most importantly - addressing the underlying causes of conflict and local instability.

Investing in agriculture is crucial, given the region’s heavy dependence on food imports. These actions will almost certainly not provide immediate relief from rising food prices, but they are vital to building resilience in the face of ongoing and future challenges. Speaking of challenges, there is a pressing need for coordinated action at local, national, regional and international levels. Some of the possible solutions include:

Promoting peace and stability:

Ending conflicts and restoring peace are essential prerequisites for achieving food security in the Middle East. This requires political dialogue, humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and development efforts that involve all stakeholders and respect human rights.

Enhancing water management:

Improving water efficiency and productivity in agriculture, industry and domestic use is key to reducing water stress and ensuring water security in the Middle East. This requires investing in water-saving technologies, infrastructure and institutions, as well as promoting water conservation, recycling and reuse practices.

Adopting sustainable agriculture:

Promoting sustainable agricultural practices that conserve natural resources, enhance soil health and biodiversity, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change is vital to ensuring food se-

curity in the Middle East. This requires supporting smallholder farmers, diversifying crops and livestock systems, integrating agroforestry and agroecology approaches, applying organic farming methods and using renewable energy sources.

Strengthening food systems:

Building resilient food systems that can cope with shocks and stresses caused by climate change or other factors is crucial to ensuring food security in a region where income levels are dipping fast. This requires enhancing food storage, processing and distribution capacities, improving food quality and safety standards, expanding local production and consumption networks, supporting urban agriculture initiatives and reducing food loss and waste.

The Clock is Ticking

The intersection of climate change, geopolitical conflicts, and disrupted food supply chains has left the MENA region facing an nigh-unprecedented food security crisis. These issues were raised at the just-concluded COP28 as well. Urgent and coordinated efforts are required to alleviate the compounded stressors facing the region’s populations, particularly the most vulnerable subsets.

As the world grapples with the ramifications of the Ukraine war and the ongoing impacts of climate change, it is imperative that global leaders prioritize MENA’s food security. The consequences of inaction have far-reaching implications for regional stability and global security, besides obvious local infractions. Addressing the complex mesh of challenges in MENA demands a unified, comprehensive, and immediate response from the international community- emphasis on immediate.

Tea’s Timeless Triumph – How a British Staple Became a Silent Saviour

In the annals of history, tea has played multifaceted roles – from being a sought-after global commodity to a comforting elixir for many. It is a beverage steeped in tradition and ceremony and has etched its mark across various epochs, sometimes even as a symbol of political discord.

Yet, economist Francisca Antman’s groundbreaking study illuminates an unprecedented dimension: the life-preserving role of tea during 18th-century England’s tumultuous landscape.

Unraveling the Paradox

Historical data presents a perplexing conundrum that has long intrigued

scholars. In the span between 1761 and 1834, England experienced a noteworthy decline in its annual mortality rate – from 28 to 25 per 1,000 individuals. This reduction unfolded against a sobering backdrop: stagnant wages and an arguably unimproved quality of life. The industrial revolution, while transformative, ushered in overcrowded urban centers marred by inadequate sanitation.

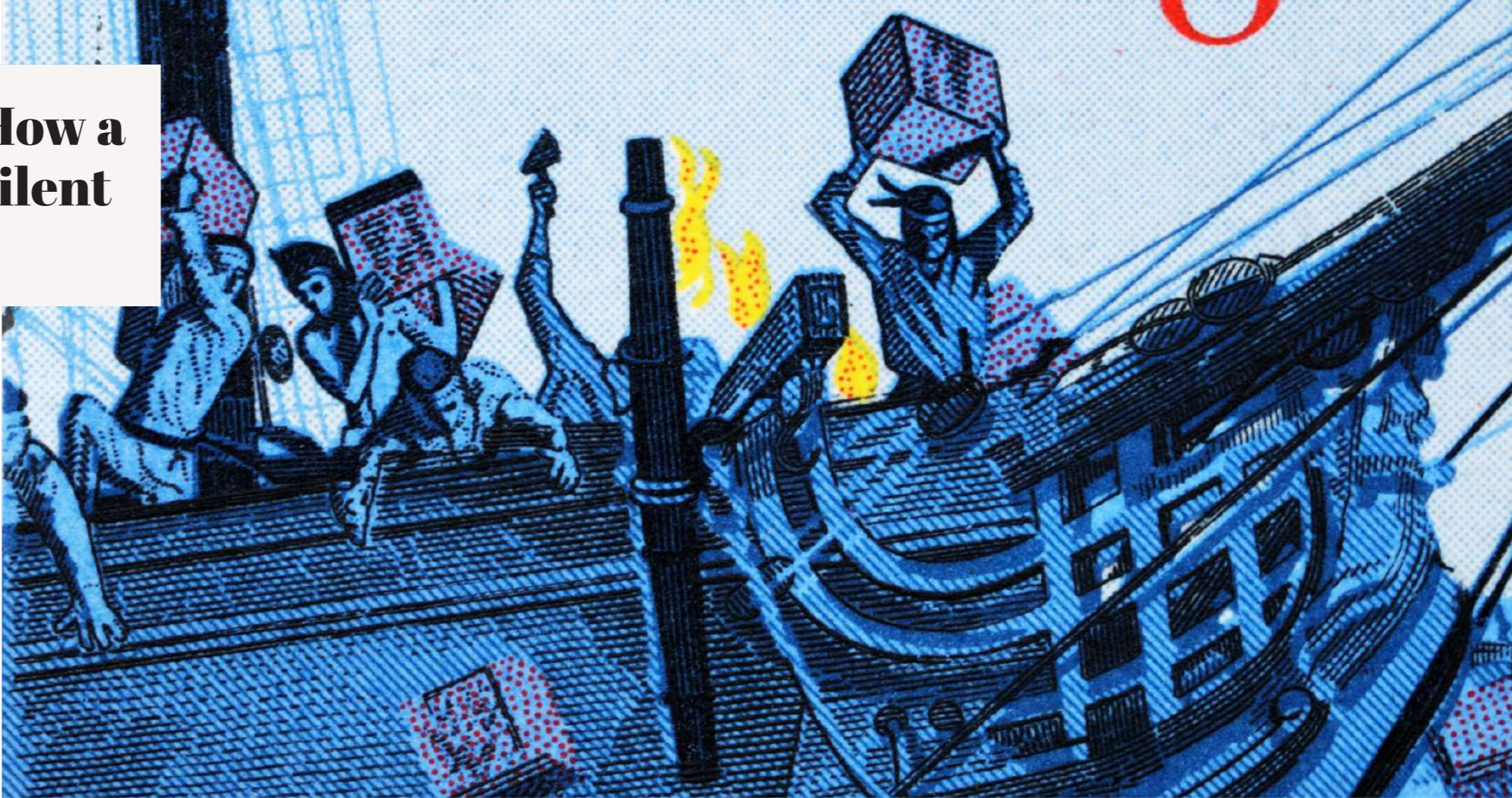
Antman frames this historical anomaly with a probing question, “How did mortality rates decline amidst such challenging societal conditions?” Her quest for answers unveils a surprising protagonist – the humble cup of tea.



