SAUDI ARABIA
SAUDI ARTIST DANA ALMASOUD FINDS BEAUTY IN THE ORDINARY
Page 5



SPORT
STRONG FIELD SET FOR SAUDI OPEN GOLF
Page 15



OPINION
NATO AND THE MIDDLE EAST: ENGAGING MORE FOR OUR SHARED SECURITY
By Mircea Geoana
Page 9



&FINALLY
EIZA GONZALEZ STUNS AT PREMIERE OF SAUDI-BACKED FILM
Page 16



WEDNESDAY, April 17, 2024
Shawwal 8, 1445
www.arabnews.com

ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

SINCE 1975

NATURAL DISASTER

Weather chaos as deadly storms and torrential rain lash the Gulf

●18 dead in Oman ●Dubai paralyzed by floods ●Saudi weather chiefs warn more to come

Arab News Dubai

Swaths of the Gulf were gripped by weather chaos on Tuesday as deadly storms and torrential rain flooded roads, homes and shopping malls.

In Oman, the death toll rose to 18 when a child's body was recovered, and two people are still missing. Earlier, nine schoolchildren and three adults died when their vehicles were swept away in flash floods.

Meteorology chiefs in Saudi Arabia forecast more heavy rain and high winds on Wednesday after the Eastern Province, Qassim region and Riyadh suffered storms and flooding on Tuesday.

Schools in several parts of the Kingdom were closed, and introduced online classes.

Civil Defense and traffic authorities urged caution on the roads.

Dubai was paralyzed by the storm, with skies already dark by mid-afternoon.

All operations at the city's airport, the world's busiest international hub, were initially suspended for 25 minutes and more than 50 flights were canceled.

Later, all arriving flights were diverted, although departures continued to operate as normal.

Flagship shopping centers Dubai Mall and Mall of the Emirates both suffered flooding, and water was ankle deep in at least one Dubai Metro station.

Roads and residential communities suffered heavy flooding, with major highways under water, snarling traffic and leaving cars stranded.

Some inland desert areas of the UAE recorded more than 80 millimeters of rain in 24 hours, approaching the usual annual total of about 100 millimeters.

The storms were expected to continue on Wednesday, the UAE's National Center of Meteorology said.

It urged residents to "take all precautions ... and stay away from areas of flooding and water accumulation."



Dubai motorists drive through a heavily flooded street during Tuesday's rainstorm. Reuters

The Asian Champions League football semifinal between Al-Hilal of Saudi Arabia and Al-Ain of the UAE, which was due to take place in Al Ain, was postponed.

Bahrain was also hit by heavy rain and flooding after being pummeled by thunder and lightning overnight.

"I like to play in the rain, but for the first time it scared me," said Ali Hassan, 9, as he helped his mother clear water from outside their house in Manama.

"I was terrified by the sound of thunder and the sky was lit by lightning. I had never seen anything like this, so I hid with my mother ... the sound of rain scared me."

UAE authorities sent tanker trucks out into the streets and highways to pump away the water. Water poured into some homes, forcing people to bail out their houses.

Elsewhere, at least 33 people were killed over three days of heavy rain and flash flooding in Afghanistan.

Most casualties were from roof collapses.

About 600 homes were damaged or destroyed, nearly 600 km of road demolished, and about 2,000 acres of farmland washed away.

Afghanistan devastation Page 8

MIDDLE EAST WAR

Hezbollah commander killed in new Israel airstrike

Arab News Beirut

A Hezbollah field commander was one of three people killed on Tuesday by Israeli airstrikes in southern Lebanon.

Israeli authorities said Ismail Baz, who died in the attack on his car near the southern town of Ain Ebel, led the militant group's coastal sector and planned rocket and anti-tank missile attacks.

Separate Israeli strikes on two vehicles near the southern town of Chehabiyeh also killed at least two other Hezbollah members.

In Gaza, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said on Tuesday it had found unexploded 45kg bombs inside schools after Israel pulled troops out of Khan Younis.

A UN assessment mission in the city found "significant challenges in operating safely due to the presence of unexploded ordnance," the agency said. "Thousands of internally displaced persons require a range of lifesaving assistance, including health, water and sanitation, and food."

Experts said it would take "millions of dollars and many years to decontaminate the Strip from unexploded munitions." UN Mine Action Service chief Charles Birch said: "We work off the rule of thumb that 10 percent of ordnance doesn't function as designed. We estimate that, to begin the clearance of Gaza, we need around $45 million."

The UN will launch a $2.8 billion appeal on Wednesday for donations to help Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. "Ninety percent will be for Gaza," a spokesman said.

INSIDE

●**Spotlight** Page 3
● **Related reports** Page 6
●**Opinion by Ali Shihabi, Osama Al-Sharif & Yossi Mekelberg** Pages 9 & 10

The Brief

YOGA COUPLE

Khalid Al-Zahrani and Haifa Mahzari are a young Saudi couple who aspire to bring the benefits of yoga to every home. They launched Ananda Yoga Studio in Jeddah in 2019. **P5**

INDONESIA COFFEE

Indonesia, world's fourth-largest coffee producer, has become Egypt's main source of coffee as annual exports reached $83 million, or about 43 percent of the market. **P8**

SAUDI GROWTH

The World Bank has raised its expectations for Saudi Arabia's economic growth to 5.9 percent in 2025 from 4.2 percent predicted earlier in January. **P11**

DIPLOMACY

Pakistan hails 'new era of strategic partnership' with Kingdom

Saudi foreign minister holds talks with president on two-day visit aimed at boosting trade, investment

Aamir Saeed Islamabad

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan's visit to Islamabad heralds a new era of strategic and commercial partnerships, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Tuesday.

Prince Faisal's two-day visit at the head of a high-level delegation is aimed at enhancing economic cooperation and accelerating previously agreed investment deals.

"Pakistan wants to further promote cooperation in the fields of trade and investment between the two countries," Sharif said.

Pakistan was taking steps to promote foreign investment and make partnerships "mutually beneficial" for allies, and Islamabad was grateful to the Saudi leadership for increasing investment, he said.



Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif receives Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan in Islamabad on Tuesday. AFP

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and Prince Faisal also met and restated their resolve to build a strong partnership and promote mutually beneficial economic cooperation.

Zardari said Pakistan was working to transform its long-standing and decades-old relationship with Riyadh into a "long-term strategic and economic partnership."

The two men also discussed developments in the Middle East, and called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza and an end to Israeli air and ground offensives there.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia enjoy strong trade, defense and cultural ties. The Kingdom is home to more than 2.7 million Pakistani expatriates and the top source of their remittances home.

"We aim to transform our traditionally fraternal ties into a strategic and economic partnership," Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said at a Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Investment Conference in Islamabad. "Your investments are not just financial commitments but are crucial in nurturing a deeply valued partnership," the minister said.

2 Riyals • Vol. XLIX
No. 133• 16 pages

We stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Oman during the great affliction and heavy losses caused by the floods, especially the tragic loss of lives.

Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa
Secretary-General, Muslim World League



Radar

KSA today



Diriyah

Kids' acting classes

Diriyah Biennale Foundation is offering children aged 8 to 11 the chance to learn the fundamentals of acting and improvisation through fun exercises, games and group activities. Find out more about the Thursday workshop at biennale.org.sa.



Jeddah

Kite surfing

Experience an adrenaline rush with kite surfing in Jeddah. Super Kite Day's mentors will introduce you to this exciting sport with safety in mind. For registration and more details, visit the Hala Yalla app.



Diriyah

Embroidery workshop

Learn the art of embroidery at this special workshop. The lessons comprise stitching techniques and how to attach materials like beads and flowers to an organza base. Find out more at biennale.org.sa.



AlUla

Skies festival

Make great memories amid AlUla's breathtaking scenery. Ride a hot air balloon above the mountains by day or gaze at the stars from a helicopter by night. Symphonies and drone shows will also be part of the festivities, which run until April 27. Find more details at experiencealula.com.

The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Chairman of the board of directors of the Saudi Journalists Association, Adhwan Al-Ahmari, and Zaid bin Kami, a member of the association's board of directors and chairman of the audit and performance committee, recently visited the National Union of Journalists in the UK and met Michelle Stanistreet, the general secretary.

The discussions aimed to benefit from the experience and expertise of the union.

The Saudi Journalists Association, established in 2003, is a licensed civil society body and serves as an umbrella entity for the nation's media professionals.

What's Trending *Today's hot topics explained by Nada Jan*



REST IN PEACE

Reita

Reita, the bassist of legendary Japanese band the GazettE, died at age 42 on Monday, April 15.

The band announced the heartbreaking news on Tuesday in a statement uploaded on social media. No reason for death was given.

In the statement, they thanked fans for their support throughout Reita's career, expressing their shock and sadness over the musician's passing and asking the public to respect his family's privacy during this difficult time. The band added that memorial services would "be held with only close relatives."

The tragic loss of a great musician from Japan's golden era of rock and roll sent waves of sadness across the nation and beyond. Fans rushed to X to mourn Reita's death and send their condolences to his family and friends, making "The GazettE" a globally trending topic on the platform.

@Aether01_ posted: "Rest in peace, Reita ... I can't express how shocking this news is and how his family and friends must feel right now. I really liked this bassist so much and I'm grateful for all the hard work he's done all these years with The GazettE. Thank you Reita."

@justalittleKai posted: "No amount of words can express ... except deepest condolences for your family, the Gazette, friends and plus the family you built through music."

@riotimpulse posted: "Please rest in peace. You were a great and a very talented person. The GazettE wouldn't be the GazettE without you."

SUPERDAD TO BE

Henry Cavill

Henry Cavill and his girlfriend Natalie Viscuso are expecting their first child.

"The Witcher" star confirmed the delightful news during the premiere of Guy Ritchie's "The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare" in New York City in an interview with Access Hollywood's reporter, who asked him about taking on fatherhood.

"I'm very excited about it. Natalie and I are both very excited about it. I'm sure you'll see much more of that," Cavill said to the reporter.

Speculations about the pair's first child started in January after they attended the premiere of "Argylle" in London, and Viscuso's little baby bump was slightly visible through her white gown.

On Monday, the news was confirmed after Viscuso, a television executive at Vertigo Entertainment, was spotted with Cavill in New York City wearing a fitted black dress that showed her round belly.

The couple confirmed their romance in April 2021 when each posted a picture of themselves playing chess together on Instagram.

"Just teaching my dear Henry how to play some chess ... or ... maybe he let me win?" Viscuso captioned the post, while Cavill wrote: "This is me looking quietly confident shortly before my beautiful and brilliant love Natalie, destroys me at chess."

The lovebirds made their red carpet debut for the premiere of Netflix's movie "Enola Holmes 2."

Fans of the "Man of Steel" actor took to X to celebrate the news and share their excitement.

@CavillSupport wrote: "Parenthood is such a beautiful journey. We wish the couple nothing but the best."

@Across3Horizons wrote: "Congratulations! He's going to be a great dad."

@sel_skye wrote: "Congrats on becoming parents! I hope you have a happy family."

@ipraytojesustoo wrote: "That kid won the genetics lottery."



Today's Number

266

Saudi aid agency KSrelief recently distributed 266 shelter bags to displaced families, benefiting 1,529 people in the Karari locality of Khartoum, Sudan, Saudi Press Agency reported on Monday. The effort is part of a series of relief and humanitarian projects implemented by the Kingdom to help the Sudanese people facing a humanitarian crisis.

Review

'Lord of the Flies'

GHADI JOUDAH

"Lord of the Flies" is a coming of age novel by British novelist William Golding. First published in 1954, the title has since become a classic of modern literature.

It tells the story of a group of British boys who find themselves stranded on an uninhabited island after their plane crashes during a wartime evacuation.

The novel explores themes of human nature, civilization, power and the inherent darkness within individuals. As the boys struggle to survive and establish order on the island, their society gradually descends into chaos and savagery.

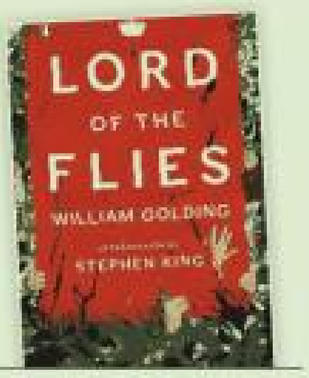
The title refers to a severed pig's head, symbolizing the evil and primitive instincts that take hold of the boys.

The main characters in the novel include Ralph, a charismatic and responsible boy who tries to maintain order and establish a signal fire to attract rescuers; Jack, a power-hungry and savage boy who becomes the leader of a group of hunters; Piggy, an intelligent but socially marginalized boy who serves as Ralph's adviser; and Simon, a quiet and introspective boy who experiences a deep connection with nature.

As the story progresses, the boys' civilization erodes, and they succumb to their primal instincts, engaging in violence and tribal warfare.

"Lord of the Flies" explores the destructive potential of unchecked power, the loss of innocence, and the conflict between civilization and savagery.

The novel has always been subject to various interpretations and perspectives by different readers and scholars. Much of it has been analyzed through the lens of allegorical human nature, political and social commentary, and even Freudian psychology.



The Region

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Jeddah

- Aiming to connect children to the concept of book fairs from a young age and enhance the value and status of the Arabic language, "Bel-Arabi Festival" in Amman, Jordan, provides the chance to meet authors, explore books, and enjoy various interactive activities and puppet shows with special guests. The festival will run from April 18 to April 22 next to the Royal Automobile Museum.

- An exceptional musical night in Bahrain awaits fans of the renowned artists, Mohammed Abdu and Khalid Al-Shaikh. The concert on April 19 will bring a distinctive blend of musical performances and captivating melodies. Held at Al-Dana Amphitheater. For more details, check calendar.bh.

- Unleash your imagination at the Lego Show, where the young and young at heart are guaranteed lots of fun. Offering a mix of play and learning, the event features more than 50 sculptures to admire as well as obstacle courses and console games. The show is at the Qatar National Convention Center until April 25.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

April 17	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	4:43	6:01	12:21	3:45	6:41	8:11
Madinah	4:38	5:59	12:22	3:51	6:44	8:14
Riyadh	4:10	5:31	11:54	3:22	6:16	7:46
Abha	4:36	5:53	12:10	3:30	6:27	7:57
Dammam	3:53	5:15	11:40	3:11	6:04	7:34



Love is my modest and only victory against my jailer.
Walid Daqqah
Palestinian prisoner

Spotlight

RESEARCH & STUDIES
THE MIDDLE EAST, BETTER EXPLAINED
ARAB NEWS

PALESTINIAN PRISONERS' DAY

Nightmare of Israeli incarceration

The life and death of Walid Daqqah symbolizes the suffering of Palestinians who have followed him into custody



Jonathan Gornall London

When he was arrested by Israeli forces on March 25, 1986, Walid Daqqah was just 24 years old. When he died of cancer on April 7 this year, aged 62 and still a prisoner, he had spent all of the intervening 38 years in Israeli custody.

In the process Daqqah earned the dubious distinction of becoming Israel's longest-serving Palestinian prisoner and was one of only a handful of inmates who had been in prison since before the Oslo Accords in the 1990s.

On Palestinian Prisoners' Day, the story of Daqqah's life and death has profound significance for every Palestinian jailed by Israel — and especially for the record number thrown behind bars since Oct. 7.

According to the Palestinian Commission of Detainee Affairs, Daqqah is the 251st Palestinian to have died in Israeli custody since 1967 and the 14th since the Hamas attack on Israel last year.

Daqqah was sentenced to life in prison in March 1987, following the abduction and killing of an Israeli soldier by a unit of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in 1984.

He was not found guilty of killing the soldier but of commanding the unit, a charge he consistently denied. Furthermore, Amnesty International said "his conviction was based on British emergency regulations dating back to 1945, which require a much lower standard of proof for conviction than Israeli criminal law."

What happened next, said Erika Guevara-Rosas, Amnesty's senior director for research, advocacy, policy and campaigns, was "a cruel reminder of Israel's disregard of Palestinians' right to life."

Daqqah's original 37-year sentence had been due to expire in March 2023, but in 2018 was extended by two years after he was implicated in a scheme to smuggle mobile phones to prisoners desperate to contact their families.

He was, in effect, sentenced to die in prison.

In 2022 Daqqah had been diagnosed with terminal bone marrow cancer, but his appeal for parole on humanitarian grounds was rejected, even after he had served his original sentence.

