

Knowledge Summit in Dubai shows way to navigate pitfalls of Fourth Industrial Revolution

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Dubai

Arab countries can play a big role in the Fourth Industrial Revolution but to participate governments need to show the will to rise to the challenges of the digital age.

This affirming note was struck by Jordanian Prime Minister Hani al-Mulki during opening remarks at the Knowledge Summit 2017 in Dubai on the theme of "Decision-making in the Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution." "The Fourth Industrial Revolution stands out because it includes all people, all societies and governments, unlike the previous revolutions, which were limited to certain specific sectors," Mulki said.

"Arab governments must work to develop their operations to suit the changes that this revolution brings and to channel them to serve Arab societies."

The Arab world was among the early drivers of the scientific age in philosophy, mathematics, astronomy and medicine but fell behind during the industrial revolutions that followed.

Mulki said improving education was the key to benefit from Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies.

"We shouldn't be afraid. We must develop our capabilities and humanise the technology," he said. "We cannot let what happened in the previous revolutions happen again... without any contribution from our end. The UAE has made great strides in that regard and its successes are a source of pride for all the countries of the region."

The summit – the fourth edition of this annual event – was hosted by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation (MBRF) and brought together leading figures from Arab governments, the United Nations, researchers and academics to deliberate on the opportunities posed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The summit covered artificial intelligence, big data, cyber-security,



A focus on the future. (From L-R) Chief Technical Adviser of the Arab Knowledge Project Hany Torky, UNDP Assistant Secretary-General Michael O'Neill and MBRF CEO Jamal bin Huwaireb at the Knowledge Summit in Dubai.

nanotechnology, gene editing, human organ printing, block chain, media and publishing and fake news. Debates focused on how countries in the region could take advantage of breakthrough technologies to transform themselves into knowledge societies.

Among announcements at the Knowledge Summit was MBRF beginning the "Literacy in the Arab World" initiative to combat and eradicate illiteracy in the region.

The Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Awards went to the Saudi-based MiSK Foundation, Mitsubishi Research Institute Chairman Hiroshi Komiyama and Wendy Kopp, founder of Teach for America and CEO/Co-founder of Teach for All. The award seeks to raise awareness of the importance of knowledge and to recognise most notable efforts and achievements of individuals and institutions to promote knowledge-centric societies.

Arab governments were urged to develop their operations to suit the changes brought by the digital revolution.

The results of the first Global Knowledge Index, an initiative by MBRF in collaboration with UN Development Programme (UNDP) covering more than 130 countries, were announced at the summit. Switzerland, Singapore and Finland took the top three spots with the United Arab Emirates leading the Middle East region at 25th.

The index is based on a combination of higher education; pre-university education; technical/vocational training and continued education; information and communication technology; scientific research and innovation; and economics in addition to a general indicator of enabling environments.

The index considers 133 variables covering vital sectors in the country, such as enrolment, graduation and dropout rates in schools; literacy; unemployment; life expectancy at birth; e-government; political stability; regulatory and legal frameworks; patents; private-sector indicators; quality and availability of human resources among other criteria.

MBRF CEO Jamal bin Huwaireb said all governments could benefit from the data. He recalled the UAE's journey to almost full lit-

eracy, stressing that, though there were many reasons for the gap between the Arabs and the rest of the world, at the heart of it was lack of data.

"Through the Knowledge Index, we can address the problem of sector-specific spending. We want to prove that the seven sectors are complementary and should actually be treated as one, by which we can reduce the gap," Huwaireb said.

Michael O'Neill, UNDP assistant secretary-general, expressed excitement about the Knowledge Project and the Global Knowledge Index, emphasising the importance of data. "We need data to initiate policies for sustainable development," he said.

O'Neill said that collaboration between the United Nations and the UAE led to initiatives such as the Arab Knowledge Index, Arab Reading Index and the Knowledge Portal – Knowledge4All. "The next stage in our partnership is the [memorandum of understanding] that was signed with MBRF to combat illiteracy," he said.

N.P. Krishna Kumar is an Arab Weekly contributor in Dubai.

Jordan seeking to woo Japanese investors

Roufan Nahhas

Amman

Jordan and Japan are seeking to consolidate their diplomatic relations by expanding economic cooperation and facilitating mutual investments through the Japanese-Jordanian Investment Initiative.

The initiative, which principally aims to support Japanese companies expand business to Jordan, was in response to growing Japanese investors' interest in taking advantage of Jordan's political and economic stability.

Jordan is tenth in the region in the ease of conducting business in the "Doing Business 2018: Reforming to Create Jobs" report published by the World Bank.

"Our aim is to find and create opportunities for Japanese investors who are seeking a stable environment. Since the Jordanian market is not big enough, Japanese companies can utilise Jordan as a business hub for the Middle East and North Africa market," said Kazuya Nakayama, president of the initiative.

"The role of the initiative is to promote business between Jordan and Japan and when we say business, we mean both ways: from Japan to Jordan and vice versa."

