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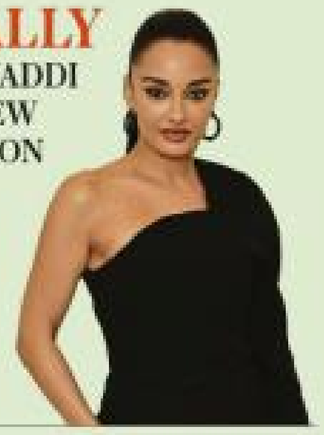
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49TH ANNIVERSARY

ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

WEDNESDAY, April 24, 2024
Shawwal 15, 1445
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SINCE 1975

The White House said it would 'have to see real progress' before restoring its funding to UNRWA, the UN aid agency for Palestinians, operating in war-torn Gaza.



Palestinians rush to landing humanitarian aid packages dropped over the northern Gaza Strip on Tuesday. AFP

FAMINE RISK 'VERY HIGH'

Hezbollah launches deepest attack into Israel since start of Gaza war

Protests roiling US colleges escalate with arrests, new encampments and closures

Najia Houssari Beirut

Lebanon's Hezbollah group said on Tuesday it had launched a drone attack against Israeli military bases north of the city of Acre, in its deepest strike into Israeli territory since the war began.

The focus of the attack was the headquarters of the Golani Brigade at the Shraga barracks, north of the city of Acre.

Hezbollah said it had acted in retaliation for an earlier Israeli attack killing one of its fighters.

A security source told Arab News that the attack was "a sensitive targeting."

The area struck is more than 15 km from the border with Lebanon. "This targeting took place in broad daylight while the Israelis were celebrating the Jewish Passover," the source said.

Videos on social media showed explosions and smoke rising north of the coastal city of Acre, with beachgoers fleeing in all directions.

A few hours later, Israeli warplanes carried out an airstrike on the town of Hanin, 7 km north of Bint Jbeil. It destroyed a two-story family house, killing a woman and a girl from the same family.

Meanwhile, an Israeli military drone struck a car between the towns of Adloun and Al-Kharayeb, killing Hussein Ali Azqul, who reports suggested was an engineer working in Hezbollah's air defense unit.

The group was left mourning a second member, Mohammed Khalil Attiya, from Qana, who died from injuries received a few days ago.

Meanwhile, the Israel-Hamas war protests creating friction at universities across the US escalated as some colleges encouraged students to attend classes remotely and dozens faced charges after setting up tents on campuses and ignoring official requests to leave.

The protests had been bubbling for months but kicked into a higher gear after more than 100 pro-Palestinian demonstrators who had camped out on Columbia University's upper Manhattan campus were arrested last week.

Police said 133 protesters were taken into custody after a protest at New York University and all had been released with summonses to appear in court on disorderly conduct charges.

In Connecticut, police arrested 60 protesters — including 47 students — at Yale University, after they refused to leave an encampment on Beinecke Plaza.

Washington's special regional envoy for humanitarian issues said the risk of famine throughout Gaza, especially in the north, is "very high."

David Satterfield said Israel must do everything possible to facilitate efforts to avert a famine and called for more to be done to get aid to those in need, particularly in the north.

INSIDE

- **Related reports** Pages 6 & 7
- **Opinion by Osama Al-Sharif, Kerry Boyd Anderson, Yossi Mekelberg & Chris Doyle** Pages 9 & 10

THREATS CONTINUE

Houthi attacks on ships in Red Sea appear to be on hold

Saeed Al-Batati Al-Mukalla

Despite ongoing threats by Houthi leaders in Yemen that they will continue to attack international shipping in the Red Sea, the number of strikes on vessels has drastically fallen in recent weeks.

The group has not claimed credit for any assaults on ships since April 10. Analysts speculate that the militia might be running out of missiles and drones, or airstrikes on Houthi targets by the US and UK could have damaged their launchers.

Since November, the Houthis have launched hundreds of drones, ballistic missiles and remotely controlled and explosive-laden boats at international commercial and naval ships in the Red Sea, Bab Al-Mandab Strait and the Gulf of Aden.

They say they are acting in support of the Palestinian people and the aim is to force Israel to allow more humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip.

Compared with the early days of their campaign, the Houthis have claimed credit for significantly fewer assaults this month, and international marine agencies have reported a decline in the number of strikes.

Despite the decline in attacks on shipping, the Houthis' Political Office said on Monday it had instructed its military forces to escalate attacks in the Red Sea and Arabian Sea on ships linked to or bound for Israel in response to "genocide crimes" committed by Israel against Palestinians in Gaza.

Mohammed Al-Basha, an expert on the Middle East with the Navanti research group in the US, cautioned that the extended period without any claims of attacks does not necessarily mean the Houthis have halted their attacks in the Red Sea.

Yemeni military analyst Brig. Gen. Mohammed Al-Kumaim suggested airstrikes in recent months by US and UK forces might have diminished the capability of the Houthis to launch attacks, and said the group might be settling into a war of attrition.

The Brief

MADINAH FORUM

Over the past two years, more than 19 million people have visited Rawda Al-Sharif, along with a significant number of historical sites in Makkah and Madinah, a forum was told on Tuesday. **P4**

QATAR EMIR'S VISIT

Bangladesh and Qatar signed 10 cooperation agreements as the Gulf state's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani made his first official visit to Dhaka. **P8**

CHINESE CARS

The entry of Chinese car models in the Middle East could drive regional electric vehicle sales, as global figures are projected to reach 17 million units by 2024. **P12**

WEATHER WARNING

Riyadh, outskirts likely to witness heavy rains from Friday to Tuesday

Weathermen forecast wet week for Makkah, Jazan, Asir, Baha, Eastern Province and Riyadh regions

Rashid Hassan Riyadh

Saudi Arabia is set to receive more rainfall toward the weekend, with Riyadh and its outskirts likely to witness heavy rains from Friday to next Tuesday.

In addition, the National Center for Meteorology said on Tuesday: "May forecasts indicate a chance of higher than average rainfall."

More rain is forecast this week in Makkah, Jazan, Asir, Baha, the Eastern Province, and regions in Riyadh, the NCM added.

Makkah and the surrounding areas are set to experience heavy showers, while Riyadh, Wadi Al-Dawasir, and Al-Sulayil will receive medium rainfall. Southern regions like Jazan, Najran, Asir, and Baha will be impacted by medium to heavy rainfall, with Jazan and Asir expected to receive torrential rain and strong winds. Saudi Arabia's General Directorate of Civil Defense has issued weather warnings and safety instructions.



The National Center for Meteorology said that May forecasts indicate a chance of higher than average rainfall. AN photo by Basheer Saleh

Its message, which has been sent to residents, said: "Forecasts from the NCM indicate that there will be moderate to heavy rainfall in the Riyadh region (Riyadh, Diriyah, Muzahmiyah, Al-Harij, Al-Kharj, Hotat Bani Tamim, Al-Majmaah, Thadiq, Marat, Al-Ghat, Al-Zulfi, Shaqraa, and Huraymila).

"The Civil Defense calls on everyone to take caution and adhere to its instructions. Your cooperation and your safety is our goal."

The NCM has also warned of high-speed winds that may cause sandstorms, further complicating the situation. Consequently, the Civil Defense has urged the public to stay at home during the severe weather and avoid going to valleys and waterlogged areas, while adhering to all safety directives.

The UAE, Oman, and Bahrain were hit by heavy storms last week that saw high levels of rainfall.

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It was an honor to host the future stars of fencing in the Kingdom and witness the intense competition, skill, respect and sporting behavior on display.

Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Faisal
Saudi sports minister

Radar

KSA today



Diriyah

Cooking workshop

Combining cooking, poetry, and storytelling, "Cooking from a Migrant Memory" recreates recipes from Filipino curators and artists from the diaspora with the arts collective Sa Tahanan Co. The workshop is taking place at the Britto Arts Trust in Diriyah from April 25-27. More details are available on biennale.org.sa.



Jeddah

Create memories

Experience horseback riding along the beach plus a photo session, time to relax, delicious food and games. For more details or to book, use the Visit Saudi app.



Diriyah

Cinema night

Enjoy a night with friends and family watching "After the Long Rains," a film that follows the story of 10-year-old dreamer Aisha, who aspires to become an actress and tries her best to find the means to go to Europe to live her dream. The movie will be displayed in the Auditorium in Diriyah on April 25. For more information, check biennale.org.sa.



AlUla

Camel Cup

Returning to AlUla on April 24-27, the hotly anticipated camel racing event promises to be a thrilling showcase of speed, skill and tradition featuring top riders and the finest camels from across the region. For more details, check experiencealula.com.

The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Saudi Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Waleed Elkhereiji met Honduran Foreign Minister Eduardo Enrique Reina in the country's capital city, Tegucigalpa, on Tuesday.

During the meeting, they discussed Saudi-Honduras relations and ways to strengthen them, along with prominent regional and international issues, the Saudi Foreign Ministry said on X.

The two ministers also signed a general framework agreement for coooperation between the Kingdom and Honduras.

The meeting was attended by Saudi Arabia's nonresident ambassador to Honduras, Haitham bin Hassan Al-Maliki, and the director general of the deputy minister's office, Mutashar Al-Enezi.

What's Trending

Today's hot topics explained by ***Afshan Aziz***



DIAMOND-CERTIFIED

Rihanna

Rihanna has once again made music history by achieving diamond certification for her 2012 hit single "Diamonds," making it her third song to join the elite Diamond Record Club recognized by the Recording Industry Association of America.

The news was shared by Roc Nation, acknowledging Rihanna's previous diamond-certified tracks "Love the Way You Lie" featuring Eminem in 2010 and "We Found Love" in collaboration with Calvin Harris in 2011.

"Diamonds" was released as the lead single of Rihanna's seventh studio album, "Unapologetic," and made a significant impact on various music charts. Notably, it became Rihanna's 12th No. 1 hit on the Billboard Hot 100, maintaining the top spot for an impressive three weeks.

The song's success extended to other charts as well, including a one-week reign on the Billboard Dance Club Songs chart, a remarkable 14-week dominance on the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart, and a 10-week run atop the Rhythmic Airplay chart.

Co-written by the talented Sia, "Diamonds" showcased Rihanna's artistry and musical versatility, capturing audiences worldwide and solidifying her status as a chart-topping artist with an extraordinary track record of hit singles that resonate across genres and generations.

Fans expressed their congratulations and words of encouragement for Rihanna on the X platform.

UNFAZED AND UNBOTHERED

Kim Kardashian

During her appearance on Jimmy Kimmel Live, Kim Kardashian addressed internet rumors amid speculation that the presumed diss track, "thanK you aIMee," on Taylor Swift's latest album, "The Tortured Poets Department," is about her.

The 43-year-old reality star seemed unfazed during the interview, which notably avoided any questions related to Swift's music.

Instead, Kardashian discussed her new SKIMS products and reminisced about glamorous childhood experiences, such as being neighbors with Madonna and celebrating her 14th birthday at Michael Jackson's Neverland ranch.

Host Kimmel shot off a lightning round of questions about internet rumors concerning Kardashian, with many of them confirmed as true by the star.

"You sleep with your eyes slightly open?" Kimmel asked.

"I do!" Kardashian confirmed. "There's footage because my sisters have taken videos and pictures."

The reality star also shared quirky habits like hating the sound and feel of cardboard, blow-drying her jewelry before wearing it, and washing her feet every night before bed.

While Kardashian's personal routines made headlines, Swift's fans, known as Swifties, dissected the lyrics of the song "thanK you aIMee," which tells the story of a hometown bully inflicting pain on the narrator, who finds strength through the hardship.

Swift's lyrics reframe the experiences and change the bully's name to protect their identity, yet ironically, the song title spells the name "Kim" in capital letters. The song concludes with a powerful message about resilience and personal growth in the face of adversity.

The ongoing feud between Swift and Kardashian dates back to a public disagreement involving Kanye West's song "Famous" in 2016, when Kardashian was still married to West. Kardashian released a manipulated video of a phone call between West and Swift discussing a lyric, leading to a misunderstanding.

Swift later clarified the situation, revealing the impact it had on her career and mental health. Fans speculate that Swift's new music also hints at her past relationships and current romance with Travis Kelce.



Today's Number

$492m

Saudi Arabia's Social Development Bank has provided financing worth SR1.85 billion ($492 million) "to support and enable individuals and establishments to contribute to economic development, and to continue efforts towards sustainable national development," the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development Ahmed Al-Rajhi reported on X.

Who's Who



Abdulrahman Abaalkhail

Abdulrahman Abaalkhail is the CEO of Dan Co., a Public Investment Fund company dedicated to promoting agritourism, ecotourism, and adventure tourism in Saudi Arabia.

As CEO, he uses his expertise in strategic planning, business model design, investment and business development, operations management, and project delivery to guide the company's growth and achieve its strategic objectives.

Under his leadership, the company offers top-notch agritourism, ecotourism, and adventure tourism experiences, fostering the development of a robust local tourism industry that drives positive change and contributes to the growth of the Kingdom's hospitality sector.

In addition to his role with Dan Co., Abdulrahman Abaalkhail currently serves as chairman of the board at Al-Fadhili Housing Co. (a joint venture between Masic Logistics and Saudi Aramco), chairman of the board at Mumtalakat (a joint venture between Al Akaria, PECSA, and POSCO Korea), vice chairman at Alrajhi Ekhwan, and as an investment committee member at Maharah Human Resources and Awj Holding Co.

Throughout his career, he has held board and committee member positions at several organizations, including Abdullah Al-Othaim Investment Co., Almutlaq Real Estate Investment Company, and Sand Saudi Arabia.

Abaalkhail was CEO of MASIC Logistics from 2020 to 2022 and of Almutlaq Real Estate Investment Co. between 2013 and 2020.

Previously, he served as group head of business development at Al-Faisaliah Group Holding for four years.

The Region

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Jeddah

- Enjoy a run with family and friends at the lowest point on Earth as part of the Dead Sea Ultra Marathon. On April 26, runners can choose between a 50, 21, and 10-km race, while on May 3, children can run a small marathon at King Al-Hussein Park in Amman. For registration and more details, check calendar.jo.
- An unforgettable night of entertainment awaits everyone on April 26 as the legendary Amr Diab is set to perform live at the Dana Amphitheatre in Bahrain. Tickets are available on the manama.platinumlist.net.
- Led by Calligrapher Hussein Ammar Ahmed, the Nasta'liq Script workshop will teach Mir Ali Tabrizi's Arabic calligraphy style. The workshops will run until April 27 at the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar. Find more details at mia.org.qa.
- Discover the fascinating world of spider silk at the Golden Spider Silk exhibition, which explores the rare material produced by Madagascar's indigenous golden orb-weaver spiders. Held at the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar, the exhibition will run until July 6. Check mia.org.qa for more information.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

April 24	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	04:34	05:54	12:19	03:42	06:44	08:14
Madinah	04:29	05:51	12:20	03:48	06:48	08:18
Riyadh	04:01	05:23	11:52	03:20	06:20	07:50
Abha	04:29	05:47	12:09	03:25	06:30	08:00
Dammam	03:43	05:07	11:38	03:09	06:09	07:39

These achievements reflect the filmmakers' passion for crafting captivating stories that are deeply embedded in our culture.

Mohammed Al-Turki
CEO of the Red Sea Film Festival



Spotlight

SAUDI ARABIA

Local talent, global platform

Resumption of movie screening after decades-long ban has unlocked endless opportunities in cinema-loving Kingdom

Rebecca Anne Proctor Riyadh

This month, Saudi Arabia marks six years of movie screenings after a 35-year gap. Back then, the idea of a flourishing domestic film industry seemed improbable. Today, it has become a reality.

Since cinemas reopened on April 18, 2018, multiplexes have prospered, with accumulative box office revenues hitting almost $1 billion. Even the closures of the pandemic years were not enough to halt the industry's meteoric rise.

Cities across the Kingdom now boast their own world-class movie theaters, screening the latest international blockbusters, regional hits and domestic productions, while homegrown filmmaking capability is now routinely spotlighted at local film festivals.

With the launch of the Red Sea Film Festival in December 2021 and the establishment in 2020 of the Saudi Film Commission under the Ministry of Culture, many Saudis who were working in production houses overseas are now relocating to the Kingdom.

"The year 2018 marked a significant turning point for Saudi filmmakers and audiences as well," Saudi film producer Mohammed Al-Turki, who was named CEO of the Red Sea Film Festival in 2022, told Arab News.

"The Saudi box office is growing rapidly. These achievements reflect the filmmakers' passion for crafting captivating stories that are deeply embedded in our culture and resonate with an engaged local audience."

