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SATURDAY, May 11, 2024
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SINCE 1975

ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

FAST FACT

The UN General Assembly voted by a wide margin to grant new 'rights and privileges' to Palestine and called on the Security Council to reconsider Palestine's request to become the 194th member of the UN.

Smoke billows following Israeli strikes on the Islamic University of Gaza on Friday. AFP



MIDDLE EAST WAR

WAR-SCARRED

We don't need you, Iraq tells UN aid mission

Arab News Jeddah

Iraq's government on Friday told the UN assistance mission set up after the 2003 invasion that it should pull out of Baghdad by the end of 2025 because it was no longer needed.

Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani said Iraq wanted to deepen cooperation with other UN organizations but there was no longer a need for the political work of the UN mission because Iraq had made significant progress toward stability.

"Iraq has managed to take important steps in many fields, especially those that fall under the assistance mission's mandate," Sudani said in a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

The mission, which has its HQ in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone, was set up with a wide mandate to help develop Iraqi institu-

Critics worry about Iraq's stability, given the presence of many heavily armed groups that have battled in the streets.

tions, support political dialogue and elections, and promote human rights.

The mission's head in Iraq often shuttles between top political, judicial and security officials in work that supporters see as important to preventing and resolving conflicts, but critics have often described as interference.

Iraq's government has since 2023 moved to end several international missions, including the US-led coalition created in 2014 to fight Daesh and the UN mission to promote accountability for the militant group's crimes.

Iraqi officials say the country has come a long way from the sectarian bloodletting after the US-led invasion and Daesh's attempt to establish a caliphate, and that it no longer needs so much international help. But critics worry about stability, given the presence of many heavily armed military-political groups that have battled in the streets.

Israeli troops drive further into Rafah as tanks split city in two

• Hamas regroup in north, 4 Israeli soldiers killed • UN General Assembly backs Palestinian bid for membership

Arab News Jeddah

Israeli troops pushed further into Rafah in southern Gaza on Friday as its tanks split the city in two and encircled the eastern half.

The Israeli forces faced fierce resistance from Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters, and battles also resumed in northern Gaza, where Hamas has regrouped after being forced out earlier in the war. Four Israeli soldiers were killed in fighting there.

Israel's move into Rafah has been short of the full-scale invasion that

it threatened. The US and other Israeli allies are deeply opposed to a major offensive, and Washington has threatened to hold back arms to shipments to Israel.

But the heavy fighting has shaken the city and spread fear that a bigger assault is coming.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees said more than 110,000 people had fled Rafah, and families who had already moved numerous times during the war were doing so again.

"The full invasion hasn't started and things have already gotten below zero," said Raed Al-Fayomi, a refugee in Rafah. "There's no food or water."

NUMBER

34,943

Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip during more than six months of war between Israel and Hamas.

Those fleeing erected new tent camps in Khan Younis, which was half destroyed in an earlier Israeli offensive, and the town of Deir Al-Balah.

The charity Project Hope said there had been a surge in people

from Rafah seeking care for blast injuries, infections and pregnancies in its clinic in Deir Al-Balah.

"People are evacuating to nothing. There are no homes or proper shelters for people to go to," said the group's Gaza team leader in Rafah, Moses Kondowe.

UN aid official Georgios Petropoulos said humanitarian workers had no supplies to set up in new locations.

"We simply have no tents, we have no blankets, no bedding, none of the items that you would expect a population on the move to be able to get from the humanitarian system," he said.

The fighting in Rafah has left crucial nearby aid crossings inaccessible, and food and other supplies were running critically low, aid agencies said.

The World Food Program will run out of food for distribution in southern Gaza by Saturday, Petropoulos said.

Aid groups have said fuel will also be depleted soon, forcing hospitals to shut down critical operations and bringing to a halt trucks delivering aid across south and central Gaza.

• Opinion: Jonathan Gornall Page 9
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ACHIEVEMENT

Saudi manga artist receives award from Japan

Samah Kamel's work inspired by the challenges faced by parents of disabled children

Rahaf Jambri Riyadh

A Saudi manga artist has been given a special award by Japan for work inspired by the challenges faced by parents of disabled children.

Samah Kamel, from Jeddah, is the first Saudi to win a Japan International Manga Award since it was launched 17 years ago. Japanese Ambassador Fumio Iwai presented her with the scheme's Special Encouragement Award in a ceremony at the Japanese Embassy in Riyadh.

Kamel's award-winning work, "Taif," is about the challenges facing parents of children on the autism spectrum, and the various



Japanese Ambassador Fumio Iwai presents Samah Kamel the Manga award at the embassy in Riyadh.
AN photo by Huda Bashatah

ways autistic people can be accommodated and integrated into society. "I was surprised to win because I had entered a few times before without success," she told Arab

News. "This taught me that persistence pays off, and my daughter, who is here with me today, inspired the manga. I would like to encourage any mother raising a child with

a disability to know that she is a powerful and inspirational person."

Issam Bukhari, editor-in-chief of Manga Arabia, to which Kamel is a regular contributor, said her achievement was a historic milestone in exporting Saudi and Arab creativity to the world.

Iwai told Arab News: "Manga is one of the most popular cultural fields in Japan. So I'm very happy to see the spread of manga culture, not only in Saudi Arabia but also in the Arab world."

The International Manga Award was established by Japan's Foreign Ministry to honor manga artists who have contributed to interna-

tional cultural exchange by spreading the genre overseas. This year there were 587 entries from 82 countries and regions. For the first time, entries were received from four African countries — Ethiopia, Comoros, Senegal, and Rwanda.

The Brief

SAUDI STUDENTS

Thirty-five Saudi students will compete in the Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair 2024 in Los Angeles from May 10 to 18. **P4**

PARTNERSHIPS

The Philippines says it is open to expanding partnerships with Saudi Arabia in its top priority sectors, including renewable energy and the halal industry. **P8**

TRANSFORMATION

Digital transformation is on the cusp as regional companies join hands to further boost this technological development across the Mideast and North Africa. **P11**

2 Riyals • Vol. XLIX
No. 157 • 16 pages



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The Saudi General Authority of Civil Aviation looks forward to hosting investors at the Future Aviation Forum this May.

Abdulaziz Al-Qasbi
GACA president



Radar

KSA today



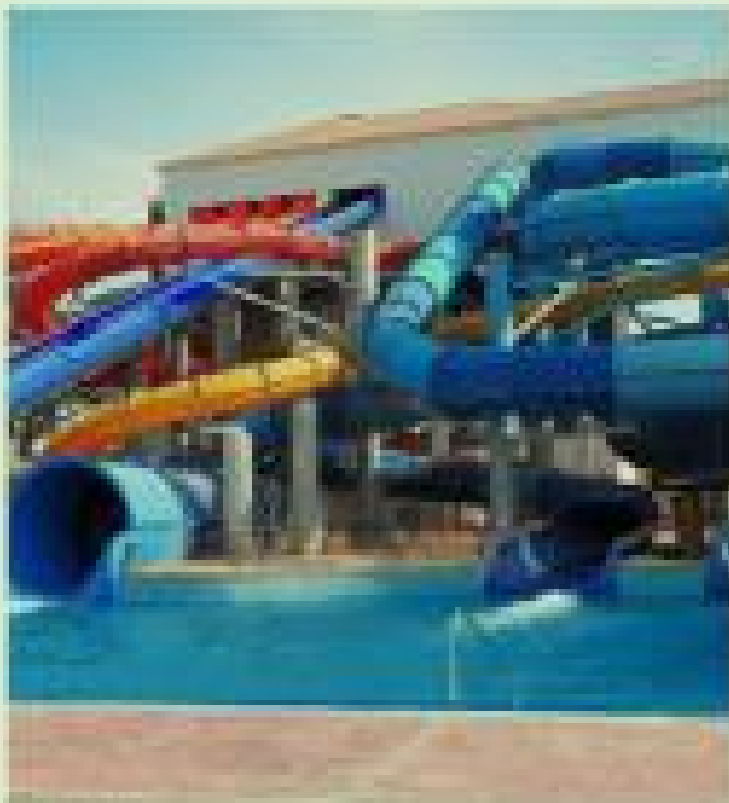
Hofuf Horse riding

Learn how to handle, train, and ride horses at a one-day workshop in Riyadh on Tuesday, May 14. To register, go to experiences.suplift.com.



Diriyah Glass stain

Discover how to paint glass and create interesting art pieces to make your space more attractive at this workshop on Saturday, May 11. Book through experiences.suplift.com.



Dhahran Loopagoon

Visit the first water park for women in Dana Bay, at Half Moon Beach, and discover exciting water slides and water activities. Book through loopagoon.com.



Jeddah Scuba diving

Saeed Bawazeer will guide novice divers through the principles of diving and how to use diving gear, beginning in a swimming pool before moving to the ocean, where students can explore underwater life. Register at experience.suplift.com.

The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Saudi Arabia's Commerce Minister Dr. Majid bin Abdullah Al-Qasbi has stressed the importance of expanding trade with Thailand. The minister, who is also chairman of the General Authority for Foreign Trade,

recently concluded his visit to Thailand where talks included the participation of nine government agencies and 85 private sector entities, the Saudi Press Agency reported on Friday.

Al-Qasbi said the two nations have been

bolstering ties over the past few years with visits, forums, exhibitions and conferences.

He said Thailand has vast potential across various sectors including energy, manufacturing, technology, agriculture, tourism, finance, and health services.

What's Trending

Today's hot topics explained by Ameera Abid



TOP VISIT Prince Harry

Meghan Markle and Prince Harry touched down in Nigeria and visited a school in the country. They were met with excitement and joy from the locals.

A group welcoming the couple held a welcome banner saying "We are honored to have you!" Local dancers and singers also gathered to hold a traditional performance for the couple.

They were then given wooden beaded necklaces, which they wore during the visit. They met with the school founder, Oprah Adl, and her daughter, who is the director of the school, located in Nigeria's capital, Abuja.

The CEO of the GEANCO Foundation — which provides critical healthcare and education services in Nigeria — also met the couple.

Last year, the couple's Archewell foundation said it would donate school supplies and menstrual products to women in Nigeria, according to a report by PEOPLE.

In addition to the financial support, Archewell is also providing menstrual health education to about 2,500 girls in the country.

While in Nigeria, Prince Harry delivered a speech on mental health. He said that there is "no shame in acknowledging that a day is bad, that you woke up this morning feeling sad, that you were at school, feeling stressed, that you have lost a loved one in your family and you don't know who to turn to or who to speak to."

POLITICAL LIMELIGHT

Barron Trump

The youngest son of former US president Donald Trump, Barron, is set to enter the political limelight at the Republican National Convention in July.

The 18-year-old has made it on the list of delegates-at-large to attend the event in Florida. During Trump's time as president, Barron was kept out of the public eye by his mother, Melania. He lived at home in Trump Tower in New York City until he finished school.

Renowned lobbyist Evan Power said: "We are fortunate to have a great group of grassroots leaders,

elected officials and members of the Trump family working together as part of the Florida delegation."

Donald Trump has balanced working on his 2024 presidential campaign and fighting legal issues. The

former president is facing dozens of criminal charges across four separate cases. He has also been accused of falsifying business records.

Trump was allowed a break from his trials to attend Barron's high school graduation by Judge Juan Merchan.



Today's Number

35

Thirty-five Saudi students will compete in the Regeneration International Science and Engineering Fair 2024 in Los Angeles from May 10 to 18, the Saudi Press Agency reported on Friday.

Review

'I Used to Have a Plan'

HAIFA ALSHAMMARI

"I Used to Have a Plan: But Life Had Other Ideas" is a captivating book by New York-based author Alessandra Olanow. Her book was published in 2020 and talks about a self-discovery journey and resilience.

Through her beautifully crafted stories and storytelling, she takes readers on a journey of self-discovery and invites them to learn through the unexpected experiences that shape their lives.

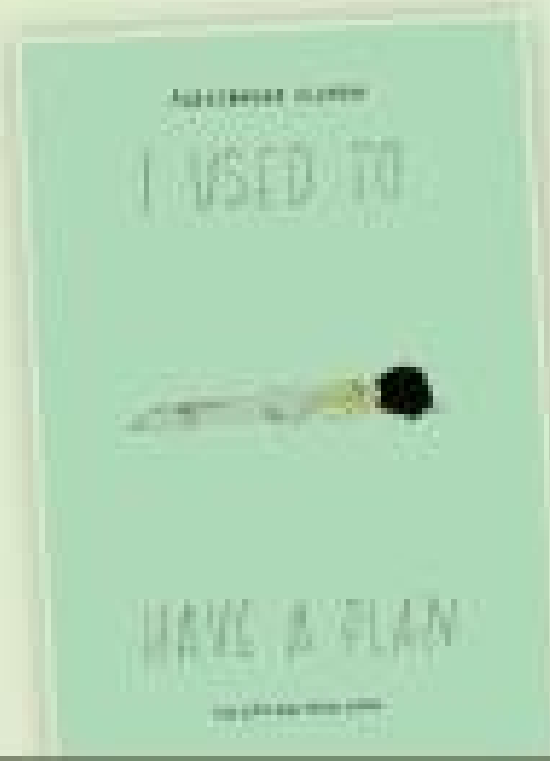
Through the pages of this book, Olanow shares her personal experiences of how she managed to overcome life's unpredictable circumstances. With her honesty and interesting narrative, she speaks about the lessons learned on her life journey. From her professional experiences to her personal relationships, Olanow's story exudes authenticity and reminds the reader that life rarely follows a straight path, which makes life realistic and beautiful at the same time.

One of the strengths of Olanow's book is her ability to describe the depth of emotions and how she talks about her personal struggles during some of the hardest moments in her life.

She expresses her opinions and reflections on life's challenges by encouraging the readers to reflect as well on their own journeys, motivating them to overcome their obstacles too.

Moreover, regardless of the ups and downs she encountered, she explained how she maintained a sense of hope and resilience.