"For Daqqah and his family, the last six months in particular were an endless nightmare, during which he was subjected to torture or other ill-treatment, including beatings and humiliation by the Israeli Prison Service, according to his lawyer," Guevara-Rosas said.

"He was not permitted a phone call with his wife since Oct. 7. His final appeal for parole on humanitarian grounds was rejected by the Israeli Supreme Court, effectively sentencing him to die behind bars."

In death, Daqqah will live on in the collective memory of his people as one of the million or more Arab citizens imprisoned by Israel since 1948 and whose incarceration has been commemorated every year since 1974 on April 17 as Palestinian Prisoners' Day.

This year, there are more Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons than ever before.

According to figures released by the Israel Prison Service, as of this month, Israel is holding 9,312 "security inmates" in jails under its jurisdiction, including Ofer Prison in the West Bank.

That figure does not include the thousands of Palestinians detained by the Israeli military in the Gaza Strip, who are believed to be held incommunicado in military camps, including the Sde Teiman base in the desert.

Even without this unknown number of detainees, the 9,312 prisoners acknowledged by the IPS is a record.

Of these, just 2,071 have been tried and sentenced. A further 3,661 are what are euphemistically termed "administrative detainees" who have not been charged, tried or found guilty of any offense.

According to B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, administrative detention is when "a person is held without trial, without having committed an offense, on the grounds that he or she plans to break the law in the future."

A smaller but significant number of residents from the Gaza Strip — 849 — are being held under Israel's controversial Incarceration of Unlawful Combatants Law, which was introduced in 2002 and also allows arbitrary detention without trial.

For many, incarceration is just the beginning of the nightmare.

"Palestinian detainees and prisoners have been subjected to gruesome levels of inhumane treatment that reached unprecedented levels of cruelty as part of the Israeli authorities' retaliation campaign against Palestinians following Oct. 7," Waed Abbas, a research and campaigns officer at Amnesty's regional office in Ramallah and Jerusalem, told Arab News.

Drawing on the testimonies of Palestinians who have been released from prison and detention, and evidence gleaned through rarely allowed visits by lawyers, Amnesty said "a chilling image of a terrifying reality" was emerging.





Amnesty International says Palestinian detainees, above and bottom, have been subjected to inhumane treatment in Israeli jails, main. AP/AFP

"They've been tortured, starved, denied adequate medical care, cut off from the outside world, including from their families, put in solitary confinement, humiliated and degraded," Abbas said.

In a bid to put the issue on the global agenda, on Feb. 19, four NGOs, including Adalah and Physicians for Human Rights Israel, submitted a joint plea for action to Dr. Alice Edwards, the UN special rapporteur on torture, drawing her attention to the "marked and severe escalation in the abuse of Palestinian detainees and prisoners incarcerated in Israeli prisons and detention facilities" since Oct. 7.

Among other things, the signatories urged Edwards to "call on Israel to immediately halt the systematic abuse, torture and ill-treatment inflicted upon Palestinian prisoners and detainees," to ensure that "all persons deprived of liberty are afforded all legal safeguards from the very outset" and guarantee adequate medical care generally and "specifically for victims of abuse, torture and ill-treatment."

On March 8, the UN rapporteur said she was investigating the allegations of torture and mistreatment of Palestinian detainees in Israel and was in talks to visit the country.

In a statement to Reuters, the UN human rights office said it had received "numerous reports of mass detention, ill-treatment and enforced disappearance of Palestinians in northern Gaza by the Israeli military and has recorded the arrests of thousands in the West Bank."

In many ways the life and death of Walid Daqqah symbolizes the wider suffering of the tens of thousands of men, women and children who have followed him into Israeli custody over the almost four decades since he was first incarcerated.

How he lived his limited life behind bars, however, lives on as an example of how hope can survive in even the most seemingly hopeless of circumstances.

In an obituary published on April 8, the day after his death, Amnesty said: "His writings, which included letters, essays, a celebrated play and a novel for young adults, were an act of resistance against the dehumanization of Palestinian prisoners."

A line he once wrote shines as a beacon of hope for the tens of thousands of Palestinians: "Love is my modest and only victory against my jailer."

IN NUMBERS

251
Palestinians who to have died in Israeli custody since 1967 — 14 since Oct. 7.

9,312
'Security inmates' held in Israeli jails in the West Bank as of this month (IPS).

3,661
'Administrative detainees' not charged, tried or found guilty of any offense.

News Saudi Arabia



KSrelief Supervisor-General Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabeeah and World Food Programme Executive Director Cindy McCain signed the agreements in Paris. SPA

HUMANITARIAN MISSION

WFP welcomes KSrelief contribution to fight malnutrition in Sudan

$1.4 million funding will help more than 35,000 children and pregnant or breastfeeding mothers impacted by ongoing crisis

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi aid agency KSrelief recently signed two agreements with the World Food Programme, totaling $1.4 million, to treat and prevent malnutrition across Sudan and South Sudan.

The agreements were signed by KSrelief Supervisor-General Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabeeah and WFP Executive Director Cindy McCain on the sidelines of the International Conference for Sudan and Neighboring Countries, organized by France and the EU in Paris.

The agreement aims to prevent nutritional deficiencies among children and pregnant and nursing women by providing food aid and distributing 132.4 tons of nutritional supplements.

The funding will help more than 35,000 children and pregnant or breastfeeding mothers impacted by conflict, economic shocks, and climate events. This includes almost 29,000 in Sudan who have been caught up in the war and almost 6,000 in South Sudan who are impacted by an ongoing humanitarian crisis driven by conflict and economic and climate crises.

Dr. Abdullah Al-Moallem, director of KSrelief's health and environmental aid department said: "We are committed to supporting vulnerable population groups in Sudan and South Sudan, and to fostering a healthier and more resilient future for all communities.

"Today's event allows us to highlight the signing of two projects with the WFP for a total cost of $1.4 million to provide emergency nutritional aid for children and for pregnant and lactating women. These programs will enable those in need to access vital food and medical assistance and will help to fight famine and malnutrition in both countries."

Michael Dunford, WFP regional director for the East Africa region, said: "This funding comes at a critical time, it's been one year since the conflict in Sudan began and has since spiraled into what may soon be the world's largest hunger crisis.

"With extreme hunger comes malnutrition and we have already started to receive reports of children in Sudan dying of starvation. Support for our nutrition programs is critical to prevent these deaths as well as the long-term impacts of childhood malnutrition."

In Sudan, 4.9 million children under the age of five and pregnant or breastfeeding women are acutely malnourished — a 22 percent increase from the previous year. Of these, 730,000 children are suffering from severe acute malnutrition. In South Sudan, 1.6 million children and 870,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women are expected to be malnourished this year.

HIGHLIGHT

The agreement aims to prevent nutritional deficiencies among children and pregnant and nursing women by providing food aid and distributing 132.4 tons of nutritional supplements.

In his address at the conference, Al-Rabeeah said: "Saudi Arabia will not allow turning a blind eye to the Sudanese crisis and its neighboring countries or forgetting it. It was at the forefront of those calling for the importance of reaching lasting and comprehensive peace in this country and supporting the humanitarian efforts there.

"At a time when the Kingdom played a pivotal role in hosting and facilitating negotiations to resolve the conflict in Sudan, the Kingdom's leadership directed the provision of aid to Sudan worth $100 million and announced the addition of more than $20 million. In the coming period, the Kingdom will implement relief and humanitarian projects in Sudan and neighboring countries with more than $61 million in coordination with the UN and international and local organizations."

Al-Rabeeah, confirmed that the close ties between Saudi Arabia and Sudan had seen the Kingdom move urgently to operate relief bridges, including 13 aircraft and four sea bridges, to provide comprehensive humanitarian aid. "It implemented 43 humanitarian projects in Sudan and neighboring countries, amounting to more than $59 million, in partnership with international and local organizations. The center also sent 20 volunteer medical teams to Sudan," he said.

VISION 2030

Inaugural Umrah and Ziyarah Forum to foster partnerships for enhanced services

Arab News Riyadh

The Ministry of Hajj and Umrah is in the final stages of preparation for the launch of the inaugural Umrah and Ziyarah Forum, scheduled to convene in Madinah on Monday, April 22, for three days.

Under the patronage of Prince Salman bin Sultan, the governor of Madinah region, the forum will be held at the King Salman International Convention Center.

Developing Hajj and Umrah services in the Kingdom is a key priority of the Saudi government and an extension of the country's historic role in serving Muslims and Islam worldwide.

The forum will showcase initiatives and services aimed at enriching the experience of Umrah performers and visitors from within and outside the Kingdom. It is part of achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030, aiming to enable a larger number of Umrah performers to visit Makkah and Madinah and have the best experience they can.

The forum is held in partnership with the Pilgrim Experience Program, one of the programs of Vision 2030.

The event will include dialogue sessions, discussion groups, interactive workshops and an exhibition displaying the latest advancements in the sector.

HIGHLIGHT

The forum will address opportunities in the Umrah and tourism sectors, and will focus on the quality of projects, services, and products.

It will feature participation from government officials and private sector stakeholders, including travel agencies, pilgrimage and tourism companies, and innovators spanning the insurance, healthcare, transportation, and technology industries.

The forum will address opportunities in the Umrah and tourism sectors, and will focus on the quality of projects, services, and products.

Participants in the general sessions and accompanying workshops of the Umrah and Ziyarah Forum will showcase their experiences, services and products. During the forum, the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah will announce new opportunities and innovative work domains.

Moreover, several partnerships and agreements will be signed to enhance services in Makkah, Madinah, and various Islamic, historical, archeological, and other cultural sites.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Humanitarian challenges

OIC calls for action amid Gaza crisis at Jordan meeting

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Tuesday took part in the 37th session of the Islamic Committee of the International Crescent, held virtually in the capital of Jordan, Amman.

OIC Assistant Secretary-general for Humanitarian, Cultural and Social Affairs Tarig Ali Bakheet said the session was happening as Israel continued to escalate acts of genocide against the people of Palestine in Gaza, in clear disregard for international law, human values and divine laws and when its occupation forces were impeding the arrival of aid.

He called for concerted efforts and initiatives across Red Crescent societies in the Muslim world to contain the fallout of the situation in the Gaza Strip.

The session was held amid serious humanitarian challenges for the Muslim world in the form of natural disasters and crises caused by conflicts and wars, Bakheet said.

Effective efforts were required to alleviate the impact and dimensions of these problems, he said.

Bakheet thanked Jordan for hosting the session and all those who had helped to ensure its success.

The session runs until Wednesday, when the activities of the Islamic Committee of the International Crescent will be showcased. **AN Riyadh**

Recognition

Riyadh governor to attend King Faisal Prize award event

Under the patronage of King Salman and on his behalf, Riyadh Gov. Prince Faisal bin Bandar will attend a ceremony on Monday to present awards for laureates of the 46th King Faisal Prize in the capital.

The King Faisal Prize general secretariat earlier announced the winners for the 46th session in 2024. The service to Islam prize was jointly awarded to the Japan Muslim Association and Dr. Mohammad Al-Sammak of Lebanon.

The Islamic studies prize was granted to Dr. Wael Hallaq, a US national, while the Arabic language and literature prize was withheld.

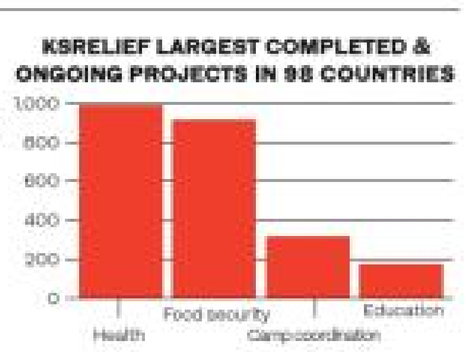
Dr. Jerry Roy Mendell, a US national, was granted the medicine prize, while Dr. Howard Yuan-Hao Chang, another US national, won the science prize.

The King Faisal Prize was established in 1977, and was given for the first time in 1979 in three categories: service to Islam, Islamic studies, and Arabic language and literature.

Two additional categories were introduced in 1981 — medicine and science. The first medicine prize was awarded in 1982, and in science two years later.

Since 1979, prizes have been awarded to 295 laureates from 45 countries who have made distinguished contributions to different sciences and causes. **AN Riyadh**

The Day's FIGURES



Source: ksrelief.org

Combat efficiency

Saudi air force to participate in UAE Desert Flag drill

The Royal Saudi Air Force will participate next week in the multinational air exercise Desert Flag at Al-Dhafra Air Base in the UAE.

RSAF Commander Lt. Gen. Prince Turki bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz saw off the Saudi team participating in the drill at King Faisal Air Base in the northern sector.

Prince Turki was briefed by the commander of the air force team on the readiness of the team and equipment, met members of the team, and urged them to exercise the utmost effort to fully benefit from the exercise, to honor the RSAF, and to maintain the air force's distinction in all forums, highlighting the importance of commitment to safety standards.

The RSAF commander said that Desert Flag was one of the important exercises in the region, adding that the RSAF would participate in the exercise with the F-15SA aircraft, along with all its air, technical and support crews.

Prince Turki said that participation would enable the exchange of military experience, boost readiness and combat efficiency, and strengthen relations with the participating forces. **AN Riyadh**

Smuggling sweep

Saudi authorities crack down on drug offenders

Saudi authorities recently made several drug-related arrests and confiscations in operations across the Kingdom.

Border Guard land patrols in the Jazan region thwarted an attempt to smuggle 120 kg of qat. The patrols also foiled an attempt to smuggle 170 kg of qat in Al-Ardah governorate of the same region.

The General Directorate of Narcotics Control arrested two residents, a Pakistani and an Egyptian, in the Eastern Province for attempting to sell 1.2 kg of methamphetamine, a narcotic substance commonly referred to as "shabu."

Additionally, authorities arrested a citizen in the Qassim region for selling amphetamines.

Preliminary legal procedures have been completed for all the individuals involved and all seized items have been handed over to the relevant authorities.

The Saudi government urges anyone with information related to suspected smuggling operations or customs violations to call the confidential hotline 1910, the international number +966114208417, or to email 1910@zatca.gov.sa.

Financial rewards are offered for valid tips. **AN Riyadh**

Follow Arab News Briefs all through the day @ArabNews

LOCAL TALENT

Young Saudi artist finds beauty in the ordinary

Dana Almasoud's works are inspired by historical Middle Eastern and European art aesthetics

Sulafa Alkhunaizi Riyadh

When picking up a pencil or paintbrush to create an artwork, Qatif-based self-taught Saudi artist Dana Almasoud channels her inner child.

"As soon as a child picks up a pencil, they attempt to draw or capture a sense of what they see through their eyes on paper. The majority of them stop at some point in their childhood, for whatever reason," Almasoud told Arab News.

"Fortunately, I was one of the few who never did. I had the luxury of a supportive mother who always looked forward to my next scribble."

While pursuing her undergraduate studies in finance, as a freelance artist Almasoud explores a variety of styles, from fine art to surrealism and fantasy inspired by everyday scenes.

"The warm morning sun, the singing of the birds, the stoplights and the people. I am surrounded by life and I do my best to pour what I see into my work. What makes us human is how we make things from nothing," she said.

Much of Almasoud's work is inspired by Islamic historical art, characterized by its symbolism and emphasis on the beauty of spirituality.

Explaining why she is drawn to this type of artwork, she said, "In order for me to create things that resemble life, it only makes sense to use colors that already exist in nature.

"I take a lot of inspiration from historical art, both from Europe and the Middle East, since the pigments they used were extracted from natural sources and were perfectly saturated."

She enjoys experimenting with new mediums, but drawing with a pencil is her preference.

"I also do enjoy the occasional challenge of an ink brush, because once it sets its bristles on paper, you cannot go back. When it comes to painting with color (watercolors, acrylics, oils), I still consider myself in the process of learning," she said.

In her upcoming works she hopes to experiment with pyrography, doll making, embroidery, linoleum block printing and murals.

Almasoud said one of her first works inspired by Saudi culture was a commission from a man who wanted a portrait in the orientalist style.









Almasoud's painting of a man selling ramsi tomatoes, the seasonal heirloom fruits with green 'shoulders' found in Qatif. Supplied

> **The warm morning sun, the singing of the birds, the stoplights and the people. I am surrounded by life and I do my best to pour what I see into my work.**
> Dana Almasoud
> Saudi artist



Her most recent painting also pays homage to the Kingdom — it depicts a man selling ramsi tomatoes, the seasonal heirloom fruits with green "shoulders" that are prevalent in Qatif.

