

SPORT

FOOTBALLERS MITROVIC, NEVES PRAISE NEW SAUDI LIFESTYLES

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OPINION

KINGDOM'S MESSAGE OF COOPERATION TO ALL IRAQIS

By Hassan Al-Mustafa
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& FINALLY

KSA FILM 'NORAH' EARNS ACCOLADES AT CANNES

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SUNDAY, May 26, 2024
Dul Qaada 18, 1445
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ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

SINCE 1975

Jordan marks Independence Day



Jordanian flags are on sale in Amman as the country marked its 78th Independence Day on Saturday. Saudi King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman congratulated King Abdullah on the occasion and wished him good health and happiness.

AFP

MIDDLE EAST WAR

Israel pounds Rafah defying ICJ's order

Spanish defense minister calls Gaza war 'real genocide'

Arab News Jeddah

Israeli airstrikes and artillery pounded Rafah on Saturday, as the government dismissed a UN top court's order to immediately halt its military offensive in the southern Gazan city.

In a case brought by South Africa alleging the Israeli military operation amounts to "genocide," the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to halt its Rafah offensive and demanded the immediate release of hostages still held by Palestinian militants.

But National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi said "Israel has not and will not carry out military operations in the Rafah area that create living conditions that could cause the destruction of the Palestinian civilian population, in whole or in part."

Witnesses reported Israeli strikes or shelling in Rafah, the central city of Deir Al-Balah, Gaza City and Jabalia refugee camp in the north, and elsewhere.

"We hope that the court's decision will put pressure on Israel to end this war of extermination because there is nothing left here," said Umm Mohammad Al-Ashqa, a Palestinian woman

from Gaza City displaced to Deir Al-Balah by the war.

Spanish Defense Minister Margarita Robles said the Gaza conflict is a "real genocide," as relations between Israel and Spain worsen following Madrid's decision to recognize a Palestinian state.

"We cannot ignore what is happening in Gaza, which is a real genocide," Robles said in an interview with TVE state television.

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● **Related reports** Pages 6 & 7
● **Opinion by Alistair Burt and Yossi Mekelberg** Pages 9 & 10

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The Brief

HAJJ 2024 PLAN

Saudi Arabia launched its plan for Hajj that focuses on enriching pilgrims' experience and creating a devotional atmosphere. **P4**

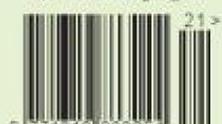
ISRAELI FAUX PAS

Egyptian sports critic to sue authorities in Israel after Shin Bet confused him with a member of Gaza's Hamas. **P7**

INDIA ELECTION

Voters in Delhi braved a heatwave as they voted in the penultimate phase of India's general election. **P8**

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\$1.2 BILLION VALUE

KSA business aviation sector scales new heights

Saudi clientele described as 'most discerning'

Dayan Abou Tine Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's business aviation sector is experiencing a surge fueled by the Kingdom's expanding economy, significant government investment on infrastructure, and a growing influx of high-net-worth individuals.

Valued at \$1.2 billion in 2023 according to TechSCI research, this segment is projected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate of 8.88 percent between 2025 and 2029.

Farid Gharzeddine, captain and CEO of Dubai based private jet company SkyMark Executive, told Arab News: "Saudi Arabia's private aviation and charter business have always been

thriving, serving individuals, business executives, government officials, and special missions."

Gharzeddine said his company's clients from Saudi Arabia are often one of the most discerning clientele and prioritize state-of-the-art technological advancements when selecting aircraft for their travel needs.

"These clients prioritize excellence in service delivery, emphasizing both technological sophistication and exceptional service standards. They are committed to enhancing their travel experiences to achieve the utmost levels of comfort, safety, and luxury," he added.

Detailed report Page 12

The Muslim World League welcomes the decision by the United Nations to dedicate an international day to commemorate the Srebrenica massacre.
Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa
 Secretary-general, Muslim World League



Rad ar

KSA today



Riyadh Cultural center

At the "Unfolding the Embassy" exhibition, you will be transported to a futuristic world on a SpaceX satellite orbiting a meta-earth, exploring artists' interpretations through installations including video, photography, and print media. For more information, visit riyadh.sa.



Jeddah Museum

Visit the Tariq Abdelhakim Center to explore a museum housing a collection of artifacts, musical compositions, and visual and auditory materials showcasing the esteemed musician's legacy. More details on the Saudi Events App.



Riyadh Nofa Park

Book a tour for your friends and family at the beautiful Nofa Wildlife Park, where you can see animals up close from the safety of a caged jeep. More details are available on the Hala Yalla app.



AlUla Challenge

The Twisted Maze will push you to your limits, taking you deep into the heart of Madakhal's canyons. The journey takes you through challenging terrain, requiring you to hike, swim and use ropes to navigate the rugged landscape. Visit the Hala Yalla app for more details.

