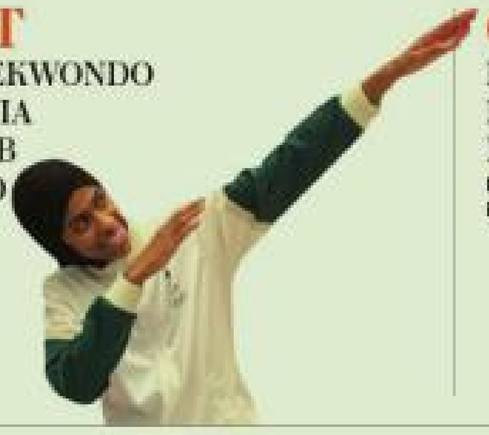
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SUNDAY, May 5, 2024
Shawwal 26, 1445
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ARAB NEWS

Since 1975

The Voice of a Changing Region

MIDDLE EAST WAR

'Full-blown famine' in Gaza amid bloodbath

- Dozens killed in Rafah, West Bank
- Truce talks resume without Israel

Arab News Jeddah

The chief of the UN food program has warned of a "full-blown famine" in northern Gaza and reiterated calls for a ceasefire in Israel's war against Hamas.

"There is famine, full-blown famine in the north and it's moving its way south," Cindy McCain, executive director of the World Food Programme, told the US network NBC in an interview.

"What we are asking for and what we've continually asked for is a ceasefire and the ability to have unfettered access to get in safe ... into Gaza — various ports, various gate crossings," McCain said.

Israeli strikes on Saturday on Gaza killed at least six people. Three bodies were recovered from the rubble of a building in Rafah. A strike in the Nuseirat refugee camp killed three people, according to hospital officials.

In the last 24 hours, the bodies of 32 people killed by Israeli strikes have been brought to local hospitals, Gaza's Health Ministry said.

Rafah resident Sanaa Zoorob said on Friday an Israeli strike on the family's home killed her sister and six of her nieces and nephews.

Two of the children "were found in pieces in their mother's embrace," Zoorob said.

The Israeli army also killed five Palestinian fighters barricaded in a building during a 12-hour siege in the occupied West Bank.

Talks resumed in Egypt aimed at halting the war. Mediators from Qatar, Egypt and the US sat down with a Hamas delegation to hear the militant group's response to a proposal that would halt fighting for 40 days and exchange hostages for Palestinian prisoners, according to details released by Britain.

Israel has yet to send a delegation to Cairo, with a top official telling AFP that it would do so only if there was "positive movement" on the proposed framework.

Security and political expert Ahmed Mustafa told Arab News: "According to my information, Hamas has agreed to the first phase of the ceasefire deal in Gaza. This includes the release of a number of hostages, with the assurance that Israel will fully withdraw from Gaza after 124 days, upon completion of the three stages of the major agreement being coordinated here in Cairo."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that accepting a ceasefire deal with Israel should be a "no-brainer" for Hamas.

"The reality in this moment is the only thing standing between the people of Gaza and a ceasefire is Hamas," Blinken said.

Meanwhile, protesters chanted anti-war messages and waved Palestinian flags during the University of Michigan's commencement, as student demonstrations against the war collided with the annual pomp and circumstance of graduation ceremonies.

INSIDE

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- **Opinion by Yossi Mekelberg & Hafed Al-Ghwell** Page 9



Holy Fire ceremony in Jerusalem

Orthodox Christians gather with lit candles during the Holy Fire ceremony at the Holy Sepulchre Church in Jerusalem's Old City on the eve of Easter Sunday. The ceremony for believers in Greek Orthodox communities has been held for more than a millennium. The church is built on the site where Christian tradition holds that Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected. AFP

SUDAN CONFLICT

Darfur risks starvation if aid isn't allowed in, UN warns

AP New York

The UN food agency has warned Sudan's warring parties that there is a serious risk of widespread starvation and death in Darfur and elsewhere in Sudan if they don't allow humanitarian aid into the vast western region.

Leni Kinzli, the World Food Programme's regional spokesperson, said at least 1.7 million people in Darfur were experiencing emergency levels of hunger in December, and the number "is expected to be much higher today." She told a virtual UN press conference from Nairobi: "Our calls for humanitarian access to conflict hotspots in Sudan have never been more critical."

Sudan plunged into chaos in mid-April 2023, when long-simmering tensions between its military led by Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces commanded by Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, broke out into street battles in the capital, Khartoum. Fighting has spread to other parts of the country, especially urban areas and the Darfur region.

Kinzli said she received photos of severely malnourished children as well as older people 'who have nothing left but skin and bones.'

The paramilitary forces, known as the RSF, have gained control of most of Darfur and are besieging El-Fasher, the only capital in Darfur they don't hold, where some 500,000 civilians had taken refuge.

Kinzli said the situation in El-Fasher is "extremely dire" and it's difficult for civilians wanting to flee the reported RSF bombings and shelling to leave.

She said the violence in El-Fasher and surrounding North Darfur is exacerbating the critical humanitarian needs in the entire Darfur region, where crop production for staple cereals is 78 percent less than the five-year average.

The Brief

BLISSFUL IN KSA

Margo Marsden from Russia, married to a Briton, has been 'living blissfully in Saudi Arabia,' says her TikTok profile. Marsden's social media accounts detail her experiences of life in the KSA. **P5**

INDIAN ELECTION

India's election chiefs have ordered 2.65 million vials of purple ink to mark the index fingers of all those who cast their ballots to prevent duplicate votes. **P8**

CLIMATE CHANGE

As temperatures continue to rise worldwide, the Arab region, especially Saudi Arabia, is on the frontline of the battle against climate change. **P11**

TRIBUTES

KSA mourns death of pioneering poet Badr bin Abdul Mohsen

Prince Badr, affectionately known as the 'word engineer,' died in Paris at the age of 75

Nada Hameed Jeddah

Saudi Arabia on Saturday mourned the loss of poet and national literary icon Prince Badr bin Abdul Mohsen, who died at the age of 75 in Paris after an illness.

The prince, affectionately known as the "word engineer," was a legendary figure in contemporary Saudi poetry whose influence in the art form was felt across the country and the wider Gulf region.

A pioneer in the popularization of Saudi poetry among Arab audiences, Prince Badr's verses were immortalized in songs by many esteemed Arab artists, including Talal Maddah, Mohammed Abdu, Kadim Al-Sahir and Assala.

Saudi and Arab officials and celebrities expressed their sadness upon learning of the prince's death on Saturday, and acknowledged his significant contributions to literature and culture.

Prince Badr was born on April 2, 1949, and his journey as a poet and cultural figure began at a young age.



Turki Al Alshikh, chairperson of Saudi Arabia's General Entertainment Authority, expressed his condolences to the royal family and the people of the Kingdom, describing the profound sense of loss as being similar to losing a father figure. "May the soul of Prince Badr bin Abdul Mohsen rest in peace, and may he be granted the highest paradise," he said. "My heartfelt condolences go out to his esteemed family, his children, and the people of Saudi Arabia."

In a message posted on X, Saudi Minister of Commerce Majed Al-Qasabi wrote: "Today, our nation mourns the loss of a literary, poetic and cultural icon. May Allah bestow His mercy upon my dear brother, the 'Word Engineer,' Prince Badr bin Abdul Mohsen, and grant him the highest place in paradise. He will always hold a special place in my heart."

Ameerah Al-Taweel, a prominent Saudi philanthropist, said: "May patience and solace comfort his children, family and all who cherished him. In this transient life, we leave behind our deeds and the essence of our character."

Renowned Emirati singer Ahlam said she prayed for peace for the prince's soul and strength for his loved ones during this difficult time. He studied in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UK and the US as he took his early steps on the path to becoming a significant figure in Arab literature.

2 Riyals • Vol. XLIX
No. 151 • 16 pages

Radar



We look forward to continuing to work to achieve industrial integration, in the interest of the Kingdom and Qatar, and fulfilling the aspirations of our leaders.

Bandar Alkhorayef
Saudi industry and mineral resources minister

KSA today



Diriyah

LomoMod workshop

Participants at this workshop will build their own camera from scratch — crafting the LomoMod N1 from sustainable cardboard and a liquid lens. Book your seat for Monday through biennale.org.sa.



Jeddah

Forest experience

Tropical Land in Jeddah Park Mall is an exciting and immersive destination aimed at visitors of all ages. The tropical environment features a collection of reptiles and birds, along with a range of entertaining activities designed to engage children.



Taif

Full day tour

A perfect opportunity to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city and travel to the mountains of Taif. This full-day tour is a great way to refresh yourself and restart your week. Book through platinumlist.net.



Jeddah

Padel

Sports enthusiasts are invited to try a game of padel — sometimes called padel tennis. It is a racket sport of Mexican origin, typically played in pairs on an enclosed court slightly smaller than a doubles tennis court. Further details can be found on experiences.suplift.com.

The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan's tripartite committee held its third meeting recently in Istanbul to discuss ways to enhance defense cooperation.

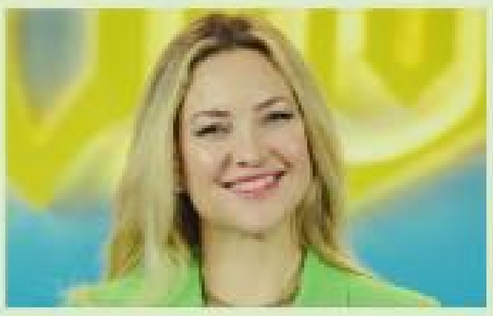
Saudi Assistant Minister of Defense Talal bin Abdullah Al-Otaibi, Turkish Deputy Minister of National Defense Bilal Durdali, and Lt. Gen. Mohammed Owais from Pakistan were among the officials present at the meeting, the Defense Ministry said in a report on Saturday.

The meeting focused on joint cooperation in defense, the transfer and localization of technology, and the development of scientific research in accordance with Saudi Vision 2030, the ministry stated.

The Saudi-Turkish bilateral defense cooperation committee also met in Istanbul recently.

What's Trending

Today's hot topics explained by ***Ameera Abid***



'GREATEST FEELING'

Kate Hudson

US actress Kate Hudson, 45, is ready to get her musical career off the ground.

Hudson, the star of films including "How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days" and "Bride Wars," surprised the audience of the "The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon" with a stunning debut performance.

She sang "Gonna Find Out," a track from her upcoming album "Glorious," and showed off her vocal range.

The performance left Jimmy Fallon speechless. But he later told the actress: "What are you talking about? That's how you do it! Come on, that is amazing."

While talking to Fallon on the show, Hudson revealed that releasing her debut album, which has been "two-and-a-half years in the making," is the "greatest feeling."

She said: "I have loved music my entire life. I have been writing music my whole life. I just thought that it was something I only had for myself until COVID-19. (At that time) I didn't know if I will regret just putting it out in the world, so I did."

Hudson released her first ever single, "Talk About Love," in January, followed by "Love Forever" and "Gonna Find Out," leading up to her album's release on May 17.

There is a "little bit of country in there," as well as Americana and pop influences, she told Fallon.

The "Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery" actress revealed that she and co-writers Linda Perry and Danny Fujikawa (Hudson's fiance) ended up creating 26 songs in two weeks.

'SHARING MY JOURNEY'

Bindi Irwin

The daughter of late Australian zookeeper and conservationist Steve Irwin received the Blossom Award at the 2024 Blossom Ball at Gotham Hall on Friday.

Bindi Irwin became the first international figure to receive the honor at the event, which celebrates people who have contributed to the fight against endometriosis, a disease of the female reproductive system.

She described her battle against the illness as "personal and painful," according to a report by PEOPLE. "It was quite tricky deciding whether or not I should tell my story. Talking about endometriosis — it's challenging because it's the most personal you can get," she added.

Irwin said it required "talking about every little health detail, a lot of talk about fertility problems and IBS symptoms, and the fatigue and the nausea, and the pain that comes with endo."

She added that her fear was "not knowing what would happen when I stepped off into that world of sharing my journey."

But the thing that "drove (her) forward" was "hopefully helping other people, to reach out to other people who are in a similar situation, and maybe giving them that strength to find answers for themselves if they are dealing with unbelievable pain for no reason," she added.

Irwin revealed she had "no idea" she had endometriosis for a decade.

"It was 10 years before I was diagnosed, and I had every scan and test you could possibly imagine with no answers. So, it was really scary," she said.

The 25-year-old, who followed in the footsteps of her father in conservationism, discovered the source of her ailment when she heard a story from a family member.

"That is when I started looking into endometriosis, because she was brave enough to share her story. So, hopefully more people can know about this disease and get the diagnosis and treatment that they so desperately deserve," she said.

Her brother, Robert, 20, called Bindi one of the bravest people he knows.

"When you finally started finding those answers, it just meant so much to all of us to have the Bindi that we know back in action as the most determined, graceful under pressure person there is," he added.



Today's Number

160k

According to Saudi Arabia's Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority, over 160,000 cars were imported into the Kingdom during the 2022-2023 period, making it one of the top 20 car markets globally. The statistics show imports reaching 93,199 cars in 2023 alone, and 66,870 cars entering the country in 2022, Saudi Press Agency reported.

Review

Sawada

LAMA ALHAMAWI

Sawada cafe is located in a plaza overlooking Olaya Street, Riyadh, making it an ideal getaway from the bustle of the city.

The coffee shop offers specialty coffees and desserts, but what sets it apart is its ambiance, with a bohemian-influenced interior design style, soft lighting, and decorative wheat plants lining the walls of the seating area.

Eclectic paintings from Saudi artists are displayed on the walls, providing an artistic touch.

Sawada is ideal for those looking for a quiet and calm spot to relax with friends. It is also good for studying or working — if you can ignore the light, ambient music playing in the background.

Various seating areas are available, including booths bordering the walls and benches overlooking the barista area. A designated smoking area with seating is well separated from



nonsmokers sitting indoors.

Customers can also grab their coffees and head to the outdoor seating area or take a walk on the path outside the cafe.

With so many coffee shops and cafes opening in Riyadh, it can be difficult finding authenticity when it comes to coffee beans. But Sawada's quality is revealed in its V60 drink, a pour-over coffee that highlights the subtle and smooth flavors of the beans.

The menu is standard, with many local favorites, including Spanish latte, flat white, cortado, cappuccino, and tea. Iced tea, an ideal thirst quencher in Riyadh's summer heat, is also available.

Sawada offers a variety of desserts that can be paired with coffee, including pecan tart, classic date cake, croissants, sweet bars made out of dates, and toffee crumble.

The Region

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Jeddah

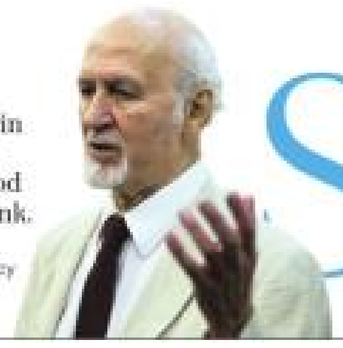
• Embark on a captivating culinary journey with Pink Alien's Bahrain Food Tour, where visitors can immerse themselves in the enchanting alleys of the historic Manama Souq. This gastronomic adventure with six stops not only promises delicious dishes but also provides a gateway to discovering the rich history and cultural tapestry of Bahrain through its traditional foods. The tour starts at 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. For more information, visit pinkalien.me.

• The Ramp Rush will be held at the Mall of Qatar until May 9, starting at 5 p.m. The audience will enjoy an exciting display of skateboarding skill, with flips, twists and jumps that seem to defy gravity and push the boundaries of what is possible. More details on mallofqatar.com.qa.

• Sharjah Children's Reading Festival takes place at Expo Centre Sharjah until May 12. The festival aims to instill a love of reading in the youngest children as well as being fun for all the family. For more details, check sharjahevents.ae.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

May 5	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	4:26	5:47	12:18	3:38	6:48	8:18
Madinah	4:20	5:44	12:19	3:45	6:53	8:23
Riyadh	3:51	5:15	11:50	3:18	6:25	7:55
Abha	4:22	5:41	12:07	3:20	6:33	8:03
Dammam	3:33	4:59	11:37	3:07	6:14	7:44



A trial Palestinian state must begin in Gaza. After a test period of peaceful sovereign rule, statehood could be extended to the West Bank.