"These tomatoes are known for a special flavor and a lot of farmers from various lands tried to grow it themselves, but to no avail. For some reason, these tomatoes only taste special when they grow on that specific piece of land," Almasoud said.

She said she had been told her work had "a layer of fog, where the edges are never harsh," which reflects the high levels of humidity in the Eastern Province where she lives.

"I can see the Arabian Gulf from the window of my room. You can imagine the high rates of humidity, which is where I think that layer came from," she said.

"I will always wonder how this translated into what I draw, but regardless, I do love it."

Almasoud said her art was an attempt to fill the void that excess simplicity and minimalism has created in recent years: "My art is an attempt to inspire people back to see the beauty in complexity and the intricacy of the small things in life."

Speaking about the importance of art in the modern world, she said: "With the increase in the pace of the world, art has become even more important. It gives people and their minds something to hang on to, for them to not lose themselves and their identities in a busy world."

For more information about the artist visit @esotericdana on Instagram.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Much of Dana Almasoud's work is inspired by Islamic historical art, characterized by its symbolism and emphasis on the beauty of spirituality.
- One of her first works inspired by Saudi culture was a commission from a man who wanted a portrait in the orientalist style.
- The artist says her work is an attempt to fill the void that excess simplicity and minimalism has created in recent years.

As a freelance artist Dana Almasoud explores a variety of styles, from fine art to surrealism and fantasy inspired by everyday scenes. Instagram / esotericdana



WELLNESS

Saudi couple wants to bring art of yoga to every home

Rahaf Jambi Jeddah

Khalid Al-Zahrani and Haifa Mahzari are a young Saudi couple who aspire to bring the benefits of yoga to every home.

They spent years researching and practicing yoga before launching Ananda Yoga Studio in Jeddah in 2019, and offered free courses and continue to give back to the community.

"Yoga has a significant impact on the mind and body. We want to help those in need and promote yoga to all ages because it is beneficial to joints and can be practiced at any age," Mahzari said. "We also offer voluntary and awareness classes."

Mahzari knew very little about yoga when she first met Al-Zahrani, but his commitment to the practice inspired her to give it a try. After reading books about yoga and doing research, she realized the value and health advantages of the practice and developed an obsession with it.

Al-Zahrani had trained under numerous instructors. Nouf Al-Marwaai, the first Saudi yoga acharya, first Arab recipient of the Padma Shri Award and president of the Saudi Yoga Committee, was one of the trainers who saw his dedication.

"I obtained a 200-hour instructor certificate and a 500-hour master certificate, and I have a level one and two Himalayan meditation certificate," he said.

Al-Zahrani added: "We competed in a competitive yoga tournament and won the gold and silver medals in 2023 and two gold, two silver and one bronze medal in 2024."

The Saudi Yoga Asana Championship was organized by the Saudi Yoga Committee under the umbrella of the Ministry of Sport. Al-Zahrani also received support from the committee to open Ananda Yoga.



Numerous yoga sessions are offered by Ananda Yoga Studio, including children's yoga and yoga for anxiety and stress, among others. Supplied

The International Yoga Sports Federation nominated Al-Zahrani for a scholarship in April, for the "advanced international yoga asana coach" certification program.

This is in recognition of his work founding the first Saudi yoga asana squad, called "Team Ananda," which competed in several regional competitions, winning first place.

"The Saudi Yoga Committee has given me unending support, whether it be through the courses they helped me complete, the certifications they gave me, the yoga judges courses or the scholarship to (attend the) yoga instructor training program in Switzerland at their headquarters," Al-Zahrani said.

Many have trained at Ananda Yoga Studio, making it a success story for yoga enthusiasts in Jeddah, and with plans to open more locations throughout the Kingdom.

Al-Zahrani said that the Kingdom was encouraging yoga practice and its dissemination as it fostered a healthier community, both physically and spiritually.

Numerous yoga sessions are offered by the studio, including children's yoga and yoga for anxiety and stress, among others. The center also offers qualified instructors for kung fu, shaolin, chi kung and other Chinese martial arts.

FASTFACTS

- Khalid Al-Zahrani and Haifa Mahzari spent years researching and practicing yoga before launching Ananda Yoga Studio in Jeddah in 2019.
- Their team competed in the Saudi Yoga Asana Championship organized by the Saudi Yoga Committee under the umbrella of the Ministry of Sport.
- The yoga center also offers qualified instructors for kung fu, shaolin, chi kung and other Chinese martial arts.



People move a car next to buildings destroyed by Israeli bombardment in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip, on Tuesday as fighting continues between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas. AFP

RELENTLESS STRIKES

Israeli tanks push back in northern Gaza Strip, warplanes hit Rafah

Israel obstructing access to victims of Hamas Oct. 7 attack: UN probe

Reuters, Geneva Cairo, Geneva

Israeli tanks pushed back into some areas of the northern Gaza Strip on Tuesday which they had left weeks ago, while warplanes conducted airstrikes on Rafah, the Palestinians' last refuge in the south of the territory, killing and wounding several people, medics and residents said.

Residents reported an internet outage in the areas of Beit Hanoun and Jabalia in northern Gaza.

Tanks advanced into Beit Hanoun and surrounded some schools where displaced families have taken refuge, said the residents and media outlets of the militant Palestinian group Hamas.

"Occupation soldiers ordered all families inside the schools and the nearby houses where the tanks had advanced to evacuate.

The soldiers detained many men," one resident of northern Gaza said via a chat app.

Beit Hanoun, home to 60,000 people, was one of the first areas targeted by Israel's ground offensive in Gaza last October.

Heavy bombardment turned most of Beit Hanoun, once known as "the basket of fruit" because of its orchards, into a ghost town comprising piles of rubble.

Many families who had returned to Beit Hanoun and Jabalia in recent weeks after Israeli forces withdrew, began moving out again on Tuesday because of the new raid, some residents said.

Palestinian health officials said in one strike, Israel killed four people and wounded several others in Rafah, where over half of Gaza's 2.3 million people are sheltering and bracing for a planned Israeli ground offensive into the city, which borders Egypt.

The Israeli military said its forces continued to operate in the central Gaza Strip and that they had killed several gunmen who attempted to attack them.

"Furthermore, over the past day, IDF fighter jets and aircraft destroyed a missile launcher along with dozens of terrorist infrastructure, terror tunnels, and military compounds where armed Hamas terrorists were located," it added.

After six months of fighting, there is still no sign of a breakthrough in US-backed talks led by Qatar and Egypt to clinch a ceasefire deal in Gaza, as Israel and Hamas stick to their conditions.

In Al-Nusseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip, residents said Israeli planes had bombed and destroyed four multi-story residential buildings on Tuesday.

Israel is still imposing "unlawful" restrictions on humanitarian relief for Gaza, the UN human rights office said on Tuesday, despite assertions from Israel and others that barriers have eased.

The amount of aid now entering Gaza is disputed, with Israel and Washington saying aid flows have risen in recent days but UN agencies say it is still far below bare minimum levels.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said 33,843 Palestinians have so far been killed by Israeli fire since Oct. 7, including 46 in the past 24 hours.

Israel is preventing UN investigators from speaking to witnesses and victims of the Oct. 7 attack, former UN rights chief Navi Pillay, who is chairing a three-person probe, said.

The unprecedented Commission of Inquiry was established by the UN Human Rights Council in May 2021 to investigate alleged violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

"I deplore the fact that people inside Israel who wish to speak to us are being denied that opportunity, because we cannot get access into Israel," Pillay said.

The investigation briefed diplomats at the UN in Geneva on its work and said that since Oct. 7, it had focused on the Gaza war between Israel and Hamas.

"So far as the government of Israel is concerned, we have faced not merely a lack of cooperation but active obstruction of our efforts to receive evidence from Israeli witnesses and victims to the events that occurred in southern Israel," said Chris Sidoti, one of the three members of the inquiry.

The Gaza war began with Hamas's attack against Israel which resulted in the deaths of 1,170 people, mostly civilians, according to Israeli figures.

The militants also took about 250 hostages, of whom Israel estimates 129 remain in Gaza, including 34 who are presumed dead.

Pillay, 82, a South African former High Court judge, said the commission was investigating alleged crimes during the Hamas attack as well as some allegedly committed by Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank.

Sidoti, speaking via video-link, said the investigation had found it difficult to collect evidence from large numbers of witnesses.

AFFRONT

Arab League condemns surge in West Bank settler attacks

Gobran Mohamed Cairo

The Arab League on Tuesday strongly denounced relentless attacks carried out by Israeli settlers on Palestinian cities and towns across the West Bank.

"These attacks, often perpetrated under the tacit approval and protection of Israeli authorities, are exacerbating a pervasive state of impunity and continued oppression of Palestinian lives and properties," the league said in a statement.

Gamal Roshdy, the secretary-general's spokesperson, said that while daily atrocities committed by Israeli forces in Gaza demand attention, they must not overshadow the escalating violence in the West Bank.

He added: "Incidents of violent crimes, arson and property destruction perpetrated by armed settlers have seen a noticeable surge, facilitated by a settler-led government that shields them from accountability."

Roshdy warned that the imposition of sanctions by some countries on settlers, though a belated gesture, falls short of addressing the escalating crisis and safeguarding Palestinian civilians in the West Bank.

He called for action from the UN Security Council to end the "shameful cycle and the culture of impunity prevailing in the West Bank," and to "hold these settlers accountable for their reprehensible crimes against the Palestinian people."

Tensions in the West Bank have been especially high since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip on Oct. 7.

On Friday, dozens of Israeli settlers stormed a Palestinian village in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, shooting at and burning houses and cars.

CARE

Egypt, UN coordinator stress smooth aid delivery to Gaza Strip

Gobran Mohamed Cairo

Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and the UN's coordinator for the Gaza Strip Sigrid Kaag on Tuesday discussed the various facets of the humanitarian crisis in the besieged territory, the volume and quality of aid entering it and the priorities regarding the type of aid.

The meeting took place at the Foreign Ministry's headquarters in Cairo where the two sides reviewed the ongoing endeavors with various parties to expedite the launch of the UN mechanism as soon as possible.

They affirmed the inevitability of intensifying the volume of aid to meet the needs of the Palestinians as well as providing the necessary protection for international relief personnel present in the Strip.

Shoukry reaffirmed the legal and humanitarian responsibility incumbent upon international parties to ensure the implementation of the provisions of Security Council Resolution 2720 and all other UN resolutions relevant to the situation in Gaza.

He stressed the necessity of dealing urgently with the crisis by reaching an immediate and permanent ceasefire, as well as sustaining aid access in a full, safe and intensive manner to all areas, the removal of impediments imposed by Israel in this regard and the opening of all land crossings to increase the flow of aid.

RISING TENSIONS

Treasury secretary says US set to tighten sanctions on Iran soon

AFP, Reuters Washington, Moscow

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned on Tuesday of further sanctions targeting Iran following its unprecedented attack on Israel over the weekend, saying she expects Washington will take added action "in the coming days."

"I fully expect that we will take additional sanctions action against Iran in the coming days," she said as this week's spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank began in Washington.

The Treasury, Yellen said, will not hesitate to work with US allies to "use our sanctions authority to continue disrupting the Iranian regime's malign and destabilizing activity."

Yellen told a press briefing that US authorities have been using economic tools to counter Iran's activity, taking aim at its drone and missile programs, as well as its financing of groups like Hamas.

"From this weekend's attack to the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, Iran's actions threaten the region's stability and could cause economic spillovers," she warned.

She stopped short of sharing details on possible sanctions while noting that Washington has been working to diminish Iran's ability to export oil and there might be "more that we could do."



Yellen said Iran's actions 'threaten the region's stability and could cause economic spillovers.'

Yellen also outlined US priorities during the spring meetings, including deepening ties with allies and partners, and engaging with China on issues like risks from excess industrial capacity.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin urged all sides in the Middle East to refrain from action that would trigger a new confrontation which he warned would be fraught with catastrophic consequences for the region, the Kremlin said.

Putin spoke to Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi by phone about "retaliatory measures taken by Iran." Putin said that the root cause of the instability in the Middle East was the unresolved conflict between Palestinians and Israel.

"Vladimir Putin expressed hope that all sides would show reasonable restraint and prevent a new round of confrontation fraught with catastrophic consequences for the entire region," the Kremlin said.

"Ebrahim Raisi noted that Iran's actions were forced and limited in nature," the Kremlin said. "At the same time, he stressed Tehran's disinterest in further escalation of tensions."

Russia has repeatedly scolded the West for ignoring the need for an independent Palestinian state within 1967 borders.

"Both sides stated that the root cause of the current events in the Middle East is the unresolved Palestinian-Israeli conflict," the Kremlin said of the call with Raisi.

"In this regard, the principled approaches of Russia and Iran in favor of an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, easing the difficult humanitarian situation, and creating conditions for a political and diplomatic settlement of the crisis were confirmed."

TRANSITORY VIOLATIONS

Crimes by Syrians prompt calls for their early repatriation from Lebanon

Latest incident was the killing of an official in the Lebanese Forces Party, Pascal Sleiman

Najia Houssari Beirut

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees reiterated on Tuesday "the right of Syrian refugees in Lebanon to return freely to their homeland whenever they choose to do so."

It came as the campaign against the continued presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon intensified against the backdrop of crimes committed by Syrians in recent weeks.

The latest incident was the killing of an official in the Lebanese Forces Party, Pascal Sleiman, last week after his car was stolen and his body taken to the Lebanese-Syrian border.

It was preceded a few days earlier by another crime committed in the Achrafieh area in Beirut against a husband and wife by their Syrian maid and other Syrians in and intended robbery. The husband died following the incident and his wife seriously injured.

On Tuesday morning news broke of the death of Lebanese Yasser Al-Kokash in the town of Al-Azzounieh in Aley district at the hands of Syrian citizens after they tied him up and stole the contents of his apartment.

Syrian refugees started coming to Lebanon in 2011. The number of refugees registered with the UNHCR has decreased to less than 1 million people after some returned to their country. However, after the UNHCR stopped registering Syrian refugees in 2015, the rate of illegal crossings from Syria to Lebanon increased.

Lebanon estimates the number of Syrian refugees on its territory to exceeds 2 million people.



Lebanese Interior Minister Bassam Al-Mawlawi speaks during a press conference about the killing of Pascal Suleiman which shook the country, at the Ministry of Interior in Beirut. AFP

Caretaker Minister of Interior Bassam Al-Mawlawi estimated the percentage of Syrian detainees and convicts in Lebanese prisons to be about 35 percent of the total prison population.

The Lebanese General Security has organized voluntary repatriation trips for Syrian refugees, but only a few thousand refugees returned, as the Syrian regime decides who can return according to lists of names provided by the Lebanese General Security to the relevant Syrian authorities.

In a statement, UNHCR spokeswoman Dalal Harb said: "We support and respect the humanitarian right of refugees to return freely and voluntarily to their home country, whenever they choose to do so, in accordance with international principles and non-refoulement."

HIGHLIGHT

Syrian refugees started coming to Lebanon in 2011. The number of refugees registered with the UNHCR has decreased to less than 1 million people after some returned to their country. However, after the UNHCR stopped registering Syrian refugees in 2015, the rate of illegal crossings from Syria to Lebanon increased.

Harb stressed that "most Syrian refugees express their desire to return to Syria, but their decision is based on several factors, including safety, security, housing, access to basic services, and securing livelihoods."

He added the UNHCR "will continue to cooperate with the General Directorate of General Security, which facilitates the repatriation of the refugees who want to return to Syria by registering their names."

Ahead of the Brussels Conference on Refugees on April 30, Lebanon has urged donors to secure assistance to cover the cost of the Syrian presence in the country.

Minister of Information Ziad Makary said on Tuesday: "The illegal infiltration of Syrian refugees through the sea from Lebanon into Cyprus has caused a diplomatic crisis.

"The crimes that have occurred made us focus more on this existential problem for Lebanon. The solution is for them to either return to Syria or go to a third country."

Makary also went over the decisions taken, such as "the circular aiming to close all the unauthorized institutions owned by Syrians."

He considered that "convoys of return require a political solution with Syria."

