

## FACEBOOK UNVEILS CENTER TO TEACH BRAZILIAN CODERS, ENTREPRENEURS

**SAO PAULO:** Facebook Inc unveiled its first training center in Latin America for coders and entrepreneurs, encouraging technology careers for young Brazilians saddled with staggering unemployment after a deep economic crisis.

The company's regional Vice President Diego Dzodan told Reuters the space in mid-town Sao Paulo, known as Estacao Hack, will bridge the gap in Brazil between a tech sector hungry for skilled talent and an eager but untrained generation with time on their hands.

"Imagine the opportunity," Dzodan said in an interview at Facebook's Latin America headquarters. "You've got people without a job, so they can't afford training. And yet there's so much demand for positions that the market can't fill."

One in four Brazilians aged 18 to 24, most with more formal education than their parents, were unemployed at the start of the year, as the country's worst downturn on record stunted the careers of a generation of young workers.

Facebook's 1,000-square-meter space

on the bustling Avenida Paulista is slated to open by December, offering free coding courses, career guidance, entrepreneur training and digital marketing workshops for 7,400 Brazilians in its first year.

Dzodan said Estacao Hack or "Hack Station" would draw on lessons from outreach projects like the Startup Garage in Paris, opened by Facebook in January, but was tailored to Brazil. For example, the Sao Paulo space offers workstations and mentoring for entrepreneurs focused on projects with social impact.

The initiative is one of several in Sao Paulo where major firms are making the most of a tech-savvy subculture - and a slump in the commercial real estate market - to create branded spaces for innovation in Latin America's biggest business hub.

In June 2016, Alphabet Inc opened the six-story Google Campus Sao Paulo, a half dozen blocks south of the new Facebook space, also offering mentoring for startups, training for entrepreneurs and free community events. Last week, Brazilian bank Ita Unibanco Holding SA announced it

was quadrupling its Cubo co-working space for tech startups, a joint investment with venture capital firm Redpoint ventures, which moves to a 12-floor building in Sao Paulo's financial district in June 2018. Dzodan, who declined to say how much Facebook was spending on its new space, said the impact would be measured in participants rather than brick-and-mortar investments. "The maximum impact will come from training and education," he said. "The multiplier effect of that is much greater than infrastructure." — Reuters



**BERLIN:** A fair worker uses a tablet to operate a tumble dryer during a demonstration how to operate smart controlled household appliances for "IQ800" washing and drying machines at the booth of Siemens as preparations are under way for the consumer electronics fair IFA in Berlin yesterday. The fair is open for the public from September 1 to 6, 2017. — AFP



**BERLIN:** A volunteer holds a remote control as he presents the "X-Spect" textile identification system at the booth of Siemens during the consumer electronics fair IFA in Berlin yesterday. — AFP

# 'GIFTED' HIGH-TECH TAKES SPOTLIGHT AT IFA FAIR

**BERLIN:** The gadgets on display at Berlin's mega consumer electronics fair this week may not look radically different, but they are smarter than ever before and designed to meet our every need-often before we've even thought of it ourselves.

As smartphones and other electronic devices make greater use of artificial intelligence (AI), the digital assistants already pervasive in our lives are set to become more intuitive and play a bigger role in our homes, observers said.

The humble television, overshadowed in recent years as viewers streamed their favourite shows on tablets and phones, is also poised for a comeback with better-than-ever screen quality and online applications.

This year's IFA is all about "AI to make our daily life easier," Klaus Boehm of consultancy Deloitte said ahead of the annual trade show which kicks off tomorrow.

Boehm pointed to Amazon's and Google's voice-controlled speakers that can answer questions, turn off the lights and do our online shopping as examples of the "smart home" trend. And in the race to be the smartest, developers are focussing less on hardware and more on intelligent software to woo consumers. A so-called innovations "hub" resembling a university library will take pride of place at the conference venue, where researchers, developers and start-ups will give fairgoers a glimpse of the gadgets of the future.

Such is the emphasis on AI this year that Chinese smartphone manufacturer Huawei, the world's third largest, will use the IFA stage not to present a new model but to unveil its first personal assistant, Kirin, which it hopes will rival the dominance of Amazon's Alexa, Apple's Siri and Samsung's Bixby.

From offering restaurant recommendations before you've realised you're hungry to asking if you'd like your usual coffee after your alarm goes off, life without smart aides will fast become unthinkable, observers predict.