The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Saudi Minister of Finance Mohammed Al-Jadaan recently met Bruno Le Maire, France's minister of the economy, finance and industrial and digital sovereignty, at the Group of Seven meeting

in Italy to discuss the current global economic outlook and other topics of interest.

Meanwhile, Vice Minister of Finance Abdulmuhsen Al-Khalaf recently met Ethiopia's State

Minister of Finance Semereta Sewasew in Riyadh.

The parties discussed bilateral financial relations and other topics of common interest, the Finance Ministry reported on X on Saturday.

Today's Number

49m

As part of Saudi Green Initiative over 192,000 hectares of land have been revitalized in the Kingdom, more than 3 million wild seedlings have been cultivated and 49 million trees have been planted across the country, Saudi Press Agency reported.

Who's Who



Joseph Rank

Joseph Rank is Lockheed Martin's vice president and CEO for Saudi Arabia and Africa.

Rank is a retired US Army brigadier general who has lived in the Kingdom for more than five years. He served as acting deputy assistant secretary of defense for Middle East policy for former secretary of defense James Mattis in his last posting in the Pentagon.

As an Arabic-speaking foreign area officer, Rank focused on the Middle East for the last 25 years, with postings to five US embassies and Middle East policy positions in the Pentagon, including with the army, joint staff and office of the secretary of defense staff.

He served as the senior defense attache in four US embassies: The UAE from 2015 to 2017, Jordan from 2011 to 2014, Lebanon from 2010 to 2011 and Yemen from 2004 to 2006.

In addition, Rank served in Egypt for a year from 1998 to 1999 and was also deployed to Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait for Desert Shield/Desert Storm from 1990 to 1991 with the 1st Infantry Division.

While working overseas, Rank was responsible for all aspects of defense cooperation in the countries he was posted to, including training programs, bilateral exercises and billions of dollars worth of foreign military and defense sales, with the intent of building capacity, enhancing interoperability and strengthening relationships.

What's Trending Today's hot topics explained by Afshan Aziz



TROUBLE IN PARADISE? Jennifer Lopez

G Amid rumors of trouble in her marriage to Ben Affleck, American actress and singer Jennifer Lopez was seen in Los Angeles in a long-sleeved outfit that hid her left hand, only for a ring to briefly slip into view.

Reports indicate that Affleck has been living separately from Lopez in a high-priced rental property in Brentwood.

He was repeatedly seen without his wedding band, which added to speculations about their marriage, until it reappeared on his hand on Friday when Lopez also inadvertently revealed her ring.

Lopez has allegedly prohibited questions about Affleck during her promotional appearances for "Atlas," as rumors of divorce continue to surround the couple.

STANDING OVATION

North West

G Kim Kardashian and Kanye West's daughter North West stole the show at a star-studded Hollywood Bowl concert, receiving a standing ovation for her acting debut as Simba in Disney's "The Lion King."

North, 10, wowed the audience with her performance of "I Just Can't Wait to Be King," alongside renowned stars like Nathan Lane, Billy Eichner, Jeremy Irons, Ernie Sabella, Heather Headley, Lebo M, Jason Weaver, and EGOT winner Jennifer Hudson.

Kanye and "grandmama" Kris Jenner proudly supported the young girl at the event, with the rapper seen in a white hoodie and Jenner making a stylish statement in an animal print coat.

Also in attendance were Kourtney Kardashian and her husband

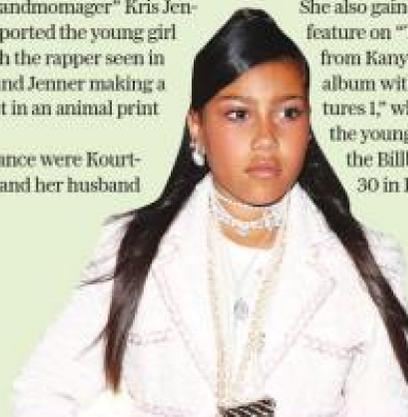
Travis Barker, adding to the star-studded affair.

Kim supported her daughter backstage, sharing photos on Instagram of their passes and character-themed cupcakes.

North opted for a more casual look, wearing a yellow hoodie and matching shorts with a fuzzy hood and slippers instead of the typical Broadway costumes.

Earlier this year, the young star announced her first album, "Elementary School Dropout," inspired by her father's debut album, "The College Dropout."

She also gained recognition for her feature on "Talking/Once Again" from Kanye's collaborative album with Ty Dolla Sign, "Vultures 1," which made her one of the youngest artists to chart on the Billboard Hot 100 at No. 30 in February.



TheRegion

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Jeddah

- The Badaro Farmers Market located at College Saint Sauveur, Parc, Beirut, offers the opportunity to purchase locally grown produce and have a relaxing time over coffee with friends. The market will run every Sunday until Dec. 29. More details on lebtivity.com.

- 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.

- 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 26	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

People inside the State Department are devastated by what US policy is enabling Israel to do.