A plan proposed by the ministers of labor and social affairs, the Maronite League, and the General Directorate of General Security was also addressed, which aims to repatriate Syrians, calls for the establishment of a National Emergency Authority headed by the prime minister.

It will be in charge of communicating with UNHCR officials in order to assist the state in classifying Syrians into three categories.

The first includes Syrians registered with the UNHCR as refugees and who can return to safe areas of their country. The second category includes Syrians who are registered with the UNHCR as refugees and work in Lebanon, while the third includes those who are registered with the UNHCR as refugees and want to travel to a third country.

RWANDA BILL

UK MPs vote down plan to protect Afghan 'heroes' from deportation

Arab News London

Conservative MPs in the UK have voted against a plan to prevent Afghan veterans who served alongside British soldiers from facing deportation to Rwanda.

An amendment to the controversial Rwanda bill was overturned by 312 votes to 253 on Monday, in a rejection of plans to exempt agents, allies and employees of the UK from being deported to the African country, The Independent reported.

The House of Lords' amendment 10B is part of the larger bill, which seeks the deportation of illegal migrants to Rwanda.

Several amendments set in the House of Lords have sought to prevent Afghan veterans who fought alongside the British military in the decade-long war from being included in deportation orders.



The House of Lords' amendment 10B is part of the larger bill, which seeks the deportation of illegal migrants to Rwanda. AFP/File

The 10B amendment included people eligible to enter the UK under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy, which supports Afghans who helped the British campaign in their country and who are at risk under the Taliban government.

After the vote, the Rwanda bill will now return to the House of Lords for new scrutiny.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak had told Conservative MPs to vote against all amendments to the bill, including 10B.

The move to exclude Afghan veterans from potential deportation to Rwanda has received support from the highest levels of Britain's military establishment.

Thirteen senior military officials, two former chiefs of defense staff, a former defense secretary and a former UK ambassador to the US have supported the amendment.

The Sunday Telegraph carried a letter from top military officials ahead of Monday's vote. They warned that a rejection of the amendment would cause "grave damage to our ability to recruit local allies in future military operations."

BREAKING POINT

Wife of British cyclist in Islamophobic social media rant

Arab News London

The wife of a former Tour de France-winning cyclist has caused controversy in the UK following an Islamophobic outburst on social media.

Michelle Froome, wife of Chris Froome, said on her X profile on Monday that there are "no innocent Gazans" and called Muslims a "drain on modern society."

In her first posts on the platform since 2020, she told her 15,000 followers that she is "sick of sitting idly by quietly supporting Israel while the Hamas propaganda takes over social media."

Her husband, who won four Tours de France and was an Olympian for Team GB, is a member of the Israel-Premier Tech cycling team.

While not directly affiliated with the Israeli state, it has strong ties to the country through billionaire owners Sylvan Adams and Ron Baron.

Earlier this year, the team dropped "Israel" from its vehicles for security reasons. In recent weeks, pro-Palestinian activists have called for the team to be confronted with "more protests than ever" ahead of the upcoming Giro d'Italia race in May.

In a 13-post diatribe, Michelle Froome said: "The silent majority needs to stand up and be heard. We don't want your religion, we don't want your beliefs. It is not compatible with modern civilisation … There are no innocent Gazans."

EXTREME MEASURES

Algerian reporter says he was expelled from his country without explanation

AP Algiers

An Algerian journalist was expelled from the country after flying in from France and not being allowed to leave the airport as journalists continue to face challenges reporting in Algeria.

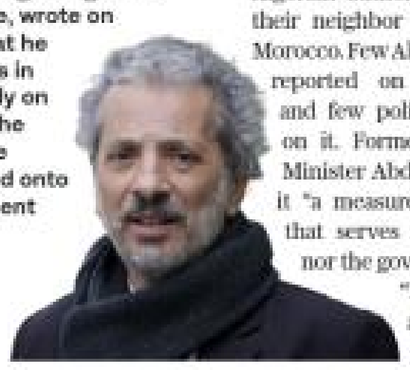
Farid Alilat, a writer for the French-language magazine Jeune Afrique, wrote on Facebook that he spent 11 hours in police custody on Saturday at the airport before being boarded onto a plane and sent to France, where he has a residency permit.

Alilat said he regularly takes flights from Paris to Algiers to report on Algeria, where he has for years been a well-known journalist due to his work for French-language daily newspapers including Liberté, which was shuttered in 2022 amid financial problems and scuffles with the government and Algeria's state-owned oil company, both of which are major advertisers for the country's newspapers.

In a lengthy post in which he wrote of his deportation as if he were reporting on it, Alilat alleged that police officers on the tarmac in Algiers told him that they were acting on orders "from above."

FASTFACT

Farid Alilat, a writer for the French-language magazine Jeune Afrique, wrote on Facebook that he spent 11 hours in police custody on Saturday at the airport before being boarded onto a plane and sent to France.



He said he was interrogated about his travels, who he has met with and about Jeune Afrique, which Algerian authorities believe favors their neighbor and regional rival, Morocco. Few Algerian media outlets reported on Alilat's expulsion and few politicians commented on it. Former Communications Minister Abdelaziz Rahabi called it "a measure from another era that serves neither the people nor the government."

"No one can be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter their own country," he wrote on Facebook.

The episode is the latest instance of Algeria's government restricting journalists from reporting in Algeria and comes while high-profile journalists, including editors Ihsane El Kadi and Mustapha Benjama remain in prison on charges related to using foreign funds to finance journalism and disrupting public order. The government, however, has also resumed granting authorizations to journalists starting new media outlets or television shows and last year passed a law enshrining new protections for journalists.

News International



Afghans wait to cross a flooded area in the Spin Boldak district of Kandahar province on Saturday after a flash flood following a heavy rainfall. AFP

DEVASTATING DISASTER

At least 66 killed in Afghanistan as heavy rains set off flash floods

Number of reported casualties has doubled since Sunday; many were killed when their homes collapsed on them

Modaser Islami *Kabul*

Extreme rainfall in Afghanistan and devastating flash floods have killed at least 66 people and damaged homes, infrastructure, and farmlands across most of the country's provinces, authorities said on Tuesday.

The storms, which started over the weekend, are adding to the challenges facing Afghanistan, which is still recovering from decades of conflict and natural disasters, including unprecedented droughts in the past four years, as well as a series of deadly earthquakes.

"According to primary reports from the provinces, at least 66 people lost their lives, and 36 others are injured," Janan Sayeq, spokesperson of the National Disaster Management Authority, told Arab News on Tuesday.

The number of reported casualties has doubled since Sunday, raising fears the actual toll could be higher. Many of the victims were killed when their homes collapsed on them.

Sayeq said that 1,235 houses were destroyed.

Flash floods were reported in 23 of the country's 34 provinces, damaging crops ahead of harvest season, and further affecting food security in the country as UN agencies estimate that more than half of its population has been in need of humanitarian assistance.

"The wheat crops will be ready for collection in a few weeks. But the rainfalls could destroy most of it," said Gul Hussain, a farmer from the eastern Laghman province, which is one of the main agricultural regions.

The impact of drought, and now also floods, has been devastating for rural families struggling with access to water.

"The floods have had severe effects on the lives of people in the southeast, southwest and east of the country and have caused loss of life and damage to houses, as well as economic and agricultural effects as crops are destroyed and livestock are killed," Najibullah Sadid, a hydrometeorologist, told Arab News.

The country's mountainous topography and reduced vegetation left little to no space for people to escape flood events, as preparedness and prevention in the face of the changing climate are almost nonexistent.

Water management infrastructure — such as check dams, trenches, terraces, and reservoirs that could help reduce flooding — is insufficient.

"For instance, Afghanistan has 22 percent less water storage compared to Iran and 13 percent less compared to Pakistan, making the country more vulnerable to floods during rainfalls," Sadid said.

"Considering the increasing climate change effects as well as frequency and intensity of rainfalls, steps taken during the past two decades and now are limited and are not sufficient to control the situation."

FASTFACT

Flash floods were reported in 23 of the country's 34 provinces, damaging crops ahead of the harvest season, and further affecting food security in the country as UN agencies estimate that more than half of its population has been in need of humanitarian assistance.

HIGH DEMAND

Indonesian coffee takes lead in Egyptian market

Sheany Yasuko Lal *Jakarta*

Indonesia has become Egypt's main source of coffee, authorities said on Tuesday, as annual exports reached nearly $93 million, or about 43 percent of the market.

Indonesia is the world's fourth-largest coffee producer and Asia's second-biggest. In 2023, the Southeast Asian nation exported around 276,000 metric tonnes of the commodity worth almost $916 million, according to the Central Statistics Agency.

Egypt was the second-biggest export destination for Indonesian coffee, just behind the US, accounting for about 5.2 percent of the country's total coffee exports.

"Indonesian coffee has successfully dominated the Egyptian market. Total export value reached $92.96 million, making Indonesia the biggest coffee-exporting country to Egypt in 2023," Indonesian Ambassador in Cairo Lutfi Rauf said in a statement.

"This shows how Indonesian coffee products are loved by Egyptian consumers. The unique aroma and flavor are the main factors attracting consumers from Egypt."

Indonesian officials held an annual meeting with Egyptian coffee buyers in Damanhour over the weekend, as they seek to foster good trade relations.

"We hope to continue and to improve trade relations. If there are any challenges, everything can be discussed well for the prosperity and welfare of the people of both countries," Rauf said.

Indonesian officials have been increasing trade engagement with Egypt as a gateway for exports to other African countries in recent years, while Indonesian coffee producers are seeking to further their exports to the Middle East amid rising interest from the region.

Hariyanto, a coffee exporter from East Java province, said promotion efforts by the Indonesian Embassy in Cairo have helped boost the popularity of Indonesian coffee in Egypt.

"Egypt is a great market, and now there is a high demand for Indonesian-origin coffee products," Hariyanto, a coffee exporter from East Java province, told Arab News.



This photo taken on Sept. 19, 2022 shows Indonesian workers sorting organic Gayo Arabica coffee beans at a coffee warehouse in the highlands of Takengon, Aceh province. AFP

FASTFACTS

- **Indonesia is the world's 4th-largest coffee producer and Asia's second-biggest.**
- **Egypt was second-biggest export destination for Indonesian coffee in 2023, behind the US.**

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Swollen river

Woman, 5 kids dead after boat capsizes in Kashmir

A woman and five children were killed after a boat ferrying them across a swollen river capsized in Indian-administered Kashmir on Tuesday, officials said. Rescuers in rubber boats joined by marine commandos and divers were searching for three others believed to have been aboard.

Residents said the remaining missing were schoolchildren on their way to class when the boat overturned in the Jhelum River in the city of Srinagar.

"Six died in the accident, another six were rescued and three are still missing," Srinagar district magistrate Bilal Mohi-ud-Din Bhat told AFP.

"Our information so far is that 15 people were on the boat," he said.

Three of those rescued were being treated at a hospital and the other three were sent home, Bhat said. Residents had initially reported to local disaster management field personnel that 26 people were on the boat. **AFP**

Priceless art

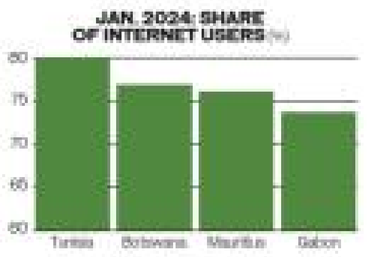
Fire rages through one of Copenhagen's oldest buildings

A fire raged through one of Copenhagen's oldest buildings on Tuesday, causing the collapse of the iconic spire of the 17th-century Old Stock Exchange as passersby rushed to help emergency services save priceless paintings and other valuables.

Danish Culture Minister Jakob Engel-Schmidt said it was "touching" to see how many people lent their hand "to save art treasures and iconic images from the burning building." One man jumped off his bicycle on his way to work to help.

Brian Mikkelsen, chief of the Danish Chamber of Commerce, which is headquartered in the Old Stock Exchange, and his staff were seen scrolling through a binder of photos of paintings to be saved. The works were carried to the nearby parliament and Danish National Archives around the corner. **AP**

The Day's FIGURES



Source: Statista

What We Are Reading Today

FROM AROUND THE WEB & IN PRINT

'The Little Book of Spiders'

SIMON POLLARD

Packed with surprising facts, this delightful and gorgeously designed book will beguile any nature lover. Expertly written and beautifully illustrated throughout with color photographs and original color artwork, "The Little Book of Spiders" is an accessible and enjoyable mini reference about the world's spiders, with examples drawn from across the globe. It fits an astonishing amount of information in a small package, covering a wide range of topics — from anatomy, diversity, and reproduction to habitat and conservation.



Emergency declared

Homes flooded in Russian region near Kazakhstan

Nearly 14,500 homes have been flooded in a Russian region bordering Kazakhstan after water levels spiked in a local river, local authorities said Tuesday. The floods sparked evacuations of thousands in the Orenburg region, located some 1,200 kilometers, southeast of the capital, Moscow, after a dam on the Ural River burst last week under the pressure of surging waters.

Water levels in the river have since been fluctuating in different parts of the region, affecting the number of flooded houses.

Experts have cited multiple possible causes of the floods: large snow reserves in the area melting, deep freezing of the soil which doesn't allow it to absorb rain or melting snow, and a massive release of water from the Iriklinksy reservoir in the eastern part of the region into the Ural River. Local authorities have classified the deluge as an emergency of federal importance, and more than 16,500 people have been evacuated from the flooded areas, the office of the Orenburg governor said Tuesday. **AP**

Baltimore bridge

Ship experienced electrical issues while still docked

Hours before leaving port, the massive container ship that caused the deadly collapse of a Baltimore bridge experienced apparent electrical problems, a person with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press on Monday, the same day FBI agents boarded the vessel amid a criminal investigation into the circumstances leading up to the catastrophe.

The Dali departed Baltimore's port early on March 26 laden with cargo destined for Sri Lanka. It lost power before reaching open water and struck one of the supports for the Francis Scott Key Bridge, causing the span to collapse into the Patapsco River and sending six members of a road repair crew plummeting to their deaths. Two of the victims are still unaccounted for.

Authorities announced Monday evening the recovery of a fourth body from a construction vehicle in the underwater wreckage. **AP**

Follow Arab News Briefs all through the day @ArabNews

حتّى لو صارَ البحرُ حِبراً
لا يكفي لكتْبِ زُرقَةَ عينَيك
زاهي وهبي

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

Even if the sea turned to ink, it would not be enough to write about the blue of your eyes.

Zahi Wehbe

(Lebanese journalist, writer and poet)

Opinion

The question of Iran for Saudi Arabia

ALI SHIHABI

As Iran and Israel enter an era of direct confrontation, a lot of attention is now being paid to the position of Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Cooperation Council states, particularly to where they stand on this crisis and how they will behave if it escalates, as it may.

The Iranian regime, with its ongoing support of proxies hostile to the Kingdom, has failed to build trust about its good intentions in the GCC. Because of this, it cannot expect the GCC states to avoid further integration into a US-led defensive alliance against Iran, despite serious criticism of Israel's actions.

Israel, with its horrific behavior in Gaza and its shortsighted failure to put in place any building blocks toward a two-state solution in Palestine, is a source of grave concern for the Kingdom. Unless material progress is made toward a peaceful settlement of the Palestine question, it is difficult to imagine a breakthrough in relations between Riyadh and Tel Aviv.

At the same time, Iran is an aspiring regional hegemon that is very difficult to trust despite a recent diplomatic detente that saw a Chinese-sponsored reestablishment of relations between the Kingdom and Iran. Iran has worked since the revolution in 1979 to export its ideology and expand its influence throughout the region. It has had the GCC in its crosshairs despite public claims to the contrary.

GCC countries have long since learned to watch Iranian actions, not listen to its words, when judging its behavior. And Tehran's actions in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and particularly in Yemen, even after the reestablishment of diplomatic ties, have confirmed its malign intentions toward the Gulf. Ayatollahs Khomeini and Khamenei have often and directly criticized the governments of the GCC as being illegitimate, as do their proxies across the Arab world.



Ali Shihabi is an author and commentator on the politics and economics of Saudi Arabia.
X: @alishihabi

Moreover, Iran's pretensions of supporting the Palestinian cause are recognized in the Gulf for what they are: a naked attempt to grab Sunni market share in public support, while enabling Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad to act as continuous spoilers (with the tacit cooperation of Israel's right wing) of any attempt by the Palestinian Authority to move forward on a two-state settlement.