Jerome M. Segal
Director of the International Peace Consultancy

Spotlight RESEARCH & STUDIES THE MIDDLE EAST, BETTER EXPLAINED | ARAB NEWS

ISRAEL-PALESTINE

Fading of the Oslo dream

With ironic timing, given the tragedy unfolding in Gaza, a unique memento of the failed Oslo process is up for auction

Jonathan Gornall London

Monday, Sept. 13, 1993, was a sunny day in Washington and, for those gathered on the lawn of the White House, it seemed that a bright new era had dawned in the fraught relationship between Israel and the Palestinians.

The occasion was the formal signing of the Oslo Accords, a declaration of principles on interim Palestinian self-government that had been agreed in the Norwegian capital the previous month by Israeli and Palestinian negotiators.

It was a historic moment, and it produced a remarkable photograph that claimed its rightful place on the front pages of newspapers around the world: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat smiling and shaking hands in front of a beaming US President Bill Clinton.

With ironic timing, given the current tragedy unfolding in Gaza 30 years later, a unique memento of that day is being offered for sale by the Raab Collection, a US company that specializes in the buying and selling of important historical documents and autographs.

The single piece of paper, embossed with the golden seal of the President of the United States, and apparently torn from the White House program for the signing ceremony, is signed by all the key players on that hopeful day.

According to Raab, which declines to reveal who put the document up for sale, it was "acquired from the archives of one of the important participants at the event."

Each of the seven signatures has great value for any student of politics and history — here are the hands of Arafat, Rabin, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Israeli President Shimon Peres, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, and Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, whose country had co-sponsored the 1991 Madrid Conference that set the stage for the Oslo Accords.

Taken together, they offer a bittersweet reminder of a moment when, in the words that day of an ebullient Clinton, "we dare to pledge what for so long seemed difficult even to imagine: That the security of the Israeli people will be reconciled with the hopes of the Palestinian people and there will be more security and more hope for all."

Rather like a rare stamp, the value of which is increased by a printing anomaly, the document includes a curious discrepancy. It was signed on Sept. 13, the day of the White House ceremony, but only two of the signatories added the date to their signature. While Abbas wrote the correct date, the 13th, Arafat dated his signature the 14th.

The document is offered for sale at $35,000, but in political terms, with the hope expressed that day by Clinton that it was the gateway to "a continuing process in which the parties transform the very way they see and understand each other," it is worthless. As a reminder of the seemingly intractable nature of a conflict that has raged unresolved since 1948, the 30-year-old document is priceless.

One of the witnesses on the White House lawn that September day in 1993 was philosopher Jerome M. Segal, a peace activist who in the spring of 1987 had been part of the first American-Jewish delegation to meet with the PLO leadership.

The following year Segal played a key role in negotiations that led to the opening of a dialogue between the US and the PLO, and a series of essays he published is credited with having informed the PLO's decision to issue a Declaration of Independence and launch a unilateral peace initiative in 1988.

In 1993, as he watched Arafat and Rabin shaking hands, Segal, the founder of the Jewish Peace Lobby, had good reason to think that the elusive prize of peace might actually be within grasp.

Four days before the signing, Arafat and Rabin had exchanged letters, the former renouncing violence and acknowledging Israel's right to exist in peace and security, and the latter recognizing the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and committing to peace negotiations.

It was agreed that a new Palestinian National Authority would be formed, and would assume governing responsibilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

After five years, "permanent status" talks would be held to forge agreement on key issues to pave the way for the creation of a future Palestinian state, including borders, the right of return of Palestinian refugees, and the status of Jerusalem.

For Segal, director of the International Peace Consultancy, the failure of Oslo owes less to the supposed intransigence of the PLO over the years than to the internal dynamics of Israeli politics.

"The thing to realize about Oslo is that since 1993 the Palestinians have had only two leaders, Arafat and Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas, the second and current president of Palestine)," he told Arab News.

"Their positions on final status were almost identical, so there has been a consistency on the Palestinian side of a willingness to end the conflict and recognize the State of Israel — even through the Second Intifada, that never changed, and it's still there today.

"But on the Israeli side, we've had enormous flip-flops, from Rabin, to Peres, to Netanyahu, to Ehud Barak, to Ariel Sharon, to Ehud Olmert, and back again to Netanyahu."

In 2000, Barak took part with Arafat in the Camp David Summit, which ended without agreement. As the violence continued in 2001, Barak stood for reelection as prime minister, losing to Ariel Sharon, one of the founders of Israel's right-wing Likud party.

In 2006, Sharon was succeeded by Ehud Olmert, leader of the more liberal Kadima party. By 2009, he too, would be gone, enmeshed in a series of corruption allegations and succeeded by Netanyahu.

Ironically, given the unwillingness of every Israeli leader since Olmert to compromise in the interest of peace, "even though they would support the two-state solution, they don't believe there's a Palestinian partner who will. In their mind they're not losing a conflict-ending agreement they might get if they had a left-wing leader, so they end up going for Mr. Security."

This, believes Segal, is a crucial factor in the ongoing failure to find the peace that seemed so close in 1993.

"You have to deal with this, what I call 'no-partnerism,' the dogma that there is not, and has never been, a Palestinian partner for peace, because this is not just a Netanyahu thesis. It's one that's deep in the belief structure of the majority of Israelis.

On Oct. 6, the eve of the Hamas-led attack on Israel, Segal was optimistic that a breakthrough was close.

In his book "The Olive Branch from Palestine," published in 2022, he had urged "a Palestinian return to unilateral peacemaking, with the Palestinians taking the lead in establishing ... a UN commission through which the Palestinians would advance, in full detail, without any ambiguity, the end-of-conflict, end-of-claims agreement that they are prepared to sign."

This he dubbed UNSCOP-2, an allusion to the UN committee formed in 1947, which proposed the original partition plan for Palestine.

"On Oct. 6, I believed that we could get major changes through the UNSCOP-2 process. I believed that a committee could be created in a matter of months, that all I had to do was to get Abu Mazen across the line.

"We talked to many countries at the UN. We even talked to Iran, and nobody was opposed. I believed that we could then put in front of the Israeli public something that in decades of conflict they have never had, which is a Palestinian 'Yes'."

Now his view is that "Gaza first" offers the only realistic hope of progress.

As he wrote in a column for Foreign Policy on Feb. 6, in the wake of Oct. 7 "no Israeli government will ever agree to a Palestinian state in the West Bank unless there is substantial confidence that it will not be a threat to Israel."

Right now, Segal's dogged commitment to the peace process is as admirable as it is remarkable.

But, in the face of a general lack of alternative proposals, it perhaps also offers the best hope of achieving Clinton's wish, expressed on the White House lawn over 30 years ago, that "two peoples who have both known the bitterness of exile" might "put old sorrows and antagonisms behind them ... to work for a shared future shaped by the values of the Torah, the Qur'an, and the Bible."



Main: Clinton stood between Arafat, right, and Rabin, left, on Sept.13, 1993, at the White House in Washington DC, after signing the Oslo accords. Below: A piece of paper torn from the White House program, bearing seven signatures, has great value today. AFP file/ Supplied

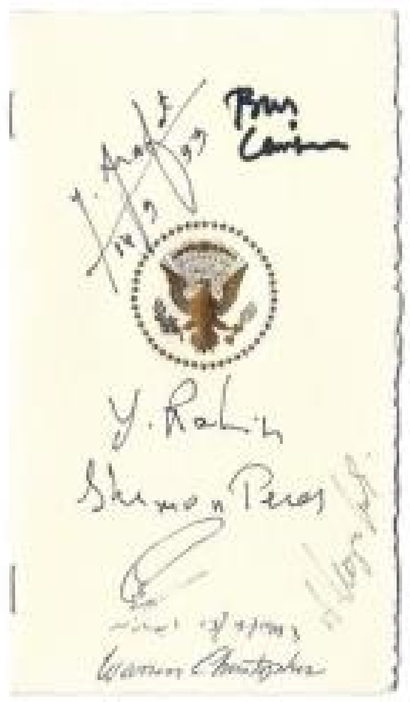
IN NUMBERS

10

Israeli prime ministers since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993.

4

Palestinian prime ministers since creation of the post in 2013.







The White House South Lawn, below, had a crowd of 3,000 guests on Sept. 13, 1993. Nearly 30 years on, shockwaves of the conflict are being felt, bottom, by college campuses in New York. AFP file

News Saudi Arabia



The reserve contains over 180 plant species from 38 families, making up 7.5 percent of all plant species in the Kingdom. SPA

BIODIVERSITY

Green cover in Saudi royal reserve grows to 8.5%

Over 600,000 trees planted in reforestation projects

Arab News Riyadh

Green cover in the Imam Turki bin Abdullah Royal Nature Reserve has grown to 8.5 percent, the reserve's development authority has said.

Covering an area of 91,000 sq. km, the reserve is located in the north-eastern part of the Kingdom. It is a popular destination for visitors, particularly people interested in eco-tourism, bird watching, hiking and similar activities.

Based on research and field studies, the authority said that the reserve has experienced significant plant growth since last spring, driven by improved air quality and reduced severity of dust storms in several central regions of the Kingdom.

The reserve has planted more than 600,000 trees through desert forestation projects, in line with the national targets of the Saudi Green Initiative, which aims to plant more than 600 million trees by 2030, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

The reserve authority's efforts focus on protecting wildlife, restoring environmental balance and reviving vegetation cover. The rate of green cover across the reserve has grown from 1.4 percent in 2018 to the 8.5 percent recorded this year.

More than 180 plant species from 38 plant families have been identified in the Imam Turki bin Abdullah Royal Nature Reserve, representing 7.5 percent of the total plant species in the Kingdom, according to the SPA.

The reserve also offers cultural experiences, allowing visitors to interact with the local Bedouin communities, learn about their traditional way of life and enjoy authentic cuisine.

It is one of six royal reserves in Saudi Arabia, established in 2018 by royal order. Within the reserve, there are villages and deserts where about 80,000 to 100,000 people reside.



The reserve authority's efforts focus on protecting wildlife, restoring environmental balance and reviving vegetation cover. SPA

HIGHLIGHT

The Imam Turki bin Abdullah Royal Nature Reserve is a popular destination for visitors, particularly people interested in eco-tourism, bird watching, hiking and similar activities.

'WE TRANSLATE OUR IDENTITY'

Riyadh conference to explore role of translation in promoting Saudi identity

Arab News Riyadh

The College of Languages at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University in Riyadh will host a conference titled "Translating the Saudi identity through other languages and cultures" on May 15.

The event, carrying the slogan "We translate our identity," will take place at the Department of Conferences and Seminars, and is sponsored by Saudi Minister of Education Yousef Al-Benyan.

It will focus on sharing the Kingdom's cultural, historical, literary and intellectual heritage with a global audience, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

The role of translation in promoting a positive image of the Kingdom will also be discussed, as well as fostering international recognition and underscoring the Kingdom's cultural impact.

The conference will contribute to a key objective of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 in promoting Islamic values and national identity, by encouraging Saudis to translate these concepts into other languages and cultures.

HIGHLIGHT

The conference will attract researchers and enthusiasts interested in Saudi identity and its translation for foreign cultures. Students specializing in national identity and translation will take part, alongside representatives from sectors focused on translating Saudi identity, including ministries, agencies and companies.

A competitive environment will be established among university students to introduce them to their identity through other languages and cultures.

The conference will attract researchers and enthusiasts interested in Saudi identity and its translation for foreign cultures. Students specializing in national identity and translation will take part, alongside representatives from sectors focused on translating Saudi identity, including ministries, agencies and companies.

Six scientific sessions and workshops will be hosted at the conference, as well as topic-related exhibitions and cultural events. Sessions will cover themes including "Saudi family identity," "National identity," "Linguistic communication," "The role of translation and publishing in sharing the Saudi identity with the world," "Translating national heritage into global languages" and "National identity in film translation."

The conference's workshops will focus on topics including translating the Saudi identity within the tourism sector.

The Space

KSA winning the race to become a cashless society



TALAT ZAKI HAFIZ

The Saudi Central Bank announced that the share of retail consumer electronic payments, one of the key performance indicators for the Financial Sector Development Program, reached 70 percent of total retail payments in 2023, up from 62 percent in 2022.

SAMA noted that this achievement is due to the significant growth in payments processed through the national payment systems in 2023.

The number of payments processed reached 10.8 billion transactions in 2023, compared with 8.7 billion in 2022, a 24 percent increase.

In recent years, the Kingdom has experienced rapid growth in the adoption of electronic payments, thanks to an integrated, strategic, and collaborative approach across the financial community.

Moreover, the evolving cost-effective and reliable e-payment system has improved transaction efficiency and contributed to financial stability.

The Financial Sector Development Program, one of the key programs of the Kingdom's Vision 2030, launched in 2018, has played a crucial role in shaping the future of the financial sector in Saudi Arabia.

SAMA has played a major role in encouraging financial institutions under its supervision, such as banks, to offer various electronic payment options and channels for their customers. This aligns with Vision 2030, which aims to transform Saudi Arabia into a cashless society.

The central bank has collaborated with the Financial Sector Development Program to achieve these significant milestones by supporting the banking sector in providing banking services that are digitally more accessible to customers.

Additionally, Saudi Payments, a wholly owned subsidiary of SAMA, is mandated to continue SAMA's legacy by developing a secure, interoperable national payment infrastructure. This infrastructure serves banks and fintech companies while providing the required standardization to ensure all providers have a level playing field.

Several national payment schemes in Saudi Arabia have enabled electronic payments to flourish through various channels and options.

Mada is one of Saudi Arabia's national payment schemes that facilitates electronic payments through various channels, including point-of-sale terminals, SoftPOS, ATMs, and e-commerce websites across the Kingdom, through a central payment system that re-routes financial transactions performed with issuer cards.

The number of POS terminals has increased from about 438,000 in 2019 to more than 1.7 million in 2023, a 300 percent increase.

The value of sales performed through POS amounted to SR615 billion ($164 billion) in 2023, compared with SR268 billion in 2019, an increase of 113.4 percent. Meanwhile, the number of transactions has grown by 453 percent.

More than 31.5 million ATM cards were issued in 2019, a figure that grew to more than 47.7 million in 2023, a growth of 51 percent.

Saudi banks have played a prominent role in driving the growth of electronic payments by introducing several electronic payment options and channels to their customers, such as points of sale, Mada, and Internet banking.

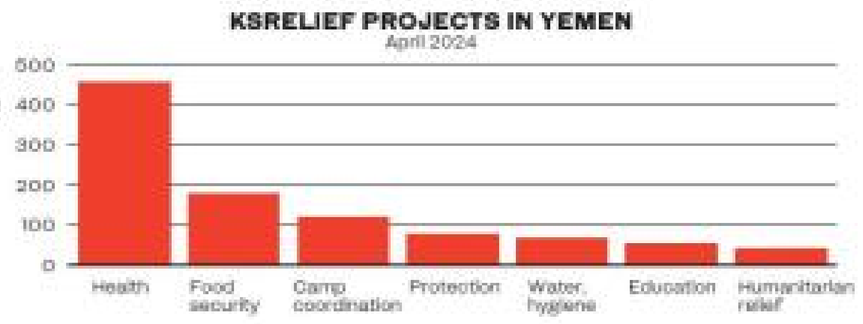
Banks have invested significantly in technology to provide their customers with a wide range of electronic financial products and services.

The sharp rise in electronic payments in the Kingdom has been significantly supported by individuals' preference for digital and electronic channels. I believe that Saudi Arabia is on the verge of achieving its goal of transitioning to a cashless society, especially since 70 percent of total retail payments was reached in 2023, well ahead of the 2025 target.

I believe that Saudi Arabia is on the verge of achieving its goal of transitioning to a cashless society, especially since 70 percent of total retail payments was reached in 2023, well ahead of the 2025 target.

Talat Zaki Hafiz is an economist and financial analyst. X: @TalatHafiz

The Day's FIGURES



Source: ksrelief.org

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Building bridges

MWL, Malaysia to host religious leaders forum

The Malaysian prime minister, in partnership with the Muslim World League, is set to host the largest international conference for religious leaders in Asia.

