Feature: Israel gets global limelight with high-tech innovations

by Anat Shalev

JERUSALEM, Sept. 9 (Xinhua) -- Israel has made the whole world impressive with latest technological innovations including waste management, medical devices, biotechnology and a series of frontier research achievements by local high-tech companies.
Namely, an Israeli neurologist pitches a mind-reading video game to a Korean investor; an entrepreneur created special wristbands enabling concertgoers to interact with one another.

These are just a few of the scenes from the ongoing Tel Aviv Digital Life Design (DLD) Festival, an annual event attracting thousands of visitors from dozens of countries, including entrepreneurs, as well as hundreds of startups, venture capital firms and multinational companies.

The buzzing four-day festival, starting Tuesday, attests to a well-known fact in the high-tech industry nowadays that Tel Aviv, a metropolitan city situated in a volatile region, is a leading startup hub.

"This is the best place to come to for an entrepreneur," Yan Lee-Dajoux, a French entrepreneur told Xinhua Wednesday during a "pitch the press" meeting in which entrepreneurs present their work to journalists.

"It's just a three-hour flight from Paris, and it is so lively -- it feels like people here dream big, it's a very exciting place, second only maybe to Silicon Valley," Dajoux said.
He explained his main purpose in attending was to exchange ideas with counterparts and catching up on the latest developments in the field. He plans to return to the festival next year.

Last year, the festival drew around 1,300 people. This year, the festival drew 3,000 people after two days, and more are expected to come in the following days and attend the various events offered by the festival.
"We didn't expect it to grow as fast as it did, people just flooded the venue," Yossi Vardi, a legendary Israeli entrepreneur who is the chairman of the festival told participants during a "fireside chat" gathering, one out of many events taking place in the festival, along with one-on-one meetings and presentations, panels and hackathons.

"This festival won a place of a leading event and its success puts Israel on the map," Vardi said. And indeed, the success of the festival attests to the strength of Tel Aviv's startup ecosystem and its prominent place in the industry worldwide.

A BOOMING SILICON WADI

With between 3,100 and 4,200 active startups operating on its turf, Tel Aviv was recently named as the number one startup and high-tech hub outside the U.S. by the Compass Technology Company. The estimated value of the Tel-Aviv based companies is estimated between 23.7 and 28.9 billion U.S. dollars.

So how did Tel Aviv, a vibrant metropolitan city situated in one of the world's most volatile regions, garner this status? Industry people believe it is a combination of a pool of creative and diverse talents, high aspirations and the lively atmosphere the city offers.
Hilla Oren, manager of the Tel Aviv Municipality's Global City Initiative launched in 2011 seeking to define Tel Aviv as a leading high-tech city, thinks the secret to the city's success lies in its DNA.

"The city was established 100 years ago by 66 families of entrepreneurs, it runs in the city's DNA," she told Xinhua. "This city is filled with creative and dynamic people, there's a special atmosphere as well as support for the high-tech industry. There's a feeling that young and talented people are wanted here," she added.

Other reasons for Tel Aviv's success, she believes, are the inter-connectedness of working networks as well as the municipality's support for the industry.

"We work to create infrastructure and spaces needed for innovation and development, whether it's creating spaces for entrepreneurs to work in side by side, initiating events like the DLD festival, enabling Wi-Fi access for free on the city's street and giving discounts for companies on property taxes," Oren said.

ISRAEL'S THRIVING HIGH-TECH INDUSTRY

It's impossible to speak of Tel Aviv's success without talking about the success story of the industry in Israel in general. Wix, Waze, Mirabilis, Nice ... these are just some of the Israeli companies that made the industry famous worldwide.

If you ask **Edouard Cukierman, Managing Partner at the Catalyst Investment House and Prof. Daniel Rouach from the ESCP Europe Business school, authors of "Israel Valley,"** the first and foremost reason for Israel's success is its high investment in technological education.
Another factor contributing to Israel's success in the industry is the army, specifically the 8,200 Intelligence Corps Unit responsible for collecting signal intelligence (SIGNIT) and code decryption, valuable assets in the field.
The elite unit is an incubator of technological skills and expertise in engineering and communications, with many of the graduates going on to establish world renowned companies like Comverse, Nice and Checkpoint. Beyond the expertise, important ties are made there.
Finally yet importantly is Israel's "exceptional" entrepreneurial workforce, rated third best in the world in a recent publication of the International Competitive Center (IMD).

The so-called entrepreneurial spirit is a combination of the Israeli chutzpah -- freedom to speak someone's mind -- as well as a mentality of migrants' society with few natural resources and the ability to strive for unique solutions.
"Israel is a country of migrants, with dozens of nationalities represented in this tiny country, with two out of every three Israelis being either a newcomer themselves or an offspring of an immigrant," Orit Mosinzon, General Partner at the Globe International Holdings Venture Capital firm told Xinhua.

"There is something about the Israeli culture that enables people to try -- and also to make mistakes, not succeed and then try again. There are many startups that fail, but still quite a few succeed because people keep on trying," she said. Enditem

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