Tea as a Sanitary Saviour

Contrary to popular belief about the health benefits of tea’s antioxidants, Antman’s research posits a more pragmatic explanation. Boiling water to brew tea became a common practice, inadvertently safeguarding individuals from water-borne diseases like dysentery, commonly termed “flux” during that era.

“Given the unsanitary conditions of the time, water was a potential killer,” Antman observes. The widespread adoption of tea consumption might have inadvertently promoted a safer, boiled-water culture, mitigating the spread of deadly pathogens.



Quantifying the Impact

Antman employs a meticulous methodology, leveraging data from over 400 parishes across England. By evaluating geographical water sources and quality, she correlates the rise of tea consumption post the 1785 tax reduction on tea with a notable decline in mortality rates.

Her findings are compelling. Parishes with initially poorer water quality witnessed a more significant reduction in death rates post-1785, attributing an 18% higher decline compared to areas with better water sources. This statistical correlation underscores the potential life-saving impact of the widespread adoption of tea-drinking habits.

Economic Incentives and Behavioural Impact

Historically, tea offered multiple economic advantages. It was cost-ef-

fective compared to beer, and its consumption was amplified post the 1784 tax reduction, making it accessible even to the impoverished. Alan Macfarlane, a tea historian, notes that by the end of the 18th century, even the economically disadvantaged consumed tea twice daily.

Antman’s study illuminates how economic incentives, combined with a pre-existing cultural practice, could inadvertently revolutionize public health outcomes. “The simplicity of integrating tea into daily routines demonstrates that sometimes, behavioural changes grounded in existing habits can significantly impact public health,” Antman observes.

A Testament to the Unforeseen Benefits of Cultural Practices

While modern interventions like advanced sanitation systems and pub-

lic health campaigns remain invaluable, Antman’s research underscores a timeless lesson. The humble cup of tea, beyond its cultural and economic significance, emerged as an unsung hero in 18th-century England, potentially saving countless lives through the simple act of boiling water.

As businesses and policymakers navigate contemporary health challenges, Antman’s study serves as a poignant reminder: sometimes, solutions to complex problems lie hidden within our everyday practices, waiting to be discovered and harnessed for broader societal benefit.

So, the next time you savour a cup of tea, remember its historic significance – a symbol not just of comfort, but of unintended yet transformative public health impact.

Decoding Vibecession: The Unseen Force Behind End-of-Year Layoffs

Termination Letter

The twinkling lights, festive melodies, and joyful gatherings that mark the holiday season bring warmth and cheer to many. However, behind this façade of merriment lies a harsh reality for some workers – holiday layoffs. This unsettling trend has garnered attention recently, as a slew of companies across diverse sectors have announced significant job cuts, leaving many to wonder about the underlying motives.

A Season of Surprises

December witnessed a series of high-profile layoffs that have sent ripples across various industries. Online marketplace Etsy made headlines by announcing a reduction of 11% of its workforce, amounting to over 200 jobs.

Similarly, financial giant State Street revealed plans to lay off 1,500 employees, while renowned toy maker Hasbro reported cuts exceeding 1,000 jobs.

These announcements followed closely on the heels of Spotify's decision to cut 1,500 jobs and global publisher Condé Nast reducing its workforce by 5%.

Across the world in the UK, the trend continued with pharmaceutical companies, banks, automakers, and consulting firms all announcing sweeping layoffs as the year drew to a close. Such a widespread phenomenon prompts the question: Why are companies choosing this season to let employees go?

The Vibecession Theory

Nicholas Bloom, an esteemed economics professor at Stanford University, offers a compelling perspective. He introduces the concept of a "Vibecession," a term coined to describe layoffs driven more by perceptions than actual economic data.

According to Bloom, these end-of-year mass layoffs are predicated on the assumption that an economic downturn is imminent, despite compelling evidence suggesting economic stability.

"While many indicators point

towards a robust economy, companies seem to be acting on perceived economic anxieties," Bloom observes. The disconnect between actual economic strength and perceived weakness contributes to what Bloom describes as companies' urgency to bolster end-of-year profits, even if it means sacrificing workforce stability.

Contrary to the Vibecession theory, Shirley Lin, a professor at Brooklyn Law School, attributes these layoffs to a more traditional business practice.

She argues that companies frequently align their financial calendars with the calendar year, making end-of-year layoffs a strategic move to enhance financial performance metrics reported to shareholders and potential investors.

"The timing of these layoffs aligns with companies' efforts to present an enhanced financial outlook," Lin states.

By implementing cost-cutting measures, including layoffs, companies can improve their balance sheets and circumvent year-end bonus payouts, thereby appealing to stakeholders focused on financial metrics.

The Changing Landscape: Workers' Rights and Public Perception

While end-of-year layoffs may be a longstanding business practice, the current labour landscape and growing emphasis on workers' rights have thrust these actions into the spotlight. Lin emphasizes the potential repercussions of such layoffs on company morale and

public perception, especially at a time when worker productivity in the U.S. has surged without corresponding wage growth.

"Companies risk damaging their public image and undermining employee morale by executing layoffs during the holiday season," Lin warns.

As public sentiment increasingly favours equitable workplace policies and recognizes workers' contributions, companies may face heightened scrutiny and backlash for prioritizing short-term financial gains over long-term stakeholder interests.

The holiday season's juxtaposition of joyous celebrations and disheartening layoffs underscores the complexities of corporate decision-making. Whether driven by genuine economic concerns, traditional financial strategies, or evolving public sentiment, companies must navigate a delicate balance between short-term financial objectives and long-term stakeholder relationships.

As the debate surrounding holiday layoffs continues to unfold, one thing remains clear: the scrutiny surrounding these decisions may compel companies to reconsider their strategies, prioritizing holistic approaches that align with both financial imperatives and ethical considerations.

