

Israel: Land of Tech Opportunities

以色列：科技商機處處

Tiny nation punches far above its weight when it comes to technology and successful start-ups

小國在科技和初創企業領域成就斐然

With a population of more than 8 million, a small land area, very limited natural resources and a thriving economy, Israel has a number of comparison points with Hong Kong. But where it really stands out is in its technology sector. Ester Perets-Burke, Head of the Economic and Trade Mission of the Consulate General of Israel in Hong Kong, visited the Chamber on 8 November to discuss the country's tech-driven economy and booming start up scene, as well as giving members an overview of the history and culture.

Israel is a majority Jewish nation, but it also has a significant Muslim and Christian population. And it is culturally liberal – Tel Aviv is a well-known party destination and the city hosts a famous gay pride parade every year.

The country has enjoyed a steady GDP growth rate of around 3.4% for the past decade, and far punches above its weight in terms of globally successful technology companies. As Perets-Burke explained, the country's small size has actually helped to drive its emergence as an innovation powerhouse.

Tech companies in Chinese or American cities, for example, can depend on their huge domestic markets. "But Israel doesn't have a market," she said.

This means that companies have to think global from the start. Israel does not have an auto industry, but this did not stop Mobileye from developing vision-safety technology for use in cars. In a particularly successful exit, the company was bought by Intel in 2017 for US\$15 billion.

Another innovation to emerge in recent years is the Pillcam – a camera embedded in a tablet that is used to take images of the small intestine. This technology was originally developed by the Israeli Defence Force, the country's army, which is a major developer of technology.

The country is also a global leader in areas including drip irrigation, desalination and cybersecurity.

Some of Israel's technology success can be attributed to government support, which has been a factor

since the 1990s. But the country's attitude and environment play an important role.

Israel is made up of people who have come from all over the world, and Perets-Burke described the population as being very "restless." This translates into a creative and inventive culture, which also fosters an environment that encourages start-ups. The Israeli attitude is very open to trying something, failing, and trying again.

"Chutzpah" is another Israeli characteristic, and is very different to the type of attitude commonly found in Hong Kong and Asia generally. "There is something very direct about the way we communicate," she explained. ✿



The Chamber's Young Executives Club is planning a study mission to Israel in April, in collaboration with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and with the support of the Consul General of Israel in Hong Kong and Macao. At the event, Gal Koren, General Manager at Amsalem Business Travel, gave an overview of the planned itinerary, which will include visits to some of Israel's successful innovative companies and the opportunity to explore the

country's famous cultural and historical sites. For more information see the Chamber's What's On listings.

總商會卓青社計劃於4月份聯同耶路撒冷希伯來大學合辦以色列考察團，此行得到以色列駐港澳總領事館的支持。會上，Amsalem Business Travel總經理Gal Koren概述計劃行程，包括參觀以色列一些傑出的創新企業，以及暢遊當地知名的文化歷史古蹟。有關詳情，請瀏覽本會網站的「最新活動」頁面。



以色列擁有800多萬人口、幅員細小、天然資源極為有限，經濟欣欣向榮，在多方面都可與香港媲美。然而，真正突圍而出的是當地的科技業。以色列駐香港經濟商務處主管Ester Perets-Burke於11月8日到訪總商會，討論該國以科技主導的經濟及蓬勃的創業生態，並向會員介紹當地的歷史文化。

以色列是以猶太人為主的國家，但亦有大量的伊斯蘭和天主教人口。當地享有文化自由——特拉維夫是著名的派對狂歡勝地，該市每年均舉辦備受矚目的同志大遊行。

過往十年，該國經濟一直以3.4%左右的幅度穩定增長，而當地科技公司的成績卓越，更在國際闖出一片天。Perets-Burke解釋，國家面積細小，實際上有助帶動其崛起成為創新強國。

以中國和美國為例，當地的科技公司可依賴其龐大的國內市場。「以色列卻沒有市場。」她如是說。

也就是說，企業打從一開始便要放眼國際。以色列沒有汽車業，但這並未有阻止Mobileye開發汽車視覺安全技術。其後，該公司更於2017年獲英特爾以150億美元收購。

近年冒起的另一創新技術是膠囊內視鏡 (Pillcam) ——攝錄機置於膠囊內，用以拍攝小腸的影像。這項技術最初由以色列國防軍開發，而這支國家軍隊亦是技術的主要開發者。

該國在其他範疇也堪稱全球先驅，包括滴灌、海水化淡和網絡安全。

以色列的科技成就部分可歸功於政府，而自1990年代以來，政府的支持一直是推動因素之一。然而，國家的取態和實際環境更有著重要的影響。

以色列的人口來自世界各地，Perets-Burke形容該國人口川流不息。這衍生出一種創意創新的文化，打造出鼓勵創業的環境。以色列人十分開明，敢於嘗試、而且屢敗屢戰。

耿直敢言是以色列人的另一個特質，與香港和亞洲人的普遍態度截然不同。她解釋：「我們的溝通方式比較直截了當，不會拐彎抹角。」