The Red Sea Film Foundation, which was created in 2019, has become a catalyst for the industry's expansion, staging one of the Middle East's biggest film festivals in partnership with other major gatherings in the world cinema calendar.

RSFF has developed a variety of programs and initiatives specifically tailored to filmmakers from the Arab world, Africa, and Asia, with a special focus on Saudi filmmakers.

"Our programs include the Red Sea Fund, which offers financial support to film projects at various stages from development through to post-production," said Al-Turki. "The Red Sea Labs provide a range of training workshops and courses for filmmakers."

Additionally, the Red Sea Souk acts as a networking hub, providing numerous developmental programs.

"Among our recent successful initiatives is our collaboration with the Series Mania festival, which has enabled several promising Saudi filmmakers to advance their television projects and gain exposure at one of the world's foremost television festivals," said Al-Turki.

"We continue to launch many value-adding programs aimed at nurturing rising Saudi talent."

The Kingdom has established several initiatives to support the industry. Most recently, a SR375 million ($1 million) Saudi Film Fund was unveiled by the government's Cultural Development Fund in partnership with local investment firm MEFIC Capital and Rosa Media Ventures, a holding company that promotes local media projects and talent.

The fund will collaborate with major international studios to invest in film production that provides content reflecting Saudi culture and values.





Since cinemas, above and below, reopened, the Red Sea Film Festival, main, and similar entities have helped homegrown talent, bottom left and bottom right, to create award winning movies like 'Norah' (2023), inset. AFP/Reuters/AN photo

Such government initiatives are also spurring the private sector. In 2023, Syed Ali launched 40Films KSA to work with local and international clients.

"This cinematic renaissance has made a positive impact on our business, fueling commitment to nurture more and meet the top standards being set daily in the market," Ali, a Pakistani businessman based in Riyadh, told Arab News.

"The Kingdom is not just a consumer of global cinema; it is a creator, contributing its unique voice to the rich tapestry of world cinema. Saudi filmmakers are narrating stories that captivate audiences both at home and around the globe."



Saudi filmmaker Mujtaba Saeed says he has also benefited from the boom in the Saudi entertainment industry and will begin shooting a film in the Eastern Province at the end of this year.

The film, titled "Drowning," will be funded by the Red Sea Film Festival, the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, and the Saudi Film Commission. "Without this support I would not have been able to shoot the film," Saeed told Arab News.

"The great developments in the Saudi film industry have greatly contributed to the growth of my work as a young director. Through increased opportunities for collaboration and greater support I have access to resources and support that were previously unavailable to me."

During the Cannes Film Festival in 2022, the Saudi Film Commission announced an incentive program aimed at transforming the Kingdom into a global hub for film production. This included 40 percent returns for productions that hired local crews, among other initiatives.

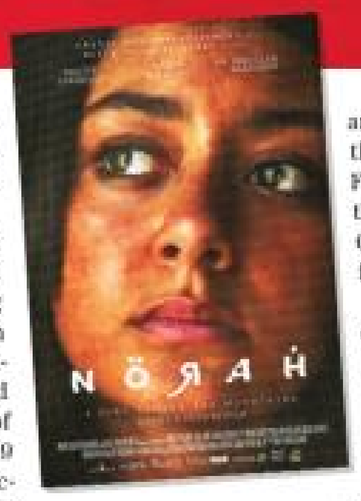
The incentive program was announced a few months after the RSFF established the Red Sea Fund to support Arab and African filmmakers and directors. The $10 million fund has backed more than 250 projects since its launch.

The Saudi Film Commission is responsible for numerous initiatives that have helped bolster the Saudi industry at home and abroad by providing young Saudi filmmakers with opportunities.

One example is "Norah," a Saudi production that will be screened at the 77th Cannes Film Festival this year in its "Un Certain Regard" section. It will be the first time a Saudi movie has been selected for the prestigious festival.

Directed by Saudi Tawfik Alzaidi and produced by American Paul Miller, formerly the head of finance at the Doha Film Institute, the film is the first Saudi movie shot entirely in the AlUla region.

Supported by the Red Sea Fund, the film also clinched the top prize of a funding award from the Saudi Film Commission's Daou Competition — an initiative launched by the Kingdom's Ministry of Culture in September 2019 to bolster Saudi film production and nurture the country's next generation of filmmakers.



Set in Saudi Arabia during the 1990s, the film follows Norah, a young Saudi woman who lives in a small village, who is introduced to Nader, an artist. Norah asks him to paint her portrait and soon an artistic relationship develops between them.

The film, Alzaidi's debut feature, explores the period of Saudi conservatism and the various forms of art that were banned. It examines how art can facilitate communication between people and foster social change.

In the run-up to the sixth anniversary of the lifting of the cinema ban, the Saudi Film Commission organized the fourth edition of the Gulf Cinema Festival, which ran from April 14 to 18.

In a speech during the opening of the festival, the Film Commission's CEO Abdullah bin Nasser Al-Qahtani said "this edition of the festival represents a crucial milestone in cultural cooperation among the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and embodies our wise leadership's commitment to enhancing collaboration among us," according to SPA. "This festival, which brings us together today, reflects the strong connection between ambition and the cultural strategy of the GCC countries, which play a significant role in enhancing cultural exchange, expanding infrastructure, drawing inspiration from successful experiences, and encouraging Gulf talents to offer more."

The booming Saudi entertainment industry is also attracting directors from across the world to produce films in the Kingdom.

Over the last 18 months, the landscapes of NEOM in the Tabuk region have been featured in several international films, including Ruper Wyatt's "Desert Warrior," starring Anthony Mackie and Sir Ben Kingsley; "Dunki" directed by Indian filmmaker Rajkumar Hirani starring Shahrukh Khan; the first regional reality TV show "Million Dollar Island;" and the "Rise of the Witches," the region's largest-ever budget TV show.

The future looks bright not only for domestic movie theaters but also for local, regional and international filmmakers and producers intending to work and collaborate in the Kingdom.

"Despite these accomplishments, this is merely the start," said Al-Turki. "Saudi cinema has much more to accomplish."

FAST FACTS

$1bn
Accumulative box office revenues since Saudi cinemas reopened.

$1bn
Saudi Film Fund created to boost fledgling domestic industry.





News Saudi Arabia

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

Saudi Cabinet reiterates commitment to regional security, global cooperation

Arab News Riyadh

King Salman chaired a Cabinet session on Tuesday in Jeddah and briefed the Council of Ministers on recent talks between Saudi Arabia and various countries regarding joint relations, regional issues and global developments.

The Cabinet reaffirmed the Kingdom's stance on the need to establish security and stability in the region and the world, and reiterated its call on the international community to take responsibility, stop Israeli attacks on civilians in the Gaza Strip, and support the Palestinians' right to self-determination and the creation of an independent state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Minister of Media Salman Al-Dossary said that the Cabinet praised the outcome of the second ministerial meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council-Central Asia Strategic Dialogue, stressing the Kingdom's commitment to fostering stronger communication channels with various countries and promoting coordination.

The Cabinet welcomed participants in the special meeting of the World Economic Forum taking place in Riyadh on April 28 and 29, underscoring the Kingdom's commitment to strengthening international cooperation and addressing global challenges.

The Council of Ministers also welcomed the World Bank's decision to designate Saudi Arabia as a knowledge center for disseminating global economic reform practices, a recognition of the Kingdom's progress in global competitiveness indicators.

The Cabinet highlighted the five Saudi cities — Riyadh, Jeddah, Makkah, Madinah and Alkhobar — that secured high rankings in the 2024 International Institute for Management Development's Smart City Index, an indication of the ongoing development and prosperity the Kingdom is experiencing in various sectors.

HIGHLIGHT

The Council of Ministers welcomed participants in the special meeting of the World Economic Forum taking place in Riyadh on April 28 and 29.



Prince Salman visited an exhibition accompanying the forum, featuring over 100 pavilions with services from tourism, Umrah agencies and other sectors. SPA

VISION 2030

Madinah forum aims at improved pilgrim experience

Event explores new opportunities for Hajj and Umrah services

Nada Hameed Jeddah

The Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, in collaboration with the Pilgrim Experience Program, organized the first Umrah and Ziyarah Forum at the King Salman International Convention Center in Madinah.

The three-day event, taking place from April 22-24, is being held under the patronage of Prince Salman bin Sultan, the governor of the Madinah region.

Prince Salman said that the leadership has prioritized the enhancement of Hajj and Umrah services during the prosperous era of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

He said: "The great honor bestowed by God on this country is a source of pride for all of us and motivates us to improve the level of services provided to the guests of God, to search for ideas, and to conduct studies that would advance the Umrah and visit sector."

The forum is an opportunity for specialists to communicate and exchange experiences during discussion panels, and to develop recommendations that contribute to enriching visitors' experience, Prince Salman added.

He also expressed hope that the forum would yield positive outcomes and thanked the minister of Hajj and Umrah, Tawfiq Al-Rabiah, as well as the ministry's employees, for organizing the forum.

Prince Salman visited the exhibition held in parallel with the forum. It houses more than 100 pavilions showcasing the services offered by tourism and travel companies, Umrah agencies, academic and research institutions, small and medium enterprises and service developers, as well as companies from related sectors such as hospitality, catering, transportation, healthcare, technology, communications, artificial intelligence, banking and insurance.

Al-Rabiah delivered a speech at the forum, highlighting the special attention given by the leadership to the Two Holy Mosques and visitors to the sites.

One of the most important factors in the Kingdom's Vision 2030, Al-Rabiah said, is the Pilgrim Experience Program, as the Two Holy Mosques are expected to witness the influx of millions of worshippers and visitors, requiring management by security personnel from the Ministry of Interior, and from the General Authority for the Affairs of the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque.

Al-Rabiah highlighted the involvement of 28 government entities and more than 3,000 local and international companies, with more than 1,500 agreements expected to be signed over the course of the event.

He noted that visits were made to 24 countries to address challenges faced by pilgrims and visitors, and to introduce them to the facilities provided by the Kingdom.

Al-Rabiah said that over the past two years, more than 19 million people have visited Al-Rawda Al-Sharifa, along with a significant number of unique historical sites connected to the life of the Prophet Muhammad in Makkah and Madinah, with many of the historical sites having been rehabilitated.

He announced the launch of the 1966 contact center in nine languages for pilgrim inquiries, catering to both domestic and international audiences.

Fahd bin Mayouf Al-Ruwaili, the ambassador of Saudi Arabia to France and Monaco, and the permanent representative of the Kingdom to UNESCO, also gave a speech highlighting the role of historical and cultural sites in enriching the visitor experience.

Four significant agreements were signed during the opening ceremony. The first, between the General Authority for the Affairs of the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque and Nusuk, aimed to establish and operate an awareness center for pilgrims.

The second, with the Prince Mutaib bin Abdulaziz Charitable Foundation, created a fund of SR100 million ($26 million) for water supply.

The third agreement, between the General Authority for Awqaf and the Madinah Region Development Authority, focused on repairing and renovating water facilities at the Meeqat of Dhul-Hulayfah.

The fourth agreement, between the General Authority for Awqaf and the Taybah Mosques Association, addressed support for the Quba Mosque's needs.

The forum consists of six dialogue sessions and 24 workshops, in which 29 experts and specialists will take part. It also includes several competitions, including the Artificial Intelligence Competition in Umrah and a hackathon on historical sites related to the Prophet Muhammad's life.

HIGHLIGHT

The forum consists of six dialogue sessions and 24 workshops, in which 29 experts and specialists will take part. It also includes several competitions, including the Artificial Intelligence Competition in Umrah and a hackathon on historical sites related to the Prophet Muhammad's life.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Desert Flag

KSA joins global allies for military drill in UAE

Personnel from the Royal Saudi Air Force joined their counterparts from several allied nations on Monday at the start of Desert Flag, a multinational military exercise taking place at Al-Dhafra Air Base in the UAE.

Over the next three weeks the forces will take part in various flight-related exercises, including defensive and offensive counter-air operations, close-air support, and combat search and rescue missions.

In addition to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the participating nations include Oman, Turkiye, the US, France and South Korea.

Lt. Col. Adel bin Saeed Abu Malha, the commander of the participating Saudi air force group, said the exercise is designed to facilitate the exchange of military expertise in strategic planning and execution within a simulated wartime environment. It also aims to "enhance the operational readiness and combat efficiency of air and technical-support crews and to bolster the ties between the nations' forces."

Six Saudi F-15SA fighter jets, with their full air, technical and support crews, are taking part in the exercise, Abu Malha said.

The Saudi air force group arrived at Al-Dhafra Air Base last week to begin their preparations. They were greeted by Brig. Gen. Khalid Alhajiri, the military attache at the Saudi Embassy in the UAE. **AN Riyadh**

Green future

Riyadh forum focuses on afforestation

The National Center for Vegetation Cover Development and Combating Desertification is organizing the first National Afforestation Forum with the theme "Toward a Green Future."

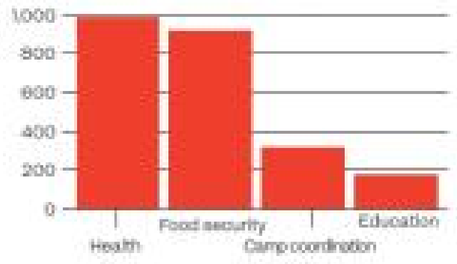
The forum will be held in Riyadh on May 6 and aims to unify national efforts, align energies, and foster collaboration across various sectors, including public, private, and nonprofit. One of its key objectives is to support the Saudi Green Initiative's ambitious target of planting 10 billion trees.

The forum is designed to involve stakeholders from various sectors, including experts, environmental enthusiasts, and the general public, aiming to raise awareness of the National Afforestation Program.

It aims to showcase successful models, encourage participation, highlight investment opportunities, and explore the latest developments in the sector. It also seeks to organize community engagement across all segments to achieve ambitious national environmental objectives.

The forum will address the complexities of nursery development, international afforestation initiatives, and the challenges confronting seed banks. It will also explore strategies to improve nursery standards and optimize plant quality to support a variety of projects. **AN Riyadh**

The Day's FIGURES



Source: ksrelief.org

Bedouin heritage

Cairns continue to be silent guides in the desert

Cairns, known as "rjum" in Arabic, are more than just heaps of stones scattered throughout the desert but have served as important landmarks and silent guides for Bedouins and travelers through the years, and will continue to do so, according to a local heritage researcher and archeologist.

Shaped as pyramidal or circular heaps of stones, cairns mark valleys, ravines and deserts across the region. Their strategic placement atop hills or elevated ground provides a vantage point for hidden landscapes, said Abdulrahman Mohammed Al-Tuwayjiri, from the Rafha governorate.

Al-Tuwayjiri said these landmarks are constructed using stones of varying sizes with diameter, as well as height, between 2 and 3 meters.

Abu Ishaq Ibrahim Al-Harbi, an early geographer, documented the landmarks and mile markers that guided Hajj pilgrims from Kufa to Makkah. These landmarks were spaced approximately 2 km apart, with closer intervals at road intersections and divergences to ensure that travelers maintained their direction. **AN Riyadh**

Interfaith dialogue

Al-Sudais praises Saudi leadership's dedication to Islam

Sheikh Abdulrahman Al-Sudais, head of the Presidency of Religious Affairs at the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque, praised King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for their dedication to the message of Islam.

He commended their promotion of tolerance and moderation, service of Islam, Muslims and the broader Islamic community, and advocation for Islamic world issues in international forums.

In his speech at the Muslim World League meeting in Riyadh on Tuesday, Al-Sudais expressed his gratitude to the grand mufti of the Kingdom, Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Asheikh, for his role in supporting the Islamic Fiqh Council's mission.

He also highlighted the role and contributions of Muslim World League Secretary-General Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa in promoting the values of moderation and inclusivity, encouraging interfaith dialogue and serving the league's mission.

He acknowledged the league's efforts in organizing international conferences and awareness programs, and its role in combating religious extremism. **AN Riyadh**

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TECH INNOVATION

Outer Edge Summit explores AI, digital futures

Experts highlight issues in data ownership and the revolutionary Web3

Sulafa Alkhunaizi and Hajar AlQusayer Riyadh

By owning our data, we will be empowered and safe, says Krista Kim at the Outer Edge Innovation Summit on April 23 at The Garage in Riyadh.