Additionally, the book is enriched with evocative descriptions of the places the author has lived and traveled to. Whether she was exploring the busy streets in one city or immersing herself in the serenity of nature, her ability to paint a colorful picture through her words takes readers to these places, allowing them to travel with her in thoughts.



TheRegion

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Jeddah

- High-end local and globally admired jewelry brands will display their new designs at the Jewellery and Bride Arabia exhibition in Dubai. The event will connect local and international buyers to brands with sales and discounts on jewelry. The exhibition is at Dubai World Trade Centre from May 10-13. Check

dwtc.com for more details.

- "Physics and Honey," a Lebanese play, follows an extraordinary love story that goes beyond the reality we think we are living in, challenging our understanding of time and place. The play will make audiences laugh and cry, feel nostalgic, and will talk to their hearts and minds. Held at Al-Madina Theater, Beirut, the show

runs from Thursday to Sunday until May 19.

- Sharjah Children's Reading Festival is being held until May 12 at Expo Centre Sharjah. The festival is a celebration that goes beyond one age group to enrich the whole family, while instilling a love of reading in the youngest of children. For more details, check sharjah-events.ae.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

May 11	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	04:22	05:45	12:18	03:37	06:50	08:20
Madinah	04:35	05:41	12:18	03:44	06:56	08:26
Riyadh	03:47	05:12	11:50	03:38	06:28	07:58
Abha	04:19	05:38	12:07	03:38	06:35	08:05
Dammam	03:28	04:56	11:37	03:06	06:17	07:47



SAUDI ARABIA

The science of sustainable living

Embracing green-living guidelines could benefit the environment and both the well-being and finances of homeowners

Rahaf Jambi Riyadh

The concept of sustainable living has gained significant traction in recent years as individuals and communities strive to reduce their environmental impact.

In Saudi Arabia, where rapid urbanization and economic growth have led to increased energy consumption, the importance of adopting green living practices cannot be overstated.

"When designing or buying a new home, it is important to consider the insulation levels of walls and windows," Thaar Qasem, senior energy engineer at SETS Saudi Arabia, told Arab News.

"The choice of building orientation can also increase natural light and help reduce heat absorption."

Integrating smart home technology for monitoring and controlling energy usage allows residents to optimize their consumption and identify areas where efficiency can be improved.

Proper insulation, sealing, and the use of efficient heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems are also essential in preventing waste and maintaining a comfortable indoor environment.

Similarly, using recycled glass not only diverts waste from landfills but also reduces the energy required to produce new materials.

Khalid Al-Harbi, an architect based in Riyadh, said a common misconception around sustainability is that it relies solely on the energy systems, equipment, and material choices used in the building.

"A well thought out architectural design that studies the needs of the users and considers the environmental factors will significantly reduce the cost and energy use of the building," Al-Harbi told Arab News. "Through studying the solar orientation of the sun in both summer and winter, we can decide on the most efficient placements of the windows and the shading systems needed such as exterior screens, outdoor shades, curtains, and so on, throughout the building."

Clay walls have emerged as a popular choice for eco-conscious homeowners due to their natural insulation properties, humidity regulation, and sustainability.

According to Adam Weismann,

ECO-FRIENDLY HOME MATERIALS THAT CAN SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE THE ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT OF A HOME



FIBER FROM GLASS AND SHEEP

Fiber from glass and sheep fleece is used for insulation and construction. Glass fiber is lightweight, fire resistant, prevents mold and keeps out pests. It is commonly used for insulating roofs, walls and floors, as well as in heat, ventilation and air conditioning systems. Sheep fiber has excellent thermal-insulation properties, is breathable and moisture-wicking, and has flame-retardant properties.



CLAY WALLS

Can regulate indoor temperatures by trapping heat or keeping out cold. This reduces the reliance on artificial heating and cooling systems, thereby decreasing energy consumption and lowering utility costs.



BAMBOO

This is a resource that can be harvested in as little as three to five years, in contrast to traditional hardwoods that may take decades to mature.



RECLAIMED WOOD

Sourced from old buildings, barns and industrial structures, it offers a sustainable alternative to virgin timber. Designers and builders can then also embrace the beauty of aged wood.



RECYCLED GLASS

Waste from sources including bottles, jars and windows is crushed, melted and shaped into new products. This reduces energy consumption and carbon emissions associated with production from raw materials.



founder of Clayworks and Claymoon, clay is a sustainable, non-toxic alternative.

"From a sustainability perspective, clay has a very minimal carbon footprint because it is a pure substance with no chemicals," Weismann told Arab News.

"Additionally, from a toxicity perspective, there is nothing that clay can truly release into the atmosphere. Thus, using it is a highly healthy and beneficial solution." Traditional Saudi architecture has long used sun-dried clay blocks, which remain cool during hot weather and release heat during the late hours when the temperature drops.

In addition to using sustainable materials, implementing energy-efficient strategies is key to creating eco-friendly homes in Saudi Arabia.

One effective approach is the installation of solar panels or solar water heaters to harness the

DID YOU KNOW?

- In 2022, Saudi Arabia's residential sector consumed more than 47 percent of electrical output.
- Home cooling accounted for the largest share of that residential consumption.
- Air conditioning alone may soon account for 70 percent of consumption.

abundant sunlight in the region.

"However, a government incentive is needed to push people towards incorporating solar panels in their homes," said Al-Harbi. "Many countries offer subsidies to their citizens where they help with 30-70 percent of the cost of solar systems."

"The incentive programs are usually done with tax credits, lowering bills, low interest loans, etc. We're confident that these types of programs will soon be implemented in the country."

Part of the battle will be changing consumer behavior. Qasem believes raising awareness is essential to making effective energy savings.

"Various easy methods make a big difference," he said. "Turning off lights and AC when not needed, closing the windows and doors to conserve energy, using the washing machine at full capacity only, and using sunlight to your advantage are just a few."

Business must partner with communities to save the environment

RAED ALBASSEET

Effective stewardship of a natural habitat hinges on the involvement of the people who live and work there. Communities understand local environmental issues from firsthand experience.

Red Sea Global, the company I work for, is creating luxury resorts on the western coast of Saudi Arabia, helping to put the Kingdom on the global tourism map.

Upon completion, our flagship destinations — the Red Sea and AMAALA — will be powered exclusively by renewable energy, with some 760,000 solar panels already in place.

We aim to achieve a 30 percent net conservation benefit at our locations by 2040. We are gardening corals to help replenish reefs and we have planted more than 1 million mangrove tree seedlings, one of nature's best carbon

sinks, out of a planned 50 million by 2030.

To nurture our environment, we must involve the farmers, fishermen and townspeople who are our neighbors.

By helping them find their voice and express their wants and concerns, we can forge the partnerships that are vital for protecting and enhancing our environment, while we also try to improve people's lives.

Our collaborations range from the grassroots to the private sector, government agencies, such as Saudi Arabia's National Center for Environmental Compliance, and a broad spectrum of civil society organizations.

Empowering local communities means raising awareness, building capacity, and linking them with essential knowledge and resources. A good example of this is Tamala, the farmers' co-operative that Red Sea Global co-founded,



Raed Albasheet is the group chief environment and sustainability officer of Red Sea Global, the developer behind The Red Sea and AMAALA, two tourism projects on the northwestern coast of Saudi Arabia.

In 2021, we approached some of the farmers in our areas to source fresh vegetables and fruits for our future hotels. These farmers told us about the many challenges they faced, from overpriced fertilizers and a lack of technical expertise, to limited transportation that made it hard for them to sell their produce.

So we stepped in, helping to establish Tamala in 2022. Today, local farms are delivering high-quality produce directly to The Red Sea destination. Traveling from farm to table, this produce leaves a much smaller carbon footprint than would be the case if we had to truck it north from our supply hub in Jeddah.

Our partnership with local farmers through Tamala is a success because we listened to local communities.

Another example of local empowerment is Red Sea Global's project to restore traditional

sailboats in the town of Umluj. Our aim was to help the community revive and preserve its rich maritime heritage.

Yet another initiative for community empowerment is a mobile phone app that we designed for people living near The Red Sea destination. It is an open, two-way communication channel that lets communities share feedback, suggestions and complaints directly with us. The app is called Jewar, which translates roughly as "Good Neighbor." Even though Jewar is still in its beta phase, almost 17,000 people have already downloaded it.

These diverse examples show that the only limit to community engagement is imagination.

Yet, to achieve truly outstanding success, it is essential that we empower local communities, enabling them to become partners in regenerating our natural habitats.

News Saudi Arabia



The Kingdom's team was selected from over 210,000 candidates earlier this year by experts and specialists linked to Mawhiba. SPA

BOOSTING TALENT

Leading Saudi science, engineering students to compete in world fair

Mitigating dust build-up on solar panels is a top project

Arab News Riyadh

Thirty-five Saudi Arabian students will compete in the Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair 2024 in Los Angeles from May 10 to 18, the Saudi Press Agency reported on Friday.

They will join 1,700 other participants from 70 countries in the ISEF, which is recognized as a pre-college competition in scientific research and innovation. The Kingdom will be led by representatives from the King Abdulaziz and His Companions Foundation for Giftedness and Creativity, or Mawhiba, and the Ministry of Education.

The Kingdom's team was selected from over 210,000 candidates earlier this year by experts

and specialists linked to Mawhiba. Their projects underwent rigorous evaluation during the "Ibdaa" National Olympiad for Scientific Creativity, culminating in the selection of 180.

Thirty-five talented students were nominated to represent the Kingdom in the ISEF from the 45 students whose projects qualified for the Olympiad's finals, the SPA reported.

Among these students is Areej Al-Qarni, who will showcase her research focused on mitigating dust accumulation on solar panels. This is a problem that leads to energy and financial losses amounting to millions of dollars.

Al-Qarni explained that her research is aimed at developing sustainable solutions to this global issue, to conserve energy and ensure financial viability for crucial projects.

HIGHLIGHTS

• The Saudi students will join 1,700 other participants from 70 countries in the ISEF, which is recognized as a pre-college competition in scientific research and innovation.

• The Kingdom will be led by representatives from the King Abdulaziz and His Companions Foundation for Giftedness and Creativity, or Mawhiba, and the Ministry of Education.

• Thirty-five talented students were nominated to represent the Kingdom in the ISEF from the 45 students whose projects qualified for the Olympiad's finals.

Mawhiba has emphasized that the students chosen to represent the Kingdom underwent rigorous training conducted by both local and international academics and experts across various disciplines, the SPA reported.

The Kingdom is a primary sponsor of the ISEF 2024 exhibition, offering prizes for innovative projects in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM. These prizes include full scholarships for undergraduate studies at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, and participation in the Mawhiba Universal Enrichment Program.

This year marks the Kingdom's 18th-consecutive participation in the ISEF. Saudi Arabia students have at previous fairs won 133 awards, including 92 grand prizes and 44 special distinctions.

CULTURAL EXCHANGE

International conference in South Korea focuses on spreading Arabic language

Hebeshi Alshammari Riyadh

The international conference, Challenges and Prospects of Teaching Arabic Language and Literature, concluded on Friday in the South Korean capital, Seoul.

Held over two days at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, the event was organized by the King Salman Global Academy for Arabic Language in cooperation with the Korean Association of Arabic Language and Literature and Hankuk University of Foreign Studies.

Dr. Abdullah Al-Wosheemi, secretary-general of the King Salman Global Academy for Arabic Language, emphasized the center's commitment to strengthening its strategy and objectives in promoting the Arabic language worldwide.

He highlighted the center's ongoing efforts to enhance Arabic language education in Korea by implementing courses, publishing books, and organizing lectures.

Al-Wosheemi expressed the center's aspirations for the international conference to serve as a platform for reaching global



Jong Wha Lee, president of the Korean Association for Arabic Language and Literature, during the event. SPA

historical overview of the Arabic language in Korea, mentioning the establishment of several departments, the oldest dating back to 1965.

He also discussed the rapidly evolving language education landscape with the advent of artificial intelligence. He intends to develop a plan for revitalizing Arabic language instruction through collaboration with organizations in Arab countries, he said, as well as exchanges among Arabic language specialists to explore various approaches to ensuring effective teaching methodologies.

The conference's sessions addressed six key themes: modern methodologies in teaching Arabic as a second language; preparing teaching materials for Arabic as a second language; measurement and evaluation in the context of teaching Arabic as a second language; means and techniques for teaching Arabic as a second language; the current state of Arabic language teaching in Korea; and language planning for teaching Arabic and other languages in Korea.

audiences, establishing communication channels, and drawing upon diverse global experiences in teaching Arabic as a second language. He further emphasized the center's dedication to unifying scientific references internally and externally in the Arabic language and its sciences.

Dr. Jong Wha Lee, president of the Korean Association for Arabic Language and Literature, provided a

HIGHLIGHT

The aim is to establish a periodic program for book production in Arabic to elevate the Kingdom's film industry writing from amateur to an area known for its professionalism and specialization.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Challenges

Health forum held in Tabuk concludes

The first Tabuk International Forum for Health Promotion concluded on Thursday at the King Salman Armed Forces Hospital in the northwest region, with the participation of more than 18 speakers from various medical fields and related sectors.

The forum discussed treatment methods for diabetes, the technical uses of mobile phones to promote health, and the role of education, in addition to telemedicine and the importance of clinics, and the latest medical developments in tackling obesity. It discussed human health rights, drug health standards, and modern drainage techniques, as well as water and food health standards.

It also focused on safety measures for the quality of work life and ways to avoid burnout. The conference concluded with a discussion on the latest methods in combating addiction, the effect of drugs on individuals and society, and the role of smoking cessation clinics and education on addiction and its causes.

SPA Tabuk

Laws and regulations

Market inspections conducted in Jazan

The Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture in Jazan has inspected thousands of fish and marine product markets in Jazan over the past four months.

The director of the ministry's Jazan branch, Eng. Mohammad bin Ali Al-Atif, said the inspections were part of the authority's work to ensure compliance with health requirements, technical conformity and approved food security standards.