Nakayama, who visited Jordan to explore areas that might be of

an interest to Japanese companies such as Dead Sea products, gaming and animation, said "there are lots of opportunities for both countries."

"Jordan has been making steady progress towards economic liberalisation while aiming to nurture internationally competitive industries and this is an excellent development," Nakayama said.

There are 304 Japanese-affiliated companies operating in the United Arab Emirates, compared to 21 in Jordan, the Japanese official said, stressing: "We need a different strategy for Jordan from that in the UAE."

The Japanese-Jordanian Investment Initiative aims mainly to encourage Japanese investors to expand their business to Jordan.

Nakayama argued that Jordan enjoys several key characteristics, including natural resources, highly qualified, educated and well-trained human resources and advanced infrastructure in various fields, making it a favourable partner for joint projects.

"I think the advantage of Jordan is its people who know very well the MENA market and my mes-

sage to the Japanese companies is why you don't work with Jordanian companies to get into that market," he added.

A Jordan-Japan business forum was organised by the Jordan Investment Commission and the Japanese-Jordanian Investment Initiative on the sidelines of an official visit by Jordanian King Abdullah II to Tokyo in October 2016.

The forum included bilateral meetings between Jordanian and Japanese business leaders in the information technology, animation, games industry, cosmetics and Dead Sea products, pharmaceutical, tourism and olive oil industries; 26 Jordanian businessmen and 100 Japanese participated in the forum.

"Most Japanese think that the Middle East is not safe enough to do business and changing this perception is the biggest challenge. Another challenge is to increase Japanese companies' interest in the MENA market as their main focus at the moment is on the Asian market," Nakayama said. "As for Jordanian companies, the biggest challenge is the determination for quality control. Japanese market expects 100% quality control; 99% is not enough."

The World Bank report stated that Jordan had a number of economic strengths, including the ease in getting electricity, registering a property, trading across bor-

ders and, to a certain extent, paying taxes. However, the kingdom has a mixed record on protecting minority investors, resolving insolvency, enforcing contracts, issuing construction permits and securing credit.

King Abdullah recently met with a delegation representing Japan's Toshiba Corporation that took part in the World Science Forum 2017, the largest scientific event in the region. Media reports said the Japanese company expressed interest in investing information and communications technology in the country and providing training to qualified Jordanians.

Official figures indicate that Jordan has obtained from Japan about \$1.3 billion in soft loans, grants and technical assistance. Japan is the tenth biggest trading partner of Jordan in terms of volume, which is estimated at \$596.2 million yearly, Global Edge said.

Earlier this year, the Jordanian Council of Ministers endorsed measures to ease doing business in the country and to stimulate the national economy in accordance with Jordan Vision 2025.

Some 307 Japanese nationals lived in Jordan as of October 2016 while Jordanian nationals residing in Japan are estimated to be no more than 155 as of December 2016.

Roufan Nahhas is a journalist based in Jordan.

Briefs

Algeria's inflation rate at 6% in October

Algeria's annual inflation rate rose to 6% in October from 5.9% the previous month, due to higher food prices, official data indicated.

Struggling with lower oil and gas export prices in recent years, Algiers has approved import restrictions, causing shortages and higher prices for some products.

The consumer price index was up 0.5% in October on a monthly basis, the National Statistics Bureau said.

(Reuters)

Egypt economy likely to remain unshaken by Sinai attack

The mosque attack in Egypt's Sinai may strengthen the view that the country needs continued International Monetary Fund support as agreed a year ago and the economy is likely to quickly shake off any negative repercussions, economists said.

Gunmen carrying Islamic State flags killed more than 300 worshippers in the attack on the mosque, the worst such attack by militants in Egypt's modern history.

Tourists and investors seem unlikely to be much deterred by the attack, which took place in an isolated spot far from Egypt's main tourist resorts and economic centres.

(Reuters)

Tunisia to lift bread prices for first time since revolution

Tunisia plans to slightly increase bread prices for the first time since its 2011 revolution and sell eurobonds worth \$593.2 million as it seeks to slash a budget deficit, an economic adviser said.

Tunisia is under pressure from the International Monetary Fund to cut its deficit and overhaul its economy, in turmoil since the 2011 toppling of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali.

Tunisia is struggling with high unemployment and foreign investment has dried up since 2011. Militant attacks have affected the vital tourism sector.

(Reuters)

French defence minister hopeful for Qatari sales

France is hoping to strike deals to sell 12 Rafale fighter jets and armoured vehicles to Qatar when French President Emmanuel Macron visits the country in December, the French defence minister said.

Qatar has been strengthening its military since its ties with other Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, have deteriorated.

France, which has carefully avoided taking sides in that dispute, is hoping to capitalise on a recent arms export surge, which included the sale of 24 Rafale jets to Doha in 2015. The Rafale is made by Dassault Aviation.

(Reuters)