Outer Edge Innovation Summit brought together some of the biggest names in the blockchain, AI, and gaming ecosystems from all over the world. AN photos by Abdulrhman Bin Shalhoub

Kim spoke in one of the summit's panel discussions, titled "Web3 and AI for business and smart cities," which included guest speakers Naif Al-Rabeah, director of Web3 and spatial reality portfolio at NEOM; Eric Pulier, founder & CEO at Vatom Corporation; and Kamal Youssefi, president at the Hashgraph Association.

The Korean Canadian artist has a goal to raise awareness of the importance of each person owning their data: "I believe that data is power. You need to allow people to be empowered by owning their own data and to give them a choice of what projects they want to be involved in."

Kim highlighted that data ownership "is one of the greatest human rights issues in the 21st century.

"Right now, in the Web2 system, our data is taken for free. The companies practice surveillance capitalism and they take your data and they monetize on your free data."

Scott Lawin, CEO of Candy Digital, a gaming and fan engagement company focused on sports and entertainment, attended the summit to support Web3: "Web3 really gives people that opportunity to authenticate their data and share it in a selective way where necessary. And also benefit from the contribution of that data."

Lawin attended the panel discussion highlighting the importance of the harmony of web3 and smart cities. Web3 is a term used to describe an idea for the next stage of internet development, which incorporates concepts such as decentralization, blockchain technologies, and token-based economics.

"I'm really excited about the Kingdom's push forward and support for Web3. And I wanted to come and sort of see it here at first hand and meet the community here," he said.

"As it relates to smart cities, (they) are designed and built around data. And understanding how the personalization of that data can help improve citizens' lives," he explained. "But ownership of that data and giving each individual the ability to sort of turn on and turn off the way that data is utilized is also quite important. From a privacy perspective and just a self-determination perspective."

HIGHLIGHTS

- Topics at the Outer Edge Innovation Summit in Riyadh include smart cities, gaming, esports, art, culture, and more.
- The panel discussion titled 'Web3 and AI for business and smart cities' included guest speaker Naif Al-Rabeah, the director of Web3 and spatial reality portfolio at NEOM.
- Last month, Krista Kim presented 'Heart Space,' the first collaborative generative AI biometric artwork in history, commissioned by Julius Baer at Art Dubai.

Meanwhile, Kim hopes to raise awareness of the global issue through personal projects and artistic efforts.

Last month, she presented "Heart Space," the first collaborative generative AI biometric artwork in history, commissioned by Julius Baer at Art Dubai.

Within the exhibition, visitors take their heartbeat measurements with an app that will create a heart signature to be used an artwork in the immersive space.

"So, you are contributing through your heartbeat to the experience of the artwork, and you have the opportunity to create the NFT of your heart signature on the app," the artist explained. "This is a project that I'm creating for people to take the first step to create your heart signature and then from that first step, you can start the movement toward that privacy and identity on the chain."

(Data ownership) is one of the greatest human rights issues in the 21st century.
Krista Kim
Contemporary artist



The line between real and fake is being blurred further, creating ramifications in various fields. "AI can now create fake articles and they can fake your identity ... in three years, AGI (artificial general intelligence) is going to automatically just create stories," Kim said. "So, we need to differentiate between what is real and what is fake, and also what is made by a human being who is what is made by the machine."

Technology can be used to its advantage. Blockchain provides a solution of creating verification for newspapers, journalists and online media outlets, Kim says.

Speaking about how it works, she added: "On-chain media is very important, so that you can see the verification of this story on the blockchain. To bring it a step further — biometrics. So, your heart signature that I spoke about, as a journalist, you can use your heart signature to sign your story online."

Outer Edge Innovation Summit brought together some of the biggest names in the blockchain, AI, and gaming ecosystems from all over the world.

In partnership with Animoca Brands and King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology, the summit highlights advances in Web3 and the gaming ecosystem development in Saudi Arabia.

Topics at the summit will include smart cities, gaming, esports, art, culture, and more.

For more information about the Outer Edge Innovation Summit in Riyadh, visit outeredge.live/riyadh.

CONSERVATION EFFORTS

World needs rewilding experiments, Riyadh forum told

Haifa Alshammari Riyadh

The Kingdom is taking promising steps to balance its ecosystem by expanding rewilding efforts.

Rewilding is a method used to restore and sustain biodiversity by reintroducing wild animals, restoring wilderness areas and promoting natural processes.

During a discussion panel titled "Rewilding, Restoration and Reintroducing" at the inaugural Hima protected areas forum, held in Riyadh from April 21-24, Paul Marshall, head of NEOM Nature Reserve, along with other panelists such as Prof. Philip Seddon from the department of zoology at the University of Otago and Tim Coulson, head of biology at the University of Oxford, shared insights on the topic.

Ahmad Al-Boug, general manager of terrestrial habitat conservation at the National Center for Wildlife, said: "Our focus goes beyond reintroducing wildlife to protected areas. We're dedicated to restoring native, endangered species to their natural habitats across the Kingdom, within their geographical range."

Marshall explained some of the steps NEOM is taking to ensure the success of its program, adding: "Rewilding brings many things to our arid ecosystems ... the first is ecological benefits. We restore natural dynamics and we rebuild populations."

However, Marshall argued that rewilding can pose some ecological risks, including the potential for mismatches between reintroduced and existing species.

"I like to think of rewilding as an experiment ... an experiment the world needs," he said.

Another panelist, Robert Muir, technical adviser for the operationalization of protected areas at the National Center for Wildlife, shared steps for success in rewilding: "One is animal protection — making sure that the areas into which wildlife is being brought are sufficiently well protected. Drivers of threat and threats themselves that led to the degradation of habitat and wildlife should be sufficiently addressed."

We're dedicated to restoring native, endangered species to their natural habitats across the Kingdom, within their geographical range.
Ahmad Al-Boug
General manager of terrestrial habitat conservation, National Center for Wildlife



Speaking about the Kingdom's efforts, Marshall said: "What's remarkable about Saudi Arabia is its forward-thinking approach. It's leading the way in economic development and social transformation. Equally inspiring is its commitment to conservation, making it a beacon for future generations."

NEOM bred four Arabian oryx by late 2022. The species had not walked on Saudi sands during the previous century after being driven to near extinction in the wild.

What's remarkable about Saudi Arabia is its forward-thinking approach ... equally inspiring is its commitment to conservation, making it a beacon for future generations.
Paul Marshall
Head of Nature Reserve, NEOM



The Kingdom is improving environmental protection programs throughout its reserves, ensuring sustainable practices.

The National Center for Wildlife organized the Hima forum to discuss conservation efforts for natural habitats and wildlife in Saudi Arabia.

The forum was inaugurated on Sunday by the minister of environment, water, and agriculture and chairman of the board of the center, Abdulrahman Al-Fadhli.

Since launching in 2019, the center has addressed challenges facing wildlife and marine ecosystems, aiming to protect the environment for future generations.



Palestinian health workers stand next to unearthed bodies buried by Israeli forces in Nasser Hospital compound in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. AFP

ENDLESS AGONY

UN rights chief 'horrified' by mass grave reports at Gaza hospitals

●Egypt condemns Israeli human rights violations ●UN probes reports victims' hands were tied

Gobran Mohamed Cairo

UN rights chief Volker Turk said on Tuesday he was "horrified" by the destruction of the Nasser and Al-Shifa medical facilities in Gaza and reports of mass graves containing hundreds of bodies there, according to a spokesperson.

Palestinian authorities reported finding hundreds of bodies in mass graves at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis this week after it was abandoned by Israeli troops. Bodies were also reported at Al-Shifa site following an Israeli special forces operation.

The Israeli military said claims by Palestinian authorities that the Israeli Defense Forces had buried bodies were "baseless and unfounded."

It said forces searching for Israeli hostages had examined bodies previously buried by Palestinians near Nasser Hospital and had returned the bodies to where they were buried after they were examined.

Ravina Shamdasani, the spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the rights organization was raising the alarm because multiple bodies had been discovered. Turk said he had been horrified by the reported mass grave discoveries and the hospitals' destruction, she said.

"Some of them had their hands tied, which of course indicates serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and these need to be subjected to further investigations," Shamdasani said.

She added that the UN human rights office was working on corroborating Palestinian officials' reports, including one that 30 bodies were found at Al-Shifa. According to those reports, some of the bodies were buried beneath piles of waste and included women and older people.

Reporters on Monday saw emergency workers digging corpses out of the ground in the ruins of Nasser Hospital.

Gaza's Hamas-run Civil Emergency Service said a total of 310 bodies had been found at one mass grave at Nasser so far and that two other graves had been identified, but not yet excavated. The Palestinian Health Ministry repeated the figure.

Palestinian authorities reported finding hundreds of bodies in mass graves at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis this week after it was abandoned by Israeli troops. Bodies were also reported at Al-Shifa site following an Israeli special forces operation.

Turk, who was represented by Shamdasani at a UN press briefing, also decried Israeli strikes on Gaza in recent days, which he said had killed mostly women and children.

He also repeated a warning against a full-scale incursion on Rafah where some 1.2 million civilians are crowded together, saying this could lead to "further atrocity crimes."

Egypt condemned the repeated Israeli violations of international law and international humanitarian law in the Gaza Strip.

The Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said: "It is regrettable and shameful that violations of international law and humanitarian values continue in such a flagrant manner in the 21st century, in full view and hearing of all countries, international organizations, and the Security Council."

This came during statements made by ministry spokesman Ahmed Abu Zeid regarding the discovery of mass graves.

Egypt said it condemned violations of international law including the targeting of civilians, displaced persons, and medical teams by Israeli forces.

Abu Zeid reiterated the need for immediate intervention by the international community to stop such violations and to conduct the necessary investigations to hold perpetrators accountable.

He added that the killing, destruction, and violence witnessed in the West Bank over the past few weeks is no less dangerous, further aggravates the crisis, and threatens to escalate tensions across all occupied Palestinian territories.

He called for an immediate halt to the violence and attacks by settlers, protected by Israeli forces, against Palestinian civilians, their property, and homes in the West Bank.

Meanwhile, the spokesperson for Hamas' armed wing Al-Qassam Brigades, Abu Ubaida, called for an escalation across all fronts in a televised speech marking 200 days since the start of the war.

In a video aired by Al Jazeera TV, Abu Ubaida praised Iran's attack on Israel on April 13, saying the direct strikes with explosive drones and missiles "set new rules, drew important equations, and confused the enemy and those behind it."

He also called for an escalation in the West Bank and Jordan calling it "one of the most important Arab fronts." Abu Ubaida said: "We call on the Jordanian people to step up their actions and raise their voices."

He said Hamas was sticking to its demands at the ongoing ceasefire talks that Israel ends its military offensive, pulls out forces from Gaza, allows the displaced to return to northern Gaza, and lifts the blockade.

TRAGEDY

Iraqi father launches legal action against BP over son's cancer death

Arab News London

An Iraqi father has launched legal action against British oil giant BP after his son died of leukemia allegedly as a result of flaring, the BBC reported on Tuesday.

Ali died aged 21 last year because a local BP-run oil field had practiced flaring, the burning off of gas, his father Hussein Julood has alleged.

The village where Ali grew up, which lies within the boundaries of the oil field, contained high levels of carcinogenic pollutants that are linked to flaring, a BBC investigation in 2022 showed.

Julood's case is believed to be the first instance of individual legal action against an oil firm over the practice of flaring.

In a claim letter, he argues that "toxic emissions from the Rumaila oil field" led to Ali's leukemia and subsequent death, and that as the lead contractor of the site, BP holds partial responsibility.

BACKGROUND

●Hussein Julood says practice of flaring in Rumaila oil field caused Ali's leukemia.

●'I am also representing those poor people living here and suffering from pollution.'

Julood is demanding compensation for his son's lengthy medical treatment, which included overseas trips, as well as for loss of earnings, funeral costs and "moral losses."

He told the BBC: "I am just hoping for those who hear my voice, from BP, to consider my situation. I am not representing myself alone, I am also representing those poor people living here and suffering from pollution."

Rumaila oil field has the highest known levels of flaring in the world, according to BBC analysis of World Bank figures.

Aged only 15, Ali was diagnosed with acute lymphomatic leukemia and endured two years of treatment, including chemotherapy, a bone marrow transplant and radiotherapy.

Despite being a keen footballer and student in school, he was unable to return to classes after his treatment. But after being declared in remission in 2021, Ali opened a local phone business and "was excited about the future."

In 2022 he was found to be in relapse, and his father urgently tried to raise funds for experimental treatment in India, but Ali died on April 21 last year before he could make the journey.

RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY

Israel army unit facing US sanctions has history of abuses

AFP Jerusalem

An Israeli battalion which US media say Washington is likely to sanction over alleged rights violations against Palestinians, has a long history of transgressions and impunity, according to analysts and Israeli media.

The military's Netzah Yehuda unit was founded in 1999 to encourage ultra-Orthodox Jewish men to enlist but has since accepted other religious recruits including residents of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, where Netzah Yehuda was deployed until 2022.

The unit has mainly attracted marginalized ultra-Orthodox youths "who see the army as a means of integrating into Israeli society and earning a living," said David Khalfa of Jean-Jaures Foundation, a French think tank.

But it has also drawn "rather radical religious nationalists having strong hostility toward Arabs," he said. "Marked by a strong ideological and sociological leaning, the battalion has acquired a scandal-prone reputation."

Marwa Maziad, a visiting lecturer of Israel studies at the US University of Maryland, told the Middle East Eye website that unlike most army units, Netzah Yehuda relies on volunteers.

She said: "The battalion attracts religious Zionists, who combine Jewish religious interpretations with nationalist militarism" and are closely associated with the extreme fringes of the Israeli settler movement.

The West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, is home to 3 million Palestinians alongside some 490,000 Israelis living in settlements considered illegal under international law.

"A large part of the unit's soldiers were born and raised in the West Bank," Khalfa said, noting Netzah Yehuda was often tasked with policing and "counter-insurgency" operations in the Palestinian territory.



Soldiers of Israel's ultra-Orthodox Netzah Yehuda battalion hold morning prayers in the Israeli annexed Golan Heights on May 19, 2014. AFP/File

The January 2022 death of Palestinian American Omar Assad, 78, at the hands of Netzah Yehuda soldiers in the West Bank drew attention to the unit, with the US State Department later that year ordering embassy staff in Israel to investigate the case.

"A significant number of them — not all — committed abuses and the army hardly imposed any sanctions," Khalfa said.

The January 2022 death of Palestinian American Omar Assad, 78, at the hands of Netzah Yehuda soldiers in the West Bank drew attention to the unit, with the US State Department later that year ordering embassy staff in Israel to investigate the case.

Handcuffed, gagged and blindfolded, Assad was left lying on the ground on his stomach for more than an hour in a freezing winter night.

Following Assad's death, several Israeli media outlets published reports detailing incidents linked to the battalion that had gone largely unpunished, including beatings of Palestinians and attacks on Bedouin citizens of Israel.

The Jerusalem Post newspaper said Netzah Yehuda troops effectively allowed settlers to attack Palestinians, while Haaretz, a left-leaning daily, denounced the "clear ideological connection between the residents of the settlements and the unauthorized outposts and the soldiers" in the unit.

According to Khalfa, "within the army there are lively debates" over Netzah Yehuda, with some military officials considering it "dangerous for the army to bring together so many young people sharing the same nationalist ideology."

News Middle East

COOPERATION

Egypt FM holds talks with UN migration official

Parties also looked at ways to support and operationalize the Loss and Damage Fund

Gobran Mohamed Cairo

Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shoukry held talks with the Director General of the International Organization for Migration Amy Pope during the UN official's visit.

Shoukry expressed his appreciation of the organization's cooperation, and spoke of aims to further relations to ensure comprehensive management of migration in a manner that contributed to achieving sustainable development in accordance with the principles and goals enshrined in the Global Compact for Migration. This stressed the importance of crystallizing the organization's action priorities in consultation with developing countries' governments.

He affirmed Egypt's backing to adopt a comprehensive approach to migration governance so that it was not limited to security aspects only, but also took into account the development aspects associated with them, while addressing the root causes that lead to illegal immigration.



Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shoukry confers with International Organization for Migration head Amy Pope during the UN official's visit. Supplied

The minister also praised existing cooperation with the IOM in promoting ways of legal labor mobility and bridging the existing gaps in labor markets, thus achieving the interests of origin and destination states and migrants alike. Shoukry noted that Egypt was facing increasing flows of migrants forced to flee their countries in pursuit of stability as a result of conflicts, economic reasons, or the repercussions of climate change, which had been clearly reflected in the sharp increase in the numbers of immigrants to Egypt.