During the 3,228 inspections, field teams confiscated and destroyed 7,830 kilograms of spoiled fish, farmed crustaceans and other marine products unfit for human consumption.

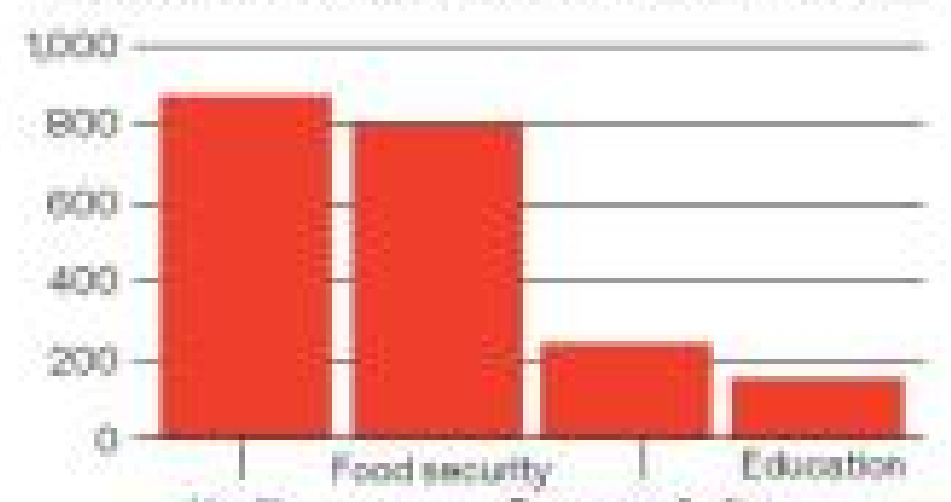
They issued 282 warnings and violations for issues such as selling spoiled fish, not wearing gloves while cleaning fish, poor cleanliness, expiration of the health card, and poor labor hygiene.

Al-Atif stressed the field inspections would continue and called on workers and investors in the fish and shrimp trade to abide by the laws and regulations.

SPA Jazan

The Day's FIGURES

KSRELIEF LARGEST COMPLETED & ONGOING PROJECTS IN 95 COUNTRIES



Source: KSrelief

DiplomaticQuarter

EMBASSY ACTIVITIES



Mayor of Riyadh region Prince Dr. Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf and Mogobo David Magabe, S. Africa's envoy to KSA, during the event.

Strong relationship

South African ambassador holds Freedom Day celebration in Riyadh

Mogobo David Magabe, South Africa's ambassador to Saudi Arabia, hosted a Freedom Day celebration on Thursday in Riyadh's Cultural Palace.

Freedom Day is celebrated annually on April 27 in South Africa to commemorate its first democratic election on that day in 1994, an event that signaled the end of official racial segregation in the country. The embassy in Riyadh decided to hold the 30th anniversary celebrations after Ramadan.

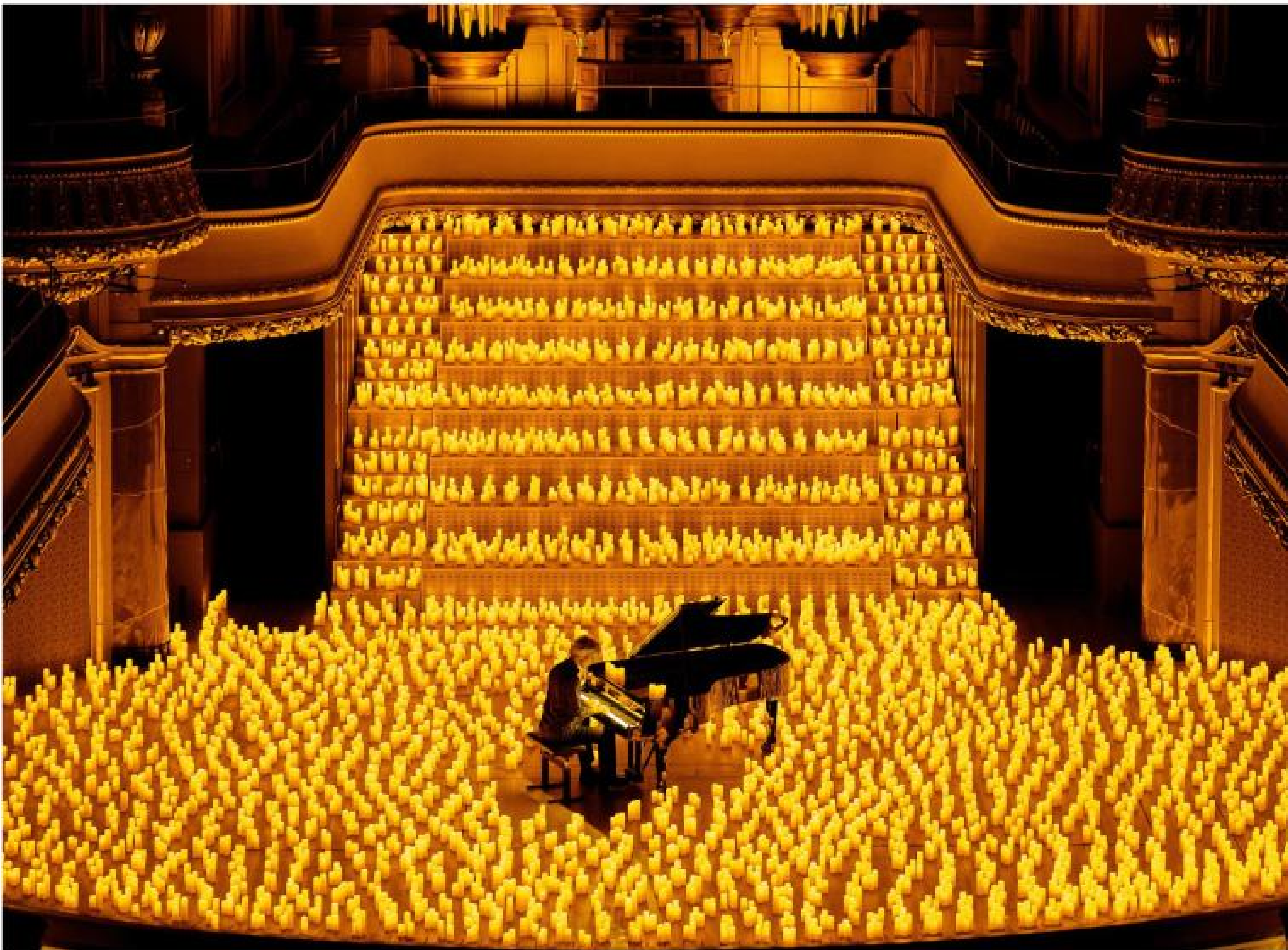
"This is a very important day because of the relationship that South Africa shares with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in several areas," Magabe told Arab News. "Since 1994, our diplomatic ties, which this year turn 30, have grown substantially. "Saudi Arabia is a regional power that is presenting itself as a gateway into the market and GCC countries," the ambassador continued. "South Africa is also a gateway into the continent of Africa and the two friendly nations play a very important role."

Magabe highlighted numerous

visits made by South Africa's leaders to the Kingdom, including President Cyril Ramaphosa's visit in October 2022, when he met with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. During that visit, the two sides signed multiple memorandums of understanding, to a value exceeding \$15 billion, and also agreed to explore areas of joint cooperation in the fields of energy, petroleum and petrochemicals, and electricity and renewable energy such as solar and wind.

At the celebrations on Thursday, Magabe gave a speech highlighting the historical ties between the two countries and areas of cooperation including trade, investment, and tourism. Mayor of Riyadh region, Prince Dr. Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf, was the guest of honor.

Following Magabe's opening remarks and the cutting of the cake — performed by the ambassador and the mayor of Riyadh — guests had the opportunity to sample multiple products and dishes from South Africa.



It was my first time playing for a Saudi crowd, and I thought it was fantastic.

Magdalena Wajdzik
Polish pianist

The iconic concerts, supported by the live entertainment platform Fever, have been held in more than 150 cities across the world, including Dubai, New York City, London, Singapore and Tokyo.

Supplied

STRIKING THE RIGHT CHORD

Candlelight concerts return to Riyadh

Events bring a rich classical music experience to Saudi audiences

Rahaf Jumbi Riyadh

Candlelight concerts are returning to Riyadh in three different settings, bringing a rich classical music experience to Saudi audiences following a thrilling series in December last year.

The iconic concerts, supported by the live entertainment platform Fever, have been held in more than 150 cities across the world, including Dubai, New York City, London, Singapore and Tokyo.

Running until the end of June, the shows are held in several places in Riyadh, including The Ritz-Carlton Hotel and the Crowne Plaza Riyadh



Palace. Performers play music from greats such as Mozart, Vivaldi and Ludovico Einaudi.

In an interview with Arab News, Magdalena Wajdzik, a Polish pianist who performed in the Ritz-Carlton ballroom, discussed how Einaudi has inspired her career.

"I have watched Ludovico Einaudi's work in movies a long time ago and absolutely loved the soundtracks. So, I obviously Googled the soundtracks, and I started playing his music ever since," said Wajdzik.

The pianist resides in Dubai and performs in concerts for Fever throughout the Gulf.

"The Saudis are eager for this form of art and are really welcoming. It was my first time

HIGHLIGHTS

• Running until the end of June, the shows are held in several places in Riyadh, including The Ritz-Carlton Hotel and the Crowne Plaza Riyadh Palace. Performers play music from greats such as Mozart, Vivaldi and Ludovico Einaudi.

• The Candlelight Concerts in December featured hits from British rock band Coldplay as well the outstanding works of Polish composer Chopin.

• The concerts held around the world have celebrated works from classical, jazz, pop, film soundtracks, ballet and more.

playing for a Saudi crowd, and I thought it was fantastic. I really enjoyed the atmosphere, and I believe the Saudi audience is quite curious," she said.

"The ballroom is just gorgeous. Their location is excellent, and I believe Fever distinguishes our candlelight concepts by always looking for truly wonderful sites, such as this ballroom at the Ritz-Carlton."

The Candlelight Concerts in December featured hits from British rock band Coldplay as well the outstanding works of Polish composer Chopin.

Candlelight concerts held around the world have celebrated works from classical, jazz, pop, film soundtracks, ballet and more.

CREATIVITY

Opposites attract as artists explore beauty in Diriyah exhibition

Sulafa Alkhunaizi Riyadh

In Shashai Studio's latest exhibition, "Delicacy of Dualities," seven artists and one creative studio from the Kingdom explore the theme "intricate dance of opposites."

The exhibition in Diriyah's Jax district showcases a series of thought-provoking artworks and installations from artists Nada Al-Ali, Maan Alabbadi, Nouf Alsharif, Rasha Saddiq, Abdullah Al-Bugami, Eida Alzahrani, Ahmad Haddad, and Makhtut Studio.

Each artist tells a profound and personal story, including Al-Bugami, who dedicated his three artworks to the powerful duality of woman and man.

In some traditional and conservative societies, such as parts of Saudi Arabia, some women may choose to wear the burqa, a

cultural garment that covers the entire body and includes a mesh screen to cover the face.

Women who practice this tradition choose to cover themselves in front of everyone, including their husband and family members.

"The burqa is considered the identity of the badu woman. Some people may see it as something that is quiet or sad, because it is black, but I decided to portray my aunt, who is in her 70s and I have never seen her face," he said.

"One time, I accidentally saw her face and I could not recognize her. But, with that being said, behind the covering, when I greet her, I feel a deep and profound sense of love and belonging."

One of Al-Bugami's artworks is handwoven using the sadu sewing technique, an ancient skill made famous by Saudi women in the



The exhibition in Diriyah's Jax district showcases a series of thought-provoking artworks and installations from several artists. Supplied

north of the Kingdom. It is characterized by its bright colors and intricate weaving, and is registered on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage.

Sadu is usually performed by women, but Al-Bugami chose it as his medium to portray the sense of woman in his work.

"The pattern in the middle is an

This exhibition exemplifies the power of artistic collaboration and the ability of artists to create profound narratives.

Khayria Refaat
Curator

old design used in the past, and I decided to depict this pattern as if it resembles a woman. I decided to put the design in the middle because she is the foundation of the home; she is the most important part. I could not put the design in a corner, otherwise the home won't be balanced."

Al-Bugami has worked on a series of artworks that reflect his views on the vital role of women in life.

"For a while I have been working

on a concept that depicts things within humanity that complete one another, such as the man and woman, life and death, Adam and Eve ... I have worked on this project using charcoal, acrylic, and sadu.

"Life is man and woman; what would a man do without a woman and what would a woman do without a man? You can't have one thing without the other. We have to have the duality of both, like night and day."

The exhibition is curated by Khayria Refaat, who said in a statement: "This exhibition exemplifies the power of artistic collaboration and the ability of artists to create profound narratives." "Delicacy of Dualities" invites viewers to question and explore the boundaries of perception while discovering the hidden beauty within the dance of opposites."



Gaza under attack Palestinians move to safer areas in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Friday amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas. | AFP

SECURITY

Suspected pirate attack in Gulf of Aden raises concerns about growing Somali piracy

AP Dubai

A European naval force detained six suspected pirates on Friday after they opened fire on an oil tanker traveling through the Gulf of Aden, officials said, likely part of a growing number of piracy attacks emanating from Somalia.

The attack on the Marshall Islands-flagged *Chrysal Arctic* comes as Houthis have also been attacking ships traveling through the crucial waterway, the Red Sea, and the Bab Al-Mandeb Strait connecting them.

The assaults have slowed commercial traffic through the key maritime route onward to the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Sea.

The pirates shot at the tanker from a small ship "carrying weapons and ladders," according to the British military's UK

BACKGROUND

Maritime sources say pirates may be encouraged by a relaxation of security or may be taking advantage of the chaos caused by attacks on shipping by the Houthis.

Maritime Trade Operations Center, which oversees Mideast shipping routes.

The pirates opened fire first at the *Chrysal Arctic*, whose armed onboard security team returned fire at them, the UKMT said.