The event, titled "Promoting Harmony Among Followers of Religions," will take place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital, on Tuesday.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and MWL Secretary-General Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa will take part in the event.

The conference will focus on themes including pluralism, tolerance, moderation, education, building bridges and inclusivity. It aims to highlight the role of religion in promoting world peace, enhancing solidarity among peoples and exploring civilizational cooperation. **AN Riyadh**

Relief efforts

Saudi aid agency assists Yemen and Pakistan

Saudi aid agency KSrelief recently delivered emergency aid to people affected by flash floods in the Al-Ahr district of Yemen's Hadramout governorate. The aid included 146 tents, 200 shelter bags, and 360 food baskets.

KSrelief also launched a measles vaccination campaign for children in Hajjah governorate.It targets children and teens and includes awareness and health education efforts.

The plan is that the campaign will result in the vaccination of more than 15,000 children.

In Pakistan, KSrelief distributed 355 food baskets in the Dera Ismail Khan area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, benefiting 2,485 individuals from vulnerable groups in flood-affected areas. **AN Riyadh**

Border control

Saudi authorities arrest 19,662 illegals in one week

Saudi authorities arrested 19,662 people in one week for breaching residency, work and border security regulations.

A total of 12,436 people were arrested for violations of residency laws, while 4,464 were held over illegal border crossing attempts, and a further 2,762 for labor-related issues.

Among the 1,233 people arrested for trying to enter the Kingdom illegally, 65 percent were Ethiopian, 31 percent Yemeni, and 4 percent were of other nationalities.

The Ministry of Interior said that anyone found to be facilitating illegal entry to the Kingdom could face imprisonment for a maximum of 15 years, a fine of up to SR1 million ($260,000), as well as confiscation of vehicles and property. **AN Riyadh**

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The battle of the bands event featured Wasted Land (above), Jaheem, Volfram, and Kaizer aiming for top spot, while 2023 winner, Egyptian band Erasing Mankind, took to the stage as guest performers. AN photos/Supplied

MUSIC SCENE

Metal bands battle it out in Jeddah

Saudi band Wasted Land emerged as champions of the 2024 Wacken Metal Battle Middle East

Afshan Aziz Jeddah

Wacken Metal Battle Middle East arrived in Jeddah's Makan Music Center on Friday night, providing a platform for local metal bands to showcase their musical prowess.

The battle of the bands event featured Jaheem, Volfram, Kaizer, and Wasted Land aiming for top spot, creating a memorable experience for regional metal fans.

Wacken Metal Battle Middle East — supported by the German Consulate in Jeddah and European Weeks in Saudi, and a competition connected with Germany's famous Wacken music festival — featured a jury of music experts and international guests, including judges from Germany, who evaluated the bands based on technical ability, song composition, and musical interpretation.

They also took into account the band's uniqueness, stage presence, audience interaction, execution of sound checks, communication, punctuality, and overall attitude.



The jury selected Wasted Land as the champions of the competition, meaning they now have the chance to perform at the Wacken festival, which takes place annually in Hamburg. Adding to the excitement, the winners of the 2023 event, Egyptian band Erasing Mankind also took to the stage as guest performers.

Promoter Monika Bremer said, "Since its inception 10 years ago, Metal Battle Middle East has provided numerous emerging bands with the opportunity to showcase their talent and advance their careers. This anniversary edition is an important milestone for the regional metal scene.

"Thanks to the support of our partners, emerging metal bands have the opportunity to participate in this competition and gain valuable experience," she added.

Emad Ashor, guitarist and vocalist of Jeddah-based death metal outfit Immortal Pain and one of the judges at the event, said, "Talent, passion, and professionalism are key. This platform allows all bands to explore new experiences and pursue their dream of victory."

HIGHLIGHTS

- Wacken Metal Battle Middle East was supported by the German Consulate in Jeddah and European Weeks in Saudi Arabia, and a competition connected with Germany's famous Wacken music festival.
- Saudi band Volfram described the night as a 'unique and unforgettable experience.'

Karim Mounir, composer and bassist of Erasing Mankind, who was also a judge at the event, said: "Wacken is all about embracing the present moment and fostering camaraderie between bands and the audience. Live performances truly distinguish bands, and the Saudi metal scene's exceptional talent and musicianship have demonstrated their worthiness for such a significant event.



"The band that can most effectively captivate Wacken's lively and inclusive crowd would be a perfect representative from the Middle East."

Saudi band Volfram described the night as a "unique and unforgettable experience."

Reflecting on the band's journey to the final of the Wacken Metal Battle, a member of Kaizer said, "Being part of this competition is an honor in itself, and sharing the stage with incredible bands is an experience we will always treasure.

"Kaizer is just beginning and has so much more to offer. Our goal is to represent the Saudi metal scene in the most intense and impactful way possible. Earning the title of Jeddah's Heaviest Music from the crowd is a recognition we deeply appreciate."

EXPAT LIFE

Meet the Russian stylist living 'blissfully' in the Kingdom

Rahaf Jambi Riyadh

Margo Marsden relocated to Saudi Arabia two years ago when her husband — a British oil and gas engineer — accepted a job in the Kingdom. Since her arrival, she has been documenting her experience of life in Saudi Arabia on social media. Her TikTok profile states she is a "Russian mother married to British father ... living blissfully in Saudi Arabia."

"True to our expectations, we've found immense satisfaction living in Saudi Arabia. We consider it the best decision we've made for our family, and have no regrets." Marsden, a professional stylist, told Arab News. "Living here is incredibly invigorating; one can palpably sense the positive transformations taking place in the country, aligned with the ambitious Vision 2030 plan. In my view, Saudi Arabia stands as the premier destination for living in 2024."

Marsden was born and raised in Kazakhstan before moving to Russia with her parents when she was 14 years old. She lived in several countries before relocating to Saudi Arabia, including Malaysia, Singapore, Italy, Turkiye, Lebanon, Thailand, the UK, and Norway.

Marsden had worked in Riyadh for a month in 2019 with fashion retailer Zara during Ramadan, and when her husband told her about his job offer, she was thrilled at the prospect of visiting the Kingdom again.

"I love it here, and I look forward to sharing my knowledge with local and expat women, to elevate their confidence and refine their fashion identity," she said.

Living here is incredibly invigorating; one can palpably sense the positive transformations taking place in the country, aligned with the ambitious Vision 2030 plan.

Margo Marsden
Russian stylist in KSA

Marsden now has more than two decades of experience in the fashion industry. It's a passion that began in her childhood, when she would meticulously craft outfits for her Barbie dolls with her mother's guidance.

Marsden said she worked as a model — treading catwalks in Russia, Kazakhstan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Turkey, Trinidad and Tobago, and Thailand — before moving into the business side of the industry, studying fashion design at Accademia Italiana in Bangkok and personal styling at the London College of Style. She has worked as a buyer, content creator and stylist.



Since her arrival, Margo Marsden has been documenting her experience of life in Saudi Arabia on social media. Supplied

"My artistic pursuits also extend behind the camera; I coordinated photoshoots for both personal and corporate clients," she added.

As a stylist, she said, her main objective is "to enhance my client's natural beauty and instill confidence in each customer I work with." While Marsden doesn't currently have any clients in the Kingdom, she is hoping to establish her own business eventually.

"I'm eager to offer my expertise to individuals keen on enhancing their appearance. Helping others look and feel their best is immensely fulfilling to me," she added.

News Middle East

PEACE PUSH

Relative calm in southern Lebanon amid talks on French plan

Najia Houssari Beirut

Discussions continued on Saturday about a French proposal designed to ease tensions and halt clashes between the Israeli army and Hezbollah along Lebanon's southern border.

Lebanese officials received an amended version of the proposal on Friday, which summarized meetings held by Stephane Sejourne, France's foreign minister, in Lebanon and Israel.

The proposal also aims to ensure the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which was adopted in 2006 with the aim of resolving the war that year between Israel and Hezbollah.

One political observer said Lebanese officials had prepared a response to the French document and were awaiting Israel's response.

On Friday and Saturday there was a noticeable decline, generally, in hostilities between the two sides in southern Lebanon, though there were exceptions. One of them was the targeting of the "Israeli Meron Airbase in the Safed area on Friday from Lebanese territories," Israeli authorities said. Hezbollah did not immediately claim responsibility for the attack. However, the group did say it shelled the Israeli site of Bayad Blida at dawn on Saturday while Israeli soldiers were there.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army opened fire in the vicinity of a shepherd in Wazzani but he was unharmed. Israeli artillery targeted Aita Al-Shaab, Jabal Blat and the outskirts of the towns of Naqoura and Alma Al-Shaab.

Extreme caution seemed to prevail in many border areas as Israeli reconnaissance warplanes continued to operate over Hasbaya and the occupied Shebaa Farms, reaching Western Bekaa and Iqlim Al-Tuffah.

In addition to the diplomatic processes related to the French peace plan, Lebanese authorities were also awaiting the outcome of negotiations in Cairo for a possible agreement between Israel and Hamas on a ceasefire in Gaza. Hezbollah previously linked any end to hostilities in southern Lebanon along the border with Israel to a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

Channel 12 news in Israel reported on Saturday that the security establishment in Tel Aviv believed Israeli authorities were close to an agreement with Hezbollah and Lebanon, similar to the provisions of UN Resolution 1701. It said the Israeli security establishment was working with US officials on the process,



Smoke billows during an Israeli strike on the southern Lebanese village of Tayr Harfa on Saturday. AFP

including American envoy Amos Hochstein, who oversaw indirect negotiations between Lebanon and Israel to demarcate their maritime borders in 2022.

Regarding the French peace plan, Nabih Berri, the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, said he had received a copy of the document from the French Embassy in Lebanon and will respond.

"It included acceptable points and others that are unacceptable and must be amended, subject to discussion and review," he added.

The revised proposal refers to a previous ceasefire agreement signed by Israel and Lebanon on April 26, 1996. It also highlights the steps that can be "taken to stop the escalation and ensure the effective implementation of UN Resolution 1701."

Media leaks suggested its recommendations included "creating a monitoring group with the US, France, Lebanon and Israel. This group would oversee implementation and address any complaints from the involved parties in stages."

The first stage would require Lebanese armed groups to halt their military operations inside Israel and disputed border regions, refrain from attacking personnel or facilities belonging to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon, and guarantee unrestricted freedom of movement for UNIFIL forces, including patrols in all areas south of the Litani River.

It calls on Israel to "halt military operations inside Lebanon, including airstrikes on Lebanese territory, refrain from any actions that may put UNIFIL personnel or facilities at risk, and ensure UNIFIL's freedom of movement, including stopping the locking of aircraft radars on UNIFIL naval forces ships."

SOLIDARITY

Students in Ireland, Switzerland join the protest wave over Gaza

Dublin students build encampment, forcing university to restrict campus access and close Book of Kells exhibition

Reuters Dublin

Students at Trinity College Dublin and Lausanne University in Switzerland have staged occupations to protest against Israel's war in Gaza, joining a wave of demonstrations sweeping US campuses.

In Dublin, students built an encampment on Friday, forcing the university to restrict campus access on Saturday and close the Book of Kells exhibition, one of Ireland's top tourist attractions.

The camp was set up after the students' union said the university had fined it €214,000 ($230,000) for losses caused by protests in recent months, not exclusively over Gaza.

The protesters were demanding that Trinity cut academic ties with Israel and divest from companies with ties to Israel.

Students' union president Laszlo Molnarfia posted a photograph of benches piled up at the entrance to the building housing the Book of Kells, an illuminated manuscript created by Celtic monks in about 800 AD.

Trinity College said it had restricted access to students, staff, and residents to ensure safety and that the exhibition would be closed on Saturday.

More than 34,600 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's seven-month-old assault on the Gaza Strip, say health officials in the enclave.

The war began when Hamas militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7.

Pro-Palestinian protests have also been held at universities in Australia and Canada.

In Lausanne, around 100 students occupied a building to back demands, including an end to scientific cooperation with Israel.

"Palestinians have been dying for over 200 days, but we are not being heard," one protester told Swiss television on Saturday.

"There's a global movement to get governments to take action, but it's not happening. That's why we want to get universities involved now."

The university said the occupation could continue until Monday, provided it did not disrupt work on campus.

"We universities are not called upon to take political stands," the university's rector, Frederic Herman, told RTS radio.



Around 100 pro-Palestinian students occupy the entrance hall of a building of the University of Lausanne, demanding an academic boycott of Israeli institutions. AFP

BACKGROUND

The protesters were demanding that Trinity College Dublin cut academic ties with Israel and divest from companies with ties to Israel.

AIRPORT ORDEAL

British Palestinian doctor denied entry to France for 'Gaza meeting'

AP Paris

A well-known British Palestinian surgeon who volunteered in Gaza hospitals said he was denied entry to France on Saturday to speak at a French Senate meeting about the Israel-Hamas war. Authorities would not give a reason for the decision.

Dr. Ghassan Abu Sitta was placed in a holding zone in the Charles de Gaulle airport and will be expelled, according to French Sen. Raymonde Poncet Monge, who had invited him to speak at the Senate.

"It's a disgrace," she posted on X.

Abu Sitta posted on social networks that he was denied entry to France because Germany had banned him from entering Europe for one year.

Germany denied him entry last month, and France and Germany are part of Europe's border-free Schengen zone. He posted on Saturday that he was being sent back to London.

The French Foreign Ministry, Interior Ministry, local police, and Paris airport authorities would not comment on what happened or explain.

According to the Senate press service, France's left-wing Ecologists group had invited Abu Sitta to the Senate to speak at a colloquium on Saturday about the situation in Gaza.

The gathering included testimony from medics, journalists, and international legal experts with Gaza-related experience.



Dr. Ghassan Abu Sitta

Last month, Abu Sitta was denied entry to Germany to take part in a pro-Palestinian conference.

He said he was stopped at passport control, held for several hours, and then told he had to return to the UK.

He said airport police told him he was refused entry due to "the safety of the people at the conference and public order."

Abu Sitta, who recently volunteered with Doctors Without Borders in Gaza, has worked during multiple conflicts in the Palestinian territories, beginning in the late 1980s during the first Palestinian uprising.

He has also worked in other conflict zones, including Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.

France has seen tensions related to the Mideast conflict almost daily since the deadly Oct. 7 Hamas incursion into Israel.

SECURITY

Tunisian authorities 'expel hundreds of sub-Saharan migrants from capital'

AFP Tunis

Tunisian authorities, in the early hours of Friday, expelled hundreds of sub-Saharan asylum-seekers, migrants, and refugees from encampments in the capital, Tunis, a nongovernmental organization said.

Makeshift settlements in Tunis, including near the International Organization for Migration, were destroyed as the migrants were "deported to the Algerian border," said the Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights.

"At least 300 migrants, including refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as women and children, were forcibly evacuated," said FTDES spokesman Romdhane Ben Amor.

Up to 700 sub-Saharan migrants had set up makeshift encampments in the area of Lac 1, north of the Gulf of Tunis, in the past few months, the rights group said.

Many had fled from other cities after a surge of anti-migrant violence following a speech by President Kais Saied in February 2023 in which he said "hordes of illegal migrants" posed a demographic threat to the country.

Humanitarian sources confirmed Friday's expulsions, which the police said had started at around 3 a.m.

Some migrants had left the encampments before the authorities began clearing the area, said Ben Amor.

UPROAR

KFC stores in Malaysia shutter amid anti-Israel boycott

Franchise operator cites 'challenging economic conditions' as reason for closure of 100 outlets since October

Patrick Lee Kuala Lumpur

Scores of KFC outlets have closed in Malaysia amid calls to boycott the chain and other brands accused of links with Israel.

Since the outbreak of Israel's deadly attacks on Gaza in October, many Malaysian citizens have backed a growing refusal to buy products from the Western companies seen as having relations with Tel Aviv.

KFC is among a number of brands that have been reeling from falling revenues, as those who join the boycott movement see them facilitating the Israeli strikes, which have already killed nearly 35,000 people in the Palestinian territory, mostly women and children.

The US-origin fast-food chain has closed more than 100 outlets across Malaysia since October, according to local media estimates.

