

The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) joins the Global Emerging Markets (GEMs) Risk Database Consortium

During the World Bank-IMF Spring Meetings in Washington, DC, on April 20, Werner Hoyer, President of the European Investment Bank (EIB), acting on behalf of the *Global Emerging Markets (GEMs) Risk Database Consortium*, and Joaquim Levy the Managing Director and Chief Financial Officer of the World Bank signed a membership agreement, making the IBRD the nineteenth member of the Consortium. The two institutions were also represented by the Co-Chairs of the Consortium, Alain Godard, EIB's Director General and Chief Risk Officer and Lakshmi Shyam-Sunder, Vice President and World Bank Group Chief Risk Officer. The signed membership agreement marks an important moment in the nine-year history of GEMs as an initiative of the development community to address a data gap by pooling data into a comprehensive credit risk database.

Mr. Hoyer said: “*GEMs is the jewel of the international development banking community. GEMs has created a unique partnership among International Finance Institutions and I'm convinced that the participation of IBRD, as part of the World Bank Group, will further strengthen our cooperation to achieve the objectives set by the United Nations (UN) in the field of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), by the Paris Agreement on climate change and in our fight against poverty and the root causes of the migration crisis*”.

Joaquim Levy added: “*GEMs fulfills a vital role in overcoming informational hurdles. High-quality data must be readily available, accessible and standardized for an adequate assessment of risks to spur cross-border investment in EMDEs. I am very happy that IBRD is joining the consortium.*”

Alain Godard one of the co-founders and co-chairs of this consortium stated: “*This agreement is a big step towards the further development of GEMs as a tool for deeper collaboration and exchange between International Finance Institutions. GEMs is instrumental in our joint effort to mobilize private sector in the financing of projects in the emerging and developing partner countries*”.

Lakshmi Shyam-Sunder, co-chair of this consortium who co-founded this with the first contributions of data from the International Finance Corporation (IFC), also a member of the World Bank Group, stated: “*It was great to see the growth and interest in this IFI collaboration over the last nine years with 19 members and even more importantly, the recognition of its value to the broader investment community*”.

GEMs was established in 2009 as a joint effort between the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the

World Bank Group in 2009 to pool credit performance data of project lending into a comprehensive database, which would allow participants to enhance their credit risk analysis through benchmarking and greater data coverage. As of the end of December 2016 the GEMs database reports around 8,300 counterparts, 1,700 default events and 1,900 resolved contracts making it the world's largest default and loss database for the emerging markets business of IFIs.

Over the years, GEMs has helped strengthen the collaboration of IFIs in supporting common challenges in maximizing finance for development in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement on climate change (COP 21), and the Infrastructure Action Plan. Recent policy initiatives have stressed the need for MDBs to partner, leverage the strength of their balance sheets and to crowd in private sector capital – doing this effectively depends on high-quality information about credit performance as MDBs create markets where commercial solutions alone are not viable.

EIB is managing the GEMs consortium operations through a dedicated team in its Risk Management Directorate. For further information on GEMs, please see <http://www.gems-riskdatabase.org/>.

The IDB Group and the EIB Pledge to Expand Partnership and Explore Blended Finance

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), its private sector entity IDB Invest, and the European Investment Bank (EIB) have formally expanded their partnership through a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which was signed in Washington DC by IDB President Luis Alberto Moreno and EIB President Werner Hoyer. This renewed collaboration reflects the partners' commitment to advance development in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) through blended finance, co-financing, and knowledge sharing.

In line with the IDB's strategic focus on pioneering blended and innovative financing schemes to finance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and consistent with the EIB's key role in sustainable finance, the IDB-EIB partnership will prioritize efforts to explore these new financing sources. Specifically, the partners intend to use blended instruments to further leverage the European Union's support to LAC-focused platforms such as the Latin American Investment Facility and the Caribbean Investment Facility.

The partners will also build upon their active history of co-financing projects by funding additional sovereign guaranteed operations in LAC countries including Colombia, Haiti, and Peru and identifying key areas in which to expand their co-financing of non-sovereign guaranteed operations

with IDB Invest.

Finally, the IDB and the EIB will continue to tap into each organization's technical expertise by exploring the facilitation of capital market instruments issuance by third parties, such as SDG bonds, and through knowledge sharing efforts. A top priority for the partnership is the development of a staff exchange program to facilitate knowledge sharing on public-private partnerships and other topics of mutual interest.

Shopping and parking

There seems to be virtual unanimity on this site that high charges for parking, and difficulty in parking in or near Town Centres is an important contributory cause to the decline in use of High Street shops. It is true that out of town centres and retail parks with plenty of free parking near to the shops have a distinct advantage, as does the internet. I will have another go at making this case as part of the debate on how to revive or improve town centres.