The pirates then abandoned their attempt to take the tanker, which continued on its way with all its crew safe, the UKMT said.

Hours later, the EU naval force in the region known as Operation Atalanta said a frigate operating in the region detained six suspected pirates.

The frigate seized the pirates, given "the unsafe condition of their skiff" and said that some had "injuries of varied severity."

It was not immediately clear if those injured suffered gunshot wounds from the exchange of fire with the *Chrysal Arctic*.

The EU force declined to elaborate "due to the security of the operations."

Once-rampant piracy off the Somali coast diminished after a peak in 2011. That year, there were 237 reported attacks in waters off Somalia.

GRAVE CRISIS

Drone strike kills rescuer, technician in south Lebanon

Head of Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc dismisses Gaza peace efforts as 'theatrics'

Najla Housseini Beirut

An Israeli drone strike in southern Lebanon on Friday killed a first responder from a rescue team affiliated with a Hezbollah-allied group and a telecoms technician carrying out maintenance work.

Two Israeli military drones launched the attack on a maintenance team working in the southern Lebanese village of Tayr Harfa.

The victims were identified as Youssef Fadi Jalloul, an employee of Power Tech, a company that undertakes maintenance work for MTC Touch, and Ghaleb Al-Hajj, 53, a rescuer with the Islamic Risala Scout Association, a group affiliated with

Hezbollah's ally the Amal Movement.

Several civilians injured in the attack were taken to nearby hospitals. Israeli attacks continued amid reports suggesting Hezbollah is set to declare a public mobilization.

The latest escalation came two days after Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant threatened to step up military activity in the border region in preparation for open war.

Sirens sounded in the Kiryat Shmuna and Margaliot settlements warning of possible drone attacks.

Israeli drones raided KfarKila and Bika in Marjayoun, while artillery targeted Rachaya Al-Fakhar in the eastern sector.

The outskirts of Zebqine, Yarin, and Jebbayn in the western sector were subject to heavy shelling.



Israeli artillery also targeted Khiam and the Al-Labbouneh-Naqoura area. Israeli attacks using phosphorus shells resulted in a fire in a forested area east of the town of Odaiseh. Incendiary and phosphorus shells

also struck Mount Labouneh, and areas near the towns of Naqoura and Alma Al-Shaab.

Hezbollah said that it destroyed recently installed surveillance equipment at the Israeli Misgav Am

Several houses in the southern Lebanese villages near the border have been damaged in Israeli airstrikes. File/AF

military site with a "direct hit."

The group also targeted the Israeli Al-Malikiyah military site with a dawn artillery attack.

Israeli troops responded by shelling and destroying a house in the town of Alma Al-Shaab in an attack that also damaged nearby property, crops and homes.

MP Mohammed Raad, head of Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc, warned that "what Israel is doing today in Gaza, it will do in any country it considers weak and from which it senses division and readiness for surrender." He described any attempt to achieve a settlement to the conflict as "theatrics," and highlighted the importance of "cohesive ranks and understanding the seriousness of Israel's goals."

AGGRESSION

'Escalation' of violence against UNRWA in East Jerusalem condemned

AFP Frankfurt

Germany has condemned the "escalation of violent protest" against the UN agency for Palestinian refugees in East Jerusalem, which temporarily closed its headquarters there following repeated attacks.

"Israel must ensure the protection of UN facilities and personnel in the occupied Palestinian territories," the German Foreign Ministry

said on X, formerly Twitter.

"The UN need to be able to serve their important mandate in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem."

UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini announced on Thursday the temporary closure of the site after Israelis set fire to its perimeter in just the latest attack.

While there were no casualties, he said the blaze caused extensive damage to the outdoor area.

It came after two months of

"Israeli extremists" staging protests outside the compound, with one earlier this week turning violent when demonstrators threw stones, he said.

Germany is a key supporter of Israel, offering staunch backing since the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas that triggered the war in the Gaza Strip.

But as the conflict has ground on, Berlin has increasingly voiced criticism, calling for more humanitarian

BACKGROUND

Created in 1949, UNRWA employs around 30,000 people in the Palestinian territories, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

aid to be allowed into war-ravaged Gaza.

UNRWA, which coordinates nearly all aid to Gaza, has



been in crisis since January when Israel accused about a dozen of its 13,000 Gaza employees of being involved in the October attack.

This led many donor nations, including the top donor, the United States, to abruptly suspend funding to the agency, threatening its efforts to deliver aid in Gaza.

However,

several have since resumed payments.

An independent review of UNRWA, led by French former foreign minister, Catherine Colonna, found some "neutrality-related issues" but said Israel had yet to provide evidence for its leading allegations.

Created in 1949, the agency employs around 30,000 people in the Palestinian territories, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

RESULTS ON MONDAY

Iranians vote in parliamentary runoff election

AP Tehran

Iranians voted on Friday in a runoff election for the remaining seats in the country's parliament after hard-line politicians dominated March balloting.

People in 22 constituencies across the country will elect 45 representatives from a pool of 90 candidates, 15 of whom are considered moderate.



People vote during Friday's runoff parliamentary elections in Tehran.

In the capital, Tehran, 36 representatives will be chosen from 32 candidates, all hard-liners.

Final results are expected on Monday, though counts in smaller constituencies are likely before that. Iran's parliament plays a secondary role in governing the country.

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has the final say in all important state matters.

State TV showed Khamenei voting on Friday immediately after the polls opened.

He urged people to vote and said the runoff election was as important as the main one.

In the March election, hard-liners won 200 out of 245 seats, with more moderate candidates taking the other 45. A total of 25 million ballots were cast, for a turnout of just under 41 percent.

The previous lowest turnout was 42 percent in the 2020 parliamentary election.

Politicians calling for change in the country's government, known broadly as reformists, were generally barred from running in the election.

Those calling for radical reforms or for abandoning Iran's theocratic system were also banned or did not bother to register as candidates.

CONFLICT

Turkish forces kill 17 Kurdish militants in northern Iraq, Syria

Reuters Ankara

Turkish forces have killed 17 militants of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) across various regions of northern Iraq and northern Syria, the Defense Ministry said on Friday.

In a post on social media platform X, the ministry said its forces had "neutralized" 10 PKK insurgents found in the Gara and Hakurk regions

of northern Iraq and in an area where the Turkish military frequently mounts cross-border raids under its "Claw-Lock Operation."

It said another seven militants were "neutralized" in two regions of northern Syria, where Türkiye has previously carried out cross-border incursions.

The ministry's use of the term "neutralized" commonly means killed.

FASTFACT

Turkiye's cross-border attacks into northern Iraq have been a source of tension with its southeastern neighbor for years.

The PKK, which has been waging an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984, is designated a terrorist organization by Türkiye, the US, and the EU.

Turkiye's cross-border attacks into northern Iraq have been a source of tension with its south-eastern neighbor for years. Ankara has asked Iraq for more cooperation in combating the PKK, and Baghdad labeled the group a

"banned organization" in March.

Last month, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan held talks with officials in Baghdad and Irbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, about the continued presence of the PKK in northern Iraq, where it is based, and other issues.

Erdogan later said he believed Iraq saw the need to eliminate the PKK as well.

Turkiye has also staged military

incursions in Syria's north against the YPG militia, which it regards as a wing of the PKK.

Erdogan and his ministers have repeatedly said that while Ankara is working on repairing ties with Syrian President Bashar Assad's government after years of animosity, it will mount a new offensive into northern Syria to push the YPG away from its border.

PROTEST

Casualties reported from gunfire celebrating Chad junta chief's victory

Special representative of UN chief calls on all parties to show restraint

Reuters N'Djamena

Several people were hurt and some may have been killed in gunfire celebrating Chad's interim President Mahamat Idriss Deby's declared election victory on Thursday, an Amnesty International representative said, citing reports from partners.

Volleys of shots could be heard in the capital N'Djamena in the hours after the state election agency announced Deby had won a hefty 61.3 percent of the May 6 vote, even as his main challenger rejected the result and called for protests.

"Deaths and injuries from bullets have been reported ... The exact number of victims is unknown, but there is already talk of around 10 dead, including children," said Amnesty International researcher Abdoulaye Diarra.

The chaotic celebrations followed a fraught electoral period marked by the killing of opposition figure Yaya Dillo, the omission of prominent opposition politicians from the candidate list, and other issues that critics say undermined the credibility of the vote.

N'Djamena was calm on Friday, with little sign of the leading challenger Succes Masra's supporters taking to the streets.

There was a heavy police presence, including convoys filled with men in camouflage fatigues patrolling the nearly empty streets.

On Friday, Masra's Transformateurs party, keeping a parallel vote tally, said he had won based on their count.

The party said in an online post: "We have the evidence, and Chadians all know it."

The presidential election makes Chad the first coup-hit country in West and Central Africa to stage a return to constitutional rule via



An armored vehicle of security forces is deployed in N'Djamena on Friday, a day after the announcement of Chad's presidential election results. AFP

the ballot box. However, Masra and other opposition factions have cried foul over transparency concerns.

Abdou Aboury, special representative of the UN Secretary-General in Central Africa, called on all parties to show restraint.

While Masra drew larger-than-expected crowds on the campaign trail, analysts had widely predicted

BACKGROUND

President Mahamat Idriss Deby seized power when rebels killed his long-ruling father, Idriss Deby, in April 2021.

that Deby would win.

Deby seized power when rebels killed his long-ruling father, Idriss Deby, in April 2021.

"Post-election protests are possible, though the threat of police repression could dissuade many people from taking to the streets," Crisis Group experts said ahead of the vote.

The election is being closely watched from abroad.

While other juntas in the insurgency-torn Sahel region, including Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, have told Paris and other Western powers to withdraw and turned to Moscow for support, Chad remains the last Sahel state with a substantial French military presence.

RISKY JOURNEY

Tent camps razed and activists arrested as Tunisia clamps down on migrants

AP Tunis

Tensions in Tunisia ratcheted up as demonstrators seeking better rights for migrants staged a sit-in before EU headquarters, capping a week in which Tunisian authorities targeted migrant communities from the coast to the capital with arrests and the demolition of tent camps.

Several activists were apprehended this week, accused of financial crimes stemming from providing aid to migrants. Authorities razed encampments outside UN headquarters, sweeping up dozens of sub-Saharan Africans who had been living there for months. Fewer migrants have made the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean Sea this year than last due to weather and beefed-up border security.

The 2024 figures align with objectives set by the EU as part of a deal worth more than €1 billion (\$1.1 billion) that included assistance to better police the border and prevent migrants without papers from reaching Europe.

However, human rights activists say the crackdown has been damaging for the tens of thousands of migrants stuck in Tunisia as a result.

Demonstrators blasted the security-centric approach governments on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea have chosen to drive their migration policies. Some of the signs at the protests decried Tunisia's cooperation with Italy and Europe, while others mourned the lives of Tunisians who had died or gone missing at sea.

Bodies continue to wash ashore on the country's central coastline not far from small towns where migrants have clashed with police and farmers have grown increasingly wary of the growing presence of encampments in olive groves where they make their livings, claiming rampant theft and staging protests demanding government intervention, according to local media.

TRADITION

Turkiye reopens ancient church with prized mosaics to Muslim worship

Reuters Istanbul

Turkiye has opened the ancient Chora church, one of Istanbul's most celebrated Byzantine buildings, to Muslim worshippers after it was used as a museum for more than 70 years, making it the second such major conversion under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Erdogan turned Istanbul's world-renowned Hagia Sophia from a museum into a mosque in 2020 in a ceremony attended by tens of thousands of people.

That move was criticized by church leaders and some Western countries, who said reconverting Hagia Sophia risked deepening religious rifts. Erdogan said this was interference in sovereign rights.

The original Chora, or Kariye, church dates back to the 4th Century and was turned into a mosque by the Ottomans. It became a museum in 1945, and Erdogan signed an order in 2020 to convert it back into a mosque. It reopened on Monday after restoration.

The outer halls were preserved as a museum, and visitors could view the prized mosaics that dot the ceiling unhindered.

In line with religious traditions, curtains concealed the mosaics in the building's prayer section.

Ferdy Simon, a British tourist, said he would have preferred the building to remain a museum so that people could see the mosaics and frescoes.

"It seems to be a political gambit,"



A visitor takes a picture at Chora Museum or Kariye Mosque in Istanbul. File/Reuters

he said, speaking outside the Chora.

"It's a bit of a shame when you see devout women who have come here to pray, and they are told they cannot go into the main narthex area," he added, referring to the fact that the main prayer section is reserved for males, as in all mosques.

Ugur Gokgoz, a Turkish man who came to pray, said it was the Turkish people's right to use the Chora as a mosque and that the artifacts inside the museum were preserved.

"There was a small section reserved for prayer. In the end, they did not tear everything down and turned it into a mosque," he said.

A church was first built at the site in the 4th century, but most of the existing building dates to an 11th century church that was partly

rebuilt 200 years later following an earthquake.

The Church of the Holy Savior in Chora, built near the ancient city walls of Constantinople, contains 14th-century mosaics and frescoes depicting scenes from biblical stories.

They were plastered over after the Ottomans conquered the city in 1453 but brought to light when — like Hagia Sophia — it was converted to a museum by Türkiye's secular republic in 1945.

Burcin Altınsay Ozguner, Türkiye head of the International Council on Monuments and Sites, said the Chora artifacts are unique, and the best way to make them available for researchers is to maintain the building as a museum.

COOPERATION

Philippines invites Saudi partnerships in halal industry, renewables

- Govt wants renewables to contribute 35% to energy mix by 2030
- It launched strategic plan to develop domestic halal industry in January

Elie Aben Manila

The Philippines says it is open to expanding partnerships with Saudi Arabia in its top priority sectors, including renewable energy and the halal industry.

The use of renewable energy was announced as the main issue in the country's climate agenda during President Ferdinand Marcos Jr's first state of the nation address in 2022.

Renewable energy contributes about 30 percent to the Philippines' energy mix, which is dominated by coal and oil. The government seeks to increase it to 35 percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2040, and make renewables more accessible to the public.