Only time will tell if the 2023 holiday season marks a turning point in how companies approach workforce management amidst economic uncertainties and evolving expectations.

A Taste of Luxury – The Complexities of Olive Oil’s Rising Price Tag

Imagine a world where the vibrant hues of Mediterranean cuisine are muted, where the rich flavours that once defined a culture now come at an exorbitant price. This isn’t a dystopian future – it’s the unfolding reality of the olive oil crisis gripping the Mediterranean. From family-owned groves to high-end restaurants, the repercussions are shaking the very foundations of a millennia-old tradition. For centuries, olive oil has woven its way through the fabric of Mediterranean culture, capturing the essence of health, culinary artistry, and tradition. Yet, the recent spike in its prices, reaching unprecedented levels, has left consumers, producers, and chefs grappling with an unsettling reality. The once-affordable kitchen staple is now akin to liquid gold, reflecting a complex interplay of environmental challenges, market dynamics, and cultural significance.

Historical Context and Present Crisis

Historically, olive oil has been lauded not merely as a cooking ingredient but as a symbol of vitality and well-being. Ancient civilizations revered it; modern science extols its health benefits. However, as the International Monetary Fund reports a staggering 117% year-on-year price increase, questions arise: Why has this essential Mediterranean commodity become prohibitively expensive?

Spain, the world’s largest producer, along with Italy and Greece, has long dominated the olive oil landscape. Their temperate climates fostered ideal conditions for olive cultivation. However, recent years have seen a confluence of adverse events, from heatwaves to droughts, decimat-

ing production. For instance, Spain’s scorching summers and parched soils led to a 40% decline in EU production last year, creating a ripple effect on global prices.

Environmental Challenges and Production Decline

The Mediterranean, known for its azure waters and verdant landscapes, now faces a grim reality. Rising temperatures, attributed to climate change, have disrupted traditional agricultural cycles. For farmers like Rafael Alonso Barrau in Almeria, Spain, who represents the seventh generation in his family’s olive groves, these changes are palpable. “Last year, we witnessed a mere 45% yield, significantly below the 20-year average,” Barrau laments. Italy’s struggle with *Xylella fastidiosa*, a devastating bacterium decimating olive groves, exacerbates the crisis. Originating from a Costa Rican plant imported in 2008, this pathogen has ravaged an estimated 21 million trees, further crippling production capacity.

Economic Repercussions

The confluence of environmental degradation and supply chain disruptions has precipitated a cascade of economic challenges, reverberating across global markets. Mintec, a leading raw material market forecaster, reports a staggering 115% surge in Spanish olive oil prices between September 2022 and September 2023.

Beyond environmental factors, market dynamics have propelled prices skyward. Elevated interest rates and escalating fertilizer costs have eroded farmers’ margins. Additionally, Turkey’s decision to curtail bulk olive oil exports to stabilize domestic prices has inadvertently inflated global rates.

This complex interplay has engendered a series of illicit activities where thefts, like the \$500,000 olive oil heist in Spain’s Cordoba province, become increasingly common.

When supply shrinks, demand soars – and so does the dark side of capitalism. Cordoba’s half-million-dollar heist isn’t an isolated incident but a symptom of a larger malaise. Cartels are exploiting the crisis, creating a volatile underground market that further destabilizes economies and inflates prices. European consumers, particularly, grapple with these escalating costs. For chefs like Matteo D’Elia of Umami restaurant in Badalucco, Italy, olive oil transcends culinary utility. “It’s the foundation of our culinary heritage,” D’Elia asserts, echoing sentiments shared across the continent. However, as prices surge, the very essence of Mediterranean cuisine hangs in the balance.

Culinary Adaptations

While the crisis threatens to erode culinary traditions, it has also catalyzed innovative adaptations among chefs and home cooks. Poppy Kourkoutaki, an executive chef in Crete, emphasized the importance of leveraging traditional cooking techniques and alternative ingredients.

“By focusing on slow-simmering processes and utilizing bone broth,” she asserts, “we can preserve the essence of Mediterranean cuisine even in the absence of olive oil.” Similarly, Nicola Olivieri, an award-winning baker from Arzignano, Italy, explores alternative fats like pork fat for baking, highlighting the resilience and adaptability inherent in Mediterranean gastronomy.

Cultural Significance

Beyond its culinary utility, olive oil serves as a linchpin of Mediterranean cultural identity. Despite these challenges, producers like Rossella Boeri, a fifth-generation olive oil producer from Badalucco, remain undeterred. “We’ve weathered droughts and climate extremes for generations,” Boeri affirms. As industry stakeholders adapt and innovate, the future remains uncertain yet hopeful. For consumers worldwide, olive oil’s cultural, culinary, and health significance ensures its enduring appeal. As Boeri aptly states, “Our commitment to producing exceptional olive oil remains unwavering, reflecting a legacy dating back to 1877.”

Pathways to Sustainability

Amid the dire landscape, sustainable solutions offer a glimmer of hope. Forward-thinking producers like Rossella Boeri advocate for water conservation, innovative irrigation techniques, and sustainable farming practices. However, individual initiatives necessitate broader systemic changes, encompassing governmental policies, scientific research, and consumer education. The crisis demands a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach, emphasizing environmental stewardship, economic resilience, and cultural preservation.

The olive oil crisis transcends geographical boundaries, resonating with global implications that extend far beyond culinary circles. As the Mediterranean’s “liquid gold” hangs precariously in the balance, the imperative for collective action becomes increasingly evident. Addressing this multifaceted crisis demands a comprehensive strategy, integrating environmental sustainability, economic stability, and cultural preservation. In doing so, we not only safeguard a cherished commodity but also preserve the rich tapestry of traditions, cultures, and identities woven into the fabric of the Mediterranean landscape.





THE ANNUAL GLOBAL ECONOMICS

AWARDS - 2022 CEREMONY AT DUBAI



Navigating New Horizons: A Deep Dive Into the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor

In the highlight of this year’s G20 summit held in New Delhi, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) project was announced, promising to reshape the global trade order. This initiative, part of the US-led Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, involves major players like India, the US, Saudi Arabia, UAE, the European Union, Italy, France, and Germany.

This ambitious multimodal network, spanning oceans, rail, and roads, aspires to create a new channel for trade, connecting Mumbai to Europe and has captured the imagination of global leaders, economists, and industry experts. But what is it really? And how viable is it? In this piece, we will thoroughly explore this project, both what has been announced and what has been left unsaid.