KFC Malaysia operator QSR Brands Holdings admitted in a statement earlier this week to a temporary closure to "manage increasing business costs," which it attributed to "challenging economic conditions."

QSR Brands did not say how many outlets had been closed or if the action was due to a loss in sales caused by the boycott.

The company, which runs over 600 KFC restaurants across the Southeast Asian nation, said staff from affected outlets were given the opportunity to "relocate to busier" stores.

Major companies with international brand names in Malaysia have in recent months reported losses due to the boycott, even if they were not original targets of the action.

In February, the parent company of the US-origin coffee chain Starbucks in Malaysia said the snub by customers led to a near 40 percent drop in revenue. The news followed an earlier claimed loss of profits and job cuts by the country's McDonald's franchise.



Malaysia has long supported Palestinians, prompting boycotts against certain Western fast-food brands over Israel's actions in Gaza. File/AFP

BACKGROUND

Since the outbreak of Israel's deadly attacks on Gaza in October, many Malaysian citizens have backed a growing refusal to buy products from the Western companies seen as having relations with Tel Aviv.

The anti-Israel boycott in Malaysia has been spearheaded by the local chapter of the global Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement.

Besides McDonald's, other popular brands it listed included Burger King, Puma, Airbnb and Pizza Hut.

BDS Malaysia Chairman Mohd. Nazari Ismail told Arab News that KFC was not on the group's boycott list, but it might be targeted because of its US origins.

"Many Malaysians perceive any American fast-food operator to be related to Israel including KFC," he said.

"KFC is not on our list because BDS's strategy is to focus on a limited number of companies to maximize the impact of our efforts. But it is on the list of other organizations that call for boycott of all companies that are related to Israel."

Many Malaysians who reacted on social media to the news of the outlets closing commented "alhamdulillah," or "thank God," with some singling out KFC's parent company in the US, the American fast-food multinational Yum Brands.

"KFC's parent company, Yum Brands, invests in Israeli startups," said X.com user meraungkesepian.

Others targeted the chain's quality, saying it had fallen off the mark, leading to their shunning of the brand.

"Many have boycotted KFC not 100 percent because of Israel. But because KFC doesn't have any quality," said X.com user tonny-chua9988 in Malay.

The boycott of KFC was expected, according to Syaza Farhana Mohamad Shukri, associate professor of political science at the International Islamic University Malaysia.

"I think the KFC boycott was inevitable because what is more American than Kentucky Fried Chicken?" she said.

"It is all based on sentiment ... companies that appear to be American-based get the brunt of the people's anger."

Malaysia has been fiercely supportive of the Palestinian struggle for decades.

It has no formal relations with Israel and bars Israeli nationals from entering its territory.

In December, Malaysia also barred Israeli and Israel-bound ships from docking at its ports.

POLITICS

UK opposition suffers major Muslim vote losses in local elections

Arab News London

A series of local election victories by the UK's opposition Labour Party has been overshadowed by a major fall in support among Muslim voters, leading to concern within the party ahead of a general election later this year.

After local elections were held across the country on Thursday, Labour suffered key losses in areas with high Muslim populations due to controversies over the party's stance on the Gaza war.

Labour must do some "searching" in response to "questions" over its performance, one MP said.

The potential loss of Labour candidate Richard Parker in the West Midlands mayoralty election led to a racism row after an unnamed party source blamed "the Middle East" on deciding the race.

In total, the party gained more than 140 council seats during the elections, The Guardian reported.

But those gains are overshadowed by the potential West Midlands defeat and the Conservative candidate for mayor of London, Susan Hall, running a closer race against incumbent Sadiq Khan than previously expected.

Labour have "trouble brewing on their left flank" after focusing on traditionally rural and whiter areas, said Rob Ford, a politics professor at the University of Manchester.

"There has been a substantial loss of support in heavily Muslim areas and they are going backwards a bit in progressive areas and areas with students. It is progress at a price," he added.

By offsetting urban losses with gains among rural voters, Labour would win about 34 percent of votes at a general election compared to 25 percent for the Conservatives, the BBC reported.

Yet fear of bleeding urban voters, including Muslims, is driving anxiety in the party ahead of the general election, sources told The Guardian.



Protesters in the UK have staged a number of demonstrations over the Israel-Hamas war and ensuing humanitarian crisis in the besieged Palestinian territory of Gaza. File/AFP

"The polls (which predicted a 20-point lead for Khan) were completely wrong; this is going to be much closer than expected," one source said. A source in Birmingham, where independent candidate Akhmed Yakoob stood as a spoiler to Labour, said: "Yakoob is picking up over 50 percent in some inner-city wards, so the Gaza impact may be bigger than first estimated."

Labour also suffered a shock loss in Oldham, losing control of the council after a number of seats were taken by pro-Palestinian independent candidates.

In Manchester, the party lost its deputy leader to a candidate from MP George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain.

Jess Phillips, Labour MP for Birmingham Yardley, said in the wake of the vote that the party will have to "wake up and face" the issues that led to losses against independent and Workers Party of Britain candidates.

GRAVE CONCERN

US blames Rwanda for deadly attack in DR Congo

AFP Washington

The US has accused Rwanda of involvement in a deadly attack on a camp for displaced people in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, a claim dismissed as "absurd" by Kigali on Saturday.

At least nine people were killed in blasts on Friday in the camp on the outskirts of the city of Goma, local sources said.

The US "strongly condemns the attack from Rwanda Defense Forces and M23 positions on the Mugunga camp for internally displaced people in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement.

Miller said the US was "gravely concerned" by the expansion in DR Congo of Rwandan forces and the M23, a mostly Tutsi group that resumed its armed campaign in the vast, long turbulent DR Congo in 2021.

"It is essential that all states respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity and hold accountable all actors for human rights abuses in the conflict in eastern DRC," he said.

DR Congo government spokesman Patrick Muyaya on Friday had also accused "the Rwandan army and its M23 terrorist supporters" of being responsible in a statement on X, the former Twitter.

Rwandan government spokesperson Yolande Makolo described the US comments as "ridiculous" in a post on X.

DISASTER

Cyclone bears down on flood-hit Kenya, Tanzania

AP, AFP Nairobi

Beaches were deserted, and many shops closed on Saturday as heavy rains and winds from a tropical cyclone buffeted coastal areas of Tanzania and Kenya.

Both countries have gone on alert for Tropical Cyclone Hidaya after weeks of torrential rains and floods that have wreaked havoc in many parts of East Africa and claimed more than 400 lives.

However, as of Saturday afternoon, there were no reports of casualties or damage as the cyclone rolled in from the Indian Ocean and made landfall in Tanzania.

"It's so strange today to see only a few people at the beach. We are used to seeing crowds, especially during the weekend," said Yusuf Hassan, a Tanzania's main city Dar Es Salaam resident.

"But I am sure people are afraid of the cyclone."

The Kenya Meteorological Department said the cyclone was already being felt offshore, with strong winds exceeding 40 knots and waves of over 2 meters.

It forecasts heavy rainfall along the coast from Sunday, intensifying over the following two days, but Kenya would only feel the effects of the cyclone from the "fringes" because of its location on the equator.

Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki banned all beach activities like swimming and fishing.

The Tanzanian Meteorological Authority said strong winds and heavy downpours along the coast.

It said over 9 millimeters of rain had been reported in the Mtwara area in 24 hours, nearly twice the average May rainfall of 5 millimeters.

The agency advised people living in risk-prone areas and those involved in marine activities to take "maximum precautions."

In the Zanzibar archipelago, all marine transport has been suspended.

"We believe it's not safe to travel under such weather conditions caused by the cyclone," said Zanzibar Maritime Authority director general Sheikha Ahmed Mohammed.

News International

AVOIDING IMPERSONATION

Hectoliters of purple ink mark voters in India's colossal poll

Ink started to be used in 1962, during India's 3rd general election

Sanjay Kumar New Delhi

Every election in India leaves a mark on its people, not only in political terms, but also literally, in the form of purple stains on their index fingers.

As voters register in booths and have their ID verified to cast ballots, election officers paint a streak of ink across the top of their left index finger, leaving a dark purple stain that usually stays on the skin for more than two weeks.

The exercise started in 1962, during India's third general election, to prevent fraud and duplicate votes, after the country's first two polls were marred by complaints of voter impersonation.

One manufacturer was chosen to supply the ink and, as the country's 18th parliamentary vote is underway, it is still the same one: Mysore Paints and Varnish, from Mysore city in the southern state of Karnataka.

The company was founded in 1937 by the then ruler of Mysore, Maharaja Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV, and became a public sector company after India gained independence from British rule in 1947.

Operated by the Karnataka state government, it is the only company authorized to produce the voter ink.



In this combination of pictures created on May 10, 2023, Indian voters show their ink marks after casting vote at a polling station in Bengaluru. File/AFP

FASTFACT

2.65m vials of ink produced for the 2024 parliamentary vote.

"From 1962, we have been the exclusive supplier of ink to the election commission of India," K. Mohammed Irfan, the company's managing director, told Arab News.

"At that time, Sukumar Sen was the chief election commissioner, and the inventor of the ink is by the name of Dr. Mathur."

The inventor worked at the National Physical Laboratory, one of India's earliest national laboratories, and the manufacturing process is based on a guarded chemical formula that has never changed.

"This ink cannot be erased easily," Irfan said. "It is made of silver nitrate. Once the ink comes into the light it forms bluish and brownish stains, which remain from three days to more than one month."

More than 968 million people are registered to vote in the world's biggest election, which started on April 19 and will run in six phases until June 1. The Election Commission has ordered hectoliters of the indelible ink as part of the process.

"For this parliamentary election, we have taken around 80 days to manufacture 2.65 million bottles of ink," Irfan said, adding that each vial is 10 ml.

"The total cost of manufacturing is 55 crore rupees ($6.6 million)."

Inked fingers are flashed by all those who cast their vote — from Bollywood stars and politicians to common citizens who take pride in being part of elections, which the Indian government usually refer to as "the festival of democracy."

Shashank Aggarwal, 19, a first-time voter from Noida city, went to the polls on April 26 in the second phase of the vote.

"When the ink got marked on the finger, I felt that I had become part of the festival," he said. "It felt nice."

Kapil Sharma, who also voted last week, said that the purple pigment was still clear on his skin.

"The mark is still fresh and has not disappeared," he said. "I proudly display my inked finger. I don't mind if it sticks with me for the next five years. It's a symbol and color of our democracy."



This drone footage shows the village of Ocheretyne, a target for Russian forces in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine. It had a population of 3,000. AP

WAR IN EUROPE

Drone footage shows Ukrainian village battered to ruins as residents flee Russian advance

AP Kyiv

The Ukrainian village of Ocheretyne has been battered by fighting, drone footage obtained by The Associated Press shows. The village has been a target for Russian forces in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine.

Russian troops have been advancing in the area, pounding Kyiv's depleted, ammunition-deprived forces with artillery, drones and bombs. Ukraine's military has acknowledged the Russians have gained a "foothold" in Ocheretyne, which had a population of about 3,000 before the war, but says that fighting continues.

Residents have scrambled to flee the village, among them a 98-year-old woman who walked almost 10 kilometers (6 miles) alone last week, wearing a pair of slippers and supported by a cane, until she reached Ukrainian front lines.

Not a single person is seen in the footage, and no building in Ocheretyne appears to have been left untouched by the fighting. Most houses, apartment blocks and other buildings look damaged beyond repair, and many houses have been pummeled into piles of wood and bricks. A factory on the outskirts has also been badly damaged.

The footage also shows smoke billowing from several houses, and fires burning in at least two buildings.

Elsewhere, Russia has in recent weeks stepped up attacks on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, in an attempt to pummel the region's energy infrastructure and terrorize its 1.3 million residents.

FASTFACT

Ukraine's military has acknowledged the Russians have gained a "foothold" in Ocheretyne, which had a population of about 3,000 before the war, but says that fighting continues.

Four people were wounded and a two-story civilian building was damaged and set ablaze overnight after Russian forces struck Kharkiv, in northeastern Ukraine, with exploding drones, regional governor Oleh Synichubov said Saturday.

The four, including a 13-year-old, were hurt by falling debris, he said on the Telegram messaging app.

Russian state agency RIA reported Saturday reported that Moscow's forces struck a drone warehouse in Kharkiv that had been used by Ukrainian troops overnight, citing Sergei Lebedev, described as a coordinator of local pro-Moscow guerrillas. His comments could not be independently verified.

Synichubov said Russia also bombed Kharkiv on Friday, damaging residential buildings and sparking a fire. An 82-year-old woman died and two men were wounded.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Courageous act

Chinese driver praised for helping reduce casualties

A Chinese truck driver was praised in local media Saturday for parking his vehicle across a highway and preventing more cars from tumbling down a slope after a section of the road in the country's mountainous south collapsed and killed at least 48 people.

Wang Xiangnan was driving Wednesday along the highway in Guangdong province, a vital economic hub in southern China. At around 2 a.m., Wang saw several vehicles moving in the opposite direction of the four-lane highway and a fellow driver soon informed him about the collapse, local media reported.

Reacting swiftly, Wang, a former soldier, positioned his truck to block the highway, effectively stopping dozens of vehicles from advancing into danger, Jiupai News quoted Wang as saying. Meanwhile, his wife got out of the truck to alert other drivers about the situation, it said. **AP**

Worst results

UK's ruling Tories brace for losses in local elections

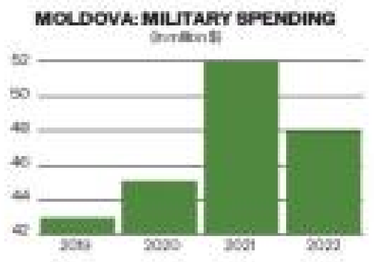
Britain's ruling Conservatives braced Saturday for further losses in local elections, their worst results in recent memory and a key test before a general election to be held by January.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's party lost nearly 500 councillors and control of 12 councils as well as a parliamentary seat, after voting Thursday across a swathe of England saw the Labour opposition make huge gains.

The beleaguered Tory leader faces more likely defeats when results of crunch mayoral races — in London, Liverpool and Manchester — are announced Saturday, but is hoping to retain the West Midlands.

In a rare success Friday, a Tory mayor won a third term in Tees Valley, northeast England — albeit with a vastly reduced majority — providing Sunak with some respite. **AFP**

The Day's FIGURES



Source: Statista

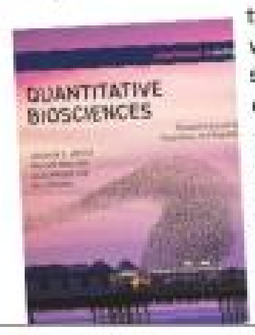
What We Are Reading Today

FROM AROUND THE WEB & IN PRINT

'Quantitative Biosciences Companion in Python'

JOSHUA S. WEITZ, NOLAN ENGLISH, ALEXANDER LEE, AND ALI ZAMANI

This lab guide accompanies the textbook "Quantitative Biosciences," providing students with the skills they need to translate biological principles and mathematical concepts into computational models of living systems. This hands-on guide uses a case study approach organized around central questions in the life sciences, introducing landmark advances in the field while teaching students—whether from the life sciences, physics, computational sciences, engineering, or mathematics—how to reason quantitatively in the face of uncertainty.



Biden remark

India is not xenophobic, says FM

India is not xenophobic, the country's foreign minister has insisted, after comments by US President Joe Biden suggesting the South Asian nation and fellow ally Japan were struggling economically because they rejected immigrants.

Biden, who is seeking reelection against Republican rival Donald Trump in November, made the remarks at a campaign fundraising event in Washington this week.

Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar told a media roundtable Friday that Biden's comments did not match India's reality.

"First of all, our economy is not faltering," he said, according to a report of the discussion published Saturday by the Economic Times newspaper.

"India has been a very unique country," he added. **AFP**

Regional stability

Japan seeks economic recovery for Sri Lanka

Strategically placed Sri Lanka's economic recovery was essential for stability in the Indo-Pacific region, Japan's foreign minister said Saturday, urging Colombo to swiftly restructure its foreign debt.

Yoko Kamikawa said after talks with her Sri Lankan counterpart that Colombo should secure agreements with bilateral lenders and international sovereign bondholders to unlock suspended foreign funding.

