

INFOCUS

WEATHERING AN ONGOING IMPACT

Resurfacing from an economic downturn

A new globalisation

What's so cryptic about crypto?

Lewis Pugh swims to make an
environmental change

Organised By



WIEF ROUNDTABLE 2021

REVITALISATION AND REFORM: CATALYSING GROWTH

15 - 16 DECEMBER 2021



Log on to www.wief.org
or scan QR code for
more information.

#WIEFDIGITALISATION2021

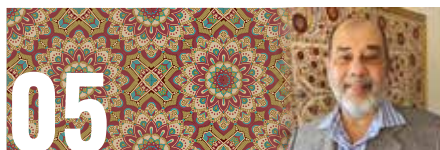


A Chairman's Farewell

I always say, fundamental ingredients of growth have always included sustenance and innovation. This applies to businesses as much as living creatures. I am proud to say that as Chairman of WIEF Foundation, I have been fortunate to have had the trust and support of a well-functioning team and Board. We have realised that very little can be achieved by working in silos. I would like to welcome the new Chairman, Tan Sri Dr Syed Hamid Albar and the new Secretary General, Tan Sri Mohd Radzi Abdul Rahman. I trust that, together, they will successfully steer WIEF Foundation towards its new chapter of growth and achieving its aspirations.

Tun Musa Hitam

Former Chairman of WIEF Foundation
2006 - 2021



05 FIRST WORDS

Weathering an Ongoing Impact
by Chairman of WIEF Foundation

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2022?

- Solo Economy: pg 11
- Digital Currency: pg 18
- Rethinking Employment: pg 28
- Changing Perceptions of Food: pg 32
- Healthcare: pg 39
- Eliminating Plastic: pg 43
- Travel Sphere: pg 51



06 QUICK FOCUS

Leadership in the Time of Corona



08 ECONOMY

A New Globalisation
Resurfacing from an Economic Downturn



16 FINANCE

Ask the Expert: Cryptocurrency
What's so Cryptic About Crypto?



22 TECH

Data Dynamics



25 BUSINESS

Sustaining Speed, Cruising Forward



29 BUSINESS

Impacting the Food Industry
Getting Creative with Business



36 GREEN

Thoughtful Consumerism:
Electronic Goods



40 GREEN

Climate Calculations
Water Borne Change



48 PEOPLE

Focusing On: Faisal Ariff



52 YOUTH

Age Does Matter

About IN FOCUS

IN FOCUS is a complimentary bi-annual publication by WIEF Foundation. Its inaugural issue was published in November 2017 and it's an extension of the Foundation's online bank of articles that is constantly growing to cater to the reading pleasure of the global business community. Do drop us a line if you'd like to subscribe or tell us what economic and business-related matters you think we should report on.

Editorial Information

IN FOCUS online

Web: infocus.wief.org

Email: infocus@wief.org

Digital version: infocus.wief.org/digital-version

IN FOCUS editorial

Writers: Su Aziz, Reyana Nacerodien

Designer: Amphibia Digital Sdn Bhd

Publisher

WIEF Foundation
157 Hampshire Office Place,
1 Jalan Mayang Sari,
50450 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Tel: +603 2163 5500

On the cover of issue 9

Weathering an Ongoing Impact

Photo by Liuzishan



Weathering an Ongoing IMPACT



It is a fine balance between keeping the population safe and the economy afloat. So far, there has been no one formula that works. Each day, it seems, is an exercise in finding the most effective way to save lives, livelihoods and economic stability during a very trying time. My hat off to leaders of today, because it is not easy to govern during an uncertain time. To get us all out of the woods, incredible intellectual dexterity is needed, as well as stamina, to navigate a rapidly transforming reality, intimidating digital disruptions, economic volatility and a global health crisis.

The weight of governance is already as heavy as lead without the headache of the current challenges we are going through. This is because one course of action, just one decision, can significantly change the long-term fate of a nation and an economy. While holding that kind of power in your hand is intoxicating, it is also a heavy responsibility.

You, and I mean the leaders of not only governments but businesses too, set the precedence for a new normal that will be the norm in every aspect, including economy, environment and society. One thing is for sure, things will no longer be the same. How we do things, live and think, must change. There is no other way if we are to endure this severe economic devastation and resurface stronger than before.

The formula to weather a prolonged impact on the economy may well be a combination of collaboration and innovation. There's no other time that calls for innovation more than today. Also, collaborations at all levels may be the way out of this critical situation we are in.

This issue of WIEF Foundation's in-house magazine, *In Focus*, focuses on ways to weather the impact of a prolonged global crisis while moving towards a sustainable economic rebound. Now, during these extraordinary times, articles in this magazine aim to contribute to stimulating the acceleration of economic rejuvenation.

The topics in this issue have been composed to help business folk rethink management strategies, counter, as well as react positively to disruptions. Most of all, to be accepting of a new today that will shape an improved tomorrow, as a way to move forward. I hope you will look to the articles in *In Focus* for content of your own economic growth playbook, to be inspired and benefit greatly by them.

Unitedly, be transformed, informed and resilient.

On that note, I wish you an enjoyable read, best of luck and may God bless us all. ■

Tan Sri Syed Hamid Albar

Chairman
WIEF Foundation

LEADERSHIP

in the Time of Corona

The impact of the pandemic continues. **Su Aziz** and **Reyana Nacerodien** ask a few industry leaders how they make hard decisions during this global health crisis.

AARON TANG

Country Manager

Luno, Malaysia

Area of expertise: cryptocurrency



I'm a big believer in collaboration and seeking as many angles and perspectives as reasonably possible to make the best decision. This would include 360 discussions with my direct reports as well as superiors and mentors. I would also seek external perspectives as much as possible. Once a decision is made, it's also important to monitor the results of that decision and continuously improve and iterate on data.

RAYMOND SIVA

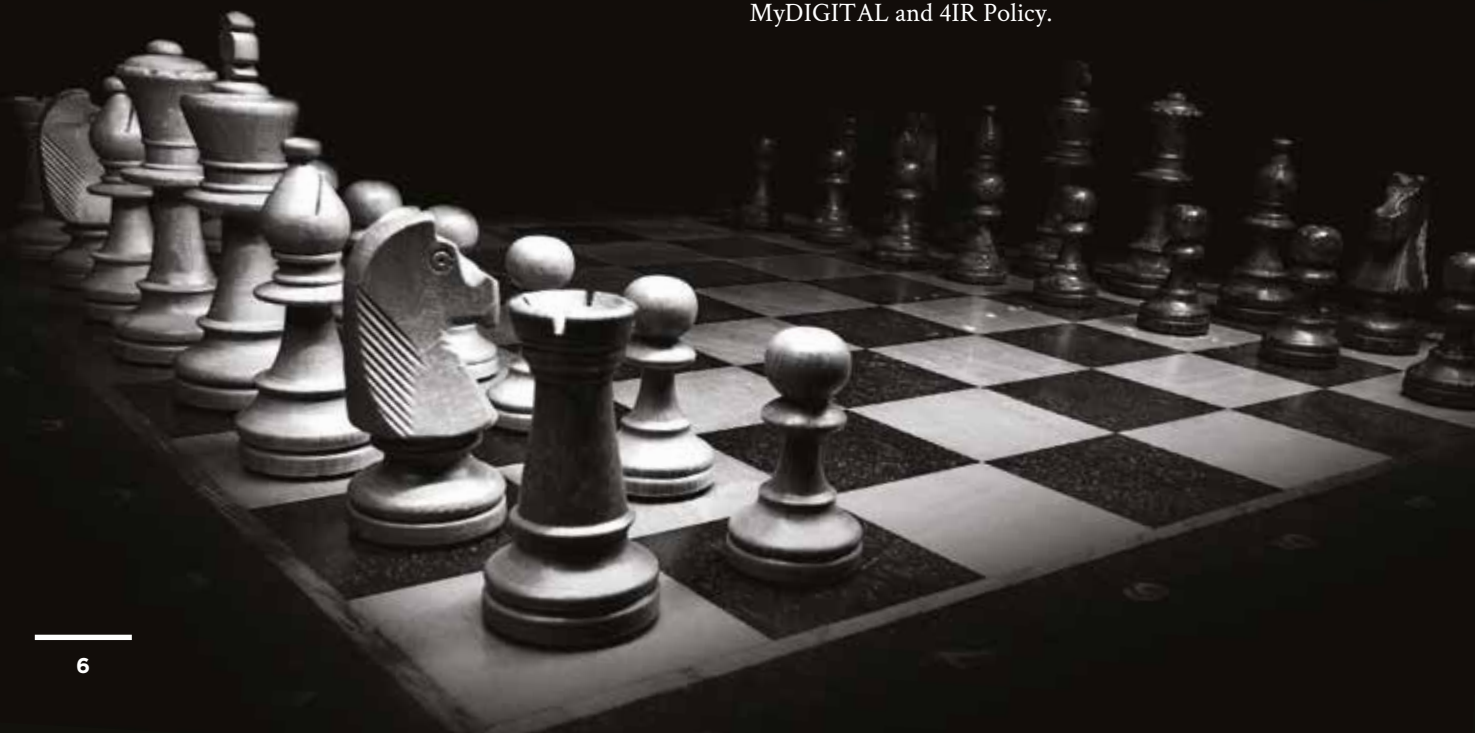
Senior Vice President

MDEC, Malaysia

Area of expertise: digital industry



By being creative in how I approach and solve a problem, staying agile and having empathy are necessary as it ensures that flexible planning but decisive execution can be carried out, yet not affect the morale of the staff. A balance of communication that's firm yet understanding is necessary to achieve both. Adopting a fresh mindset, one that's open to experiment, innovate and be agile. My decision-making process also leverages on advanced analytics to extract insights from different data points to develop a more holistic view. Detecting those signals of change early is also crucial. It's also important for me to prioritise MDEC's strategy to be aligned with the national direction, such the MyDIGITAL and 4IR Policy.



TAUHIR MANUEL

*Managing Director
Academic Research Delivery
Information Systems, South Africa
Area of expertise: business
management*



While it would have been easy to succumb to quick decisions to attempt to shift with the prevailing winds, I found that taking the time to properly assess the lay of the land before rushing into decisions has stood me in good stead. In addition to patience, adaptability has been key. Being able to seek out and identify new opportunities has ensured survival of my business through the pandemic. The other factor is the ability to align with industry bodies that opened new opportunities and avenues for generating sustainable income. While these have been important in keeping the doors open during these tough times, it has also been important to plan for the future and commit some of these ideas to paper. I've found that this has kept the energy and enthusiasm flowing while increasing the morale in the business.

**LEON FOONG**

*CEO
SOCAR, Malaysia
Area of expertise: car-sharing
platform*

Focus on the things that you have control over and don't be emotionally affected by the things that you do not. Lying to yourself and delaying the inevitable will only cost you time. Acknowledge that there'll be trade-offs in every decision you make, own these decisions and live with the trade-offs. Finally, make sure the important people in your life stay happy. In difficult times when you might need some reassurance, these are the people who can help steer you back on track. Know the values that define you as a leader and the ones you're willing to compromise. With all decisions, it's often a multi-stage game and that's where we need to move beyond financial myopia. As one of my friends once told me, financial statements keep the accountants and shareholders temporarily happy, but it's customer obsession that creates advocates and a lovable brand that drive consumers to support your business.

PETER GOULD

*Founder And CEO
Gould Studio, Australia
Area of expertise: creative and
design*



It's important to have a clear set of values that are meaningful, and actively lived. They're not the kind of values that live in a dusty company handbook. Those values become essential for transformation through adversity. To reframe problems as design challenges. To be in a state of gratitude and thankfulness for blessings, regardless of the present difficulty, *that* is success.

**WESLEY LYNCH**
CEO

*Snapplify, South Africa
Area of expertise: software
development industry*

Snapplify's broad business approach to crisis is the same approach we encourage our team to take to their work each day: focus on the customer and solving their problems, collaborate with each other as well as partners, and maintain a laser focus on the work that really matters. Our core focus has always been on building edtech tools that address real challenges like connectivity and accessibility faced by schools in emerging markets. At the beginning of the pandemic, we were already well-positioned to offer immediate, accessible, relevant e-learning solutions to educational institutions in crisis. With thousands of new registrations and a massive uptick in enquiries from schools, our challenge was maintaining the level of service all our customers are used to.

The switch to remote working was manageable for us as we already had robust systems in place to support our globally distributed team. To ensure that we support our customers through their transition to remote learning, we extended our customer service team and support hours. This is because parents juggling home-learning and work need to be able to access help after hours. We've also never taken for granted that being able to deliver this level of excellence to our customers is made possible by an incredible team. During a crisis, cultivating compassionate leadership is essential. ■

GLOBALIS^{NEW}ATION

As COVID-19 traversed border, the economy retreated.
As the world continues to contend with the pandemic and
its impacts, global dynamics will undoubtedly remain affected.
The question remains, to what extent? *Reyana Nacerodien* reports.



**LAURA KELLY**

Director of the Shaping Sustainable Markets Group at the IIED

The progress of globalisation has been marred by challenges and crises but a marked regress directly related to COVID-19 was and still is evident. As we retreated into our homes during various lockdown rules and associated restrictions, so too did regional economies. These economies would do well if they could mimic the cross-border power and influence of the pandemic. Unfortunately, that's not the case. Regional recovery is still widely debated and the far-reaching impacts are still unfolding.

COVID-19 AND TRADE

The COVID-19 pandemic has struck at a time of unprecedented global crises. It has and continues to wreak havoc on economies with predictions of a global recession reaching a possible 10 per cent of GDP. Globalisation marked by the free flow of goods and services has long been touted as an effective means of economic progress, but has not been left untouched by the pandemic reality. Changing global demand and supply variables, coupled with nationalist and protectionist focus from countries trying to ensure sustained local economies, has added complexity and, indeed, hinderances to global exchange.

**DAVID HENIG**

Director of the United Kingdom Trade Policy Project at the European Centre for International Political Economy (ECIPE)

The World Bank estimates that COVID-19 has pushed over 125 million people into absolute poverty, wiping out some of the gains of the last 10 years and threatening the chances of reaching the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) acknowledges the nuanced nature of countries as well as regions in general, particularly, with the COVID-19 reality. 'Developing countries, for example, are actually very heterogeneous, ranging from China and India to Malawi and Haiti,' says Laura Kelly, director of the Shaping Sustainable Markets Group at IIED.

Globalisation may have been seen as the fundamental solution some 20 years ago, whereas today, the situation for many countries is different. 'Trade has been shown to be an important engine of poverty reduction, particularly in countries in South East Asia. However, as domestic incomes rise and purchasing power increases, local and regional markets for goods and services have become more important, reducing dependence on exports,' Laura explains.

THE DEVELOPING WORLD

David Henig, director of the United Kingdom Trade Policy Project at the European Centre for International Political Economy (ECIPE) notes, 'All countries are dependent on globalisation, because to be part of the supply chain is lucrative, and to lose that role potentially damaging. This means that countries have to be careful about the way they propose taxes or regulations. Developing countries may feel particularly vulnerable in this way. Equally, however, they may be positively affected by the regulations of other countries or rules of corporates. For example, in the rise of fair trade or the insistence of fair working conditions.'