A Counter to Belt and Road, But Not Explicitly

The corridor, announced during the G20 Leaders’ Summit in New Delhi, includes a diverse coalition of nations, such as India, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, France, Germany, Italy, the European Union, and the United States.

This initiative reflects a clear departure from previous unilateral endeavours, presenting a united front with a single objective — to boost trade and strengthen the global supply chain. While some analysts see IMEC as a hard counter to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the official policy document makes no explicit mention of BRI.

Instead, IMEC positions itself as a joint initiative of both developed and developing economies, aiming to create “a robust alternative trade route.” IMEC aims to secure energy and resource supplies, stabilising India’s energy sector and supporting its fast-growing economy.

The project’s supporters argue that IMEC’s collaborative approach distinguishes it from the country-centric nature of BRI, and that it provides an alternative for countries looking to balance ties between China and the West. Importantly, IMEC bypasses Chinese ally and Indian arch-enemy Pakistan, breaking its veto over India’s overland connectivity to the West, a historical hurdle for India.

The Corridor Blueprint

The corridor is designed to include a multimodal network connecting Mumbai to Piraeus through ocean and rail routes, with road connections in Europe. The project is seen as a strategic move to provide an alternative to the existing ocean route through the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, Red Sea, Suez Canal, and the Mediterranean Sea.

IMEC consists of two proposed main corridors: the Eastern Corridor, which links India to the Arabian Gulf, and the Northern Corridor, which connects the Gulf to Europe. The corridor would integrate diverse modes of transportation, including rail, road, and sea routes, and importantly, includes critical infrastructure elements such as an electricity cable, a hydrogen pipeline, and a high-speed data cable.

Key ports to be connected include Mundra, Kandla, and Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust in India, along with ports in the Middle East (Fujairah, Jebel Ali, Abu Dhabi, Dammam, Ras Al Khair) and Europe (Piraeus, Messina, Marseille).

This proposed route would be a complete paradigm shift, providing a much-needed alternative to the existing ocean route that traverses the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, Red Sea, Suez Canal, and the Mediterranean Sea.

The traditional journey from Mumbai to Piraeus spans approximately 7,637 km, taking around 15-16 days of shipping time. In contrast, the IMEC scenario aims to reduce this distance to approximately 6,600 km, with a total travel time of 10-11 days, potentially saving 5-6 transit days for every container.

Geopolitical, Economic, and Environmental Considerations

As with any other such undertaking, IMEC grapples with the delicate balance between time and cost. While the corridor promises faster transit times, it also introduces new complexities that could impact shipping costs.

The reliance on a combination of ocean and rail transport, along with two additional transshipment points, introduces variables that need more consideration. A conservative estimate suggests that the transport cost via the IMEC route could be higher by almost 35%, excluding the costs of transshipment at key points.



Beyond the economic realm, IMEC’s geopolitical significance also looms large. Some experts view IMEC as a strategic countermove to challenges posed by the Suez Canal, a critical bottleneck in global shipping. The Suez Canal, while a vital maritime artery, has faced disruptions, such as the high-profile blockage in 2021.

However, the environmental implications of the corridor also come into focus. IMEC’s reliance on rail transport, while reducing transit distances, introduces concerns about increased carbon emissions. Studies suggest that rail transport can be less environmentally friendly than maritime shipping. The proposed route substitutes approximately 3,700 km of maritime shipping with 2,600 km of rail corridor. However, as a counterbalance, the planned shift to rail-powered nuclear plants could offer environmental benefits in the long run.

Challenges on the Horizon

Despite all the potential benefits,

IMEC faces significant challenges, including logistical and connectivity issues, missing rail links, coordination among multiple countries, potential opposition from existing transport routes, and the need for substantial financing.

The success of this ambitious project hinges on the collaborative efforts of several nations, the ability to balance time and cost considerations, and a nuanced understanding of the geopolitical situation, things which can always be counted on. IMEC joins the ranks of past economic corridors aiming to spur development and connectivity. However, history shows us that the success of such projects is contingent on various factors.

Past economic corridors, like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), have faced hurdles such as political instability and regional conflicts.

The lack of clear implementation details, funding timelines, and final project details adds an air of uncertainty to the whole affair as well. As the vision of IMEC takes form, it could further run into both anticipated and unforeseen challenges. The recent Israel-Hamas conflict introduces a geopolitical variable that adds an element of uncertainty to the project’s future. Turkey, feeling bypassed, has proposed its own project, claiming contested waters along the proposed IMEC route.

IMEC has the potential to promote intra-regional connectivity, easing political tensions in the Arabian peninsula and becoming an “infrastructure for peace.” The project also strengthens integration across continents for the US to maintain influence in the face of China’s expanding reach. The challenges are formidable, but so too are the potential rewards — a faster flow of goods, lower supply chain risks, and an alternative to existing trade routes.

A Tripartite Defence Pact: Japan, Britain, and Italy Unite for Advanced Jet Fighter Development

In a strategic move to fortify their defence capabilities against emerging threats from China, Russia, and North Korea, the defence ministers of Japan, Britain, and Italy have inked an agreement to collaborate on the development of a cutting-edge jet fighter. This collaborative effort, known as the Global Combat Air Program, aims to create a new combat aircraft slated for deployment in 2035. The move underscores a global shift in defence alliances and a shared commitment to bolstering security in a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape.

The tripartite agreement builds upon last year's decision to amalgamate individual plans – Japan's Mitsubishi F-X and Britain's Tempest – creating a unified initiative to replace the retiring F-2s and bring forth a next-generation combat aircraft. With Japan intensifying its military capabilities and seeking to counter China's assertiveness, the collaborative venture becomes pivotal in addressing the complexities of a challenging security environment.

Defence Minister Minoru Kihara emphasized the indispensability of co-developing a high-performance fighter aircraft, stating that such collaboration is crucial for securing air superiority and ensuring effective deterrence. As global security challenges become increasingly interconnected, the partnership signals a departure from a unilateral defence approach, acknowledging that no single nation can entirely defend itself in the current scenario.

Britain's Defence Minister Grant Shapps echoed this sentiment, em-

phasizing that the project is not just about developing advanced technology but also fostering a new era of prosperity. The collaboration, spanning thousands of personnel across the three nations, is poised to strengthen collective security amid evident risks and challenges stretching from Europe to the Indo-Pacific region.