"Given the Kingdom's role in the supply of conventional and



Philippines' Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo speaks to AFP during an interview in Melbourne on March 4, 2024. AFP

renewable energy, the Philippines is open to possible partnerships in the field of renewables," Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo told Arab News this week.

An agreement to enhance

cooperation in the field was reached in October, during President Ferdinand Marcos' visit to the Kingdom at the invitation of Saudi Crown Mohammed bin Salman.

A business delegation accompanying the president signed investment agreements collectively worth more than \$4.26 billion

with Saudi business leaders.

"With Saudi Arabia's role as a regional business and political hub, we wish to increase investments," Manalo said.

"Further, amidst the region's changing landscape and economic diversification initiatives, we aspire to expand our partnership in the fields of agriculture, tourism and the halal industry."

In January, the predominantly Catholic Philippines — where Muslims constitute about 10 percent of the almost 120 million population — launched its Halal Industry Development Strategic Plan to tap into the global halal market, which is estimated to be worth more than \$7 trillion.

The plan aims to double the industry's output in the next four years, create 120,000 new jobs and attract \$4 billion in investments by 2028.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Politics

Labour to ditch govt's Rwanda deportation plan

Britain's main opposition Labour Party on Friday pledged to scrap the Conservative government's flagship Rwanda scheme if it comes to power, replacing it with a tougher more joined-up approach to tackling irregular migration.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has staked his political reputation on his plan to "stop the boats," pushing the controversial deportation plan despite opposition from rights groups and judicial rulings.

Labour, which is widely expected to win the next general election later this year after 14 years in opposition, has been under mounting pressure to say what it will do if it is voted into office.

Immigration has become an increasingly central political issue since the United Kingdom left the European Union in 2020, largely on a promise to "take back control" of the country's borders. **AFP**

Diplomacy

India completes Maldives troop withdrawal

India pulled out its last remaining soldiers stationed in the Maldives on Friday, meeting a deadline for their withdrawal that had strained ties between the two neighbors.

Pro-China President Mohamed Muizwa won office last year while campaigning on a promise to downgrade ties with India, and has since reoriented the strategically placed archipelago nation toward Beijing.

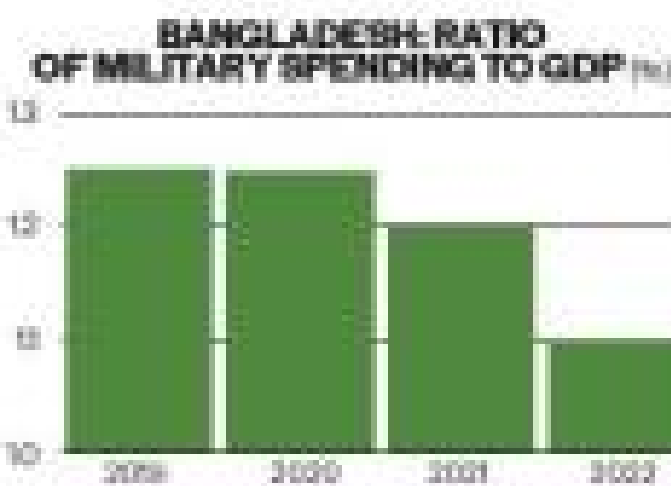
After coming to power, he demanded the withdrawal of Indian soldiers who had been stationed in the upscale beach holiday destination to assist with maritime patrols.

The third and final batch of 27 Indian troops left the archipelago on Friday, the official said, declining to be named as they were not authorized to speak to media.

Another 51 soldiers had left the atoll nation by Tuesday, according to Indian and Maldivian officials. **AFP**

The Day's FIGURES

Source: Statista



What We Are Reading Today

FROM AROUND THE WEB & IN PRINT

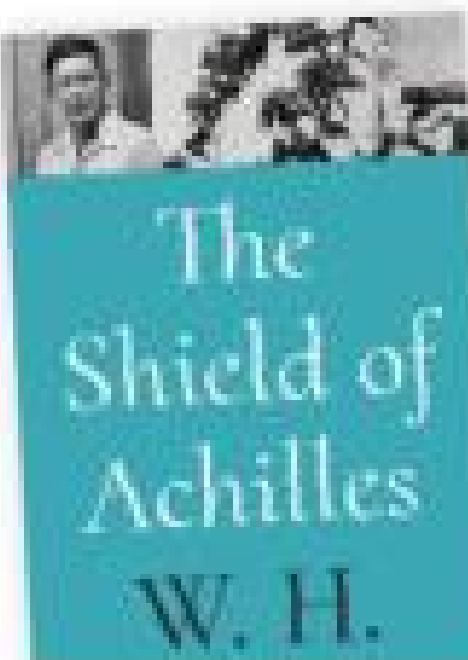
The Shield of Achilles

W. H. AUDEN EDITED BY ALAN JACOBS

"The Shield of Achilles," which won the National Book Award in 1956, may well be W. H. Auden's most important, intricately designed, and unified book of poetry. In addition to its famous title poem, which reimagines Achilles's shield for the modern age, when war and heroism have changed beyond recognition, the book also includes two sequences—"Bucolics" and "Horae Canonicae"—that Auden believed to

be among his most significant work. Featuring an authoritative text and an introduction and notes by Alan Jacobs, this volume brings Auden's collection back into print for the first time in decades and offers the only critical edition of the work.

As Jacobs writes in the introduction, Auden's collection "is the boldest and most intellectually assured work of his career, an achievement that has not been sufficiently acknowledged."



A supporter of the Aam Aadmi Party distributes sweets as he waits with others for the release of the party leader Arvind Kejriwal from Tihar Jail, AP

OPPOSITION BOOST

India's opposition jubilant as Modi critic Kejriwal gets bail to campaign in elections

Reuters New Delhi

India's top court gave temporary bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in a graft case on Friday, allowing him to campaign in the ongoing general elections, boosting the opposition alliance of which he is a prominent figure.

The Supreme Court said Kejriwal — a fierce critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi — would be out on bail until June 1, the last day of the nationwide seven-phase vote, and would have to return to pre-trial detention on June 2.

India began voting on April 19 and elections for more than half of the 543 seats in parliament have now been completed following the third phase of the vote on May 7.

The two areas governed by Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party — the National Capital Territory that includes New Delhi, and the northern state of Punjab — go to

the polls on May 25 and June 1 respectively.

Votes will be counted on June 4 and results are expected to be announced the same day.

"This is the victory of democracy," Kejriwal's wife Sunita posted on X after the court order.

AAP members began celebrating on hearing the news, beating drums, dancing and shouting slogans praising Kejriwal and criticizing Modi as they gathered outside the party office in the capital.

"Today, the Supreme Court has struck a ray of hope in the hearts of the people who love this country, the constitution, and democracy ... this is a victory of truth," Delhi Environment Minister and senior AAP leader Gopal Rai told reporters.

The court had said last week that it may consider granting Kejriwal temporary bail "because of the elections" while it heard an appeal

against his arrest, as that hearing could take a while to conclude.

Opposition parties have accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government of using investigative agencies to hurt its rivals, which the government denies.

HIGHLIGHT

The two areas governed by Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party — the National Capital Territory that includes New Delhi, and the northern state of Punjab — go to the polls on May 25 and June 1 respectively.

Over the years Kejriwal has accused Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party of damaging democracy, promoting corruption, throttling governance in Delhi, abusing their power and attacking the federal structure of the constitution

among other things.

The Enforcement Directorate, India's financial crime-fighting agency, arrested Kejriwal on March 21 in connection with corruption allegations related to the capital territory's liquor policy.

Kejriwal's government and his AAP have denied the allegations. Modi and BJP say the investigating agencies are only doing their job and the government is not influencing them.

Kejriwal has been in pre-trial detention since April 1, and his wife Sunita has stepped in to campaign for his decade-old party which has been hobbled by the detention also of two other senior leaders in the same case.

Members of the INDIA alliance of more than two dozen opposition parties — Modi's main challenger which includes the AAP — said they were pleased that Kejriwal had received bail.

القوائم السوداء قديمة قَدَمُ الرَّاي والرأي الآخر
(المنة خبري)
YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB
Blacklists are as old as opinions
and counter-opinions.
Amina Khairy
(Egyptian writer)

Opinion

Smiling Israeli soldiers on the wrong side of history

JONATHAN GORNALL



Jonathan Gornall is a British journalist, formerly with The Times, who has lived and worked in the Middle East and is now based in the UK.

Judging by an extraordinarily tone-deaf collaboration between a New York photographer and the Israeli army, the past seven months have been an endless round of fun and laughter for the Israeli soldiers delivering death and destruction on an industrial scale in Gaza.

Shot against the background of the carnage in Gaza, the images of "The Smiling Soldiers Project" have to be seen to be believed.

So far, photographer Menachem Geislinsky has taken more than 15,000 photographs showing the young men and women of the Israeli army smiling, laughing, kissing and generally having fun, "just like any other 20-year-olds."

The aim, according to Geislinsky, "is to show the world the humanity of the IDF, the true side — the happiness, the smiles, that the world media tries its best to hide."

The effect, however, is to convey the impression of a force of young conscripts so surreally detached from the reality of its bloody handiwork that it appears to have given up all pretense of being a disciplined, professional army and instead become little more than a trigger-happy mob.

Forensic analysis last week by the BBC of the shooting of an unarmed 8-year-old boy in the West Bank is among the most graphically documented evidence to date that the Israeli army, whose rampage through Gaza has so far claimed a shockingly disproportionate 35,000 lives, is a morally bankrupt force operating entirely outside the accepted parameters of

modern warfare. Ben Saul, the UN special rapporteur on human rights, has said the shooting of the child has all the hallmarks of a war crime.

On Monday, seven independent UN human rights experts issued a joint statement condemning "the continued and systematic onslaught of violence committed against Palestinians in Gaza." The irony of the timing of this statement, issued one day after Israeli Jews commemorated Holocaust Remembrance Day, appears to have gone largely unrecognized in Israel.

The closing ceremony of Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day was held at a kibbutz in northern Israel called Lohamei Hageta'ot, "the ghetto fighters." The community was founded by survivors of the Warsaw ghetto uprising of 1943, which cost the lives of only a handful of German soldiers but saw an estimated 60,000 Jews killed or deported to death camps.

Eighty-one years later, a disturbingly similar disproportionality is evident in Gaza.

The Israeli army says that, as of May 6, 266 Israeli soldiers have been killed since the start of ground operations on Oct. 27. Compare this to the 34,488 Gazans, including 14,500 children and 9,500 women, who had been killed by the end of April.

This is not the work of a professional, disciplined force. It is inconceivable that the taking of innocent lives on such a scale can be considered anything other than a war crime.

And history teaches that such crimes, carried out with the willing or unwilling complicity of a multitude of players

— including, in this case, thousands of young Israeli conscripts, many of whom will doubtless be traumatized by the atrocities they have either witnessed or taken part in — will eventually be exposed.

Ultimately, the events still unfolding in Gaza will not only be added to the international roll call of shame that includes such infamous massacres as Katyn, My Lai, Bloody Sunday, Srebrenica and Sinjar, but will also dominate it, by virtue of the sheer scale of the killings.

At Katyn in 1943, Soviet troops executed 22,000 Polish prisoners. At Srebrenica in 1995, more than 8,000 Muslims were murdered by Bosnian Serbs. Between 2014 and 2017, some 5,000 Yazidis died at the hands of Daesh. All these massacres rightly earned the condemnation of the international community.

Yet Israel's body count in Gaza is already far higher than the death toll in any of these outrages and, with Netanyahu's rejection this week of a ceasefire deal and the unleashing of an offensive against Rafah, is certain to grow even larger.

The supposedly happy, smiling Israeli soldiers, to say nothing of their commanders and political masters, would do well to pay heed to events currently unfolding in the UK.

Thanks to a former soldier, for whom the weight of conscience had become too much to bear, damning evidence has emerged that British special forces operating in Afghanistan more than a decade ago regularly murdered unarmed Afghans, including children, planting weapons on their bodies to justify their killing.

Justice is coming for the soldiers of the Special Air Service who were involved, their commanders who turned a blind eye and perhaps even for the politicians who tried to cover up the crimes.

On its website, the British army boasts that it has "an excellent reputation across the world, built on trust." Its soldiers must "obey the law, all the time, wherever you are serving ... You must always keep your self-control, however angry or provoked you might be, because no soldier is ever above the law."

Now, the murders of dozens of unarmed detainees in Afghanistan between 2010 and 2013 by members of Britain's most elite fighting force is the subject of an independent judge-led inquiry, which is widely expected to lead to criminal prosecutions.

The Israeli army has a similar website — illustrated with several photographs from "The Smiling Soldier Project" — devoted to promoting its "fundamental values," which include a commitment "to protect human dignity."

Every Israeli soldier, it says, is expected to "recognize the critical importance of human life and behave in a safe and measured manner at all times." They "will not use their weapon or power to harm uninvolved civilians and prisoners and will do everything in their power to prevent harm to their lives, bodies, dignity and property."

Except, it seems, in Gaza, where the young Israeli soldiers find themselves tragically and irredeemably on the wrong side of history.

It is inconceivable that the taking of innocent lives on such a scale can be considered anything other than a war crime



If the British cannot hold themselves in high esteem, how can they expect the world to do so?

Britain in need of a change in mindset

PETER HARRISON



Peter Harrison is a senior editor in the Dubai bureau of Arab News. He has covered the Middle East for more than a decade. X: @PhotoPJHarrison

When much of England went to the polls last week to vote in the local elections, it was generally accepted that the Conservatives would take a beating — and indeed they did.

They lost more than 470 councilors and the control of 10 councils, and also failed to hold the parliamentary seat of Blackpool South, where the party lost a by-election to Labour and were almost beaten into third place by Reform UK, the successor to Nigel Farage's Brexit Party.