Annelo Sheline
Former foreign affairs officer US Department of State



Spotlight

RESEARCH & STUDIES
THE MIDDLE EAST, BETTER EXPLAINED

ARAB NEWS

GAZA CONFLICT

Principles over a paycheck

Appalled by deaths of Palestinians, several US government staffers have resigned over Biden's support for Israel

Anan Tello London

Lily Greenberg-Call recently became the latest Biden administration official to step down in protest over the White House's handling of the war in Gaza, amid a string of resignations from the US Department of State.

Greenberg-Call, who left her position at the Department of the Interior in mid-May, slammed the Biden administration for having "enabled and legitimized" Israel's onslaught on the Gaza Strip.

In her resignation letter she said she "can no longer in good conscience continue to represent this administration amidst President Biden's disastrous, continued support for Israel's genocide in Gaza."

Biden's policy in the Middle East has repeatedly come under fire since the onset of Israel's military campaign in Gaza, particularly over the supply of weapons to the Israel Defense Forces, which rights groups say have been used to harm civilians.

The Israeli military's bombing campaign in Gaza in retaliation for the Hamas-led Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel has killed at least 35,000 Palestinians.

Israel and senior figures in the Biden administration have said Hamas shares in the blame for the high civilian death toll in Gaza by hiding in residential areas.

The day Greenberg-Call resigned, the Biden administration told Congress it planned to send \$1 billion in new military aid to Israel, despite the president's opposition to a full-scale invasion of Rafah in southern Gaza. It will be the US' first arms shipment to Israel since Biden paused the transfer of 3,500 bombs earlier in the month.

The US government said it had halted the bomb shipment to prevent Israel from using the munitions in its attack on Rafah. However, a lower chamber bill on May 16 condemned Biden for the suspension and voted to override it.

The vote prompted some 30 Congressional staffers to march on the House of Representatives at the US Capitol, calling for a ceasefire in Gaza.

According to the Washington Post, the US has made more than 100 weapons sales to Israel since the start of the war in Gaza. The sales reportedly included precision-guided munitions, small-diameter bombs, bunker busters, small arms, and more.

Hala Rharrit, who stepped down as the Arabic-language spokesperson of the US Department of State in April after 18 years of service over the Biden administration's policy on Gaza, stressed that the government



Thirty congressional staffers marched on the House of Representatives in Washington D.C. on May 16, below, to demand a ceasefire in Gaza, main. AFP

should "abide by our own laws."

She told Arab News: "We have systems in place within the State Department to ensure that our weaponry is not used to kill civilians, with requirements put in place requiring recipient countries to limit harm to civilians — to include both civilian populations and civilian infrastructure."

"There are multiple laws on the books that we are ignoring as a State Department — willfully ignoring," she continued. "There's the Arms Export Control Act, there's the Foreign Assistance Act, the Leahy Law — there are multiple regulations that would ensure what's happening now would never happen."

Urging the government to follow those laws, Rharrit said: "We would automatically have to condition our aid and, most specifically, cut our offensive military assistance to Israel."

By pausing military assistance to Israel, not only "would we ensure, hopefully, that the IDF does not go into Rafah," but also "regain credibility amongst Arab states as well — that we're actually conditioning our



Around 7,000 Gazans have been wounded since Oct. 7. AFP



aid, we're standing by our laws, we're standing by international law."

"And that could provide leverage as well, both on the Israeli side and with Arab states to put pressure on Hamas to reach a ceasefire. We have the ability to use our leverage as the US, but we're not using it at the moment."

Asked about her resignation, Rharrit said: "I never anticipated resigning, and I certainly never anticipated resigning in protest of any policy."

But the human tragedy in Gaza "completely changed that," she told Arab News. "I could not in good conscience remain in government. After 18 years with the State Department, I decided to finally submit my resignation."

She added: "I spoke up internally. I made my voice and my concerns heard, not based on my personal opinions, but based on what I was monitoring — and I

was monitoring pan-Arab traditional and social media.

"And I was seeing and documenting, and reporting back to Washington, all of the growing anti-Americanism... Nothing was convincing anyone, and we had lost credibility."

Rharrit, who previously served as a human-rights officer, continued: "It's one of the things that we (the US) are known for and that we stand for, but every day I would see human-rights violation after human-rights violation. And it was clear that we had a double standard, and I could no longer support the policy or the administration."

Despite their expertise, Rharrit said she and her colleagues were not being heard. "Our concerns, our feedback, our documentation of everything that was happening in the

IN NUMBERS

35k+

Palestinians killed in Gaza since Oct. 7 (Ministry of Health).

100

US approved foreign military sales to Israel since Oct. 7 (WaPo).

region was being ignored — and that was intensely frustrating."

Rharrit (pictured) said that US policy in Gaza "is a failed militaristic policy that has achieved nothing — over 35,000 Palestinians killed, over 15,000 of whom are children, the hostages remain in Gaza with their families in Israel protesting against Netanyahu and demanding a ceasefire."

She added: "Despite all this unimaginable suffering and countless attempts by many on the inside to shift policy, it became clear to me that the status quo was resolute."