Under the Global Combat Air Program, a joint entity named the GCAP International Government Organization will oversee the private-sector joint venture. Notable participants in this venture include Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy, Britain's BAE Systems PLC, and Italy's Leonardo. This international organization, headquartered in Britain, will be led by a Japanese official, while the joint venture will be under the guidance of an Italian representative. This rotational leadership structure reflects the collaborative essence of the project. While the collaborative effort is poised to usher in a new era of defence technology, its success hinges on Japan's ability to ease its postwar ban on exporting jointly developed lethal weapons to third countries. This restriction, rooted in Japan's pacifist Constitution, currently prohibits the export of the jointly developed fighter jet. While Japan is working towards amending this policy, the process has faced delays.

Shapps expressed confidence that Japan would approve the necessary changes promptly, acknowledging the necessity of updating principles to facilitate the project's progression. The success of the joint venture lies in navigating regulatory frameworks and ensuring a delicate balance be-

tween speed of deployment and meticulous testing and governance. Japan's proactive engagement in this multinational collaboration marks a significant departure from its historical stance and showcases its commitment to adapting to evolving security dynamics. The defence panel's ongoing discussions on easing military sales restrictions signal a broader shift in Japan's approach, reflecting an understanding of its vital role in global security.

The collaborative defence initiative comes against the backdrop of Britain's carrier strike group announcing its visit to Japan in 2025, marking the first such visit in four years. This underscores the strengthening ties between Japan and Britain, with a shared commitment to enhancing security in the Indo-Pacific region. The carrier strike group's presence aligns with the broader narrative of a collective effort to safeguard against threats in a region witnessing heightened geopolitical tensions.

The trilateral agreement signifies a pivotal moment in the global defence landscape. Japan, Britain, and Italy are navigating uncharted territory by embarking on a collaborative venture that transcends geopolitical boundaries. As they pool resources, share expertise, and collectively address security challenges, the Global Combat Air Program sets a precedent for future multinational collaborations in defence. The success of this venture will not only shape the future of defence technology but also redefine the dynamics of global security alliances in an era of evolving threats.

Green Shipping Corridors: The Future of Sustainable Shipping

In the major port city of Rotterdam, a transformative new initiative is taking off - one that will redefine the future of maritime transportation.

The concept of green shipping corridors, born out of global environmental promises and the need to decarbonise the shipping industry, is fast gaining momentum, with over 21 projects underway since the Clydebank Declaration at COP26 in 2021.

Green shipping corridors are specific trade routes designed to facilitate zero-emission shipping through public and private intervention. The goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by the use of zero or low-emission fuels along said routes. These corridors have emerged as a response to the need for sustainable alternatives.

Rotterdam and Singapore Leading the Way

Europe's largest port, Rotterdam, has joined forces with Singapore to create one of the world's first long-distance green shipping corridors. The initiative involves creating routes where cargo ships exclusively use zero or low-emission fuels like green ammonia and methanol. These alternative fuels, produced using renewable energy, are becoming key in the quest to reduce carbon emissions in the maritime sector.

Boudewijn Siemons, the interim CEO of the Port of Rotterdam Au-

thority, explained the practicality of this approach. "It's a pragmatic approach to carbon reduction in shipping. We have to get started somewhere, and you cannot get started by implementing zero-emission shipping as a total solution everywhere in the world."

Global Projects and Expansion

In September of this year, the green corridor vision became a reality when the container ship "Laura Maersk" sailed between Singapore and Rotterdam powered by methanol. This marked a major milestone, having a 65% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions compared to traditional fossil fuels.

The momentum gained at COP26, and the subsequent announcement at COP28 in the United Arab Emirates indicate a growing dedication to green corridors. Countries like Canada, Korea, Japan, the Caribbean countries, and the United States are set to establish new corridors, a collective effort to achieve net-zero emissions in the shipping industry by 2050.

While the vision of green shipping corridors is promising, challenges exist. The maritime industry faces the monumental task of transitioning to alternative fuels, with only 0.6% of cargo ships worldwide currently running on such fuels. However, high-profile demand from industry giants like Amazon and initiatives by cargo firms like North Sea Container Line and Hoegh Autoliners signal a

broader shift towards greener shipping.

The Road Ahead: Collaboration and Innovation

International collaboration is key to overcoming these challenges and accelerating the adoption of green corridors. The Global Maritime Forum's recommendations include heavy involvement of key stakeholders, closing the fuel cost gap through national subsidy policies, and focusing on new technology and processes for gradual carbon reduction.

Ports, the crucial players in this transition, are investing in infrastructure and digitalisation to support green corridors. Rotterdam and Gothenburg have signed a deal to establish a green corridor between them, setting a framework for cooperation to incentivise the use of alternative fuels.

As green corridors are promoted, with the goal of universal adoption by 2050, the year 2024 is poised to be a real breakthrough. Clarity on fuels, commercial arrangements, and government support will be instrumental.

Success hinges on more such efforts, swift government measures, and the willingness of the broader shipping ecosystem to embrace change. As ships sail along these corridors, powered by renewable energy, they carry the hopes of a greener, cleaner future for the global shipping industry.

Mubadala Energy Announces Significant Gas Discovery Offshore Indonesia

In a significant development that underscores the expanding horizons of energy exploration, Mubadala Energy, headquartered in Abu Dhabi, has confirmed a major gas discovery in Indonesia. The breakthrough emanates from the Layaran-1 Exploration well, strategically located approximately 100 kilometers offshore North Sumatra in the South Andaman region.

The exploration has yielded promising results, hinting at a colossal potential for over 6 trillion cubic feet (TCF) of gas-in-place. Mubadala Energy, acting as the operator of the South Andaman Gross Split Production Sharing (PSC), marked a pivotal milestone by drilling its inaugural deep-water well, reaching an impressive depth of 4,208 meters in waters spanning 1,207 meters.

Detailed analysis and evaluations have revealed an extensive gas column, spanning more than 230 meters within the Oligocene sandstone reservoir. Mubadala Energy elaborated in its official statement, noting that comprehensive data acquisition techniques – including wireline operations, coring, sampling, and a production test (DST) – were meticulously executed.

Notably, the well demonstrated an impressive flow rate, exceeding 30 million standard cubic feet per day (mmscf/d) with commendable gas quality.

Boasting an 80% working interest in South Andaman, Mubadala Energy solidifies its position as the largest net acreage holder in this promising region. Commenting on the groundbreaking discovery, Mansoor Mohamed Al Hamed, CEO of Mubadala Energy, emphasized its strategic significance. He stated, “This achievement not only amplifies our commitment to fortifying our gas portfolio but also bolsters Indonesia’s and Southeast Asia’s energy security landscape.