He said that the support that Egypt receives from the international community was not commensurate with the burdens it bears to provide a decent life for those arriving, especially since the phenomenon had coincided with a period in which the Egyptian economy had suffered from the consequences of global crises, which had necessitated the organization to play its role in providing necessary support.

Pope thanked Egypt for its fruitful cooperation on issues involving the impact of climate change on migration, especially during Egypt's presidency of COP27.

FASTFACT

International Organization for Migration head Amy Pope thanked Egypt for its fruitful cooperation on issues involving the impact of climate change on migration, especially during Egypt's presidency of COP27.

The parties also looked at ways to support and operationalize the Loss and Damage Fund and its important role in enhancing the ability of states to review the devastating effects of climate change and the impact on migration flows. They also spoke of cooperation between Egypt and the IOM in Africa.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Ahmed Abu Zeid said the meeting also looked at developments taking place in the region, with Shoukry and Pope discussing the situation in Gaza, and providing humanitarian aid and safe havens to shelter the displaced.

In connection with developments in Sudan, Pope spoke of her appreciation of Egypt's reception of a large number of displaced Sudanese nationals since the beginning of the crisis, as well as the Egyptian authorities' role in providing support to those fleeing the conflict, and meeting their needs.

The UN official expressed the IOM's readiness to provide support for Egypt in order to enhance its ability to care for Sudanese refugees, in cooperation with the relevant ministries, noting that the organization attached importance to Sudan for fear of it turning into a forgotten crisis.

TURF WAR

Sudan military downs drones targeting its HQ in Shendi

Reuters Khartoum

Sudan's army used anti-aircraft missiles on Tuesday to shoot down drones targeting its headquarters in the city of Shendi, witnesses and army sources said, the latest in a series of such drone attacks.

None of the drones hit their target, the army sources said. Reuters could not independently verify the report.

The head of Sudan's army, General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, arrived on Monday in Shendi, which is some 180 km (112 miles) north of the capital Khartoum, army media reported earlier. It was not immediately clear whether he remains in the area.

Sudan's army is battling the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces for control of the vast north African country.

Tuesday's drone attack is the third targeting areas that remain solidly under army control. The city of Atbara, also in River Nile state, and Al-Gedaref state to the east have also come under drone attack.

Both the army and the RSF have used drones in the conflict, which erupted a year ago.

The RSF, which controls much of Khartoum and western regions of the country, has not claimed responsibility for any of the attacks.

Shendi residents said the attacks have created panic in the town.

HIGHLIGHT

Tuesday's drone attack is the third targeting areas that remain solidly under army control. The city of Atbara, also in River Nile state, and Al-Gedaref state to the east have also come under drone attack.

The war between the army and RSF has sparked warnings of famine, displaced millions, killed thousands in the crossfire and given way to ethnic killings by the RSF and allied militias. The war appears likely to spread to the city of Al-Fashir, the army's final holdout in the Darfur region, with many warning of a humanitarian catastrophe.



The war between the army and RSF has sparked warnings of famine, displaced millions, killed thousands in the crossfire and given way to ethnic killings by the RSF and allied militias. AFP

COMPLICITY

Google fires at least 20 more workers who protested its $1.2bn contract with Israel

AP New York

Google fired at least 20 more workers in the aftermath of protests over technology the company is supplying the Israeli government amid the Gaza war, bringing the total number of terminated staff to more than 50, a group representing the workers said.

It's the latest sign of internal turmoil at the tech giant centered on "Project Nimbus," a $1.2 billion contract signed in 2021 for Google and Amazon to provide the Israeli government with cloud computing and artificial intelligence services.

Workers held sit-in protests last week at Google offices in New York and Sunnyvale, California. The company responded by calling the police, who made arrests.



Workers held sit-in protests last week at Google offices in New York and Sunnyvale, California. The company responded by calling the police, who made arrests. No Tech for Apartheid

The group organizing the protests, No Tech For Apartheid, said the company fired 30 workers last week — higher than the initial 28 they had announced.

Then, on Tuesday night, Google fired "over 20" more staffers, "including non-participating bystanders during last week's protests," said Jane Chung, a spokeswoman for No Tech For Apartheid, without providing a more specific number.

"Google's aims are clear: the corporation is attempting to quash dissent, silence its workers, and reassert its power over them," Chung said in a press release. "In its attempts to do so, Google has decided to unceremoniously, and without due process, upend the livelihoods of over 50 of its own workers."

Google said it fired the additional workers after its investigation gathered details from coworkers who were "physically disrupted" and it identified employees who used masks and didn't carry their staff badges to hide their identities. It didn't specify how many were fired.

The company disputed the group's claims, saying that it carefully confirmed that "every single one of those whose employment was terminated was personally and definitively involved in disruptive activity inside our buildings."

RESUMPTION

US troops targeted in western Iraq

AFP Washington

American forces were targeted at a base in western Iraq, a US defense official said Tuesday, the second such attack on the country's troops after a more than two month pause.

It followed another attack over the weekend in which rockets were fired from northern Iraq at a base in Syria that houses forces from the US-led coalition against Daesh extremists.

"Yesterday there was an attack against Al-Asad Air Base" that did not cause injuries or damage, the defense official said on condition of anonymity, without specifying the nature of the attack.

"This was the second attack against US forces since February 4," the official said.

A wave of more than 165 attacks on US troops in Iraq and Syria began in October shortly after the start of the latest round of conflict between Israel and militant group Hamas, causing injuries but no deaths among US forces.

But a drone attack in Jordan killed three US soldiers in late January, after which Washington carried out strikes on dozens of Iran-linked targets in Iraq and Syria. The air raids were followed by a pause in the attacks that lasted until late this month.

The majority of the attacks were claimed by the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a loose alliance of Iran-backed groups angered by US support for Israel, but there have been no claims for either of the attacks this month.

News International

BILATERAL RELATIONS

Bangladesh, Qatar sign 10 cooperation deals during emir's first Dhaka trip

Agreements cover investment, maritime transport and establishment of joint business council

Shehab Sumon Dhaka

Bangladesh and Qatar signed 10 cooperation agreements on Tuesday as the Gulf state's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani made his first official visit to Dhaka.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Tamim witnessed the signing ceremony, which covered deals on investment, maritime transport, taxation, legal affairs and the establishment of a Bangladesh-Qatar joint business council.

The two countries also signed several memoranda of understanding, including on diplomatic training, education, labor, youth and sports, as well as port management cooperation.

Sheikh Tamim then held a meeting with President Mohammed Shahabuddin as part of his visit to Bangladesh, which is the second stop in the emir's Asia tour that began in the Philippines on Sunday.



Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, left, and Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina attend the bilateral agreement signing ceremony in Dhaka on Tuesday. AFP

During their talks, Shahabuddin invited Qatar to invest in Bangladesh's special economic zones.

"Bangladesh will welcome investments in various sectors including in state-led food supply chains from production to consumption such as agro-production and processing, food packaging, smart agriculture and fertilizer production," Shahabuddin's press secretary Joynal Abedin told reporters after the meeting.

"Qatar investors can get massive incentives and support in sectors like petrochemicals, energy, machineries, information technology, electronics, ceramics, agri-business, and food processing in Bangladesh."

Shahabuddin also urged Sheikh Tamim to recruit more skilled workers from Bangladesh during their talks, Abedin said.

Qatar is currently the largest supplier of liquefied natural gas to Bangladesh. Earlier this year, the emirate signed a 15-year agreement with the US-based Excelerate Energy to supply 1 million metric tonnes per year of LNG to Bangladesh starting from January 2026.

The Gulf state is also home to about 400,000 Bangladeshis who live and work there, as it is one of the preferred destinations for migrant workers from the South Asian country.



Military Mishap The Fire & Rescue Department of Malaysia inspect the crash site of two military helicopters — which collided and crashed during a training session, killing all 10 people on board — in Lumut, Perak state, Tuesday. AFP

NATIONAL ELECTION

Modi is accused of using hate speech for calling Muslims 'infiltrators' at rally

AP New Delhi

India's main opposition party accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of using hate speech after he called Muslims "infiltrators" — some of his most incendiary rhetoric about the minority faith, days after the country began its weeks-long general election.

The remarks at a campaign rally Sunday drew fierce criticism that Modi was peddling anti-Muslim tropes. The Congress Party filed a complaint Monday with the Election Commission of India, alleging he broke rules that bar candidates from engaging in any activity that aggravates religious tensions.

Critics of the prime minister — an avowed Hindu nationalist — say India's tradition of diversity and secularism has come under attack since his Bharatiya Janata Party won power a decade ago. They accuse the party of fostering religious intolerance and sometimes even violence. The party denies the accusation and says its policies benefit all Indians.

At a rally in the state of Rajasthan, Modi said that when the Congress Party was in government, "they said Muslims have the first right over the country's resources." If it returns to power, the party "will gather all your wealth and distribute it among those who have more children," he said as the crowd applauded.

"They will distribute it among infiltrators," he continued, saying, "Do you think your hard-earned money should be given to infiltrators?"

Mallikarjun Kharge, the Congress Party's president, described the prime minister's comments as "hate speech" and party spokesperson Abhishek Manu Singhvi called them "deeply, deeply objectionable."

The party sought action from the election commission, whose code of conduct forbids candidates from appealing "to caste or communal feelings" to secure votes.

While there have long been tensions between India's majority Hindu community and Muslims, rights groups say that attacks against minorities have become more brazen under Modi.

Muslims have been lynched by Hindu mobs over allegations of eating beef or smuggling cows, an animal considered holy to Hindus. Muslim businesses have been boycotted, their homes and businesses have been bulldozed and places of worship set on fire. There have been open calls for their genocide.

FASTFACT

The remarks at a campaign rally Sunday drew fierce criticism that Modi was peddling anti-Muslim tropes.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Illegal acquisition

Ukraine's farm minister suspect in corruption case

Ukraine's anti-corruption agency is treating Agriculture Minister Mykola Solsky as a suspect in an investigation into the illegal acquisition of state-owned land worth about $7 million, Ukrainian media reported on Tuesday. The minister addressed the media reports, saying the allegations pertain to a period in 2017-2018 when he worked as a lawyer in a dispute between state-owned enterprises and individuals in a statement on Telegram.

"I guarantee maximum openness to establish the truth, but there is no need for this — all data is open to law enforcement, and the evidence and arguments of the parties are being considered by the courts," Solsky said. Solsky has overseen the embattled grain industry during the war with Russia since his appointment in March 2022. **Reuters**

Animal cruelty

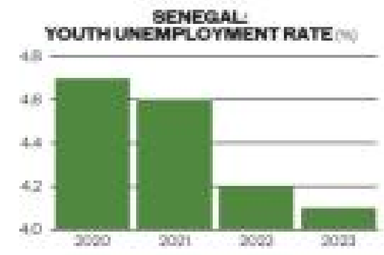
South Korean sentenced for killing 76 cats

A South Korean man has been sentenced to 14 months in prison for killing 76 cats in one of the country's most gruesome cases of animal cruelty in recent years. The man, who is in his 20s, was convicted of violating South Korea's animal protection law last week, the Changwon District Court in southeastern South Korea said Tuesday. The court did not identify the man.

The man went on a cat-killing spree between December 2022 and September 2023 due to a deep hatred of the animal that he began harboring after other cats scratched his car, according to a court verdict seen by The Associated Press.

He had caught stray cats and adopted others from online sites before strangling some to death and killing others with scissors, the court order said. **AP**

The Day's FIGURES



Source: Statista

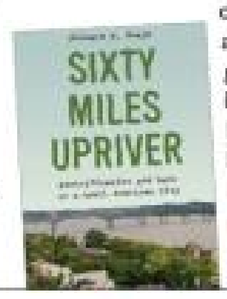
What We Are Reading Today

FROM AROUND THE WEB & IN PRINT

'Sixty Miles Upriver'

RICHARD E. OCEJO

Newburgh is a small postindustrial city of some 28,000 people located 60 miles north of New York City in the Hudson River Valley. Like many similarly sized cities across America, it has been beset with poverty and crime after decades of decline, with few opportunities for its predominantly minority residents. "Sixty Miles Upriver" tells the story of how Newburgh started gentrifying, describing what happens when White creative professionals seek out racially diverse and working-class communities and revealing how gentrification is increasingly happening outside large city centers in places where it unfolds in new ways.



Rare occurrence

China issues highest-level warning after rain, deadly floods

More than 100,000 people have been evacuated due to heavy rain and fatal floods in southern China, with the government issuing its highest-level rainstorm warning for the affected area on Tuesday.

Torrential rains have lashed Guangdong in recent days, swelling rivers and raising fears of severe flooding that state media said could be of the sort only "seen around once a century." On Tuesday, the megacity of Shenzhen was among the areas experiencing "heavy to very heavy downpours," the city's meteorological observatory said, adding the risk of flash floods was "very high."

It later downgraded its weather warning as the storms weakened, but urged residents to remain vigilant against disasters.

Images from Qingyuan — a city in northern Guangdong that is part of the low-lying Pearl River Delta — showed a building almost completely submerged in a flooded park next to a river. **AFP**

Prince Louis

UK royals thank public for wishing son on birthday

Britain's Prince William and his wife Kate thanked the public for their messages which had been sent to mark the sixth birthday of their youngest son Louis on Tuesday.

The couple, the Prince and Princess of Wales, also issued a picture of Louis on social media to mark the occasion, showing a close-up image of the beaming young prince.

"Happy 6th Birthday, Prince Louis! Thank you for all the kind wishes today," their office Kensington Palace said on X.

The picture was taken by Kate in Windsor where the family live. Louis is the youngest of their three children, with George, aged 10, and Charlotte due to celebrate her ninth birthday next month.

Kensington Palace has for some years released photographs taken by Kate, a keen amateur photographer, to mark birthdays and other family occasions. **Reuters**

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لأنّ الخيلَ قد قلّتْ، تحلّتْ حَميرُ الحَيِّ بالزّيِ الأنيقِ
إذا ظهَرَ الحمارُ بزيِّ خيلٍ تكشّفَ أمرُهُ عندَ التّهيقِ
(فاضل أصفر)

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

Because horses have become scarce, the donkeys have adorned themselves with elegant attire. But when the donkey appears in the guise of a horse, its true nature is revealed in its braying.

Fadhel Asfar
(Contemporary Syrian poet)

Opinion

Netanyahu set to pivot Israel's focus to Hezbollah

OSAMA AL-SHARIF



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

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

Iran and Israel appear to be content with the tentative outcome of what amounted to saber-rattling rather than open war. Israel misjudged by bombing Iran's consulate in Damascus on April 1, triggering a calculated, direct and decisive retaliation by Tehran on April 13. And when Israel finally responded a week later, firing missiles against air defense systems close to sensitive nuclear facilities in Isfahan, it appeared that the threat of war had been averted. Israel came under US pressure to tone down its response, while Iran belittled the Israeli attack and declared that no reply was needed. The direct and grave showdown is, for now, over.

The two sides have decided to go back to the shadow war that has been raging for years. Iran is again relying on its proxies in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon to engage the Israelis, while Tel Aviv is satisfied to revert to targeting these proxies both openly and covertly. On Friday, the military warehouses of a pro-Iran proxy were targeted in Iraq. No one claimed responsibility, including the Americans.

But while the US has managed to rein in the Israelis and stop them from venturing into a wider regional war, Israel is getting ready to ramp up its military campaign in Gaza's Rafah. Its Western allies continue to implore it not to launch a ground offensive into the heavily populated border town. However, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his military have signaled that such an operation is imminent.

And although the world's attention is back on the carnage in Gaza, following revelations of mass executions in Khan Younis and Nasser Hospital, the tensions along Israel's northern border are reaching new heights. That front is likely to flare up precipitously in the coming days. Hezbollah decided to attack Israel soon after Tel Aviv launched its war on Gaza in the wake of the Oct. 7 Hamas assault. After nearly seven months, the two sides appear ready for a fiercer and more prolonged battle.

Tit-for-tat skirmishes have resulted in a heavy toll for both sides. The pro-Iran proxy has mostly abided by the so-called rules of engagement by directing its attacks within a 10-km stretch, but as Israel's reprisals went deeper into Lebanon and hit harder, Hezbollah began hitting further into northern Galilee, including the city of Safed. Israel's strikes have resulted in at least 250 Hezbollah casualties, including key field leaders.

