

OPINION

SAUDI-JAPAN TIES: FROM TRANSACTIONAL TO STRATEGIC

By Faisal J. Abbas
Editor-in-Chief
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FRIDAY, May 24, 2024
Dul Qaada 16, 1445
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SINCE 1975

ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

Graduating students protest against Israel's offensive on Gaza during the 373rd Commencement Exercises at Harvard University in the US. Hundreds of students walked out of the function chanting 'Free, Free Palestine.' Reuters



YEMEN CRISIS

Vessel targeted by missile off Hodeidah, crew safe

Arab News Jeddah

A missile attack targeted a commercial vessel transiting southwest of Yemen's port city of Hodeidah without causing any damage or casualties, maritime security firms said on Thursday.

The vessel was "suspiciously approached" 68 nautical miles off Hodeidah, Ambrey said, without identifying the ship or the flag that it was flying.

"The vessel had undergone what she described as a 'missile attack' at the location," it added, noting that "no injuries or damages were reported."

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations said the attack happened in the southern Red Sea near the crucial Bab El-Mandeb Strait. "Vessel and all crew are safe and proceeding to next port of call," it said.

Yemen's Houthi militia did not immediately claim the attack, though it can take hours or even days for them to acknowledge their assaults.

The militia's leader, Abdul Malik Al-Houthi, said one of their operations this week targeted the Mediterranean Sea. Earlier this month, he said that all ships heading to Israeli ports would be targeted, not just those in the Red Sea region.

The Houthis have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, seized one vessel and sunk another since November.

The group say their campaign is in solidarity with Palestinians amid the Gaza war. Shipping through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden has declined because of the threat.

DIPLOMATIC ISOLATION

Colombia to open embassy in Ramallah in fresh blow to Israel

• ICJ to rule on Rafah offensive today • No letup in Palestinian bloodbath in Gaza, West Bank

Arab News Jeddah

Colombia, whose president has described Israel's campaign in Gaza as "genocidal," has said it will open an embassy in Ramallah in the Palestinian territories.

Foreign Minister Luis Murillo told reporters that President Gustavo Petro — an ardent critic of Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu — had given instructions "that we

install the embassy of Colombia in Ramallah" in the West Bank.

The announcement follows an announcement by Ireland, Norway and Spain that they would recognize a Palestinian state, more than seven months into the devastating Gaza war.

Israel launched devastating airstrikes on Gaza on Thursday while also saying it is ready to resume stalled talks on a truce and hostage release deal with Hamas to pause the war raging since Oct. 7.

NUMBER

35,800

have been killed in Gaza in Israeli attacks since Oct. 7.

Gaza's civil defense agency said two pre-dawn airstrikes had killed 26 people, including 15 children, in Gaza City alone. One strike hit a family house, killing

16 people, in the Al-Daraj area, and another killed 10 people inside a mosque compound.

Palestinians in Jenin, occupied West Bank, assessed the damage caused by a two-day Israeli raid that left 12 people dead, including children.

Meanwhile, the International Court of Justice will rule on Friday on South Africa's request to order a halt to Israel's Rafah offensive in Gaza. Last week, South Africa asked the ICJ, to

order a halt to Israel's offensive in Gaza, and in Rafah in particular, saying this was necessary to ensure the survival of the Palestinians.

Central Intelligence Agency Director Williams Burns will travel to Europe for talks with Mossad director David Barnea to try to revive Gaza talks, Axios said.

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The Brief

THE MAYMAN SHOW

MDLBEAST is building a tribe for the music lovers, the platform's COO Ahmad AlAmmary tells "The Mayman Show." P5

CLIMATE CHANGE

Bangladeshi architect Marina Tabassum's work focuses on the resilience in the country where millions lose their homes to climate change every year. P8

NON-OIL EXPORTS

Saudi Arabia's non-oil exports saw an annual rise of 3.3 percent in the first quarter of 2024, according to official data. P12

CELEBRATING CINEMA

Saudi film 'Norah' makes history with screening at Cannes

Filmed entirely in AlUla, the movie, directed by Tawfik Al-Zaidi, is running in 'Un Certain Regard' section

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi film "Norah" had its official screening at the 77th Cannes Film Festival on Thursday, becoming the first film from the Kingdom to screen as part of the official calendar at the event.

The movie, filmed entirely in AlUla and directed by Tawfik Al-Zaidi, is running in the "Un Certain Regard" section of the festival.

The film is set in 1990s Saudi Arabia when conservatism ruled



'Norah,' starring Maria Bahrawi, Yaqoub Al-Farhan, and Abdullah Al-Satian, is in competition with 19 other films from around the world. AN photo by Ammar Abd Rabbo

and the professional pursuit of all art, including painting, was frowned upon.

It stars Maria Bahrawi, Yaqoub Al-Farhan, and Abdullah

Al-Satian and follows the story of Norah and failed artist Nader as they encourage each other to realize their artistic potential in rural Saudi Arabia.

"Norah" is in competition with 19 other films from around the world.

On Wednesday, the cast, director and CEO and chairwoman of the Red Sea International Film Festival Mohammed Al-Turki and Jomana Alrashid, respectively, appeared together on the red carpet for French adventure drama film "Le

Comte de Monte-Cristo."

"Norah" was backed by the Red Sea Fund — one of the Red Sea Film Foundation's programs — and had an all-Saudi cast and a 40 percent Saudi crew.

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The Kingdom's Vision 2030 program aims to benefit from the country's strategic location to become a hub of global logistics.

Saleh Al-Jasser
Saudi minister of transport and logistics



Radars

KSA today



Dhahran Summer Camp

Enroll your children at Ithra Center's Summer Camp to help them appreciate nature, conserve resources, and reduce waste through immersive art and cultural practices. Registration is open throughout summer.



Jeddah Beach Horse

Immerse yourself in the culture of Saudi Arabia as you giddy up for a fantastic horse-riding experience in Jeddah. It includes a ride along the beach, photo session, delicious food, and games. For booking and more information, check the Visit Saudi app.



Jeddah Kite Surfing

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



Dhahran Water Challenge

Ithra Water Challenge is back as summer arrives. Enjoy new fun water-based challenges and activities, and a special surprise to have a happy ending to your day with friends and family. The event runs until May 31.

The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Princess Reema bint Bandar, Saudi Arabia's US ambassador, opened the exhibition "Al-Mangour: Loved and Beloved" in Washington on Wednesday. The work by Saudi Arabia artist Ahmad Angawi was presented by the Saudi Embassy

and the International Finance Corporation. The exhibition, held at the IFC's headquarters, showcases the beauty of Al-Mangour, the traditional Hijazi craft that consists of wooden latticework forming a mesh-like screen. In her speech, Princess Reema stressed

the importance of traditional arts in strengthening cultural identity and solidifying national heritage, and building bridges with other nations. Among those in attendance were the IFC's Director Makhtar Diop, officials, diplomats and artists.

Today's Number

\$9m

Property technology venture capital investments in Saudi Arabia saw an annual increase of 35 percent in 2023 to reach \$9 million, according to MAGNITT's latest report.

Review

'The Undiscovered Self'

GHADI JOUDAH

"The Undiscovered Self," written by Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung in 1957, delivers a warning about the dangers of modern collectivism, arguing that individuals are increasingly losing touch with their true selves.

Loss of personal responsibility, the author suggests, can lead to the rise of mass movements and, ultimately, totalitarianism.

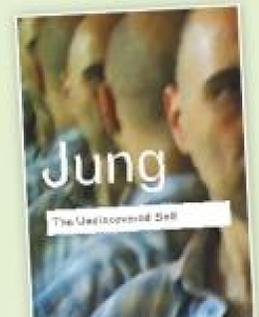
The book offers a prescription for individual psychological development and moral autonomy as an antidote to society's collectivist forces.

Jung explains the structure of the psyche, with the conscious ego and much larger subconscious, which contains universal archetypes, as well as personal complexes and shadows that shape our behavior.

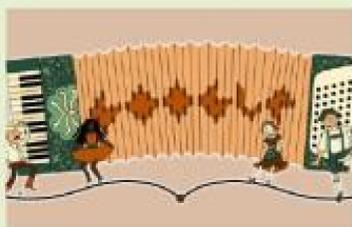
The book emphasizes the importance of understanding and integrating the unconscious rather than just relying on the conscious mind.

Jung also explores the notion of "self," defining "individuation" as the process of integrating the conscious and unconscious to become a whole, individualized person.

This requires embracing one's shadow side and personal complexes, not just the socially acceptable persona.



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



GOOGLE DOODLE

Accordion

Google Doodle celebrated the accordion on Thursday in an unusual anniversary moment.

On May 23, 1829, the instrument was patented for the first time.

Google took this information and celebrated the accordion's 195th patent anniversary with an animated doodle on the homepage of the search engine, showing the instrument being played and human figures dancing.

The tech firm also provided a list of fun facts about accordions, starting with the root of its name, which is derived from the German word "Akkord," meaning chord.

The instrument went through changes throughout its history.

MODELING MILESTONE

Bright Vachirawit

After making his Met Gala debut donning Burberry's new collection made by Daniel Lee, Thai singer Bright Vachirawit is now one of the brand's new global faces.

According to Vogue Thailand, Burberry Chief Creative Officer Daniel Lee launched his first handbag campaign for the brand with the Rocking Horse bag.

The British luxury brand's campaign has been presented by new global ambassadors including Jon Jihyun, Tang Wei, Mizukawa Asami, Lily Donaldson, Nora Aittal and Bright.

Bright's fans around the world took to

X to show their delight at his modeling milestone.

Fans also showered him with praise and supporting messages, taking "Bright Vachirawit" to trending status worldwide on X.

@R4lnb0w26 posted: "Bright's visual is so captivating. He truly shines and embodies Burberry spirit as its global ambassador. Can't wait to see his posters and other media all around the world."

@SSaksripanich posted: "Bright is very handsome, royally handsome, so handsome that his feet don't touch the ground. Let's just say that he's so handsome and so cool."

@Brights-4bvc posted: "Congratulations, Bright, on your first global campaign with Burberry!"



TheRegion

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Jeddah

• The Chocolate Factory at Jbeil, Lebanon, is inviting people to fulfill a childhood dream to see, smell, touch, and taste chocolate in a fully automatic factory and learn about the production process, from raw materials to end products. The tour takes place every Saturday until Sept. 28.

"A Sneak Peek" Exhibition at Qatar Auto Museum explores the past, present, and future of the automobile and its impact on global life and culture. It also celebrates the mission to drive culture forward and to inspire the next generation of innovators, designers, engineers, collectors, and policymakers through a shared passion for cars. The exhibition

will run until Jan. 26, 2025.

• Learn about the history and culture of Bahrain on this walking tour in Muharraq with guides who will tell visitors stories and facts about the country that they might not find in books. To register for the Muharraq Cultural Walking Tour, which will run until May 30, visit calendar.bh.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

May 24	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	4:14	5:39	12:18	3:33	6:56	8:26
Madinah	4:06	5:34	12:19	3:42	7:03	8:33
Riyadh	3:38	5:06	11:51	3:14	6:35	08:05
Abha	4:12	5:34	12:07	3:24	6:40	8:10
Dammam	3:18	4:49	11:37	3:05	6:24	7:54

Saudi people are passionate and excited. They can tell amazing stories.

William "Wink" Winkler
Instructor of digital arts
Bainford University

Spotlight **EYE ON AI**



FILMMAKING

Pushing the boundaries of creativity

Expert thinks Saudi filmmakers will use AI for good and noble ends, but recommends they start simple

Jasmine Bager Dhahran

William "Wink" Winkler of Samford University landed in Saudi Arabia earlier this month for the Saudi Film Festival in Dhahran, he felt he had discovered a new frontier in cinema and technology.

The instructor of digital arts brought with him a wealth of experience to conduct a master-class in artificial intelligence in filmmaking. However, during his visit, he gained a fresh perspective on the Saudi film industry.

"I learned that the Saudi people are passionate and excited," Winkler told Arab News. "They can tell amazing

stories, original Saudi stories, and as they start to embrace new and emerging technology, that will help them to do that."