"Knowing that this policy continued to dehumanize and devastate the Palestinians, generating a vicious cycle of violence, hurting all sides involved, while undermining the US for generations left me no choice but to speak out against the policy from outside government."

Preceding Rharrit in late March was Annelo Sheline, a foreign affairs officer in the department's human rights bureau, who left after trying to "raise opposition on the inside," she told ABC News on April 11.

"Many of my colleagues, people inside the State Department, are devastated by what US policy is enabling Israel to do to Palestinians inside Gaza," she said. "They (the Biden administration) continue to send weapons. We've seen announcements of new weapons. It's really shocking that this has been allowed to go on." In January, former Biden appointee Tariq Habash, a Palestinian-American, resigned from the Department of Education, saying the US administration "turns a blind eye to the atrocities committed against innocent Palestinian lives."

In his resignation letter, which he shared on the social media platform X, Habash said his government "has aided the indiscriminate violence against Palestinians in Gaza."

He added: "Despite claims that Israel's focus is on Hamas, its military actions simultaneously persist across the West Bank, where there is no Hamas governing presence."

Ten days after Israel began its Gaza offensive, Josh Paul, a former director overseeing US arms transfers, quit the Department of State, citing "a policy disagreement concerning our continued lethal assistance to Israel."

In a letter he posted on LinkedIn, Paul said his government's "rushing" to provide arms to Israel was "shortsighted, destructive, unjust, and contradictory to the very values that we publicly espouse."





Pilgrims worldwide are converging in the Kingdom to perform Hajj, which is expected to run from June 14-19. SPA

LIFETIME JOURNEY

Hajj operational plan launched to serve pilgrims

Strategy puts focus on religious enrichment initiatives

Tareq Al-Thaqafi Jeddah

Sheikh Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Sudais, president of religious affairs at the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque, has launched the presidency's operational plan for this year's Hajj season.

The plan focuses on serving pilgrims — enriching their religious experience while creating a devotional atmosphere — and launching 120 religious enrichment initiatives during Hajj. Al-Sudais described it as the largest religious operational plan yet undertaken by the presidency.

In his opening speech during the inauguration of the plan at the headquarters of the presidency in Makkah, Al-Sudais said: "This year's plan is the largest since the establishment of the presidency with its purely religious specializations."

He explained that it was the result of efforts of the presidency's teams in preparation, planning, and study, as well as building on achievements of past seasons.

The plan is designed in harmony and integration with the various agencies working at the Two Holy Mosques, which collaborate and cooperate with the presidency to serve pilgrims, Al-Sudais added.

The plan for the Hajj season, he said, revolved around various religious enrichment paths, which include numerous events and hundreds of religious programs encompassing scientific and guidance lessons.

Al-Sudais said the presidency's plan this year was dedicated to promoting voluntary and humanitarian work, recognizing the Two Holy Mosques as attractive environments for such efforts. This focus is based on religious and Saudi values, which highlight the importance

HIGHLIGHT

The presidency's plan this year was dedicated to promoting voluntary and humanitarian work, recognizing the Two Holy Mosques as attractive environments for such efforts. This focus is based on religious and Saudi values, which highlight the importance of generosity and hospitality.

of generosity and hospitality.

The spotlight will fall on enhancing the experience provided by the Two Holy Mosques. This includes integrating religious digital services, investing in technology and artificial intelligence, and using applications and digital media.

Specific religious initiatives are being activated to achieve digital leadership and to reduce the barriers of space and time through the applications.

NARCOTICS SWEEP

Saudi authorities foil drug smuggling attempts in Jeddah, Hail, Jazan, Asir

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi authorities recently made several drug-related arrests in operations across the Kingdom, the Saudi Press Agency reported on Saturday.

The General Directorate of Narcotics Control arrested five individuals for violating border security regulations in Jeddah, among them an Ethiopian female on a visitor visa who had attempted to sell 27 kg of hashish and amphetamine.

Meanwhile, in Hail, the directorate arrested a Saudi national for selling 9.7 kg of hashish.

In another operation, Border Guard patrols in the Al-Harth governorate of the Jazan region thwarted an attempt to smuggle 27 kg of hashish.

Additionally, in the Al-Raboah sector of the Asir region, Border Guard patrols apprehended five border security violators of Ethiopian and Yemeni nationalities attempting to smuggle 352 kg of qat.

Preliminary legal procedures have been completed, and the seized drugs have been handed over to the authorities. All those arrested have been referred to the Public Prosecution.

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

TheSpace

SAMA's Account Finder service reinforces banking security

TALAT ZAKI HAFIZ



The Saudi Central Bank, SAMA, has launched a new service, Account Finder, for retail customers across local banks. The new service enables retail banking customers with accounts at local banks operating in Saudi Arabia to verify their ownership through digital banking channels.

Additionally, the new service will contribute to enhancing and ensuring the reliability of the local banking system, as well as reducing the risks of suspicious transactions, unauthorized account use and impersonation.