Hamas' attack on Oct. 7 — one it knew would rain terror and destruction down on Gaza's unprotected and exposed population by an Israeli government that has no compunction about committing war crimes or even ethnic cleansing — is just the latest example of Iran empowering spoilers that gain nothing for the Palestinians but misery and suffering.

Ultimately, the Kingdom and the other GCC states see Iran as a dangerous adversary that dreams of bringing down the ruling order in the Gulf, establishing its hegemony over the region and cynically using the Palestinian cause to foment instability and anger throughout the region toward that final objective. Iran does not want to, and it knows it can never, "liberate" Palestine, as it loudly and noisily claims. Rather, it cynically wants to liberate the GCC of its US presence and establish its own hegemony over the Gulf and its oil wealth.

Until Iran's actions show otherwise — such as, for example, its complete termination of support for the Houthis in Yemen — all its pretensions of friendship and cooperation toward the Gulf will be taken for what they are: cynical attempts to disguise wolfish behavior in sheep's clothing. As it does this, Iran should expect the GCC states to move ever closer to the US-led alliance, with all that entails. They will do so to protect themselves from what they see as Tehran's malign intentions and to ensure their own national security.



NATO's engagement with the region is growing

MIRCEA GEOANA

NATO will this year mark significant anniversaries for both its Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative — platforms through which the alliance has forged partnerships with Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, Tunisia and the UAE.

For decades, we have worked together on common security interests affecting the Euro-Atlantic area, the Mediterranean, the Gulf region and beyond.

Our cooperation over the years has been beneficial to all — in areas including small arms and light weapons, countering improvised explosive devices, crisis management, counter-terrorism, civil preparedness, resilience and the "Women, Peace and Security" agenda.

NATO has contributed valuable expertise in the defense and security sector, including experience in military training and education, as well as in strengthening the interoperability of military forces. In turn, partner nations have helped enhance our understanding of regional security challenges.

We live in a more dangerous and competitive world, where security is increasingly global, not just regional. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is a case in point — causing untold damage to Ukraine and creating Europe's greatest refugee crisis since the Second World War — while also driving up food and commodity prices and making the world a more dangerous place.

Persistent conflict and instability across the Middle East, North Africa and Sahel regions are of great concern too. While NATO does not play a role in the Gaza conflict, individual NATO allies are working tirelessly to achieve a ceasefire and to deliver humanitarian aid.

We now all face the prospect of the Gaza war escalating into a wider regional conflict. Iran and its proxies are an enduring source of regional instability and pose a serious risk to NATO allies in Iraq and to maritime security in the Red Sea.



Mircea Geoana is Deputy Secretary-General of NATO.
X: @Mircea_Geoana

Russia and China's growing presence across the Middle East and North Africa do not bode well for the region's security. Moscow is promoting anti-Western and anti-NATO views, using mercenaries to fuel unrest and reinforcing its ties with Iran. Tehran is supplying weapons to help strengthen Moscow's hand in Ukraine. For its part, Beijing is increasing its economic influence in Africa, expanding its military presence and buying up critical infrastructure to increase its control over the region.

Global challenges require global solutions. This is why NATO is adopting a global approach and working more closely with partners around the world, including in the Middle East and North Africa.

There is a lot we can build on. NATO has been present in Iraq since 2018, with a mission to support the Iraqis in strengthening their security forces and institutions. NATO is also present in Kuwait, where we have a regional center bringing NATO allies and Gulf countries closer together. Work is underway to establish a NATO liaison office in Jordan.

As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Mediterranean Dialogue and the 20th anniversary of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, we are looking to redouble our efforts to build a better, stronger and more secure world together.

Looking ahead, we want to grow NATO's engagement with the Middle East and North Africa even further. We are looking for opportunities for more dialogue and closer cooperation with nations, international organizations and other relevant actors. Counterterrorism, maritime security, climate change, cybersecurity and demining are some of the practical areas where we can, and must, do more and better together.

At the NATO Summit in Washington in July, the alliance's leaders will agree concrete recommendations to step up our security offer to partners. This matters for our shared security — now and into the future.

Opinion

Jordan forced to walk a tightrope over Israel-Iran showdown

OSAMA AL-SHARIF



Iran's attack on Israel at the weekend has underlined once more Jordan's delicate geopolitical position, now acting as a buffer between Tehran and its proxies on the one hand and Tel Aviv on the other. An unknown number of Iranian drones and ballistic missiles crossed Jordan's night skies — hours after the kingdom closed its airspace to all flights — on their way to Israeli targets. Later, Amman announced that its air force had intercepted "flying projectiles" and shot them down. Officials said Jordan had acted to defend its people and sovereignty, brushing aside Iranian warnings and ultimatums.

Jordanian officials have justified the country's decision to intercept Iranian missiles. Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said Jordan must protect its sovereignty and will do so again, regardless of where the rockets come from and where they are heading, even if Israel decides to launch them. But he was careful to point out that it was Israel's bombing of the Iranian consulate in Damascus earlier this month — an attack that killed seven senior Iranian military officials — that caused the recent escalation.

> **King Abdullah clearly pointed out that Jordan would not allow a regional war to unfold on its land**

In a Sunday call with US President Joe Biden, King Abdullah clearly pointed out that Jordan would not allow a regional war to unfold on its land.

Also on Sunday, Jordan's Foreign Ministry summoned the Iranian ambassador in Amman to protest Iranian media reports, which included a direct warning to Jordan. On Monday, Iran's Foreign Ministry issued a statement underlining its keenness to maintain good ties with Jordan.

But Jordanian officials were quick to point out that, despite the Iranian reprisal attack, the pressing issue remains Israel's war on Gaza, the dire humanitarian situation there and the need to end the occupation of Palestinian territories through a two-state solution. For Amman, bringing attention back to the Gaza debacle remains a priority.

Safadi told local media that Netanyahu was seeking to ignite a regional war with Iran to deflect attention from the war in Gaza. Such statements appear to ameliorate Jordan's position both locally and regionally.

By underlining that Amman will not tolerate its airspace being violated by any party, including Israel, it is hoping to absorb local criticism of its interception of Iranian projectiles. The popular mood in the country has been openly hostile toward Israel and the US over the Gaza massacres. Jordanians have taken to the streets in protest for the last six months and emotions have been running high.

To be clear, while ties between Jordan and Israel have gone from bad to worse since the latter launched its war on Gaza, coordination at the military and counterterrorism intelligence levels has remained intact. While Jordan has been openly and vehemently critical of the far-right government of Benjamin Netanyahu, even before the Oct. 7 attacks, both sides have been careful not to push ties to the point of no return. Jordan is aware of the need to preserve the peace treaty to protect the kingdom's national security.

Still, the king and senior officials have led regional and international criticism of Israel's reckless war in Gaza and warned of the impending humanitarian disaster there. Jordan was the first country to conduct food airdrops over northern Gaza, opening the way for other countries to do the same.

The kingdom's position on Gaza brought about an unprecedented rhetorical attack by extremist Israeli officials. Relations between the two countries had reached a historic low point. But while some in the Israeli media praised Jordan's role in downing Iranian drones and missiles, officials in Amman made sure to point out that they were only acting in Jordan's best interests. Jordan is skeptical of Netanyahu's prevarications on key issues such as the custodianship of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the two-state solution.

> **Jordanians have taken to the streets in protest for the last six months and emotions have been running high**

Jordan's relations with the Islamic Republic have always been strained. Amman stood with Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s and refused to join a US-led international coalition against Saddam Hussein in the first Gulf War. Still, the two countries have maintained diplomatic ties for most of the past 40 years, as Jordan always realized that turning Tehran into an enemy would not serve its national interests. At one point last year, the two countries' foreign ministers exchanged calls and met to normalize relations. Amman is yet to send an ambassador to Tehran. Now, such a move will remain on hold.

Jordan, a key US ally, has tried to chart a seemingly independent regional foreign policy despite its growing dependence on Washington. It did so with Syria's Bashar Assad and with various Iraqi premiers following the US invasion of Iraq.

Jordan has learned to walk a precarious political tightrope with the outer neighborhood. The fast-changing geopolitical terrain, especially under former US President Donald Trump, has forced the kingdom to adapt quickly while still maintaining this delicate balancing act.

With Tel Aviv and Tehran moving from their shadow war toward a more open one, Jordan once again finds itself in an uneasy place. With one eye focused on Gaza and the West Bank, it is also keeping track of a possible regional conflagration. Jordan's utmost priority is to cushion itself against any harmful fallout from both simmering conflicts. It is not an easy task — it never is — but it is one in which Jordan has an impressive track record.

Osama Al-Sharif is a journalist and political commentator based in Amman.
X: @plato010

For full version, log on to www.arabnews.com/opinion

Israel must understand how it lost the support of its friends

YOSSI MEKELBERG



The chorus of a very popular Israeli song that topped the charts for weeks goes as follows: "The whole world is against us. Don't worry, we'll overcome. They don't care about us. Don't worry, we'll manage." This is not a new song written in response to Oct. 7 and criticizing the way Israel is conducting the war in Gaza, but one that was written 55 years ago.

Yes, this sentiment is deeply ingrained in Israeli society, allowing a master manipulator like Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his like in the populist far right to exploit it for their personal and political interests and reject any criticisms that originate from abroad.

> **The sense of fear and vulnerability in Israel is currently being fueled by an opportunistic government**

This sense of fear and vulnerability among many in Israel is currently being fueled by an ultranationalistic and opportunistic government that keeps driving home the message that Israel can do no wrong and all those who criticize it either do not understand the grave dangers Israel is facing, do not care about this or are simply antisemites who want to see the state destroyed.

Without taking anything away from the severity of the atrocities it committed on Oct. 7, from the moment Hamas began to be repeatedly described by top Israeli officials and others as a Nazi movement — and the people of Gaza as active or at least passive collaborators — the death and devastation inflicted on Gazans by the Israeli armed forces had become justified and legitimized in the eyes of most Israelis.

It is not that all criticism leveled against Israel is necessarily correct, fair or beyond reproach. But much of it is legitimate and constructive and, had its government heeded it, Israel's international standing would have been in much better shape and might have led to some strategic achievements in the war with Hamas.

It was US President Joe Biden who, at the beginning of the war, knew in his heart of hearts that Israel under Netanyahu was not about to take a measured approach with a strategic horizon. Instead, it would react with disproportionate force in a rush of anger and revenge. And in the most simplistic and crude manner.

In his visit to Israel only days after Oct. 7, Biden warned the country's leadership not to make the same mistakes as the US did in response to the 9/11 terrorist attack, observing that "those horrors have tapped into some kind of primal feeling in Israel just like it did in the United States. Shock, pain, rage. An all-consuming rage." Such a warning was prophetic, yet such an outcome could have been prevented by the very person who expressed that fear. Nevertheless, within a very short time, which by now feels like an eternity, Israel has experienced an unprecedented loss of international support because it ignored the warnings of Biden and others.

It feels almost inappropriate to speak of a PR battle in a war in which so many thousands of people have lost their lives and many more have been injured and deeply traumatized, while hundreds of thousands have also lost their homes, their belongings and probably their hope for a better future. However, in the sad reality of modern warfare, the battle to win over public opinion is crucial and Israel started from a position where it would have been unimaginable to lose this battle.

The international community showed sympathy and support and genuinely wanted to embrace the Israeli people in their time of great anguish, while those who were rejoicing at the massacre it suffered at the hands of Hamas were a very small minority and were rightly silenced. Yet, six months later, Israel, by its reckless approach to the lives of ordinary Palestinians in Gaza, including thousands of children, has reversed this broad international support and also alienated those who are traditionally and instinctively its friends and allies. Instead of consolidating support for the country, Netanyahu's government has made it almost untenable to maintain it.

> **Israel has experienced an unprecedented loss of international support because it ignored the warnings**

Staggeringly, this has upset and angered many Israelis, and not only the prime minister's political opponents, who cannot accept that a just war could involve killing more than 33,000 people, the vast majority of whom have committed no acts of militancy against Israel. One cannot maintain the backing of the world when one treats an entire territory and its people as collateral damage in a war with one's enemies, repeatedly displaces them and denies them access to humanitarian aid to the point of starvation and with no access to medical aid.

It is especially unsustainable for those countries that are providing the weaponry and the ammunition that enables this to happen, first and foremost because such aid cannot be justified when it is turned against civilians, but also because it makes these enablers complicit in what one day might be deemed by the International Court of Justice to be war crimes or even genocide.

Furthermore, in an age of around-the-clock media coverage, the horror of what is taking place in Gaza is being witnessed by millions of viewers worldwide. The pressure on governments to make their support for Israel conditional on stopping the killings and the destruction has become inevitable.

Whether or not Israelis approve or appreciate it, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict always enters into the domestic politics of many countries and, when it flares up the debate around this, it can become extremely toxic and at times threaten to descend into actual violence. Israel can only ignore this at its own peril.

When the war is over and the inevitable investigation is held into the failures that allowed the disaster of Oct. 7 and the nature of Israel's response, some attention should also be paid to the need for Israel to understand how it has lost this PR battle so quickly and at such a cost to the country.

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.
X: @YMekelberg

For full version, log on to www.arabnews.com/opinion

srmg
Established in 1987 by
Prince Ahmad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz
CEO
Jomana Rashid Alrashid
ARAB NEWS
is a daily international newspaper published by the
SAUDI RESEARCH & PUBLISHING COMPANY
Founded in 1975 by
Hisham & Muhammad Ali Hafiz
Editor-in-Chief
Faisal J. Abbas
Deputy Editor-in-Chief
Noor Osama Nugali

ARAB NEWS WELCOMES FEEDBACK FROM READERS
Letters sent from within the Kingdom should include the writer's name, address, phone and ID numbers. E-mails from readers abroad should include a name and city. Letters should be mailed to P.O. Box 478, Riyadh 11411, Saudi Arabia.
• Tel: +966-112128000 • Fax: +966-11441807
• E-mail: general@arabnews.com

EDITORIAL:
general@arabnews.com
MARKETING:
marketing@arabnews.com

TOLL FREE NUMBER: +966-8002440076

PRINTED AT:
AL-MADINA PRINTING AND PUBLICATION CO., JEDDAH

Saudi Arabia SR2; Bahrain 200 Fils; Iran 200 R; Egypt LE 3; India 12 Rs; Indonesia 2000 R; Japan 250 Y; Jordan 250 Fils; Kuwait 200 Fils; Lebanon 1000 L; Morocco 2 D; Oman 200 P; Pakistan 15 Rs; Philippines 25 P; Qatar 2 QR; Singapore $3; Syria 20 L; Thailand 40 BHT; UAE 2 AED; UK 50 P; US $1.50; Republic of Yemen R 50; Sudan 25 P

SRPC AND AFFILIATED AGENCIES
JEDDAH: Tel: (966-12)253-6200, Fax: (966-12)283-6229
RIYADH: Tel: (966-11)212-8000, Fax: (966-11)442-9094
DAMMAM: Tel: (966-13)835-3838 Fax: (966-13)834-0489
ABU DHABI: Tel: (971-2)681-5999, Fax: (971-2)681-7595
CAIRO: Tel: (202-3)749-2775, (202-3)749-2999, (202-3)338-8654, Fax: (202-3)749-2884, (202-3)749-2855
MOROCCO: Tel: (212-537)262-696, Fax: (212-537)663-869
JORDAN: Tel: (962-6)563-7101, (962-6)561-7102 (962-6)553-9409, Fax: (962-6)553-7103
LONDON: Tel: (44-20)7631-8185, Fax: (44-20)7631-2310

ADVERTISING:
SAUDI RESEARCH AND MEDIA GROUP
KSA: +966-11-294 0500
UAE: +971 4 3996500
E-mail: revenue@srmg.com
Website: www.srmg.com

DISTRIBUTION AGENT
TOLL FREE: (966)800-244-0076
Head Office: (Riyadh): P.O Box 6216, Riyadh 11585
Tel: (966-11)4419933, Fax: (966-11)2121774
E-mail: info@saudi-distribution.com
Western Region: Tel: (966-12)663-0909
Eastern Region: Tel: (966-13)847-3569
Southern Region: Tel: (966-17)221-6693
Northern Region: Tel: (966-16)324-3070
Dubai: Tel: (971-4)391-6503, Fax: (971-4)391-8354
Abu Dhabi: Tel: (971-2)673-3555, Fax: (971-2)673-3354
Kuwait: Tel: (965)483-4922, Fax: (965)483-4719
Manama: Tel: (973-17)617770

SUBSCRIPTION
Head Office: (Riyadh)
P.O Box 22304, Riyadh 11495
Tel: (966-11)4419933, Fax: (966-11)4429955
TOLL FREE: +966-800-244-0076
Email: info@arabmediaco
Web: www.arabmediaco.com

PRINTING CENTER
Riyadh: P.O Box 50202
Riyadh 11523, Tel: (966-11)2128000
Fax: (966-11)2864900
Jeddah: P.O Box 1024
Jeddah 21441, Tel: (966-12)639-6060
Fax: (966-12)638-4085
Dammam: Tel&Fax: (966-13)847-1960
Email: mppc@mpp-co.com

DISCLAIMER
Views expressed by writers in this section are their own and do not necessarily reflect Arab News' point of view.