AI is still considered an emerging technology, but one that is evolving rapidly.

As a giant aggregator, AI can instantly sift through vast amounts of data in an instant and use existing screenplays to identify patterns and generate curated story ideas.

In pre-production, AI can help streamline location scouting by analyzing images in real time based on a prompt. It can also cut casting time by instantaneously analyzing audition tapes.

In post-production, AI will transform filmmaking by using

automated editing tools, which can analyze footage and suggest instant edits.

It can also assist with color grading, sound design, and visual effects.

However, AI in filmmaking is not without its issues. The tool could negate several jobs, while machine-generated stories might seem inauthentic or lacking in human spirit.

"Films invoke emotion, and they can create feelings because they're told from a human story," said Winkler. "And humans have felt feelings and have dealt with real human problems. And the computer hasn't.

"All it can do is read what has been written and repeat it, but

DID YOU KNOW?

1 AI can sift through vast amounts of data in an instant and use existing screenplays to generate story ideas.

2 In pre-production, AI could help streamline location scouting and cut casting time by analyzing footage.

3 In post-production, AI could automate editing and assist with color grading, sound design, and visual effects.

it doesn't actually know what to say, or how to convey it. It can only try to replicate what a human said before."

There are also concerns about bias in AI algorithms, as they mimic what already exists. AI systems have a tendency to perpetuate and amplify demographic and racial biases.

Another consideration is plagiarism, as AI pulls from existing works without providing credit.

To manage this, Winkler believes a thoughtful discussion leading to robust regulation is required.

"We can fight it, just like we've always fought it — through rules and regulations," he said.

"I think that creating

communities and discussions at small local levels — to larger governance levels — creates some guardrails around what's happening."

Winkler believes Saudi filmmakers will use AI for good and noble ends — but recommends they start simple.

"I think the place that I would start is actually not in AI," he said. "Start with a journal and a piece of paper and a pen — and document. Get the stories from your mother, your grandmother, your grandfather, your great-grandmother and your great-grandfather.

"Everyone's ancestors have done amazing things, and that should be documented and shared."

Navigating the ethical landscape of AI in the classroom

RAFAEL HERNANDEZ DE SANTIAGO

In the sprawling metropolis of Techville, residents grapple with the moral maze of AI. One particularly contentious issue revolves around the integration of AI into higher education.

Proponents argue that AI can revolutionize learning, offering personalized curriculums tailored to each student's unique needs. With the right algorithm, even the most disinterested students might find themselves captivated by quadratic equations or Shakespearean sonnets.

Critics, meanwhile, raise the alarm about the inherent biases lurking within these digital tutors. In Techville's institutions of higher learning, where textbooks are replaced with tablets and lectures are live-streamed in virtual reality, a battle rages.

As the philosopher Plato once opined: "The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future life." But when that direction is skewed by the biases of algorithms and data sets, does the road to enlightenment lead to a dead end?

Consider the case of AI-powered grading systems, touted as the saviors of overwhelmed professors drowning in a sea of term papers. Yet, beneath the veneer of efficiency lies a Pandora's box of biases, where zip codes and surnames become the unwitting judges of academic merit.

Picture this: You are a bright-eyed student, eager to soak up the wisdom of the ages in the hallowed halls of higher education. But your professors are not flesh and blood; they are algorithms, programmed to teach and grade.



Rafael Hernández de Santiago, Viscount of Espes, is a Spanish national residing in Saudi Arabia and working at the Gulf Research Center.

As the brightest minds converge in pursuit of knowledge and innovation, the specter of bias casts a long shadow over higher education. In the famous words of Aristotle: "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all." But when the heart of AI algorithms beats to the rhythm of societal prejudices, what becomes of the pursuit of truth?

Take, for instance, the case of admissions algorithms tasked with selecting the next generation of Techville students. In a city where diversity is celebrated, these algorithms wield the power to shape the future of generations. Yet, in their quest for efficiency, they often fall prey to the very biases they were designed to mitigate.

In the case of AI-powered hiring algorithms designed to sift through

resumes with impartiality, beneath the surface lies a labyrinth of biases. When those individuals are reduced to mere data points in an AI calculation, what becomes of meritocracy?

As the wise Islamic philosopher Ibn Khaldun once stated: "The world of today is not the one of yesterday. Tomorrow will be different from today. Do not expect things to remain the same." And it was Avicenna who once said: "The more brilliant the lighting, the quicker it disappears."

Perhaps, just perhaps, we will find our way through the maze of AI ethics, emerging on the other side wiser, kinder and infinitely more human. For, in the end, it may be our humility, not our technology, that guides us through the labyrinth of AI and ethics in the city of tomorrow.



Symbol of hospitality The Saudi pavilion at the World Water Forum in Indonesia has attracted significant attention from visitors. Saudi hospitality, exemplified by the quality and variety of dates and coffee on offer, has proved a major draw. The event is being held from May 18 to May 25. Saudi coffee is considered a symbol of hospitality.

SPA

CULTURAL EXCHANGE

European Film Festival set to regale Saudi movie buffs

VOX Cinemas will host 21 films over the one-week event

Rashid Hassan Riyadh

The third European Film Festival begins next week, taking place in both Riyadh and Jeddah for the first time.

The event, which will run from May 29 to June 6, is being launched by the European Union Delegation to the Kingdom in conjunction with the embassies of EU member states and Arabia Pictures.

It will be hosted at VOX Cinemas Century Corner in Riyadh and the newly opened VOX Cinemas Jeddah Park in Jeddah.

This year the festival is bigger than ever, with 21 European films from countries including Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal,

Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

The line-up features movies that have won awards including Oscars and the Palme d'Or, the highest prize awarded at the Cannes Film Festival.

EU Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Christophe Farnaud said: "I am glad that the European Film Festival has become a landmark event on the Kingdom's cultural calendar. The festival has been expanding year by year and this time around we are not only showcasing more movies, but also bringing the festival to Jeddah. I hope that this will allow even more Saudi film enthusiasts to attend the festival's many film screenings and side events."

Ahmed Teama, CEO of Arabia Pictures, expressed his pleasure at extending the collaboration with the EU Delegation to Saudi Arabia for

SPEEDREAD

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• It will be hosted at VOX Cinemas Century Corner in Riyadh and the newly opened VOX Cinemas Jeddah Park in Jeddah.

a third consecutive year.

He lauded the festival as one of the most significant cinematic events in the Kingdom, highlighting its unique appeal to a devoted audience of international cinema enthusiasts.

Aimed at facilitating cultural exchange and promoting

European cinema, the festival will also foster contacts between European and Saudi filmmakers.

Among the guests will be Oscar-winning Austrian film director Stefan Ruzowitzky, who will give a special masterclass.

Also attending will be director Kyriakos Tofaridis and screenwriter/director Mijke de Jong as well as Robert Higgins and Patrick McGivney, from Cyprus, the Netherlands and Ireland respectively, who will meet the audiences and run an open conversation with filmmakers and film enthusiasts.

All side-events are free of charge and will take place at VOX Cinemas Century Corner in Riyadh.

Cinema enthusiast Meshal Al-Mutairi told Arab News: "I have seen movies during previous EU film fests and like their movie selection."

SPIRITUALITY

First pilgrims from Philippines depart for Hajj 2024

Elle Aben Manila

The National Commission on Muslim Filipinos sent off the first group of Hajj pilgrims on Thursday, marking the beginning of the annual pilgrimage season for Muslims from the predominantly Catholic Philippines.

Muslims constitute about 10 percent of the nearly 120 million Philippine population, with most living on the island of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago in the country's south, as well as in the central-western province of Palawan.



About 5,000 Filipino Muslims are set to perform Hajj this year. Muslims make up 10 percent of majority Catholic Philippine population. AN photo

With the Hajj this year expected to start on June 14 and end on June 19, many pilgrims depart early to make the most of the spiritual journey that is one of the five pillars of Islam.

The Philippines' first group of 150 pilgrims left early on Thursday morning from the main airport in Manila, making the first leg of their journey to Madinah via Oman.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Transformation

DCO official holds talks with Egypt minister

Deemah Al-Yahya, secretary-general of the Digital Cooperation Organization, held talks with Egyptian Minister of Communications and Information Technology Amr Talaat, and the Arab League's Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit during her visit to Cairo.

Al-Yahya affirmed to Talaat that there were several opportunities for cooperation between the organization and Egypt in light of the latter's digital strategy.

She added that this was the result of Egypt's economic components and strategic goals aligning with the organization's aims.

Al-Yahya added that the organization was able to provide opportunities that could be leveraged to achieve digital economic growth and prosperity.

She also praised the Digital Egypt Pioneers Initiative, which drives digital transformation by developing skills and innovation while supporting young talents in business.

Al-Yahya affirmed that the organization seeks to enhance cooperation with different sectors in Egypt. **SPA Tabuk**

Vision 2030

Kingdom secures membership in ITF in Germany

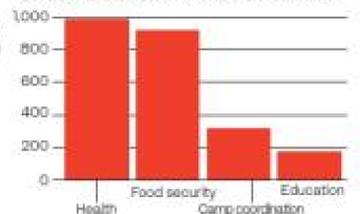
Saudi Arabia secured membership in the International Transport Forum on the sidelines of the event held in Leipzig, Germany.

Saudi Minister of Transport and Logistics Saleh bin Nasser Al-Jasser said the membership symbolizes the Kingdom's commitment to addressing transportation challenges through innovative and sustainable solutions. It also supports the Kingdom's established role in developing the transport and logistics sector, he added, highlighting the Saudi Vision 2030 goal of benefiting from the country's strategic location to become a global logistics center.

Al-Jasser said the Kingdom has made significant strides in logistics, jumping 17 places to reach 38th place globally in the logistics services performance index. Additionally, the Kingdom achieved 13th place globally in the IATA's international air connectivity index and 10th in the maritime navigation network connectivity index. He also noted the launch of a new air carrier, Riyadh Air, aimed at connecting the Kingdom to more than 250 international destinations. **SPA Riyadh**

The Day's FIGURES

KSRELIEF LARGEST COMPLETED & ONGOING PROJECTS IN 98 COUNTRIES



Source: KSrelief

Gaza assistance

KSA delivers aid to Palestinians through Jordan

Saudi Arabia's aid agency KSrelief has delivered equipment and tools to the Jordanian Hashemite Charity Organization that will be sent to support Palestinians in Gaza.

Jordan's Armed Forces will airdrop the 30 tonnes of supplies into the area that remains under siege by Israel.

The Kingdom remains committed to delivering humanitarian aid into Gaza through various means, the Saudi Press Agency reported on Thursday.

Earlier, the aid agency distributed hundreds of food aid packages and shelter kits to thousands most in need in Sudan and Pakistan. The agency provided 956 food parcels, benefitting nearly 5,500 people in Sudan, while nearly 600 shelter kits were distributed in the Gwadar district of Pakistan's Balochistan province. **SPA Amman**

Protecting environment

3 residents arrested for violating law

The Special Forces for Security and Protection arrested three residents for violating environmental regulations by unlawfully exploiting sediments without a permit in the Tabuk region.

The forces explained that three tools used in transporting sand and dredging the soil, operated by two residents, were seized, and legal procedures were taken against them.

Meanwhile, Al-Afwaj security patrols in Al-Arida, Jazan, recently arrested a Saudi citizen for transporting in 10 Ethiopians in his car who crossed the Kingdom's border illegally.

The 10 Ethiopians were referred to the relevant authorities.

Media spokesperson of the Ministry of Interior's Al-Afwaj Regiment said that anyone found to be facilitating illegal entry to the Kingdom could face imprisonment for a maximum of 15 years. **SPA Tabuk**



'The Mayman Show' is a weekly podcast hosted by reporter Hussam Al-Mayman.

THE MAYMAN SHOW

MDLBEAST building a creative tribe through music, says chief creative officer

Ahmad AlAmmary talks about MDLBEAST vision, his own musical background

Hussam Al-Mayman Riyadh

MDLBEAST is building a tribe for the region's music lovers through its initiatives such as the Soundstorm festival, the platform's Chief Creative Officer Ahmad AlAmmary, also known as DJ Baloo, said.