After such success, it would be reasonable to assume the current Labour opposition is headed for a landslide victory in the coming parliamentary general election. But it seems that Labour leader Keir Starmer still has a long way to go — some pollsters say that, even with last week's wins, a massive landslide is probably not on the cards. So Labour may have to form alliances in a hung parliament if it is to form a government.

The problem with this is that the UK political system is not built for this — many believe that the country's first-past-the-post system creates "strong government." But the past three decades have shown that "strong" is not the best way to describe Britain's seat of power. For example,

Boris Johnson won a huge majority in the 2019 election but lasted three years.

The British voting system, more than 200 years old, is designed to create a single-party majority government. Every election is fought on the basis of single-party politics and the blinkered "we are right, they are wrong" attitude that comes with it. Every aspect of politics is built for confrontation — even the House of Commons, where the government and opposition are seated directly across from one another, set up to squabble rather than discuss.

While the British people have traditionally voted for a party and its leader, it is evident that they are now more inclined to vote locally for their MP of choice. And that is more likely to return a hung parliament, something last seen in 2017, when Theresa May and the Conservatives formed an alliance with the Democratic Unionist Party.

That is why the British system of democracy needs a serious rethink; not just the way the government is elected, but everything attached to it. If Parliament is to be a modern democratic assembly that serves not only its people but the wider world, then it needs to be more collaborative: it is hard to see how Britain can expect to be taken seriously internationally when its own

population constantly calls it broken. If the British cannot hold themselves in high esteem, how can they expect the world to do so?

Before the next election, each party will publish its manifesto — a list of pledges and policies that outline what they are standing for. The problem is that there is no obligation for a party to honor these pledges, or be able to. The only people with access to all the information needed to make honest, informed decisions are those already in the government. Once elected, parties often renege on key pledges, claiming that the previous government had not provided the correct information.

Voters will cast a single vote the candidate they most want to represent their constituency in Parliament. The MP is the person with the highest number of votes, but not necessarily an overall majority. And the party with the most MPs will either form a government if it has a minimum of 326 seats — or, if fewer, enter into negotiations with smaller ones.

Then they will sit in the ancient Commons chamber, one side facing the other, and debate — although to many it sounds more like a cacophony of zoo animals at feeding time than one of the most powerful governments in the world.

Britain needs to stop resisting change. The British public needs to get over the notion of

superiority and embrace collaborative discussions. The election needs to represent all instead of a few, maybe through a system of regional assemblies with representatives who sit in Parliament.

If people were voting with an expectation of hung parliaments, then it is possible that they might start voting for the people they believe would be the best collaborators, rather than personalities and those who wield power.

Government should return to a fixed term — a policy abolished by Johnson — so that the public vote when it is required, not when the prime minister thinks it is tactically preferable to give them the biggest gains.

And the building MPs sit in should create a mindset of positive constructive debate, with lawmakers facing the front of the chamber and the speaker holding court.

Britain needs to move away from a situation where only a small number of people are represented and where the few do not make life-changing decisions for the many (such as war) without collaborative thought.

If the country is to move forward, then it needs to stop arguing — although, in defense of democracy, I write this in the knowledge that I can be critical without fear of reprisal or intimidation.

Business



This collaboration (with Comera Financial Holding) represents a pivotal step forward in our commitment to improve financial services for our customers.

Dalia Khorshid
Group CEO of Beltone Holding

STARTUP WRAP

Regional collaboration flourishes in effort to boost digital transformation

Partnership underscores commitment to foster innovation and drive economic empowerment

Nour El-Shaerl Cairo

Digital transformation is on the cusp as regional companies join hands to further boost this technological development across the Middle East and North Africa.

On top of this week's partnerships, Saudi Arabia's Alraedah Digital Solutions, the innovation arm of Alraedah Digital Group, inked a deal with regional fintech ABHI to boost financial inclusion in the Kingdom.

Under the terms of the agreement, Alraedah Digital Solutions will harness ABHI's advanced technological capabilities to introduce a range of innovative financial services tailored to the Saudi market.

The collaboration will focus on leveraging Alraedah's deep knowledge of local market dynamics to launch new financing products collaboratively.

Additionally, Alraedah has committed to a substantial financial investment, pledging access to \$200 million over three years to support the development and localization of ABHI's products for the Kingdom.

"We are excited to join forces with ABHI to revolutionize the financial landscape in Saudi Arabia. This partnership underscores our commitment to fostering innovation and driving economic empowerment through strategic collaborations. Together, we aim to redefine access to financial services and empower individuals and businesses across the region," Paul Melotto, CEO at Alraedah Digital Solutions, said.

Founded in 2021, ABHI specializes in earned wage access, invoice factoring, small and medium-sized enterprise working capital, revenue-based financing, and payroll solutions.

To date, ABHI claims to have supported over 1,000 companies, enhancing financial stability for approximately 750,000 employees and processing over \$300 million in loans across different regions.

The company is backed by notable investors including Y Combinator, VEF, SpeedInvest, Venture Souq, Global Ventures, and Zayn Capital.

Abu Dhabi's Comera Financial Holding joins hands with Egypt's Beltone Holding

Comera Financial Holding, an Abu Dhabi-based group with interests in technology and fintech, has joined forces with Beltone Holding, a prominent financial services provider in Egypt, to enhance digital transformation and customer experience in the North African country.

The strategic partnership focuses on knowledge transfer and the introduction of new digital solutions across the region.

Together, Comera and Beltone aim to develop and deploy advanced products that will elevate customer

Paul Melotto, CEO at Alraedah Digital Solutions and Omair Ansari, CEO and co-founder of ABHI.
Supplied



Monsha'at has announced the successful graduation of 25 startups from Qassim University's business incubator.
Supplied



experiences in various financial sectors, including payments, consumer finance, SME finance, and supply chain financing.

"This collaboration represents a pivotal step forward in our commitment to enhancing digital access and improving financial services for our customers," Dalia Khorshid, Group CEO of Beltone Holding, said.

The collaboration will leverage both companies' expertise to introduce cutting-edge technological solutions not only in Egypt but also in other Middle East and North Africa countries.

MoneyHash partners with Visa

US-based, MENA-focused fintech MoneyHash has announced a new collaboration with digital payments firm Visa.

This partnership aims to deliver secure and enhanced digital payment experiences across the region.

By collaborating with Visa, MoneyHash will gain access to an extensive array of Visa's digital payment solutions, enhancing its service offerings with advanced technologies like network tokenization.

Additionally, this partnership allows MoneyHash to tap into Visa's vast global reach, capabilities, and renowned security infrastructure.

These elements are crucial to Visa's mission of connecting the world through an innovative, reliable, and secure payment network, now extending further across the MENA region.

This strategic alliance is set to significantly boost MoneyHash's capacity to serve its customers with payment solutions.

Dubizzle acquires Drive Arabia

Dubizzle Group, a leading online classifieds platform in the Middle East, has further cemented its position in the automotive sector across the MENA region with the acquisition of Drive Arabia.

Known for its strong brand presence over the past two decades, especially in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, Drive Arabia brings valuable expertise and a loyal customer base to Dubizzle Group.

This acquisition enables Dubizzle Group to enhance its automotive advertising services, introduce innovative new products, and expand its market reach.

The integration of Drive Arabia is expected to significantly bolster Dubizzle Group's capabilities in meeting the evolving needs of automotive customers across the region.

Egypt's Swypex secures \$4m in seed round

Swypex has announced its emergence onto the financial technology scene with a \$4 million seed investment round led by US venture capital fund, Accel.

This investment marks Accel's first foray into the fintech sector in the region and includes contributions from Foundation Ventures, the Raba Partnership, and several leading industry angel investors.

Licensed by the Central Bank of Egypt, Swypex aims to become the first comprehensive platform that eliminates financial inefficiencies

and maximizes business potential in the country.

The platform integrates payments, invoice management, and smart corporate cards into a single system designed to streamline financial operations.

Swypex's products are tailored to simplify financial management for businesses, allowing them to automate workflows and facilitate easy payments.

The corporate cards offered by Swypex are specifically designed for Egyptian businesses to help reduce costs, enhance operational efficiency, and support scalable growth.

Monsha'at graduates 25 startups from Qassim University

Saudi Arabia's Small and Medium Enterprises General Authority, also known as Monsha'at, has announced the successful graduation of 25 startups from Qassim University's business incubator, as part of the University Startups Initiative Program.

The business incubator is designed to facilitate the transition of creative ideas and university graduation projects into market-ready startups capable of securing investments.

During their time in the incubator, the startups managed to increase their client base by 35 percent and successfully secured two investment rounds totaling around SR500,000 (\$133,317).

Since its inception in 2023, the University Startups Initiative Program has graduated 75 startups



Swypex's platform integrates payments, invoice management, and smart corporate cards into a single system.
Supplied

FAST FACT

Under the terms of the agreement, Alraedah Digital Solutions will harness ABHI's advanced technological capabilities to introduce a range of innovative financial services tailored to the Saudi market.

Geographically, UAE-based startups led the funding charts with \$32 million distributed across six deals, while Egyptian startups received \$8.7 million over five deals. Saudi startups saw a noticeable decrease in investment, attracting only \$4.8 million across three deals. Reuters

in collaboration with three government universities located in Riyadh, Al-Ahsa, and Qassim.

April startup funding sees sharp decline

Startup funding in the MENA region experienced a sharp decline in April, with only 19 startups raising \$55 million.

This represents a 78 percent drop month on month from \$254 million raised in March, although it marks an 87 percent increase year on year, according to Wamda's Monthly report.

The largest funding amount in April was awarded to Fortis, a UAE-based fintech startup, which secured \$20 million in a series A round.

This was followed by WEE, which raised \$10 million in a pre-series A round, and Tunisia's Qodek, which garnered \$8 million in its series B round.

Geographically, UAE-based startups led the funding charts with \$32 million distributed across six deals, while Egyptian startups received \$8.7 million over five deals.

In contrast, Saudi startups saw a noticeable decrease in investment, attracting only \$4.8 million across three deals. Sector-wise, fintech remained the most funded, with four companies raising \$25.7 million, \$20 million of which was allocated to Fortis alone.

E-commerce startups received \$10.5 million across two funding rounds, and an AI firm, Qodek, raised \$8 million. Additionally, three Software-as-a-Service providers collectively raised \$3.5 million.

In terms of gender representation in funding, disparities remain significant.

Only one female-founded firm managed to secure \$100,000, in stark contrast to the \$43 million received by male-founded companies, highlighting ongoing challenges in achieving gender parity in the startup ecosystem.

FISCAL STABILITY

Saudi Arabia's first quarter budget deficit aligns with expectations

Ministry of Finance report also revealed an annual 9 percent boost in non-oil revenues to reach SR293.43 billion

Dayan Abou Tine Riyadh

Saudi Arabia recorded a budget deficit of SR12.4 billion (\$3.3 billion) in the first quarter of 2024, comprising 16 percent of the annual deficit forecast set by the Ministry of Finance at the end of the previous year.

This suggests that it aligns with expectations, showcasing the Kingdom's progress in accelerating spending related to Vision 2030 implementation, alongside its careful fiscal management.

The ministry's quarterly performance report also revealed an annual 9 percent boost in its non-oil revenues to reach SR293.43 billion, primarily driven by increased taxes on goods and services.

Report data showed these taxes surged by 11 percent to approximately SR70 billion in the specified period. This income source constituted nearly a quarter of total government revenues and approximately 63 percent of non-oil income.

This typically refers to taxes imposed on particular products or services, rather than on individuals or businesses as a whole. Examples include excise tax, value-added tax, and specific levies such as those targeting expatriates.

The percentage share of non-oil revenues from overall government income increased to 38 percent, up from 36 percent in the same quarter of 2023.

The second largest factor driving the non-oil revenue growth is categorized as other revenues, which, as per the ministry's report, includes income from a variety of sources.

These encompass revenues from other public government units, including the Saudi Central Bank, sales conducted by other entities such as income from advertising and fees from port services, administrative fees, fines, penalties, and confiscations.

Conversely, oil revenues experienced a 2 percent uptick, reaching SR181 billion. However, their percentage share decreased from 64 percent in the same quarter the previous year to 62 percent. This brought total government revenues to SR293.43 billion.



Compared to advanced economies or G20 countries, Saudi Arabia's public debt as a percentage of GDP remains relatively low. Additionally, it is well-covered, with government reserves totaling around SR392 billion in the first quarter of this year. SPA

The tightening of oil revenues can be linked to the voluntary oil production cuts adopted by members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and their allies, known as OPEC+. Saudi Arabia announced in March the extension of its 1 million barrels per day cut, initially implemented in July 2023, until the end of the second quarter of 2024.

Government expenditure
Expenditures surged by 8 percent during this period, reaching SR305.82 billion, with non-financial capital expenditure, often referred to as CAPEX, driving much of this growth.

This category saw a substantial 33 percent increase, totaling SR34.5 billion, and it encompasses investments in physical assets like buildings, machinery, and infrastructure, aimed at enhancing the Kingdom's capacity and capabilities.

The ministry had indicated in

its budget statement in December for the fiscal year 2024 that there will be increased spending during the coming years to expedite the implementation of key programs vital to the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030. Therefore, the quarterly deficit remains within expectations, reflecting prudent fiscal management.

The second most significant factor driving the increase in expenditure is the utilization of goods and services, which surged by 12 percent during this period, reaching SR60.7 billion. Accounting for 20 percent of total expenditure, their substantial share amplified their impact.

This category represents the total amount spent on acquiring goods and services by the government for various purposes, such as operational activities or resale. It reflects the government's consumption or investment in resources necessary for its operations, excluding any changes

in inventory levels.

In third place was the compensation of employees, making up the largest portion of the total at 45 percent, reaching SR137.5 billion. However, its growth during this period was only 3 percent.

According to the ministry's report, this refers to the compensation received by an employee for the work they perform, which can be in the form of cash or non-monetary benefits. It includes any social security contributions that the government unit pays on behalf of its employees.

Although subsidies account for a small portion of government spending, at 3 percent, they experienced the highest growth rate, reaching SR8.33 billion, highlighting the Kingdom's dedication to investments in education, health, and social protection programs.