With a confrontation with Iran off the agenda, Netanyahu and his war Cabinet are now committed to neutralizing the threat from the north. Netanyahu is facing pressure from a polarized Israeli public over his failure to conclude a deal to return the hostages held by Hamas. His war on Gaza does not appear to be fulfilling any of the declared goals. On the contrary, the mission has burdened Netanyahu and his army. The world has turned against Israel and is now blasting it for creating an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

Netanyahu is once more under pressure to call for early elections, which he will undoubtedly lose to his rival Benny Gantz. He desperately needs to regroup and turn retreat into an attack. He is not alone in believing that a war on Hezbollah could turn things round. Netanyahu's government has been under pressure to resolve the fate of the thousands of Israelis who have become displaced as a result of the low-intensity war in the north. These people demand to be allowed to go home.

Also, it was Hezbollah that broke a tentative truce in the north and breached a UN resolution to stay away from the common border area. The Israeli self-defense card would work much better against Hezbollah than in the beleaguered Gaza Strip. A strong retaliation against Hezbollah would not receive much objection from Israel's Western allies. It is a case of self-defense, with Israel in a position to present itself as the victim.

Added to this is the fact that Lebanon is deeply divided over Hezbollah's latest gambit. Aside from its local allies, the Maronite Christians and the Lebanese Forces are becoming openly hostile to Hezbollah holding Lebanon's future hostage.

On the other hand, a full-fledged war against Hezbollah would open a Pandora's box for Israel. The pro-Iran militia is tenfold stronger than Hamas and has prepared itself for all sorts of scenarios. It can retaliate with full force against an Israeli attack and could strike cities deep into Israel. It also has access to Iranian logistical support, unlike Hamas.

Hezbollah has been upping the ante recently, indicating that it is not backing down, making a possible showdown even more likely.

Iran's position on an open war between Hezbollah and Israel remains cryptic. Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has not mentioned Hezbollah in a few weeks, but has said that Israel needs to end its crimes against Gaza. What that means is anyone's guess. Would Iran come to Hezbollah's rescue if Israel were to wage a total war against south Lebanon? And what would that help look like? Iran is unlikely to risk an open war with Israel and will instead rely on its proxies to keep Israel engaged.

But the case for an Israeli attack on Lebanon is getting ripe. Netanyahu needs to deflect attention from Gaza and the aborted hostage deal. A war on Lebanon could provide that. It would be a calculated risk that he and his allies and rivals seem willing to take.

After nearly seven months, the two sides appear ready for a fiercer and more prolonged battle



COURTESY: JAMJAD RASMI/ASHARQ AL-AWSAT

There has never been a defined territory for Palestinian governance that would be remotely recognizable as a state

Is a two-state solution feasible in wake of US veto?

KERRY BOYD ANDERSON



Kerry Boyd Anderson is a professional analyst of international security issues and Middle East political and business risk.
X: @KBAresearch

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The US last week vetoed a UN Security Council resolution that would have recommended that "the State of Palestine be admitted to membership in the United Nations." The veto — the only "no" vote on the council — defeated the resolution.

Current US policy supports "Palestinian statehood in the context of a comprehensive peace agreement" negotiated between Israel and the Palestinians. President Joe Biden has emphasized his position that "the only real solution is a two-state solution."

Years of rhetoric about a two-state solution, combined with the political effects of the Oslo Accords, created the false impression among many people around the world that the Palestinians basically have a state. Many people see maps listing the entirety of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as "Palestinian Territories." They hear about the Palestinian Authority and President Mahmoud Abbas. To many casual observers, it can appear that the Palestinians have something approximating a state with their own government.

The reality is that the Palestinians have never had anything close to a sovereign state. There has never been a defined territory for Palestinian governance that would be remotely recognizable as a state. Setting aside the separation of the West Bank and Gaza, for which there once were potential solutions, the PA has never been granted authority over the West Bank. It has never governed any sort of contiguous territory.

A look at a map that shows how the Oslo II Accord divided the West Bank into Areas A, B and C makes that clear; the PA officially has authority over various dots spread around the West Bank, which are divided by areas under Israeli control. A glance at maps that also include the wall that Israel built deep into the West Bank and the expansion of Israeli settlements clearly demonstrates that there is no current territory that the PA could feasibly govern.

The PA can make economic and other policies but it has no realistic ability to implement many of them. The reality is that Israel controls the Palestinians' economy. In the West Bank, Palestinians need Israeli permission to move goods or people through checkpoints or to construct infrastructure or buildings. Crucially, Israel controls the West Bank's water resources and ensures that Israeli populations have disproportionate access to that water.

Israel even collects taxes from Palestinians for the PA and sometimes withholds the funds, which contributes to the authority's fiscal challenges. For decades, Israel had significant control over Gaza's economy and, after Hamas took over in 2007, Israel imposed severe restrictions that choked the economy.

Despite security cooperation with Israel, the PA has had limited control over security in the areas it is supposed to govern and Israeli forces regularly enter Palestinian-governed areas without any type of Palestinian permission. Israeli forces can hold Palestinians in administrative detention indefinitely.

Furthermore, even US leaders who call for a two-state solution seldom imagine a Palestinian state capable of defending itself. For example, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer recently gave a speech arguing that a two-state solution is the "only real and sustainable solution," with the caveat that a future Palestinian state would be "demilitarized."

The PA has many flaws, but even a perfectly competent, democratic and transparent authority would have failed without the basic components of sovereignty. If a two-state solution has any future viability, then its advocates should recognize that the Oslo process, as implemented, failed to make real progress toward a Palestinian state.

Any new peace efforts should start by recognizing several key realities. First, no Palestinian state is possible without contiguous territory and real sovereignty over both the land and the people.

Second, the Palestinians have learned that promises of a state are hollow at best and deceitful at worst, and they will no longer embrace that hope without very clear, practical steps forward — steps that few Israelis today would be willing to take.

Third, economic-focused approaches that fail to understand the link between economics and sovereignty — such as ideas that the Trump administration proposed — will not work.

Fourth, few, if any, Israeli leaders ever accepted the idea of a fully sovereign Palestinian state. In the 1993 Oslo I Accord, Israel recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the Palestinians' representative but did not recognize Palestinian statehood. The Israeli leaders who sincerely wanted real peace envisioned, at most, a demilitarized Palestinian state with limited independence. Indeed, many Israeli leaders promoted the idea of "autonomy" for the Palestinian people with ongoing Israeli control over the land and security. Other leaders, like Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, never honestly supported even that.

Those realities might make a two-state solution seem impossible. But rather than ignoring reality, a better approach would be to adjust policy, which means an entirely new approach to a two-state solution or another resolution to the conflict altogether.

Opinion

Wars cannot conceal the rifts in Israeli society

YOSSI MEKELBERG



To argue that utter malaise has spread across Israeli society would be an understatement in light of the deep rifts and fragmentation that have taken hold of it. This is probably the greatest threat Israel currently faces, much of it cynically orchestrated by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

This may sound like a precarious argument only a fortnight after Iran launched 350 drones and missiles at Israel, while the war in Gaza has not ended and the hostilities with Hezbollah on the Lebanon border have only intensified — but please bear with me. These conflicts only highlight the fact that the Israeli experiment in state and nation-building has hit an extremely bumpy road.

> **Israel's unity was to be short-lived and followed by widespread criticism, even anger, at the government's failures**

Wars tend to conceal differences in society and, for a short time after Oct. 7, Israeli society came together, partly due to shock and trauma, but also because the need to respond required putting differences aside. However, it soon became apparent that the people in power who had brought this calamity upon Israel, above all the prime minister, were arrogantly refusing to take responsibility.

The intensity of the events of the last six months might have quickly suppressed the memory of the months leading up to Oct. 7, when regular mass demonstrations took place in Israel. These protests galvanized the progressive-liberal forces into resisting attempts by the newly formed sixth, and hopefully last, Netanyahu government — comprised of some of the most ultranationalist, messianic and religious elements in Israeli politics — to weaken the independence of the judiciary in an attempt to ensure that the government and its activities would not be subjected to its scrutiny.

In its ignorance and bigotry, this coalition government refuses to understand that, without an independent judiciary, Israel as a state, politicians and members of the security forces would long ago have faced international courts for the acts they committed in the Occupied Territories after 1967.

The early days of the present war found Israel united in grief and a determination to go after Hamas. But Israel's unity was to be short-lived and followed by widespread criticism, even anger, at the government's failure to avert the Hamas attack and for not prioritizing the release of the hostages. Consistently, polls now suggest that voters are longing for new leadership, although this does not mean a shift in support toward the left or to the peace camp; in fact, many would support a move in exactly the opposite direction.

Every day provides further evidence that the current government is stuffed with self-serving and corrupt, not to mention incompetent, ministers. Hence, despite the continuing war in Gaza and the ever-present danger of escalating clashes with Iran and its proxies, protests have returned to the streets of Israel.

This time, the uniting theme is to demand the release of the hostages and for the government to take responsibility for the worst six months in the country's history and resign, in spite of Netanyahu's desire to see out the entire term of this Knesset until late 2026. His desperate attempts to cling to power for at least the duration of his corruption trial eclipse any other considerations. To achieve this, he and his supporters are prepared to intimidate witnesses and prosecutors, attack protesters — including family members of the hostages — both verbally and physically and prolong the war, while claiming that there is no time for elections or an investigation into the Oct. 7 failures while the country is embroiled in a multifront conflict.

> **Netanyahu's desperate attempts to cling to power eclipse any other considerations**

But nothing could be further from the truth. Fresh elections and a state commission to investigate the failures of Oct. 7, which left 1,200 people dead and 250 taken hostage, are vital steps for Israel to take in order to begin a healing process and liberate itself from the current wretched government. The protesters are rightly demanding truth and accountability.

And it is worth recalling that the current prime minister is someone who, together with other senior members of his then-government, was last month found by a state commission to be personally responsible for the 2021 Mount Meron disaster, which claimed the lives of 45 men and children during a crush at a public religious celebration. Needless to say, Netanyahu has not apologized or taken responsibility for that either. Instead, he was busy trying to persuade the state to pay for the renovation of his private home's swimming pool.

However, the most powerful demonstration of his government's moral bankruptcy and inability to achieve the objectives it set for itself is the unscrupulous attack on the families of the hostages. If there is a cause that unites those who oppose this government regardless of their political persuasion, it is the deep conviction that Israel should have been unwavering in its commitment to the release of the hostages.

In this litmus test of the covenant between a people and their government, the latter has failed. For this, above almost everything else, ordinary citizens in Israel cannot forgive Netanyahu and his government and are demanding their removal.

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

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Jerusalem relatively quiet for now but a storm is close

CHRIS DOYLE



Very few areas of contention have not borne witness to alarming levels of tension in the Israeli-Palestinian arena over the last 200 days. Gaza is on life support, decimated by an unimaginable pounding that has produced an estimated 23 million tonnes of rubble. Meanwhile, Israeli settlers and a complicit Israeli army have laid waste to the West Bank in historically high levels of violence.

Yet one arena, typically the trigger point for major conflagrations between Israelis and Palestinians, has remained relatively quiet, at least for now. Jerusalem has sparked many conflagrations, not least the 2014 Israeli invasion of Gaza. So, how long will this last?

> **Many Israeli Jewish extremists are planning ever more dramatic ways of further altering the status quo on Al-Aqsa**

Let's be clear. Jerusalem for Palestinians has been no fun since the beginning of October. Palestinians routinely report, as do human rights agencies, how much more brutal the Israeli police have been since the Hamas attack. They remain third-class residents, not even citizens, in what Israel portrays as a united city. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The pyromaniacs are all hovering, waiting to be unleashed. Chief among these is Itamar Ben-Gvir, the convicted criminal who is now Israel's national security minister. He has recently pushed for two decisions, neither of which have been approved.

Firstly, he wanted to ban Palestinian citizens of Israel from accessing Al-Aqsa during Ramadan. The Israeli security services pushed back, arguing this would be inflammatory, as of course Ben-Gvir knew only too well. The racist settler minister did not get his way.

Secondly, the Cabinet had decided to devolve the authority for the enforcement of construction laws from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of National Security. Ben-Gvir would have had a free hand to kick off his much-cherished demolition derby of Palestinian homes, which he has long threatened. For whatever reason, the Cabinet then dropped this from the agenda. This could, of course, be resumed as desired.

As a result, this year's Ramadan in Jerusalem was surprisingly calm in comparison to recent years. This is deceptive and the storm could be just round the corner. Passover began on Monday evening and many Israeli Jewish extremists are planning ever more dramatic ways of further altering the status quo on Al-Aqsa. These even include a plan to sacrifice a pure red heifer on the Mount of Olives in an attempt to get closer to the building of a so-called Third Temple to replace Al-Aqsa.

That Jerusalem may be calmer on the outside than usual is not accidental. Palestinians in the city, who constitute 40 percent of the population, are wary of providing even a scintilla of an excuse for the Israeli extremists to hammer them. They know their enemies just want a reason to smash them. They clearly decided not to rise up after Oct. 7.

But the Israeli authorities have also decided to be cautious and, as the Ramadan decision showed, the security services are acutely aware of the perils of opening up too many fronts at once.

Yet everything is on a knife-edge. Israel's plans for evicting Palestinians and expanding settlements in Jerusalem are not on hold. Far from it. In the shadow of the Gaza atrocities, Israel's government has accelerated the construction of settlements across East Jerusalem, with more than 20 projects totaling thousands of housing units having been approved or advanced since the start of the war in Gaza six months ago.

Last week, tenders for more than 1,000 units were published to expand a very dangerous settlement. The Lower Aqueduct project would link Har Homa and Givat HaMatos, completing the concrete settlement jungle that cuts off Jerusalem from neighboring Bethlehem. The whole plan, according to the Israeli nongovernmental organization Peace Now, has been expedited in record time.

> **Israel's plans for evicting Palestinians and expanding settlements in Jerusalem are not on hold. Far from it**

The lack of any international reaction shows how little politicians in American and European capitals understand how this further undermines any residual chance of a two-state solution.

Demolitions and the forcible evictions of Palestinians have been running at a record pace over the last 12 months. Last week, the Supreme Court ruled that three Palestinian families who live in the Silwan district are to be evicted and their homes turned over to the East Jerusalem settlers of Ateret Cohanim. This extremist settler group is, for some reason, yet to be sanctioned by the US and the EU. The presiding judge was Noam Sohlberg, who just happens to be a West Bank settler himself. He too is yet to be sanctioned.

Many will recall the massive protests over demolitions in Sheikh Jarrah when Israel threatened major evictions in 2021. Last week, Jerusalem Magistrate's Court ruled that the Diab family have to leave their home in Karem Al-Ja'uni in Sheikh Jarrah within three months. They can appeal, but what chance will the 23 members of the family have? At best, they may get more delays.

Other projects still proceeding apace include settler efforts to take over Armenian properties in the Old City. This is part of an attempt to Judaize the Old City and, in this case, threaten the 1,600-year-old Armenian presence there. Armenians are taking it in shifts to guard their properties, but they face settlers armed with clubs and who have police backing. The Armenians are part of the wider Christian presence in Jerusalem. Alarmingly, Christians in the city have witnessed an alarming rise in settler hate crimes committed against them, including the desecration of graves.

Jerusalem needs not only careful observation, but also preventive action. Peacemakers, wherever they are hiding, need to be pressing for action now, before the crisis re-erupts in this most contested of cities. Israel needs to know there will be meaningful consequences. The forcible evictions, the demolitions and the land grabs increase the tensions, as does the Israeli police brutality. If matters do explode, precedent suggests it will be at Al-Aqsa.

Chris Doyle is director of the Council for Arab-British Understanding in London.
X: @Doylech

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EDITORIAL:
general@arabnews.com
MARKETING:
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TOLL FREE NUMBER: +966-8002440076

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> The rise in investments in the electric battery sector is a strong indication of the rise of the EV appetite globally.
> **Fatih Birol**
> IEA executive director



Business



The report suggested that intensifying market competition and improving battery technologies are expected to reduce the prices of electric cars in the coming years. Reuters/File

> **Charging networks globally need to grow sixfold by 2035 to meet the level of EV deployment in line with the pledges made by governments.**
> IEA report

OUTLOOK

Chinese models to drive Mideast EV sales amid global surge

Worldwide sales of electric cars grew by approximately 25 percent in Q1 of 2024: IEA report

Arab News Riyadh

The entry of Chinese car models in the Middle East could drive regional electric vehicle sales, as global figures are projected to reach 17 million units by 2024.

According to the latest International Energy Agency report, this marks a 21.42 percent increase from the previous year, with nearly 60 percent of new electric car registrations in 2023 occurring in China, followed by 10 percent in the US and 25 percent in Europe.

"The continued momentum behind electric cars is clear in our data, although it is stronger in some markets than others. Rather than tapering off, the global EV revolution appears to be gearing up for a new phase of growth," said Fatih Birol, executive director of the IEA.