The Saudi veteran DJ and producer with over 20 years of experience under his belt sat down with Arab News' "The Mayman Show" for the launch of its sixth season, talking about MDLBEAST's ambitions and his own background.

His role taps into his ability to find solutions on many levels, he shared.

"It's been my role since the onset of this whole project. My background sits between design thinking, brand development, and brand strategy, and music," the CCO said, adding that the role feels like a perfect fit for him.

"Creatively, you know, every day is its own day. There's no system for creativity. Its context is whatever comes your way, whatever problem you're solving — that's where your creativity sits," he said.

AlAmmary said it was MDLBEAST's goal to become involved in all facets of the creative music industry since its launch in 2019.

"From the onset, the big splash was Soundstorm, but we had every intention of launching our record labels, our music conferences, and XP Music Future," he said. The platform launched around the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which provided an opportunity for it to focus on entertaining.

"So, whether or not you (could) go to an event, we were still around there to ... provide



Chief Creative Officer Ahmad AlAmmary, also known as DJ Baloo, in conversation with Hussam Al-Mayman about music and entertainment. AN photo

the MDLBEAST website.

"We developed these smaller pop-up events, with more intimate settings," AlAmmary said, explaining that the events take place in spaces that have been abandoned, giving MDLBEAST space to flex its creative muscles.

"We can take over and create an experience that is very unique," he said. "We saw that with Tahlia in Jeddah and Irqah in Riyadh, the abandoned hospital ... We're looking at all of these different spaces and projects as ... fun experiences that we can create for our people and platforms for musicians to shine."

Speaking about his own background, AlAmmary says he owes his creative attributes to his very musical family.

"My eldest brother, Khalid, actually, he was kind of like the cultural center of our family. Everything from film to music, design, art, you know, we always had a deep interest in the arts because of his influence. Especially with me and house music — that's where I learned it. I learned it from Khalid," he said.

The DJ and producer developed an interest in music at an early age.

"By the time I was 17, I already had a collection of music," he said. "Years later, you know, I started to get things like a residency in Bahrain ... I would just travel to Beirut and the gigs would appear."

the music and to provide the entertainment," AlAmmary said.

After pandemic restrictions eased, it allowed him and the team to stay on the path they paved. MDLBEAST started with flagship live events and some record labels.

"We had ... launched MDLBEAST Records, Qabo, Wattar, Maestro-Lab and, most recently, Mahoul Records. Each of these labels, for example,

HIGHLIGHT

The platform launched around the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which provided an opportunity for it to focus on entertaining.

serves ... a niche. Above and beyond, our conference is a really unique experience that gathers people from around the region. We have a day and night experience. During the day, it's all about learning and networking, connecting, and collaborating. And at night, that turns into a regional music showcase," AlAmmary said.

MDLBEAST highlights up-and-coming brands that are

leading the underground scene of Saudi music across a variety of genres, the CCO said.

"It's just been, you know, a lot of fun ... but also a lot of ... work. We're turning around projects left and right," he said, adding that the platform is now "diving into venues" with the launch of Beast House, for example, "Riyadh's first music and creative members club," according to

Scan this code to access the podcast



COMMITMENT

Italian shipbuilding giant floats KSA partnership plan

Haifa Alshammari Riyadh

One of the world's biggest shipbuilders will work in partnership with Saudi Arabia to strengthen the Kingdom's maritime sector, with a focus on sustainability and the development of "green shipping."

Fincantieri, an Italian company and Europe's largest shipbuilding group, highlighted its commitment to Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 agenda at a conference under the theme "Where Vision Meets Maritime Excellence" held in Riyadh on Wednesday.

Saudi decisionmakers from related sectors in Riyadh joined Italian officials in a range of sessions at the forum.

During the event, Fincantieri



Fincantieri CEO Pierroberto Folgiere outlined the shipbuilder's plans to collaborate with Saudi companies in line with Vision 2030. AN photo by Huda Bashatah

CEO Pierroberto Folgiere outlined the shipbuilder's plans to collaborate with Saudi companies in line with Vision 2030.

"Our commitment to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is

steadfast," he said.

Fincantieri stands out in the shipbuilding industry for its innovation, and has a leading role in the naval, cruise, and oil and gas sectors, Folgiere said.

The CEO highlighted the importance of developing green ships, designed to minimize the environmental impact of maritime operations, as part of Saudi Arabia's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2060.

Digitizing shipyard operations through innovations such as AI also aligns with the goals of Vision 2030, Folgiere said.

"Today, the shipping industry and the maritime industry, in general, is coping with environmental regulation. For us, it is not only a source of compliance, but

FASTFACT

Digitizing shipyard operations through innovations such as AI also aligns with the goals of Vision 2030, Folgiere said.

also a source of distinctiveness. So, we believe that in the maritime sector, in the shipbuilding sector, mastering energy transition and new technologies will be a source of competitiveness and distinctiveness," he said.

"That is why we are engaged in all the solutions (regarding) energy transition at sea. We are a new engine. We are in biofuels. We are in methanol. We are in LNG. We are in ammonia. We are

in hydrogen. We are everywhere there is innovation at sea."

Maria Tripodi, undersecretary of state for foreign affairs at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, discussed the significance of keeping operations and businesses sustainable.

Fincantieri's ships are built to produce zero carbon emissions, which helps to protect the environment and marine ecosystem, she said.

Khalil Ibrahim bin Salamah, deputy minister for industry affairs at the Saudi Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources, said: "Localization for us is a key factor. Key components are crucial, but the whole supply chain is equally important."

News Middle East

SOLIDARITY

Arab Parliament welcomes move to recognize Palestinian state

Gobran Mohamed Cairo

The Arab Parliament has welcomed a decision by the governments of Spain, Norway and Ireland to recognize the state of Palestine.

The prime ministers of the three countries said on Wednesday that they would formally recognize Palestine as a state on May 28.

All three said they hoped the decision would accelerate efforts toward securing a ceasefire in Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza, now in its eighth month.

The parliament described the move as a victory for justice and the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent state.

It said the decision was a "new victory for the Palestinian cause

and Palestinian diplomacy," and an important step toward recognition by many countries worldwide.

The parliament said the recognition supported the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, foremost of which is the establishment of an independent state with the city of Jerusalem as its capital.

It said that the announcements come at a time when

Israel is working to destroy the Palestinian cause through "ethnic cleansing and forced displacement against civilians, including children, women, and the elderly, against whom war crimes and crimes against humanity are being committed."

Growing international recognition of a Palestinian state represented a practical response

to Israel's plans to "liquidate the Palestinian cause, which will not succeed," it added.

The parliament called on countries that have not yet recognized the state of Palestine to take a step toward "ending the historical injustice to which the Palestinian people have been exposed for decades of occupation and per the internationally recognized two-state

solution based on international legitimacy resolutions."

It called on the international community and all countries to stand with the Palestinian people and their just cause.

Ireland has said it will upgrade its representative office in the West Bank to a full embassy, while the Palestinian mission in Ireland will also be offered full embassy status.

DESTRUCTION

Palestinians survey damage, mourn dead after Israel raid in West Bank

Health Ministry in Ramallah says Israeli forces killed 12 people, including 4 children

AFP Jenin

Palestinians on Thursday began assessing the damage caused by a two-day Israeli raid on the Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank that left 12 people dead, including children.

Young militants shouted into walkie-talkies as they loaded anti-tank obstacles into a pickup truck, an AFP correspondent reported as he toured the camp after the troops left.

Black canvas sheets littered the narrow alleyways of the impoverished camp, torn down after providing cover from Israeli drones.

Damaged parts from Israeli armored vehicles were laid out on a main street, adorned with the flag of the Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad.

The Palestinian Health Ministry in Ramallah said Israeli forces had killed 12 people, including four children, and wounded 25 during the fighting, which began on Tuesday morning.

The bodies of several people killed in the clashes were wrapped in black and green flags and placed on stretchers, which were then hoisted on the shoulders of supporters.

They were carried through the streets of downtown Jenin on Thursday, surrounded by militants from Islamic Jihad, who fired automatic weapons into the air in salute.

The body of local surgeon Usaed Jabareen received a special commemoration from staff at the government hospital in the city.

Crowds lined a courtyard



A Palestinian man inspects the damage to a building after Israeli forces raided the occupied West Bank city of Jenin on Thursday. AP

and stairwell before holding a memorial for him outside the courtyard.

Jenin has long been a stronghold of militant groups, and the Israeli army routinely carries out raids in the city and the adjacent camp.

This time, Israeli forces stayed in the camp for about two days.

Troops took over a two-story sports center, where foam mattresses were strewn around and chairs arranged in circles.

The West Bank, which Israel

FASTFACT

The body of local surgeon Usaed Jabareen received a special commemoration from staff at the government hospital in Palestinian city.

has occupied since 1967, has experienced a surge in violence for more than a year, especially since the Israel-Hamas war erupted on Oct. 7.

At least 518 Palestinians have been killed in the territory by Israeli troops or settlers since the Gaza war broke out, according to Palestinian officials.

The army said it had raided the house of Ahmed Barakat, who was suspected of involvement in an attack on an Israeli civilian last year.

Barakat's house was reduced to rubble in the operation.

After the troops left, children played outside.

"I was afraid when the Israeli army came here," said a young boy as he kicked a football.

Journalists saw dozens of recently damaged buildings in the camp on Thursday morning.

Some structures had been destroyed, while others were less severely damaged.

On the roof of one of the damaged buildings, a teenage resident pointed out where an Israeli sniper had been positioned hours earlier.

GRIEF

Iranian President Raisi laid to rest in Mashhad

AFP Tehran

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi was laid to rest on Thursday, concluding days of funeral rites attended by throngs of mourners after he died in a helicopter crash, state media reported.

Hundreds of thousands marched in his hometown Mashhad to bid farewell to Raisi ahead of his burial following processions in the cities of Tabriz, Qom, Tehran, and Birjand.

The 63-year-old died on Sunday alongside his foreign minister and six others after their helicopter went down in the country's mountainous northwest while returning from a dam inauguration on the border with Azerbaijan.

Once the five days of public mourning, announced on Monday, have passed, the authorities including acting President Mohammad Mokhber will focus on organizing an election for a new president set for June 28.

Men and women, clutching white flowers, crowded the main boulevard of Mashhad, Iran's second city in the northeast where Raisi was born.

Some held aloft placards paying tribute to Raisi as the "man of the battlefield" as a large truck carrying his body drove through the sea of mourners.

Posters of Raisi and black flags were erected along the streets of Mashhad, particularly around Raisi's final resting place.

Earlier thousands of people holding images of Raisi and waving flags lined the streets of Birjand, capital of the eastern province of South Khorasan, for the procession of Raisi's coffin.

AGGRESSION

Medic says Gaza hospital under Israeli siege for fifth day

AFP Gaza Strip

A senior official at Al-Awda Hospital in northern Gaza said it was under Israeli military siege for a fifth straight day on Thursday after soldiers stormed it the previous day.

"We are still under siege for the fifth day in a row," said the

hospital's acting director, Dr. Mohammed Saleh.

"Soldiers are present in the hospital's courtyard and nearby houses," he said, adding that there was "continuous gunfire and shelling" toward it.

Troops stormed the hospital building on Wednesday evening, he said.

"The hospital was stormed, and staff were forced to leave. I currently have only 13 staff, 11 patients, and two women accompanying wounded children," Saleh said.

World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on social media platform X that 140 staff,

patients, and accompanying adults were inside the hospital when troops stormed it.

The WHO visited Al-Awda regularly in April to deliver medical supplies and fuel, but on Tuesday Ghebreyesus said snipers were targeting the building and artillery had hit the fifth floor.

On Tuesday, patients and staff were also evacuated from another hospital in northern Gaza, Kamal Adwan, its director, Dr. Hossam Abu Safa, said at the time.

