

MEI Weekly.



Spectators watching the broadcast of the launch of Hope spacecraft at the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre in Dubai. Hope is the United Arab Emirates first mission to Mars and has a seven-month space journey to its destination. Photo: Giuseppe Cacace / AFP.

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

READ: In this edition of MEI *Insights*, Thai diplomat Dr Paradorn Rangsimaporn explains how Asean and Central Asia stand to benefit from strengthening their relations due to potential energy trade and the sharing of regional mechanisms. Read the full article here.



READ: Despite the global economic downturn due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia (PIF) is still pursuing a strategy of broadening its global portfolio. It has, however, shown little interest in Indonesia. Indonesian diplomat Dede A Rifai shares his strategies for Indonesia to attract PIF.

READ: Friday prayers will resume at the Hagia Sophia this week after an 86-year hiatus. MEI Research Fellow Serkan Yolacan outlines what is behind the move and what lies ahead in this article for *South China Morning Post*.
<https://bit.ly/3f0KY7T>



READ: The relationship between China and Iran cannot exist in isolation. It has to be looked at in terms of a triangular relationship if they want to avoid the wrath of the United States. MEI Principal Research Fellow Alessandro Arduino comments on the secret deal between China and Iran for *The Straits Times*.
<https://bit.ly/3hq6cNS>

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

UAE Launches Mission to Mars

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) successfully launched its first mission to Mars on Monday (20 July) at 5.58am, marking the beginning of a seven-month space journey. To reduce its reliance on oil, the UAE continues to develop its scientific and technological capabilities. Though the objective of the Mars mission is to provide a comprehensive report on the planet's atmosphere, the UAE's ultimate goal is to build a human settlement on the Red Planet by 2117.



A microbiologist in Pennsylvania performing a manual extraction of Covid-19 inside an extraction lab. Wealthier Gulf states have been relying on blanket testing to deal with the coronavirus pandemic and have discovered far more asymptomatic cases than in the West. Photo: Governor Tom Wolf / via Flickr.

Wealthy Gulf States Bet on Blanket Testing

Wealthier Gulf states have been focusing on mass testing as a preventive measure to deal with the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. By isolating the positive cases, they have allowed their economies to restart. The UAE is leading with the world's highest testing rates among countries with more than a million inhabitants, and other Gulf states such as Bahrain and Qatar are following close behind. A critical outcome of this blanket testing approach in the Gulf has been the discovery of a far larger percentage of asymptomatic cases than in the West, with more than 80 per cent of those who test positive showing no symptoms.

Qatar Airways Seeks Redress for Airspace Ban

Qatari flag carrier Qatar Airways has started four international investment arbitrations of up to at least US\$5 billion to seek redress for the airspace ban carried out by the UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, according to a statement on Wednesday (22 July). The Saudi-led bloc had cut diplomatic ties with Qatar in 2017 as they accused the kingdom of maintaining close ties with Iran and supporting terrorism. This month, Qatar won a legal round in the International Court of Justice and has jurisdiction to negotiate over the airspace.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

Travel Blog with Mandy Tay

Visual storyteller Mandy Tay will show us a very different side of Iran by sharing with us the highlights of her Persian trip in 2013. In this second MEI Salon session, she will also talk about her experience working in Dubai and how being a solo female traveller has transformed her.



Join us for this virtual public talk conducted via Zoom on **28 July from 3pm to 4.30pm**. Registration is free and all are welcome. Check out <https://nus.edu/2D1OMII> for more details now!

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Dubai Resumes Flights to China

Dubai carrier Emirates has announced that it will be resuming its flights to four additional cities, including the Chinese city of Guangzhou, from this Saturday (25 July). This marks a significant step for the Middle East with air travel reopening to parts of Asia.



Oman Issues Lockdown Affecting Eid Al-Adha

Oman has issued a travel ban from Saturday (25 July) to 8 August to stem the spread of Covid-19. It will also implement a daily 7pm to 6am curfew which will see all shops and public spaces closed. This will affect Omani celebration of Eid Al-Adha, known in Singapore as Hari Raya Haji, next Friday (31 July). The Festival of Sacrifice honours the willingness of Ibrahim to sacrifice his son Ishmael at God's command.



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