Coupled with the economics, Laura highlights the ever-increasing impacts of climate change. 'The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its eighth report in August 2021 with the message that we're running out of time to avert catastrophic climate change above 2 degrees. The 2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) from the UN highlights that we're losing species at a faster rate than ever before, threatening not just the natural world but our food supplies and availability of clean water,' she says.

'The challenge for economies, now is dealing with climate change and environmental degradation with problems such as air pollution, water use and nature loss which could undermine their growth. Other countries in South Asia and Africa have experienced less or more variable economic growth and are also often most impacted by climate change through its effects on agriculture, water availability, energy (from hydropower), health etc,' Laura adds. 'Many governments have acknowledged this and integrated climate and equity into economic stimulus and recovery plans. These include initiatives such as the European Commission Euros 100bn Green Deal and the USD1.9 trillion

ECONOMY

economic recovery package. G20 finance ministers have also prioritised inclusive post-COVID recovery and investment in climate and biodiversity.’

However, many developing countries don’t have access to stimulus resources, so support from developed countries is needed to enable a global response to the issues. ‘These are global issues which countries cannot address in isolation, so we need a more globalised post pandemic approach,’ Laura affirms. ‘Also developed countries have yet to fulfil their climate financing commitment of USD100 billion a year by 2020 to support developing countries cope with climate change.’

THE EMERGENT GLOBALISATION

Globalisation has had a changing face over the last two decades, with an accelerated rate of change even before the pandemic. ‘The new globalisation has been driven by three major factors -: technology to allow production to take place in different places around the globe, governments increasingly deciding to be open to goods and services, and the rise of regulations and standards as a tool used by governments, inter-government organisations, and companies as a mechanism of control,’ David illustrates.

‘This has sat alongside political changes notably the end of the cold war, productivity improvements allowing goods and services to be delivered using fewer people, and the multiple impacts of the internet. Collectively there has been a dramatic change in the importance of global trade between 1990 and 2020,’ David says. ‘The new globalisation is centred around major global supply chains which can be seen in goods and services. For goods this is major retailers, drug companies, aircraft manufacturers, all directing extensive numbers of suppliers in different countries.’

It also applies to services, from phone app stores to English Premier League football

teams, who also rely on an extensive number of suppliers of both goods and services. These major corporates develop extensive supply chains across the world, put in place their own controls, and work alongside government interventions in areas such as tax and regulation. Smaller companies are in many cases suppliers, but some will be globally active in their own right. Economic developments off the back of the COVID-19 experience have continued to progress quickly in some instances and industries but slower in others.

‘Early in the pandemic as some shortages of goods emerged, there were calls to shorten global supply chains and re-onshore production. However, this doesn’t yet seem to have materialised. The IIED points out the example of microchip production which is still focussed in Asia despite shortages experienced. In addition, the current shortage is projected to persist into 2023, with little evidence of investment in production capacity in Europe or North America. In face of the economic impacts of COVID, which have hit the poorest



across all societies, and the need to combat climate change and nature loss, IIED would argue that we need a greener and more inclusive global economy,' says Laura.

THE WAY FORWARD

The road to success is far too complex to easily summarise. However, David suspects one important factor in the new globalisation is stability, in regulation, tax or other matters. 'Constant change is unlikely to be good for attracting economic activity. All countries need to carefully consider their policy mix that will serve them best in such a global model, ranging from trade agreements to regulations as well as taxes, and other more internal issues such as investment incentives and skills,' he advises. There's no single best practice way to do this. Similarly, governments need to consider how to balance domestic demands for control with global realities that no control fully has this. Few have fully understood the implications.

'I think we can look at trade agreements, such as the way Vietnam has joined CPTPP and will therefore have to accept higher labour standards, or the part of the



USMCA which requires possible higher wages and unions in the car supply chain in Mexico. Then we can see the way the EU want regulations to increase corporate responsibility for supply chain transparency. There are increasing demands on countries to in effect accept the regulations of others,' David adds. 'Countries need to improve their awareness of the current realities of globalisation and think how best to handle these to attract major corporates while still retaining some economic control. This is not a new problem, but it becoming more prevalent.'

FINAL WORDS

The increased recognition that global crises such as COVID-19, climate change and nature loss require global solutions should spur greater collaboration. Also, for developed countries to meet their commitments to support the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to address global issues as they realise that it's also in their own interests to do so. While these commitments are being made by wealthy countries, they're still not being translated into action.


'Access to COVID-19 vaccines has been a case in point. Vaccines are a particular issue with many developed countries prioritising vaccinating children despite low risks to their health. Also, rolling out booster vaccines rather than increasing vaccine supply to poorer countries where only very small percentages of the population have been vaccinated,' says Laura. 'The current global crises have re-emphasised the interconnectedness of countries at all levels of economic development. Therefore, increased global collaboration and support is the best way to help all countries succeed in the current context.' ■

What to Expect in 2022: Solo Economy

To be post-pandemic ready means knowing what to expect in 2022 and beyond. Here's, a prediction that'll influence the economy and shape a new normal.

In South Korea, reports *The Korea Times*, single households now constitute almost one-third of all households. The *honjok* (people who live, eat and entertain alone) lifestyle has increased to almost 50 per cent compared to 15 years ago and has contributed to increased pet ownership by 60 per cent rise over the last decade, while the number of pets in China has more than doubled in the last five years. Single households require different products, such as food delivery, smaller portions in terms of packaged food and shifts in urbanisation patterns such as demand for single-unit housing, digital forms entertainment including gaming and streaming. In Japan, single households spend between 1.5 times and 3.5 times more on digital content, such as videos and e-books, than households with more than one person. Since a high population is no longer vital to become a high-income country, a survey by Malaysian higher education institution UTAR reports only 41.8 per cent of Malaysian youth plan on getting married but prefer smaller families.

Resurfacing from an Economic Downturn



Independent and government-linked organisations in Morocco as well as Egypt are joining hands to overcome socioeconomic disruptions of COVID-19. **Reyana Nacerodien** reports on how they alleviate pandemic caused poverty.

Governments, businesses and organisations alike are grappling with the unprecedented socioeconomic disruptions of COVID-19. Measuring the impact of the pandemic, associated response policies as well as the impact of those policies are critical in supporting vulnerable groups and all other households impacted by the pandemic. Researchers from the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) have conducted studies on social assistance programmes. They show that the design and implementation details of social assistance programmes matter for their effectiveness and have bearing on the realisation of their COVID-19 impact mitigation responses.



THE MOROCCAN REALITY

Launched in August 2020 as part of a joint partnership between J-PAL, Evidence for Policy Design (EPoD) at Harvard Kennedy School and Policy Center for New South (PCNS), the Morocco Employment Lab (MEL) aims to strengthen labour market policies in Morocco in response to the pandemic and beyond. MEL does this through rigorous impact evaluations to generate evidence, capacity building to build a culture as well as expertise of evidence generation and use. Also, dissemination to share evidence and advocate for its use in policymaking.

To contribute to the research base on the impact of the pandemic, MEL assessed the impact of the pandemic on the labour market and associated policy responses in an October 2020 report. 'The pandemic has disproportionately affected disadvantaged populations worldwide', says Samia Sekkarie, senior research and policy manager of EPoD. 'In Morocco, this has certainly been the case for the informal, female, low-skilled and youth workforce who were already struggling segments of the workforce prior to COVID-19.' Prior to the pandemic, Morocco had a female unemployment rate of 11 per cent compared to seven per cent for men in

the second quarter of 2019 and a female labour force participation rate of 21 per cent compared to 70 per cent for men.

Research further noted domestic responsibilities for females likely grew during the pandemic. In a country where women were primary caretakers at home, devoting six times more time to household chores than men, school closures during lockdowns likely increased females' caretaking responsibilities. 'This, in addition to a tighter labour market resulting from lockdown measures, likely increased female unemployment rates and decreased female labour force participation of women in Morocco,' explains Samia.

The informal workforce in the country was further disproportionately affected. Nearly 80 per cent of Moroccan workers aren't registered with the social security services. While the government made notable efforts to target emergency support to these populations through other means, such as a government health insurance programme, many were left out since they were informally employed or not registered in these systems. Consequently, the government launched an online platform in order to allow workers from the informal

sector not registered with Régime d'Assistance Médicale (RAMED), Morocco's subsidised Health Insurance regime for the poor, to claim cash benefits.

This programme came to be known as Tadamon and it reached 5.5 million households between April and end of June 2020, 45 per cent of which were in rural areas as explained in the October 2020 report. Though a positive step, the programme was not without challenges. 'Morocco's Higher Planning Commission (HCP), revealed that 59 per cent of household heads working in the informal sector experienced delays in receiving the pandemic cash transfers due, in part, to the administration verifying applicants' eligibility. Another 18 per cent were not able to claim the benefit due to failure to comply with registration criteria.

Similarly, Moroccan youth were disproportionately unemployed, even prior to the pandemic. In 2019, the average unemployment rate among youth 15 - 24 years old was above 20 per cent, which is twice as high as the average unemployment rate. Due to COVID-19, the youth unemployment rate rose by 11 percentage points, to above 33 per cent. According to the report, this is a striking increase compared to the four-percentage point increase in the overall unemployment rate.

'The disproportionate increase in youth unemployment could partly be caused by fewer years of work experience youth have. When deciding who to lay off, firms may select workers they have invested in more rather than fresh graduates,' Samia elaborates. 'Youth may also disproportionately work in sectors most affected by the pandemic, such as agriculture.' Recognising the importance of supporting youth workers, Morocco's National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Competencies (ANAPEC) started developing programmes aimed at supporting the newly unemployed in their job search.

ECONOMY

In the second phase of the report, MEL aims to assess the impact on households on a more granular level through a household survey that will be launched in fall of 2021. One of the impact evaluations launched by MEL aims to assess how the Moroccan Ministry of Labour and Professional Insertion and its implementing agency, Anapec, can design programmes that stimulate job creation by offering support services to firms that aim to reduce the cost of hiring in a context of low labour demand due to the pandemic. Another evaluation aims to inform how NGOs can design vocational training programmes to train youth in line with the changing hiring needs resulting from the pandemic.

‘The long-term aim of these activities and MEL, more generally is to create a culture of evidence-based policymaking among Moroccan policymakers, practitioners and academics. Even beyond the pandemic response,’ Samia says.

THE EGYPTIAN REALITY

J-PAL Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is conducting similar research. They’re coordinating efforts by affiliates as well as staff to understand and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in Egypt. The Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics in the country affirms that 73.5 per cent of Egyptian families have reported a decline in income due to the pandemic.

‘Despite progress in setting up social protections achieved by the Egyptian government over the past years, the global economic shock stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged Egypt’s economy and directly affected its most vulnerable citizens,’ say Nadeen ElAshmawy, policy associate at J-PAL MENA. ‘This large and widespread shock has pushed more Egyptians into poverty, making it all the more essential to rethink how social assistance systems can be more adaptive,’ adds Adil Ababou, its former policy manager.



The Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) and the Egyptian government at large designed a multifaceted response to COVID-19. Assistance ranged from offering cash transfers to poor and vulnerable households to providing hygiene kits and food supplies, disinfecting neighbourhoods, providing shelters for refugees, protecting victims of gender-based violence, offering emergency support funds to individuals who worked in the crisis-affected tourism sector and supporting women to repay their loans.

In assessing the impact of the pandemic in the region, researchers found that, similar to Morocco, female labour force participation decreased during the pandemic. While such initiatives are a positive step, research by J-PAL affiliates has identified means for improvement of such delivery. The body further spearheads the Global Evidence for Egypt Spotlight Seminar Series that aims to foster a discussion using rigorous evidence between Egyptian policymakers, development practitioners and J-PAL affiliated researchers on timely policy priorities in Egypt.

In one such webinar, Adil and Nadeen encourage implementors to emphasise the beneficiary experience when delivering programmes. They noted that, only 2.5 per cent of cash transfers beneficiaries in Egypt were aware that further conditions were to be added to continue receiving cash transfers. Evidence from Indonesia indicates that providing programme information to beneficiaries can be a cost-effective way to improve their access to services and reduce corruption.

During the webinar, Noura Selim, executive director of the Sawiris Foundation for Social Development (SFSD), notes that adding elements of social protection and social empowerment to the intervention's financial inclusion, economic empowerment and coaching components have been highly effective, unique aspects of the Bab Amal Programme. J-PAL in collaboration with the SFSD, the Egyptian Human Development Association (EHDA) and Giving Without Limits Association (GWLA), are involved in the Bab Amal Program.

The Program targets approximately 2,400 rural, extreme poor households in the Assiut and Sohag areas of Upper Egypt and women are the majority of participants. In these areas, the main barriers to success

include:

- Lack of food, nutritional security, skills and livelihood options
- Poor health-seeking behaviour, hygiene and sanitation practices
- Limited access to government support and financial services
- Low literacy levels and female participation in the workforce
- Lack of self-esteem and vision for the future

The programme consists of a comprehensive, time-bound and sequenced set of interventions that aim to graduate people from ultra-poverty into sustainable livelihoods. The programme's four pillars of intervention - livelihoods, social safety nets, financial inclusion and social integration - are crosscut with coaching. Using the internationally recognised Graduation approach, each Graduation intervention plays a complementary role that enables households to achieve sustainable solutions to the challenges they face. J-PAL MENA continues to engage policymakers, development practitioners, and J-PAL affiliates in discussions on priority issues and development challenges in Egypt as part of its Global Evidence for Egypt Spotlight Seminar Series. ■



FINAL WORDS

Nearly two years after the WHO and, indeed, the world, was made aware of the first cases of a novel coronavirus in Wuhan City in China, the disease has spread worldwide having not only health impacts but further socio-economic impacts for countries who were already grappling with such challenges. A disproportionate address to the pandemic means that some countries are yet to move on to a recovery from COVID-19 impacts. Commonality can be found in the fact that responses to the pandemic and emerging from it are highly tabled considerations. In these, the work of J-PAL attempts to offer scientific evidence to inform policy development. It is hoped that the empiricism will assist with answers to critical, complex questions in the fight against poverty now nuanced by the need for re-emergence post-pandemic.



Speaker for WIEF thinkTALK webinar on *E-funding Avenues for SMEs: Borderless Financing* and crypto leader from PwC Hong Kong, **Henri Arslanian** gives an update on cryptocurrency and advises us to understand instead of fearing them because they're here to stay.

Ask the Expert:

CRYPTO

Firstly, it's important to understand, there are a number of types of digital assets, but more often than not, people focus on bitcoin. Sure, when you look at crypto assets, bitcoin has around 40 per cent of what we call market dominance. That being said, there are many different types of crypto assets. In fact, there are around 9,000 different types of crypto assets according to CoinMarketCap.

For example, there are obviously cryptocurrencies that we all know about, but there are also what will be called 'tokens' or 'utility tokens'. They have a certain purpose, and in many cases, they allow users or holders to access certain platforms such as ethereum, which is the second biggest cryptocurrency out there. Then, there are central bank digital currencies (CBDC) or digital currencies issued by a central bank, and non-fungible token (NFT). They're all a kind of crypto assets and covers a whole range of assets. Although, bitcoin is the original, the mother of all and has a lion's share of the market.