"These are the only two functional hospitals remaining in northern Gaza. Ensuring their ability to deliver health

services is imperative," Ghebreyesus said in Geneva.

Israeli troops have previously raided other medical facilities in Gaza, including Al-Shifa in Gaza City, the territory's largest hospital, which was reduced to rubble after an operation in March, the WHO said.

News Middle East

GROWING RISKS

Lebanon teacher killed as children narrowly escape deadly drone strike

Najla Housseini Beirut

Lebanese school children on a bus had a narrow escape when a drone strike killed a Hezbollah member in the car ahead, blowing out the windscreen of their vehicle and wounding three pupils.

Mohammed Nasser Farran, also a physics teacher at a public school in Nabatieh, was killed in the Israeli strike that targeted his car early on Thursday.

Three students were injured in the attack, which left the car in flames.

The strike was the first targeting a school teacher since the beginning of the confrontation between Hezbollah and the Israeli army.

Farran, 35, who is originally from Nabatieh and a resident of Kfarsir, was on his way to the Hassan Kamel Al-Sabbah public high school in Nabatieh at 7:15 a.m. to supervise quarterly exams.

An Israeli drone directly targeted his Toyota car on the Nabatieh road, killing him instantly.

Hezbollah mourned Farran's death and said that he was a member of the group.

The bus was carrying middle school students as young as 14 to the Choukine Public School when the drone struck.

Bus driver Ahmad Sbeity said that the drone launched a rocket toward the car, and the subsequent explosion shattered the bus windscreen.

Students screamed while the driver tried to calm the situation.

"Three of them were injured, with blood running from different parts of their bodies, while others had panic attacks and were screaming continuously. Divine providence saved these students from inevitable death," Sbeity said.

The driver contacted the ambulance and Lebanese Red Cross, which took the injured to the hospital. He also asked another bus driver to return the other students to their homes.

"What happened is a brutal criminal act. This enemy does not differentiate between a student and a civilian, and between a



The injured children were admitted to a hospital in Lebanon with cuts from flying glass after Israel's aerial attack on Thursday. Supplied

school and a hospital."

Following the attack, 11-year-old Mohammed Ali Nasser, one of the three injured students, was seen sitting on the sidewalk, his clothes stained with blood. Nasser was taken to hospital, and later said that he and his classmates heard an explosion and saw the car burst into flames.

What happened is a brutal criminal act. This enemy does not differentiate between a student and a civilian, and between a school and a hospital.

Students immediately placed their backpacks on their heads in fear of another raid, he said.

Nasser said that he would return to school after treatment and was not afraid of Israel.

Two other students, Ali Reda Moussa Ayyash, 13, and Qassem Mohammed Jaffal, 12, were also injured, while more than 10 others were treated for panic and stress.

Abbas Shmeisani, principal of Hassan Kamel Al-Sabbah Public High School in Nabatieh, mourned the death of the physics teacher.

Farran was an "active educator characterized by ethics, generosity, politeness, and dedication. Such is our fate with this criminal and terrorist enemy," he said.

Nisreen Choueib, principal of Choukine Public School, condemned the targeting of school students.

"Our students sleep to the shaking of the walls from the sounds of raids, wake up to the sound of gunfire, and go to their schools where education is resilience and victory," Choueib said.

Hezbollah targeted Israel's military sites with rockets in response to the strike, including the recently established headquarters of the 91st Division at the Ayelet base, and the headquarters of the Sahel Battalion of the 769th Brigade at the Beit Hillel base.

Sirens sounded in the Upper Galilee in the settlements of Ayelet Hashachar, Rehaniya, Avivim, Alma, and Yir'on.

تقرير

واشنطن

WASHINGTON REPORT

مع رنا أبتير

انتخابات أميركا: مناظرات رئاسية ومبارزات سياسية

يوم السبت | 8:00pm
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The prayer hall of Marina Tabassum's Bait Ur Rouf Mosque in Dhaka, which she designed, built, and fundraised. Photo by Aga Khan Trust for Culture

ARCHITECTURAL MARVELS

Bangladeshi architect's work builds resilience to climate change

Marina Tabassum is among Time's most influential people of 2024

Shehab Sumon Dhaka

With structures that "breathe" and are designed in tune with Bangladesh's history and environment, Marina Tabassum's work focuses on the local community and resilience in the country where every year millions of people lose their homes and livelihoods to climate change.

The award-winning architect came to the international spotlight after winning the 2016 Aga Khan Award for Architecture for the Bait Ur Rouf Mosque in Dhaka, which she designed, built and fundraised.

She is also the recipient of the 2021 Soane Medal for Architecture and was featured on the 2024 Time Magazine 100 Most Influential People list for developing a "practice and a way of being that prioritizes local cultures and values, as well as the perils faced by our shared planet."

One of the drivers of



Marina Tabassum, center, and her colleagues from the Foundation for Architecture and Community Equity stand next to the frame of a house for low-income Bangladeshi communities affected by climate change.

HIGHLIGHT

Her mosque in Dhaka received the 2016 Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

Tabassum's work is a sense of responsibility.

"There is enormous disparity in our human condition in Bangladesh and I feel like it's not just my responsibility, (but

it's for everybody to take that, their own share of the responsibility, and to do something about it," she told Arab News at her practice in Dhaka.

The Bait Ur Rouf Mosque was built on land donated by her grandmother and with a modest budget raised through community contributions.

The building's porous brick walls keep it ventilated and cool while natural light enters it

through a skylight.

For Tabassum, one of the most important features in her work is that it "has to be able to breathe without artificial aids," especially in her own subtropical country.

"That's an absolutely crucially important phenomenon that we should integrate in our architecture," she said.

Another crucial element is the local context, material, and craftsmen.

In 2020, Tabassum established the Foundation for Architecture Community Equity to provide homes and humane living environment to Bangladesh's low-income, landless, or climate-affected communities.

Under one of its initiative over 50 such bamboo-frame houses have already been built in the south where seawater regularly claims the land, and in the north, where swelling rivers cause catastrophic flooding during the monsoon season.

The cheap and light houses are made from materials that are widely available in the regions.

said in a statement.

"The decision to tighten the entry rules are in line with the Norwegian approach of standing by allies and partners in the reactions against Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine," Minister of Justice and Public Security, Emilie Enger Mehl, said in the statement.

Norway, a member of NATO but not of the EU, stopped issuing most tourist visas to Russians in spring 2022, after Moscow

invaded Ukraine.

But holders of long-term visas that had been issued before or those who had visas from other Schengen member countries could still enter via the Storskog-Boris Gleb border crossing, the only one between the neighbors.

From May 29, they will no longer be able to do so, the statement said.

Exceptions will be made for work and study, and those visiting close family residing in Norway.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Fireworks

One killed as explosion rocks Colombia factory

At least one person was killed and 33 were injured in a powerful explosion at a gunpowder and fireworks factory on the outskirts of the Colombian capital Bogota, government officials said.

It was unclear what set off the explosion at the factory, Bogota Mayor Carlos Galan said on Wednesday.

Emergency medical personnel and firefighters swarmed the scene, while images on social media showed a huge column of greyish smoke rising above the industrial town of Soacha late in the afternoon. **AFP**

Defense

Five killed in Russian strikes on Kharkiv

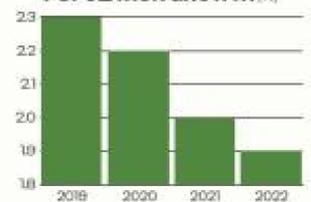
Russian strikes on the eastern Ukraine city of Kharkiv killed at least five people, regional authorities said Thursday, in the latest aerial bombardment on the war-battered hub.

President Volodymyr Zelensky described the attacks as "brutal" and said Russia was "taking advantage" of Ukraine's lack of air defense systems to launch fatal attacks on towns and cities at his country's frontier.

The surrounding region of Kharkiv has become the latest flashpoint of the war after Russian forces launched a surprise ground offensive in the border territory this month. **AFP**

The Day's FIGURES

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: POPULATION GROWTH (%)



Source: Statista

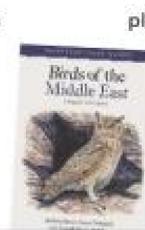
What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

'Birds of the Middle East'

RICHARD PORTER, OSCAR CAMPBELL, AND ABDULRAHMAN AL-SIRHAN

The Middle East is home to some of the most spectacular birdlife in the world. It features 180 superb color



plates depicting some 900 species and subspecies as well as 646 color distribution maps that show the breeding range for almost every species.

Turbulence

Singapore Airlines passengers in ICU

Twenty people who were aboard a Singapore Airlines flight that hit severe turbulence and diverted to Bangkok for an emergency landing on Tuesday remain in intensive care, a hospital official said on Thursday.

"The number of patients in ICU remain the same," Adinun Kittiratanapaibool, Director of Bangkok's Samitivej Srinakarin Hospital told reporters, referring to the medical facility's intensive care unit.

Of the 40 people on the flight still under treatment, 22 patients have spinal cord injuries and six have brain and skull injuries, he said.

Reuters

Conflict

UN investigates war crimes in Myanmar

UN war crimes investigators said Thursday they were tracking the escalating fighting in conflict-torn Myanmar's Rakhine State, and were probing reports that thousands from a persecuted minority had been displaced.

The United Nations' Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar said in a statement that it was closely following events unfolding on the ground in Rakhine and "assessing if crimes against humanity and war crimes have been committed."

Clashes have rocked Rakhine since the Arakan Army attacked junta forces in November, ending a ceasefire that had largely held since a military coup in 2021. **AFP**

NO ENTRY

Norway says will close border to Russia tourists

AFP Oslo

Norway said Thursday that it will close its border to Russian tourists, shutting their last direct access to Europe's border-free Schengen area, as Moscow vowed to respond to the "discriminatory" measure.

As of May 29, most Russian tourists will not be able to enter Norway, which shares a 198-kilometer border with Russia in its far north, the government

الظلم مؤذنٌ بخراب العُمران
(ابن خلدون)

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

Injustice heralds the
ruin of societies.

Ibn Khaldun

(14th-century Arab social scientist, philosopher and historian)

Opinion

Saudi-Japan ties: From transactional to strategic

FAISAL J. ABBAS | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Geographically, Saudi Arabia and Japan could not be much farther apart, but the past few days have shown just how close the two countries have become politically, economically and strategically.

It is true that the eleventh hour cancellation of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's presence in a delegation to Japan this week — due to the health condition of King Salman, who was admitted to hospital for checks just hours before the trip was due to begin — subdued what was meant to be a grandiose presence on the Saudi side. However, the indication from Riyadh was very clear: the show must go on.

There was still a delegation of heavy-weight ministers on the flight to Tokyo, including Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman (the crown prince's brother and the world's most influential energy minister); Prince Badr bin Farhan, the minister of culture; Minister of Communications and Information Technology Abdullah Al-Swaha; and last but certainly not least, Khalid Al-Falih, the veteran minister of investment, former head

of Saudi Aramco and the very capable man entrusted with coordinating the Kingdom's strategic relationship with Japan.

Furthermore, a video call was conducted between the crown prince and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to ensure this message was well received in Tokyo: Japan is an important country, we understand your needs and we see eye to eye on many points.

Perhaps the strongest message from the crown prince was restressing the Saudi commitment to providing a stable supply of crude oil to Japan, which is known for being a net importer of energy, with about 45 percent of its oil coming from the Kingdom.

However, the last few days also signaled many other important indicators, including that Saudi Arabia intends to diversify its energy offerings to Japan to include cleaner options. Both countries agree that this should be done in a practical and scientific way.

But energy is only one of the many aspects in Saudi Arabia and Japan's multifaceted journey to transform their relationship from a transactional one into a strategic one, as it surely should be. With the two countries preparing to celebrate the 70th



X: @FaisalJAbbas

anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations in 2025, the crown prince and prime minister agreed to establish a Strategic Partnership Council.

During the call, Kishida "expressed his hopes for direct investment from Saudi Arabia into Japan in a wide range of fields, as well as cooperation in the fields of construction, power transmission, utilization of hydrogen, digital, ICT, space, health, medicine, food, agriculture and other sectors, which will lead to creating business opportunities."