**BERLIN:** A man sits on a couch inside a showroom of a so-called smart home at the ZVEH booth during the consumer electronics fair IFA in Berlin yesterday. — AFP

As the long-promised revolution of the "internet of things" is slowly making itself felt, IFA exhibitors are also set to showcase rubbish bins that know which items to recycle and fridges that can help you stick to your diet.

### 'Television not dead'

Smart TVs that respond to voice commands and allow for easy on-demand viewing are expected to help reclaim the telly's place

at the heart of the home as viewers are lured back with super-high-definition screens.

And of course, bigger is better. "TV is not dead," said Roland Stehle of Germany's gfu federation for electronics firms, a co-organiser of the IFA trade show. "People are buying bigger TV sets, so the picture sizes are increasing and it's necessary to have a high resolution."

IFA organisers are predicting a bumper year for television makers, as the latest OLED and

Ultra-High Definition (UHD/4K) technologies become more affordable. More geared towards the general public than its Las Vegas rival, the Consumer Electronics Show, IFA is known for lifting the veil on the must-have electronics most likely to end up under our Christmas trees.

"The demand for consumer electronics and household appliances is quite high, it's a good sign for IFA," said gfu president Hans-Joachim Kamp. Sales in the global market for consumer electronics, including mobile phones, are forecast to reach some 887 billion euros (\$1 trillion) in 2017, up four percent on the previous year, according to gfu data.

Some 240,000 visitors are expected at this year's fair, which runs until September 6, organisers said at a preview press conference yesterday. No major new announcements are expected in the smartphone arena as Apple traditionally skips IFA and Samsung already unveiled its latest high-end model last week, the Galaxy Note 8 that is supposed to banish memories of the ill-fated Galaxy Note 7 and its exploding batteries.

Instead, Samsung plans to use IFA to showcase its newest offerings of smart wearables, the Gear Fit2 fitness bracelet and the Gear S4 smartwatch. Having failed to live up to the initial hype, tech giants are betting that there is life in the wearables market yet.

The Gartner consultancy estimated earlier this month that wearable devices such as smart headphones, eyewear, clothing and watches will generate global revenues of some \$30.5 billion this year. And wireless headphones will become so standard that phones without audio jacks will become the norm, they said, a path already charted by Apple after it controversially ditched the 3.5-millimetre jack in the iPhone 7 last year.

"By 2021, we assume that almost all premium mobile phones will no longer have the 3.5 mm jack," said Angela McIntyre, author of the Gartner study. — AFP

## IN SMARTPHONE AGE, THE HAJJ IS FOR SHARING

**MAKKAH:** Arm outstretched, Abdul Rahman sweeps his mobile phone across the vista of Makkah, the Great Mosque dazzling in the sun, so his son in Tanzania can experience the pilgrimage to Islam's holiest sites.

He may be thousands of kilometres (miles) away and on another continent, but thanks to his father's smartphone and video sharing app, 18-year-old Nabil might as well be standing right next to him. "Someday I hope I can make the pilgrimage," he says on the screen, his father wearing a broad smile.

Abdul Rahman is one of the more than 1.7 million foreign pilgrims travelling to Mecca in Saudi Arabia for this year's hajj, which began yesterday. For the faithful it is a deeply spiritual journey, which for centuries every capable Muslim has been required to make at least once in their lifetime.

In the age of smartphones, social media and live video streaming, it's now also an experience to be shared in real time. "I'm showing him live... how happy we are, how lucky we are," Abdul Rahman tells AFP, showing off imo, the application he uses for video calls.

Across the holy city, pilgrims from around the world can be seen with their arms extended, showing off their surroundings to friends and family back home. Travel agencies in

charge of organising trips to the hajj are now offering packages that include mobile internet so they can avoid roaming fees.

In a shopping centre where the faithful flock to buy souvenirs, one pilgrim is scanning the images on his phone.

### Which effect to choose?

He stops at a selfie and hesitates-what effect to choose, black-and-white or retro? He puts it away when the call to prayer sounds and the pilgrims roll out their carpets between escalators and boutiques to pray.

Later, on an upper floor of the shopping centre, Mohammed Ismaelzad, a 26-year-old pilgrim from Mali, is looking over the images on his phone, deciding which ones to post on his Instagram or Facebook accounts.

He has photographs of Makkah Masjid al-Haram-the Grand Mosque that is the largest in the world-and of the Kaaba, the black masonry cube at its centre. He has video of the Tawaf, when pilgrims circle the Kaaba seven times counter-clockwise, and more pictures of the mass prayers.