What's Driving Crypto to Where it's Headed?

Over the last few years, we've seen cryptocurrencies become more mainstream. To put things into perspective, in 2016, there were only five million people with an account on a crypto exchange. In 2020, before the last bull market, there were over 100 million people with an account on a crypto exchange. Now, I would argue that the number has easily doubled that amount in the last couple of weeks. It's because of the regain in interest.

Crypto assets becoming more mainstream is driven obviously by retail investors. However, there's also a lot of institutional investors and one of the big trends that we've seen in recent months and years, is the entry of institutional players. Not the large financial institutions such as Wells Fargo or Morgan Stanley, but DBS Bank and others have entered the crypto market in force. Also, a lot of the investors as well, some of the world's biggest investors such as BlackRock, even hedge funds like



HENRI ARSLANIAN

*Borderless Financing and crypto leader
PwC Hong Kong*

Brevan Howard and others are entering the crypto space.

That's obviously a big deal and contributing to cryptocurrencies becoming mainstream. Another reason for that is, there's now increasing regulatory clarity. Today, according to research from Cambridge University, only five per cent of regulators don't have somebody working on crypto internally. There's increasing levels of



CURRENCY

regulatory clarity right now in the market. That's providing comfort as well as demand from clients and it's also driving a lot of activity. So, cryptocurrencies are here to stay. You may love bitcoin, you may hate bitcoin, the reality is it's here to stay.

Regulating the Unregulated

The crypto industry is probably the only industry vertical of financial services. There has been lobbying in recent years for more regulatory clarity, for more regulations. The reason is obviously because the crypto community wants some basic reasonable regulations to ensure there's a level playing field.

Also, regulatory clarity is important because it categorises the entry of not only institutional players but, to a certain extent, retail players as well. It's because, obviously with regards to clarity comes certain standards and, to a certain extent, customer protection. That's quite important and it's why the crypto community has been in favour of regulations.

There have been different approaches to regulatory clarity around the world and obviously today, majority of global financial centres either have no regulatory clarity or about to. That's the issue that is pretty much being addressed, if it hasn't yet. One area that needs a bit more work to be done is on the tax side. It's great that we have regulatory clarity, we also need a tax clarity. This is an area in which increasing work is needed. I'd say, tax authorities are probably one or two years behind.

Benefits of Crypto for Humankind

The reality is, there are a number of benefits for people to use cryptocurrencies. For example, bitcoin as kind of digital gold as a hedge against inflation and currency devaluation. Another example, is cross-border payments. Today, the average fee of cross-border payments is seven per cent and in many emerging markets, that's double digit. Frankly, that's unacceptable in 2021 that these fees are there now. The benefit that we have with cross-border

payment is that if we can use crypto, for instance, it would allow us to send money around the world instantaneously and 24/7.

A Useful Tool for Economic Recovery

During COVID-19 pandemic, it was a very interesting situation because people were afraid to touch banknotes. They were afraid that would transmit the virus. But at the same time, we have reduced amount of payments using cash, while there are record levels of cash in the system. The reason being, financial stability-type people tend to hoard cash. It was a bizarre issue where less and less people are using cash payment, while there are now pretty much record levels of cash in the system globally.

On the economic recovery, a good example, is CBDC issued by central banks. Let's say today, as a stimulus of the economy, I can give everybody USD1,000 like they're doing in America. However, there's no way

you can force somebody to spend it. With digital currencies, I can say it's going to expire in two weeks if you don't use it. Also, it's a way to access people. One of the challenges we saw during the COVID-19 period was that it was difficult to get money to the people, because many don't

have bank accounts. With digital currencies, you can easily send it to people in their digital wallet. Also, through CBDC, it can allow you to have live monitoring of economic activity in the country, where people are spending and other data that can be very useful. ■

Henri's advice on how you should view cryptocurrency:

I always believe that cryptocurrencies are here to stay. I think we all have an intellectual duty to understand what cryptocurrencies are. The piece of advice I give to everybody looking to enter the [crypto] space is, first make sure you at least spend some time to understand how it works. You don't need technical white paper like back in the day, there are a lot of videos on YouTube, for example. Even myself, I have now YouTube videos available in English, also in French, Arabic and even Chinese. They're available for free. There's a lot of educational content available for people who want to learn more about crypto.

Often my advice is to invest just an amount in the market that you're comfortable to lose. Once you realise how easy cryptocurrencies are, it'll allow you to experiment with cryptocurrencies and you'll be able to use them. Also, you'll feel like there's a vested interest and you'll be following the markets a bit more closely as well.



What to Expect in 2022: Digital Currency

To be post-pandemic ready means knowing what to expect in 2022 and beyond. Here's, a prediction that'll influence the economy and shape a new normal.

Cryptocurrency, and this includes CBDC, is the future. Just how big a future it has seems to be a form of contention between sceptics and believers. Nevertheless, it seems to be a natural progression looking at the current trends in monetary operations. Furthermore, its popularity seems to either grow or deflate according to mass media influence, and of course, opinions from the current eccentric billionaire. Bitcoin has held the top spot since it started and is still predicted to hold the crown in terms of investment opportunity. Slowly but steadily, more and more are accepting bitcoin for payment including retails and game developing companies. At one point, a leading American electric vehicle manufacturer did too, and very possibly still does or will again. In September 2021, hoping to alleviate economic problems, El Salvador officially adopted bitcoin as legal tender. However, it's been speculated that other countries are in no hurry to follow suit. The prediction for central banks to go ahead with digital currency (CBDC) seems like a right one since it'll allow, for example, financial inclusion and instant transactions.

WHAT'S SO CRYPTIC CRYPTO

ABOUT

Country Manager (Malaysia) of Luno, **Aaron Tang** answers a few questions on what the layman should know about cryptocurrency and why, as well as how to, invest in the volatile asset.

In 2016, the then 32-year-old Aaron Tang, started investing in cryptocurrency. 'My biggest driving factor was the concern that almost 100 per cent of my assets were denominated in Malaysian ringgit,' he recalls. 'I was looking for ways to diversify into other assets that weren't highly correlated with the performance of my local currency. After spending considerable time reading and educating myself on cryptocurrencies, bitcoin fit the bill, and I started with a small amount.'

Five years later, Aaron is now the country manager (Malaysia) of Luno, and has continued to invest a portion of extra money in cryptocurrency. 'I'm personally not an active trader, as I don't have time nor expertise to watch the markets closely. Rather, I view myself as a long-term investor and only investing in crypto assets which I believe in for the long term,' he explains. 'If I viewed my first bitcoin as a bit of an experiment, today, and with 3.5 years of working fulltime in crypto, my conviction is stronger than ever that cryptocurrency is the future.'

Here, Aaron responds to a few questions on understanding cryptocurrency, why invest in it and platforms on which it's traded.

How are cryptocurrencies doing at the moment compared to fiat money?

Interest in cryptocurrency has steadily increased globally in the past year. Cryptocurrencies have become more attractive to investors amid inflation concerns due to increased fiscal and monetary stimulus by governments around the world. People invest in cryptocurrencies for many reasons, ranging from long-term investment, short-term profits, portfolio diversification to the value that cryptocurrency will provide to the modern finance industry. In the context of the devaluation of fiat currencies, people are looking for ways to protect their wealth. Bitcoin, as well as other cryptocurrencies, are set to disrupt the world of money the same way the internet disrupted everything a few years ago. Many believe that it's the future of money.

Who determines the value of these virtual currencies and how to decide on their fair market value?

The value of cryptocurrencies boils down to perceived value and people's faith in using them, similar to any financial instrument. However, unlike fiat currency, where each country's government enforces their value, cryptocurrency's value comes from its code, infrastructure, adoption and scarcity. For example, bitcoin's fixed supply also attributes value in the sense that scarce assets tend to appreciate over time as demand goes up. We've seen the price skyrocket in the past year and its market cap crossed a significant milestone, surpassing RM4 trillion in March 2021. With over 100 million wallets holding active balances globally, it's clear that many individuals and corporations are viewing bitcoin as a credible innovation.



Fundamentally, bitcoin's price is primarily affected by supply and demand. Like other investment assets, the more demand there is, the more people are willing to pay for it. If there were no demand for bitcoin, people would be looking to sell it for a lower price. If we look over the past decade, bitcoin has been by far the best performing asset class. Nevertheless, returns aren't guaranteed, so we encourage people to always do their research and start with a small amount they're comfortable with.

What are the main reasons people hesitate to invest in cryptocurrency and how to curb their hesitation?

As with any new area of investment, cryptocurrency has prompted many questions from potential investors surrounding its value, volatility, as well as the latest concerns on its environmental impact and effects of regulations. Hence, we see the most significant need today is still in the education and awareness of cryptocurrency. We encourage beginners to learn about cryptocurrency first, before they start investing. At Luno, we're committed to educating the public, so they're well-equipped with the necessary knowledge to explore the world of cryptocurrency. Our platform isn't just a place to safely buy and sell cryptocurrencies, but it's also a great resource to learn about

cryptocurrency for anyone, from beginners to seasoned investors.

What are the main reasons people are eager to invest in cryptocurrency?

Investor interest in cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin has been on an upward trend, with many investors looking to these digital assets, especially in a global economic environment of increased monetary stimulus and low-interest rates, causing inflation concerns. As a result, cryptocurrency has become an alternative investment asset for a store of value and a hedge against inflation.

For example, bitcoin is considered an alternative store of value due to its similarity to gold. It has a limited supply of 21 million [coins] and it can be made into smaller units without losing unit value. Furthermore, the technology that powers it, blockchain, makes it very stable and virtually impossible to counterfeit due to its decentralised nature or, in other words, it's entirely free from traditional third-party financial institutions like banks.

Bitcoin's role as digital gold has established itself as a hedge against inflation. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, central banks worldwide have pumped more money into circulation as a response to recharge the economy. As a result, the value of money continues to drop and more investors look at cryptocurrencies to soften the impact of inflation. In 2020, bitcoin appreciated by more than 300 per cent, proving its capability as a store of value.

How to decide on a crypto exchange platform out of the many?

Choosing a regulated cryptocurrency exchange should be the first important step before beginning to invest because it provides consumers with a good indication that they can trust a company with their funds and have controls to prevent the use

of cryptocurrency for illicit means. This trust is vital for any company dealing with finances but particularly in cryptocurrency, as it is still not widely understood. There remains a widespread misapprehension that bitcoin is only used for criminal purposes, which unfairly tarnishes the entire industry.

Furthermore, a regulated exchange provides greater transparency and a blueprint for further collaboration with regulatory bodies. Luno is the first Securities Commission-approved digital asset exchange and the largest digital asset exchange in Malaysia. It stores more than RM1 billion digital assets on behalf of more than 300,000 customers and has already processed more than RM4.2 billion in 2021. When you trade on an unregulated exchange, you risk losing your assets. To safely trade bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies, we recommend using a regulated and secure exchange like Luno, as we comply with regulations that help ensure our users' safety and assets. On top of that, we've created educational content on using digital asset exchanges safely in collaboration with the Securities Commission Malaysia.

In simple-to-follow, step-by-step instructions, can you explain how to start investing in cryptocurrency?

Before investing in cryptocurrency, we encourage people to research cryptocurrencies and assess their personal risk tolerance. Next, they can choose a regulated cryptocurrency exchange to get started. At Luno, the first step is to sign up

for an account using your email address and mobile phone number. You will then undergo identity verification where you provide some basic information like a copy of your identification card and a selfie. This is very similar to signing up for any other digital service in Malaysia. Rest assured, your personal data is secure and stored in accordance with the Personal Data Protection Act.

Your application should be approved within a few business days. Once done, you can instantly deposit Malaysian ringgit to your Luno wallet via an FPX transaction, which is similar to topping up any Malaysian e-wallet. Once this is complete, you can now begin buying your preferred cryptocurrencies by clicking the 'Buy' button and following simple instructions. Currently, we offer five approved cryptocurrencies, which are bitcoin (BTC), ethereum (ETH), ripple (XRP), litecoin (LTC) and bitcoin cash (BCH).

How do you calculate gain or loss when buying or selling virtual currency for real currency?

The easiest way to calculate your gains is to be aware of the value of cryptocurrencies you are buying with your domestic currency. For example, if the current price of a bitcoin is RM136,000 and you're planning to buy RM1,000 worth of it, you'd get 0.007 BTC. If the price of a bitcoin goes up 50 per cent, then your bitcoin holdings will also increase by 50 per cent. If you decide to sell your bitcoin, you'll make a profit on your investment.

What do you think is the outlook for crypto's growth in the next couple of years?

Over the past year, we've seen tremendous demand for cryptocurrency among retail investors. For example, the Securities Commission of Malaysia recently released its annual report for 2020, stating more than 450,000 digital asset exchange (DAX)

accounts in Malaysia. This is a remarkable number, given that it was achieved in only about 14 months starting from October 2019, when the first DAX in Malaysia began regulated operations. Just at Luno alone, in 2021, we've regularly seen days where thousands of customers are signing up. While we don't have exact numbers of other asset classes, we believe cryptocurrency and digital assets will continue their rapid march into becoming an established asset class soon. ■



Aaron Tang's three principles that he keeps to when investing in cryptocurrency:

- ▶ First, before investing in cryptocurrency, it's crucial to do the necessary research about the industry first. Learn how it works and the impact it will be making in the future.
- ▶ Then, take the time to understand the technology behind it, the blockchain, to get a sense of how this aspect of the cryptocurrency world works. By better understanding cryptocurrencies and blockchain technology, you'll have the necessary knowledge to decide whether cryptocurrency is a worthwhile investment opportunity.
- ▶ Finally, it would help if you consider your risk tolerance as cryptocurrency is a volatile asset. Start investing with an amount you can afford to lose. The prime purpose of any investment, be it traditional or digital, is to add more value to your existing wealth. This way, even if you suffer some losses, it won't completely strip you of your wealth.



Beyond baselines, benchmarks and the measurement attributed to business goals, companies are embracing the idea of data as a business asset. *Reyana Nacerodien* reports.



It has long been held that data helps business make better decisions. Digital transformation and advanced associated systems are facilitating bigger and better uses of data in which competitive companies are sweating their data to set them apart.

The COVID-19 Reality

The pandemic has brought about some urgency by necessitating ease of remote work and additional data infrastructure and requirements for various operational reasons. So says Jennifer Stirrup, founder and CEO of Data Relish, UK-based AI and business intelligence leadership boutique consultancy. 'During the pandemic organisations and leaders started to wonder what to do with their staff especially in light of out of office data projects which had been hanging around for some time. I found that, because of the pandemic, there was definitely an uptick in the number of companies who wanted to do something with their data,' she adds.

Enrico Rizzon, APAC analytics lead at Kearney, a global management consulting firm, concurs, 'The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the use of analytics, with 50 per cent of organisations relying on data more than ever before. However, many are still struggling to measure the impact of their efforts - 47 per cent still don't have a clear, quantifiable analytics business case, which makes securing the investments needed to move forward difficult.'