Furthermore, Al Hamed articulated that the Layaran-1 discovery would catalyze future growth trajectories, providing a robust foundation for upcoming exploration initiatives slated for 2024.

This triumph follows closely on the heels of another noteworthy achievement for Mubadala Energy in the Andaman area – specifically, the Timpan-1 in Andaman-II. This series of accomplishments gains further momentum when considering Mubadala Energy’s prior success at Cengkih-1 in SK320, Malaysia. Collectively, these discoveries augment the company’s contingent volume, setting the stage for sustained growth and expansion throughout the region.

As energy markets continue to evolve, developments of this magnitude not only elevate corporate profiles but also contribute significantly to regional energy security and sustainability.



Saudi Arabia's Development Funds for Vietnam: Strengthening Ties

In 2021, Saudi Ambassador Saud Al-Suwailem expressed Saudi Arabia's willingness to cooperate and provide resources through the SFD to promote future cooperation, investment, and trade relationships with Vietnam. Saudi Arabia has now once again reaffirmed its commitment. The Saudi Fund for Development (SFD) played a crucial role in fostering this economic cooperation and plans to continue, as evidenced by the recent meetings between the SFD CEO and the leaders of Cambodia and Vietnam.

The two countries explored avenues of cooperation on various development projects across multiple sectors. The discussions focused on enhancing collaboration in areas such as rural infrastructure, human resource development, and healthcare—a testament to Saudi Arabia's dedication to addressing economic challenges faced by its Southeast Asian partners.

The SFD has invested over \$164 million in projects and programs, contributing significantly to Vietnam's social development and economic prosperity. Noteworthy initiatives include those related to rural infrastructure, human resources, and healthcare in provinces experiencing economic strains.

The SFD's commitment aligns with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, a strategic

roadmap for the country's economic diversification and sustainable development. The fund's investments in Cambodia's infrastructure and agricultural development emphasise the Kingdom's dedication to south-south collaboration and fostering sustainable growth in emerging economies.

Vietnam's Business with Saudi Arabia is Booming

The discussions with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and other leaders focused on consolidating political-diplomatic relations, increasing bilateral trade, and identifying specific projects for cooperation. The commitment to building a cooperation roadmap and celebrating the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2024 reflects the shared desire for a long-term partnership.

The signing of five cooperation documents in justice, diplomacy, crime prevention and control, tourism, and trade promotion solidifies the legal and regulatory framework for future collaboration. Saudi Arabia inaugurated a vocational college expansion project in Vietnam's northern province of Ha Nam. This project, funded by the SFD with over \$9 million, aims to construct and equip educational buildings to serve approximately 3,000 students annually.

Key areas of interest for cooperation

include Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030" Strategy, which aligns with Vietnam's own developmental priorities such as the green economy, innovation, high technology, and renewable energy. Vietnam encouraged Saudi Arabia's investment funds to inject capital into these fields, fostering sustainable growth and mutual benefit.

The government statement also revealed that Aramco is keen on exploring investment opportunities in Vietnam, particularly in the petrochemical and refinery sectors. Business leaders suggested a meeting between Aramco and officials from Vietnam's state oil firm, Petrovietnam, to discuss the specifics of these potential investment projects.

Role of Vietnam in ASEAN-GCC Relations

Beyond bilateral engagements, the recent ASEAN-GCC Summit marked another milestone in the relationship between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Leaders from both regions gathered to strengthen cooperation in various sectors, emphasising the importance of mutual benefit and equal collaboration.

The visit included meetings with leaders from Laos, Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Singapore, fo-

cusing on key areas such as economic connectivity, transportation infrastructure projects, and tourism cooperation. The visit to the GCC Secretariat Headquarters and the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation with the GCC Secretariat furthered Vietnam's commitment to bridging ASEAN-GCC relations.

Key areas of focus included politics-security, economics, culture-social, and development cooperation. Trade, investment, supply chain assurance, connectivity, maritime cooperation, energy security, and climate change response were highlighted as priority areas for collaboration. The summit affirmed the commitment to building trust, respecting sovereignty, and collectively addressing regional and global challenges.

Vietnam actively contributed to the success of the summit, emphasising the deep historical connections between Southeast Asia and the Gulf region. The leaders highlighted the need for dynamic adaptation in the face of global changes and called for stronger cooperation to achieve a breakthrough in regional and global collaboration.

A Shared Vision for Mutual Growth

In conclusion, Saudi Arabia's development funds for Vietnam and the broader collaboration between ASEAN and GCC reflect a shared striving for mutual growth and prosperity. As Vietnam and Saudi Arabia explore new avenues of collaboration and celebrate diplomatic milestones, the foundations for a robust and enduring partnership are being laid. The development funds serve not only as a diplomatic engagement but as a catalyst for deeper economic ties, paving the way for a future of shared success and prosperity between the two nations.

Tensions Rise as Angola Departs OPEC Amidst Production Quota Disputes

In a move that underscores the evolving dynamics within the global oil industry, Angola has announced its departure from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The decision, revealed after a cabinet meeting led by President Joao Lourenco, has sent ripples through the energy markets and highlighted the strains among oil-producing nations.

Angola's decision to exit OPEC comes as no surprise, given its simmering discontent with the cartel's leadership, particularly Saudi Arabia. Last June, Saudi Arabia, wielding its influence as the de facto leader of OPEC, implemented a controversial strategy to adjust oil output quotas. This move disproportionately impacted Angola and Nigeria, while favouring an increase for the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Helima Croft, head of global commodities at RBC Capital Markets, elucidated Angola's long-standing grievances, stating, "Angola never reconciled to the deal that enabled the U.A.E. to increase for 2024 at the expense of the underperforming African producers." Such sentiments reflect Angola's recurrent dissatisfaction, punctuated by multiple walkouts from OPEC meetings in recent years.

Angola's oil production has faced a downward trajectory, plummeting nearly 40% over the past eight years. The country's ageing oil fields have failed to attract significant investment from international oil companies, diminishing its attractiveness as a viable investment destination. This decline

mirrors similar challenges faced by Nigeria, further complicating the economic landscape for African oil producers.

Saudi Oil Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman's efforts to align OPEC members' production ceilings with actual capacity have been met with resistance, particularly from Angola. From President Lourenco's perspective, accepting lower quotas would deter the much-needed investment, thereby rendering Angola's continued membership in OPEC counterproductive. Diamantino de Azevedo, Angola's Minister of Minerals, succinctly encapsulated the nation's stance: "We realized that right now Angola does not gain anything by keeping in the organization." This sentiment was further exacerbated when consultants hired by Saudi Arabia recommended a reduced daily quota of 1.11 million barrels for Angola, down approximately 25% from its previous allocation.