They will not only provide memories of his trip, Ismaelzad says, but give others the chance to see it. "My friends in my country... can't come here, so they can see the pictures," he says, a black-and-white keffiyeh



**MAKKAH:** Muslim pilgrims take a selfie at the Grand Mosque in the holy Saudi city of Makkah, early yesterday, on the eve of the start of the annual Hajj pilgrimage. For the faithful it is a deeply spiritual journey, which for centuries every capable Muslim has been required to make at least once in their lifetimes. — AFP

scarf wrapped around his neck. "They just see on TV, but with my pictures they will see another angle, like from my angle when I do the prayers."

As night falls, pilgrims gather on the esplanade of the Grand Mosque to mingle,

like cousins Mohammed and Abdelaziz Zahran, aged 19 and 20. "You can see all sorts of nationalities, you mix with people, sometimes we try to talk to them," Abdelaziz says. And of course they snap pictures of their meetings on their mobile phones. — AFP

## NEW UBER CHIEF PACKS TRAVEL, MONEY SMARTS

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Expedia chief Dara Khosrowshahi is credited with turning the company into a global travel services behemoth, winning admiration from employees on the journey. Uber is hoping he will steer the controversy-battered ride-sharing service along a similarly glorious route.

The San Francisco-based startup confirmed late Tuesday that Khosrowshahi will replace ousted chief Travis Kalanick. "We are delighted to announce that Uber's board has voted unanimously to appoint Dara Khosrowshahi to be our new CEO," Uber executives said in an email to employees.

"We're really fortunate to gain a leader with Dara's experience, talent and vision." Khosrowshahi is known as an experienced top executive, willing to speak his mind and to advocate for women getting equal pay and leadership opportunities.

His most recent Twitter post criticizes US President Donald Trump for his response to a white supremacist rally that turned deadly in Charlottesville. "I keep waiting for the moment when our Prez will rise to the expectations of his office and he fails, repeatedly," Khosrowshahi said in the tweet, which included a link to a story about the Trump controversy.

Born in Iran, Khosrowshahi immigrated to the United States with his family as a child and became a citizen here. Expedia shares have climbed more than five-fold during the 12 years Khosrowshahi has been in charge of the travel services internet firm.

"I don't doubt his skills and his background in finance and hospitality, which is going to be very important," said Tim Bajarin, president of Silicon Valley technology analyst firm Creative Strategies. "The only thing we don't know is his ability to navigate some of the difficult settings around internal disciplinary issues and code of conduct that he will inherit."

### Need for discipline

Khosrowshahi will have to address conflicts with regulators and taxi operators, a cut-throat company culture, sexism and board members feuding with investors over Kalanick. Kalanick was the driving force behind Uber, taking a spur-of-the-moment idea and turning it into the world's most valuable venture-funded tech startup.

But his brash personality and freewheeling management style, which some argue set a tone inside the company, made him a liability as well as an asset to the global ridesharing giant, and in June he stepped down as chief executive. Good chief executives typically ramp up discipline and accountability in employee ranks upon taking charge at companies, so that will likely be among steps taken by Khosrowshahi at the Uber helm, according to Bajarin.

"He is going to have to be highly aggressive in disciplining the company to stay on message and, more importantly, to stick within whatever the codes of conduct are," the analyst said. Khosrowshahi has consistently scored well at website Glass Door, where executives and companies are anonymously rated by employees past and present, suggesting he might be able to parent workers without alienating them.

And, since Uber's board members including Kalanick agreed to offer him the job as chief, he could have backing if he butts heads with those resentful of the founder was pressured to step down.

### Is it enough?

Khosrowshahi's strong background in travel and transportation should be a benefit when it comes to guiding Uber through its next phase of growth, according to Bajarin. Khosrowshahi's experience includes jobs managing finance and strategy, having worked in executive positions at IAC/InterActiveCorp and the investment firm of Allen & Company, according to his LinkedIn profile.

Khosrowshahi, 48, was born in Tehran to a prominent family behind a conglomerate with interests in food, trade, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and more. His family immigrated to the United States prior to the Iranian Revolution in 1978.

"Dara came to America at nine years old when his family escaped Iran on the eve of the Iranian Revolution," Uber said in its message to employees. He attended college here, earning a university degree in electrical engineering.

Khosrowshahi proposed to his wife, Sydney, during a visit to Angkor Wat temples in Cambodia, and they have four children, according to Uber. Expedia is based in the city of Bellevue, near Seattle. Global Equities Research analyst Trip Chowdhry considered Khosrowshahi a fine choice to run Uber, but questioned whether one person can make a difference at a troubled company. "Dara is not a magician," Chowdhry said. — AFP