The Data Dilemma

While the pandemic had a positive impact on the focus on data and the acceleration of usage, it further forced business to confront their flaws. 'The uptick in data projects is a good thing, though the



JENNIFER STIRRUP

*Founder and CEO of Data Relish
UK-based AI and Business Intelligence
Leadership Boutique Consultancy*

problem is that companies still ran into the same data quality issues that they had previously such as missing data and people being data lazy,' says Jennifer. 'I like to think of it as data debt - there's a debt to be paid and during the pandemic people had to pay this data debt so they're still struggling to turn it into an asset because their being lazy with the data.'

Jennifer illustrates, 'One of the reasons that companies don't do much with the data is that doing something involves a productivity because it costs more time to make the data correct so eventually you don't measure how much time people are wasting looking around for data that's not there. If you had invested time making sure the data was right in the first place, you won't pay that penalty later, digging around for information that's not there.'

Companies don't pay attention to how much time their colleagues are squandering, Jennifer observes. 'We see that in the data. Bill Gates was once quoted as saying that you're sometimes running so fast that you're dropping dollar bills as you go. With data, you're running so fast, you're dropping opportunities as you go because of data laziness,' muses Jennifer.



AIZA AZREEN AHMAD

*Chief Digital Business Officer
Malaysia Digital Economy
Corporation (MDEC)*

Aiza Azreen Ahmad who is chief digital business officer at Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), agrees. MDEC is tasked with organising and leading the country's digital economy forward. 'With the opportunity to unlock the value of data to accelerate innovation, drive optimisation and improve compliance using data-driven decision making comes the need to demonstrate value, navigate expanding technology alternatives, re-create business processes, and ensure the availability of appropriately skilled staff. The ability to manage, analyse data and derive value from these activities, as well as to measure and improve these capacities, will increasingly define an organization's ability to compete or service its constituents.'

In Malaysia, as the country surges forward to tackle the effects of COVID-19, the government developed a Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL) to transform the nation into one that is digitally capable and inclusive, to be a regional leader in the digital economy. The blueprint also calls for industry players to innovate and adopt new business models which will build a digital ecosystem, allowing society to easily embrace the digital economy. But to do





so, companies need to understand the importance of data.

Reaping Rewards

‘Being data-driven isn’t just a technological buzzword,’ says Aiza. ‘It’s based on empirical analysis and evidence, leading to tangible results.’ To help businesses understand the benefits of data, MDEC brought the Data Driven Enterprise (DDE) programme to life. ‘The programme aims to provide a structured and accelerated approach in assisting business enterprises to gain value from their digital transformation efforts and rapidly shift towards becoming more productive, innovative and resilient. The DDE programme is in line with MDEC’s vision of Malaysia 5.0, enabling a nation that’s deeply integrated with tech, to provide equitable digital opportunities to the people and businesses,’ she further explains.

MDEC boasts examples of such businesses who have successfully integrated data technology into their operations:

- **Hartalega:** One of the world’s largest nitrile glove manufacturers, successfully improved manufacturing output through data. The investment the company has made in digital capabilities, has led to

optimised production of a million gloves monthly. Through the understanding of data on their processes, it allowed the company to build a manufacturing plant that is fully digital and automated.

- **Mah Sing:** It successfully built a data-driven culture and utilises tech to gain key metrics such as how fast tickets are resolved, how quick employees respond to customers and even the effectiveness of their digital marketing. Their understanding of their customers also led to effective marketing strategies, with 50 per cent of their in-house sales brought in through digital marketing channels alone.
- **Permodalan Nasional Berhad (PNB):** It has over 14 million unit holder accounts under their belt and 12.6 million of them are actively investing with the organisation. Through data obtained, they knew that 30 per cent of their customers are iOS users and 70 per cent are android users and what devices these used which helped in-house app developers to create an app specific to customer needs. Data also allowed PNB to understand and predict customers’ actions and respond to their investment needs. They now have over 1.6 million users of their unit holders engaging digitally through their mobile app.

Some Advice

Jennifer advises that a strategy is needed for data to provide a defined view of data in order to turn it into something achievable. ‘Work out the business priority and do that well. Pin down a view in order to turn data into something achievable. What I tend to talk about more is decision support. How can we support people to make decision better based on the information that we have - what data will impact your decisions most. Are your data projects in line with your company vision, is it customer-centred? If it’s not, should you be doing it?’

Enrico observes how the path to becoming an analytics leader is not always smooth. Organisations that exhaust quick wins early on in their transformation find the rate of return on their investments slows down, as does motivation.

‘The middle ground can be slow and frustrating territory. It’s important to note that capital investment alone will not get you to where you need to be,’ Enrico says. ‘We know from years of studying this area that it takes a comprehensive approach to analytics investments for an organisation to succeed. Having a strong data ecosystem is necessary but not sufficient. Enabling that transformation requires organisations to embed culture of curiosity and experimentation into the fabric of your organisation, driven by leaders who understand the unique transformative capacity of analytics.’ ■

Final Words

‘There’s a quote that says, sometimes you run so fast in business, that you’re dropping dollar bills as you go. I’d argue that the same is true for data,’ says Jennifer. ‘You need to prioritise the data that will have the most impact for your business decisions.’

Enrico agrees, ‘Have a data and analytics strategy that is aligned to your business strategy - such that priority is given to using data and analytics to address the organisations priorities. A data and analytics culture that’s driven from the executive down, specifically a culture of experimentation and fact-based decision making serves the business well.’

Though an end point is arguably never really achieved with data as it’s living, breathing and evolving, so too are the opportunities of harnessing it.

SUSTAINING SPEED, CRUISING FORWARD

CEO of technology and data-driven car sharing company SOCAR, Leon Foong, talks on running a disruptive business, how it survived the pandemic and readying the business for post-pandemic.

The core business of SOCAR is in enabling the multiflex mobility ecosystem in Malaysia. We want to make it possible for Malaysians to have wider options in mobility beyond the traditional choices of public transit and private car ownership. SOCAR's car sharing model has been well-received and we've seen significant

growth in the Malaysian market since our launch in 2018. Now, our fleet has expanded to include over 2,200 cars in 37 models ranging from sedans to hatchbacks to SUVs across more than 1,200 zones in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Johor, Penang, Melaka and Ipoh. In the near future, we're looking at expanding our fleet to additional cities and more states.

With more Malaysians adopting the car-sharing concept, our competitive edge of having variety, accessibility, affordability and convenience has definitely contributed to our success in changing the perception of mobility and car ownership. We use an app-based system to facilitate bookings in just a couple of taps. Compared to e-hailing, we have space to accommodate more people because there is no driver present and the self-drive model also allows for drivers to make multiple stops in a single booking as well as make interstate trips, making us a great option for road trips and mid to long distance travel. We've even expanded our service to include a Buddy Driver or chauffeur on demand for the times users may want to book a car but not take the wheel.

Pandemic-induced Shifts

During the pandemic, we did see a decrease in usage especially during the implementation of the movement control order (MCO) because of the travel restrictions put in place by the government. This decrease in usage forced us to look at things differently and re-examine how we could pivot our business to serve our users better during such challenging times.

In line with efforts to curb COVID-19 transmission rates, we didn't encourage SOCAR members to make travel plans and leave their homes. However, we assured them that if there was an absolute need to book our cars for essential trips such as commuting to work, purchasing groceries or medical supplies or for emergencies, they were available and properly maintained

with thorough sanitisation processes in place. We also acknowledged it was difficult for people to renew their insurance and collect their new road tax in person. Hence, we launched an insurance renewal service called TREVO Guard which allows you to get your insurance renewed via the app in just a few taps.



Currently, we see our usage rates getting back on track again as users book our cars for their vaccination appointments. Our Malaysia Can Overcome campaign aims to provide at provide safe and affordable mobility and with vaccinated Malaysians allowed more freedom to move around, our cars are also an option for those who don't wish to take public transport.

The car sharing business started in 2011 with 100 rental cars in South Korea where there hasn't been an extensive lengthy lockdown period as Malaysia. The fact that people can still go to work and travel means that demand for mobility will be resilient. Drawing lessons from Korea with the sharp increase in travel demand once the economy reopens, we want to make sure both our SOCAR and TREVO platforms are ready to support the spike in demand when Malaysia fully opens up again.

Driving Smoothly Over Speed Bumps

During the pandemic, our main focus was on sanitisation, safety and security. Our keyless car-sharing technology ensures

contactless handoff of cars. As vaccination rates in Malaysia increase and the economy reopens, our focus is now on recovery. I always believe that at the core of every successful mobility company lies three important pillars: technology, capital and the people behind the organisation.

Every resilient high growth business starts with its founding team and we've been lucky to have had mobility experts right from day one who understand the sacrifices and the work it takes to build a sustainable and scalable mobility business. With the growth we've seen in our business and the uptake in user adoption, we've been fortunate to have been able to attract new capital into the business which then makes it easier for us to invest in growth initiatives and technology.

With any organisation that grows quickly, we've encountered problems such as technical and organisational debt - things that can create bigger fractures in your organisation if you don't address it and pay down the 'debt'. Dilution of talent and dispersion of resources become a problem when you grow from a team of 10 to a team of hundreds of people sitting across

many offices in different countries. This is something I realise that needs to be addressed as much as our longevity. Our relevance depends on innovation and investing in new technology. Also, addressing some of the structural issues is always key before we take the next step forward. At this stage, investing in the right HR talent and business partners will be crucial in helping the company get to the next stage.

We approach technology in the same way. Without the people and a strong technology organisation, we'll not be able to iterate and produce the products that we desire. As our product offerings and the size of our consumer base grows, the architecture behind our technology also needs to evolve accordingly while serving both external and internal stakeholders. We're generating data at a faster pace than ever, but it's only worth something if we can ingest, stream, store and utilise this data to help us make better business decisions.

Sustaining Speed, Cruising Forward

Our strategy moving forward is to continue maintaining close contact with the government and stakeholders to enable more Malaysians to embrace the idea of going carless and enable more individuals from the B40 and M40 segments to benefit from our service offerings. We're confident that our business will be able to bounce back in due time, as we offer added value to the multiflex community.

The pandemic has also created a new heightened awareness of how vulnerable we are to exogenous shocks. COVID-19 has been one of the biggest existential threats to humanity and economies in recent decades, but the bigger threat to all of us and posterity is that of climate change. As players in the mobility space, we have our role to play in reducing net emissions from the transportation industry, which contributes to about a fifth of total carbon emissions. We can sleepwalk our



way to impending catastrophe or we can all start playing an active role in transitioning towards clean mobility.

As a car-sharing player, sustainability shouldn't just be part of our long-term strategy, it should be an imperative that we're obligated to deliver. In addition, in line with national and global goals to address climate change, we're committed to enabling the expansion of sustainable mobility by introducing EVs to our fleet, which will enable Malaysians to adopt greener mobility without the burden of purchasing their own car.

We're also actively pursuing opportunities to fundraise and attract new investors. We see a lot of potential for our multiflex business model to grow in neighbouring markets in Southeast Asia and our entry into Indonesia has yielded promising results. So, having new funding will contribute significantly to our ability to grow our footprint across the region. ■



Leon's survival tip for startups to survive an economic crisis:

The biggest threat to your organisation is inertia and fear of change. **Embrace change**, constantly cannibalise yourself and find new ways to make yourself relevant. If you're afraid of these changes and justifying these changes to your stakeholders, there are plenty of people out there who are hungrier and smarter who will do the exact same thing to your business without even asking you or your shareholders for permission.

Things are more fluid than ever in terms of competitive dynamics. Talented people have a choice to choose any job in any country and loyalty is only reserved for the sentimental. Knowledge is also more transferable than ever. Joseph Schumpeter's 'gale of creative destruction' that illustrates the 'process of industrial mutation that continuously revolutionises the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one' is a pervasive force in today's economy.

That's why every single business needs to be able to embrace change and this needs to be built into their internal culture.

What to Expect in 2022: Rethinking Employment, Rebooting Work

To be post-pandemic ready means knowing what to expect in 2022 and beyond. Here's, a prediction that'll influence the economy and shape a new normal.

There are thousands, if not millions, of jobs open but there are no applicants. What is going on? Over a five-year period, Harvard Business Review analysed over 9,000 rejection experiences of employees at a Fortune 100 company and discovered that 'employees don't apply for jobs solely because they want a new job right now, they also apply to learn what opportunities might be available to them in the future'. There'll be a departure from the thinking of one profession, one job until retirement. PwC's 2022 report on the future of work lays out an analysis of three distinct worlds of work: blue (bigger organisations), green (socially responsible corporations) and orange (smaller organisations). But it highlights the vital role of forward-looking HR to meet 'the needs of a workforce that demands more freedom, autonomy and flexibility'.



IMPACTING THE FOOD Industry

During WBN #iEmPOWER webinar *Digitalisation Trend Creating Opportunities in F&B*, three CEOs of food-based companies Foodpanda, MyGroser and Tealive speak on the evolving consumer behaviour, managing their services as well as products during the pandemic and beyond. **Su Aziz** writes.

The current trend in the food industry, according to Sayantan Das of online food delivery platform Foodpanda, sees a steeper gradient in terms of adoption rates, whether it's new customers, active users or returning customers purchasing more frequently, demanding convenient, fast delivery. Stephen Francis, CEO of online grocery platform MyGroser believes that you should be able to get what you want, when you want, every day of the year and it should be affordable as well as fresh, if not fresher than physically grocery shopping at the store. 'MyGroser started from that idea and ultimately needed to be an app that anyone could use, even those who aren't familiar with technology. That was where Microsoft came in,' explains Sayantan.

While the petrol station format of Tealive, an increasingly popular bubble tea store, performed really well during the pandemic, the stores in shopping malls were the most badly impacted in this period, admits its CEO, Bryan Loo. 'Urban areas too due to inconsistent foot traffic, while our suburban stores did well enough. We managed to



cruise through the pandemic because our staff are diverse. We also observed a change in consumer buying behaviour during the pandemic. For example, if before college level consumers only make up five to eight per cent of our total sale, now they make up 30 per cent. So, we'll continue as we do to remain accessible to our customers.'

For MyGroser, a focus area would be hyper local product selection. Currently, it offers around 17,000 to 18,000 different products. 'Still, we ask ourselves, what more could we do to make the experience better for consumers. Ideas such as ready to eat food and an extension of existing products such as fresh meat which we can marinade or work with partners who can do that. It's great to have high quality products but even greater if they're of good quality at affordable prices,' says Stephen. 'Our ready to cook meal kits, has a funny story. Every meal kit has actually been tried by co-founders of MyGroser before it's sold. Basically, every product we sell has been used by someone on our team. This gives a measure of confidence in that we know what we're selling.'