2018 World Book Day Fest opens with joy and fun (with photos)

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, today (April 21) officiated at the opening ceremony of the 2018 World Book Day Fest, co-organised by the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) and the Education Bureau (EDB), to launch the city-wide reading promotion campaign "Discover and Share the Joy of Reading".

In celebration of World Book Day and to further promote reading in Hong Kong, the EDB, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and the Information Services Department are working together to present a series of vibrant activities to the community under the theme "Discover and Share the Joy of Reading". The curtain-raising event – the 2018 World Book Day Fest – was held at SKH St Mary's Church Mok Hing Yiu College in Sham Shui Po District today.

At the opening ceremony, Mrs Lam launched a new TV Announcement in the Public Interest (API) entitled "Discover and Share the Joy of Reading". The API highlights the joy and endless charm of books to encourage reading in a refreshing tone and manner. It will be broadcast on TV and radio as well as social media platforms starting today. More publicity initiatives will be

rolled out in the coming months to mark local citizens' discovery of joy of reading in the new age.

Together with the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung; the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services, Ms Michelle Li; and the Chairman of SCOLAR, Mr Lester Huang, Mrs Lam joined some 160 primary school students and their teachers in the "Reading Marathon" activity – reading out an interactive story themed "Appreciation and Respect" to share the pleasure of reading.

Mrs Lam also visited the "My Pop-up Library" set up by the Hong Kong Public Libraries (HKPL) of the LCSD at the venue. She toured the e-books experience zone and shared her reading experience with students. In support of the theme of the campaign, Mrs Lam gave away some 130 books chosen from her personal collection to participants to share with them the joy of reading.

Under the theme "Towards a Reading City", the 2018 World Book Day Fest aims to foster a sustainable atmosphere and culture of reading across the city by building on the strengths in the promotion of reading across the curriculum and capitalising on the synergy of schools, parents and community partners.

Today's activities included various programmes for students of different ages and parallel experience-sharing sessions conducted by schools, parents, government and non-governmental organisations as well as game booths and book exhibition. Over 3 000 school heads, teachers, school librarians, students and parents of secondary and primary schools and kindergartens participated in the activities.

SCOLAR and the EDB will continue to collaborate with different working partners in promoting reading in the school sector and nurturing students' interest in and habit of reading. Immediately following today's event, the LCSD will also launch a rich array of fun-filled activities including the Fun at Central Library fun day at Hong Kong Central Library tomorrow (April 22), enabling members of the public to have a unique and extraordinary library experience, and take in the joy of reading with family members.

To tie in with World Book Day, the Reading Charter campaign organised by the HKPL aims to raise the public's awareness by promoting reading. Members of the public may sign the Reading Charter, make a pledge and set their own goals for the joy of reading. An online version has been designed for readers to make the pledge at any place or any time. For details of HKPL activities, please stay tuned to its webpage (www.hkpl.gov.hk).



Solving the Irish border

The EU has long decided to use the Irish border issue as one to try to force the UK to stay in the Customs Union, keep all EU rules and make the exit payment they want which is not a legal requirement on the UK. It is most important that the UK civil service negotiators understand this is a silly ruse, and robustly put the alternative case. Let me remind them what it is.

The border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, part of the UK, is already a complex one. It is a currency, VAT, Excise and criminal law jurisdiction border. This means there are already so called hard border arrangements to ensure any goods moving across the border pay the right amount of VAT to the right authorities, and pay the relevant Excise duties. There are anti smuggling systems in place as there is obviously current scope to exploit differences of VAT and Excise by criminals. There are ways of handling movement of criminals across the frontier, and electronic systems for trade through TIR, registered economic operators and the rest.

If we also need to levy customs duties when we leave because the EU refuses the UK offer of tariff free trade, so be it. The same methods used for Vat and Excise can be used for the customs levies. It can be done electronically away from the border as it is today.

Before we entered the EU we had a free travel area with the Republic and all involved in the negotiations wish this to continue, so it is difficult to see new problems concerning movement of people. When the UK legislates its new borders system for movement of people it is likely to seek to reduce migrant numbers into the UK by changing benefit rules and requiring work permits, not by imposing new controls at the frontier. We already have external border checks on illegals and on criminals seeking to cross. We will continue to welcome as many tourists, visitors and people who pay their own bills who wish to come.

I trust the UK will give a robust defence of this approach and demonstrate that the Irish border is a put up job by the EU to push us back into conformity.