While Angola's departure may not immediately fracture OPEC, it does illuminate the challenges faced by the cartel. Despite efforts to stabilize oil prices through production restraints, OPEC finds itself grappling with surging output from non-member countries, notably the United States. This precarious balance underscores the complexity of managing a diverse coalition of oil-producing nations, each with its own economic imperatives.

Robert McNally, founder of Rapidan Energy Group, contextualized Angola's exit within broader discontent among OPEC members: "Angola's

departure does reflect disgruntlement by other members of the group about carrying a quota they feel constrains their growth." Such sentiments could portend future fissures within OPEC, especially among nations reliant on oil revenues to sustain their economies.

Upon Angola's announcement, oil prices experienced a brief 2% decline before stabilizing, underscoring market concerns about OPEC's cohesion. Despite this immediate reaction, analysts like Giovanni Staunovo, a UBS strategist, downplayed the long-term supply implications, noting that Angola's declining production necessitates higher investment for any meaningful output increase. OPEC's recent decision to extend voluntary oil output reductions until the end of Q1 2024 reflects ongoing apprehensions about global fuel demand. Nevertheless, the cartel remains cautiously optimistic, maintaining its oil demand growth forecast for 2023 and 2024. Factors such as resilient global GDP growth and improving economic conditions in China could bolster crude demand, providing a glimmer of hope amid the evolving geopolitical and economic landscape.

Angola's exit from OPEC marks a pivotal moment in the annals of global oil politics, signalling broader discontent among member nations grappling with production constraints and economic realities. As OPEC navigates these turbulent waters, the repercussions of Angola's decision will reverberate through energy markets, influencing investment strategies geopolitical alliances, and the future trajectory of global oil prices.

Dubai-Based Airline, Emirates, Orders Jets Worth Over USD 50 Billion

Emirates, a Dubai-based carrier, placed an order of long-range flights worth over USD 52 billion to Boeing Co. aircraft at the Dubai Airshow. Such a huge order is placed amidst bounce back from the coronavirus pandemic, rising aviation fuel, and unstable regional security due to Israel's war with Hamas.

Emirates, the biggest airliner in the Middle East, ordered 95 planes, and its sister airline FlyDubai ordered 30 wide-bodied planes from the US manufacturer Boeing. The largest order from Emirates worth over USD 52 billion comprises an order of 55 Boeing 777-9s, 35 777-8s, and five 787 Dreamliners. They left European Airbus hanging out dry for their similar A350 jets.

Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, chairman of Emirates and FlyDubai, said that these orders reflect the huge investments that Dubai is willing to make for the future of aviation. As per his saying, it is expected that Boeing will deliver the 777-9s in 2025 and the 777-8s in 2030. FlyDubai, an Emirates sister company offering budget services, has ordered 30 Boeing 787-9s at the cost of USD 63 billion (231 billion dirhams). These are wide-bodied planes with larger capacities beneficial for expanding services to newer routes.

SunExpress, a Turkish-German budget carrier, signed their largest-ever order for 45 Boeing 737 MAX aircraft for over USD 5 billion at list price when normally such orders are placed at a discount. This consists of 28 737-8s and 17 737-10s with the option to purchase up to 90 planes. Boeing's share price increased 4.4% at the NYSE. Shares also rose because of a Bloomberg report that stated talks between US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping for unfreezing the Chinese 737 purchases.

Other deals

Riyadh Air, a newcomer in the industry, is competing with the leading regional carrier, Emirates. Its CEO, Tony Douglas, said that they will be placing a new order for narrow-body jets in a few weeks. Latvia-based airBaltic has ordered 30 A220-300 planes from Boeing's European counterpart, Airbus, which was left out by Emirates.

They have plans to run 100 planes by the end of this decade with purchase rights for more than 20 aircraft. Royal Jordanian ordered 4 Boeing 787 Dreamliners to expand its fleet of 787-9 to six. EgyptAir leased 18 737 MAX instead of ordering. The Paris Air Show held in June was a major success in terms of record deals.

The Indian low-cost carrier Indigo placed an order for 500 Airbus

A320-family planes, registering the biggest order for a civil aircraft. Emirates now has a pending order book for more than 295 planes. This order book consists of 205 777X planes for which the airline has placed the order for 202 GE9X engines to power the massive fleet. Thales, a French technology group, has signed a contract to provide entertainment systems for the 777X flights.

The first edition of the Dubai Airshow, where Emirates has been profitable since the pandemic. It reported a loss of USD 5.5 billion in FY 2020-21, majorly because of halting flights. Later on, in FY 2021-22, the losses decreased to just USD 1.1 billion, thanks to the reopening of economies. Last week, Emirates posted a record net profit of AED 10.1 billion (USD 2.7 billion), a staggering 138% increase since the previous year.

According to the International Air Transport Association, air traffic has reached a level of 97% of pre-covid levels. The Middle Eastern airlines witnessed an increase of 26.6% in the September traffic on a YoY basis. These Gulf aircraft carriers cater to pivotal East-West routes in global traffic. Tim Clark, President of Emirates, told Bloomberg to keep an eye on this space in terms of purchases from Airbus and Boeing. The airline is also hiring new pilots and crew members to operate the new aircraft.





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Saudi Arabia’s Ambitious Vision: Transforming Into a Global Entertainment Hub

In a seismic shift from its traditional reliance on oil, Saudi Arabia, is on a mission to position itself as a global entertainment hub, investing heavily in sports, movies, and other such sectors.

Spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s Vision 2030, the ambitious plan aims not only to diversify the kingdom’s economy but also to present a more progressive and dynamic image to the world.

Saudi Arabia’s entertainment industry has become a focal point of investment, with the government providing plenty of support. The goal is clear – to create over 100,000 jobs and contribute \$23 billion, constituting 3% of GDP, by 2030.

The government has allocated a whopping \$64 billion for the industry’s expansion. With over 11,000 en-

tertainment permits issued since the implementation of a new licensing system in August 2019, the country has seen a massive surge in events, concerts, and cultural activities.

Cinematic Revolution

The ban on cinema until 2017 is now a distant memory as Saudi Arabia aims to become a major player in the global film industry. Notable initiatives include the Red Sea Film Festival, which attracts international stars and signals the country’s new openness to contemporary cinematic experiences.