Consumer Behavioural Evolution

The team at Foodpanda observes an increase in demand for food choices. 'Interestingly, a sort of behaviour called impulsive revenge spending during the pandemic,' says Sayantan. 'It's when people are stuck at home and have more disposable income. This is when online channels are outlets for their spending. The fact that micro, right up to medium and large businesses are going online, breaks the digital divide.' Malaysians responded enthusiastically to the change and engagement seems to be well distributed from local stores to franchises. 'What we also see is many more F&B business owners getting more sophisticated, more savvy. They're looking for smaller format store to minimise capital investment and on labour,' he adds.

Meanwhile, Bryan keeps Tealive's format compact and manageable. Instead of focusing on one product, they're operating many things out of the same branch with the same manpower. It's a way to compress the margin. Operating on the online



platform gives them a lot more room to look at better margin while banking on existing resources. 'We realised that your [business] model is really the answer for going forward,' he says. 'What we've observed is, every time when there was a lockdown there was a massive shift in consumer value. Which means that more people switch to online delivery. We need to be accessible online and offline.'

Sayantan sees trends evolving. 'With lockdowns easing, more people are stepping out especially to malls, F&B outlets and the like. Being a data-driven company, Foodpanda observes the trend to help us diversify through offerings on complimentary goods-adjacent products and delivery of a variety of products,' he elaborates. 'In the past year, we've launched a new vertical called Shops where you're able to buy non-food products online from convenient stores, pharmacies and more to be delivered by Foodpanda. So far, the response has been positive.' It stemmed from the question: how to connect the entire [online delivery and shopping] ecosystem and embed Foodpanda's service in a customer's daily life?

Food makes up around 30 to 40 per cent of a person's daily life while another 20 per cent is possibly buying groceries and the like and the balance of around 30 per cent is spent on chores at home. Sayantan realises that Foodpanda's biggest competitor is not other online platforms but those who cook at home. 'We want to disrupt that habit, encourage a dependency on our service, the convenience we offer. We've partnered with brands, be it dining in or takeaway, connecting back to delivery regardless of whether they're food products or otherwise.'

The pandemic isn't going to end anytime soon and this heavily influences consumers' behaviour. 'We now have a generation of people who experienced a different way of doing things, hesitant to physically shop in stores and know that they don't actually have to,' says Stephen. 'Fact is, they may never return to physically shopping in stores. While MyGroser was never created to replace traditional supermarkets or hypermarkets, its appeal for those looking for freshness, convenience and value, is growing. We encourage home-based entrepreneurs to join our platform as long

as their products meet our set of standards. Quite a number of them are women with amazing products that we've tested before putting them online.' This pandemic has changed habits. For instance, people who have never cooked before started cooking.

Now and Tomorrow

One of Tealive's breakthrough innovation is the KDS system, on which its staff are trained. Through the system, it cuts the barista training period from a month to 10 days. This helped in terms of coping with rapid store expansion. My Groser started out as a tech company, but during the pandemic they had to rebuild many things to keep up with the changes, and part of that was how they tracked their system. To keep quality of produce high they need to be able to predict the amount needed and to track delivery when a product is packed and should be delivered within a certain number of hours. This is also to avoid extra cost or a loss.

'It's going to sound odd but we don't actually spend a lot of time thinking about how we're going to beat our competitors. There's tremendous opportunity in the



market and even if every online store today was to grow by five times the demand will be greater than that. It's fantastic that so many people out there are trying to make things better for consumers and trying to improve,' admits Stephen. 'We have a 95 per cent success rate which leaves us to learn from issues stemming out of the remaining five per cent. We had a loss of RM60,000 during the first week of starting MyGroser and today, it's less than three per cent.'

The moment entrepreneurs raise funds or have a little or a lot of liquidity, Sayantan notices they fall into the trap of thinking they need to spend a lot on acquiring customers. While there's some truth in that, it's not all true. You want to acquire the right kind of customers and doing it blindly without a strategy will cause your ROI to not be anywhere near what you expect. 'Always try to understand what your business model is, where you're going to make revenues and the revenue model of your business. Focus on the basics, know what's the worst-case scenario, how much is your safety margin and what's the best-case scenario. Ensure that you have a really great team. A lot of Foodpanda's success during the pandemic is because we have a great team in place,' he concludes. ■



What to Expect in 2022: Changing Perceptions of Food

To be post-pandemic ready means knowing what to expect in 2022 and beyond. Here's, a prediction that'll influence the economy and shape a new normal.

In May 2021, Spoonshot reported on how sustainability and health are taking centre stage for food and drink companies in the coming year since consumers show greater concern for these issues. A few specifics include, **food synergy**: a concept of how nutrients from different foods interact and improve absorption and bioavailability of the nutrients in the body. One of the reasons why focusing on food synergies can be beneficial is that there's growing interest in the concept of food as medicine. **Gut-lung axis**: is just one of the many emerging benefits of maintaining a healthy gastrointestinal system. While it's too early to use this as a scientifically-backed claim, this is an evolution of the growing interest in gut health and underscores the importance of food-as-medicine. **Automation** to fill in the gaps, right from making and serving of food to home delivery. **Lab-to-Fork**: lab-grown food isn't limited to only meat, it now includes dairy products, honey, coffee, gelatine and more. They allow new ways of sourcing animal-based food and those facing an existential threat. Investors, Spoonshot's report states, such as Bill Gates and Richard Branson see the opportunity and have been behind these products. Interestingly, while business interest in lab-grown food grew by 64 per cent over the last year, consumer interest declined by 35 per cent.

GETTING CREATIVE with BUSINESS

Speakers of WBN #iEmPOWER webinar on *Creative Industry: Harnessing Emerging Technologies*, CEO of Gould Studio in Sydney and Senior Vice President of MDEC in Kuala Lumpur talk to **Su Aziz** on creative solutions to challenges faced by their industries as well as being post-pandemic ready.

18 years ago, Peter Gould founded a design company in Sydney. Gould Studio is somewhat unique, hardly your run-of-the-mill design company. Over the years, they've created foundations for some of the most well-known brands in the Islamic economy while working with recognised multinationals. While they grew a diverse international team brought together by a mutual intention to design with heart for positive change, they also developed a set of principles to provide a framework for meaningful work and called it Heart-Centered Design.

Here, Peter talks about:

Current challenges faced by the design industry in Australia

Companies that embrace a strategic understanding of design are winning, because their products and services are integrated into a cohesively designed experience. There's a growing awareness in understanding the role and importance of design within leading organisations. Design now has a seat at the C-suite in many organisations and often a chief design officer to guide and unify key decisions connected to all aspects of an organisation. Companies that view design as an afterthought, or simply as marketing, will be limited.

In terms of geography, we're definitely in a shared, globally interconnected digital economy industry, so physical locations have a different role than it used to. Our team, for example, has a hub here in Sydney, Jakarta and Dubai. We're able to deliver a 24-hour workflow for clients that require it. Like all sectors however, the design industry is experiencing transformation through the pandemic and the volatility of many sectors has a ripple effect to service providers.

Solutions for these challenges

Success lies in the capacity to listen, adapt and be agile. If we're serving the real needs of people, then our function is valuable. Design teams need to invest in strategic capability, by aligning and understanding business objectives that start with solving human problems. Large consulting firms and tech companies continue to acquire design teams for this reason. If design teams don't adapt, we may slip into a kind of commodified service of creating artefacts and digital assets that look beautiful or work well in isolation, without clear business value and strategic direction.

Learning from past failures on business growth, building financial resilience and longevity

It's easy to become enamoured with a particular technology, trend or platform. As a design team we ourselves must embrace change as habit, requiring constant iteration and prototyping of our business model. We've explored areas that didn't lead where we imagined, but there is value and learning in each attempt. Resilience is helped by building quality, lifelong relationships. In times of economic change and disruption, this is especially important to maintain trust and togetherness during these times knowing the next chapter ahead is waiting to flourish.

Being post-pandemic ready

As designers, we must continue to serve the needs of people. During this mid or post-pandemic era, it's a time to reflect and re-evaluate what we're designing, and why. My personal view is that a spiritual lens onto design practice offers a special and timely perspective. In a time of shared global adversity, we have an opportunity to reflect within ourselves as individuals, but collectively as teams, communities and global friends. Our design practice must take a more holistic view, beyond simply sales, shareholders and user growth. We



must deeply care for personal and spiritual wellbeing in the products and services that we create. We must design with heart. At Gould Studio, we call this Heart-Centered Design. It defines our team culture, who we work with, and why. Maintaining this alignment is essential to meaningful, sustainable, enriching work that aims to benefit hearts around the globe.



Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) focuses accelerating the growth of Malaysia's digital economy and ensuring it's inclusive as well as beneficial for all. Part of **Raymond Siva's** role as a senior vice president is drive the organisation to empower Malaysians with digital skills, enable digitally-powered businesses and drive digital sector investments.

Here, Raymond shares on:

Challenges influencing the digital economic growth in Malaysia

Companies understand the need for digitalisation and most are demanding for assistance now. Understanding the stage of digitalisation they are at now, tools required and skills they need to have in the organisation and clear understanding of the results they can expect is key. Understanding the shift in consumer habits, information sharing and the way trade has completely changed over the past two years is critical in ensuring digital adoption among business, government and civil society. The pandemic has accelerated decisions related to digitalisation, the need to reinvent how we organise ourselves and enable a society integrated with 4IR technology. In this scenario, agile policy making, developing new digital skills and ability to adapt to the evolving global and local economic demands will be key to coming out stronger.

MDEC's solutions for these challenges

MDEC will focus on four digital thrusts of New Skills, Adoption, Disruptors and Investments. They form the basis that will drive its core programmes for the people, industry and investors. Under New Skills, in 2021, MDEC targets to place and train 6,000 people in digital jobs. Under Adoption, in 2021, at least four strategic pilot projects facilitated to improve the livelihood of the many across sectors via digital adoption and digitalisation. Under Disruptors, in 2021, MDEC oversees 30 companies facilitated for funding, RM320 million export revenues and developing a RM1.0 billion company. Lastly, under Investments, as of 2019, 2,954 Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) status companies brought in RM472 billion in revenue and created 182,538 jobs. Today, Malaysia is considered as world's third most competitive Global

Business Solutions (GSB) locations and continues to welcome new investments.

Advice on business growth, building financial resilience and longevity

Cultivate a new mindset and pivot to digitalisation of key operational or marketing approach. Hire accordingly, upskill and approach new markets since digitalisation will allow borderless access for goods and services.

Using tech to be post-pandemic ready

Technology tools provide means for better remote communication, workflow improvements and sales. It increases productivity and workflow improvements increase profit margins. Digital channels provide more means of distributing content. There are also a few ways of earning money through gaming, leisure or social economies such as streaming and play to earn. MDEC has aided through programmes that provide incentives for the adoption and usage of digitisation tools, upskilling and training courses to learn new skills as well as tech, teaching the industry new ways of earning revenue via streaming and facilitates business opportunities. ■



GREEN



THOUGHTFUL CONSUMERISM: ELECTRONICS

Beyond price and quality, modern consumers as well as institutional purchasers are thinking about the social and environmental impact of the products they buy. Electronic goods have not escaped the critique of conscious consumers.

Nancy Gillis of Global Electronics Council answers some questions on the issue.

Across the globe, electronics are finding their way into all aspects of life through products within homes, cars, clothing, toys, etc. While the technologies that rely on electronics can provide tremendous societal good, they are also the source of significant negative environmental and social impacts. The rise of conscious consumerism has not left the sector untouched, and more and more electronics purchasers are seeking goods that have positive social, economic and environmental impact.

Enter Global Electronics Council. Since its inception in 2006, when it began as the Green Electronics Council, the Global Electronics Council (GEC) has been leveraging the power of the ICT purchaser to create a more sustainable and just world. Primarily, the GEC acts as the fulcrum point between the institutional purchasers who



NANCY GILLIS
CEO, GEC

buy electronics and the manufacturers who produce them. The GEC provides free access to many tools and resources including the ecolabel, EPEAT, the world's leading ecolabel for technology products and services. The GEC's EPEAT registry is an easy-to-use resource for identifying and purchasing sustainable IT products.

We speak to Nancy Gillis, CEO of GEC to explore sustainable electronics.



'The genesis of GEC is the power of the purchaser. The power to create positive sustainable good in terms of reductions in energy, greenhouse gas emissions and climate change,' Nancy elaborates. 'We recognise that there are two types of purchasers - individuals and institutional purchasers. We focus on institutional purchasers because with one buying decision, they represent the same impact as thousands of individual purchasers. Historically, we've focused on public sector institutional purchasers and the role they play in furthering sustainability as well as addressing climate change. But now we also focus on the private sector, the global companies who should also be buying only sustainable ICT.'

Globally, COVID-19 has impacted all sectors, what impacts have you seen in the electronics sector?

COVID-19 has spurred a large number of additional, unanticipated purchases like laptops which are in global demand. We already had a major problem with e-waste before the pandemic which has only become worse since we still haven't figured out how to take products back and recycle them. There's a concern that there is so much technology being bought so quickly with no plan for how to address what to do with these products at the end of their life. The largest growing waste stream in the world is e-waste, and the pandemic has not helped.

We saw the reduction of airline greenhouse gas (GHG) and there were positives from

an air quality perspective. However, with the increase in technology-related energy use, especially the streaming of movies plus other media content and the associated GHGs, we can't definitely say the two balanced out.

So, how do we start to tackle sustainability in the electronics sector?

Electronics is in all aspects of our lives. It can help us to remain healthy, such as wearable technology that's used for monitoring and testing. Technology is also becoming affordable for more people. With the pandemic, many of us were only able to continue with education or work or remain sane because of electronics. Sustainability of products should be addressed in consideration of the product's entire lifecycle, from extraction, through manufacture, assembly, use and end of life.

If you focus on reducing the impact a product has in only one area, it could significantly increase the impact in the other. You not only have to balance the environmental and social impacts of a product across its lifecycle, you also have to address the triple bottom line. Make sure the product is good from an environmental, social and economic perspective. You can't make something that's so environmentally sustainable that no one can afford it. When you account for the triple bottom line, it means balancing the impacts across the whole value chain as well as bringing all costs in and accounting for them.

What does a sustainable balance look like and how do we achieve it?

The happy medium is to have all the environmental as well as social benefits and have the technology at a price that's accessible. Consumers who value products because of what the product does and not just as a status symbol retain them longer. Because of e-waste, companies need to

start having an acceptance of electronics products having a second life. There needs to be a way to find the business model for maybe even third or fourth life. A product that continues operating as long as possible without going into a landfill helps people, creates jobs and is a definite win.

For many sectors, impacts are different. They can be anything from transport to packaging. Look at the lifecycle analysis and see what are the big science-based impacts that are true to your sector that you should be responsible for. End consumer packaging gets a lot of attention in the press but is not always the biggest environmental impact for example. The electronics sector has its own impacts, but when you prioritise them scientifically, packaging isn't the highest at all - energy use in production and manufacturing has a much higher impact.

Tell us more about the thinking behind EPEAT

It's not just about giving the purchaser raw data. In the food sector, nutritional labels give a lot of data to consumers, but yet we still have big healthcare problems globally as is the case with obesity.

It's not that there's a lack of info or data per se, the challenge lies in balance between everything that wants your attention when making purchasing decisions. I'm a strong advocate for ecolabels because of all the considerations that go into an ecolabel. It's third-party validated and makes things easier. There are too many decisions that take up mental space for the consumer, therefore, super simple, credible and trustworthy ecolabels help.