Not many countries share what Saudi Arabia and Japan have. In essence, while the Kingdom's public and declared policy is regional stability, it is absolutely in Japan's interest that this is the case, as its lifeline of energy supply depends on it. So, the two countries can closely collaborate on bringing peace and prosperity to the region.

Like us here in the Middle East, Japan also has regional problems, and Saudi Arabia, with its diplomatic and economic clout, can play a role in bringing points of view closer together. We both want to see a reduction in the number of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction,

which is also in the global interest.

Both countries are close to the US and seek to ensure the best of relations with Washington in a mutually beneficial way. Meanwhile, Japanese investors have huge potential in Saudi Arabia, and vice versa.

The challenge is to safeguard this vision against political turmoil and changing governments in Japan, but this is exactly why creating multi-stakeholder value is important. In essence, business is secular and arguably apolitical, so a big chunk of responsibility lies with business leaders on both sides ensuring there is enough interdependence so that the shared vision, which is for the benefit of both peoples, goes forward regardless.

The Japanese prime minister stated that he was pleased he will be handing over the torch of the World Expo from Osaka 2025 to Saudi Arabia ahead of Expo 2030 in Riyadh, and that he seeks to further encourage the growth of exchanges, including in the fields of entertainment, tourism, academia and sports.

Meanwhile, the torch of friendship that was lit by Saudi Arabia and Japan almost 70 years ago will burn ever more brightly in the years to come.

Energy is only one of the many aspects in Saudi Arabia and Japan's multifaceted journey to transform their relationship



This lack of accountability has only emboldened bad behavior, as can be clearly seen in the ongoing war against Gaza

ICC action brings an end to Israel's exceptionalism

DR. ABDEL AZIZ ALUWAISHEG

International Criminal Court prosecutor Karim Khan on Monday announced that he would file applications for arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant, as well as against three Hamas leaders, for gross violations of international humanitarian law.

There was universal support for the long-awaited announcement, with the exception of the unhinged reaction of a handful of American lawmakers, who threatened to impose sanctions on the court and its staff. A handful of countries, such as Hungary, also objected to the announcement.

For decades, Israel's claim of exceptionalism has been used to exempt it from rules of war and laws governing the use of arms exports. But this false claim of

exceptionalism has had a destabilizing effect, leading Israeli leaders to act outside the law and commit increasingly cruel atrocities against the Palestinians without facing consequences. This lack of accountability has only emboldened bad behavior, as can be clearly seen in the ongoing war against Gaza.

When the International Court of Justice in January ruled that it was "plausible" that Israel had engaged in acts of genocide in Gaza, it implicitly rejected Israel's claims of exceptionalism. The ICC prosecutor has now effectively put the final nail in that coffin, asserting that Israel should be judged by the same yardstick as all states.

The protestations by Israeli leaders, including accusing the ICC of antisemitism, are meant to thwart the expected additional steps required for the court



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

to issue the arrest warrants, work to execute them and then start the prosecutions.

The warrants will have both legal and political repercussions. While it is unlikely that Netanyahu or Gallant would voluntarily surrender to the court, the warrants, once issued, would make it difficult for them to travel to any of the 120-plus countries that are signatories to the Rome Statute, the ICC's charter. They could also weaken them domestically, as their rivals could argue that the fact they are being pursued by international law enforcement would make them less effective advocates for Israel.

Similarly, for the three Hamas leaders, their lawyers may be able to persuade them to surrender to the ICC once the warrants are issued and face their day in court. That action would demonstrate

courage and put the Israeli leaders in a bad light if they continued their defiance of the court orders. Defendants, whether Hamas or Israeli leaders, would have ample opportunity to defend themselves in The Hague and they would be absolved if the evidence was not strong enough.

In addition to the cases announced this week, there has been a wider ICC investigation into possible violations in the Occupied Territories. If that wider investigation results in the issuing of new arrest warrants, it would further reinforce accountability and bury forever any claims of Israeli exceptionalism.

Applying the rules of international law on all nations in our region can have a stabilizing effect by reining in impulses to act outside of the law, as Israel has clearly done in its 75-year war against the Palestinians.

Opinion

Syrians' right to return should be an international priority

KHALED ABOU ZAHR



There is nothing in the international news today that would let people know that, after well over a decade of conflict, Syria continues to be the world's largest refugee crisis. In complete silence, the Syrian people are suffering between a rock and a hard place — either living in a precarious situation as refugees or risking their lives going back to their home country.

We all forget that, since 2011, according to the UN Refugee Agency, more than 14 million Syrians have been displaced. More than 7.2 million people are internally displaced, with 70 percent of the population needing humanitarian aid and 90 percent living in poverty. Approximately 5.5 million Syrian refugees reside in neighboring countries — Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Germany hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees outside the region, with more than 850,000.

Türkiye hosts the largest number, with 3.3 million Syrian refugees. About 92 percent of these refugees live in rural and urban areas, with only about 5 percent in refugee camps. However, living outside camps does not equate to stability, as more than 70 percent of Syrian refugees in Türkiye live in poverty, facing limited access to basic services, education and job opportunities and having little prospect of returning home.

Syrians face significant challenges, which are worsened by the war in Ukraine, global

inflation and last year's earthquakes in southeastern Türkiye and northern Syria. Within Syria, the cost of the food basket doubled between January and October 2023 and had quadrupled in two years, leaving 12.9 million people food insecure.

For Syrian refugees in neighboring countries, conditions have deteriorated. Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees per capita and per square kilometer in the world, with the government estimating 1.5 million Syrian refugees and about 11,000 of other nationalities. About 90 percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon depend on humanitarian aid.

In Jordan, more than 93 percent of Syrian households are in debt just to meet basic needs, while in Türkiye 90 percent struggle to cover monthly expenses. The loss of livelihoods among refugees has made it increasingly difficult to access essential resources like clean water, electricity, food and medicine. This

economic hardship has increased their vulnerability to risks such as child labor and other forms of exploitation.

As mentioned, Lebanon is carrying more than its weight and no amount of international aid will solve the problem. The issue of Syrian refugees, who make up 30 percent of the country's population, is only keeping the wound open and increasing instability. After suffering at the hands of the Syrian and Iranian regimes, Syrians are now condemned to a life of misery.

There is total international silence about

the fact that the Syrian regime dropped nearly 82,000 barrel bombs in the first nine years of war, killing more than 11,000 civilians, including 1,821 children. Why has UN Security Council Resolution 2139 not been implemented? This would have held the perpetrators of indiscriminate bombardment, destruction and forced displacement accountable. Why are only a few officials being tried for their crimes in international courts?

Worse, Syrians have suffered the atrocities of torture and killings while the international community has stood silent or even honored their torturers for dealmaking purposes. Needless to say, this violence was targeted toward a single and specific community. This has transformed the demographic constitution of the country. Yet, international pundits are silent or even justify the horrors that this community has experienced. Why such a difference in treatment?

This is why, today, the real goal should not be to institutionalize Syrians' refugee status but to create a real possibility for them to return to their country without the risk of violence and further suffering. The international community should be working on this objective and not just managing despair, humiliation and suffering with the distribution of aid, while leaving unstable countries like Lebanon to do the heavy lifting. Moreover, allowing the refugees back home in safety and security is what will bring a real end to the never-ending resurgence of Daesh — a resurgence

for which the Syrian people pay the price, while Daesh and the regime have learned to live through these crises and even thrive.

The people of Syria have a right to their land. They have been stripped of this right by their own rulers and the world is silent. The world is silent because its interests align with those of Damascus and Tehran. And instead of using this to leverage a solution for the Syrian people, the international community diverts the problem. It is urgent to put forward the right of return for the Syrian people. We are now in the 14th year of displacement; this should not

be acceptable, as most areas are now conflict-free. Children born in 2012 are now turning 12 years old and they have only known refugee camps. They know nothing of their country except the stories their parents tell them.

The demand should be for them to go back without facing the risk of retaliation or violence from the

regime under any circumstances. As Bashar Assad attempts to make his comeback on the international scene with all sorts of media gimmicks, this comeback should only be accepted only after the Syrian people are allowed back to their hometowns. Like all the people in the Levant, they are resilient and will find ways to rebuild and thrive. Yet, this can only happen if the threat of violence from any party disappears.

Can this happen through a great reconciliation? This is something only the Syrians who have suffered can answer.

After suffering at the hands of the Syrian and Iranian regimes, Syrians are now condemned to a life of misery

The people of Syria have a right to their land. They have been stripped of this right by their own rulers and the world is silent

Khaled Abu Zahr is the founder of SpaceQuest Ventures, a space-focused investment platform. He is CEO of EurabiaMedia and editor of Al-Watan Al-Arabi.

Immigration crisis: What crisis?

PETER HARRISON



It is impossible to avoid the fact that, in recent years, the number of migrants on the move has been on the increase.

A combination of war, civil unrest and abject poverty have pushed many thousands to take enormous risks in the hope of finding a better life in another country.

The problem is that, rather than being welcomed with open arms, most of these people are instead faced with hostility from their hosts.

According to Amnesty International, there are more than 110 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, along with more than 35 million refugees — that is from a world population of just over 8.1 billion. And yet, Amnesty International says "many people feel overwhelmed by the numbers and see people moving across borders as a global crisis."

But the suggestion that such small numbers are the problem is nonsense, says Amnesty,

and instead the "unrealistic ways" that politicians handle the issue is the problem.

Indeed, the UK has long politicized the issue of migration — its tabloid press regularly writes of "illegal immigrants," an oxymoron of the very worst kind.

Britain and its European neighbors are not overwhelmed by foreign nationals, there are no statistics to back up the claim that they are.

For most of us, life is about working for a living. We keep a roof over the heads of our family members and put food on their plates so they can eat every day — the basic needs of most people around the world.

We all have ambitions to a varying degree, whether that is to start a business or to simply make sure that we provide a home for our loved ones or live out a life's dream — these are all valid reasons to be driven and it is what makes us who we are.

This is best summed up in psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, in which he placed our very identity at the

top, followed by our sense of achievement, then relationships and our ability to feel safe. Finally, he says, we need food, water, warmth and rest — our physiological needs.

Take these basics away and we start to suffer the consequences — a vulnerability to the very core. Yet that is precisely what people who have fled their homes feel every single day.

In recent years, there

has been an ever-increasing amount of people prepared to risk everything by fleeing their home countries. When they arrive in a new country, they are subjected to interrogations to establish their motive. Some are sent back to their home countries, where many face an uncertain future, including the risk of torture and execution.

These people lose their very basic rights to freedom, safety and security. Their dignity is stripped, their identity as individual human beings replaced with case numbers — there is no compassion.

And yet, when war appeared on the

doorstep of Europe as Russia invaded Ukraine, Western Europe opened its doors. British households were offered financial incentives to house those fleeing the front line.

The problem is that few countries are prepared to take the humane route. With elections coming up, no political party wants to be seen to be increasing the intake

of refugees, so instead they hope to pass the burden on to any country that will take them.

So, while the sons and daughters of the migrants who run these Western countries enjoy the safety of the likes of the UK — Prime Minister Rishi Sunak springs to mind — the refugees they treat as pawns in their electoral manifestos will continue to suffer and these people's skills as doctors, teachers, farmers and builders will slowly go to waste, despite the serious skills shortages across the Western world.

And it seems that humanity will continue to fall by the wayside while politicians try to claw back votes.

Britain and its European neighbors are not overwhelmed by foreign nationals, there are no statistics to back up that claim

Their dignity is stripped, their identity as individual human beings replaced with case numbers — there is no compassion

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

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Business



China will deepen reforms to tackle institutional obstacles to economic modernization.

Xi Jinping
Chinese president

CAPITAL

KSA's proptech investments surge 35% to \$9m in 2023

Saudi Arabia outpaces other markets with six deals, says report

Nour El-Shaeri Cairo

Property technology venture capital investments in Saudi Arabia saw an annual increase of 35 percent in 2023 to reach \$9 million, according to MAGNITT's latest report.