Additionally, the data revealed that health and social development were the second-largest

HIGH LIGHT

The ministry had indicated in its budget statement in December for the fiscal year 2024 that there will be increased spending during the coming years to expedite the implementation of key programs vital to the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030.

contributors to expenditure growth, increasing by 20 percent to reach SR60.5 billion, following municipal services.

The ministry's report indicated that the deficit will be covered entirely through borrowing. Domestic debt accounted for 60 percent, or SR665.03 billion, of the end-of-period debt balance, while the remaining 40 percent came from external debt, totaling SR450.8 billion.

Compared to advanced economies or G20 countries, Saudi Arabia's public debt as a percentage of GDP remains relatively low. Additionally, it is well-covered, with government reserves totaling around SR392 billion in the first quarter of this year.

This robust reserve level provides a substantial buffer against any potential financial challenges or economic downturns, enhancing the Kingdom's fiscal stability and ability to meet its financial obligations.

Saudi Arabia stands as a beacon of inspiration, growth

DANIEL MCBREARTY

In the realm of transformative journeys, Saudi Arabia's evolution stands as a beacon of inspiration, illuminating pathways to progress and opportunity. As the chief development officer of Soudah Development, overseeing initiatives within the Kingdom's dynamic landscape, I have been privileged to witness firsthand the remarkable change unfolding within the borders.

The Kingdom's transformation is not merely a narrative of economic growth or infrastructural development; it is a deeply personal journey that resonates with the hopes and dreams of every citizen. With each passing day, we witness the manifestation of their collective aspirations, driven by an unwavering commitment to realizing Saudi Arabia's full potential.

At the heart of this journey, lies a spirit of innovation and resilience that permeates every sector of society. From the emergence of vibrant new industries to the hosting of prestigious global events such as the Expo, FIFA World Cup, and Dakar Rally, Saudi Arabia has positioned itself as a global leader in innovation and cultural exchange. These events not only demonstrate our capabilities but also

foster international collaboration and unity.

Further fueling this remarkable progress is the visionary leadership of the Public Investment Fund, playing a pivotal role in driving economic diversification and sustainable growth. The sovereign wealth fund's strategic investments have catalyzed the emergence of vibrant new industries, such as entertainment, sports, adventure, health, wellness, and tourism, positioning the Kingdom as a global leader in innovation and development.

"Our vision is for a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation that stands tall on the global stage," articulates Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, emphasizing on his aspiration for the Kingdom to become a leading global player. He envisions a society that is not only economically prosperous but also socially vibrant and culturally diverse.

Furthermore, our dedication to sustainability underscores our responsibility to preserve and protect our planet for future generations. Initiatives such as the Saudi Green Initiative, aiming to plant millions of trees and harness renewable energy sources,



Daniel McBrearty is the chief development officer of Soudah Development.

exemplify our unwavering commitment to environmental stewardship.

The planting of over 43.9 million trees and the rehabilitation of 94,000 hectares of degraded land are examples of the Kingdom's dedication to environmental conservation and global climate action. Additionally, the remarkable 300 percent increase in installed renewables capacity and plans to achieve an optimal energy mix by 2030 highlight Saudi Arabia's rapid transition toward renewable energy sources, displacing approximately 1 million barrels of liquid fuel currently used.

Among the ambitious projects driving Saudi Arabia's transformation is the Soudah Peaks project, led by the crown prince. Wholly owned by PIF, Soudah Development plays a role in diversifying the economy and promoting tourism, aligning with Vision 2030's objectives. While noteworthy, it is important to recognize that Soudah is just one facet of Saudi Arabia's broader development agenda.

The crown prince envisions the Kingdom to be "a nation of dreamers and doers, a nation that leads the world in innovation

and creativity," nurturing a culture of entrepreneurship and empowering individuals to think outside the box, creating a nation at the forefront of technological advancements.

As the tempo of progress quickens, the Kingdom emerges not just as a beacon of growth and prosperity but also as a global archetype for sustainable development. Leading by example, Saudi Arabia showcases a harmonious blend of economic advancement and environmental stewardship, offering a blueprint for nations to emulate. In this paradigm, the Kingdom's journey serves as a guiding light, inspiring countries worldwide to navigate the complexities of growth while preserving the planet's precious resources for generations to come.

Witnessing the remarkable strides Saudi Arabia has made toward a brighter, more sustainable future reaffirms my belief in the power of collective vision and concerted action. Let us continue to chart this inspiring path forward so that together, we can shape a world where prosperity flourishes hand in hand with environmental stewardship — leaving a lasting legacy for generations to come.

The pattern of destruction indicated either a 'reckless approach' to civilian infrastructure or intentional targeting.

Leila Sadat
Former special adviser on crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court



Satellite footage from BBC Verify showed over half of the 603 desalination plants and borehole systems used to supply water to Gaza have been damaged or destroyed, along with four of the six wastewater treatment plants. AFP

HEAVY DAMAGE

BBC investigation finds half of water facilities in Gaza have collapsed

Human rights experts argue facilities critical to civilian survival should be protected

Arab News London

A BBC investigation has revealed that half of Gaza's water and sanitation facilities have collapsed since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.

Satellite footage from BBC Verify showed just over half of the 603 desalination plants and borehole systems used to supply water to Gaza have been damaged or destroyed, along with four of the six wastewater treatment plants.

According to an aid agency cited by the BBC, the remaining two

treatment plants have shut down due to lack of fuel or supplies. Repair efforts have been severely disrupted by damage to a major depot.

The collapse of facilities has led to a surge in waterborne illnesses, posing serious health risks to the population and particularly to children and pregnant women.

The number of cases of diarrheal disease, hepatitis A, and in some cases, cholera, have all spiked dramatically. Dr. Natalie Roberts, executive director of Medecins Sans Frontieres UK, said the destruction of water and sanitation facilities had resulted in "disastrous

The destruction of water and sanitation facilities had resulted in disastrous health consequences for the population.

Dr. Natalie Roberts
Executive director of Medecins Sans Frontieres UK



health consequences for the population," leading to fatalities.

She highlighted Rafah and the southern border region as particularly affected areas.

The BBC said as the exact condition of each facility could not be determined, there was no distinction between classifying

them as "destroyed" or "damaged."

It also acknowledged that not all damage was visible from the satellite images — mostly in northern Gaza or the area around the southern city of Khan Younis — so some affected facilities could have been missed.

The situation has been exacerbated by damage to Gaza's Coastal Municipalities Water Utility and the main service depot of UNICEF, making repairs challenging.

Human rights experts argue facilities critical to civilian survival should be protected.

Leila Sadat, a former special adviser on crimes against

humanity at the International Criminal Court, suggested the pattern of destruction indicated either a "reckless approach" to civilian infrastructure or intentional targeting.

She added it was possible that "these were not all mistakes."

In response to BBC's findings, the Israel Defense Forces said Hamas used civilian infrastructure for military purposes, storing weapons and ammunition.

It maintains water facilities were primarily struck during airstrikes targeting Hamas fighters and denies intentionally targeting civilian infrastructure.

UNAUTHORIZED ACTIVITY

Jordan media authority files complaint against Al-Yarmouk channel

Arab News London

Jordan's media authority has filed a complaint against Al-Yarmouk Satellite Channel, accusing it of breaching broadcasting regulations.

The Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated network was closed down and referred to public prosecutors on charges of unauthorized activity and broadcasting from Jordan without obtaining government approval.

"The Jordan Media Commission had filed several complaints in the past in this regard, a number of which included a general pardon law, while the latest decision was issued by the highest judicial body in the Kingdom (Court of

Cassation) and by written order," the JMC's Director-General Bashir Momani said in a statement.

Sources close to the channel's staff reported that security agencies raided the offices, seizing broadcasting equipment and preventing employees from entering. The channel employs 25 people.

Momani explained that the decision was taken in accordance with the country's Audio-visual Media Law, adding that the broadcasting equipment confiscated would be used as evidence in the case.

This is not the first time Jordan's authorities have closed the channel for broadcasting without a permit.



Sources close to the channel's staff reported that security agencies raided the offices, seizing broadcasting equipment and preventing employees from entering. File

Launched in 2013, the channel faced a similar shutdown two years later. Al-Yarmouk then worked with local companies and studios to produce and record its

HIGHLIGHT

The Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated network was closed down and referred to public prosecutors on charges of unauthorized activity and broadcasting from Jordan without obtaining government approval.

programs before transmitting them via satellite.

In 2016, the Jordan Visual and Audio Authority issued a circular to production and distribution companies in the country, prohibiting "unlicensed" channels from transmitting via third parties without legal approval.

At that time, the commission did not clarify the reasons for not licensing the channel but denied that the decision was politically motivated.

The channel's then-director, Khader Al-Mashaykh, later claimed that the network received initial approval but that the application was stalled while waiting for approval from Jordan's prime minister.

He added that authorities informed him Al-Yarmouk TV could continue operations while awaiting a final response.

Momani suggested that the decision was not specifically targeted at the channel, emphasizing that the JMC would apply the law to any parties found in violation.



Yazeed Al-Rajhi in a Toyota Hilux on his way to a commanding lead in the Tabuk Toyota Rally. Al-Rajhi and co-driver Timo Gottschalk led the opening 245 km selective section. Supplied

MOTOR RACING

Saudi ace Yazeed Al-Rajhi storms into big lead in Tabuk Toyota Rally

Al-Mogheera tops motorcycle overall standings

Arab News Tabuk

Saudi pilot Yazeed Al-Rajhi and German co-driver Timo Gottschalk took a commanding 4 minutes and 21 seconds lead in the Tabuk Toyota Rally on Friday.

The Overdrive Racing Toyota Hilux crew led the opening 245 km selective section, a scenic and demanding route through the Zalta desert, from start to finish.

"No issues, no problems, all is good," said Al-Rajhi afterwards.

The pair's teammates, Dania

Akeel and Stephane Duple, also had a strong run that left the two Ultimate P class cars at the top of the leaderboard.

"It was spectacular and a lot of fun, amazing views and a really nice race," Akeel said.

"The first 85 km were open and fast and the remainder were more technical between the rocks and the mountains and canyons. We took care to pass without any surprises. I love this car a lot and I feel more confident every kilometer."

Saleh Al-Saif was the best of the rest with Qatari co-driver Nasser Al-Kuwari. The Saudi moved into

FASTFACT

MX Ride Dubai's Mohammed Al-Balooshi claimed the stage win in the motorcycle category on his Husqvarna with a time of 3 hours, 7 minutes and 42 seconds.

a comfortable category lead over fourth-placed Can-Am driver Abdullah Al-Haydan.

"The stage is different to last year. A lot of new terrain and tracks. It was a little bit tricky and rocky and we had a puncture at the beginning," Al-Saif said.

"About 10 km before the end, we

had another puncture and decided not to change it. My aim is to be second in the championship."

MX Ride Dubai's Mohammed Al-Balooshi claimed the stage win in the motorcycle category on his Husqvarna with a time of 3 hours, 7 minutes and 42 seconds.

But the Emirati still trails local rider Abdulhalim Al-Mogheera by 1 minute 50 seconds in the overall standings after the Saudi won the Prologue stage.

"Today, it was a very long stage and quite busy. I am really happy. I picked the strategy to start 10th and I knew if everything went right, I would win," Al-Balooshi said.

"I didn't expect to catch everybody at 60km. Then I led to the finish. That's why I'm here — to improve my navigation. I am really happy with that overall and I am happy to be able to compete in the championship."

"I have won in Kuwait, Qatar and Oman but I don't have a Saudi title. This would make my list complete. I did win something in KSA in 2009 but it would be special to win this title."

Hamdan Al-Ali and Kuwait's Abdullah Al-Shatti were classified third and fourth, with Ahmed Al-Jaber rounding out the top five.

ARAMCO TEAM SERIES KOREA

Hyo-Joo Kim's dazzling finish gives South Korean star lead in individual race

Arab News Seoul

The Hyo-Joo Kim fan club was treated to a clinic at the New Korea Country Club, as an eagle-birdie finish catapulted the world No. 12 to the top of the leaderboard at the Aramco Team Series Korea presented by PIF.

The 2014 Evian Championship winner was trailed by her devoted fans across the undulating landscape of New Korea Country Club, with the climax coming on the last two holes. A remarkable 60-yard eagle on the eighth hole, followed by a birdie on nine, propelled her to a 4-under par score and the top spot at the close of play.

With the course proving tough for the field, Hyo-Joo Kim used her knowledge of the course to her advantage, taking sole lead into the second day of the tournament, in her Aramco Team Series

presented by PIF debut.

"I wish they had played the music a bit louder, but it was quite enjoyable," said the leader of her debut. "Also, it was the first time playing with four people in a match. I'm working on the things that I wanted to improve this year and I feel like it's getting better and better."

Colombian Marijo Uribe posted an impressive early score, with an opening round of 3-under keeping her hot on the heels of Hyo-Joo Kim.

Uribe, who won her first LET event in Australia in March, is looking to make the most of her final year on tour before retiring after the 2024 Paris Olympics.

"It's a tough course, so it's good to be taking advantage of those opportunities, and we're happy to be close to the (top of the) leaderboard," said Uribe.

"This is my last year traveling



The home favorite Hyo-Joo Kim finished round one in the top spot at Aramco Team Series Korea. Supplied

the world, so I'm taking advantage of it. My sister-in-law came with me, so we've been buying a lot of Korean skincare products and just going around eating my favorite foods, like Korean barbecue."

On the team side of the event, Team Gustavsson stormed into an

early lead, with a score of 13-under placing them atop the leaderboard at the close of play. Made up of Johanna Gustavsson, Laura Beveridge, Gemma Clews and amateur Jaeho Shin, the team sit in pole position to claim the team trophy on Saturday.

"I hit a lot of fairways," said captain Gustavsson, who finished the day on 1-under. "I drove it very well, putted OK, but missed a few chances, so hopefully tomorrow there's a chance to be even better."