For purchasers we need to tell them the value of the sustainable products, why they address the impacts they care about and how easy it is to buy them. We also need to tell manufacturers what it means to be credibly sustainable. Over the last decade, purchasers have chosen to buy 1.3 billion EPEAT-registered products,

resulting in the reduction of 184 million metric tons of greenhouse gases and mitigating climate change which the GEC says is but one example of the power of the institutional purchaser.

What would you and the GEC team like to reiterate to our audience?

In terms of the environment, everybody loses with climate change. We consider a more sustainable and just world and the role that electronics and associated technology plays in it. We work towards a future in which the mindset of circularity has been so internalised that that there's no need to signify what's a sustainable product because they all are.

It may sound like nirvana, but it is not unattainable given the computer example - so much has changed especially if you reflect on the last 15 years' difference between what a computer was how a computer is produced today. What really will make the change happen is if every economic actor has an opportunity to be part of this global value chain and makes the move towards circularity. If not, then we're not going to get there.

Product example: HP ZBook Fury 15 and 17 G7

The HP ZBook Fury Notebook has attained gold status on the GEC's EPEAT register attaining an optional criteria score 42 out of 49. The product achieved 100 per cent of allocated scores in the product longevity/life-cycle extension, energy conservation, packaging, lifecycle assessment and carbon footprint and

corporate environmental performance sections of the EPEAT assessment. HP touts the Z range of products as the world's most PC sustainable.

The company's Sustainability and Compliance Centre affirms that they use recycled plastics in Z products, reducing waste going into oceans and landfills. They also minimise waste by allowing you to ship multiple products in one carton. Z products are ENERGY STAR® certified and designed with highly efficient power supplies and idle management to use less energy without sacrificing performance. EPEAT is a comprehensive measure of product sustainability and we offer a full portfolio of EPEAT Gold and Silver devices.

Z products meticulously adhere to restricted substance regulations and materials that meet GreenScreen® for Safer Chemicals' methodology are selected. HP share extensive product safety and environmental information online and contribute to the development of new standards. In 2020, HP provided ECO Declarations for product groups representing 94 per cent of the company's revenue. More broadly, HP has launched the Amplify Impact program which outlines the company's ambitious goal to become the most sustainable and just technology company by 2030. The Sustainable Impact Program for Partners aims to extend impact on climate change, human rights and digital divide.

Product example: Fairphone

Branded as the phone that cares for people and the planet. It's the world's most sustainable smartphone at a lower price. The company asserts the smartphone's journey in terms of extraction, production and distribution, is filled with unfair practices. Fairphone has committed to changing the industry from the inside out by creating products that last, reducing e-waste, choosing fairer materials and putting people first.





Fairphone began in 2010, as a campaign to increase awareness for the use of conflict minerals in consumer electronics. Ioiana Luncheon, PR and communications manager at Fairphone, says that six years later, this social enterprise has released two smartphones and more than 300,000 Fairphone owners have joined their movement, but this cause is more relevant than ever. 'We believe a fairer electronics industry is possible. By making change from the inside, we're giving a voice to people who care. We believe that care for the environment and people should be a natural part of doing business throughout our industry. With suppliers, local communities and the wider industry, we work for fairer materials and more responsible practices - one step at a time. Together we're disrupting a short-term way of thinking that the world can no longer afford.' ■

Circular Electronics Partnership

- ▶ GEC is producing 50 million tonnes of e-waste annually.
- ▶ 80 per cent of e-waste is not collected for recycling.
- ▶ 76 per cent of e-waste is not documented and 4 per cent thrown into household waste.
- ▶ It is estimated there are over 100 million old devices in homes.
- ▶ At the current rate we'll produce 120 millions tonnes of e-waste annually by 2050.

The Circular Electronics Partnership (CEP) unites leaders in tech, consumer goods and waste management, to identify how to do things better. Big names such as the GEC and the World Economic Forum are joining the likes of Google, Microsoft, Vodafone and more, working together for a circular economy. The partnership acknowledges the global dependency on technology, but believe that businesses should work together to overcome the barriers to access to a truly circular economy.

As the visualisation of our plan, the CEP roadmap provides clear action pathways in the form of key interventions. These are:

- ▶ Design for circularity.
- ▶ Drive demand for circular products and services.
- ▶ Scale responsible business models.
- ▶ Increase official collection rate.
- ▶ Aggregate for reuse and recycling.
- ▶ Scale secondary material markets.

Acting as a guide, the CEP roadmap identifies vital players such as industry leaders, partner organisations, research institutes and NGOs. It suggests how to overcome challenges and enable scalable circularity.

What to Expect in 2022: Healthcare

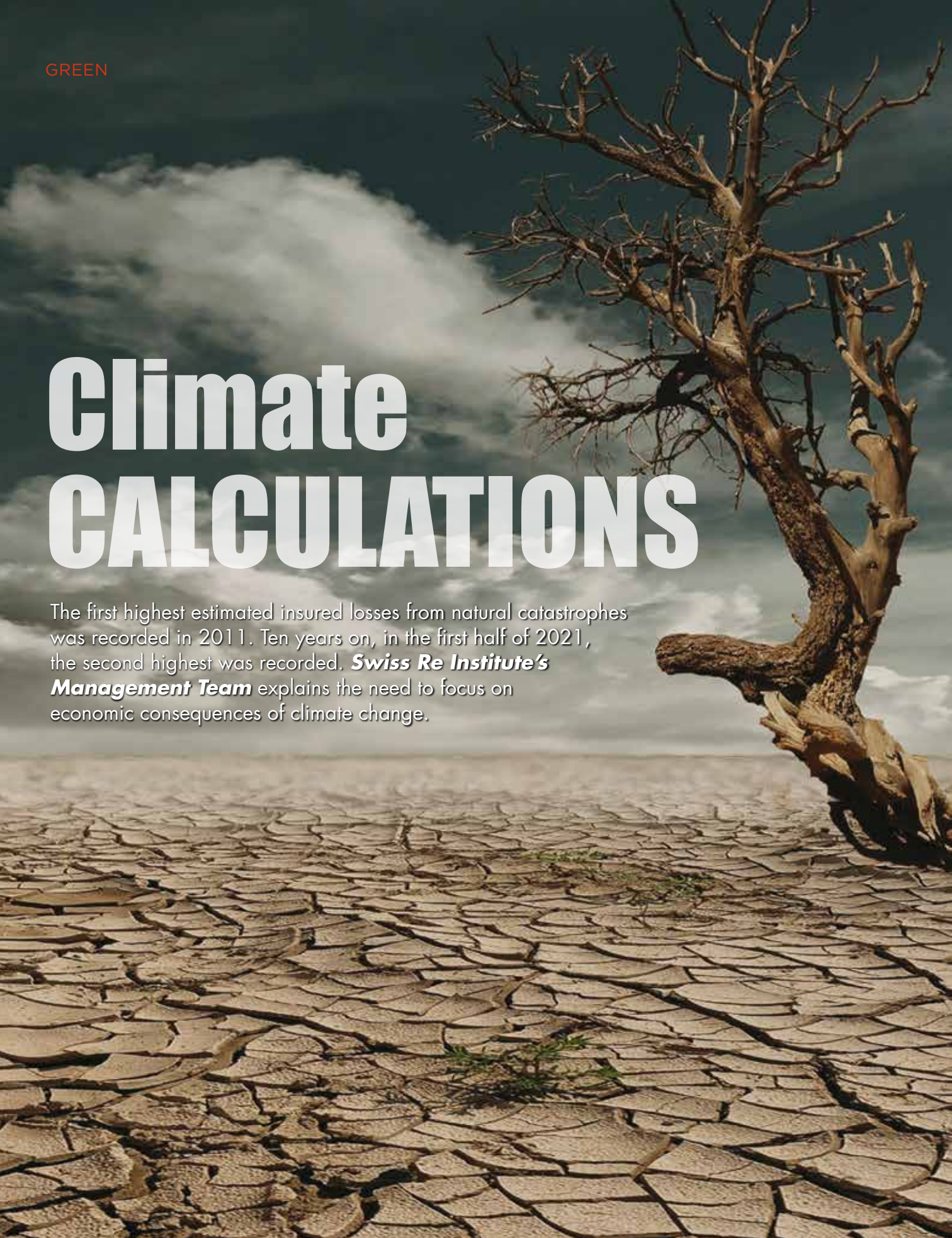
To be post-pandemic ready means knowing what to expect in 2022 and beyond. Here's, a prediction that'll influence the economy and shape a new normal.

Interestingly, five years ago, Deloitte reported on six predictions for healthcare in 2022. Three out of the six seem to be prevalent: One, patients understand they have options and use information as well as data about themselves and providers to get the best treatment at a time, place and cost convenient to them. Two, digital technologies are transforming health care culture into smart health care and is delivering more cost-effective patient-centred care. Three, data is the new health care currency. AI and real-world evidence are unlocking value in health data. The other three predictions are industrialised life sciences industry, advances in medicine and blurred boundaries between stakeholders. What's more, a 2021 paper by Sabuzima Nayak and Ripon Patgiri, titled 6G Communication Technology: A Vision on Intelligent Healthcare, exposes the role of 6G communication technology in telesurgery, epidemic and pandemic. The authors state, '6G is a promising communication technology that will dominate the entire health market from 2030 onward' and 'healthcare will be fully AI-driven and dependent on 6G communication technology.' Currently, they deduce, time and space are key barriers to health care and 6G will be able to overcome these barriers.

GREEN

Climate CALCULATIONS

The first highest estimated insured losses from natural catastrophes was recorded in 2011. Ten years on, in the first half of 2021, the second highest was recorded. **Swiss Re Institute's Management Team** explains the need to focus on economic consequences of climate change.



Swiss Re Institute's Management Team



Jérôme Jean Haegeli



Martin Bertogg



Thierry Leger

Swiss Re Institute, a global leader in reinsurance, insurance and other forms of insurance-based risk transfer, estimates severe weather events drove global insured catastrophe losses of USD42 billion in first half of 2021. COVID-19 impacts on the economy have overshadowed climatic impacts. 'Climate change is one of the biggest risks facing society and the global economy,' says its group chief economist Jérôme Jean Haegeli.

Swiss Re Group was founded in 1863 and is headquartered in Zurich with a network of around 80 offices globally. It supports sustainable progress for the benefit of a range of clients with a long-term perspective. The company has outlined their 2030 Sustainability Ambitions which denote three key areas it aims to impact significantly to support sustainability and strengthen global resilience: mitigating climate risk and advancing the energy transition, building societal resilience and driving affordable insurance with digital solutions.

'The recent analysis from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change confirms expectations of more extreme weather in the future and urgency to act to limit global warming. Working with the public sector, the reinsurance industry plays a key role in helping to strengthen communities' resilience by

steering development away from high-risk areas, making adaptation investments, maintaining insurability of assets and narrowing protection gaps,' says Jérôme.

THE CLIMATE REALITY

Severe weather events push up natural catastrophe losses. 'The effects of climate change are manifesting in warmer temperatures, rising sea levels, more erratic rainfall patterns and greater weather extremes,' says Martin Bertogg, head cat perils and cyber at Swiss Re. 'Taken together with rapid urban development and accumulation of wealth in disaster-prone areas, secondary perils, such as winter storms, hail, floods or wildfires, lead to ever higher catastrophe losses. The experience so far in 2021 underscores the growing risks of these perils, exposing ever larger communities to extreme climate events.'



According to Swiss Re Institute's preliminary sigma estimates, a deep winter freeze, hailstorms and wildfires contributed to natural catastrophe losses of USD40 billion in the first half of 2021. This is above the previous 10-year average of USD33 billion and the second highest on record for a first half after 2011. 2011 was marked by major earthquakes in Japan and New Zealand which pushed the six-month total to USD104 billion. Man-made disasters triggered another estimated USD2 billion of insured losses in the first half this year, less than usual and likely reflecting remaining COVID-19 restrictions.

Winter storms, intense heatwaves and severe flooding around the globe continue to signal the growing risks from secondary perils, fuelled by rapid urban development and climate change. According to Swiss Re, of the total estimated economic losses in the first half of 2021, USD74 billion were caused by natural catastrophes. In February, the United States was hit by a period of extreme cold including heavy snowfall and ice accumulation. What is commonly referred to as winter storm Uri resulted in estimated insured losses of USD15 billion which is the highest ever recorded for such winter storms and makes up an estimated 38 per cent of all estimated insured losses resulting from natural catastrophes that occurred in the first half of this year.



CLIMATE CALCULATIONS

Similarly, in June this year, Europe was hit by severe weather in the form of thunderstorms, hail and tornadoes. Affected homes and vehicles in Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Czech Republic and Switzerland dominated headlines with losses estimated at USD4.5 billion. On the opposite end of the extreme weather, Canada was struck by a heatwave around the same period with record highs reaching 45 degrees Celsius recorded in western Canada and north-western United States. Wildfires in California which occurred as a direct result of the heat and severe drought conditions made global news.

The start of the latter part of 2021 was not much better. Europe and China experienced severe flooding in July which caused major property destruction and loss of life. Germany and neighbouring countries experienced the same. The expectation is that these will result in substantial insured losses. Germany alone is estimated to incur insured losses exceeding USD5 billion, similar to California, Turkey, Greece and Italy were subject to wildfires fuelled by extreme heat with expected economic and insured losses. Manmade disasters triggered an additional USD3 billion in the first half of this year. Close to 4,500 people lost their lives or went missing in disaster events in the first half of 2021.

LESSENING THE IMPACT

According to Swiss Re Institute's research, by mid-century, the world economy stands to lose up to 18 per cent of total economic value as a direct result of climate change. The Institute notes this as a very real scenario if temperature increases stay on

their current trajectory and both the Paris Agreement and 2050 net-zero emissions targets are not met.

Swiss Re Institute has conducted a stress test to examine how 48 economies would be impacted by the ongoing effects of climate change under four different temperature increase scenarios. Climate Economics Index ranks countries' resilience to climate change and shows how climate risks will impact these 48 countries, including economies across the United States, Europe and Asia that represent 90 per cent of the world economy and ranks their overall climate resilience. It shows that all countries will be affected by the climate reality, but some are more vulnerable than others.

In a severe scenario with a temperature increase of 3.2 degrees Celsius, China, for example, would stand to lose almost an estimate 24 per cent of its GDP by mid-century. The United States, Canada and the United Kingdom would all see around a 10 per cent loss, while Europe would suffer slightly more with an estimated 11 per cent loss. Economies such as Finland or Switzerland are less exposed with an estimated loss of six per cent, while France or Greece, for example, are estimated to lose 13 per cent of their GDPs.

The Swiss Re Institute also ranked each country on its vulnerability to extreme dry and wet weather conditions and considered the country's capacity to cope with the effects of climate change. Put together, these findings generate a ranking of countries' resilience to the impacts of climate change. The ranking illustrates that

countries most negatively impacted are often the ones with fewest resources to adapt to and mitigate the effects of rising global temperatures. The most vulnerable countries in this context are Malaysia, Thailand, India, the Philippines and Indonesia while advanced economies in the northern hemisphere are the least vulnerable.