The venture data platform emphasized that the Kingdom outpaced Africa, the Middle East, Pakistan, Türkiye, and Southeast Asia regions with six proptech deals last year.

In funding amount, Saudi Arabia ranked fifth across all markets, with Indonesia leading with \$54 million, followed by the UAE with \$35 million, and South Africa and Singapore with \$13 million and \$11 million, respectively.

In terms of deal count, the UAE followed the Kingdom with five deals, while Indonesia, South Africa, and Türkiye each had three.

Total funding across all markets in 2023 amounted to \$157 million, marking an 81 percent decrease compared to the previous year.

Deal count also experienced a significant annual decline, reaching 34 transactions, reflecting a 40 percent fall compared to 2022.

MAGNITT's Emerging Venture Markets Real Estate report focused on analyzing the property marketplace, co-working, tenancy management, and facility management subsectors.

The property marketplace was the leading sub-industry, attracting \$120 million in



Property management was the most funded subsector on the continent, receiving \$18 million in 2023, reflecting a 6 percent annual growth. File

funding, though this represented an 83 percent decline compared to the previous year.

Africa was the best-performing region, with a 10 percent annual increase in funding, reaching \$22 million. Property management was the most funded subsector

on the continent, receiving \$18 million in 2023, reflecting a 6 percent annual growth.

In terms of deal count, Africa experienced a 53 percent drop, totaling seven transactions for the year.

In the MEPT region, \$59

million in funding was deployed in 2023, marking a 78 percent year-on-year decrease.

This was spread across 19 deals, with the property marketplace being the most funded subsector at \$38 million and the most transacted with 11 investments.

CRUDE

Oil creeps back up after three days of losses

Arab News Riyadh

Oil prices crept up on Thursday, clawing back some of the previous three days' losses.

The gains were made despite the US Federal Reserve entertaining a further tightening of interest rates if inflation remains sticky, a move that could hurt oil demand.

Brent crude futures were up 92 cents, or 1.1 percent, at \$82.82 a barrel by 1317 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude futures were 97 cents, or 1.3 percent, higher at \$78.54. Both benchmarks fell more than 1 percent on Wednesday for their third straight day of losses.

Saudi crude exports

Saudi Arabia's crude exports reached 6.41 million barrels per day in March, according to an analysis from the Joint Organizations Data Initiative.

This figure increased by 96,000 bpd, or 1.52 percent, compared to the previous month, marking a nine-month high. Furthermore, the data indicated that the Kingdom's crude production fell to 8.97 million bpd, reflecting a monthly decrease of 0.42 percent.

This 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 bpd cut, initially implemented in July 2023, until the end of the second quarter of 2024.

The Ministry of Energy said that the Kingdom's production will be approximately 9 million bpd until the end of June.

SEOUL SUMMIT

SDAIA chief calls for effective laws to mitigate AI risks

Arab News Riyadh

The chief of Saudi Arabia's artificial intelligence authority took part in a top-level summit on AI held in South Korea from May 21-22.

Co-hosted by South Korea and the UK, the summit focused on international cooperation in data and AI, as well as preparations for the third edition of the Global AI Summit, hosted in Riyadh by the Saudi Data and AI Authority in September.

The authority's president, Abdullah bin Sharaf Al-Ghamdi, in a roundtable discussion at the Seoul summit, said that AI technologies will "experience

significant developments" that will result in more efficient and scalable models capable of handling a wider range of tasks.

He highlighted the significance of open-source AI, which fuels innovation and reshapes the technological landscape. A goal of the summit was to explore the transformative potential of open-source AI and open-access databases, he added.

"Open-source AI has the capability to add flexible character to technology, making advanced tools and algorithms accessible to a broad spectrum of creators, such as large companies and individual developers," Al-Ghamdi said.



SDAIA President Abdullah bin Sharaf Al-Ghamdi visits a technology firm in Seoul. SPA

This inclusivity accelerates technological advancement through collaboration and ensures a level of transparency in the digital age, Al-Ghamdi

added, calling for robust governance frameworks, international cooperation and continuous public awareness efforts to mitigate risks.

Governments require strategies that balance the need for open-source databases to fuel AI innovations while protecting individual privacy and ensuring data security, a balance that can be achieved through strict data protection laws and technical solutions, the SDAIA chief said.

As data flows transcend national borders, coordinating international standards for data access and privacy becomes critical, he added.

"This requires the presence of globally standardized data protection laws, where local regulations must adapt to address specific cultural

and economic contexts. This coordination facilitates smoother data exchange, enhances security and privacy, and helps address global challenges collectively."

By adopting open-source AI and open databases, "we can bring technology to a larger number of people, promote transparency, and foster a more inclusive technological landscape," Al-Ghamdi said.

"However, this future also requires effective governance, strong regulatory frameworks, and proactive international collaboration to overcome risks and harness the full potential of AI responsibly."

GASTAT

Saudi Arabia's non-oil exports increase 3.3% in first quarter

Value of merchandise exports in March increased by 4.9 percent compared to February

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's non-oil exports saw an annual rise of 3.3 percent in the first quarter of 2024, fueled by an increase in the value of re-exports, according to official data.

According to the General Authority for Statistics, while non-oil exports experienced a slight dip of 5.2 percent, the value of re-exported goods surged by 31.5 percent during the same period.

This trend underscores Saudi Arabia's burgeoning role as a logistical hub — a key goal of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 economic diversification strategy.

Leveraging its strategic geographic location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, the Kingdom has invested heavily in its transport and logistics infrastructure.

Major projects such as the expansion of pivotal ports and the establishment of logistics zones like the King Salman Energy Park are designed to streamline the movement of goods and enhance supply chain efficiency.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia has hosted numerous international forums and conferences, such as the Supply Chain and Logistics Conference, to attract global investors and foster dialogue on advancements in the sector.

On another note, a 4.9 percent uptick in merchandise exports in March of this year underlined the resilience of the Kingdom's export sector amidst global economic fluctuations.

China emerged as a pivotal destination for Saudi exports, absorbing 14.9 percent of the total in the first quarter of 2024, and 16.4 percent of the total shipment during March alone.

The nation also ranked first for the Kingdom's imports in March, constituting 21.2 percent of the total imports, followed by the US with 8.7 percent and the UAE with 6.9 percent.

Despite a decline, chemical products remained a significant portion of non-oil exports, constituting 25.1 percent of this sector in the first three months of 2024, and 28.1 percent of total shipments in March alone.

This underscores the Kingdom's focus on leveraging its petrochemical industry, a key pillar of Vision 2030.

In a separate bulletin, GASTAT highlighted that non-oil exports and re-exports in March rose by 2.9 percent compared to February, and slipped by 0.8 percent compared to March 2023.

While national non-oil exports, excluding re-exports, saw an annual decrease of 6.3 percent in March, the value of re-exported goods increased by 17.6 percent



SAUDI ARABIA INTERNATIONAL TRADE (Q1, 2024)

Key exported goods	Value	Key imported goods	Value
Mineral products	SR222.9bn	Machinery & mechanical appliances, electrical equip.	SR45.6bn
Products of the chemical & allied industries	SR17.5bn	Vehicles, aircraft, vessels & associated transport equip.	SR26.2bn
Plastic & rubber	SR15.9bn	Products of the chemical & allied industries	SR18.6bn
Machinery & mechanical appliances, electrical equip.	SR9.8bn	Base metals & articles of base metals	SR18.2bn
Vehicles, aircraft, vessels & associated transport equip.	SR8.3bn	Mineral products	SR14.2bn

Source: General Authority for Statistics

SAUDI ARABIA INTERNATIONAL TRADE (Q1, 2024)

Total exports	SR291.7bn	Total imports	SR201.1bn	Trade volume	SR492.8bn	Trade balance	SR90.6bn
Non-oil exports by mean of transport		Sea	62.4%	Land	19.8%	Air	17.8%
Imports by mean of transport		Sea	58.5%	Land	13%	Air	28.5%

Source: General Authority for Statistics

SAUDI ARABIA INTERNATIONAL TRADE (Q1, 2024)

Key export partners	Value	Key import partners	Value
China	SR43.2bn	China	SR41.9bn
South Korea	SR28.5bn	US	SR16.2bn
India	SR27.6bn	UAE	SR13.6bn
Japan	SR27.4bn	India	SR13.1bn
UAE	SR20.6bn	Egypt	SR6.2bn

Source: General Authority for Statistics

during the same period.

During the first quarter of 2024, the proportion of oil exports out of the total value declined from 78.2 percent to 76.1 percent. Imports, on the other hand, increased by 6.4 percent.

In the first quarter, compared to the same period in 2023, both merchandise exports and non-oil exports, including re-exports, decreased by 1.4 percent and 0.2 percent respectively.

Meanwhile, imports saw a 0.3 percent decline, resulting in a 3.8 percent decrease in the merchandise trade balance surplus.

In March, merchandise exports declined by 5.9 percent, largely driven by a 7.3 percent decrease in oil exports, leading to a drop in the proportion of oil exports from 78.1 percent to 76.9 percent compared to March 2023.

Conversely, imports increased by 1 percent, while the surplus of the merchandise trade balance decreased by 17.2 percent compared to March 2023.

This period also witnessed a slight decrease in the ratio of non-oil exports, including re-exports, to imports, which fell to 34.7 percent from 35.8 percent in the previous year, attributed to a significant increase in imports by 6.4 percent, compared to a 3.3 percent rise in non-oil exports.

In the first three months of

Non-oil exports and re-exports in March rose by 2.9 percent compared to February, and slipped by 0.8 percent compared to March 2023. File

FASTFACTS

• This trend underscores Saudi Arabia's burgeoning role as a logistical hub — a key goal of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 economic diversification strategy.

• Leveraging its strategic geographic location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, the Kingdom has invested heavily in its transport and logistics infrastructure.

• Expansion of pivotal ports and the establishment of logistics zones like the King Salman Energy Park are designed to streamline the movement of goods and enhance supply chain efficiency.

this year, China was the leading source of the Kingdom's imports at 20.9 percent, followed by the US at 8.1 percent and the UAE at 6.8 percent. Imports from these and other top sources accounted for 63.4 percent of the total.

King Abdulaziz Sea Port

in Dammam was the major entry point for goods into the Kingdom, accounting for 27.4 percent of total imports.

Other key ports included Jeddah Islamic Port with 18.8 percent, King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh with 14.2 percent, King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah with 8.1 percent, and King Fahad International Airport in Dammam with 6.1 percent.

Together, these five ports handled 74.6 percent of the Kingdom's total merchandise imports.

According to GASTAT, primary imported goods include machinery, electrical equipment, and parts, constituting 24.1 percent of total imports, rising by 21.4 percent from March 2023.

King Abdulaziz Sea Port in Dammam played a vital role as one of the primary ports for goods entering the Kingdom, comprising 28.9 percent of total imports.

Other significant entry points included Jeddah Islamic Port, King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, King Abdulaziz International Airport, and King Fahad International Airport in Dammam.

Together, these five ports accounted for 76.3 percent of the Kingdom's total merchandise imports in March.

Business News



Various fiscal and monetary reforms carried out by the Lebanese authorities have helped reduce inflationary pressure. Shutterstock

FINANCIAL CRISIS

Lebanon's reforms not enough for recovery: IMF

Current geopolitical situation exacerbating economic situation

Reuters Washington

Lebanon's economic reforms are insufficient to help lift the country out of its economic crisis, the International Monetary Fund said on Thursday.

Ernesto Ramirez Rigo, the head of the IMF mission visiting Lebanon, said in a statement that Lebanon's ongoing refugee crisis, fighting with Israel at its southern border and the spillover from the war in Gaza are exacerbating an already dire economic situation.

Israeli forces and Lebanon's Hezbollah have traded fire across Lebanon's southern border since the war in Gaza broke out in October last year.

The Israel-Gaza conflict "has internally displaced a significant number of people and caused damage to infrastructure, agriculture, and trade in

southern Lebanon. Together with a decline in tourism, the high risks associated with the conflict create significant uncertainty to the economic outlook," Rigo said.