This service underscores the continuous commitment of both SAMA and the banking sector to introduce value-added services and ensure security in e-banking transactions in line with international best practices.

It is worth noting that SAMA has always been very persistent in implementing certain security banking measures aimed at protecting bank customers' rights and ensuring that customers' bank accounts and transactions are fully secured, especially through e-banking channels.

Furthermore, SAMA is pioneering in ensuring the safety of financial transactions carried out by banks' customers, especially in light of the globally observed notable increase in the number of fraudulent websites and social media accounts, including the persistent recurrence of financial fraud incidents such

as social engineering scams.

Unfortunately, financial scams have deceived bank customers across the globe and exposed their transactions and accounts to potential financial fraud, especially when dealing with untrusted third parties and revealing their banking records and personal information.

SAMA has repeatedly issued instructions to all banks operating in the Kingdom to implement several security measures against financial fraud to protect customers' transactions.

A scientific study conducted by Naif Arab University for Security Sciences in cooperation with Interpol has revealed the volume of financial fraud crimes directed at Arab countries via the internet. The study also revealed that five types of financial fraud crimes are most common in the Arab world, with 24 criminal methods used to reach the victims.

Additionally, through an analysis of 503 fraudulent advertisements, the study revealed that the number of daily visits from potential victims to these fraudulent sites exceeds 137,000. The top categories include investment scams, business email scams, romance scams via text messages and sextortion.

I believe that SAMA is doing a great job in combating financial crimes, whether these crimes are linked to financial or banking fraud, or connected to money laundering.

I believe that for such efforts to work and achieve their goals, bank customers must strictly adhere to instructions related to protecting their bank accounts from being exposed to financial fraud.

Talat Zaki Hafiz is an economist and financial analyst. X: @TalatHafiz For full version, log on to www.arabnews.com/thespace

The Day's FIGURES

SAUDI FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGNS ON KSRELIEF'S SAHEM PLATFORM



Source: sahem.ksrelief.org

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Economic cooperation Saudi, Kosovo officials discuss parliamentary ties

The Saudi-Kosovo Parliamentary Friendship Committee, led by Khalid Al-Bawardi, met with Kosovo's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Kreshnik Ahmeti and other officials in Pristina.

Discussions aimed to boost bilateral relations and parliamentary cooperation between the Shoura Council and Kosovo Parliament.

The committee met with Podujeva's Mayor Sheqjtim Bulliqi and discussed municipal affairs. They also engaged with local companies, reviewing Kosovo's future projects and discussing economic cooperation. **AN Riyadh**

Border control Saudi authorities arrest 17,030 illegals in one week

Saudi authorities arrested 17,030 people in one week for breaching residency, work and border security regulations.

A total of 10,662 people were arrested for violations of residency laws, while 4,147 were held over illegal border crossing attempts, and a further 2,221 for labor-related issues.

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

Humanitarian mission KSA continues aid projects in Sudan, Lebanon

The Kingdom's aid agency, KSrelief, continued its humanitarian projects in Sudan and Lebanon.

In Sudan, KSrelief distributed 950 personal hygiene kits to displaced and needy families in Kosti. In Wad Sharifi town, 330 food parcels were provided to displaced families.

In Lebanon, KSrelief continued its implementation of the Al-Amal Charitable Bakery Project in the districts of Akkar and Miniyeh.

The project distributed 150,000 loaves of bread daily to Syrian and Palestinian refugee families. **AN Riyadh**

News Saudi Arabia



INSPIRED BY CULTURE

Digital artist captures Saudi charm

Ghada Al-Shammari says art can be a means to showcase nation's rich heritage

Sulafa Alkhanalzi Riyadh

Timeless Arabic songs and heartfelt poetry provide the inspiration for Ghada Al-Shammari's digital art, which showcases the Kingdom's culture and society.

Al-Shammari's first artwork in 2017 was inspired by a popular Saudi song by Majed Al-Esa called "Hwages," which means "concerns" in English.

The music video provided a comment on society by using satire, showcasing women driving cars, skateboarding, and playing basketball — activities that at the time were not easily accessible for women.

"I liked how they portrayed women in the traditional Saudi abaya, which motivated me to draw it," Al-Shammari told Arab News.

For one of her artworks Al-Shammari was inspired by a poem by literary icon Prince Badr bin Abdul Mohsen and popularly performed by the late Saudi singer Talal Maddah.

The drawing depicts a man glancing at a woman who has her eyes downcast, with an oud instrument between them, and the 1980 song title "Forgive Me" written in Arabic text above the illustration.

The Saudi artist said that she tries to capture the poet's feelings with her artwork, adding: "Romantic songs with descriptions of the poet's beloved have been particularly inspiring for me."

Al-Shammari draws inspiration from the beauty within the Kingdom's culture. Many of her artworks depict women



wearing traditional Najdi-style dresses and gowns with draping silhouettes and glimmering gold headpieces and turbans.