> Germany and China should be vigilant against rising protectionism.
>
> **Xi Jinping**
> Chinese president



Business



In its latest report the bank, however, revised its 2024 forecast for the Kingdom's gross domestic product growth downward to 2.5 percent from an earlier forecast of 4.1 percent. Shutterstock

FORECAST

World Bank raises Saudi Arabia's 2025 growth forecast to 5.9%

MENA region is expected to achieve a growth rate of 2.7 percent in 2024

Arab News Riyadh

The World Bank has raised its expectations for Saudi Arabia's economic growth to 5.9 percent in 2025 from 4.2 percent predicted earlier in January.

In its latest report, the bank, however, revised its 2024 forecast for the Kingdom's gross domestic product growth downward to 2.5 percent from an earlier forecast of 4.1 percent.

Concurrently, the overall GDP growth forecast for Gulf Cooperation Council countries in 2024 has been reduced to 2.8 percent, down from 3.6 percent, while the 2025 forecast has been revised to 4.7 percent from 3.8 percent.

The report also adjusted the UAE's GDP growth forecast to 3.9 percent for 2024, up from the previously projected 3.7 percent, with a further rise to 4.1 percent in 2025, from 3.8 percent.

Kuwait's economy is expected to expand by 2.8 percent in 2024 and increase further to 3.1 percent in 2025.

Similarly, Bahrain's economy is likely to grow by 3.5 percent in 2024 and 3.3 percent in 2025, marking an increase from January's projections.

Meanwhile, Qatar's economy saw a downward revision for its 2024 forecast from 2.5 percent to 2.1 percent but an upward revision for 2025 from 3.1 percent to 3.2 percent.

Oman's economy projections for 2024 and 2025 saw a marginal increase of 0.1 percent since the January forecast.

This adjustment reflects the broader economic trends where the surge in oil prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 bolstered oil-exporting economies in the Middle East and North Africa.

In contrast, economic growth in non-oil-exporting nations — including MENA oil importers like Djibouti, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, and the West Bank and Gaza — has slowed.

By 2024, the growth disparity between GCC oil exporters and developing oil importers is expected to narrow to just 0.9 percentage points, marking a significant shift from 2022 when GCC countries grew 5.6 percentage points faster, the report stated.

"Developing oil exporters will grow 2.8 percent in 2024, down from 3.1 percent in 2023 while growth in developing oil importers is forecasted to decrease to 2.5 percent in 2024, down from 3.1 percent in 2023," the report stated.

Overall, the MENA region is expected to achieve a growth rate of 2.7 percent in 2024, which aligns with pre-COVID levels but still trails the global average.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **The overall GDP growth forecast for Gulf Cooperation Council countries in 2024 has been reduced to 2.8 percent, down from 3.6 percent.**
- **The UAE's GDP growth forecast to 3.9 percent for 2024, up from the previously projected 3.7 percent.**
- **Kuwait's economy is expected to expand by 2.8 percent in 2024 and increase further to 3.1 percent in 2025.**

CRUDE

Oil slips as concern eases about supply risk

Reuters London

Oil slipped for a second day on Tuesday as easing concern about supply risks and a rapidly escalating conflict after Iran's weekend attack on Israel offset data showing China's economy grew faster than expected in the first quarter.

Also weighing was stronger-than-expected US retail sales for March that further reinforced expectations the US Federal Reserve is unlikely to rush to cut interest rates, a scenario that dampens the prospects for oil demand.

Brent futures for June delivery fell 52 cents, or 0.6 percent, to $89.58 a barrel by 1218 GMT. US crude for May slipped 55 cents, or 0.6 percent, to $84.86.

FASTFACTS

- **Stronger-than-expected US retail sales for March also weighed as the data further reinforced expectations the US Federal Reserve is unlikely to rush to cut interest rates.**
- **Brent futures for June delivery fell 52 cents, or 0.6 percent, to $89.58 a barrel by 1218 GMT. US crude for May slipped 55 cents, or 0.6 percent, to $84.86.**

"The balancing act between sticky inflation, a hesitant Fed and the gradual move towards a full-blown regional conflict keeps oil in its range," said Tamas Varga of oil broker PVM. "Material disruption to oil production, supply or shipping must take place to approach the $100 a barrel milestone. Currently such a development appears implausible."

Concern that Iran would respond to the strike on its embassy compound in Damascus helped send Brent on Friday to $92.18, the highest since October. Prices, though, fell on Monday after Iran's attack on Israel proved to be less damaging than anticipated, easing concerns of a quickly intensifying conflict that could disrupt supply.

"As the risk to supply is waning and a military response from Israel looks less likely as more time passes, prices are holding steady," said Rystad Energy's Jorge Leon. "Tensions are high, and either party's next moves are hard to predict."

REPORT

GCC oil companies' capex to grow by 5% to reach $115bn in 2024

Arab News Riyadh

The capital expenditures of national oil companies in the Gulf Cooperation Council are likely to grow by 5 percent in 2024 as compared to the previous year and are expected to reach $115 billion, according to a report.

The analysis by S&P's Global Ratings, however, does not take into account the potential surge in spending from recent expansion plans such as the North Field West Project in Qatar, which it said could significantly boost expenditures.

The report highlighted that while the growth in capital expenditure is modest, Saudi Arabia's planned output cuts in line with the current policy of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, known as OPEC+, is likely to decrease demand for drilling platforms, operating ratios, average daily production rates, and profitability among regional drilling companies, especially in the Kingdom.

"We stress-tested the effect of a hypothetical 15-20 percent loss of total rig demand in the region on GCC drillers, and we estimate that the debt to EBITDA (Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization) of rated and publicly listed drillers based in GCC countries could increase by about 1x on average," S&P Global Ratings Credit analyst Rawan Oueidat said.



Oil prices are predicted to average $85 per barrel for the remainder of 2024. File

"At this point, we think that drillers' rating headroom could shrink, but we don't expect any short-term rating pressure," Oueidat added.

The agency also raised concerns about the future of capital expenditure in other oil and gas-producing countries of the GCC, following Saudi Aramco's decision to suspend its plan to increase the Kingdom's maximum production capacity.

Despite these concerns, the total oil capital expenditure in the region is expected to remain relatively high due to the ongoing expansion plans in Qatar and the UAE.

However, the pace and magnitude of spending are expected to impact oilfield service companies and the entire value chain, particularly drilling companies whose business models heavily rely on corporate capital expenditures.

The UAE's Abu Dhabi National Oil Co. is set to increase its oil production capacity to 5 million barrels per day by 2027, up from 4 million bpd as of February 2024, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

Meanwhile, Qatar is aiming to boost its liquefied natural gas production capacity to 142 million tonnes annually by 2030 from the current output of 77 million tonnes.

The report predicted oil prices to average $85 per barrel for the remainder of 2024 and $80 per barrel the following year.

It also suggested that geopolitical tensions and planned production cuts by OPEC+ will support prices and enhance the cash flows of oil companies across the Gulf region.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

ACWA Power secures $80m bridge loan from Bank of China for Uzbekistan projects

Fund to boost Saudi utility firm's Tashkent 200 megawatts solar photovoltaic power plant

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi utility firm ACWA Power has secured an $80 million equity bridge loan from the Bank of China for its Uzbekistan initiatives.

According to an official press release, the payment is split equally between Chinese yuan and US dollars, marking the first loan cooperation deal by a bank from the Asian country using its native currency involving a company from the Kingdom.

ACWA Power said the fund will boost its Tashkent 200 megawatts solar photovoltaic power plant and 500 MW per hour battery energy storage system project in Uzbekistan.

"This transaction culminated the initial agreement reached during the 3rd BRF (Belt and Road Forum) summit in October 2023, where ACWA Power was represented by its chairman as a keynote speaker," the company said in a statement.

ACWA Power's Chief Financial Officer Abdulhameed Al-Muhaidib highlighted the significance of this milestone, citing its alignment with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and China's Belt and Road initiative.

He said: "We are delighted to deepen our cooperation with Bank of China to bring renewable energy at competitive tariffs to our key markets, including Uzbekistan."

ACWA Power has a longstanding relationship with Chinese entities, dating back over 15 years, with investments from the Asian country in the company's projects exceeding $10 billion.

Pan Xinyuan, the general manager of the Bank of China, said: "I believe that the Belt and Road Initiative is in harmony with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. Bank of China will further leverage its strengths to support the cooperation between Saudi enterprises like ACWA Power and their Chinese partners for win-win objectives."

He added: "Looking ahead, Bank of China will continue to improve financial connectivity to push the Belt and Road economies on a track of sustainable and high-quality development."

Uzbekistan is ACWA Power's second-largest market in terms of investments, emphasizing its long-standing commitment to the country with a portfolio that includes 12 projects, 11 of which are fully renewable.



The payment is split equally between Chinese yuan and US dollars, marking the first loan cooperation deal by a bank from the Asian country using its native currency. File

ACWA Power has been collaborating with multiple countries to develop its plants.

Earlier this month, the company signed a $800 million agreement with Senegal's Ministry of Water to develop a desalination facility.

It announced the inking of a water purchase agreement for the construction of the facility in Dakar, Senegal in a statement on the Saudi stock exchange, Tadawul.

ACWA Power will be responsible for the infrastructure, design and financing as well as construction, operation and maintenance of the Grande Cote seawater desalination plant in the West African country.

We are delighted to deepen our cooperation with Bank of China to bring renewable energy at competitive tariffs to our key markets.
Abdulhameed Al-Muhaidib
ACWA Power CFO



The Saudi utility firm plans to lead the global energy transition, expanding to 20 countries and tripling its assets to $250 billion by 2030.

Raad Al-Saady, vice chairman, and managing director at ACWA Power, earlier told Arab News that the company is on course to grow its assets from $85 billion to $250 billion by 2030, following the strategy approved last year.

"We added $15 billion in assets to our portfolio last year, and we intend to continue to grow," Al-Saady said.

He added that the company aims to average $20 billion to $30 billion in assets under management annually from now until 2030 to achieve its goal.

Al-Saady further elaborated on ACWA Power's strategy to foster growth through localized initiatives in each country of operation.

"Our goal is to continue leading the market by enhancing local content, not just in Saudi Arabia but in every country where we operate."

HUMAN CAPITAL

stc Group top workplace in Saudi Arabia, study finds

Arab News Riyadh

Telecommunications major stc Group has been named the best workplace in Saudi Arabia by the professional networking platform LinkedIn.

According to a press statement, the firm was followed in second place by hospitality giga-project Red Sea Global, with energy giant Saudi Arabian Oil Co., also known as Aramco, ranked third.

Motor vehicle manufacturing company Ceer took fourth place on the list, while ROSHN, backed by the Kingdom's Public Investment Fund, and Riyad Bank, secured fifth and sixth spots, respectively.

"LinkedIn top companies is an annual list created by data on its platform, which will help professionals identify the top workplaces to grow their careers. The list uncovers the organizations leading the way in growth and learning opportunities for their employees, equity in the workplace, and strong company culture," according to the report.



Business consulting firm Bain & Co. was named the top organization in the UAE, followed by Mastercard and Procter & Gamble.

"This year's lists show how companies in the UAE and Saudi Arabia are continuing to grow and expand, which further cements the region's reputation as a leading business hub," said Salma Altantawy, senior news editor at LinkedIn.

She added: "Our research has previously indicated professionals' appetite for new career moves in 2024, and this list recognizes those employers that can be a top choice for professionals looking to make those moves."

Saudi Entertainment Ventures, also known as SEVEN, was named the 10th top company in Saudi Arabia, an indication of the sector's growth in the Kingdom.

"Entertainment companies Miral and Saudi Entertainment Ventures have joined the top 15 companies in the UAE and Saudi Arabia in 2024. Both companies took 10th place in their respective countries, which shows the rise of the entertainment industry across the region," said LinkedIn in the report.

According to the survey, a majority of regional professionals are considering switching jobs this year and the UAE has seen a growth in hiring over the last 12 months.

FASTFACTS

- **The firm was followed in second place by hospitality giga-project Red Sea Global, with energy giant Saudi Arabian Oil Co., also known as Aramco, ranked third.**
- **Motor vehicle manufacturing company Ceer took fourth place on the list, while ROSHN, backed by the Kingdom's Public Investment Fund, and Riyad Bank, secured fifth and sixth spots, respectively.**

OWNERSHIP

Saudi housing program benefits over 32k families in Q1

Arab News Riyadh

As many as 32,343 Saudi families benefited from Sakani's housing options during the first quarter of 2024, marking an annual 15 percent increase.

In collaboration with the Real Estate Development Fund and financial institutions, the program provides a variety of housing support packages to encourage first-time house buyers, including non-refundable financial assistance of SR100,000 ($26,659) or SR150,000.

The number of the Kingdom's households that purchased their first homes reached 25,391 in the first three months of the year, reflecting the objective of Sakani to offer a variety of residential options and financial solutions.

Founded in 2017 by the Saudi Ministry of Housing and the Real Estate Development Fund, the program aims to increase the proportion of families that own a home in the Kingdom to 70 percent by 2030, in line with the economic diversification strategy Vision 2030.

FASTFACT

25,391

The number of the Kingdom's households that purchased their first homes reached 25,391 in the first three months of the year, reflecting the objective of Sakani to offer a variety of residential options and financial solutions.

Figures from Sakani showed that the number of beneficiary households reached 12,184 in March, with 9,381 Saudi families obtaining their first residence.

In January, Sakani announced that more than 100,000 Saudi families benefited from the initiative in 2023, while the number of applicants who obtained their first home over that 12 month period reaching 98,475.

The core objectives of the Sakani initiative are to enable homeownership in the Kingdom by creating new housing stock, assigning plots and properties to citizens, and providing financing for their purchases.

The Sakani website and application provide a wide range of housing facilities and services, such as real estate consultancy, issuance of real estate transaction tax certificates and a display of financing institution rates.

It also provides electronic financing and the disbursement of land contracts, engineering design services, access to certified contractors, and additional services.

Business News



Employees work on an engine assembly line at an engine manufacturing factory in Qingzhou, in China's eastern Shandong province on Tuesday. AFP

PERFORMANCE

China's economy grew 5.3% in first quarter

Exports sank 7.5 percent in March compared to the previous year

Arab News Riyadh

China's economy grew faster than expected in the first quarter of the year with help from policies and stronger demand, though signs of weakness in the troubled housing market persisted.

The world's second-largest economy expanded at a 5.3 percent annual pace in January-March, beating analysts' forecasts of about 4.8 percent, data released on Tuesday showed. Compared to the previous quarter, the economy grew 1.6 percent.

China's economy has struggled to bounce back from the COVID-19 pandemic but gained momentum late last year as government policies to help the housing market and boost investment took effect.

However, Tuesday's better-than-expected data came days after China reported its exports sank 7.5 percent in March compared to the year before, while imports also weakened. Inflation cooled, reflecting deflationary pressures resulting from slack demand amid a crisis in the property sector.

Real estate

Investment in property developments fell 9.5 percent from a year earlier in January-March, compared with a decline of 9 percent in the previous quarter.

"The investment and sales of real estate in the first quarter are indeed not very optimistic. The real estate market is still in a process of adjustment," Sheng Laiyun, deputy commissioner of the National Bureau of Statistics, told reporters in Beijing.

Sheng also acknowledged that while growth was stronger than anticipated, it was uneven.

Infrastructure

Investment in infrastructure such as roads and bridges rose 6.5 percent year-on-year after a 6 percent increase in the previous quarter.