The Global EV Outlook 2024 stated that the electric car market in Africa, Eurasia, and the Middle East is still in its nascent stage, with such vehicles representing just under 1 percent of total sales in these regions.

However, the decision of Chinese carmakers to explore these regions, along with producing vehicles domestically, could change this trend, allowing the market to expand in the coming years.

"In Uzbekistan, BYD (Chinese automaker) set up a joint venture with UzAuto Motors in 2023 to produce 50,000 electric cars annually, and Chery International established a partnership with ADM Jizzakh," stated the IEA in the report.

This partnership has already led to a steep increase in electric car sales in Uzbekistan, reaching around 10,000 in 2023.

It added: "In the Middle East, Jordan boasts the highest electric car sales share, at more than 45 percent, supported by much lower import duties relative to ICE (internal combustion engine) cars, followed by the UAE, with 13 percent."

Moreover, in July last year, Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Investment signed a $5.6 billion deal with Chinese electric car maker Human Horizons to collaborate on the development, manufacture, and sale of vehicles.

Steady growth

The IEA report disclosed that global sales of electric cars grew by approximately 25 percent in the first quarter of this year compared to the same quarter in 2023.

Highlighting the growth of the EV market, the report revealed that the number of electric cars sold globally in the first three months of this year is roughly equivalent to the total units sold in 2020.

The steady growth in the first quarter of this year was driven by China, with 1.9 million EVs sold, marking a 35 percent rise compared to the same period in 2023.

In Europe, the first quarter of 2024 witnessed year-on-year growth of over 5 percent, slightly surpassing the growth in overall car sales and thus maintaining the EV sales share at a similar level to that of last year.

The US also experienced a 15 percent increase in sales in this segment during the first three months of this year, compared to the same period in 2023.

According to Birol, the rise in investments in the electric battery sector is a strong indication of the rise of the EV appetite globally.

"The wave of investment in battery manufacturing suggests the EV supply chain is advancing to meet automakers' ambitious plans for expansion. As a result, the share of EVs on the roads is expected to continue to climb rapidly," said the executive director of IEA.

He added: "Based on today's policy settings alone, almost one in three cars on the roads in China by 2030 is set to be electric, and almost one in five in both the US and the EU. This shift will have major ramifications for both the auto industry and the energy sector."

EV prices to fall

The report highlighted that the pace of the transition to EVs may not be consistent and will hinge on affordability.

IEA added that manufacturers have taken significant steps to deliver on the strengthening EV ambitions of governments by making significant financial commitments.

"Thanks to high levels of investment over the past five years, the world's capacity to produce batteries for EVs is well positioned to keep up with demand, even as it rises sharply over the next decade," said the report.

According to the intergovernmental organization, more than 60 percent of electric cars sold in 2023 were already less expensive to buy than their conventional equivalents in China.

However, the purchase prices for cars with internal combustion engines remained cheaper on average compared to EVs in the US and the EU.

The report suggested that intensifying market competition and improving battery technologies are expected to reduce the prices of electric cars in the coming years.

"Even where upfront prices are high, the lower operating costs of EVs mean the initial investment pays back over time," said IEA.

Moreover, growing electric car exports from Chinese automakers, which accounted for more than half of all electric car sales in 2023, could add to downward pressure on purchase prices.

IEA also underscored the vitality of ensuring the availability of public charging slots to maintain the steady growth of the electric car market globally.

According to the report, the number of public charging points installed globally was up 40 percent in 2023 compared to 2022, and growth for fast chargers outpaced that of slower ones.

However, IEA added that charging networks globally need to grow sixfold by 2035 to meet the level of electric vehicle deployment in line with the pledges made by governments.

"At the same time, policy support and careful planning are essential to make sure greater demand for electricity from charging does not overstretch electricity grids," concluded the report.

FAST FACTS

17m
Global sales of electric vehicles are projected to reach 17 million units by 2024.

1.9m
The steady growth in the first quarter of this year was driven by China, with 1.9 million EVs sold.

15%
The US also experienced a 15 percent increase in sales in this segment during the first three months of this year.



Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund wants to produce half a million electric vehicles by 2030. File

GLOBAL COLLABORATION

Minister affirms Riyadh as global solutions hub ahead of WEF meeting

Upcoming gathering in Kingdom seeks to bridge the growing North-South global divide

Arab News Riyadh

Riyadh has emerged as a beacon of "thought leadership, action, and solutions," stated one of Saudi Arabia's top officials as the Kingdom prepares to host the World Economic Forum.

Faisal Al-Ibrahim, the minister of economy and planning, made the comments ahead of the summit on global collaboration, growth, and energy for development, slated for April 28 to 29, which aims to empower leaders from both public and private sectors to tackle mutual global challenges.

According to the WEF website, the meeting will also advance key forum initiatives in the region and beyond as it aims to bridge the growing North-South global divide, which has further widened on issues such as emerging economic policies, the energy transition and geopolitical shocks.

"The crown prince's patronage of the World Economic Forum Special Meeting in Riyadh is a testament to our leadership's determination to convene the world to take action and expand global collaboration on the critical topics of our time," said Al-Ibrahim in a post on X.

He welcomed global leaders to this pivotal moment for social, economic, and human development, urging them to "build bridges toward a secure, stable and sustainable future."



The selection of Riyadh as host of the special meeting reflects the extensive partnership between Saudi Arabia and the World Economic Forum. Shutterstock

Heads of state and senior executives from the public and private sectors are expected to be among the participants, who will discuss a range of global economic issues and developments under the theme "Global Collaboration, Growth and Energy for Development."

Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan said that the Kingdom's hosting of the World Economic Forum special meeting in Riyadh exemplifies Saudi Arabia's dedication to addressing global challenges through international cooperation and pragmatic multilateralism.

"This event underscores the Kingdom's ongoing, focused efforts to promote security, stability, and sustainable development globally, benefiting people and communities worldwide," Al-Jadaan said on his X account.

The aim of the meeting is to find solutions to a host of global challenges relating to humanitarian issues, the climate and the economy. On the sidelines of the main event, the Kingdom will host exhibitions and other events to highlight the latest developments and trends in areas such as sustainability, innovation and culture. The selection of Riyadh as host of the special meeting reflects the extensive partnership between Saudi Arabia and the WEF, officials said.

It builds upon the Kingdom's active participation and contributions to the WEF's Annual Meetings in Davos.

The agenda is designed to rekindle the spirit of cooperation and collaboration with various panel discussions, workshops, and networking opportunities. It represents a significant gathering of global leaders and experts dedicated to forging a path toward a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable world.

The crown prince's patronage of the World Economic Forum Special Meeting in Riyadh is a testament to our leadership's determination to convene the world to take action.
Faisal Al-Ibrahim
Saudi minister of economy and planning



DEAL

ACWA Power to drive clean energy development in Azerbaijan

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi energy giant ACWA Power is signing a new agreement to accelerate the development of renewable projects in Azerbaijan.

The private water desalination company, known for its extensive green hydrogen storage capacity, announced it has now finalized an agreement with SOCAR, the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic.

This development follows an initial cooperation understanding signed in February 2023.

This deal focuses on the joint evaluation of the "Low-Carbon/Green Fertilizer" project, in which the two bodies will collaborate on assessing the production of green hydrogen to support the decarbonization of SOCAR downstream assets.

Marco Arcelli, CEO of ACWA Power, said in a statement: "I am proud to announce our collaboration with SOCAR to ignite a new era of renewable energy development in Azerbaijan.

With our shared vision and commitment to sustainability, this partnership will not only drive innovation but also pave the way for a cleaner and brighter future for this country."

The primary directive of the agreement will be to enhance SOCAR's carbamide fertilizer facility, striving toward more value-added low-carbon products.

This partnership will not only drive innovation but also pave the way for a cleaner and brighter future for this country.
Marco Arcelli
ACWA Power CEO



As part of the project, SOCAR and ACWA Power will conduct feasibility studies to assess the potential production and sale of green fertilizers, aligning with Azerbaijan's vision of achieving a clean environment.

ACWA Power will take a role in driving the project's renewable energy and green hydrogen production aspects, bringing their expertise to bear on this initiative.

Anar Mammadov, vice president of SOCAR, said, "Azerbaijan is committed to building a sustainable future, and our partnership with ACWA Power underscores our shared dedication to driving renewable energy development in the region. Together, we will work towards realizing our vision of a cleaner, greener Azerbaijan."

He added: "The cooperation with ACWA Power represents a significant step forward in Azerbaijan's transition toward a low-carbon economy and underscores the commitment of both organizations to sustainable development practices."

DEVELOPMENT

Diriyah Co. unveils plans for its mixed-use commercial project

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's Diriyah Co. has shared plans for its inaugural mixed-use commercial office and retail development Zallal, set to launch in the Bujairi district during the first half of 2025.

This project will feature two low-rise office buildings with a combined leasable space of around 6,000 sq. m. Additionally, there will be 12 mixed retail and food and beverage outlets spread across about 8,000 sq. m.

Located next to the popular Bujairi Terrace, Zallal will benefit from proximity to a venue that attracts thousands of visitors daily.

The development is also located close to the recently completed Diriyah Art Futures and the soon-to-open Bab Samhan Hotel.

Jerry Inzerillo, group CEO of Diriyah Co, said: "We have been delighted with the hugely positive reception that Zallal has had from the commercial sector, and we are in advanced negotiations with international and local companies eager to benefit from the central location in the heart of Diriyah and the diverse range of accessible retail, F&B and office space available."

He added: "With construction well underway, Zallal maintains the exciting momentum at Diriyah, and when open, will benefit from the thousands of daily visitors to Bujairi Terrace becoming the latest completed precinct in our rapidly developing masterplan."

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Located next to the popular Bujairi Terrace, Zallal will benefit from proximity to a venue that attracts thousands of visitors daily.**
- **The development is also located close to the recently completed Diriyah Art Futures and the soon-to-open Bab Samhan Hotel.**

The company stated that prospective tenants have responded very favorably to the project, and advanced leasing negotiations are underway with several businesses and organizations.

Zallal will provide direct access to Wadi Hanifah and offer views of the UNESCO World Heritage site of At-Turaif from its position on the outskirts of the Saudi capital.

The ongoing construction work will integrate design elements that reflect Diriyah's nearly 300-year history of traditional Najdi architecture.

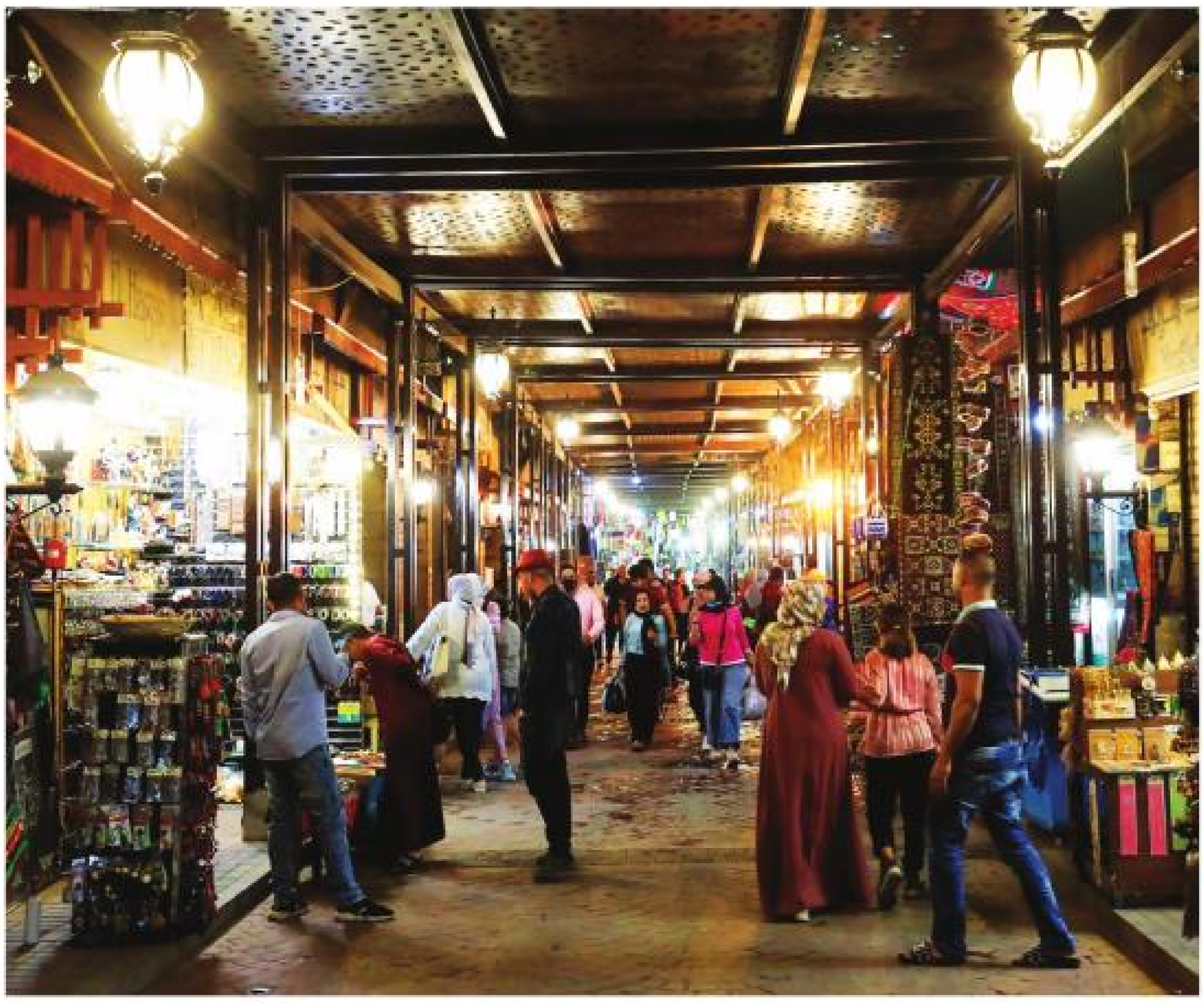
Furthermore, Zallal will feature an underground parking facility offering direct access to Wadi Hanifah, Imam Abdulaziz bin Muhammad bin Saud Road, and public transportation options.

The facility is designed with convenience in mind, featuring designated coach drop-off points for tourists and visitors. This ensures a seamless transition to the pedestrian-friendly environment upon arrival.

Among the companies already involved in leasing negotiations are well-known international brands seeking to establish their presence in Saudi Arabia for the first time, the company said. Additionally, local companies and emerging Saudi concepts are also part of the leasing discussions.

In February, Diriyah Co. unveiled its plans to initiate construction on 11 new assets by the end of 2024, with the signing of two agreements on the sidelines of the Public Investment Fund's Private Sector Forum.

Business News



Amid a staggering shortage of foreign currency, the IMF decided to expand its support to $8 billion in an attempt to shore up the Egyptian economy. Reuters/File

ALLOCATION

Egypt raises funding in budget by over $59bn

Additional funds aim to alleviate inflationary effects, says report

Arab News Riyadh

Egypt has increased the amount of funding required in its 2024-2025 budget by over 2.8 trillion pounds ($59 billion) following successive shockwaves.

In the financial statement of the new draft budget, Minister of Finance Mohamed Maait highlighted that the changes are reflective of the continuous struggles that the country has been facing following the COVID-19 epidemic.

The added funding aims to alleviate the inflationary effects that have been burdening the Egyptian public, improve the standard of living, and meet the developmental needs of citizens, the report said.

The allocation of spending in the budget will also seemingly reflect the needs of individuals by increasing spending on health and education and aiming to improve job opportunities.

Egypt's economy has witnessed blows over the last half year due to the ongoing crisis in Gaza, which has slowed tourism growth and cut into Suez Canal revenue, two of the country's biggest sources of foreign currency.

Amid a staggering shortage of foreign currency and rapidly increasing inflation, the challenges prompted the International Monetary Fund to expand its financial support to Egypt to $8 billion in an attempt to shore up the country's economy.

In a statement in March, the IMF board said its decision would enable Egypt to immediately receive about $820 million.

Similarly, the UAE, represented by a private consortium led by the Abu Dhabi Developmental Holding Co., signed a landmark agreement with Egypt in February to invest $35 billion in Ras El-Hekma, a region on the Mediterranean coast 350 km northwest of Cairo.

Since securing the deal, which marked the single largest foreign direct investment in the North African country, the nation launched some long-sought reforms with the central bank delivering a 600 basis-point interest rate hike and a pledge to unshackle its currency alongside a devaluation.