As global warming makes the impact of weather-related natural disasters more severe, it can lead to substantial income and productivity losses over time. For example, rising sea levels result in loss of land that could have otherwise been used productively and heat stress can lead to crop failures. Emerging economies in equatorial regions would be most affected by rising temperatures. Jérôme affirms, 'Climate risk is a systemic risk and can only be addressed globally. We still have an opportunity to correct course now and construct a world that will be greener, more sustainable and more resilient. The impacts of climate change can be lessened if decisive action is taken to meet the targets set out in the Paris Agreement. This will require more than what is pledged today, with both the public and private sectors working together to accelerate the transition to net zero.'

Swiss Re affirms that coordinated measures by the world's largest carbon emitters are crucial to meet climate targets. The public and private sectors can vacillate and accelerate the transition, particularly regarding sustainable infrastructure investments that are vital to remain below a two degrees Celsius temperature increase. 'Climate change is a systemic risk and can

only be addressed globally. So far, too little is being done,' says Jérôme. 'Only if public and private sectors pull together will the transition to a low-carbon economy be possible. We have an opportunity to correct the course now and construct a world that will be greener, more sustainable and more resilient.'

FINAL CALCULATIONS

According to Swiss Re Institute, climate change poses the biggest long-term risk to the global economy. If no mitigating

action is taken, global temperatures could rise by more than three degrees Celsius and the world economy could shrink by 18 per cent in the next 30 years. However, the impact can be lessened if decisive action is taken to meet the targets set in the Paris Agreement, the Institute's Climate Economics Index shows. This will require more than what's pledged today, public and private sectors will play a crucial role in accelerating the transition to net zero.

'Climate risk affects every society, every company and every individual. By 2050, the world population will grow to almost

10 billion people, especially in regions most impacted by climate change. So, we must act now to mitigate the risks and to reach net-zero targets,' says Thierry Léger, group chief underwriting officer and chairman of Swiss Re Institute. 'Equally, as our recent biodiversity index shows, nature and ecosystem services provide huge economic benefits but are under intense threat. That's why climate change and biodiversity loss are twin challenges that we need to tackle as a global community to maintain a healthy economy and a sustainable future.' ■

The Swiss Re Institute lists expected global GDP impact by 2050 under different scenarios compared to a world without climate change:

- ▶ 18% if no mitigating actions are taken: 3.2°C increase
- ▶ 14% if some mitigating actions are taken: 2.6°C increase
- ▶ 11% if further mitigating actions are taken: 2°C increase
- ▶ 4% if Paris Agreement targets are met: below 2°C increase




What to Expect in 2022:

Eliminating Plastic

To be post-pandemic ready means knowing what to expect in 2022 and beyond. Here's, a prediction that'll influence the economy and shape a new normal.

Plastic-eating microbes, according to AAAS's *ScienceMag*, may just solve the recycling problem. In the microbe-rich slime coating some of that trash, [a marine biologist] hopes to find organisms to help solve the vexing problem of what to do with the plastic flooding the planet. Collecting samples of the slime and bringing them back to the lab at Indonesia's Research Center for Oceanography, where marine biologists plan to culture the microbes and feed them only plastic to see what thrives. A group of European and Chinese labs is working to find and cultivate bacteria whose enzymes break down plastic, plus other enzymes that can turn the breakdown products into valuable chemicals. A group of researchers from Germany, France and Ireland, reports the publication further, recycled polyethylene terephthalate (PET) by using a modified version of an enzyme found in a compost pile that takes apart the waxy layer on leaves. A strain of lab-evolved bacteria then used the raw materials to build two new kinds of plastic.

GREEN

A full-page background image showing a swimmer in the foreground, partially submerged in dark, cold water. The swimmer is wearing a blue cap and goggles, with one arm extended forward, creating a splash. In the background, a massive, jagged iceberg floats under a cloudy sky. The overall tone is somber and urgent, reflecting the article's theme of climate change.

WATER BORNE CHANGE

Famously armed with nothing but a swimming cap, a pair of Speedos and goggles, Lewis Pugh is an endurance swimmer who braces icy waters to highlight the climate crisis.

Reyana Nacerodien reports.



LEWIS PUGH

*British-South African Endurance Swimmer
And Ocean Advocate*



Through his swims, and out of the water, British-South African endurance swimmer and ocean advocate Lewis Pugh, advocates for our oceans and planet at large, illustratively affirming, 'No message, no swim.' The 51-year old's expeditions have further brought about some valuable life lessons.

Early Swims

At just 17 years old, Lewis swam from Robben Island off the southern coast of South Africa, the small island where Nelson Mandela was famously imprisoned, to Cape Town. 'The Robben Island swim taught me that finishing a job gives you the power and the energy to go on to even bigger things,' he says. Now, more than four decades later, he has cemented his place in history with a number of swims.

The Arctic North Pole is basically uninhabitable. Receiving no direct sunlight, the geography is notorious for moving ice. But in 2007, Lewis completed a long distance swim across the Geographic North Pole. The one-kilometre swim took 18 minutes and 50 seconds which he spent in minus 1.7 degrees Celsius water. 'I had never been more frightened than I was standing on the edge of the sea ice. Minus 1.7 degrees Celsius was the coldest water any

human had ever swum in. The previous day's test swim had gone horribly wrong. The water was ink black, and it was 4.2 long, cold kilometres to the bottom. And there might be polar bears,' he recalls.

'But the reason I was right to be terrified, was that I shouldn't have been able to swim at the North Pole in the first place. Two years previously, 23 per cent of the Arctic ice cover had melted. I was swimming to draw the world's attention to the effect of climate change on the Arctic,' Lewis says. To date, he has completed

more than 40 successful swims and frequently in vulnerable or compromised ecosystems to draw attention to those. Getting into the water and having to face a range of conditions, challenges and potential threats puts both body and mind to the test. To this he says, 'When you have purpose, everything becomes possible.'

2021: The Ilulissat Icefjord

When this article was written, Lewis was embarking on yet another swim to highlight environmental impacts and climatic conditions. This most recent expedition saw him swimming across the mouth of Greenland's Ilulissat Icefjord, which is fed by the world's fastest-moving glacier. The Arctic is one of the most rapidly warming regions of the planet, with temperatures increasing at 2-3 times the global average - a phenomenon known as 'Arctic Amplification'.

The Arctic is feeling the effects of the climate crisis more dramatically than anywhere else on Earth, with glaciers, sea ice and permafrost all melting. The glacier lies south of Ilulissat on the west coast of Greenland, 250km north of the Arctic Circle. In what is the first multi-day polar swim ever attempted, Lewis plans to highlight the scale and pace of the climate



crisis. These are evident in the accelerated scale and pace at which the glacier is melting - a reality caused by warming air and ocean temperatures. 'Currently, the glacier discharges around 30 cubic kilometres of ice per year into the sea. If the entire Greenland Ice Sheet were to melt, it would lead to a global sea level rise of over seven metres. Any sea-level rise will be devastating, with one billion people living less than 10 metres above sea level, and around 230 million within one metre. This includes those living in London, Tokyo and New York,' Lewis says.

Science shows that changes in the Arctic are also impacting climate and weather patterns further south in North America and Europe. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) forecasts a global mean temperature rise of between 1.5 degrees Celsius and 5.5 degrees Celsius over the next century but that's likely to

be even higher in the Arctic. 'There's no better place in the world than Ilulissat to show the dramatic impact of the Climate Crisis. This is ground zero,' adds Lewis.

The Ilulissat or Jakobshavn Glacier is legendary. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, it's the world's fastest moving glacier. It moves at an average of 30 metres per day. Due to its sheer size and speed, it's one of the most studied glaciers in the world. Legend has it calved the iceberg that sank the Titanic. For the past few centuries, the Ilulissat has highlighted the devastating impact of atmospheric and ocean warming in the Arctic and developed our understanding of how glaciers are responding to climate change.

In planning the expedition, it was foreseen that the distance Lewis would swim may be considerably more than the 10-kilometre mouth of the Icefjord given harsh

conditions marred by icebergs and brash ice. The water's near freezing, and the wind chill could plummet temperatures deep into negative numbers. The swim was expected to take two weeks. No one has ever attempted a multi-day swim in the Polar Regions.

Taking Action

By plunging into freezing water and, quite literally, putting his life on the line, Lewis draws attention to the climatic plight and pushes world leaders to act. Later this year, Lewis will attend UN Climate Conference (COP26) in Glasgow. He'll use the story of his swim to impress upon world leaders the speed of the climate crisis. He'll ask them to move beyond long-term commitments toward urgent action. As UN Patron of the Oceans, Lewis will also stress the role healthy oceans play in mitigating against climate change, by calling for 30 per cent of the world's oceans to be protected.



'No one will escape climate change. It will affect every creature on this planet, great or small. The devastation of our natural world will affect every single person on this planet, every future generation, and the whole of the animal kingdom. It will impact every nation and every business,' says Lewis. 'We can avert the worst effects of climate change if we meet the Paris Agreement to limit warming

to well below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial temperatures.

Final Strokes

Tackling the climate crisis is the defining issue of our generation. But to do that we have to act fast and we have to start now. We are in a race against time. Protecting oceans alone won't solve the climate crisis, but global warming cannot be stopped

without ocean protection. What's more, life on earth depends on healthy oceans. 'If you've got a problem and you multiply it by 50-million people, it becomes unsolvable, but if you've got a problem and you divide it by 50-million people, it becomes solvable. We have a brief window of opportunity to solve this crisis. The opportunity will soon be behind us,' Lewis warns. ■



SWIM TO ACTION

In 2018, Lewis Pugh swam the length of the English Channel to call for 30 per cent of the oceans to be protected by 2030. At the end of the swim, then British environment minister Michael Gove was on Dover Beach to congratulate Lewis and told him that he would support their 30x30 campaign. One month later, the United Kingdom became the first major economy to pledge to this commitment at the UN. To date, 86 nations have joined what amounts to the biggest conservation drive in history. Now their aim is clear: to persuade the remaining 109 nations to join them.



SWIMS TO DATE

Lewis was the first person to complete a long-distance swim in every ocean of the world. Some of his major swims include:

- ▶ Swim #1: 17 Sept 1990, around Cape Point in South Africa, 6km, 12 to 17 degrees Celsius.
- ▶ Swim #8: 20 Aug 2003, around North Cape in Norway, 5km, 8 degrees Celsius.
- ▶ Swim #14: 15 Aug 2004, length of Nærøysfjord in Norway, 18km, 6 to 18 degrees Celsius.
- ▶ Swim #19: 14 Dec 2005, off Peterman Island in Antarctica, 1km, 0 degrees Celsius.
- ▶ Swim #26: 23 May 2010, across Lake Pumori at Mt Everest in Nepal, 1km, 2 degrees Celsius.
- ▶ Swim #34: 19 Mar 2015, off Cape Adare at Ross Sea in Antarctica, 540 metres, -1.7 degrees Celsius.
- ▶ Swim #38: 15 Jul 2017, along edge of Arctic sea ice at Spitsbergen Arctic, 1km, -0.1 to -0.6 degrees Celsius.

- ▶ Swim #41: 23 Jan 2020, sub glacial river at East Antarctica, distance unknown as under the ice, 0.1 degrees Celsius.

Beyond swimming, some of Lewis' achievements include:

- ▶ 2019 - awarded the Mungo Park Medal by the Royal Scottish Geographical Society for an outstanding contribution to geographical knowledge in a potentially hazardous environment.
- ▶ 2014 - named one of National Geographic's Adventurers of the Year in 2015.
- ▶ 2013 - inducted into the International Marathon Swimming Hall of Fame, the highest honour in swimming.
- ▶ 2013 - appointed as the UN Patron of the Oceans to be a voice for the world's oceans, for the penguins, whales, sharks, seals and all its magnificent creatures.
- ▶ 2010 - appointed a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum.
- ▶ 2009 - awarded the Order of Ikhamanga (Gold Class), South Africa's highest honour.

Focusing On:

Faisal Ariff

Founder and CEO of BorderPass, **Faisal Ariff**, relays his entrepreneurial experience and looks philosophically at what the post-pandemic period will be like for entrepreneurs, adding a pinch of witticism where optimism lacks.



FAISAL ARIFF
 Founder and CEO
 BorderPass

I used to be an investment manager. Stocks were relatively cheap after the 2007 global financial crisis, so you could buy companies for a fraction of their book value. I made a very big bet on American banks at a time when nobody would touch them and they did well over time. I've always liked the idea of scooping up bargains. I got graded down on my master's thesis because the faculty believed in efficient market theory (bargains don't exist on the stock market), so my career as an investment manager was in a way inspired by proving the lecturers wrong in real life.

Why the Switch of Profession?

Fast forward to 2014, my friend Soraya told me about a contest to send a Malaysian to a program called Singularity University housed on NASA Ames Research Park in Silicon Valley, to work on a business idea that could benefit a million people. I loved travelling and was coincidentally on an Antarctic expedition at the time - another separate contest sponsored by Prudential.

So, my 32-year old self drew out an idea which would become BorderPass on a plane. International border control is probably one of the last industries that's still pen and paper at a time when everything else is being digitised. I got into the final using that idea. Since our expedition leader Sir

Robert Swan told me it was unlikely that I'd make the in-person pitch in Malaysia, we videoed a pitch on the ice in Antarctica with penguins in the background. Somehow, we won. I got back to Malaysia, resigned and off I went to Silicon Valley. It's an unbelievable story and sometimes I'm not even sure it really happened.

After the program, I was fortunate to find very talented programmers, raised funds and started BorderPass. The late Nazrin Hassan at Cradle was the first to put his neck out for BorderPass and his support endured till today. We built the world's first immigration autogate equipped with facial recognition and contactless fingerprinting technology, and installed it at Malaysia's KLIA2 in 2016. It won seven international technology, innovation and industry awards from Europe, Japan, Singapore, Australia and the United States. Travellers loved our service, breezing through immigration in seconds instead of waiting for hours in queue.

Pausing BorderPass

Then, the Malaysian government changed in 2018 and we were asked to stop running our service with 48 hours' notice. We appealed, emphasising that we're an

internationally recognised innovative company and won approvals on merit. We were supposed to be reinstated in 2019, the Malaysian Minister of Home Affairs signed off on our reinstatement, but the government changed again in 2020. Even though we managed to get into the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI)'s National Technology and Innovation Sandbox program, we haven't succeeded in reinstating BorderPass.

In May 2021, the Ministry of Home Affairs wrote to MOSTI saying that they acknowledge our ground-breaking Proof of Concept at KLIA2 but they no longer need BorderPass because they've awarded the work to another company to do the same thing. Life's like that sometimes.

Moving on to the Next Thing

We're developing a kiosk that helps companies monitor their building capacity to comply with the government's pandemic guidelines such as 40 per cent capacity and keep records of employee vaccinations. The kiosk uses the same base technologies that we developed for the autogate. We're hopeful that it'll help empower companies to manage their own workspaces while helping Malaysians get back to work safely.