Fixed investment, in factories and equipment, grew 4.5 percent compared to the same period a year earlier, up from 4.2 percent in the previous quarter.

Coal output

China's coal output fell 4.2 percent in March, data showed, as miners cut back production on lower demand from power generators and ample inventories of the fuel limited stockpiling.

China produced 389.33 million tonnes of coal last month, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Tuesday. That brought output in the first quarter of the year to 1.11 billion tonnes, down 4.1 percent compared with the same period last year.

Domestic coal prices fell in March on oversupply and weak demand from marginal consumers in the steel and cement sectors as property development lags in China. Consumption from coal-fired power plants was also lower last month amid more moderate temperatures during the Northern Hemisphere spring and a lack of cooling demand, analysts and traders said.

Credit support

China is urging banks and financial institutions to increase credit support to the advanced manufacturing sector as part of efforts to become a powerhouse in goods from electric vehicles and wind turbines to aerospace components and semiconductors.

HIGHLIGHTS

6.5%
Investment in infrastructure rose 6.5 percent year-on-year after a 6 percent increase in the previous quarter.

4.5%
Fixed investment, in factories and equipment, grew 4.5 percent compared to the same period a year earlier.

9.5%
Investment in property developments fell 9.5 percent from a year earlier in January-March.

COLLABORATION

Microsoft to invest $1.5bn in UAE-based AI firm

Arab News Riyadh

Global tech giant Microsoft will invest $1.5 billion in the UAE-based artificial intelligence technology company G42.

As part of the deal, G42 will grant the US firm a minority stake and Brad Smith, Microsoft's vice chair and president, will join the Emirati firm's board of directors, according to a press release.

G42 will utilize Microsoft Azure to run its AI applications and services, partnering to deliver advanced solutions to global public sector clients and large enterprises.

Smith said: "Our two companies will work together not only in the UAE, but to bring AI and digital infrastructure and services to underserved nations."

He added: "We will combine world-class technology with world-leading standards for safe, trusted, and responsible AI, in close coordination with the governments of both the UAE and the US." The companies will collaborate to bring advanced AI and digital infrastructure to nations in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa, ensuring equitable access to services to address critical government and business concerns, while upholding high levels of security and privacy, the release added.

"Microsoft's investment in G42 marks a pivotal moment in our company's journey of growth and innovation, signifying a strategic alignment of vision and execution between the two organizations," said Tahnoon bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, chairman of G42.

"This partnership is a testament to the shared values and aspirations for progress, fostering greater cooperation and synergy globally," he added. The agreement also encompasses a $1 billion investment in a fund for developers, which aims to bolster the creation of a skilled and diverse AI workforce, as well as foster innovation and competitiveness for the UAE and the broader region.

"This partnership significantly enhances our international market presence, combining G42's unique AI capabilities with Micr soft's robust global infrastructure Together, we are not only expanding our operational horizons but also setting new industry standards for innovation," said Peng Xiao, group CEO of G42.

FASTFACTS

- G42 will grant the US firm a minority stake and Brad Smith, Microsoft's vice chair and president, will join the Emirati firm's board of directors.
- The UAE firm will utilize Microsoft Azure to run its AI applications and services, partnering to deliver advanced solutions to global public sector clients and large enterprises.
- The agreement also encompasses a $1 billion investment in a fund for developers, which aims to bolster the creation of a skilled and diverse AI workforce.

*Biz*Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Survey

German investor morale reaches two-year high

German investor morale brightened more than expected in April, reaching the highest level since March 2022, the ZEW economic research institute said on Tuesday.

The economic sentiment index rose to 42.9 points in April from 31.7 points in March.

"A recovering global economy is boosting expectations for Germany, with half of the respondents anticipating the country's economy to pick up over the next six months," said ZEW President Achim Wambach.

Contributing to the optimism were also the improved assessments of the situation and economic expectations in Germany's export destinations, Wambach said. The assessment of the economic situation in Germany, however, remained almost unchanged. It rose to minus 79.2 points from minus 80.5. **Reuters**

Produce

Ukraine's 2024 grain crop to fall about 10%

Ukraine's grain harvest is likely to fall to about 52 million tonnes this year from 58 million tonnes in 2023, mostly due to an expected smaller sowing area, the Farm Ministry said on Tuesday in its first official harvest forecast for 2024.

The ministry said last month that the sowing area for corn was likely to drop 4.5 percent to 3.863 million hectares this year from 4.043 million in 2023.

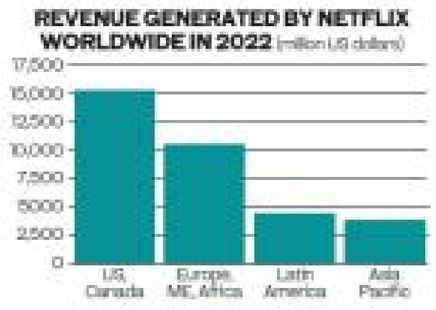
Farmers may also reduce the area sown for spring wheat and sunflowers, but are tipped to increase it for spring barley and soybeans.

The ministry's crop forecast shows the country could harvest 27 million tonnes of corn, 19 million tonnes of wheat and 5 million tonnes of barley this year.

Ukraine has not published final 2023 harvest results. **Reuters**

Chart of THE DAY

OTT platform Netflix generated the most revenue in the US and Canada in 2022.



Source: Statista

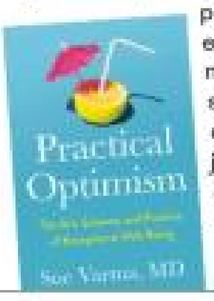
What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

Practical Optimism

SUE VARMA

Through her work with patients and combining philosophy, her own personal experience, and a review of the latest research in psychology, psychiatry, medicine, and neuroscience, Sue Varma discovered that the answer lies in cultivating an optimistic mindset that stays tethered to the real world and helps us make sound and reasonable decisions. This epiphany inspired "Practical Optimism," Varma's powerful program with eight pillars to help all of us experience a sense of meaning, mastery, and self-acceptance and create lives filled with joy and purpose, says a review published on goodreads.com.



Data

UK wage growth slows as BoE mulls rate cuts

British core wage growth slowed again, posting its weakest rise since the three months to September 2022 but remained strong by historical standards, according to official figures which are likely to be given a cautious welcome by the Bank of England.

Regular wages excluding bonuses grew by 6 percent in the three months to February compared with the same period a year earlier, down from an increase of 6.1 percent in the November-to-January period the Office for National Statistics said. A Reuters poll of economists had forecast growth in regular wages would slow by more to 5.8 percent. "The labor market continues to gradually cool but continued high wage growth underlines concerns over inflation persistence," Jack Kennedy, a senior economist at jobs platform Indeed, said. **Reuters**

Markets

Eurozone bond yields edge up after volatile days

Eurozone bond yields inched upward on Tuesday after rising at the start of the week on the back of strong US data and a fall in demand for safe assets.

Bond markets have become more volatile in recent days as a clear divergence has opened up between the US and European economics, while the rise in tensions between Israel and Iran has caused investors to switch in and out of government debt, which is seen as a safe haven during uncertainty.

Germany's 10-year bond yield, the benchmark for the eurozone, was up 2 basis points at 2.453 percent, within the 2.2 percent to 2.5 percent range it has traded in since early February. Yields move inversely to prices. **Reuters**

Follow Arab News Briefs all through the day @ArabNews

The Middle East is at the forefront of a major transformation in financial services delivery, driven by technology shifting from traditional to innovative solutions.

Khalifa Al-Shamsi
CEO at e& life



Corporate

PRESS RELEASES | FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

BUSINESS HUB

Central Park Towers, DIFC, takes office spaces to next level

Central Park Towers, the office and event destination in Dubai International Financial Centre, has announced the launch of Fitted Offices — Level 2, a significant addition to its portfolio of premium office spaces. Scheduled for unveiling this month, this new offering continues Central Park Towers' commitment to delivering unrivaled quality and convenience to businesses in the heart of DIFC.

Building on the success of Fitted Offices — Level 1, Fitted Offices — Level 2 comprises 15 meticulously designed units, ranging from 1,000 to 2,755 square feet, catering to a diverse range of business requirements. At the core of this new offering is a spacious tenant lounge, covering 1,863 square feet, mirroring the modern design and collaborative features of the Level 2 tenant lounge.

Nemo Stojanovic, director of leasing and marketing at Central Park Towers, DIFC, said: "Central Park Towers, DIFC continues to be the preferred destination for businesses due to our unwavering commitment to excellence in office spaces. Fitted Offices — Level 2 represents the next step in our journey, providing tenants with a superior workspace designed to meet their evolving needs."

Fitted Offices — Level 2 offers a host of features and amenities that enhance the tenant's experience. The thoughtfully designed floor-to-ceiling windows provide ample natural light, while direct elevator access to the offices ensures convenience for tenants. Access to the tenant lounge creates a collaborative environment, and the offices offer breathtaking views, providing an inspiring backdrop for success.

Similar to the Level 1 option, Fitted Offices — Level 2 eliminates the need for extensive construction or interior fit-outs. The spaces come complete with suspended ceilings, ambient lighting, air conditioning, premium flooring, and MEP installation. This turnkey solution empowers tenants to focus on their business priorities without the hassles of managing construction processes.

Tenants at Central Park Towers, DIFC, will also have access to the common lounge area, fostering networking and collaboration opportunities. Additionally, the convenience of free visitor parking for up to two hours enhances the accessibility and desirability of the location.

Central Park Towers, DIFC, is home to more than 190 companies, including the Ministry of Economy, Federal Tax Authority, Al-Tamimi and Co., Bank of Singapore, and Tabby. The building offers a vibrant lifestyle destination, with a wide array of dining options, lifestyle amenities, and cafes. Central Park Towers, DIFC, is more than just a residential and commercial office building. It also has plenty of event spaces that cater to numerous high-end ceremonies such as the Gov Games, Spartan Race, Gulf Business Awards, Kenzo, Pepsi, Chivas, Cavalli, Loewe, PlayStation, Sephora, and Audemars Piguet to name a few. The movie, Star Trek Beyond was also filmed there in 2015. It has been intentionally designed as a hub where smart office layouts, preferred residential apartments, and stylish leisure, dining, and retail ecosystems blend seamlessly to provide a highly desirable live-work environment. It has three floors of retail outlets with more than 30 brands in over 100,000 square feet of space.



FAST FACT

The movie 'Star Trek Beyond' was filmed at Central Park Towers, DIFC, in 2015.

Central Park Towers, DIFC, is home to more than 190 companies, including the Ministry of Economy, Federal Tax Authority, Al-Tamimi and Co, Bank of Singapore, and Tabby.

DIGITAL WELL-BEING

Kaspersky lists five tips to fight stress across social media

Stress Awareness Month, observed every April since 1992, serves as a critical reminder of the importance of managing stress for maintaining users' mental and physical health. Social media has emerged as a significant source of stress, contributing to the proliferation of anxiety and stress-related issues among users.

Besides the fact that social media can flood us with too much information and make us feel like we are missing out, it also exposes us to scammers who can use personal information for profit.

In order to minimize the negative impact of social networks on digital well-being, Kaspersky experts suggest five simple tips:

Enhancing Privacy

Appropriately configuring the privacy settings of online accounts is a crucial step toward safeguarding personal information and maintaining digital security. By customizing who can view a profile and posts, users can significantly reduce the risk of unwanted interactions with strangers who may have bad intentions.

Selective Connections

By limiting connections to people users know personally, they reduce the chances of encountering scammers and receiving harmful or malicious content. Encountering inappropriate content, such as scenes of violence or cruelty, can lead to discomfort; by controlling the digital environment through thoughtful acceptance of friend requests, customers contribute to a more positive and secure online experience.

Vigilance is Everything

Every link encountered on the internet should be approached with caution, even if it arrives via a personal message from a friend, since there is always a possibility that their account has been compromised. Behind seemingly harmless links on social media, phishing schemes often lurk, disguised to mimic legitimate websites. These deceptive sites are designed to trick users into disclosing sensitive information, such as passwords, financial details, and other personal data.

Strong Password

A weak password significantly simplifies the task for individuals with malicious intentions, making it easier for them to gain unauthorized access to social media accounts. A strong, complex password acts as a critical first line of defense against such threats.

Suspicious Activity

Online platforms are our allies in the quest for digital safety and tranquility, with a vested interest in the security and satisfaction of their users.

FINANCIAL INNOVATION

e& life joins Dubai Fintech Summit as sponsor

e& life, the business pillar of e& that brings the next-generation digital world to the consumer's fingertips, has joined the Dubai Fintech Summit, organized by Dubai International Financial Centre, the leading global financial center in the MEASA region.

The summit, scheduled for May 6-7, at Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai, will see an unprecedented gathering of more than 8,000 decision-makers, over 300 thought leaders and 200 exhibitors showcasing cutting-edge technologies.

As a "Powered By" sponsor, e& life is dedicated to supporting innovative and future-thinking businesses on a global scale.

e& life leverages cutting-edge technologies to offer fintech, entertainment, retail, and mobility services through its smart platforms and apps. Their fintech arm, e& money, has become a regional powerhouse, known for its user-friendly mobile financial services and its position as the UAE's fastest-growing issuer of Mastercard debit cards.

Mohammad Alblooshi, chief executive at DIFC Innovation Hub, said: "The path to true innovation lies in collaboration and the Dubai Fintech Summit strives to bring together global leaders, innovators and disruptive startups to shape the future of finance. The alliance between the summit and e& life demonstrates our mutual commitment to fostering a dynamic fintech ecosystem to strengthen Dubai's existing reputation as a leading business destination. Transforming challenges into opportunities, our goal is to create the most advanced, inclusive and technologically empowered financial community."



As a 'Powered By' sponsor, e& life is dedicated to supporting innovative and future-thinking businesses on a global scale.

NUMBER

8,000

decision-makers, over 300 thought leaders and 200 exhibitors will gather for the Dubai Fintech Summit.

Khalifa Al-Shamsi, chief executive at e& life, said: "The Middle East is at the forefront of a major transformation in financial services delivery, driven by technology shifting from traditional to innovative solutions. As a pioneer in the region's flourishing fintech sector, e& is driven by a bold vision to lead this change.

"Through strategic partnerships, we aim to fast-track progress and take the region's fintech potential to new heights. This partnership represents a valuable opportunity for both e& and its fintech portfolio under the business pillar e& life to collectively imagine new possibilities, inspire breakthrough ideas, and catalyze impactful innovations. By bringing together the talent and resources within our ecosystems, we can accelerate the journey toward a future where financial services truly empower people across societies. We look forward to contributing our expertise to shaping discussions that will steer the direction of the industry and play a role in realizing the UAE's aspiration to become a global hub for financial innovation."

Corporate Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Quality Care

Saudi charity opens dialysis unit with Kaaba view

A Saudi charity has launched a pioneering initiative, the first-of-its-kind in the nonprofit sector, by setting up the first kidney dialysis unit overlooking the Grand Mosque in Makkah.

This initiative, by the Berekom Charity, comes in line with the objectives of the Vision 2030 program and aims to enhance the quality of life for kidney patients during their pilgrimage. The new unit provides comprehensive healthcare services with a unique view from the Clock Tower.

Through this initiative, the Berekom Charity seeks to expand the scope of services provided to pilgrims.

Hisham Shali, chairman of the charity's board, said that the unit allows patients to perform their rituals with ease and care while receiving the service in a well-equipped place with a distinguished view of the Kaaba.

The new center is the charity's second, after the Shuaqiyah center, which provides 82 daily dialysis sessions to Makkah residents, pilgrims, and visitors.

AI Solutions

Al-Amal Exchange partners with Effiya Technologies

Al-Amal Exchange, a financial services brand in the UAE, has joined forces with Effiya Technologies in the ongoing battle against financial crime. Under the partnership, Al-Amal will adopt an intelligent, scalable, and dynamic solution that will proactively detect and prevent money laundering schemes before they can inflict harm. Effiya's expertise and smart artificial intelligence solutions will empower Al-Amal Exchange to mitigate its risks while setting higher standards of compliance and security.

Sulaiman Ismail Sherif, general manager of Al-Amal Exchange, said: "At Al-Amal Exchange, ensuring regulatory compliance and safeguarding our customers' interests remains our top concern. By leveraging Effiya's cutting-edge technology and AI enabled solution, we aim to set new standards in compliance effectiveness and efficiency. Together, we are poised to reshape the landscape of regulatory adherence for the exchange. The partnership is a timely initiative and a serious measure to ensure a secure financial environment."