This led S&P Global Ratings to note that it has been encouraged by the rush of financial support to Egypt, therefore lifting its economic outlook for the country to positive from stable after the long-awaited currency devaluation, which is poised to ease foreign currency shortages.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **The allocation of spending in the budget will also seemingly reflect the needs of individuals by increasing spending on health and education and aiming to improve job opportunities.**
- **Egypt's economy has witnessed blows over the last half year due to the ongoing crisis in Gaza, which has slowed tourism growth and cut into Suez Canal revenue.**

CLEANER ALTERNATIVE

TotalEnergies, OQ to launch $1.6bn LNG bunkering project in Oman

Arab News Riyadh

Oman's Sohar Port is set to house a new $1.6 billion liquefied natural gas bunkering plant following an agreement signed between OQ and TotalEnergies.

Bunkering involves transferring LNG to a ship for use as fuel, offering a cleaner alternative compared to traditional methods such as marine gas oil and heavy fuel oil.

TotalEnergies will provide 80 percent of the investment, with OQ contributing the remaining 20 percent through their joint venture, Marsa Liquefied Natural Gas LLC.

The Marsa LNG project, the first of its kind in the Middle East, is poised to have significant economic implications. It's expected to bolster Oman's treasury revenues and enhance local value through collaborative local investments.

The Marsa LNG project is one of the many initiatives that reflect Oman's goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.
Salim Al-Aufi
Omani minister of energy and minerals



Patrick Pouyanne, chairman and CEO of TotalEnergies, said: "We are proud to open a new chapter in our history in the Sultanate of Oman with the launch of the Marsa LNG project, together with our partner OQ, demonstrating our long-term commitment to the country."

He explained that the innovative project illustrates their pioneer spirit and showcases the relevance of their integrated multi-energy strategy, with the ambition of being a responsible player in the energy transition.

"By paving the way for the next generation of very low emission LNG plants, Marsa LNG is contributing to making gas a long-term transition energy," Pouyanne added.

The plant, powered entirely by solar energy, is expected to contribute to the reduction of carbon emissions and the shipping industry's overall carbon footprint. Notably, it is projected to emit less than 3 kg of carbon dioxide per oil equivalent barrel.

"The Marsa LNG project is one of the many initiatives that reflect Oman's goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050," Minister of Energy and Minerals Salim Al-Aufi said.

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Industry

Eurozone overall business activity expands in April

Overall business activity in the eurozone expanded at its fastest pace in nearly a year this month as a buoyant recovery in the bloc's dominant service industry more than offset a deeper downturn in manufacturing, a survey found.

The divide between services firms and factories was also evident in the country breakdown for Germany and France, the bloc's two biggest economies and the only ones to publish preliminary readings of the survey.

HCOB's preliminary composite eurozone Purchasing Managers' Index, compiled by S&P Global, bounced to 51.4 this month from March's 50.3, well ahead of expectations and marking its second month above the 50 level separating growth from contraction. "The euro area economy has returned to growth," said Christoph Weil at Commerzbank. **Reuters**

Finances

UK budget deficit surpasses official forecast

Britain's government borrowed more than expected in March, capping the 2023/24 financial year with a budget deficit that was £6.6 billion ($8.1 billion) higher than official forecasters expected, data showed on Tuesday.

British public sector net borrowing, excluding state-controlled banks, was £11.94 billion pounds in March, the Office for National Statistics said.

March's borrowing, the last of the 2023/24 financial year, was above the median forecast of £10.2 billion in a Reuters poll of economists.

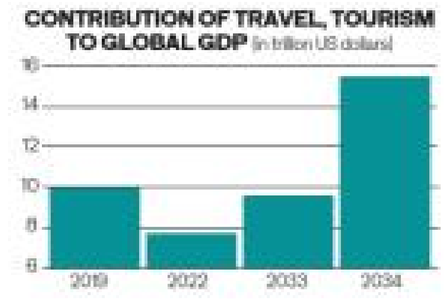
With borrowing for February and January also revised higher, the overall total for 2023/24 stood at £120.7 billion.

While down £7.6 billion on a year ago, it was £6.6 billion more than forecast by the Office for Budget Responsibility last month. **Reuters**

Chart of THE DAY

Travel and tourism sector is likely to contribute over $15 trillion to the global gross domestic product by 2034.

Source: Statista



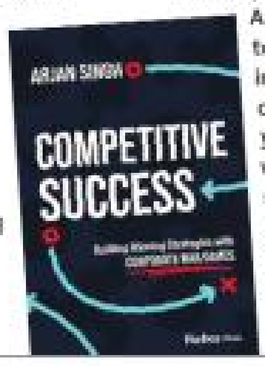
What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

Competitive Success

ARJAN SINGH

In dynamic, fiercely competitive markets you must have confidence in your business strategy, especially when the future of your company is at stake. Rather than make untested, unilateral decisions, war game strategies with your leadership team in a safe workshop environment. In "Competitive Success," Arjan Singh, a top competitive intelligence expert consultant, shows you how to build winning strategies step-by-step, says a review published on goodreads.com.



Statistics

China to revise law to fight data fraud

China will revise its statistics law in a bid to fight persistent data fraud, the state-run Xinhua news agency said on Tuesday, amid skepticism about the reliability of data in the world's second-largest economy.

The draft of the amended law, which will help strengthen statistical supervision and help authorities pin down legal responsibility, has been submitted to the standing committee of the National People's Congress for discussions, the agency said.

"In recent years, statistical work has been faced with problems such as repeated prohibitions on fraud, imperfect supervision system, and low cost of violations," it added.

Analysts have long been skeptical of the reliability of Chinese data, especially as the government has sought to defuse market concerns about a protracted economic slowdown. **Reuters**

Dip

Germany's tax revenues fell 4.5% in March

Germany's federal and regional state governments' tax revenues fell in March compared with the same month of the previous year following two months of strong increases, the Finance Ministry said on Tuesday.

The federal and state governments' tax revenue decreased by 4.5 percent year-on-year to a total of €77.55 billion ($82.65 billion) in March, according to the ministry's monthly report.

The decline was driven by lower revenues from income and corporate taxes.

For January to March, tax revenues rose by 1.6 percent compared with the same period last year, rising to €202.97 billion.

In the first quarter, the ministry noted a decline in sales taxes, due to weak consumption. A recovery is expected through the year as inflation continues its downward trend. **Reuters**

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> This collaboration (with OpenSpace) is more than a partnership — it's also a pledge to empower Saudi companies with the necessary tools to thrive in a competitive market.
>
> **Dr. Hassan Albalawi**
> CEO of WakeCap



Corporate

PRESS RELEASES | FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

LOCAL ACCESS TO GLOBAL ADVANCEMENTS

WakeCap and OpenSpace partner to transform Saudi construction

In a landmark move set to transform the construction landscape of Saudi Arabia, WakeCap, a Saudi-based provider of smart solutions for construction project management, and OpenSpace, a US-based leader in reality capture and AI-powered analytics, announced a strategic partnership aimed at making cutting-edge global technology easily accessible to the local market.

WakeCap provides real-time insights into worker activity and equipment usage through its smart hard hat solution. These data are designed to help project owners make informed decisions to enhance site safety, streamline workflows, and optimize project execution.

OpenSpace, an AI construction tech company, helps commercial builders operate more efficiently and with less risk.

This strategic partnership between WakeCap and OpenSpace is set to revolutionize the Saudi construction sector. By providing direct, local access to world-class technologies, it creates a centralized hub for all construction technology needs, enhancing operational efficiency across the board. The partnership between the two solutions further aims to provide more transparency on Saudi construction projects and to enable better decision-making and project management. This collaboration also addresses the challenge of talent scarcity, by allowing for more efficient resource utilization. Remote progress monitoring and tracking capabilities further reduce the need for frequent site visits, fostering smarter work practices that align with the demands of today's fast-paced construction environment.



WakeCap provides real-time insights into worker activity and equipment usage through its smart hard hat solution. These data are designed to help project owners make informed decisions.

Dr. Hassan Albalawi, CEO and co-founder of WakeCap, said: "At WakeCap, we are deeply committed to setting the industry standard for data-powered site visibility, and our partnership with OpenSpace is a testament to this. Together, we are poised to propel the Saudi construction industry into a new era of transformation, marked by greater transparency, efficiency, and reliance on cutting-edge technology. This collaboration is more than a partnership — it's also a pledge to empower Saudi companies with the necessary tools to thrive in a competitive market. By combining our expertise, we offer local access to global technological advancements, simplifying procurement, and ensuring these innovations are tailored to meet local requirements."

FASTFACT

The partnership will provide direct, local access to world-class technologies, creating a centralized hub for all construction technology needs.

Sam Badrah, director of sales, Middle East and emerging at OpenSpace, said: "We are excited to officially announce our partnership with WakeCap to help accelerate digital transformation in the construction sector across Saudi Arabia. Together, we can challenge the status quo in the region to help companies build smarter."

PREMIER LIVING

Aldar inks deal with Siemens to make Saadiyat Grove Abu Dhabi's leading smart district

Aldar Properties has announced a partnership with Siemens to make Saadiyat Grove, an integrated mixed-use project under development in the cultural heart of Abu Dhabi, a leading global example of smart urban living. The agreement was signed at the World Future Energy Summit in Abu Dhabi.

Utilizing the Siemens Xcelerator portfolio and its cloud-based Building X platform, Aldar will deploy the UAE's first cloud-based smart district management system across the entirety of the Saadiyat Grove community. The project represents the most significant investment globally to date in smart technology at a mixed-use residential and commercial real estate development.

The system will include advanced energy analytics to support emission reductions in line with Aldar's net-zero plan, while enabling eco-conscious living with residents enjoying a more personalized experience that prioritizes their well-being. IoT sensors will monitor air quality and noise levels, while AI technologies will support cutting-edge safety and security, as well as predictive maintenance. The platform will also monitor asset lifecycles and feature digital twins of the district to optimize operational efficiencies.

This practical implementation of an AI-powered analysis system will streamline asset management, ensuring premier living standards for residents and optimum performance for commercial tenants at Saadiyat Grove.

These solutions will be incorporated into an advanced analytics application that can be scaled across Aldar's portfolio, including new and existing developments, enabling consistent quality and operational standards across its portfolio, centralized monitoring, and secure data management. This will be a key component of Aldar's broader investment in a technology infrastructure ecosystem that delivers superior customer service, operational efficiency, and more sustainable solutions.

Our partnership with Siemens forms part of Aldar's ongoing commitment to transforming lives and landscapes for positive impact.
Jonathan Emery
CEO at Aldar Development

Jonathan Emery, CEO at Aldar Development, said: "Introducing the UAE's first cloud-based district management solution at Saadiyat Grove represents a major advancement in the application of digital technology at scale in the real estate sector. Our partnership with Siemens forms part of Aldar's ongoing commitment to transforming lives and landscapes for positive impact, leveraging innovation to introduce new sustainable living solutions that deliver meaningful emission reductions."

REVOLUTIONARY TECHNOLOGY

Honor leverages power of AI for next-level smartphone experience

Honor is pioneering the future of smartphone user experience through cutting-edge AI integration into its flagship models. The company's latest, Magic6 Pro, serves as a testament to Honor's AI-driven innovation, with various industry-first applications of this revolutionary new technology.

The very concept of how consumers interact with their smartphones is rapidly evolving, with more nuanced and meaningful interactions becoming the norm. Recognizing the transformative power of AI, Honor has taken great strides to integrate this technology into its smartphone ecosystem, delivering a visionary user experience in the global markets, including the Middle East and Africa.

Honor's vision to revolutionize AI in smartphones is no easy feat, yet the company has already made significant steps in this field, and continues to explore and test new limits with each new product lifecycle. Honor attributes this rapid evolution by adopting a four-layer AI strategy, with each layer designed to maximize the potential of AI in smartphones. Through this strategy, Honor aims to unify different devices under a single AI-powered ecosystem, thus enabling seamless connectivity and resource allocation no matter what device is being used. By reimagining the smartphone operating system with the introduction of MagicOS 8.0, Honor aims to create a more intuitive system that is tailored to individual preferences and use, so that every device experience is unique to its user.

HIGHLIGHT

By far the greatest example of AI innovation comes from the Magic6 Pro's MagicOS 8.0, which harnesses AI in a multitude of unique ways.

With extraordinary advancements in photography capabilities, display quality, performance, and user experience, the Honor Magic6 Pro again sets a new industry benchmark and delivers an unparalleled flagship smartphone experience.

The Magic6 Pro's upgraded AI Falcon camera system is now backed by powerful AI algorithms, which help users to capture photographs with intricate details. Compared to the Magic5 Pro, the Magic6 Pro brings with it several new innovations to the AI Motion Sensing algorithm, pioneered by refinements from Honor's R&D team. While the previous version of this tech relied on only 270,000 images to train for detecting actions such as jumping, walking, and running, the upgraded version uses a dataset of nearly 8 million images across 10 different scenarios, resulting in much smarter AI capabilities.

To help improve user sleep patterns, the phone's Circadian Night Display leverages AI to adapt to each user's nighttime usage and adjust color temperature accordingly.

By far the greatest example of AI innovation comes from the Magic6 Pro's MagicOS 8.0, which harnesses AI in a multitude of unique ways. Magic Portal for example, utilizes AI to understand and comprehend user messages and behaviors, and recommend a system app accordingly. A simple drag of a message from a chat can lead to directions for a nearby coffee shop, or quickly add a future meeting to your calendar. For privacy and security, the AI Privacy Call 3.0 feature helps to minimize sound leakage by leveraging the power of AI and directional sound technology, so that phone calls can be made without worrying about the call being heard by people around you, especially in an elevator or car.



The Honor Magic6 Pro sets a new industry benchmark and delivers an unparalleled flagship smartphone experience.

Corporate Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Collaborative Efforts

Moro Hub, Kaspersky sign MoU for cybersecurity defense

Moro Hub, a subsidiary of Digital DEWA, the digital arm of Dubai Electricity and Water Authority, and Kaspersky, signed an MoU to facilitate collaboration in areas of cybersecurity. The MoU was signed by Dr. Ahmed Alkebsi, CISO of DEWA and Moro Hub, and Eugene Kaspersky, CEO of Kaspersky, during the Kaspersky Cyber Immunity Conference 2024.

Moro Hub has established itself as a leader in cybersecurity practices and managed security services and by combining Moro Hub's expert services with Kaspersky's technologies, both parties will uplift the UAE's security posture. This partnership underscores each parties' commitment to strengthening cybersecurity resilience and fostering digital trust in the region.

In addition, this partnership between Kaspersky and Moro Hub signifies a proactive approach toward addressing emerging cybersecurity challenges, particularly within operational technologies, and industrial IoT, where a surge in threats has been witnessed in recent years within the evolving digital landscape.

Security Solutions

Dynatrace expands GTM partnership with Google Cloud

Dynatrace, a global provider of unified observability and security solutions, announced an expanded go-to-market partnership with Google Cloud. Together, the two companies will enable more customers worldwide to adopt the Dynatrace platform on Google Cloud for AI-powered analytics and automation of their cloud-native environments to achieve their digital transformation goals. The GTM motions include joint sales enablement and marketing initiatives, including customer solution workshops, marketing campaigns, and events.

"Cloud observability and security are essential for business success in the modern digital world," said Jay Snyder, SVP, global partner and alliances at Dynatrace. "They help organizations speed up software development and innovation, improve user experiences, and boost customer satisfaction. The Dynatrace platform offers the industry's leading AI-powered observability and security for modern cloud environments."

Faster Payments

Careem Pay launches UK remittance service in UAE

Careem Pay, the digital wallet and fintech platform within the Careem app, is expanding its international remittance services to include "Faster Payments" to the UK for residents of the UAE.

Careem Pay enables customers, Captains, and business owners to manage their money, settle bills, and make seamless transactions both within and beyond the app. The Careem Pay international remittance service to India and Pakistan has been adopted by expats across the UAE. One customer sent $93,217 to Pakistan throughout 2023.

The new UK remittance service enables customers in the UAE to send money to UK bank accounts in a matter of minutes using just the recipient's bank account number and sort code, or the IBAN.

Sport News

MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

Stacked fight card set for PFL Europe Newcastle

'Path to Greatness' event by Saudi Arabia-backed brand takes place on June 8 at Utilita Arena with bantamweight and flyweights competing

Arab News New York

The Professional Fighters League has announced a stacked card for its PFL Europe Newcastle event on June 8, featuring bantamweights and flyweights looking to secure spots in the playoffs this September.