The men are depicted with striking features and wearing traditional garments like the head coverings called ghutra or

Saudi Arabia is full of exciting things, and its diversity is what fascinates me the most.

Ghada Al-Shammari
Saudi digital artist

shemagh, and bisht, the men's cloak commonly worn in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries.

"Saudi culture and traditions have significantly impacted my work. Growing up, I used to think of Saudi Arabia as just what was around me in terms of

Drawing from the beauty of Saudi culture and traditions, many of Ghada Al-Shammari artworks depict men and women in traditional Najdi-style garments. Instagram/ghal



environment, customs, and traditions," Al-Shammari said.

When she moved from her hometown of Hafar Al-Batin to the capital Riyadh, Al-Shammari said her friendships and acquaintances showed her a new world of ideas that elevated her artistic vision.

She added: "They shared stories about their region, important landmarks, and fascinating tales that were unique to their areas. This motivated me to learn more about my country and enjoy drawing the diversity and differences I discovered in my artworks."

"Saudi Arabia is full of exciting things, and its diversity is what fascinates me the most. Each region has its own heritage, traditions, architecture, and unique dialect, which makes me eager to learn more and create works that reflect this beautiful diversity."

Al-Shammari said she selects particular color combinations to evoke the emotions she aims to convey, opting for brighter colors for her cheerful and vibrant works.

Al-Shammari graduated from the College

of Arts and Design at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University with a bachelor's degree in fine arts.

She added: "Through this specialization, I discovered many artistic and historical aspects, learned about various artists, and got to understand their ideas and philosophies, which transformed my perspective of my work."

Her love of art began as a child when she would draw characters from her favorite anime and cartoons.

"I started focusing on drawing from an educational perspective at the age of 12 through YouTube tutorials on drawing anime and cartoons, which sparked my artistic journey," Al-Shammari said.

She added that art is important as it showcases the cultural aspect of a country and its heritage, conveying its history and traditions that help define life in the past and present.

She said: "It serves as a way to preserve and transmit this heritage from one generation to the next, seeking to document knowledge and memories."



STEEPED IN HISTORY

Ancient castles in Sabya governorate reflect architectural heritage

Arab News Riyadh

The Sabya governorate in the Jazan region is a treasure trove of archaeological wonders, each with its own unique story.

Among these is the Sabya Archaeological Castle, whose origins date to the early 20th century. The castle, steeped in history, is a must-visit for any archeology enthusiast or researcher.

The castle is situated near Sabya Avenue, within King Fahd Park. It is part of the present city of Sabya, which offers a view of Wadi Sabya.

The Sabya Archaeological Castle, an architectural marvel,



The Sabya Archaeological Castle, an architectural marvel, boasts spacious rooms with high ceilings and thick walls. SPA

boasts spacious rooms with high ceilings and thick walls. The walls, adorned with beautiful geometric and floral patterns, are a testament to the skill of the craftsmen who built them.

Local materials such as volcanic stone, wood, and limestone were used during construction. Some accounts suggest that the clay used in making bricks was sourced from the banks of Wadi Sabya.

The use of volcanic stones of various sizes and shapes in particular gives the castle a unique and captivating beauty. The stones were obtained from volcanoes near the city, including Jabal

Akwa, located a short distance northeast of Sabya.

The mosque, situated north of the castle, was also constructed using the same building materials as the castle and other structures in the area. It was

FASTFACTS

• The Sabya Archaeological Castle has origins that date to the early 20th century.

• A nearby mosque was constructed using the same building materials as the historic castle.

intended for prayers and gatherings of religious leaders, dignitaries, and the people of Sabya. Its mihrab, or prayer niche, still stands despite some damage.

Some accounts suggest the presence of remains of other buildings in the vicinity of the castle, opening the possibility of conducting archaeological excavations to reveal more secrets about this site.

The Kingdom's Heritage Commission is diligently working to preserve the Sabya Archaeological Castle, recognizing its significance as one of the most important archaeological sites in the Jazan region.

RELIEF

Italy resumes UNRWA funding in Palestinian aid package

PM Meloni highlights support for efforts toward sustainable ceasefire in Gaza, release of hostages

Reuters Rome

Italy will resume funding for the United Nations' Palestinian relief organization UNRWA as part of a 35 million euro (\$38 million) aid package, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said on Saturday.

Tajani made the commitment during a meeting with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa who also held talks with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni during his visit to Rome.

Meloni told Mustafa that Italy supported efforts toward a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza, the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas and improved

humanitarian aid for the people of Gaza, her office said in a statement.

Foreign Minister Tajani said €5 million would go to UNRWA projects, with the remainder destined for its "Food for Gaza" initiative.

Italy was one of a number of countries to block aid for UNRWA following accusations by Israel that some of the agency's staff were involved in the Oct. 7 attack on Israel that triggered the Gaza war.

"Italy has decided to resume financing specific projects destined to help Palestinian refugees but only after rigorous checks that guarantee that not one cent risks ending up supporting terrorism," Tajani said.