The Sri Lankan government which defaulted on its $46 billion external debt in April 2022 had hoped to finalize deals with foreign creditors by April but there have been no final agreements yet. Kamikawa said she "stressed the importance of reaching a debt restructuring agreement with all the creditors," including China — the largest bilateral lender to the island. **AFP**

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كُنِ الصَّيادَ او كُنِ الفَريسةَ... ولكنْ إيّاكَ ان تكونَ الكلبَ الذي يُحضِرُ الفَريسةَ للصَّيّاد

(امين معلوف)

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

Be either the hunter or the prey, but never the hound that brings the prey to the hunter.

Amin Maalouf

(Lebanese-born French journalist)

Opinion

Israel and Hamas stuck in a dangerous, deliberate stalemate

YOSSI MEKELBERG



Yossi Mekelberg is a professor of international relations and an associate fellow of the Middle East and North Africa Program at international affairs think tank Chatham House.

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Negotiations between Israel and Hamas over a ceasefire, the release of hostages and allowing more humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip have been taking place mainly in Cairo, and for a reason.

To begin with, the Qatari negotiators have become increasingly frustrated and disillusioned with both sides, to the extent that a senior Qatari official, Majed Al-Ansari, told an Israeli newspaper that his country has decided to re-evaluate its role.

Secondly, Egypt has its own interest in brokering an agreement between Hamas and Israel, as it would avert a threatened Israeli ground offensive in Rafah that would almost certainly result in many thousands of Palestinian refugees, and probably many Hamas militants, crossing the border into Egypt in search of a safe haven.

Of all the possible scenarios, this is the one Egypt dreads most, both for its humanitarian implications and because of the links between the Gazan Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt.

In one sentence, Al-Ansari summed up the general feeling about the negotiations between Israel Hamas when he suggested that neither side is convinced an agreement is in their best interest, and said: "Every time we get close to a deal there's sabotage, from both sides."

To be sure, one needs to distinguish between what the leaderships of these two sworn enemies see as being in their best interest and what would actually be beneficial for their people. A temporary ceasefire that brings about the release of the hostages, increased humanitarian aid entering the Gaza Strip, and the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails could create fresh momentum for the longer and more permanent ceasefire that is urgently needed. However, it would also increase the pressure on both leaderships to justify the fact that they have inflicted this physical, psychological and political calamity on their own peoples.

In Israel, anti-government protests, which understandably were suspended after the Oct. 7 attacks by Hamas, are once again gathering momentum, and many among the protesters are the families and friends of hostages.

There is a strong sense among very many Israelis that in recent months there have been enough opportunities to reach an agreement over the release of the hostages but that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, for his own reasons and personal interests, is employing delaying tactics to prolong the war as his only hope of clinging to power, thereby derailing such opportunities.

He knows that when the war is over, the demands for him to go will increase exponentially and there will be no escape from the immediate establishment of a state commission to investigate the war from day one, an inquiry that in all probability will strongly question his suitability to remain in office.

Moreover, some of his even more extreme, warmongering colleagues in government, who still believe that destroying Hamas is an achievable objective, are threatening to quit the coalition if the army does not enter Rafah.

By all accounts, such an incursion would be bound to result in even more mass killings of Palestinians, end the chance of any of the hostages being released alive, and lead to the further displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, in some cases for at least the third or fourth time since the war began.

In addition, because of the proximity of Rafah to the border, it would put pressure on Egyptian authorities to allow civilians caught in the crossfire to enter the country, creating further tensions between Israel and the first Arab country to sign a peace agreement with it.

For Israel, the main achievement from a successful conclusion to the negotiations would be the release of the hostages — but there are strong elements within the Israeli government for whom this is not a priority.

On the Hamas side, their main concern is an end to the war and this is not on offer.

As cruel as their mind games with the hostages and their families might be, this is currently the group's main asset in their negotiations with Israel; the more they release, the more vulnerable they become, with no guarantee that an Israeli offensive on Rafah will not take place.

It seems the leaderships of both sides are more interested in deliberate procrastination to sabotage any hopes of an agreement.

In the absence of sufficient political will on the parts of Israeli authorities and Hamas to reach an agreement, it is left for the mediators to use whatever leverage they can bring to bear on the two sides to push them over the finishing line.

Should the fighting spread to Rafah, a catastrophe is almost inevitable. This would escalate the fragile situation in the Middle East very quickly, adversely affecting domestic politics and societies throughout the region and far beyond. This is reason enough to call for a united international front to do whatever is in its power to prevent such a horrific scenario, and to do it now.

Netanyahu knows that when the war is over, the demands for him to go will increase exponentially



COURTESY: AMJAD RASMI/ASHARQ AL-AWSAT

By clinging to the baton in lieu of dialogue, the crackdowns on protests have left yet another ugly scar on the American psyche

Crackdowns on US college protests sow seeds of distrust

HAFED AL-GHWELL



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American universities have historically been bastions of free speech and conduits for great social change, addressing pivotal moments in history with a blend of academic integrity, civic engagement and youthful ingenuity.

Today, campuses still enshrine the echoes and scars of the protests against the Vietnam War that sprang up across the nation several decades ago. These centers of higher learning, the stewards of the change-makers of tomorrow, quickly became hotbeds of anti-war sentiment, deeply influencing public opinion, national discourse and, ultimately, ending ruinous policy. Students used their campuses as platforms for peaceful protest and assembly, highlighting the power of the collective student voice in effecting societal shifts.

Equally notable was the role of colleges and universities during the civil rights movement, when campuses served as incubators of nonviolent protest. They became spaces where activists such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. found audiences eager for change in a country far removed from the ideals on which it was founded.

From the anti-Apartheid movement for divestment from South Africa, to Black Lives Matter or climate change, student-driven protests have consistently proved the instrumental nature of universities in championing the causes of liberty and justice.

This storied legacy seems to be faltering, however, in the face of recent campus responses to the Palestinian solidarity movement, which has sparked widespread discourse and shows of dissent. Events that have unfolded at institutions such as Columbia University in New York serve as a stark illustration of how some of America's most esteemed centers of higher learning are failing to meet the moment.

On the morning of April 30, more than 200 pro-Palestinian demonstrators occupied Columbia University's Hamilton Hall, in an echo of the 1968 anti-war protests. Yet rather than engage in constructive dialogue or use these protests as a teachable moment, the immediate response by university authorities was to call in the police, leading to a series of escalations and arrests.

This decision not only exacerbated existing tensions but raised alarming questions about the current state of free speech on American college campuses.

The arrests were part of a broader trend we are seeing across the country, with nearly 1,000 detentions reported nationwide in a matter of days in relation to the growing number of pro-Palestinian protests. This wave of confrontations and the resultant crackdowns by authorities stand in stark contrast to the expected role of universities as safe spaces for open dialogue and debate.

Columbia is far from an isolated bruising; it is merely one conflagration in a globe-spanning wildfire of campus activism related to Israel's undeterred escalations in Gaza. Similar protests have surged, affecting more than 50 campuses in the US and spreading to universities in other countries, such as the Sorbonne in France and the University of Sydney in Australia, turning them into arenas for unprecedented levels of pro-Palestinian advocacy.

This widespread mobilization has become an enduring solidarity movement that transcends borders and illustrates a universally resonant call for academia, at least, to take a decisive stance against the catalog of atrocities unleashed on helpless Gazans.

However, the rush to wield batons and deploy armored cars against students reveals a troubling schism in the compact between universities, their communities and the country at large. The fault lines signal a deeper crisis in university governance — namely, the handling of free speech, enforcement of campus rules, and the balance between collective security and individual rights.

Carefully curated and well-practiced statements from university officials, for instance, have become a reflection of what they believe the American public wants to hear, thereby disguising uncomfortable truths and sidestepping the responsibilities that they demand.

The responses to protests at Columbia and on other campuses have not only failed to stifle dissent, they have sown seeds of distrust among students and their surrounding communities. These suppressions highlight a distressing trend: the willingness of universities to prioritize public image and external pressure over the foundational values of academic freedoms and student engagement.

By clinging to the baton in lieu of dialogue, the unconscionable crackdowns on protests have left yet another ugly scar on the American psyche: an irrevocable maxim that only the causes held dear by a pliant majority ought to be championed.

Aggressive responses to impassioned activism that is driven by the ideals upon which this country was founded undermine the core mission of all American centers of inquiry, which is to foster a diverse and inclusive arena for the exchange of ideas. By choosing order over education, universities risk alienating their student populations, driving down student engagement and discouraging future activism.

Students, perceiving their concerns are being sidelined or outright silenced, might either withdraw from campus political life or escalate their actions, prompting further polarization. Such outcomes are detrimental to the kind of engagement, debate and exchange of differing viewpoints that universities take pride in and have enshrined in their curricula.

The crackdowns on protests and the manner in which universities such as Columbia have handled them illustrate a broader crisis of confidence in the role of higher education in society.

Only by embracing their historic role as crucibles of social change can American universities, and other centers of higher learning around the globe, hope to regain the trust of their students and reaffirm their place at the forefront of societal evolution.

Opinion

Future of UK, and wider world, boosted by Scottish National Party's decline

ANDREW HAMMOND



The union of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has appeared highly prone to rupture over the past decade or so owing, primarily, to the rise of the Scottish National Party.

However, the unexpected resignation last Monday of First Minister Humza Yousaf, the leader of the party, which rules the devolved Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, underlines the fact that the almost two decade-long era of SNP control of Holyrood politics is ebbing fast.

The declining fortunes of the party are significant because not only has it enjoyed a very long period in control of the Parliament, dating back to 2007, the SNP also charged the debate over Scottish independence and came within a relative whisker of winning the 2014 referendum on whether or not Scotland should leave the UK.

This "near miss" should matter to the wider world because Scottish independence would damage the UK, including its ability to "punch above its weight" on the world stage. Losing the Scottish tax base, for example, especially at a time of huge fiscal challenges in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, would make it harder for the UK to meet its new plans to spend 2.5 percent of gross domestic product on defense in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Moreover, the UK's large overseas aid budget and its extensive network of diplomatic and trade missions would also be affected.

Scottish independence would also erode the UK's voice in international forums, including the UN, G7, G8, G20 and NATO. It could also, potentially, and perhaps most significantly, be seized upon by some nonpermanent members of the UN Security Council, or other UN member states, to catalyze calls for a review of the UK's role as a permanent member of the council.

Certainly, reform of the Security Council is overdue. However, Scottish independence could have resulted in this issue being decided on less favorable terms for the UK than might otherwise be the case.

Though a resurgence of support for Scottish independence cannot be ruled out, the current era of SNP rule is on its last legs

Though a resurgence of support for Scottish independence in the longer term cannot be ruled out, the current era of SNP rule is on its last legs. The resignation of Yousaf, after he terminated a power-sharing agreement with the Scottish Green Party, will probably hasten the transition to a new administration in Holyrood through an election that could take place as soon as this year, and no later than 2026.

While Yousaf made multiple missteps during his year in office, and his was the second-shortest term of a first minister in the 25-year history of the Scottish Parliament, he inherited a troubled legacy from predecessor Nicola Sturgeon, the nation's longest-serving first minister. From at least 2014, following the independence referendum and the resignation of her predecessor Alex Salmond, she was the dominant Scottish politician, until her resignation last year.

Andrew Hammond is an associate at LSE IDEAS at the London School of Economics.

While Sturgeon proved to be a formidable politician, even she was unable to find a solution to the vexed conundrum of how to stage and win a second referendum on Scottish independence within a generation of the previous poll. Therefore she spent much of the final years of her time in power on the back foot.

Part of the reason for this also lay in her championing of a number of controversial policies, including one on trans rights through a Gender Recognition Reform Bill that would have allowed people in Scotland as young as 16 to easily change their legal gender. The combined effect was that some polls showed backing for the SNP had slumped to its lowest level in five years by the time Yousaf took office. However, the issue of independence was the one on which the SNP most significantly failed to grasp the nettle.

Scottish independence is a bad idea which would weaken the domestic underpinnings of the UK's international influence

Since 2014, Sturgeon and Yousaf repeatedly sought ways to push the independence debate in their favor, but a decade later there is relatively little to show for their efforts. This despite their attempt to capitalize on the political unpopularity of the outcome of the 2016 Brexit referendum. Though the UK-wide result was a narrow victory, by 52 percent to 48 percent, in favor of leaving the EU, the people of Scotland voted 62 percent to 38 percent in favor of remaining.

Given the declining popularity of the SNP, however, neither approach is likely to be a game changer. The party therefore still lacks a road map for delivering the independence that would unravel the UK, one of the world's longest and most successful political unions. Any new referendum is now unlikely to take place until the 2030s, at the earliest.

Certainly, Scotland has legitimate concerns about the "thin" Brexit deal agreed between the UK and the EU in 2020. However, the failure of the SNP project is welcome because it was potentially leading Scotland, and the wider UK, down a political and economic black hole that would probably weaken all members of the union, given that their futures are better together.

For Scotland, there remain huge uncertainties about whether it would benefit significantly from independence, not least because of the deficit between tax revenues and public spending in the country, which it can better deal with as part of the union with England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

All of this underscores the fact that Scottish independence is a bad idea which would weaken the domestic underpinnings of the UK's international influence. At a time of growing geopolitical and economic uncertainty, the future of Scotland and the UK is better together.

Keep an eye on the Balkans: It's the world's next flashpoint

LUKE COFFEY



When considering the security and stability of Europe, the first thing that comes to mind is Russia's invasion of Ukraine. After all, it is the largest outbreak of war in Europe since the 1940s. However, about 1,000 kilometers to the southwest of the front lines in Ukraine, another European security crisis is brewing.

The Balkans region in southeastern Europe is prone to instability. It faces many economic challenges. Ethnic, religious and sectarian differences remain a source of friction in society. And for better or worse, it is also susceptible to the influence of outside actors; Russia, the US, China and Turkiye, among others, all have interests and hold sway in the region.

The Balkans is a good example of Europe's unfinished business in terms of Euro-Atlantic integration

After several bloody sectarian wars in the 1990s, following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Europeans and Americans were able to stabilize the region through a series of peacekeeping operations. The geopolitical situation in the Balkans has since remained stable but fragile. There has not been a serious threat of instability— until now.

The Balkans is a good example of Europe's unfinished business in terms of Euro-Atlantic integration. In part, this could be a source of the region's current difficulties. Croatia and Slovenia are in the EU and NATO. North Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro are in NATO but not in the EU. Kosovo aspires to membership of both the EU and NATO. Serbia remains firmly in the Russian sphere of influence, serving as Moscow's toehold in the region, but occasionally sends signals it wants to get closer to the EU.

But perhaps the most complicated, yet consequential, country in the region is Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although it has started the formal processes for joining both the EU and NATO, little progress has been made. Like its neighbors, it faces many social and economic challenges and, as you might expect, these challenges are exacerbated by sectarian divisions inside the country that are being fueled by those outside it.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, two sub-state entities emerged as a result of the Dayton Accords following the civil war of the 1990s: the ethnically Bosnian and Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the ethnically Serb Republika Srpska. The leader of the latter, Milorad Dodik, has long advocated for independence. In recent years he has also taken steps to undermine the legitimate state structures of Bosnia and Herzegovina by creating parallel institutions inside Republika Srpska.

Last month, for example, Republika Srpska's National Assembly passed a new electoral law, considered to be unconstitutional, and established a legal framework for holding referendums, which many people fear could be used for a future vote on independence. Not only do these measures undermine the state sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina, they threaten to bring instability to the Balkans by jeopardizing the success of the 1995 Dayton Accords.

Two upcoming events could serve as a pretext for fresh instability in the region. The first potential flash point is a draft resolution being debated by the UN General Assembly that proposes to designate July 11 as the "International Day of Remembrance for the Genocide in Srebrenica." In 1995, Bosnian Serbs, along with paramilitary units from Serbia, massacred more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica after the UN declared the city a safe area.

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Of course, Dodik and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic have vehemently criticized the resolution. This criticism from people such as Dodik is unsurprising; there are many officials in Republika Srpska and Serbia who downplay what happened in Srebrenica in 1995. Dodik has said that reports of Serbia's involvement in the deaths of nearly 8,000 Bosnian Muslims are "untrue," and many of the victims are "still alive."