Fiscal and monetary reforms carried out by Lebanon's Finance Ministry and the central bank, including steps to unify multiple exchange rates for the Lebanese pound and contain a currency slump, have helped reduce inflationary pressure, according to Rigo.

However, he said more needs to be done if Lebanon is to alleviate its financial crisis.

"These policy measures fall short of what is needed to enable a recovery from the crisis. Bank deposits remain frozen, and the banking sector is unable to provide credit to the economy, as the government and parliament have been unable to find a solution

More needs to be done if Lebanon is to alleviate its financial crisis.

Ernesto Ramirez Rigo
Head of IMF mission to Lebanon



to the banking crisis," he added. "Addressing the banks' losses while protecting depositors to the maximum extent possible and limiting recourse to scarce public resources in a credible and financially viable manner is indispensable to lay the foundation for economic recovery."

Since Lebanon's economy began to unravel in 2019, its currency has lost around 95 percent of its value, banks have locked most depositors out of their savings and more than 80 percent of the population has sunk below the poverty line.

The crisis erupted after decades of profligate spending and corruption among the ruling elite, some of whom led banks that lent heavily to the state.

The government estimates losses in the financial system total more than \$70 billion, the majority of which were accrued at the central bank.

COLLABORATION

Riyadh, Amman to enhance cooperation in mining, pharma sectors

Arab News Riyadh

Mining and pharmaceutical cooperation between Riyadh and Amman is poised to advance after a top official's visit to Jordan.

Saudi Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources Bandar Alkhorayef met with the chairman of the Arab Mining Co., Mohammed Ahmed Al-Shehhi, during his trip, which

commenced on May 21.

A statement issued by the Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources highlighted that Saudi Arabia's exports to Jordan in 2023 reached SR7.6 billion (\$2 billion), while its imports from Jordan amounted to SR7.5 billion.

It noted that the Kingdom's exports to Jordan included food products, petrochemicals and polymers as well as construction materials.

Meanwhile, its imports from Jordan included commodities and medical drugs.

Saudi Arabia has previously introduced several investment opportunities in vaccines and biologics totaling \$3.4 billion.

Alkhorayef and Al-Shehhi also discussed ways to enhance

FASTFACTS

• Saudi Arabia's exports to Jordan in 2023 reached SR7.6 billion (\$2 billion).

• The Kingdom's imports from Jordan amounted to SR7.5 billion.

cooperation in the mining sector in the presence of Khalid bin Saleh Al-Mudaifer, the vice minister of mining affairs. They also explored opportunities to leverage the mining resources available in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, according to the Saudi Press Agency.

In a post on his X account, the minister said that he discussed with several officials in Jordanian

mining companies the prospects for joint cooperation to develop the mining sector in the region and to benefit from the large mineral resources in both countries, especially in a number of strategic and rare minerals.

Alkhorayef also met with the chairman of the Jordanian Association of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers, Tareq Darwazeh.

The two explored avenues to enhance cooperation in pharmaceutical manufacturing and marketing, aiming to leverage the advanced expertise and capabilities of both countries.

Moreover, Alkhorayef visited several Jordanian pharmaceutical factories and companies, where he held meetings with their senior officials.

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Growth

Key eurozone wage indicator picks up

Negotiated pay growth in the eurozone picked up slightly in the first quarter of 2024, European Central Bank figures showed on Thursday, bolstering the case for caution in cutting interest rates from record highs.

Negotiated wages in the EU rose by 4.69 percent in the first quarter after a 4.45 percent rise in the previous quarter, as unions continued to demand compensation for real incomes lost to years of rapid inflation.

The ECB has long pinned rate cut hopes on this wage figure but has committed to policy easing on June 6. **Reuters**

Outlook

German economy likely to stagnate in 2024

Germany's long-awaited economic recovery is not materializing and the eurozone's largest economy will only stagnate this year, the German chambers of commerce and industry said on Thursday.

Nevertheless, the forecast was more optimistic than at the start of the year, when the DIHK expected a 0.5 percent contraction. The DIHK expects private consumption to support the economy this year, growing by 1 percent, as inflation eases to 2.3 percent from 5.9 percent in 2023.

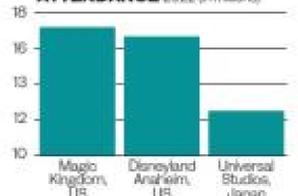
The DIHK sentiment index currently shows a below-average value of 97.2. **Reuters**

Chart of THE DAY

In 2022, the US' Magic Kingdom was visited by over 17 million people, making it the most visited amusement park worldwide.

Source: Statista

TOP THEME PARKS BY ATTENDANCE 2022 (in millions)



What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

Reframing Rich

STEVE COUGHRAN

"Reframing Rich" is a compelling and insightful book that will empower you to change the way you think about money, yourself, and others so you can reach your full potential, says a review published



on goodreads.com. With a refreshingly positive and compassionate tone, it will enable you to discover more fulfilling mindsets when it comes to wealth and success that align with your personal goals and relationships.

Bullion

Gold falls to one-week low on Fed minutes

Gold prices declined to a one-week low on Thursday, extending their fall a third consecutive session on profit taking after minutes from Federal Reserve's latest meeting indicated that interest rates would stay higher for longer.

Spot gold fell 0.7 percent to \$2,361.76 per ounce as of 0939 GMT, after hitting its lowest since May 15 at \$2,354.79 earlier in the session.

Bullion hit a record high of \$2,449.89 on Monday but has fallen 3.6 percent since then. It still holds above its 21-day moving average of \$2,348.6. **Reuters**

Survey

Growth across UK business dips in May

Growth across British businesses has cooled noticeably this month and by more than any economist polled by Reuters had predicted, a survey showed on Thursday.

The S&P Global UK Composite Purchasing Managers' Index for the services and manufacturing sectors fell to 52.8 in May from 54.1 in April, undercutting the median poll forecast for a much more modest dip to 54. Readings above 50 denote an expansion in activity.

The dominant services sector reported the weakest growth in six months, more than outweighing a recovery in factories. **Reuters**

Jon Pike's



Cricket Weekly

ANALYSIS

Cricket's rising demands are impacting physical and mental health

Against a background of outstanding achievements are cries for help by professional cricketers who want to reduce their workload

Jon Pike London

Fred Trueman of Yorkshire and England was long regarded as his nation's greatest fast bowler. In his prime, he bowled a thousand overs for Yorkshire during a summer.

This was an era when the only cricket matches on view, apart from Tests, were three-day county championships between 17 counties. In 1964, Trueman was the first bowler to claim 300 wickets in Test matches. When asked if he thought his achievement would be beaten, his response — typical of the man — was: "Aye, but whoever does it will be very tired."

Since then, 36 bowlers have beaten Trueman's record. Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralitharan claimed 800, followed by Australia's Shane Warne with 708, and then there is England's James Anderson, who has 700 and is due to play his last Test this year.

40,000 deliveries
Anderson's longevity and fitness is truly remarkable. He has sent down almost 40,000 deliveries in Test matches alone, the fourth highest among those taking more than three hundred wickets. He is not admitting to any tiredness and is regarded by some as having claim to be England's finest quick bowler, rather than Trueman. Both their achievements, in different eras, are extraordinary. Trueman's feat was accompanied by a bowling average of 21.57, only bettered by Malcom Marshall (20.94) and Curtly Ambrose (20.99). Anderson's is 26.52.

It is against the background of these achievements that current cries for help by professional cricketers to reduce their workload should be gauged. Another of Yorkshire's finest players is Joe Root who, in 140 Tests for England so far, has scored 11,626 runs. This puts him 10th on the all-time list of top Test run scorers. His workload



Team captain Rohit Sharma, in the aftermath of India's defeat in the 2023 ODI World Cup Final, was mentally shattered. He eschewed social media and opted out of ODI and T20I assignments against South Africa. File/AFP

has been intense for years, even more so when he captained England in 64 Tests, yet he rarely complains. Last week, however, he called for a major rethink of English cricket's crowded schedule.

This was accompanied by the Professional Cricketers Association calling for change "before something disastrous happens."

Key concerns

Based on a survey of professional male cricketers, the PCA revealed that key concerns are physical health (81 percent), travel conditions (75 percent) and mental health (62 percent). Long-distance driving late at night, whether moving between matches or traveling home, is a particular worry. It is

argued that player welfare and performance are compromised by the lack of time to recover, prepare and practice.

Professional cricket in England and Wales has a particular issue in that there are four men's competitions shoe-horned into a window between mid-April and the end of September, with August given over entirely to The Hundred. Last year, proposals to reduce the amount of four-day county cricket and T20 cricket were rejected by the counties. Effectively, the 50 over competition has been downgraded because so few of the top players appear in it. According to Root, the objective should be to get "the standard of first-class and county cricket as close as you can to the

international game."

Professional cricketers in England and Wales have raised the issue of congested schedules and travelling pressure before. The explosion of T20 cricket in the last 20 years has increased this congestion and turned it into a more international concern. In India and Australia, for example, the distances between venues are much greater, with flying and its attendant risks additional factors.

Gap

In November 2023, during the announcement of India's ODI squad for a series against Australia, India's captain, Rohit Sharma, blamed excessive travel for injured players across the teams. It is in the interests of all cricket boards

to narrow the gap between the standard of the breeding ground of first-class cricket and international cricket. Each one has different ways of doing so, a reflection of relative resources, geography and historic structures.

In India, reform is proposed for 2024-25. It seems likely that the Ranji Trophy, the country's state-based long format game and the equivalent of the English county championship, will be split into two halves. White ball tournaments would be held in between. The main drivers behind this are to address variable winter weather conditions in the north and to allow longer gaps between matches to facilitate travel and recovery. This is similar reasoning to that aired by Joe Root and the PCA.

More forgiving schedules may release pressure on mental health, an often-overlooked facet of professional sport.

There have been a number of high-profile cases in recent years in cricket. Azem Rafiq's experience of racism at Yorkshire was one. Another was Jonathan Trott, who played 52 Tests for England between 2009 and 2015. He left England's tour of Australia in November 2013, unable to cope with the demands at that level. A man with very high levels of concentration lost them and referred to the impact of social media, saying: "People don't look you in the face and have a conversation and ask you how you are."

Tough environment

Rohit Sharma, in the aftermath of India's defeat in the 2023 ODI World Cup Final, was mentally shattered. He eschewed social media and opted out of ODI and T20I assignments against South Africa. Men's cricket is a tough environment that appears not to appreciate that mental health issues are real. The growth of women's cricket has brought about a change in approaches to mental health within the game.

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Premier League West Ham hire Lopetegui as manager

West Ham named former Real Madrid and Spain coach Julen Lopetegui as its new manager on Thursday to replace the departing David Moyes.

Lopetegui is returning to management for the first time since he left Wolverhampton three days before the 2023-24 season began after nine months in that job.

"I feel that we have a fantastic platform," Lopetegui said in a club statement. **AP**



WNBA Toronto awarded first franchise outside US

Toronto has been awarded the WNBA's first franchise outside the US, with the expansion team set to begin play in 2026.

The team will be owned by Larry Tanenbaum-led Kilmor Sports Ventures. Tanenbaum also is the chairman and a minority owner of Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, which owns several Toronto sports franchises, including the NBA's Raptors and NHL's Maple Leafs.

Toronto will be the WNBA's 14th franchise, with the expansion Golden State Valkyries set to start play next year. **AP**

Milestone Djokovic marks 37th birthday with 1,100th win

Novak Djokovic celebrated his 37th birthday on Wednesday with the 1,100th win of his career as he gears up for his French Open title defense, progressing to the Geneva quarterfinals.

The world No. 1 downed Germany's Yannick Hanfmann 6-3, 6-3 in the second round at the Parc des Eaux-Vives grounds.

Djokovic becomes only the third man after Jimmy Connors and Roger Federer to reach the 1,100-win landmark. **AFP**

COOPERATION

Saudi and Japanese football leagues to work together to develop the sport in both countries

Arab News Riyadh

The Saudi Pro League and Japan's Professional Football League have signed an agreement to cooperate on ways to develop the sport in both countries.