UNRWA employs 13,000

BACKGROUND

UNRWA employs 13,000 people in Gaza Strip, runs the enclave's schools, primary health care clinics, and other social services, and distributes humanitarian aid.

people in Gaza, runs the enclave's schools, primary health care clinics, and other social services, and distributes humanitarian aid.

In recent weeks, several countries have resumed funding the agency. Germany said last month it would resume cooperation with UNRWA following a report led by former French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna into UNRWA's procedures for ensuring adherence to



Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni receives Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa in Rome on Saturday. Reuters

neutrality principles.

A total of 35,903 Palestinians have been killed and 80,420 have been injured in the Israeli military offensive on Gaza since Oct. 7, the Gaza Health Ministry said in a statement on Saturday.

Israel has said it is carrying out operations in Rafah, despite

growing international opposition, to remove Hamas battalions holed up there.

Some of its hostages are also being held there, it claims.

The city had become a refuge for Gazans fleeing fighting elsewhere in the enclave.

After Rafah became a target as

well, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled the city.

"The occupation forces keep the city under bombing, not only east where they invaded but at the center and the western sides. They want to scare people to leave the whole city," said one Rafah resident.

CONFLICT

Gaza war is 'real genocide,' Spanish defense minister says

Reuters Madrid

The Spanish defense minister said on Saturday that the conflict in Gaza is a "real genocide" as relations between Israel and Spain worsen following Madrid's decision to recognize a Palestinian state.

Israel has strongly rejected accusations made against it by South Africa at the International Court of Justice that it is committing genocide against Palestinians, saying it is waging war on Hamas.

The remark by Spanish Defense Minister Margarita Robles in an interview with TVE state television echoed a comment by Spanish Deputy Prime Minister Yolanda Diaz, who earlier this week also described the Gaza conflict as a genocide.

"We cannot ignore what is happening in Gaza, which is a real genocide," Robles said in the



Palestinians wounded in Israeli strikes are brought to Al-Aqsa Hospital in Gaza. AP

HIGHLIGHT

Defense Minister Margarita Robles says Spain's recognition of Palestine is not a move against Israel, adding that it is designed to help end violence in Gaza.

interview, during which she also discussed the Russian invasion of Ukraine and conflicts in Africa.

She also said Madrid's recognition of Palestine was not a move against Israel, adding that it was designed to help "end violence in Gaza."

"This is not against anyone, this is not against the Israeli state, this

is not against the Israelis, who are people we respect," she said.

Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed nearly 36,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, and destroyed much of the enclave. Israel launched the operation to try to eliminate Hamas after the Palestinian group attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7.

Spain, along with Ireland and Norway, declared this week it would recognize a Palestinian state on May 28, prompting an angry response from Israel, which said it amounted to a "reward for terrorism" and recalled its ambassadors from the three capitals.

Judges at the ICJ, the top UN court, on Friday, ordered Israel to immediately halt its military assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, in a landmark emergency ruling in the case brought by South Africa accusing Israel of genocide.

SUFFERING

More than one in four Syrians 'extremely poor': World Bank

AFP Beirut

More than a quarter of Syrians live in extreme poverty, the World Bank said on Saturday, 13 years into a devastating civil war that has battered the economy and impoverished millions.

The World Bank published two new reports on Syria, which found that "27 percent of Syrians — about 5.7 million individuals — live in extreme poverty."

"Extreme poverty, while virtually non-existent before the conflict, affected more than one in four Syrians in 2022" and might have further deteriorated after a deadly earthquake last year, one of the reports said.

The quake killed about 6,000 people in the country.

According to the UN, about 90 percent of Syrians live in poverty, while it was previously estimated that around 2 million lived in

extreme poverty after more than a decade of war.

The report cited Lebanon's economic meltdown in late 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine as having eroded the welfare of Syrian households in recent years.

The civil war in Syria has also ravaged the economy, infrastructure, and industry, while Western sanctions have added to the country's woes.

The World Bank said "continued funding shortfalls and limited access to humanitarian assistance" have further strained poor Syrians, who are already coping with "soaring prices, reduced access to essential services and rising unemployment."

The UN previously said that its humanitarian response plan for Syria in 2024 requires more than \$4 billion but is only six percent funded.

MILITIA MENACE

Houthis postpone release of 100 prisoners belonging to govt forces

Reuters Cairo

Yemen's Houthis said they had postponed the release of around 100 prisoners belonging to government forces to Sunday after it had previously been announced to take place on Saturday.

Abdul Qader Al-Murtada, head of the Houthi Prisoner Affairs

Committee, said on X that the delay was caused by "technical reasons."

Al-Murtada said on Friday that the group would release more than 100 prisoners in what he called "a unilateral humanitarian initiative."

The Houthis last released prisoners in April 2023 in an exchange of 250 Houthis for 70 government forces.

Houthis have launched repeated drone and missile strikes on ships in the crucial shipping channels of the Red Sea, the Bab Al-Mandab strait, and the Gulf of Aden since November to show their support for the Palestinians in the Gaza war.