Redrawing borders based on ethnic and sectarian lines would open up a Pandora's box

Raising the stakes even higher, Dodik has stated that should UN General Assembly adopt the resolution, he will seek out the next opportunity to secede from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Considering his previous rhetoric on the issue of independence for Republika Srpska, his threats should be taken seriously.

Secondly, next week a so-called grand Easter Assembly of Serbia and Republika Srpska will convene in Belgrade (next week marks the Easter holiday in the Orthodox Christian world). According to a statement by the Serbian government, "important decisions will be made about the survival of the Serbian people in their hearths, their economic progress, the preservation of the Serbian language and the Cyrillic alphabet and common cultural heritage."

The political elite in Serbia have often discussed their vision for the so-called "Serbian world," with Belgrade as its center. There is concern that the vote in the UN General Assembly, combined with the staging of the so-called Easter Assembly, could convince Dodik that the time is right to declare independence from Bosnia and Herzegovina and form a union with Serbia.

Such a move would be disastrous for the region. Redrawing borders based on ethnic and sectarian lines would open up a Pandora's box. The Balkans already went through a tidal wave of border changes in the 1990s. During this period, more than 100,000 people died and millions were displaced during sectarian conflicts.

The effects of redrawing the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia would be felt elsewhere, too. This is particularly true in other regions of the Balkans, such as Kosovo, with its Serbian minority, Macedonia, with its ethnically Albanian regions, and even Serbia, with the Muslim-majority Sandzak region and Vojvodina region.

Since the 1990s, the international community has invested a lot of blood and money to ensure that the Balkans remains peaceful and stable. Even countries as far away as Argentina, in Latin America, Morocco, in North Africa, and the UAE, in the Middle East, have served as peacekeepers in the region over the years.

With the present focus of the international community on Ukraine, Iran, Taiwan and Gaza, it should not ignore the Balkans. Over the next few weeks, things will start to heat up there.

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The Kingdom has been keen to amplify its efforts in energy transition for at least a decade.
Yousef Al-Shammari
CEO of CMarkits

Business



Events such as MENA Climate Week in Riyadh in 2023, the UAE's COP28 in 2023, and Egypt's COP27 in 2022 underscore the region's commitment to addressing this pressing issue to safeguard their future. SPA

HEIGHTENED FOCUS

Saudi Arabia's on the frontline of battle against climate change

Middle Eastern countries face unique challenges that compound the urgency of tackling this environmental crisis

Manal Al-Barakati Riyadh

As temperatures continue to rise worldwide, the Arab region is on the frontline of the battle against climate change.

In the global race to achieve net-zero, the Middle Eastern countries face unique challenges that compound the urgency of tackling this environmental crisis to safeguard their future.

The Gulf region is one of the areas most heavily impacted by climate change, primarily due to the already elevated temperatures that have exceeded the global average.

In recent years, the Arab world has heightened its focus on the ramifications of global warming, particularly its economic impacts, to avert the detrimental consequences.

Events such as MENA Climate Week in Riyadh in 2023, the UAE's COP28 in 2023, and Egypt's COP27 in 2022 underscore the region's commitment to addressing this pressing issue.

Speaking to Arab News, Sal Jafar, CEO of ESG MENA, underscored these efforts, stating: "I have observed firsthand the transformative strides the GCC countries are making in the realm of energy transition and climate change efforts."

He added: "This region, historically reliant on hydrocarbon economies, is now at the forefront of a pivotal shift toward sustainability and environmental stewardship, underpinned by an ESG framework."

The intricate relationship between atmospheric changes and financial growth in these nations underscores the necessity of adopting sustainable development practices.

A recent report by the Arab Monetary Fund states that by the year 2050, the region may experience a significant reduction in water availability and agricultural productivity.

This decline, which is connected to climate-related water scarcity, could result in economic losses equivalent to 14 percent of the area's gross domestic product.

Saudi Arabia, a pivotal player in the Middle East and a significant oil producer, embodies the region's complexities and potential for transformation.

The Kingdom has been keen to amplify its efforts in energy transition for at least a decade, Yousef Al-Shammari, the CEO of CMarkits, a UK-based energy research consultancy firm, told Arab News.

These measures began with the launch of the King Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy in 2013, he noted, saying: "At that time, the aim was to minimize crude oil consumption by utilizing alternative sources of energy. Especially because the local consumption of crude is projected to keep rising because of national consumption of electricity and, of course, road transport demand."

Crude oil demand is projected to rise to as high as 8 million barrels per day, while the Kingdom produces 10 million barrels. This will inevitably lead to an "economic security risk" and result in the nation's first motive of ensuring energy efficiency, Al-Shammari said.

However, with rising concerns about escalating temperatures and environmental sustainability, the nation launched its Vision 2030 in 2016 to position itself as a global leader in clean energy production and divert its economy from oil dependency.

This region, historically reliant on hydrocarbon economies, is now at the forefront of a pivotal shift toward sustainability and environmental stewardship, underpinned by an ESG framework.
Sal Jafar
CEO of ESG MENA



The road to net-zero

The Kingdom has embarked on various initiatives to reduce its carbon footprint and diversify its economy beyond oil.

Mitigative efforts include ambitious targets of 44 million tonnes of carbon dioxide captured annually by 2035 and 2 million tonnes of CO2 seized and utilized daily to produce glycol, urea and green methanol, as well as clean fuels, according to the 14th IEA-IEF-OPEC Symposium on Energy Outlooks.

This is being made possible through the circular carbon initiative, which was introduced during the Kingdom's presidency of the G20, the CEO highlighted, saying: "The circular carbon initiative that includes removal reduce, reuse, and recycle," he explained, adding: "Saudi Aramco is pursuing a very ambitious program on that line. I think there is one major project, which is starting in 2027, which will be the world's largest CO2 capture project."

The facility, which Aramco is said to play a significant role in, seeks to capture 9 million tonnes per annum of CO2 by 2027, with the aim of increasing its capacity to 44 million tonnes per annum by 2035, Al-Shammari outlined.

In October of 2022, the Kingdom's sovereign wealth fund launched its regional Voluntary Carbon Market company during the sixth edition of the Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh.

This move allowed for tradable CO2 shares to be launched on an exchange, with major players in the Saudi energy field, like Aramco and SABIC, taking part.

The idea of the VCM is to allow companies to pay to compensate for their CO2 emissions. Additionally, the market's voluntary nature presents a greater chance for success than compulsory sectors implemented in other regions, Al-Shammari outlined.

He said: "It's voluntary, which means it can have a bigger impact than compulsory carbon markets, which we have seen in Europe, which did not really lead to any carbon reductions. The idea is, by being voluntary, it essentially enables companies to make economic sense of it. So when you have an economic return by having these investments in carbon markets, that would pay off the cost of capturing carbon. So somehow, it encourages producers to minimize their carbon emissions." He added: "There is so much research and literature that has been done on that and the optimism about the voluntary market is so huge and encouraging producers to minimize emissions compared to the compulsory markets."

FASTFACT

With rising concerns about escalating temperatures and environmental sustainability, Saudi Arabia launched its Vision 2030 in 2016 to position itself as a global leader in clean energy production and divert its economy from oil dependency.

Greening the world

Equipped with a strategic location at the crossroad of three continents, the Kingdom is well positioned to lead in renewable energy exports globally.

Two ambitious projects outlined in the Symposium on Energy Outlooks include exporting 150,000 tonnes of clean ammonia globally and building the world's largest green hydrogen project in NEOM.

Therefore, the nation's location essentially allows it to export its potentially massive renewables supply east or west, Al-Shammari highlighted.

As European countries look to produce and import green hydrogen, Saudi Arabia will remain the continent's supplier "for the foreseeable future," he outlined.

He said: "As a part of the decarbonization plans, if you want to produce green hydrogen in Germany, it's going to cost you $5 a kilogram and you're going to produce it in Saudi Arabia, it's going to cost you between $1 and $2 a kg."

He added: "In the meantime, for the foreseeable future, Germany, which is Europe's largest economy, will be dependent on and will need to import green hydrogen from cheap places like Saudi Arabia."

Similarly, Saudi energy giant ACWA Power currently holds the world's most extensive green hydrogen storage unit, with 1.2 million tonnes of ammonia produced per annum.

The company can "easily" import and export this large sum from its site in the northwest region of the Kingdom to Europe.

These efforts are allowing the country to shift its global image from a crude oil exporter to a major player in all energy fields.

COLLABORATION

Ukraine keen to cooperate with KSA in digitalization push: vice minister

European nation's growing prowess in technology could help Saudi Arabia in its digital transformation journey

Reina Takla, Nirmal Narayanan Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's technological landscape is set to get a boost as Ukraine has expressed its eagerness to cooperate with the Kingdom in multiple sectors including agri-tech, fintech, and cybersecurity.



Oleksandr Bornyakov, Ukraine's vice minister of digital transformation, further noted that Saudi Arabia's business-friendly environment for foreign investments is one of the main reasons behind his current tour of the Kingdom. SPA

Speaking to Arab News during his visit to the Saudi capital, Oleksandr Bornyakov, Ukraine's vice minister of digital transformation, said the European nation's growing prowess in technology could help Saudi Arabia in its digital transformation journey.

During his visit to the Kingdom, the vice minister held meetings with the officials of the Kingdom's information and investment ministries and the General Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises also known as Monsha'at.

"My visit is kind of like exploring; breaking the ice. Since we are the policymaking body in Ukraine, we know everybody in Ukraine from the tech sector. We want to hear from the local government about what kind of problems they face, and what kind of things they need, and then, decide what's the best fit for fulfilling those. I think there's an interest in bringing this expertise to Saudi Arabia," said the vice minister.

He added: "From an educational perspective we build a framework of how we teach people from school to university. So they become very talented engineers. We have expertise in almost every sector like healthcare, automotive, energy, and finance. And when countries like Saudi Arabia, trying to digitize any of these fields, I think we could be helpful."

He said that his visit to Riyadh seeks to establish a relationship on the government level, which will in turn help them to cooperate with private sector entities including startups in the future.

During his visit to the Kingdom, the Ukrainian vice minister also presented several digital products to Saudi officials that can be used on the government-to-government level.

He said that Saudi Arabia is quickly developing, and there is enormous potential for technological firms in the Kingdom.

Bornyakov added that Saudi Arabia should build an entrepreneurship culture in the Kingdom so that local talents in the country can leapfrog in the technological sector with innovations and products.

"The world is changing fast, and I can't imagine my life without many digital things that I have become used to. So I think any country that wants to follow up on this and, be on the edge of the technology has to change and invest a lot in this. Because, in the West, many great things happen. Even Google, it came from students," the official said.

He added: "I think, Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia in particular also want to have this, this entrepreneurship culture. And, we know how to teach people how to do that, and, be part of this. I think that's why we have this mutual interest. And I feel that Saudi Arabia is open to that experience." Bornyakov further noted that Saudi Arabia's business-friendly environment for foreign investments is one of the main reasons behind his current tour of the Kingdom.

> **The world is changing fast, and I can't imagine my life without many digital things that I have become used to. So I think any country that wants to follow up on this and, be on the edge of the technology has to change and invest a lot in this.**
>
> **Oleksandr Bornyakov**
> Ukraine's vice minister of digital transformation



"Here, there is an investment environment. You can easily come to create a business in one or two days, then open a bank account, and then you are good to go. So this is one of the reasons that we decided to do this tour and, figure out who's doing what," he added.

The vice minister also lauded Saudi Arabia's efforts to diversify its economy away from oil aligned with the goals outlined in Vision 2030.

"I think diversifying is a good idea. It's actually what's happening in Ukraine. When I started in 2019, the contribution of the IT sector to the gross domestic product was 2.5- 2.6 percent, and now it is close to 5 percent. As of today, 41 percent of all Ukrainian export services are IT.

I think it is also something interesting here. The energy sector might be strong, for how many years, we do not know," he said.

According to Bornyakov, Ukraine is also steadily reducing its dependence on grains and heavy machinery, and technological products from the IT sector are becoming major contributors to the nation's economy.

"Historically, Ukraine was what? Grain and heavy machinery. Unfortunately, due to war, we lost a lot of factories and heavy machinery. And because we thought about IT, even though, less than a decade ago, but still, the sector was evolving very fast. We now have a source of export revenue, which is almost $8 billion every year, and just maybe five years ago, it was $3 billion or $4 billion," he added.



Bornyakov also talked about the success of Ukraine's Diaa application which allows Ukrainians to use digital documents on their smartphones instead of physical ones for identification and sharing purposes, along with accessing over 130 government services.

According to the vice minister, there are 20 million active Diaa users in Ukraine, and he claimed that no other government app in the world can boast about such a huge user database. He also added that such applications have huge potential in the Gulf Cooperation Council region, which will reduce the hassles of paper passports and other government documents, as it allows people to carry everything in a smartphone.

"We want to implement the vision of President Zelensky to build a country in smartphone. Then we created a government super app called Diaa. We started by putting all the papers of a citizen like driver's license, car titles, insurance, diplomas, birth certificates, tax IDs, and passport, everything on the phone, so you don't carry paper. So, we were the first country in the world to introduce digital passports," said Bornyakov.

He added: "There is a huge demand for such apps since Gulf countries have a union, GCC. And if you travel, and if you want to identify yourself, you will have to use different passports and different procedures. We have a solution to solve all of these problems."

According to the vice minister, Ukraine has opened a source code for these applications, which makes countries use these codes to develop applications as per their requirements.

"Recently, we have opened source code, so you don't have to pay us. So you can take this and we can showcase and you can use the source code to build, something that you own as this union (GCC), and use it for the sake of its people. And that is one of the things we are happy to share with the world," he added.

HIGHLIGHT

Oleksandr Bornyakov's visit to Riyadh seeks to establish a relationship on the government level, which will in turn help them to cooperate with private sector entities including startups in the future.

Business News



To date, more than SR4 billion ($1 billion) has been invested in local fintech companies, with over 100,000 individuals taking part in related events and programs. SPA

VISION 2030

KSA's fintech sector driving digital transformation

More than $1 billion has been invested in local fintech firms, says report

Nour El-Shaeri Cairo

Saudi Arabia's fintech sector has made significant strides as it nears its goal to become a regional financial hub, according to a report by Arthur D. Little.

In its latest study titled "Realizing Potential of Fintech in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," the international management consulting firm highlighted the rapid growth and innovation within the sector, spearheaded by initiatives such as Fintech Saudi.

Launched in April 2018 by the Saudi Central Bank, also known as SAMA, and the Saudi Capital Markets Authority, Fintech Saudi has been a pivotal force in promoting the Kingdom as the leading fintech hub in the Middle East and North Africa.

The initiative includes programs such as an accelerator, career fair, fintech tour, and summer sessions, contributing to a 20-fold increase in the number of fintech companies in the Kingdom since the program's establishment.

To date, more than SR4 billion ($1 billion) has been invested in local fintech companies, with over 100,000 individuals participating in related events and training programs, the report said.

The adoption of a national strategy in May 2022 marked a significant advancement in the country's fintech sector.

The strategy is built on six pillars, which include establishing the Kingdom as a regional fintech hub, fostering a regulatory environment conducive to growth, providing funding for startups, enhancing skills training, accelerating support infrastructure, and promoting local and international collaboration.

Ambitious goals

The Vision 2030 goals include the establishment of at least 525 fintech companies by 2030, up from 200 in 2023, the creation of 18,000 fintech job opportunities, up from approximately 5,400 in 2023, contribute SR13.3 billion to the gross domestic product, a substantial increase from around SR375 billion in 2023, and achieve SR12.2 billion in direct venture capital contributions, compared to SR5.2 billion in 2023.

Fintech Saudi has catalyzed this growth through various initiatives, including the Fintech Accelerator Program, the Fintech Saudi Innovation Hub, and an online Fintech directory.

Additionally, the establishment of a fintech regulatory sandbox by SAMA has allowed for controlled live testing of fintech innovations, easing their transition to the open market. Further boosting the sector, the Saudi Venture Capital Co., backed by CMA and the Financial Sector Development Program, has launched a SR300 million fund focused on fintech startups, with plans to invest an additional SR6 billion in startups and small and medium enterprises across various sectors.