Medical Innovation

Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi to host global summits

Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi, part of the M42 group, is set to host two global medical summits on complex oncology care and advancements this April. The Cleveland Clinic Global Summit on Innovations in Cancer Care and Frontiers in Advanced Hepato-Biliary Cancers and Transplant Oncology will convene more than 50 oncology and digestive diseases experts from Cleveland Clinic worldwide, affirming the hospital's pivotal role as a global force in medical education and innovation.

The inaugural event, the Cleveland Clinic Global Summit on Innovations in Cancer Care, scheduled from April 19-21 at the Four Seasons Hotel, Abu Dhabi, will be led by Dr. Faek Jamali, consultant surgical oncologist and colorectal surgeon at Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi.

ASIAN TOUR EVENT

Strong field tees it up for 2024 Saudi Open presented by PIF

Peter Uihlein, who plays for LIV Golf team RangeGoats GC, is making his first visit to Riyadh and expressed his excitement at playing in the Saudi capital

Arab News Riyadh

A strong field gathered for the 2024 Saudi Open presented by PIF, commencing Wednesday with Asian Tour, LIV Golf and DP World Tour stars teeing it up at Riyadh Golf Club

Thai star Denwit Boriboonsub won the 2023 Saudi Open in December in stunning fashion, but Henrik Stenson, Peter Uihlien and Haotong Li are the standout names hoping to dethrone him, as 144 players from 33 different countries fight for glory from April 17-20.

There are 20 Arab golfers from eight nations in the fold, including seven from Saudi Arabia, who have all been handed the opportunity to compete alongside some of the world's best players as golf continues to develop in the region. Golf&More will be on display at the course throughout the week with live DJ sessions at sunset, special activities for children and the authentic Sajah Bazaar giving fans the opportunity to immerse themselves in local culture.

Peter Uihlein, who plays for LIV Golf team RangeGoats GC, is making his first visit to Riyadh and expressed his excitement at playing in the Saudi capital. The American believes it will be an action-packed four rounds, filled with low scores and plenty of birdies.

Uihlein said: "I watched the 2023 Saudi Open on TV in December and the Aramco Series Ladies International recently and I saw a lot of low scores, so I am hoping for a tournament full of birdies. It does depend how much the wind blows, but hopefully it dies down later in the week.

"It's my first time in Riyadh, having been to Jeddah a few times, and I'm excited about it. I spoke to Othman [Almulla] about how many courses are planned and the ones they are already building around the Kingdom. It is really cool to be here.



Defending champion Thai star Denwit Boriboonsub heads a star-studded field assembled for the Saudi Open. File/AFP

"I feel like the stuff I am working on is getting better and better, and I feel a little bit sharper as the weeks go on. It is why I'm here — to carry on working on my game ahead of LIV Adelaide and LIV Singapore."

Chinese sensation Haotong Li is a four-time DP World Tour winner and has chosen to play in the 2024 Saudi Open presented by PIF to experience the continued growth of the game in the Kingdom.

Li said: "I want to see different golf courses to the ones I have played previously and to visit new parts of the world. It's extremely exciting to play this week and do something special. I am truly honored to be here and be a part of growing the game as big as possible. Hopefully, everybody starts to fall in love with golf."

Golf Saudi CEO Noah Alireza spoke to gathered media ahead of the tournament and stressed the importance of the 2024 Saudi Open presented by PIF's commitment to handing opportunities to national and regional players.

Alireza said: "We are delighted to welcome a strong field to the 2024 Saudi Open presented by PIF following its first staging on the Asian Tour last year and I am certain that this week will prove a success with exciting golf on show at Riyadh Golf Club.

"The opportunity that the Saudi Open presents to all of the competitors, but particularly to the seven Saudi nationals and the 13 other Arab golfers in the field, is one of the main driving forces behind our desire to host this tournament in Riyadh. Playing alongside the best Asian Tour players, plus a number of LIV Golf and DP World Tour members, helps them understand what it takes to reach this level and is a vital part of their golf education. It is a key part of Golf Saudi's commitment to golf in our country."

PARIS 2024

Paris presents the latest in long history of curious Olympic mascots

Jonathan Gornall Dubai

On Monday, the Olympic flame was lit in Greece, and the traditional torch began its 68-stage three-month journey to Paris, where it will arrive on July 25 to signal the start the following day of the Games of the XXXIII Olympiad.

As the torch relay travels the length of France, and global interest in the Olympics grows daily over the next three months, one question above all others will be puzzling sports fans around the world.

What on earth is that peculiar mascot Paris has chosen to represent itself on the world stage?

The answer is a hat — or, more specifically, a Phrygian cap, as modeled by Marianne, symbol of the French Revolution.

Captured in oils in an 1830 painting by Eugene Delacroix, on show in the Louvre, Marianne and her hat are omnipresent in France, represented in busts and statues throughout the nation and pictured on coins and stamps.

Traditionally, Olympic mascots have either been animals or invented creatures of some sort.

But in a minor revolution of its own, 235 years after the storming of the Bastille, the Paris Olympic committee has gone in a different direction.

Instead, it has chosen to animate an object — not, as most people might have assumed, the Eiffel Tower (too predictable and, some might argue, too identifiable) but a piece of historic millinery.

Meet the "Phryges" (pronounced "freej" — the "s" is silent.)

There are two of the things, decked out in red, white and blue, with one sporting a running blade on its right leg to symbolize the Paralympics.

In the official online Olympic shop, they are available as plush toys or printed variously on backpacks, T-shirts, hoodies, mugs, tote bags, caps, water bottles, badges, lunch boxes. You can even buy an actual Phrygian cap, although regrettably only in infant size.

What has revolution got to do with the Olympics? Simple, says the committee behind the Phryges: "As Paris 2024's vision is to demonstrate that sport can change lives, the mascots will be playing a major role by leading a revolution through sport."



Official Olympic Phryges mascots are displayed in the headquarters of the Paris 2024 Organizing Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, in Saint-Denis, outside Paris. AFP

FAST FACT

This summer's offering, a Phrygian cap, stands apart from the traditional animals and invented creatures of past games.

To scholars of ancient history, the hat is also a symbol of 18th-century cultural appropriation.

Although it came to symbolize the French Revolution, the Phrygian cap was worn originally in ancient Phrygia, a kingdom that thrived between 1200 and 700 BCE in the center of what is today Turkiye.

There is a funny thing about Olympic mascots. Including Paris, there have been 28 of the things since 1968, when the very first one appeared, but most people would be hard pressed to remember any of them.

It has not been for want of trying on behalf of the organizing committees — there have been some very peculiar offerings.

Take "Miraitowa," the mascot of the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. Remember him — or it?

A subtle blend of "traditional and futurist style," Miraitowa embodied "both the old and the new, echoing the concept of innovation from harmony."

One of 2,042 submitted designs, it was chosen in a poll of Japanese primary school children.

In 2014, Russia played it relatively straight and, perhaps unable to settle on a single mascot, chose three for the winter games in Sochi: a hare, a polar bear and a leopard, for no apparent reason.

It was certainly a welcome break from London's surreal offering in 2012.

"Wenlock" was a baffling confection of obscure references — a metallic look explained by the fact that he was, supposedly, "made from one of the last drops of steel used to build the Olympic Stadium," the light on his head reminiscent of that found on London's famous black cabs, and the shape of his forehead "identical to that of the Olympic Stadium roof."

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

After flooding, heavy rain

AFC Champions League semis put off in UAE

The first leg of the Asian Champions League semifinal between Al-Ain of the UAE and Saudi Arabia's Al-Hilal has been postponed from Tuesday to Wednesday after torrential rain brought floods to the host country.

The Asian Football Confederation made the decision after thunderstorms pounded the UAE, flooding out portions of major highways and closing roads and bridges. The UAE's national federation had earlier called off all local soccer games.

The game is now set to be played at 8 p.m. local time (1600 GMT) on Wednesday at the Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium in Al Ain. **AP**

Rejected as a child

Kane on a revenge mission vs. Arsenal

Harry Kane was released by Arsenal when he was 9 years old. He has been on a revenge mission ever since.

The England captain has scored 15 goals in 20 appearances in all competitions against Arsenal — first as a Tottenham player and now while at Bayern Munich — and will look to add to that record in the second leg of the Champions League quarterfinals.

Bayern held Arsenal to a 2-2 draw in the first leg in London last week, with Kane scoring.

He opened up Tuesday about his feelings when playing against Arsenal after being rejected as a kid.

"Up until this year, I've played them at least twice a year for the last 10 years," Kane said at a news conference ahead of Wednesday's game at the Allianz Arena. "It was always a big occasion, a big moment." **AP**



After COVID absence

Pride, hype as F1 roars back to China

Two years ago the Shanghai International Circuit hosted a COVID hospital, but this weekend it will stage Formula One once more as the sport returns to China for the first time since the pandemic.

Adding to the excitement of fans, they will see Shanghai native Zhou Guanyu drive at his home track in Formula One for the first time. "I'm extremely excited, in these 5,000 years of (Chinese) history there has only been one Zhou Guanyu," said fan Wang Xiaotian. Shanghai last witnessed an F1 race in 2019. Tickets for the action-packed Formula One weekend, which begins with Friday practice, sold out within minutes of going on sale in January. **AFP**

Follow Arab News Briefs all through the day @ArabNews



Coming off a surprise appearance during Tyler, the Creator's headlining Coachella set over the weekend, Donald Glover has announced two new Childish Gambino albums, the second of which will be the actor-singer-creator's final album released under that stage name.

& Finally

The Six

Cinema Nights

Cinema Nights are back at Diriyah, Riyadh, courtesy of the Red Sea Film Foundation. Here are six films you can catch until May.



'Nocturnes' (April 18)

A hypnotic documentary about moths – from co-directors Anirban Dutta and Anupan Srinivasan – unfolds to reveal climate change concerns.



'After the Long Rains' (April 25)

The Kenyan film is an exquisite coming-of-age story about Aisha (Electricer Kache Hamisi), a 10-year-old girl who dreams of becoming an actress.



'Norah' (May 2)

The debut feature film from Saudi writer-director Tawfik Alzaidi, set in Saudi Arabia in the 90s, is a deeply moving story about two soulmates.



'Jane' (May 9)

Set to a rich orchestral score from legendary composer Philip Glass, the film offers an intimate portrait of conservationist Jane Goodall.



'Thiiird' (May 16)

In a village outside Beirut, a mechanic receives many visitors who need to repair their cars. He soon realizes that he not only has to fix their cars but has to fix them as well.



'Iraq's Invisible Beauty' (May 23)

Latif Al-Ani photographed Iraq for 30 years before multiple wars arose. At the age of 86, he travels through his devastated country in search of the people and places he photographed at the time.



Eiza Gonzalez turned heads at the premiere of the Saudi-backed action movie 'The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare' alongside Saudi Arabia's Red Sea Film Foundation CEO Mohammed Al-Turki, pictured center-left. Getty Images

CLOSE UP

Eiza Gonzalez stuns at premiere of Saudi-backed film

Arab News Dubai

Mexican actress and singer Eiza Gonzalez this week turned heads at the premiere of the Saudi-backed action movie "The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare" in New York City.

The star dazzled in a metallic gold strapless gown by New York-based label Jason Wu. The dress boasted intricate three-dimensional designs accentuating the waist and chest.

Complementing the ensemble, she showed off matching gold heels from Maison Ernest and Cartier jewelry. Her brunette bob was styled in a voluminous blowout.

She posed on the red carpet alongside her co-stars Henry Cavill, Henry Golding, Hero Fiennes Tiffin, Cary Elwes, Babs Olusanmokun, Henrique Zaga and producer Jerry Bruckheimer.

The premiere was attended by Mohammed Al-Turki, film producer and CEO of Saudi Arabia's Red Sea Film Foundation.

The Saudi foundation, which backed the movie, took to Instagram to share pictures of the premiere captioning the post: "Live from New York, the premiere for 'The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare,' Red Sea Film Foundation is proud to have supported through its Red Sea International Film Financing initiative."

Based on recently declassified files of the British War Department and inspired by true events, the movie is an action-comedy that tells the story of the first-ever special forces organization formed during WWII by UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill and a small group of military officials, including James Bond author Ian Fleming.

The top-secret combat unit, composed of a motley crew of rogues and mavericks, goes on a daring mission against the Nazis using entirely unconventional and utterly "ungentlemanly" fighting techniques. Ultimately, their audacious approach changed the course of the war and laid the foundation for the British SAS and modern Black Ops warfare.

The film is directed and co-written for the screen by Guy Ritchie ("Sherlock Holmes," "The Gentlemen" and "Wrath of Man") and produced by Jerry Bruckheimer ("Top Gun: Maverick," "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "National Treasure").

"The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare" will be released in cinemas in the Middle East on April 18 and internationally on April 19.

NEW FILM

Jonathan Bailey approached for 'Jurassic World'

Arab News Dubai

"Wicked" and "Bridgerton" star Jonathan Bailey is in talks to star in Universal's "Jurassic World," opposite Scarlett Johansson, who has already been cast in the movie.

Gareth Edwards is set to direct the feature with a script from "Jurassic Park" writer David Koepp.

Amblin Entertainment is partnering with Universal on the movie, which continues the world created by novelist Michael Crichton and originally adapted for the big screen by Steven Spielberg in 1993's "Jurassic Park."

Bailey plays the prince, Fiyero, in "Wicked," and appeared at CinemaCon last week during Universal's presentation.



Keanu Reeves

GAME TO SCREEN

Keanu Reeves joins 'Sonic 3'

Arab News Dubai

Keanu Reeves has moved on to yet another franchise, with the "John Wick" star joining "Sonic the Hedgehog 3." He will be voicing the popular character named Shadow, according to The Hollywood Reporter.

The news comes on the heels of a jam-packed CinemaCon presentation from Paramount last week, when the studio debuted the first footage of "Sonic 3." This included the revelation that Dr. Robotnik, played by Jim Carrey, was depressed and out of shape after the events of "Sonic 2," but gets his groove back thanks to creating Shadow the Hedgehog, a character that is dark and edgy, while mirroring the hero Sonic's powers.

The "Sonic" movie franchise dates back to 2020's "Sonic the Hedgehog," which overperformed making $319 million globally, becoming a breakout hit in the video game movie space. "Sonic 2" followed in 2022. Director Jeff Fowler is behind all three installments, in which voice star Ben Schwartz plays Sonic opposite James Marsden as Tom Wachowski, a human pal of Sonic's.

INTERVIEW

New York-based artist paints the tales of female immigrants in Dubai

Rebecca Anne Proctor Dubai

Inside NIKA Project Space, a new gallery in Dubai's Al-Khayat Avenue, are epic large-scale watercolor triptychs by New York-based artist Katya Muromtseva. Titled "Over the Slopes of Speech," and showing until May 4, each work tells the story of immigrant women in Dubai. Some works capture scenes of women in dreamy landscapes carrying chairs over the heads, while others focus on their profiles in haunting yet uplifting portrayals.

The watercolors are based on interviews Muromtseva had with women from countries including Ukraine, Turkmenistan, Russia, Kuwait, Palestine, Nigeria and Ghana to explore themes of resilience, identity and personal and collective memory. Some works are even accompanied by a small pamphlet with the full interview between Muromtseva and the woman.



Large-scale watercolor triptychs by New York-based artist Katya Muromtseva are currently on show in Dubai. Supplied

The works are ambitious in scale for the medium of watercolor. The subjects in each work are painted in mesmerizing vibrant hues of ochres, lapis lazuli blues, lime and emerald greens and grid-like black lines.

"When we move somewhere, we change so much," the artist told Arab News. "For me, these symbolize a dialogue from our present self with our past self. That's why sometimes the works have two figures and sometimes even three figures in conversation." The figures serve as a connection with the theme of immigration as much as with the idea of the past and present collective and personal self."

Muromtseva began the project three years ago when she moved to New York for graduate school.

"I started meeting these women and interviewing them about their situations and what led them to be where they are. I did around 10 to 15 interviews with women from Kazakhstan, Mexico, Africa and Ukraine."

She began by asking the women such questions as "'when did you start feeling that your life is influenced by bigger historical events that you cannot control?' History is usually written by politicians or historians influenced by politics, so I wanted to explore how history could be written by its actors instead."