The "Path to Greatness" event has prize money of $100,000. Local hero Savannah Marshall makes her cage debut against Brazil's Mirela Vargas.

Dan Hardy, head of fighter operations for PFL Europe, said: "We can't wait to come back to Newcastle on June 8th, where PFL Europe officially launched in 2023. Our bantamweight and women's flyweight rosters are packed with quality and represent the best that the elite European MMA scene has to offer. And with the Regular Season format all of these fighters know what's at the end of the line — the European title, $100k and a pathway to our Global Season.

"But it wouldn't be a PFL Europe event without a stacked evening of showcase bouts, and we have a great selection of future stars, simmering tensions and a local hero in Savannah Marshall making her MMA debut."

Marshall has 10 victories by knockout as a boxer. She joins the deepest female combat sports roster in the world, which includes a familiar foe in Claressa Shields. Her first test in the cage comes in the form of Vargas, a three-fight professional.



Savannah Marshall makes her debut against Brazil's Mirela Vargas. Via @savmarshall1

With the winners progressing and the losers going home, the stakes could not be higher for the bantamweights. England's highly regarded Scouser Dean Garnett (12-2-1), who is on a four-fight win streak, faces Belgium's Ayton De Paepe (12-4) as both step into the PFL SmartCage for the first time.

Also at bantamweight, last year's finalist, Ireland's Frans Mlambo (15-6) looks to return to winning ways against Scotland's "The Apocalypse" Luke Shanks (10-4). Meanwhile, returning champion Khurshed Kakhorov (12-1) defends his PFL Europe title against Georgian Kikadze Botado (8-3-1) who dominated striking expert Dom Wooding last time out.

Rounding off the bantamweights, Alexander Luster (7-1), who has lit up the German MMA scene with all seven of his professional wins coming inside the first two rounds, faces Alperen Karabulut (10-3-0, 1 no-contest), the first Turkish fighter to compete inside the PFL SmartCage.

In the women's flyweight division, one of the most highly regarded female prospects in the world, Shanelle "The Nightmare" Dyer (4-0), will make her PFL Europe Season debut against Georgian submission specialist Mariam Torchinava (9-2). Also on the card Dyer's bitter rival and viral sensation, Sammy-Jo Luxton (2-0), makes her long awaited PFL Europe debut versus the returning Dutch talent Lizzy Gevers (3-1).

Also competing in the flyweight division, 2023 finalist Valentina Scatizzi (2-2) from Italy will face France's experienced 43-year-old Marie Loiseau (6-4), and Ireland's Dee Begley (4-5) faces Poland's Paulina Wisniewska (2-0). There will be one additional welterweight fight, with Jack Grant (19-8) facing Charlie Leary (17-13-1), with a chance to proceed to the playoffs and join the semifinalists who were victorious in Paris.

The 2024 PFL Europe Season began last month with a sold-out show in Paris. After Newcastle, the action moves to Glasgow's OVO Hydro on Sept. 28. The season will conclude at a venue to be announced later.

PFL EUROPE NEWCASTLE MAIN CARD

- Main Event: Savannah Marshall (debut) vs Mirela Vargas (1-2)
- Lightweight Showcase Bout: Kane Mousah (14-6) vs Dylan Tuke (7-4)
- Welterweight Season Bout: Jack Grant (19-8) vs Charlie Leary (17-13-1)
- Bantamweight Season Bout: Dean Garnett (12-2-1) vs Ayton De Paepe (12-4)
- Women's Flyweight Season Bout: Shanelle Dyer (4-0) vs Mariam Torchinava (9-2)
- Featherweight Showcase Bout: Ibragim Ibragimov (6-0) vs Josh Reed (13-8)
- Bantamweight Season Bout: Frans Mlambo (15-6) vs Luke Shanks (10-4)
- Women's Flyweight Season Bout: Lizzy Gevers (3-1) vs Sammy-Jo Luxton (2-0)
- Lightweight Showcase Bout: Mark Ewen (5-0) vs Mathias Poiron (7-1)
- Bantamweight Season Bout: Khurshed Kakhorov (12-1) vs Bondo Kikadze (8-3-1)
- Women's Flyweight Season Bout: Valentina Scatizzi (2-2) vs Marie Loiseau (6-4)
- Featherweight Showcase Bout: Ben Woolliss (2-0) vs Maher Belkhadir (1-1)
- Bantamweight Bout: Alexander Luster (7-1) vs Alperen Karabulut (10-3-0, 1 NC)
- Women's Flyweight Bout: Dee Begley (4-5) vs Paulina Wisniewska (2-0)



The AlUla Camel Cup 2024 will combine heart-pounding races with a vibrant celebration of sport, culture and entertainment. The races will take place April 24 to 27. Supplied

CAMEL RACING

AlUla Camel Cup promises a one-of-a-kind experience

Arab News AlUla

The AlUla Camel Cup, considered the pinnacle of camel racing in the region, promises an exhilarating spectacle for sports aficionados and cultural enthusiasts from across Saudi Arabia and the world.

Organized by the Royal Commission for AlUla in partnership with the Saudi Camel Racing Federation, the event will provide a celebration of sport, culture and entertainment.

In addition to the camel racing, there will be static and mobile displays and acts that celebrate AlUla's heritage and Saudi Arabia's artistic legacy, including music and performances that highlight the historical significance of the camel in local culture.

Workshops for adults throughout the day will cover calligraphy, traditional pottery making, incense crafting and Sadu weaving, providing hands-on learning experiences for visitors. Children, meanwhile, will enjoy a range of educational and creative activities, from camel origami and clay modeling to an augmented reality scanner that animates drawings.

Additional attractions include camel riding, a Light Brite experience where guests can try their hand at face painting, and a calligraphy light show after sunset. Visitors can also indulge in a traditional Saudi Arabian coffee roasting and tasting session.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Tickets to major heritage event available online.
- The camel racing spectacular runs from April 24 to 27.

Culinary delights from various cuisines will be available at pop-up stalls, while the retail experience will feature regional brands offering an array of products, including camel-themed streetwear, souvenirs and artisanal items reflecting AlUla's heritage.

The event will also host the AlUla Design Award Ceremony on Friday, where the winning camel covers will be displayed in the Heritage Village.

Rami AlMoallim, vice president of destination management and marketing at the commission, said: "As the second edition of the AlUla Camel Cup draws closer, we warmly invite sports and culture enthusiasts from around the globe to join us for an experience unlike any other. This event exemplifies RCU's commitment to sporting excellence infused with cultural depth, reflecting both our rich Saudi heritage and our forward-looking vision for AlUla.

"We are gearing up to deliver an unparalleled celebration of the ancient sport that is camel racing, set against the breathtaking backdrop of this oasis city that will resonate with fans and families alike. We look forward to welcoming guests to experience in person this culmination of Saudi Arabia's rich cultural landscape and sports innovation."

The event, being staged at the Mughayra Heritage Sports Village, will feature the region's fastest camels and most skilled jockeys, promising several rounds of top-tier competition.

The inaugural Camel Cup last year drew thousands of visitors and this year promises an even more significant experience because 2024 is the Year of the Camel, celebrating the animal's status in Saudi culture and society.

Ticket prices start at SR50 ($13). For bookings and further information, visit experiencealula.com.

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

After penalties furor

Nott Forest to get access to VAR audio

Nottingham Forest will be given the opportunity to privately hear the VAR audio related to three rejected penalty claims in their 2-0 Premier League defeat at Everton on Sunday.

Relegation-threatened Forest called on Monday for the audio between Stuart Attwell and on-field referee Anthony Taylor to be released publicly.

Sources close to referees' body, the Professional Game Match Officials Limited, said it has nothing to hide and will give Forest the opportunity to hear the audio in private. **AFP**



Achievement

Djokovic, Bonmati crowned at Laureus Awards

Novak Djokovic was named World Sportsman of the Year for a record-equaling fifth time at the Laureus Awards ceremony on Monday, while Spanish footballer Aitana Bonmati won individual and team awards.

Tennis great Djokovic, a record 24-time Grand Slam champion, equaled his former rival Roger Federer's tally at the prestigious ceremony in Madrid.

Djokovic, 36, won three Grand Slams last year along with the ATP Finals. "I am incredibly honored to have won my fifth," said Djokovic.

"I think back to 2012, when I won it for the first time as a 24-year-old.

"I am very proud to be here 12 years later, reflecting on a year that brought me and my fans a lot of excitement and success."

Bonmati won the Sportswoman of the Year award, becoming the first footballer to do so, and was also rewarded along with her Spain teammates for winning the Women's World Cup last summer. **AFP**

After 5 in a row

Exhausted Korda withdraws from LA stop

Top-ranked Nelly Korda withdrew from the LPGA's LA Championship on Monday, exhausted after matching a tour record with a fifth consecutive triumph and her second major victory.

Korda captured the Chevron Championship on Sunday at Carlton Woods in suburban Houston to join Annika Sorenstam and Nancy Lopez as the only LPGA players to win five titles in a row.

"The win still hasn't sunk in but I have truly been overwhelmed by all of the love and support I've received," Korda said in a statement posted on social media.

"I wanted to let you all know that after a lot of consideration with my team, I have decided to withdraw from the LA Championship." **AFP**

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'It's a very small, very exclusive club, and it's just nice to know that other people have gone through that experience as well,' 15th 'Doctor Who' star Ncuti Gatwa said of receiving support from actors who have played the iconic role previously.

&Finally

The Six

Dining out

Dine like a celebrity at these hotspots in Saudi Arabia. From Spanish cuisine to Mediterranean fare, Hollywood stars and football icons have sampled the menu at these eateries in Riyadh, Jeddah and AlUla.



Tatel

Located in Diriyah's Bujairi Terrace, Tatel Riyadh offers Spanish fine dining at an establishment that is backed by football icon Cristiano Ronaldo and tennis star Rafael Nadal.



Mamo Michelangelo

The restaurant offers guests a Mediterranean experience in Riyadh. US actress Eva Longoria dined here on a recent trip to Saudi Arabia.



Saffron, Banyan Tree

Located in AlUla's Banyan Tree Hotel, the Thai restaurant is nestled in the resort that US rapper Kanye West stayed at in 2023.



Mamlaka Al Mamlaka

With 21 dining experiences in one location, Portuguese football star Joao Felix most likely found what he was craving at Mamlaka Al Mamlaka in Riyadh.



Somewhere

Found across three locations in Saudi Arabia – Bujairi Terrace, ROSHN Front and in AlUla – Somewhere's Jeddah location was visited by Hollywood star Johnny Depp when he landed in the country for 2023's Red Sea International Film Festival.



Le Maschou

Georgina Rodriguez and Cristiano Ronaldo visited French fine dining restaurant Le Maschou in Riyadh last year, while Dutch DJ Afrojack dined there in February.

CLOSE UP

Amina Muaddi teases new collection



Arab News Dubai

Romanian Jordanian designer Amina Muaddi teased her new collection, titled "High Summer," on social media this week.

The celebrity-loved designer will release her new drop worldwide at 3 p.m. Central European Time on Tuesday.

Muaddi shared a teaser with her 1.3 million followers featuring a model opening a cream-colored clutch, revealing a mirror on the inside of the bag.

In addition to her collection of shoes, Muaddi's jewelry and bag lines are also gaining acclaim among her celebrity clientele. The shoemaker's label has garnered a loyal list of famous fans, including Dua Lipa, Gigi Hadid, Kylie Jenner and Hailey Baldwin Bieber.

Muaddi launched her eponymous footwear line in August 2018, about one year after departing from her role as co-founder and creative director of luxury footwear label Oscar Tiye.

The creator also helped design the shoes for Rihanna's Fenty collection. The collaboration received the Collaborator of the Year award at the 34th edition of the FN Achievement Awards in 2020.

A year later, she landed a spot on Women's Wear Daily and Footwear News' 50 Most Powerful Women list.

Her jewelry collection encompasses rings, earrings and bangles.

The rings boast spiral-shaped designs, bombe rings with a crystal center pieces available in both silver and gold, and a silver band adorned with crystals.

In the earring selection, versatility reigns supreme. Alongside simple rectangle and circular hoops embellished with crystals, she offers intricate multi-ring hoop designs.

The designer's handbag range includes a variety of styles, from sleek clutches with striking embellishments to bold totes and crossbody bags.

Some of the bags are embellished with sparkling crystals or intricate sequins, while others are made from satin or leather and feature metallic finishes. The color palette includes classic cream, brown, black, red and silver.

Muaddi previously spoke to Footwear News about her rise of one of the most in-demand footwear designers in the industry.

"I was so passionate, so I was willing to go through any hardship," she told the publication. "There's a reason why only so many people get to this point, because you get tested a lot.

"Many times, I was close to giving up. I had to part ways with my partner, with producers; I've had (orders) canceled. It's not about what you go through, it's how you survive the situation and how you thrive after it. It's a never-ending lesson," she added.

Amina Muaddi shared a teaser with her Instagram followers featuring a model opening a cream-colored clutch.
Getty Images/ Instagram



Francine Maisler

CASTING DIRECTOR

Francine Maisler to be honored at film fest

Arab News Dubai

One of the oldest film festivals in the world, the Czech Republic's Karlovy Vary Film Festival has teamed up with Variety magazine to honor casting director Francine Maisler.

Maisler's recent credits include "Dune: Part Two," "The Bikeriders," "Challengers," "Civil War" and "Joker: Folie à Deux."

She has worked on more than 70 feature films and is a recipient of 15 Artios Awards from the Casting Society of America, including for "Marriage Story" in 2020 and "Don't Look Up" in 2021.

"The profession of casting director has gained increasing attention over the past years, as evidenced among other things by the fact that, starting in 2026, the Academy Awards will include an Oscar for casting," the festival's executive director Kryštof Mucha said.

MUSIC ICON

Celine Dion opens up about health issues

Arab News Dubai

Canadian icon Celine Dion has opened up about living with Stiff Person Syndrome, an autoimmune neurological disorder, in an interview with Vogue France.

"I'm well, but it's a lot of work. I'm taking it one day at a time," Dion said. "I haven't beat the disease, as it's still within me and always will be. I hope that we'll find a miracle, a way to cure it with scientific research, but for now I have to learn to live with it."

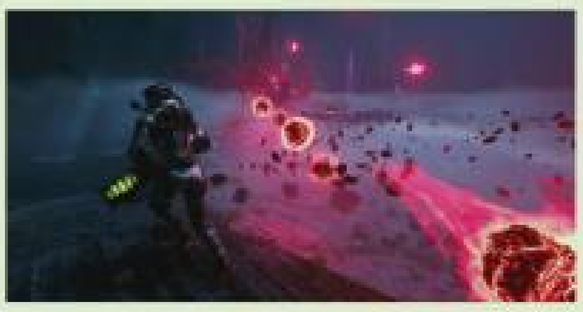
She continued: "Five days a week I undergo athletic, physical and vocal therapy. I work on my toes, my knees, my calves, my fingers, my singing, my voice ... I have to learn to live with it now and stop questioning myself."

REVIEW

'Returnal' — a thoughtful and challenging sci-fi adventure

James Denselow London

Right from the start, before you even take control of Selene Vassos, a reconnaissance scout who has crash landed on a prohibited and mysterious planet, you are warned that "Returnal" (available originally for PS5 but now PC too) is "intended to be a challenging experience." Such difficulty may deter the casual gamer used to a steady progression of character and exploration through a games environment. However, "Returnal" is a thoughtful and rewarding adventure that lays claim to much originality of thought in its set up. The key theme is that when you die, you return! But not to the same environment that you were in before. Instead, each new cycle postures new challenges and progress can only be made by unlocking upgrades that allow you to make more meta progress in Selene's journey.



'Returnal' is 'intended to be a challenging experience,' according to the game makers.
Supplied

Selene herself is a super professional, unfazed character who doesn't appear too bothered when she comes across a body of her former self that died in this strange world where the laws of physics and time appear not to apply. Staying alive is obviously crucial, particularly as it allows her to retain better weapons for longer. In addition, avoiding damage allows for boosts of agility, vision and more, making for a more lethal Selene. The environment is varied and surprising with each incarnation and the weapons on offer come complete with a range of exciting alternative fire mechanisms such as homing missiles or laser-like items. A hostile environment where even plants are a threat to life is mitigated by your technology, the core of which you can improve despite the reset of deaths, through fancy smart "xeno-tech" that becomes integrated with alien kit left around.

Players have to be patient in the early chapters getting used to the sapping dynamic of death and return. Once that makes more sense, the loneliness of both her alien environment and the impossibility of even dying to escape it make for a pretty special atmosphere that a smart shooting engine then complements.