So far, SVC investment in 35 VC funds has facilitated over 900 deals and SR1.9 billion in investments. Additionally, the Saudi National Technology Development Program has introduced the Technology Development Financing Initiative, providing debt funding to support startups.

HIGHLIGHT

SR12.2bn

The Vision 2030 goals include the establishment of at least 525 fintech companies by 2030, the creation of 18,000 fintech job opportunities, contribute SR13.3 billion to the gross domestic product, and achieve SR12.2 billion in direct venture capital contributions.

Saudi Arabia has embarked on a journey to transform society to be less dependent on cash transactions.

Mohammad Nikkar
Principal at Arthur D. Little



A cashless society

"Saudi Arabia has embarked on a journey to transform society to be less dependent on cash transactions," the report noted, highlighting the FSDP as instrumental in this shift by fostering a regulatory environment conducive to the growth of payment companies.

The ambition of Vision 2030 is notably high, aiming to increase the proportion of non-cash transactions to 80 percent by 2030, up from just 18 percent in 2016.

Remarkably, by 2021, cashless payments constituted 62 percent of all transactions, significantly surpassing the interim targets, the report stated.

This rapid adoption has been supported by the integration of innovative payment solutions, including digital wallets, local transfers, QR code payments, and the SADAD system for bill payments.

"According to data released by SAMA, digital wallet usage has seen an exponential rise from 315,000 in 2018 to 17 million by 2022, representing over half of Saudi Arabia's population," the report stated.

Initially, bank transfers dominated as the primary method for topping up these wallets, but by 2022, around 80 percent of top-ups were being made via debit or credit cards, indicating a shift in consumer behavior.

The report also sheds light on the increasing reliance on digital wallets among expatriates for international transfers, with non-Saudi users of digital wallets increasing from 17 percent in 2018 to 45 percent in 2022.

Among the leaders in this burgeoning market are stc pay and urpay. stc pay, in particular, has distinguished itself as the first fintech unicorn in the Kingdom, with a notable 25 percent year-on-year increase in profits in 2022, as stated in the report.

Alternative financing

The report, co-authored by Mohammad Nikkar, principal at Arthur D. Little, and Arjun Vir Singh, partner at the firm, delved into Saudi Arabia's alternative financing sector, notably buy now, pay later and debt crowdfunding, which has become the second-largest fintech subsector after Saudi Payments.

BNPL usage has surged from 76,000 customers in 2020 to over 10 million in 2022, with market leaders like Saudi-based Tabby and Tamara expanding across the Gulf Cooperation Council, the report explained.

Debt crowdfunding is also growing as a vital funding source for SMEs. Since 2019, investors have issued over 1,800 loans worth more than SR1.1 billion, with SR770 million disbursed in 2022 alone.

However, challenges persist with rising interest rates and fluctuating approval rates.

Challenges

"While the future for fintech in Saudi Arabia looks bright, there are still some important challenges to overcome," the report stated.

Increasing Saudi Arabia's visibility on the international stage is crucial. The report emphasizes the need to enhance the Kingdom's global profile by articulating its unique fintech ecosystem offerings to attract more global entrepreneurs and investors.

"Streamlining regulatory frameworks. Efforts to simplify the setup and licensing processes are underway to create a more navigable regulatory environment for fintech entities. Continued enhancements in this area will support both local and international ventures," the report added.

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Net results

Berkshire posts record quarterly operating profit

Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Inc. posted a record quarterly profit on Saturday, bolstered by a significant increase in income from insurance underwriting.

Berkshire said net income fell 64 percent, reflecting much lower unrealized gains from its common stock holdings as the share price of Apple declined. It also repurchased $2.6 billion of its own stock.

First quarter operating profit rose 39 percent to $11.22 billion.

Net income fell to $12.7 billion, or $8,838 per share, from $35.5 billion. An accounting rule requires Berkshire to report unrealized gains and losses with net results.

The results were released ahead of Berkshire's annual shareholder meeting in Omaha, part of a weekend that draws tens of thousands of people to the city. **Reuters**

Stock listing

Zeekr targets valuation of up to $5.13bn in US IPO

Electric vehicle maker Zeekr Intelligent Technology Holding said on Friday it was targeting a valuation of up to $5.13 billion in its US initial public offering.

Zeekr is looking to raise up to $367.5 million by selling 17.5 million American depositary shares priced between $18 and $21 each.

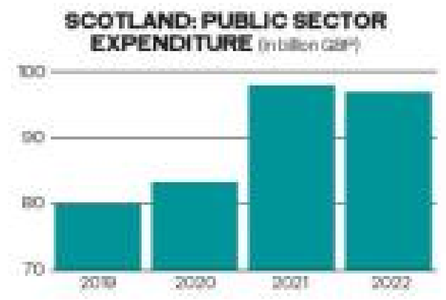
The IPO will test US investors' appetite for Chinese companies, given the simmering tensions between the world's two biggest economies. Six IPOs of Chinese companies raised $46.9 million in the US during the first quarter of 2024. Zeekr was last valued at $13 billion after a funding round in February last year.

Risks it flagged to investors included how the Chinese government exerted substantial influence over the conduct of its business and intense competition in China's EV market. **Reuters**

Chart of THE DAY

In Scotland, total public sector expenditure was around £97.5 billion in 2022.

Source: Statista



What We're Reading

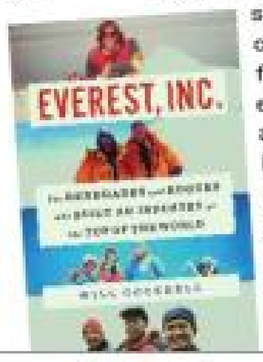
FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

Everest, Inc.

WILL COCKRELL

Will Cockrell's "Everest, Inc." chronicles one of the least likely industries on guided climbing on Mount Everest.

It all began in the 1980s with a few boot-strapping entrepreneurs who paired raw courage and naked ambition with a new style of expedition planning.



Studded with quotes from original interviews with more than a hundred Western and sherpa climbers, clients, writers, filmmakers, and even a Hollywood actor, "Everest, Inc." foregrounds the voices of the people who have made the mountain what it is today.

Operating losses

Credit Suisse China JV cuts staff numbers

Credit Suisse's securities brokerage joint venture in China said its staff numbers sank 46 percent in 2023, a year the Swiss authorities arranged a takeover to keep the firm from collapsing.

Credit Suisse Securities (China) Ltd. said in an annual report that employee numbers were 126 at the end of December, down from 234 a year earlier.

The Chinese venture made several rounds of layoffs last year in bid to stem losses.

Swiss authorities hastily arranged the takeover of Credit Suisse by cross-town rival UBS in the biggest bank merger since the 2008 global financial crisis.

After the merger was announced in March 2023, Credit Suisse put the China unit up for sale. The unit reported its operating loss narrowed to 199 million yuan ($27.5 million) last year from 255 million yuan in 2022. **Reuters**

Regulatory review

Spain's Ferrovial expects Nasdaq listing by May

Spain's Ferrovial expects to list on Nasdaq around May 9 after concluding a regulatory review for its registration, the construction firm said late on Friday.

The builder of toll roads, airports and energy projects said the company had filed an acceleration request before the US SEC to declare its registration statement effective on May 8.

Ferrovial's shares will be trading on Nasdaq under the ticker symbol "FER," following a decision to move its headquarters to the Netherlands from Spain.

The infrastructure builder would be the first firm listed on the Spanish stock market index to trade on Nasdaq with ordinary shares.

Ferrovial launched a dual listing in Amsterdam and Spain in June and began the process for a US listing that was originally planned for the end of 2023. **Reuters**

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Receiving the 'Best Place to Work' certification for the second consecutive year is a moment of pride for Pfizer Saudi.

Mohamed Fawzy
Country President, Pfizer Saudi

Corporate

PRESS RELEASES | FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

GLOBAL TRADE SHOW

6th Automechanika Riyadh spotlights tech innovation & collaboration



Automechanika Riyadh caters to all industry segments, from parts and components to repair and maintenance equipment services.

Automechanika Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's leading trade show for the automotive aftermarket, concluded a successful sixth edition on Thursday. Held at the Riyadh International Convention and Exhibition Center and running from April 30-May 2, the event featured more than 340 exhibitors from 26 countries and welcomed over 8,000 visitors.

Spanning three halls and more than 11,000 square meters, Automechanika Riyadh showcased a diverse product range featuring brands from local and international exhibitors. In addition, attendees had access to unparalleled networking opportunities, unlocking new pathways for business expansion.

Bilal Al-Barmawi, CEO and founder of 1st Arabia for Trade Shows and Conferences, said: "The international automotive aftermarket is a thriving and constantly evolving sector, and the Automechanika portfolio globally represents the entire automotive aftermarket value chain like no other. Automechanika Riyadh caters to all industry segments, from parts and components to repair and maintenance equipment services."

Aly Hefny, show manager, Automechanika Riyadh, Messe Frankfurt Middle East, added: "The event provides a unique opportunity for industry professionals to come together and explore new technologies and business opportunities in the region. Automechanika Riyadh offered three days of innovation and collaboration while highlighting our position as more than just a trade show but a place to share knowledge and keep attendees up-to-date with the latest industry trends and developments."

The Automechanika Riyadh Academy, running throughout the three-day exhibition, featured keynote presentations, panel discussions and market updates. The academy was hosted by industry leaders and featured speakers from renowned global companies such as Bosch, Renault and Nissan, as well as Saudi government representatives.

On the opening day, Saleh Al-Khabti, deputy minister of investment transaction, Ministry of Investment, launched proceedings with a keynote speech. This was followed by a presentation on "The Kingdom's Automotive Industry Landscape" by Aflah Ahmed, chief adviser — automotive cluster, National Industrial Development Center at the Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources. The rest of the day's agenda explored topics including sustainability, innovation and urban mobility among many others.

On the second day of the Automechanika Riyadh Academy, topics included "Growth Opportunities in the GCC Automotive Aftermarket," "Impact of Technology in the Automotive Aftermarket Space," and "Winning Formulas for Aftermarket Distribution."

A three-hour training workshop, "Navigating After-sales Learning and Development," concluded the academy on May 2. This workshop highlighted the importance of continuous learning for after-sales professionals in the automotive industry and was delivered by Farid Sfeir, training manager, Tiqani Inc.

Senior buyers and key decision-makers had the opportunity to meet through The Premium Club, an exclusive networking program that fast-tracks and simplifies the purchasing process.

Automechanika Riyadh hosted six country pavilions, including China, Taiwan, Thailand, Hong Kong, Korea, and Singapore. Exhibitors from Germany, the UK, the US, Japan, India and Pakistan also showcased their products at the event.

From the GCC, the UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia had a significant presence, with Saudi exhibitors taking over 25 percent of the total exhibition space.

Automechanika Riyadh featured eight product categories, which include: parts and components, electronics and systems, accessories and customizing, tires and batteries, car wash and care, oils and lubricants, diagnostics and repair, and body paint.

The show is one of 14 Automechanika events worldwide and is licensed to 1st Arabia Tradeshows and Conferences by Messe Frankfurt Exhibition.

INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

Pfizer Saudi certified as 'Best Place to Work' in Saudi Arabia for 2024

Pfizer Saudi has been recognized for the second consecutive year as one of the best places to work in Saudi Arabia for 2024.

The Best Places to Work assessment is one of the world's most widely used models to understand employee perceptions about their workplace. The certification denotes the voice of employees and demonstrates that the company is an "employer of choice." The coveted certification is awarded to the organizations that have best-in-class people practices and provide superior employee experiences.

During the assessment, Pfizer Saudi received outstanding scores across several aspects of the workplace, including creating an environment that offers support, hospitality, and a sense of pride to all employees.

The certification reaffirms Pfizer Saudi's commitment to creating an environment where employees can thrive and reach their full potential. The company's dedication to its workforce is reflected in its core values of courage, joy, excellence, and equity, which serve as a foundation of its culture.

Pfizer Saudi's Country President Mohamed Fawzy said: "Receiving the 'Best Place to Work' certification for the second consecutive year is a moment of pride for Pfizer Saudi. This recognition is a testament to our unwavering commitment toward creating a workplace where our employees can thrive and excel, reaffirming that we are on the right path toward fostering a culture of excellence, innovation and inclusivity. Receiving this certification not only validates our efforts but also serves as a motivation for us to continue investing in our people and in creating a workplace that inspires innovation, growth and collaboration, where together we will continue our pursuit of breakthroughs that change patients' lives."

Pfizer is a research-based global biopharmaceutical company that engages in the discovery, development and manufacture of healthcare products that include medicines and vaccines. It has been operating in Saudi Arabia since the early 1960s. In October 2011, Pfizer Saudi signed an MoU with the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority to set up its first ever manufacturing plant in the GCC in King Abdullah Economic City in Saudi Arabia. It kicked off the construction of its new manufacturing plant in February 2013 and completed it by 2017.

In 2016, SAGIA issued a trading license to Pfizer, making it the first pharmaceutical multinational company to be awarded such a license.

LUXURY DEVELOPMENT

Aston Martin to design interiors for $250m UAE beachfront project

Dar Global, a London-listed luxury international real estate developer, has announced a new partnership with Aston Martin. The collaboration will see the British ultra-luxury marque carefully craft interiors for an exquisite beachfront residential development in Ras Al-Khaimah, UAE.

To be officially unveiled in May, the new development will be situated on Al-Marjan Island. It is the first time Aston Martin's internationally acclaimed design team has applied its renown to a real estate project in the GCC, building on successful brand collaborations in the US and Japan.

To be strategically positioned in a pristine location near the highly anticipated Wynn Resort, the new residence, with interiors by Aston Martin, promises to bring the car maker's signature blend of sophistication, elegance, and high performance to the property, providing a unique fusion of luxury living and natural coastal beauty. The accompanying private beach gives way to scenic walking tracks and lush green spaces, with the bright lights of Dubai just an hour away.

With a gross development value of approximately $250 million, the project is expected to be completed in 2028, in joint development with Aarvees Group.

Abdulla Al-Abdouli, CEO of Dar Global, a London-listed luxury international real estate developer, has announced a new partnership with Aston Martin. The collaboration will see the British ultra-luxury marque carefully craft interiors for an exquisite beachfront residential development in Ras Al-Khaimah, UAE.



Senior officials at the signing ceremony for the partnership.

FASTFACT

The partnership will be Aston Martin's first real estate collaboration in the GCC.

Al-Marjan, said: "The introduction of a residence with interiors by Aston Martin on Al-Marjan Island further enhances the appeal of our premier destination. This partnership reflects our commitment to delivering unparalleled experiences and reinforces Ras Al-Khaimah's position as a leading real estate hub in the region."

Stefano Saporetti, director of brand diversification at Aston Martin, said: "The partnership between Aston Martin and Dar Global brings together two ultra-luxury lifestyle organizations with a shared passion for combining traditional craftsmanship with innovation and cutting-edge design. Marking Aston Martin's very first real estate collaboration in the GCC, we are incredibly proud to have the opportunity to design ultra-luxury interiors for what we believe will be an unparalleled development in the emerging luxury destination of Al-Marjan Island."

Ziad El-Chaar, CEO of Dar Global, said: "Our collaboration with Aston Martin marks a significant milestone for Dar Global as we expand our footprint into Ras Al-Khaimah. With a track record of delivering iconic properties, we are committed to setting new standards of luxury living in this vibrant emirate."

Corporate Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Real Estate

Jeddah to host housing exhibition 'SEREDO 2024'

Preparations are underway for the launch of the second edition of the Saudi Real Estate Development and Ownership in Jeddah, following the success of the pilot exhibition in 2023.

A key event that focuses on the housing and property investment opportunities offered in the Saudi market, SEREDO 2024 will run from May 14-17 at Jeddah Center for Forums and Events, under the auspices of the Ministry of Municipal, Rural Affairs and Housing.

Unveiling the latest project launches, sector innovations and market developments, the event brings together hundreds of government agencies, industry professionals, banks, funding companies, and investors, to explore opportunities, trends, and challenges within Saudi Arabia's real estate landscape.