To achieve this they will work with teams in both leagues and collaborate on ways to achieve sustainable growth of the sport, enhance the standard of football, facilitate the exchange of experiences and resources between players and coaches, and establish an effective



The Saudi Pro League (SPL) and the Japan Professional Football League (J.League) have signed an agreement aiming to establish effective communication channels between the two bodies. SPL/File

system for communication about technical and administrative matters.

The agreement was signed on the sidelines of a Saudi-Japanese

business forum by the vice chair of the SPL's board of directors, Saad Allazeez, and Yoshokaze Ninomura of the J.League.

Allazeez said the agreement reflects the SPL's transformation strategy and added: "This partnership will open new horizons for exchanging experiences and promoting the continuous development in the field of football between the two countries."

"We look forward to working with our counterparts in Japan to raise the level of the game at all levels."

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Charlee Fraser stars in 'Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga,' now in GCC cinemas.



Weekend Lifestyle, Art & Culture

ARCHITECTURE

'Untouched' Red Sea shores inspire designers of luxury resort

The story behind the creation of The St. Regis Red Sea Resort

Saffiya Ansari Riyadh

Located on the private Ummahat Island, which can only be accessed by chartered boat or seaplane, The St. Regis Red Sea Resort is quickly making a name for itself as something of a celebrity magnet.

It's easy to see why Saudi Arabia's football elite vacationed here this spring — with 90 overwater and beachfront villas, a signature spa, high-tech gym, outdoor pools, water sports center, and a children's club, the resort would impress even a seasoned luxury traveler.

But besides the butler service and handful of culinary options, what really stands out about the resort is its design. This is no cookie-cutter hotel — Japanese architects Kengo Kuma & Associates and interior design firm Kristina Zanic Consultants made sure of that.

"One of the briefs was that we had to make sure that this whole project was offering a barefoot luxury experience that really works in harmony with the nature," Zanic told Arab News. "This was an untapped, untouched part of Saudi Arabia and a lot of those islands are pristine."

Considering the white sand beaches and azure water, it's no surprise that the Red Sea's famous coastline was designed to be the star of the show, but Zanic and her team decided to base their design pitch on something rather unexpected — the wind.

"The way the wind flows ... the breeze flows through the actual resort itself, you know, keeping it cool. The whole narrative we created was about wind that you experience



(From top) The sundeck of the Presidential Dune Villa at The St. Regis Red Sea Resort; the resort's Tilina restaurant; inside one of the resorts Dune Villas. Images supplied



there. A lot of our patterns and materials were inspired by the way the wind shapes the island," she said, referencing, in part, the high-to-low pile carpets in the Dune Villas that mirror maps of the area's wind vectors.

Respect for nature is also visible in the structures themselves, with Nicola Maniero, partner at Kengo Kuma & Associates, explaining that the project "does not seek a camouflage with nature, but aims to establish a relationship of continuity with it through a language that departs from merely imitating the basic reference."

To that end, the Dune Villas reflect the shape of sweeping desert sand formations while the Maldives-style overwater Coral Villas take the form of shells.

But the nature-inspired design ethos presented challenges.

"The water villas were initially supposed to rest on the surface of the sea as if emerging from it in a continuous spiral. However, the level of the villas had to be raised to 2.6 meters due to possible storms and rising water levels caused by climate change," Maniero said.

She added that the villas' circular floor plan "adds interest, but poses difficulties in terms of layout solutions."



We had to make sure this whole project was offering a barefoot luxury experience that works in harmony with the nature.

It's a sentiment mirrored by Zanic, who explained that the Dune Villas' striking curved formations posed unique hurdles due to differing ceiling heights from room to room.

Challenges aside, the design team did manage to have some fun with aesthetic quirks. The wooden floors of the villas, for example, consist not of planks, but of angular slabs of tessellated wood resembling a turtle's shell.

That attention to detail is visible in everything from bespoke door handles and durable wall finishings designed to withstand the salty sea air, to the handmade textile art that is different in each of the villas.

"Each piece looks sort of the same, but they (aren't). That feeds into the whole concept of a luxury experience. Each person gets their own little piece of art for the weekend," Zanic said. "Everything is bespoke; it gives the resort a unique identity."

The spa, too, has its own defining motif — a henna-like detailing on the walls — while the St. Regis Bar hosts a large mural depicting a local folk tale.

Tilina, the resort's overwater restaurant, features exposed radial beams on the ceiling that mirror sea waves, while the tiles on the walls reference fish scales.

Maniero highlighted Tilina's unique structure.

"It diverges from completely imitating the water villas because it doesn't have a central courtyard, it's a split circular floor plan that is slightly shifted," she said. "However, there is still a connection to the water villas derived from the materials and floor plan."

Screen Scene

WHAT'S ON IN CINEMAS



Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga

Starring: Anya Taylor-Joy, Chris Hemsworth, Tom Burke

Director: George Miller

Prequel to Miller's excellent 2015 film "Mad Max: Fury Road." This is the story of Imperator Furiosa, kidnapped as a child by a Biker Horde and determined to find her way home.



The Garfield Movie

Voice cast: Chris Pratt, Samuel L. Jackson, Hannah Waddingham

Director: Mark Dindal

Animated adventure comedy adapted from the popular comic strip about the titular tabby. Garfield is reunited with his long-lost father Vic, a street cat, and must help him out of trouble.



Prey

Starring: Ryan Phillippe, Mena Suvari, Emile Hirsch

Director: Mukunda Michael Dewil

Action thriller. When a small plane crashes in the Kalahari desert, its passengers must fight to stay alive in the wilderness. But the threats they face aren't just from the wildlife.



Sting

Starring: Ryan Corr, Ayla Browne, Penelope Mitchell

Director: Kiah Roache-Turner

Twelve-year-old Charlotte finds a tiny spider in a mysterious object. She keeps it as a pet and names it Sting. Sting grows at an alarming rate and is soon terrorizing Charlotte's neighbors.

REVIEW

'99' captures the drama of Manchester United's annus mirabilis

Adam Grundey Dubai

Amazon's docuseries "99" marks the 25th anniversary of one of the most remarkable achievements in sporting history: when Manchester United won England's two biggest domestic trophies — the Premier League and the FA Cup — and the most prestigious tournament in European club competition — the UEFA Champions League — for a (then) unprecedented treble.

The fact that the feat has since been repeated (most recently by United's arch rivals Manchester City), has taken some of the shine

off it, but this was still one of the greatest single seasons in the history of any sport.

The show is stacked with interviews with the players who made history, as well as their fearsome manager, Alex Ferguson, whose obsession with winning the Champions League has been well-documented elsewhere.

There isn't much new insight here, and footballers aren't renowned for their eloquence, but the filmmakers have done a good job of getting them to dig beyond the platitudes and explore the sometimes-thorny relationships between certain

The team that started Manchester United's UEFA Champions League final against Bayern Munich in 1999, as featured in the documentary series '99.' Amazon



players, the pressure of playing for (at least then) arguably the biggest club in the world, and the self-doubt that could creep in during the biggest games.

But even if its makers had got nothing from the interviewees, they'd have known that "99" couldn't fail to grip even the most casual of sports

fans, because the story of the actual football is so outlandish that even a Hollywood exec might question anyone pitching it. Throughout the season,

The story is so outlandish that even a Hollywood exec might question anyone pitching it.

United staged numerous late comebacks in situations where it seemed they'd blown their chance of making history — not least in the last game, the Champions League final against Bayern Munich, when they famously scored two goals in three minutes of injury time to turn certain defeat into the unlikely of victories: an act of what seemed like sheer willpower, inspired by the manager's self-belief. As Ferguson said at the end of that game, "Football. Bloody hell!" The makers of "99" have successfully captured that sentiment.

Weekend

NADINE LABAKI »

The Lebanese actress and director, a jury member this year, went for a goth look at the festival in this Celine number. Labaki paired the embroidered tuxedo mini dress with matching knee-high boots.



MARIA BAHRAWI »

Saudi actress Maria Bahrawi — star of the Kingdom's first Cannes entry, "Norah" — sported a chic jumpsuit from Etoile La Boutique. The puff sleeves and cape detail added a dramatic touch.



ASEEL OMRAN »

The Saudi singer and actress attended the Women in Cinema gala hosted by the Red Sea International Film Festival at Cannes in this stunning creation from Lebanese designer Elio Abou Fayssal. The delicate tulle gown featured golden floral embellishments.



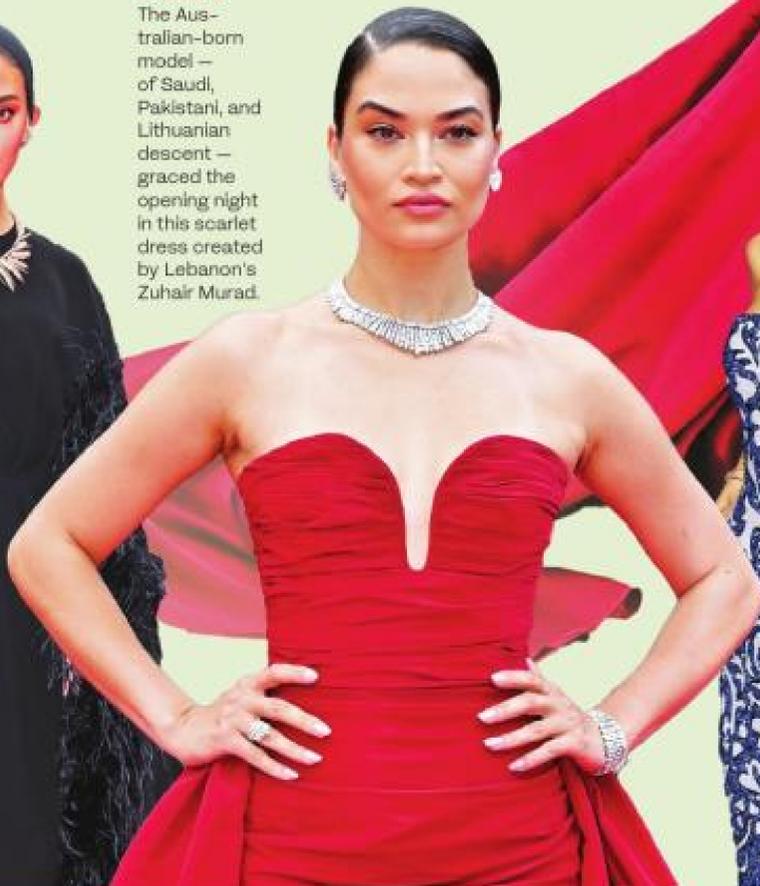
HOTLIST

Cannes fashion with an Arab flavor

Our pick of the looks from Arab celebrities and designers on the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival

SHANINA SHAIK »

The Australian-born model — of Saudi, Pakistani, and Lithuanian descent — graced the opening night in this scarlet dress created by Lebanon's Zuhair Murad.



«EVA LONGORIA

The US actress shone in a creation from Lebanese couturier Elie Saab. The sequin-embroidered gown with plunging V-neck detail came from the label's haute couture Spring/Summer 2024 collection.



SALMA ABU-DEIF »

The Egyptian actress and model attended the "Horizon: An American Saga" red carpet in a shimmering white custom couture gown from the Lebanese luxury fashion house Georges Hobeika.



«HEIDI KLUM

The German supermodel turned heads at the opening ceremony in a fiery couture number by Lebanese designer Saïd Kobelaj. She accessorized the off-shoulder, draped gown with beachy waves and golden heels.



YARA ALNAMLAH »

The popular Saudi influencer and entrepreneur hit the red carpet for the festival's opening movie, French comedy "The Second Act," in an all-black look by Lebanese designer Rami Kadi, with jewelry from Chaumet.



«DIALA MAKKI

The Lebanese-Iranian TV host wore this Georges Hobeika gown to the Trophée Chopard gala dinner, along with pieces from the Swiss jeweler's Ice Cube collection.

