

Business

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Annual Meeting



Staff set the light in the congress centre ahead of the opening of the 2019 World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting yesterday in Davos, eastern Switzerland. Fabrice COFFRINI — AFP

Has Davos made the world better?

Resentment is rising against pro-business Davos agenda and corporate bias

GENEVA: Klaus Schwab, who founded the World Economic Forum (WEF), has said his childhood during World War II inspired him to build an organization that would make the world a better place.

His foundation, which hosts many of the world's most powerful, famous and wealthy people at its annual meeting in the Swiss ski resort of Davos, has clearly made an impact. But questions have grown about whether the organization is meeting its declared goal of "improving the state of the world", with resentment rising against the pro-business Davos agenda, and voters turning instead to populist leaders. One persistent criticism is that WEF meetings, including this week's main annual gathering in Davos, have simply created a safe space for the corporate world to lobby governments without oversight.

Schwab was not available for an interview with AFP but the WEF's managing director, Adrian Monck, said in an email that the organization "subscribes to the highest standards of governance".

'Fragile authority'

Schwab, born in Ravensburg, Germany, in 1938, was a little-known business professor at the University of Geneva when in 1971 he founded the WEF's precursor, the European Management Forum.

He later broadened the conclave by inviting US business leaders, assembling a prestigious Rolodex as he turned the gathering into a showcase for networking and exchange of ideas. In a 2018 book, two Stockholm University professors chronicled the WEF's evolution, as over time politicians joined the business executives in Davos to give the forum the air of a United Nations, with a few celebrities thrown in.

"Against the backdrop of what is perceived to be malfunctioning global governance institutions and stalled international policymaking, the WEF presents itself as offering an alternative," Christina Garsten and Adrienne Sorbom write in "Discreet Power: How the World Economic Forum Shapes Market Agendas". Over the

years, success has bred success for the WEF as many of the world's movers and shakers vie to rub shoulders in the Swiss Alps at panel discussions and apres-ski socialising. Newer regional meetings have joined the Davos calendar.

The WEF's "fragile authority" relies on proving "that if you want to be part of the global nobility, then you have to be here," Sorbom said.

Good or bad?

She said the organization appears to offer something lacking in other international bodies: a venue where the heads of business and government can meet "and possibly come up with some good ideas".

But it has "troublesome aspects", she added. With dozens of heads of state and government coming to Davos each year, the WEF can be seen as a body "without a legal mandate to influence global governance yet with an ambition to do so", Garsten and Sorbom write. Oliver Classen of the Swiss NGO Public Eye, which has spearheaded protests and other campaigns to counter the Davos meet-

ing, said the WEF has always been "fully dependent" on the 1,000 companies that support the foundation.

Membership to the Forum ranges from the equivalent of \$60,000 (53,000 euros) to \$600,000, fees that allow company representatives to attend Davos and other meetings throughout the year.

"Schwab seems to have a firm belief that making people talk to each other is an objective that justifies pretty much everything," Classen said. "What he does not realize is that... when the large majority of those people have commercial interests then it is about deal-striking and nothing else." Monck, however, said that for the WEF, "multi-stakeholder engagement... means respecting the opinions and interests of others". The Davos meeting reportedly faced an existential threat in the early 2000s after sustained protests stretched the patience of the local community. In response, Schwab opened the meeting to more civil society groups while widening media access to an event that had previously been mostly held behind closed doors. —AFP

Cigar Room beckons cigar lovers to fancy and cozy café in Salhiya

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Cigar lovers can now enjoy their favorite smoke at a fancy and cozy café in the tony Salhiya area in Kuwait City. Smoking anything else other than cigars or pipes is forbidden at the Cigar Room, whether it's a cigarette or its electronic counterpart. "This is our high-end branch. We are seven Kuwaiti partners operating the Cigar Room. We started a year ago with our first branch in Ardiya. Most of us educated ourselves about cigars by researching them or attending programs abroad. We have one of the biggest humidors (the rooms where you store the cigars), as we have to keep the cigar at a certain temperature and humidity to keep it fresh for smokers," Saud Al-Yaqout told Kuwait Times.

"The difference between retail shops and our shop is that one of the partners is always on the floor. So when someone walks in, and he is new to cigars, we teach them how to smoke and how to enjoy the cigar in a friendly environment. Most people are worried about how to hold the cigar and smoke it. They have read only read about it on the Internet and may feel shy," he added.

According to Yaqout, cigars are completely different from cigarettes. "One cigarette has around 250 chemicals, and this is why there is an addiction, while with cigars there isn't any addiction. A cigar is completely natural with no chemicals added. So it's not addictive as cigarettes - it's 100 percent tobacco. It contains natural nicotine not added nicotine. Also, you only puff on the



cigar and not inhale the smoke, so the risks are minimum compared to cigarettes or others," he stressed.

"We acquire cigars vintage and new from all over the world. Habanos or the producing company in Cuba does regional additions for each country. We require these regional additions in addition to the cigars we have. We also have non-Cuban cigars - we are the official retailers for other companies. For example Royal Danish cigars made the first Kuwaiti-addition cigar ever introduced last year. We also have Optimos cigars," Yaqout noted.

"Then we have accessories from various companies, and we are their official retailers in Kuwait. This year we will try to get more companies. Our non-Cuban cigars are from Nicaragua, Dominican Republic and other places. Tobacco is just like coffee - it can be planted in tropical temperatures, especially in Central American and South American countries," he explained.

The price of a good cigar starts from around KD 5 per piece up to a few thousand dinars, depending on the make. "For instance, Davidoff cigars from the 1960s will cost around KD 15,000 per box, and people buy it like



KUWAIT: The seven partners of Cigar Room pose for a photo. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

wine. If we store the cigar at the optimum temperature and humidity, it will last for years with the same taste. We have cigars from 2004 here at the store, which are the oldest available. There are vintage cigar banks all over the world such as Girard in Geneva, and we work with them in addition to other retailers," said Yaqout.

"We are a friendly and prominent cigar café in Kuwait where you can come and enjoy a cigar and get all the

information from the partners, who are very well educated in cigars to teach the public. It's a very small market in Kuwait," he concluded.

The seven partners are Abdulrahman Al-Muraikhi, Saud Al-Yaqout, Nashmi Al-Ajmi, Abdulrahman Al-Terkait, Abdullah bin Awadh, Sayel Al-Ajmi and Yasser Al-Arbash. The Cigar Room is open from 8:00 am till midnight.