On a personal level, I answered an Instagram ad on a policy research job on migrant workers with a Malaysian think tank, The Centre. It ended up becoming a three-part policy paper outlining 140 years of migrant worker policy in Malaya and Malaysia. It was quite an eye-opener to see how the cycle works between migrant hiring during an economic boom and forcible repatriation during an economic bust.

My key recommendations were ensuring that the importation of migrant labour needs to factor in economic projections and not just be driven by company quota requests. Furthermore, we need to ensure that workers don't arrive in Malaysia indentured as it increases the risk of them overstaying and becoming illegal. Politicians have been making a lot of money from immigration and we need to put a stop to it.

Reacting to Pandemic-induced Constraints: Mental Fortitude

There's that old Mike Tyson saying, 'Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face.' We've been very fortunate to be part of the National Technology and Innovation Sandbox. If not, this article might be BorderPass' obituary. In this environment survival feels like victory. We're by no means out of the woods by any measure and like everyone else, we need the economy to turn a corner. I'm hoping it might turn out to be like that Forrest Gump scene where we're the last shrimp trawler after the storm. But man proposes, God disposes.

We're in for many difficult years ahead. Like many other countries, Malaysia's finances have been decimated, inflation will likely creep up and unemployment is high. I've a feeling that Malaysia's general election, GE15, might not solve our leadership woes either. The government may not be able to play its role in the recovery as hoped. So, it'll be down to the private sector and the people to solve our



own problems. Malaysians have already seen that happen with grassroots initiatives such as #kitajagakita, #cucukmyAZ and #benderaputih movements started by young people helping each other. Politicians are hard-wired to help themselves first, so it's on us to show leadership and entrepreneurship.

I think it'll be challenging for a bunch of reasons. Access to capital might be an issue. Government coffers are dry and probably be looking at increasing taxes rather than providing startup grants or soft loans. I'm quite sceptical of how well our banks are doing right now. Either non-performing loans aren't showing up because of some accounting treatment related to moratoriums or they are somehow making an unconscionable amount of money during a pandemic. As inflation creeps up interest rates will have to rise. Last-in, first-out (LIFO) and first-in, first-out (FIFO) might suddenly come back into the conversation for businesses.

Labour costs will likely rise. We're now pursuing a Malaysian-first hiring policy while inhumanely ousting foreign workers. Many foreign workers have been leaving anyway in the past few years because of shrinking wage differentials between the source country and Malaysia, and in relation with other potential migrant labour destinations. Malaysia population growth has been very much driven by foreigners in the past 10 years or so. Taking them out of the equation will stagnate

and age the population. This is a worry because many Malaysians wiped out their EPF savings during this pandemic, which will eventually become a crisis. Malaysia needs bold, fresh ideas on the economy, but I don't see too many in Parliament, be it from the government or opposition.

To thrive in the post-pandemic period, young entrepreneurs should try different things, you never know what could work. Don't feel that any job is beneath you. Working for other people while you work on your own idea is fine. Be patient, but be brave when the right opportunity comes along.

Travel in the Age of Corona and Beyond

Before the pandemic we had a golden age of travel. To date, I've visited about 30 countries. Thanks to AirAsia I once flew to Japan and back for just RM300, to Korea and back for RM300, Iran for RM1,000 return and Hawaii for RM900 return. Once upon a time, I could hop on a red-eye flight to Manila, Bali or Singapore, give a talk in the morning and fly back to Kuala Lumpur on the same day. I always told my wife how spectacular and unusual it is to be able to do that. I keep old posters from the early 1900s that say, 'Visit Java, Only 36 Hours from Singapore', so I never took it for granted.

We don't see that anymore because of international travel bans and there's no way to do day trips with quarantine requirements. Together with the flight, it could easily be 20 times the cost of the day trips I'd do before. Sadly, it'll look like that for a while. Not everyone can fly anymore for now, it's very much the playground for the rich - folks who don't have regular jobs and can afford time to sit in quarantine for weeks. There are talks of travel bubbles and health passports but they keep breaking down because countries can't agree on standards or a surge in COVID-19 case numbers. It'll take time and I'm not sure if airlines can wait that long.

Regrets, Too Few to Mention

Fortunately, or unfortunately, you can only live life forwards. If anything, I wish we took a bit more time to celebrate and appreciate the awards we won. No Malaysian company had won the Asian Entrepreneurship Award in Japan before, or Amadeus' Startup of the Year, or JetBlue Technology Ventures' Best New Startup. We had to literally beat hundreds of companies globally, some with tens of millions of US dollars of investment, unlike us.

Sure, it would have been nice if the Malaysian government let us build out our service at the airport in 2018 instead of shutting us down. However, can you imagine where we would be now if we took out a huge loan and ended up with zero passengers at the airport because of the pandemic? Or agreed to pay bribes? We'd be investigated by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission. So, there's no point fantasising about do-overs. Just appreciate the journey, learn from your mistakes and move forward. ■

Three main lessons Faisal learnt from starting a startup and how relevant they still are to him today.

Lesson 1: Stick to your principles and never get involved with corruption. It's simply not worth it. Word will get around that you pay bribes very quickly. Deep down you'll never feel proud of your so-called 'success' and nobody will respect you. You'll waste years of your life in court. It's better to live modestly with integrity, having the love and respect of friends, family and colleagues.

Lesson 2: A fancy degree from a prestigious foreign university doesn't guarantee better performance than those with a local degree. People who talk well may not work as well as someone who struggles to articulate. Instead, look for evidence of determination. I remember someone I interviewed showed up for work the day after, even before I agreed to hire him, just because he was excited about what we were working on. In the end, what matters most is having a team with the right attitude.

Lesson 3: There's no 'I' in team. Recognise your colleagues publicly, credit them and be generous with praise when it's due. I can't put a hammer to a nail, so it was really down to talented folks like Breno Assis, Andrew Amis, Mariana Fonseca, Zam Nayan, Nik Emir Rizan, Kam Yi Sheng, Simran Palia, Tharshinee Elanchselvan, Khye Yee Yong, Lim Kok Shyong, Philip Yong, Wei Wei Heng, Sherman Peter and Amjad Alhaneesh who over the years built the technologies we've gotten good at today. There's that old saying, 'If you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together.'



What to Expect in 2022: Travel Sphere

To be post-pandemic ready means knowing what to expect in 2022 and beyond. Here's, a prediction that'll influence the economy and shape a new normal.

It's no longer enough to travel around the globe. In fact, flying out of Earth's atmosphere altogether while defying gravity, is the way to go. Reasons for multibillionaires of the 21st century to travel to space includes to democratise space travel by Richard Branson, to produce energy resources and move polluting industries to the moon by Jeff Bezos, and to colonise Mars before creating settlements on other planets by, no other than, Elon Musk. What's more, in September 2021, SpaceX Starship's announced on its IG post, 'four civilians will launch into space for a three-day trip orbiting Earth'. *Countdown: Inspiration4 Mission to Space* was the first Netflix documentary series to cover an event in near real-time. The American streaming service premiered the TV programme in five parts leading up to and following the mission. Musk seems determine to make space travel into a business and he's just eccentric enough to make it work.

Age Does Matter

28 years old | **AZUREEN RASHID**

Co-creator, ZERO
www.tryzero.co/welcome

My business partner, Sunil and I came up with our e-commerce app idea called ZERO. Our sole aim is to help small local businesses in Malaysia by providing an online platform with zero commission and zero sign up fees. We didn't have capital for this project so it was tough to market the business. Working from home was hard as we couldn't meet merchants face-to-face. After getting our friends and family members to join ZERO, we started going through social media platforms to find more merchants. Explaining and convincing potential merchants to sign up on our app was hard over Zoom and phone calls. Now, I'm proud to say we have more than 100 merchants on board with us after just a month, and still growing.

We started off by asking merchants to send store details so we'd create an online store for them. They'd then market the store link to their customers and receive orders directly through their WhatsApp. We did this to test the market and to get feedback from merchants. Now with high volume of merchants wanting to sign up, we've decided to launch the app. We've had a few delays with the app because of the lockdown due to COVID-19. Communication hasn't been easy. We're also looking for investors to grow the business. So, we're trying to get as many merchants in as possible to provide a good profile to attract potential investors.

I'm hoping post-pandemic communication will get easier once we adjust to the new norm. We will still aim to grow our numbers and possibly our team as well. We currently only have five team members, so it hasn't been easy development wise. Many have been affected by the pandemic. Our sole aim is to help small local businesses grow, hopefully to create more job opportunities for the community.



What is the strategy of young entrepreneurs to be resilient during the pandemic and thrive post-pandemic?

Reyana Nacerodien and **Su Aziz** talk to a few to find out.



JULIAN LECHNER | 36 years old
Founder and CEO, Kaffeeform
www.kaffeeform.com

Young entrepreneurs shall see the post-pandemic market situation as a new chapter, a springboard. A great restriction in life-space mobility, the need to rethink and reduce consumption, and the indisputable, alarming dominance of a few giants' growing sales and size have been a huge eye-opener in these shifting times. In order for us to design a better future with the environment in mind, it's inevitable to implement digital tools, shift to and prioritise local production hubs and make circularity the new go-to principle.

We discovered a unique formula that turns recycled coffee grounds and renewable raw materials into the durable, robust material that is Kaffeeform which then becomes Kaffeeform cup. Our local roots alongside with our commitment to a more circular economy got even stronger during 2020. Our close collaboration with two Berlin-based long-time partners of ours - a bike courier collective and a sheltered workshop for people with disabilities - were essential in contributing to the resilience of our local community.



BRYAN LOO | 35 years old
CEO, Tealive
www.tealive.com.my

Tealive outlets in shopping malls, airport and those on university premises have taken a bigger hit in footfall from the pandemic. Surprisingly, our businesses across the system have been quite resilient throughout the pandemic period.

We've done many first attempts in an unprecedented time. We pivoted our primary brick and mortar business model from offering crafted bubble tea to consumers, to various new initiatives including the launch of Tealive's very own e-commerce bubble tea online store, Tealive with Wall's ice cream collaboration. Also, first of its kind Tealive with Mamee boba instant noodles, Tealive's DIY bubble tea kit for home-based consumers, launch of multiple virtual brands that integrated directly into Tealive store network such as Bask Bear Coffee, Culture by Tealive and Soul Brew.

Even though retail remains the key component in our sales, we're investing heavily in resources and time towards digitalisation. This is because we believe the online market will continue to grow and double its pace to become the long term new normal. As part of our commitment to adapt to the new norm in terms of safety of our stakeholders, we've implemented contactless ordering, drive-in and order ahead at nationwide stores. This online, cashless process enable social distancing and allows customers to grab their favourite drinks anytime, anywhere, with peace of mind.

Age Does Matter



MARIAM NUSRAT | 35 years old

Founder, Gaming Revolution for International Development (GRID)
republic.co/grid

I work as an education specialist across 22 different countries. As a student, I questioned why is learning so boring and wondered how we to make it more fun. I grew up playing video games like Sim City where I was learning about urban planning without necessarily understanding that I was learning about urban planning. If I look at my childhood, the lessons I learnt were from games. I'm not a hardcore gamer but I played video games. Video games aren't mainstream because of costs involved - it can take up to half a million dollars to make a video game. The price is so high that no one outside of the entertainment industry can do it and there are so many issues where video games can be used.

Seven years ago, I started making low cost video games for a global audience. We've made games about many issues such as reproductive health, structural racism, animal cruelty and climate change. Things went well, and then COVID-19 happened. We saw a complete drop. Projects we were going to get stopped because funding dried up. When the world stops, you have a lot of time to think and reflect. We reflected on what we had been doing for the past six years and focused on opportunities rather than challenges. We saw an opportunity to lower the cost of video games and lower the skills barriers in the industry.

A billion people play video games for at least an hour every day but only 200,000 have the skills to make video games. We lowered the cost and skills barrier of making video games and made it so easy that it was almost like making a PowerPoint presentation. Given the no code movement in the tech sector we made video games without coding. That was the big pivot during 2020. To let people not just be players, but empowered content creators. We decided to make this venture for profit and raise venture capital.

So here I am, a founder of a tech company trying to raise venture capital in a world where that only goes to a select few. COVID-19 meant that those investors were online globally. It was as if Silicon Valley moved to Twitter, and so, gave me access. That's how Breshna was started. Breshna means lightning in Pashtun because we are making video games at lightning speed. We raised USD200,000 in venture. With Breshna, everyone can be a game developer and an investor. By leveraging equity crowdfunding we give ordinary people the opportunity to become an investor because, if we're going to the moon, we're taking everyone along with us. ■

DIVING INTO THE DEEP BLUE: POSSIBILITIES *For* ISLAMIC FINTECH

30 NOVEMBER 2021 | 3.00PM (UTC +8)

OUR ROLE PLAYERS



Ramesh Kana
Chairperson of UN
Global Compact Network
Malaysia



Stella Cox CBE
Managing Director
of DDCAP Group
United Kingdom

Log on to www.wief.org
or scan QR code below
for more information.



#WIEFDIGITALISATION2021

LIVE ON  zoom

SPECIAL EVENT

- 14TH WIEF @ Kuala Lumpur



WIEF Roundtable

- Economic Rebound: Return to Normalcy



- **JumpStart Module 1**
Digital Value Proposition
- **JumpStart Interchange**
Conversation with a Successful Entrepreneur
- **JumpStart Module 2**
Minimum Viable Product for Online Marketplace
- **JumpStart Interchange**
Conversation with a Successful Entrepreneur
- **JumpStart Module 3**
Digital Market Validation
- **JumpStart Interchange**
Conversation with a Successful Entrepreneur
- **Post JumpStart**
An Online Pitching Session for JumpStart Entrepreneurs
- **WIEF Young Leaders Network Dialogue**

LEGEND

- WRT - WIEF ROUNDTABLE
- WYN - WIEF YOUNG LEADERS NETWORK
- WBN - WIEF BUSINESSWOMAN NETWORK
- WET - WIEF EDUCATION TRUST
- WPT - WIEF POWERTALK



WIEF
BUSINESSWOMEN
NETWORK

- **#iEmPOWER**
Stimulating Global Trade Through Partnerships & E-commerce
- **#iEmPOWER**
E-wallet: A New Edition to Business World
- **#iEmPOWER**
Rebuilding Tourism & Hospitality in Southeast Asian Region
- **#iEmPOWER**
Capturing Halal Global Market: Realities & Opportunities

Communicate With Clarity

POWERTALK

- Investment webinar
- Innovating the Future of Sustainable Smart Cities

WET

- **Straight Up:**
Asia-Pacific Security: Regional Dilemma
- **Social Enterprise**
Social Enterprise & COVID: Altering Fundamentals
- **13th WIEF Global Discourse**
Immersive Technologies: The Future Today
- **Awqaf Exchange:**
Successful Awqaf Models

Disclaimer

- The Organisers reserve the right to alter the content and sequence of the programme and introduce new events throughout the year, in the best interest of the participants and stakeholders.
- Organisers are not responsible for cancellation due to unforeseen circumstances.