World No. 8 Charley Hull was even par on the day with four birdies and four bogeys, while LPGA star Danielle Kang struggled, recording a score of 8-over, with two double-bogeys on the front nine an unfortunate start.

It was a tough day of golf for the most part, with high scores on the leaderboard demonstrating the challenge that New Korea Country Club will pose this weekend.

Indeed, only 14 players finished the day on even par or lower. However, forecast rain for day two could improve scores, helping slow the action around the greens, and offering more birdie opportunities.

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

CAF

Confederation Cup final set for hosts Morocco

Moroccan club Renaissance Berkane are due to host Egyptian outfit Zamalek on Sunday in the CAF Confederation Cup final first leg against a background of off-field drama.

Algerian side USMA, who forfeited both legs of a semi-final in a storm over Moroccan maps on the Berkane shirts, have asked the Court of Arbitration for Sport to reverse those decisions.

They also want the first leg of the title decider, scheduled for the 10,000-capacity Stade Municipal in northeastern Morocco, to be postponed.

Separately, Zamalek have requested the Confederation of African Football to change the Tunisian VAR officials chosen to handle the first encounter to those from another country. **AFP**

Premier League

Chelsea exit 'not the end of the world'

Mauricio Pochettino said "it would not be the end of the world" if he leaves Chelsea at the end of the season as the Argentine boss hinted he could quit the Premier League club.

Pochettino has been under fire for much of a difficult first season in charge at Stamford Bridge.

With speculation lingering that he could be sacked by Chelsea chairman Todd Boehly, Pochettino took the opportunity to emphasize that he has a say in his future as well.

The former Tottenham manager said he was not unhappy at Chelsea, but reiterated that he needed to have a conversation with the club's hierarchy at the end of the campaign. **AFP**



Tennis

Jabeur's troubles continue with early Rome exit

Ons Jabeur's tough 2024 continued on Friday after being dumped out of the Rome Open in the second round by Sofia Kenin 7-5, 2-6, 6-4 as defending champion Elena Rybakina was forced to withdraw due to illness.

Tunisia's Jabeur, who is ranked ninth in the world, was beaten by unseeded American Kenin in a gruelling match which lasted two hours and 17 minutes in the hot Rome sunshine.

After reaching the quarterfinals in Madrid, Jabeur, who in 2022 became the first Arab and Tunisian player to win a WTA 1000 title, looked to be on the right track. **AFP**

Slobhan Cullen stars in the comedy thriller 'Bodkin,' now streaming on Netflix.



Weekend Lifestyle, Art & Culture

Tasneem Al-Sultan 'Diversity Within Saudi Weddings'

The acclaimed Lebanon-born Palestinian-American photographer Rania Matar has curated "Louder Than Hearts," an exhibition of work by 10 female photographers, including herself, from the Arab world and Iran that runs at the Middle East Institute in Washington, DC until October 4. Saudi Arabia is represented by Riyadh-based "visual storyteller and photographer" Tasneem Al-Sultan, specifically her "Saudi Tales of Love" series, which, the MEI says, is "informed by her personal journey through marriage and divorce."

In wedding images such as this one, Al-Sultan "depicts the constructs and expectations of marriage, including the elaborate ceremonies, as well as the various societal constraints the Saudi women she photographed faced and triumphed over" and "delves into the complexities of relationships and the interplay of tradition and individual choice."

The series has garnered global recognition for Al-Sultan, featuring in Time's "Lightbox" photo series and the international photography fair Paris Photo.



PHOTOGRAPHY

Highlights from 'Louder Than Hearts'

The Middle East Institute in Washington, DC is hosting works by female photographers from the Arab world

Rania Matar 'Farah (In Her Burnt Car)'



Matar's photography, the MEI states, "captures intimate moments that transcend borders and cultures and explores themes of personal and collective identity through photos of women in the US and the Middle East."

The series to which this image belongs — "Where Do I Go? Fifty Years Later" — began after the devastating explosion in Beirut Port in August 2020, and the title alludes to the fact that 2025 will be the 50th anniversary of the beginning of Lebanon's civil war. The wave of emigration that followed the 2020 explosion was "akin to that of 1984-85 when a wave of young people including herself left the war-stricken country. By

photographing these women, Matar was relating to their experiences and their dilemma of immigration (decades) later."

Rehaf Al-Batniji 'Malak'

This image comes from Paris-based, Gaza-born photographer Al-Batniji's series titled "(Shatt) The Beach & (Shatta) The Chili Pepper," a project that explores "the social and cultural anthropology" of her hometown. Shatta is a major ingredient in Palestinian cuisine, and "emblematic of Gaza, where life's challenges can sting like this fiery spice," while shatt is "the serene beach where residents seek solace and escape their daily reality."

Al-Batniji's work, the MEI states, "offers an intimate portrayal of



the territory, reflecting the struggles and intensity of life under siege, as well as the resilience and vibrancy of its communities with refreshing hopefulness. Al-Batniji rejects the brutal imagery of conflict and instead uses color as a tool of resistance."

Carmen Yahchouchi 'Victoria'



Mali-born Lebanese photographer Yahchouchi has work from three of her series in the exhibition, all which "capture the enduring impact of the Lebanese Civil War on women, highlighting their pivotal roles in the middle of chaos and devastation," the MEI's promotional material states. "Her work offers glimpses into their resilience, strength and sacrifice as they navigated through tumultuous periods of history

emerging as heroines within their communities and families and assuming new roles in the public sphere." This piece is from her series "My Mother's Gun," and demonstrates Yahchouchi's talent for photographing "the intimate spaces of human experience, inviting viewers into her subjects' unique worlds."

Tanya Habjouqa 'Inner Resistance'

The Jordanian photographer and journalist, who lives and works in



East Jerusalem, "melds a mordant sense of irony with an unyielding examination of the repercussions of geopolitical conflicts on people's lives," according to the MEI. This image comes from her "Occupied Pleasures" series, which, the institute says, "presents a multidimensional portrayal of humanity's ability to find joy amid adversity in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza, utilizing a sharp sense of humor about the absurdities produced by a 47-year occupation."

Screen SceneE

NEW TO WATCH AT HOME



Bodkin

Starring: Will Forte, Slobhan Cullen, Robyn Cara, David Wilmot, Chris Walley

Where: Netflix

Dark comedy thriller centered on an investigative journalist from Dublin as she assists a couple of podcasters from the US making a series about an old murder case in an apparently idyllic Irish coastal town.



Hacks

Starring: Jean Smart, Hannah Einbinder, Carl Clemons-Hopkins

Where: OSN+

Season three of the widely acclaimed comedy drama about Deborah Vance, an iconic female stand-up star who, realizing her fame is waning, employs Ava, a young, 'edgy' comedy writer, to jazz up her act. Reviews suggest this is the show's best season yet.



Dark Matter

Starring: Joel Edgerton, Jennifer Connelly, Alice Braga

Where: Apple TV+

Chicago-based physicist Jason Dessen finds himself 'warped' into an alternate version of his life, leaving him desperate to get back to his old reality before the alternate 'him' can cause serious damage to his family.



Hollywood Con Queen

Starring: Scott Johnson, Hargobind Tahlramani

Where: Apple TV+

Documentary about the remarkable titular scam, run for many years by a man who would pose as powerful Hollywood executives to convince entertainment industry workers to travel to Indonesia on the promise of work, only to rip them off.



Mother of the Bride

Starring: Brooke Shields, Miranda Cosgrove, Benjamin Bratt

Where: Netflix

In Mark Waters' rom-com, Emma has returned to the US after a year in London. She shocks her mother, Lara, by telling her she's getting married in a month at a Thai resort. To make matters worse, the man Emma is marrying is the son of the man who broke Lara's heart years before.

LIFESTYLE

Mayassem Tamim's soaps use compelling chemistry of Saudi fragrances

Nada Alturki Riyadh

"I think I'm living the best years of my life," retiree Mayassem Tamim tells Arab News. "I was very happy with the work I did, but it was time to start a new chapter in my life."

Tamim is talking about her luxury handmade soap brand, Mayassem, which she launched in 2018. Her products are created from natural ingredients sourced in the Kingdom, including extra-virgin olive oil from Al-Jouf, camel milk from Janadriyah, honey from Baha, and dates from Qassim.

"My hope is these soaps are going to help establish some-

thing in Saudi Arabia that is considered pure to the region. It doesn't have to be just my soaps, it can be an industry that is localized," she says. "We're doing everything new in Saudi Arabia. Why not this?"

She thinks of her soaps as mini canvases, each with a blend of non-toxic coloring inspired by their ingredients. The Bliss bar for example, made with Zamzam water and lavender fragrance, is crafted to resemble the Kaaba. The Tamr bar reflects the palette of the Saudi Arabia landscape as it features oud, saffron and turmeric fragrance, date paste, and camel milk.

(Right) Mayassem Tamim, creator of the luxury handmade soap brand Mayassem. AN photo/Abdulrahman bin Shuhub



"I know they're soaps and not paintings, but sometimes that's the feeling for me," she says. "I was very sad at the loss of my cousin, Rana — which in Arabic means song — so for one of my soaps I decided to go with blue colors and called it Celestial Melody. Sometimes it's that simple."

The soaps come in floral, fruity, woody, citrus, or unscented options. Tamim also crafts limited-edition soaps, including an 18-box drop featuring bars encrusted with crystals such as lapis lazuli and black onyx. Her products have been featured in shops at Jeddah's Islamic Arts Biennale and Diriyah's Contem-

porary Arts Biennale, various homegrown market locations, and pop-up stores.

"People can buy soap 10 times cheaper at the supermarket," Tamim says. "If I'm not offering them something that adds to the moisturization, that is organic, that does not harm them, and remains beautiful as long as they're using it, I might as well not (bother)."

With all her products being hand-crafted, Tamim is also promoting the talents of local craftsmen and women.

"Whether they're making soap, embroidery, or painting, artisans bring out the identity of a country," she says.



CINEMA

The Arab world's representatives
at Cannes Film Festival

The features from Arab filmmakers showing at the movie industry's most prestigious event this year



'Norah'
Starring: Yaqoub Alfathan, Maria Bahrawi
Director: Tawfik Alzaidi
Last year, the Saudi-backed "Jeanne du Barry" opened the festival. This year, the Kingdom's burgeoning film industry takes an even more significant step forward on the global stage with "Norah," the debut feature from Saudi filmmaker Tawfik Alzaidi (pictured

above), which will screen in the festival's Un Certain Regard section (for "films with unusual styles and non-traditional stories seeking international recognition"). "Norah" is set in AlUla in the late '90s and follows a teacher named Nader (Yaqoub Alfathan), whose



ambitions of becoming an artist himself are fading. But when he meets Norah (Maria Bahrawi, pictured), a talented young girl, he does his best to help her make the most of her artistic abilities, in the hope that her country may one day embrace her self-expression.

Speaking to Arab News in November, Alzaidi said: "People always say to me that this movie contains one thing above all else: the truth. I am so happy that our truth can now be told." He added: "When audiences of the next generation see this film, I want them to remember one thing: Believe in yourself. And if you have a voice, never stop fighting for it."

'Motel Destino'
Starring: Iago Xavier, Fabio Assuncao, Nataly Rocha
Director: Karim Ainouz
Karim Ainouz — who was born in Brazil to an Algerian father and Brazilian mother — presents his latest feature in the festival's "erotic thriller" and centers on the titular roadside "love hotel" run by "hot-headed Elias and his restless younger wife Dayana." When 21-year-old

Heraldo arrives, on the run after an assassination he was meant to carry out went wrong, the established order of Motel Destino's world is turned upside down as Dayana finds herself intrigued by the newcomer and decides to let him stay. "As the tropical noir plays out, loyalties and desire intertwine to reveal that destiny has its own enigmatic design," the official blurb reads.



'To A Land Unknown'
Starring: Angeliki Papoulia, Mahmood Bakri, Manal Awad
Director: Mahdi Fleifel
UAE-born Danish Palestinian filmmaker Mahdi Fleifel has made several memorable short films about the harrowing experiences of Palestinian refugees in Europe — including "A Drowning Man" and "3 Logical Exits" — that have undoubtedly provided

inspiration, and information, for this feature film. Two Palestinian cousins, Chatila and Reda, are trying to make their way from Athens to Germany, and have nearly saved enough cash to buy their fake passports when Reda, a drug addict, loses their money. Desperate to get out of their seemingly hopeless situation, Chatila hatches a dangerous plan involving hostages and the two best friends posing as smugglers.



'The Village Next to Paradise'
Starring: Ahmed Ali Farah, Anab Ahmed Ibrahim
Director: Mo Harawe
The Mogadishu-born Somali Austrian filmmaker's debut feature will screen in the festival's Un Certain Regard section. Judging

by the success of his previous shorts, which include "Will My Parents Come to See Me," it should be worth watching. Harawe told Deadline that his movie "serves as a metaphor for a country that holds the potential for paradise were it not for the circumstances that make such a reality impossible." It

is set in a remote village in Somalia, and, according to the festival's synopsis, "revolves around a newly assembled family as its members navigate between their different aspirations and the complex world surrounding them. Love, trust and resilience will power them through their life paths."



'Everybody Loves Touda'
Starring: Nisrin Erradi, Joud Chamihy, Jalila Tlemsi
Director: Nabil Ayouch
Franco Moroccan producer, writer and director Ayouch is no stranger to Cannes. He's married to Moroccan filmmaker Maryam Touzani and co-wrote her 2022

Cannes entry "The Blue Caftan." Ayouch's own "Casablanca Beats" was in competition for the Palme d'Or, the festival's highest accolade, in 2021. Like the latter movie, "Everybody Loves Touda" relies heavily on Morocco's vibrant and vital music scene for inspiration. The titular character,

a single mom in a provincial town, dreams of being a "sheikha" — a traditional performer "empowered by the lyrics of the fierce female poets who came before her, with their songs of resistance, love and emancipation." Touda has her sights set on becoming a megastar in Casablanca.