Top stars like Gal Gadot, Priyanka Chopra, and Leonardo DiCaprio graced the festival’s red carpet. The government has also introduced tax rebates for film productions, providing up to 40% cashback for those featuring Saudi talent and culture.



Collaboration with the Indian film industry, Bollywood has especially emerged as a strategic move, with Saudi Minister of Culture Prince Badr bin Abdullah engaging with Indian film industry luminaries.

The lofty goal of having 2,600 theatres by 2030 shows Saudi Arabia’s determination to become a cinematic powerhouse, and Bollywood is serving as a crucial partner.

Sporting Ambitions

Beyond the silver screen, Saudi Arabia is aggressively venturing into the sports industry, aiming to host major global events and attract star athletes.

The Crown Prince’s brainchild, the 2030 Vision, views sports as a means to diversify the economy, generate employment, and engage the country’s young population.

High-profile acquisitions of foot-

ball stars like Neymar and Cristiano Ronaldo for local clubs are already making a mark in global sports.

Saudi Arabia’s investment in hosting events like WWE, international boxing, golf, tennis, horse racing, and the Dakar Rally, along with acquiring shares in major sports franchises, further boosts its sports-centric strategy.

Gaming and eSports

In a bid to capture the burgeoning gaming market, Saudi Arabia has strategically invested large sums in eSports.

The creation of Savvy Gaming Group, the acquisition of ESL Gaming and FACEIT, and the launch of the Ignite initiative are all part of this project to become a global gaming hub. Gaming consumption is projected to reach \$6.8 billion by 2030, signalling the immense potential for Saudi Arabia in

the digital entertainment landscape.

Challenges and Future Prospects

While Saudi Arabia’s entertainment ambitions are gaining momentum, challenges persist. The diversification of the economy, job creation, and balancing social reforms with the expectations of the youth pose big challenges for the leadership.

Whether Saudi Arabia can successfully balance tradition with modernity and navigate the fast-moving landscape of global entertainment remains to be seen.

Nevertheless, the kingdom’s strategic investments in sports, movies, and gaming underscore a broader vision that extends beyond economic diversification. They also signify a renaissance that is reshaping perceptions of Saudi Arabia on the world stage.



AIUla's Cultural Renaissance: RCU and Centre Pompidou Forge Artistic Legacy

In a testament to the growing global collaborations in the realm of art and culture, the Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) has officially inked an executive program agreement with the renowned Centre Pompidou in Paris. This strategic alliance comes as a precursor to the establishment of a ground-breaking contemporary art museum in AlUla, slated to grace the cultural landscape in 2027.

The signing, which took place in Paris, underscores the commitment of both entities to formalize, strengthen, and expand their collaboration. The collaboration is set to extend beyond the boundaries of conventional partnerships, fostering knowledge-sharing and reciprocity in sectors related to art, culture, science, and heritage.

This development builds upon the memorandum of understanding inked between RCU and Centre Pompidou in March. The primary objective outlined in this initial agreement was the development of a world-class contemporary art museum in AlUla, a project unfolding in defined phases leading up to its grand opening in 2027.

RCU, in its pursuit of this ambitious venture, has achieved significant milestones. Among these is the appointment of Lina Gotmeh as the architect tasked with bringing to life a new cultural epicenter for the ancient oasis city of AlUla and the wider region in northwest Saudi Arabia.

Gotmeh, recognized for her exceptional blend of creativity and sustainability, particularly showcased in the acclaimed 2023 Serpentine Pavilion in London, brings a conscientious vision to the design of the museum inspired by the rich heritage of AlUla.

Distinguished by its carbon-efficient design, seamlessly merging with AlUla's oasis, the museum aspires to set new benchmarks in sustainable architecture.

It not only seeks to be an architectural marvel but also a catalyst for urban regeneration and environmental renewal. Beyond its physical presence, the museum aims to engage with the community through a diverse calendar of workshops, school programs, and more.

At its core, the museum aspires to be a hub for cultural and artistic expression, offering a platform for critical thinking in contemporary art. The regional and international collection it will house is poised to showcase artists' comprehensive production and unique research. The museum's legacy-building initiatives encompass art residencies, exhibitions, commissions, and publications, creating an ecosystem that positions it as a world-class institution.

The new executive program agreement, beyond formalizing the partnership, sets the stage for an enriched collaboration. It offers a strategic framework encompassing clear priorities, proposals, and collaborative activities to be pursued over the next four years.

The program facilitates the ongoing exchange, acquisition, loan, and display of artworks and artefacts between RCU and Centre Pompidou. Additionally, it promotes various scientific and cultural initiatives rooted in the sharing of unique items from each partner's collection.

Centre Pompidou's extensive experience and expertise become pivotal in this collaboration, especially in creating strategies to attract international visitors, hosting major cultural events, and advocating for audience development. These elements align seamlessly with RCU's overarching goal of transforming AlUla into the world's largest living museum and a global hub for cultural and heritage tourism.

Nora Al-Dabal, the Arts and Creative Planning Director at RCU remarked on the signing of the executive program agreement, stating,

"The signing of the executive program agreement marks a new phase in our mutually beneficial partnership that is helping to define successful cross-cultural collaborations between AlUla and our colleagues at one of France's leading institutions."

She highlighted the significance of establishing a roadmap for growth

that covers key areas of cooperation in diverse sectors related to culture, heritage, and art.

The partnership is not just about the sharing of knowledge and expertise but offers an opportunity for colleagues from Paris and AlUla to collaborate closely in crucial fields related to museology.

The partnership between RCU and Centre Pompidou exemplifies the transformative potential of cross-cultural collaborations in the realm of art and culture. It is not merely about the establishment of a contemporary art museum but a broader initiative to create a dynamic cultural exchange that transcends geographical boundaries.

As the collaboration unfolds, it is poised to contribute not only to the cultural landscape of AlUla but also to the global discourse on the role of

art in fostering understanding, appreciation, and collaboration among diverse communities. The museum's commitment to sustainability, community engagement, and the elevation of contemporary art places it at the forefront of a new era in cultural institutions.

The partnership between RCU and Centre Pompidou is a testament to the transformative power of cultural collaborations. It goes beyond the conventional boundaries of museum partnerships, signalling a new era of cross-cultural exchange and shared commitment to the preservation and promotion of art, culture, and heritage.

As AlUla prepares to welcome a groundbreaking contemporary art museum, the world watches with anticipation, recognizing the potential of this collaboration to shape the future of cultural institutions and foster a global community united by the love of art.





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