According to the organizers of the exhibition, this year's edition features a comprehensive agenda filled with market talks, workshops, seminars, and panel discussions, all led by industry leaders.

This will include the Arts of Negotiation Symposium for Real Estate Brokers, as well as Understanding Real Estate Market Developments and Analyzing Trends.

This is in addition to a symposium on the importance of the national address in developing the real estate sector, a symposium on the world of geospatial data to build new horizons in real estate, and other workshops on methods for professionalizing auctions, as well as entrepreneurship and innovation in the real estate market.

Bilateral Ties

DMCC hosts first trade roadshow in Japan

DMCC — a flagship free zone and Government of Dubai Authority on commodities trade and enterprise — successfully concluded its first "Made for Trade Live" roadshow in Japan, which focused on Web3, gaming and AI to further complement the thriving tech ecosystem within DMCC.

The event in Tokyo builds on the growing bilateral trade and investment relations between the UAE and Japan. DMCC is home to 83 Japanese companies, constituting more than 24 percent of Japanese firms that are set up in the country, and sees further opportunities for Japanese businesses to accelerate their growth through Dubai.

Digital Art

Huawei to unveil GoPaint app on May 7

Huawei will soon launch a new self-developed painting app for tablets called GoPaint. Huawei's official account said: "Creation begins here! The most powerful Huawei-developed app GoPaint is coming, see you on 7 May!" According to sources, the app comes equipped with a wealth of brushes and brings easy-to-use features for painting.

As the industry's first smart device vendor to launch a self-developed painting app, Huawei has gained valuable insights into the creative needs of consumers. Adhering to the core concept of "Creation of Beauty," Huawei aims to enhance user experience through technological innovation, enabling everyone to enjoy the fun of artistic creation.



Kyrie Irving shined as Dallas Mavericks beat LA Clippers to book spot in Western Conference semi-finals.

Sport News

TAEKWONDO

Saudi athlete Donia Abu Taleb wins Best Arab Achievement Award

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi taekwondo standout Donia Abu Taleb has been honored with the Best Arab Achievement Award at a ceremony in Cairo celebrating the achievements of Arab athletes.

About 40 athletes from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, Tunisia, Jordan, Algeria, Qatar and Morocco were honored, along with businessmen from various Arab countries.

Egypt's Minister of Youths and Sports, Ashraf Subhi, handed the recognition to Taleb, the first Saudi athlete to directly qualify for the Paris 2024 Olympics.



Donia Abu Taleb, the first Saudi athlete to directly qualify for the Paris 2024 Olympics, receives honor from Egyptian sports minister. Supplied

The Saudi Taekwondo Federation was also awarded the Best Arab Federation in recognition of its achievements both locally and internationally, particularly Taleb's qualification for the Paris Olympics.

Mohammed Al-Shehri, executive director of the federation, accepted the award on behalf of the sports group.

ENGLISH FOOTBALL

Burnley sink toward relegation after 4-1 thrashing by Newcastle

Arsenal defeat Bournemouth to move four points clear at the top of the Premier League

AFP London

Burnley are on the verge of relegation after a 4-1 thrashing by Newcastle on Saturday.

Callum Wilson put Newcastle ahead with a 19th minute tap-in and Sean Longstaff doubled their advantage in the 35th minute, sliding in to finish off Jacob Murphy's pass.

Bruno Guimaraes made it three in the 40th minute with a powerful strike from Anthony Gordon's pass.

Gordon is only the second player to score 10 goals and provide 10 assists in the Premier League this season after Aston Villa's Ollie Watkins.

Gordon was involved again when his shirt was tugged by Josh Brownhill, earning a 50th minute penalty that Arijanet Muric saved to deny Alexander Isak.

Sweden striker Isak made amends five minutes later when he converted Murphy's pass for his 20th league goal this season.

Dara O'Shea's 86th minute header was no consolation for bedraggled Burnley.

Meanwhile, Arsenal defeated Bournemouth 3-0 to move four points clear at the top of the Premier League.

The Gunners' fourth successive victory ensured Manchester City will not be able to knock them out of pole position this weekend.

Bukayo Saka's penalty put Mikel Arteta's side ahead on the stroke of half-time at the Emirates Stadium.

Leandro Trossard and Declan Rice struck in the closing stages to secure a vital three points.

Chasing their first title since 2004, the Gunners will pray for a shock City stumble against Wolves at the Etihad Stadium.

Pep Guardiola's team, who have two games in hand on Arsenal, can clinch an unprecedented fourth successive English title if they win their last four matches. Arsenal's 26th Premier League victory this season equalled the club's top-flight record for a single campaign.

"It was probably the best first half we've played all season," Arteta said.

"We were unbelievable. Everything flowing, super composed on the ball. We generated so many chances, we could have gone three, four, five up easily."

Arteta's men gifted the title to City last season after blowing an eight-point lead in the closing weeks.

But the north Londoners have learned from that meltdown, winning 14 of their 16 league games in 2024 to stay firmly in the hunt.

Arsenal travel to Manchester United in their penultimate game next weekend before hosting Everton in what they hope will be a potential title clincher on May 19.

At Bramall Lane, fourth bottom Nottingham Forest took a giant step toward survival with a 3-1 win against already-relegated Sheffield United.

Gonzalo Montiel brought down Ben Brereton Díaz and the Blades forward picked himself up to lash in the 17th minute penalty.

But Callum Hudson-Odoi grabbed Forest's equalizer in the 27th minute with a superb strike that curled into the far corner.

Ryan Yates slammed in Forest's second from close-range after 51 minutes and Hudson-Odoi curled home in the 65th minute.

That gave the Blades an unwanted record as the first club to concede 100 goals in a 38-match Premier League season.

Swindon were relegated in 1993-94 after allowing 100 goals over 42 games.

Forest, awaiting the result of their appeal against a four-point deduction for financial breaches, are three points ahead of third bottom Luton, who drew 1-1 with Everton on Friday.

West London rivals Brentford and Fulham shared a dour 0-0 draw.



Burnley has to win both of its remaining games — away to Tottenham and then at home to Forest — to stand a chance of staying up. Reuters

HIGHLIGHTS

- Callum Wilson put Newcastle ahead with a 19th minute tap-in and Sean Longstaff doubled their advantage in the 35th minute, sliding in to finish off Jacob Murphy's pass.
- Bruno Guimaraes made it three in the 40th minute with a powerful strike from Anthony Gordon's pass.
- Gordon is only the second player to score 10 goals and provide 10 assists in the league this season after Aston Villa's Ollie Watkins.

COMBAT SPORT

Al-Huda club shines at Kingdom Under-15 Fencing Championship

Khaled Alarafah Riyadh

The Kingdom Fencing Championship for male fencers under the age of 15, known as the Diamond Round, came to an end on Saturday. A total of 142 fencers from 20 clubs participated in the championship at the Fencing Hall in Prince Saud bin Jalawi Sports City in Dammam.

Mohammed Bou Ali, the vice president of the Saudi Fencing Federation, presented the winners with their medals.

Noor Al-Miskin from Al-Huda club clinched the gold medal in the epee category, with Abdulaziz Al-Fida from Al-Nasser club taking silver and Salem Al-Muhri from Al-Baha club securing bronze.

In the saber competition, Mohammed Dawood of Al-Huda club took the gold medal, while his teammate Ali Al-Omani claimed silver, and Abdullah Al-Ubeed from Al-Adala club received bronze.

In the foil competition, Yassin Diaa Al-Haq from Al-Ahli club won the gold medal. Mohammed Al-Hajji from Al-Khaleej club earned the silver, and Rakan Al-Ghanam from Al-Nasser club finished in third place.



A total of 142 fencers from 20 clubs participated in the championship in Dammam. Supplied

HIGHLIGHTS

- Noor Al-Miskin takes gold medal in epee category.
- Mohammed Dawood claims top spot with saber.

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST



Injury

Jannik Sinner withdraws from Italian Open

Second-ranked Jannik Sinner said on Saturday that he is withdrawing from the Italian Open because of an injured hip — denying the tournament of its most anticipated home player in decades.

Sinner joins third-ranked Carlos Alcaraz on the sidelines after the Spaniard withdrew from Rome a day earlier due to a right forearm injury.

The 22-year-old Sinner raised the Australian Open trophy in January to become the first Italian man to win a Grand Slam singles title in nearly a half-century — since Adriano Panatta at the 1976 French Open.

Last November, Sinner led Italy to its first Davis Cup title since 1976. **AP**

NBA

Kyrie Irving 'is still perfect in games'

Kyrie Irving wowed the crowd with a crossover move that helped create just enough space for him to let fly with a leaning 3-pointer.

Luka Doncic's co-star with the Dallas Mavericks was bumped and fell with the shot in the air, and his teammates were right there to mob him when the shot went in as the whistle blew.

The four-point play was a punctuating moment in a 114-101 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers that sent the Mavericks into the second round of the playoffs with a 4-2 series victory.

Dallas beat LA for the first time in three first-round tries over the past five seasons — and Irving improved to 13-0 in elimination games for his career. **AP**

Singapore Sevens

Ireland knocks out Argentina in quarterfinal

Ireland beat Argentina 21-5 in a Singapore Sevens quarterfinal matchup of the world series' leading teams on Saturday.

The front-running Argentines have lost only two quarterfinals this season, and Ireland dumped them both times.

Ireland, which has never won the series, will have a chance on Sunday to overtake Argentina in the standings and lead going into the Madrid grand final this month.

Argentina scored first from nothing when Tobias Wade broke out of his own 22. But with seconds left in the half, Jordan Conroy collected Gavin Mullin's kickahead and they led 7-5. **AP**

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Actors Hugh Jackman and Jodie Comer are slated to headline 'The Death of Robin Hood,' directed by Michael Sarnoski, with filming due to start in February 2025.

Finally

The Six

Abu Dhabi Comedy Week

The inaugural Abu Dhabi Comedy Week is set to run from May 18 to 26 at Etihad Arena. Here are six comedians to watch.



Aziz Ansari

The award-winning actor, comedian and writer, who will perform on May 18, rose to fame for his role in "Parks and Recreation," as well as his Emmy-winning Netflix show "Master of None."



Dave Chappelle

The American award-winning comedian is set to perform on May 23. With multiple Grammy and Emmy awards under his name, Chappelle is renowned for his fearless commentary.



Bassem Youssef & Maz Jobrani

American-Egyptian comedian Bassem Youssef and US entertainer Maz Jobrani will unite their comedic prowess on May 24.



Tom Segura

The renowned US comedian and podcast host takes center stage on May 25. He is best known for his Netflix specials "Ball Hog," "Disgraceful," "Mostly Stories" and "Completely Normal."



Chris Tucker

The American actor and comedian, who will perform on May 25, is known for his high-energy performances and humor that is often characterized by rapid-fire delivery and sharp wit.



Jo Koy

The American Filipino comedian is celebrated for his relatable anecdotes about family life and cultural identity. He will perform on May 26.

CLOSE UP

Loli Bahia, Arab models walk Chanel cruise show in France

Arab News Dubai

French Algerian model Loli Bahia, British Moroccan Nora Attal, and part-Saudi Amira Al-Zuhair took to the runway at the Chanel Cruise 2024/2025 show in Marseille, France.

Bahia donned a green ensemble, composed of a knee-length pencil skirt paired with a matching top, layered over a white shirt boasting a hoodie collar.

Attal graced the runway in a white summery dress adorned with delicate sheer geometric prints, complemented by white slippers.

Her look also featured beach-inspired layered necklaces, a thin chain belt and chunky bracelets adorned with hat, ship anchors and Chanel logo pendants.

Meanwhile, Al-Zuhair sported a vibrant yellow ensemble featuring hot shorts paired with a button-down top and a coordinating cardigan.

She also wore a beige hat, a gold choker embellished with blue detailing, chunky earrings and a chain belt adorned with pendants.

From intricate embroideries to dazzling sequined jackets and swimwear, creative director Virginie Viard's latest collection showcased ensembles inspired by an underwater reverie.

The outfits included knee-length Bermuda shorts, high-waisted shorts, loose trapeze dresses, and large outerwear. Viard also demonstrated the power of layering, using shirt collars, French cuffs and jackets in unexpected ways throughout the collection.

Earlier this week, Chanel shared a series of images, captured by British photographer Jamie Hawkesworth, on Instagram featuring Bahia. The pictures, drawing inspiration from the seaside and scuba diving, provided an initial preview of Viard's collection.



Loli Bahia donned a green ensemble on the runway. Getty Images

Inset: Bahia also starred in the campaign images by British photographer Jamie Hawkesworth. Instagram



Bahia showcased multiple ensembles from the collection in the photographs. In the first shot, she dazzled in a glitzy black sequined mini pencil skirt and blazer. Another image captured her wearing the green ensemble seen on the runway, with the hoodie of the white shirt covering her head.

Additionally, she was photographed donning a white one-piece swimsuit adorned with a black bow around the chest.

The photo series also featured Bahia in a variety of other outfits, including a vibrant white dress with colorful square-like designs, tailored shorts paired with a blazer, as well as a striped set featuring a full-length skirt and matching top.

SOUND OF SILENCE

Ed Sheeran plots different path on new releases

Arab News Dubai

Ed Sheeran this week revealed that he is still creating fresh tunes, but has no plans to release any tracks this year.

In an interview with People Magazine, the singer-songwriter remained tight-lipped about his upcoming releases. When asked about his new music, he replied: "I'm working on them and they're new songs."

He added: "But nothing's going to come out this year. I'm enjoying being on tour. I released two records on tour last year, and it's quite a lot being on tour and releasing records.

"So, I've made the new music and I'm just going to sit on it for a bit."

Sheeran also said that his daughters, Lyra Antarctica and Jupiter, are fans of his new music.



Ed Sheeran

BIG WIN

Medal of Freedom honor for Michelle Yeoh

AP Washington

Actress Michelle Yeoh was among 19 people awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by US President Joe Biden this week.

Civil rights leader the late Medgar Evers, former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and Rep. James Clyburn also received the award.

Biden said the recipients of the nation's highest civilian honor are "incredible people whose relentless curiosity, inventiveness, ingenuity and hope have kept faith in a better tomorrow."

The White House said the recipients had made "exemplary contributions to the prosperity, values, or security of the United States, world peace, or other significant societal, public or private endeavors."

The 10 men and nine women hail from the worlds of politics, sports, entertainment, civil rights, science, religion and more.

INTERVIEW

London restaurant, UAE fashion label launch t-shirt collection

Hams Saleh Dubai

Persian restaurant Berenjak Dubai, hailing from London, has joined forces with UAE-born brand Shabab Intl. to launch a range of T-shirts that will soon be sold at their popular location in the British capital in a rare collaboration between fashion and food. The T-shirts feature a Berenjak-inspired print on the back while the logos of both the restaurant and Shabab Intl. are depicted on the front.

Images for the launch campaign were shot by Dubai creative Cheb Moha, who leads the fashion label.

"We're thrilled to be at Berenjak," he told Arab News. "Personally, I am a huge fan and make it a point to dine there at least once especially when I'm in London."

Moha's deep appreciation for Berenjak stems from an enduring passion for Persian cuisine and cultural heritage, he said.

"Having Shabab there is particularly special for us, and I am confident that it will open doors for more collaborations. With our Shabab community present, it is exciting for them to witness this crossover between our origins and the spaces we inhabit at the restaurant. We are thrilled to stand alongside Berenjak and to have Shabab represented there."



The T-shirts feature a Berenjak-inspired print on the back. Supplied

Moha added his T-shirt designs aimed for simplicity and clarity.

"I wanted to incorporate our identity with Berenjak's identity and the identity of (the) city we are in, which is Dubai," he said.

"If you notice, the graphic on the back of the T-shirt is sort of sun shaped. That is part of the Shabab spirit, the sunrise. And if you look in the windows, Berenjak also has a sun motif in the glass. I wanted to incorporate that and feel like there is a nice synergy between both brands."

Moha also feels there is a crossover between fashion and food. "I feel like there's always been a pipeline between both. They do complement each other in some way," he said.

Berenjak, founded by chef Kian Samyani and award-winning London restaurant group JKS Restaurants, is a Persian restaurant that has made its mark by bringing a contemporary twist to classic dishes.