This has forced shippers to re-route cargo to longer and

more expensive journeys around southern Africa.

The US Central Command said on Friday that the Houthis had launched two anti-ship ballistic missiles into the Red Sea on May 23, but no injuries or damage were reported.

Houthis launched attacks on three ships in the Red Sea,

Mediterranean Sea, and Arabian Sea, the group said on Friday. However, the ship's manager allegedly attached in the Mediterranean said there was no sign of such an incident.

The reported attacks are the latest in a months-long campaign of Houthi strikes against regional shipping.

News Middle East

UPROAR

UK literary festival drops sponsor after pro-Palestine boycott

Speakers pull out from scheduled appearances in protest over Baillie Gifford sponsorship

Arab News London

The UK's Hay literary festival has dropped its main sponsor over a boycott criticizing its links to Israel and fossil fuel companies.

Speakers and performers at the festival pulled out from scheduled appearances in protest over investment firm Baillie Gifford's sponsorship of the event, The Guardian reported.

On Friday, the festival said it was canceling its sponsorship deal with the firm.

Singer Charlotte Church and comedian Nish Kumar had earlier pulled out of appearing at the event.

In a statement on her social media channels, Church said she had taken part in the boycott "in solidarity with the people in Palestine and in protest of the artwashing and greenwashing that is apparent in this sponsorship."

Fossil Free Books, the group that has led the campaign against Baillie Gifford's sponsorship of the event, has demanded that the firm divest from companies

BACKGROUND

Singer Charlotte Church and comedian Nish Kumar had earlier pulled out of appearing at the UK's Hay literary festival.

"that profit from Israeli apartheid, occupation and genocide."

More than 700 writers and publishing professionals have signed a statement by FFB concerning the Hay festival campaign.

Kumar shared the statement

online in announcing the cancellation of his appearance.

An FFB organizer said: "Hay festival is right to listen to the concerns of hundreds of book workers who are working to create fossil-free and genocide-free festivals."

"Hay must now develop a fundraising policy that rules out any future sponsorship by companies that invest or profit from the fossil fuel industry, Israeli occupation, apartheid or genocide, and any other human rights abuses."

Hay CEO Julie Finch said the festival's decision to cancel the

sponsorship deal with the firm was taken "in light of claims raised by campaigners and intense pressure on artists to withdraw."

She added: "Our first priority is to our audience and our artists. Above all else, we must preserve the freedom of our stages and spaces for open debate and discussion, where audiences can hear a range of perspectives."

Baillie Gifford began its relationship with the festival in 2016 as a principal sponsor. A spokesperson said: "It is regrettable our sponsorship with the festival cannot continue."

CONCERN

Rising cost of medicine in Egypt poses risk to 'thousands of pharmacies'

Layla Mohammed Cairo

Pharmacy owners in Egypt have voiced concerns about the rising cost of pharmaceuticals in the country as they prepare for another price increase following the Egyptian Drug Authority's recent review.

That review followed pharmaceutical companies' request for price increases for various medications to "offset the rising costs of production, which have been exacerbated by the devaluation of the Egyptian pound against the dollar."

The EDA's "decisions over (recent) years to raise the prices of certain types of medicine have resulted in the closure of about 1,500 pharmacies," said Dr. Hatem El-Badawi, secretary-general

We face several problems due to price increases, including reduced profit margins for pharmacists.

Samir Saad
Pharmacy owner

of the Pharmacy Division at the Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce, adding that the "uncontrolled" rise in medicine prices has not been matched by a corresponding increase in profit margins for pharmacists.

"We anticipate more closures in 2024," he added.

"In February, the General Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce appealed to the Central Bank governor to reactivate the low-interest rate loan of 5 percent for small and medium-sized pharmacies, capped at EGP500,000 (\$10,600) per pharmacy.

"The goal was to safeguard pharmacies from economic challenges such as low purchasing power, cash payment demands from pharmaceutical companies, limited liquidity, rising operating costs, and shrinking profit margins."

Gaza under attack



Palestinians search for survivors at the site of an Israeli military strike on the Al-Daraj neighborhood in Gaza City. | AFP

MEDIA FIASCO CONDEMNED

Egyptian sports critic to sue authorities in Israel after Shin Bet confuses him with Hamas member

Mohamed El-Shamaa Cairo

Egyptian sports critic Mohamed Shabana plans to sue authorities in Israel for defamation after Israeli security agency Shin Bet published his photograph by mistake instead of an image of a Hamas leader in Rafah who it believed had been killed.

Shabana said he would demand substantial compensation for the damage inflicted on him, his family, and his audience in the Egyptian media.

He also said his political career was being damaged following

the incident.

He said he would donate the compensation to the "Palestinian cause — a cause we all fight for."

Shin Bet sparked controversy on social media after posting a picture of Shabana, claiming that he was a Hamas leader killed in Rafah.

Local Israeli media initially reported the assassination of Mohammed Shabana in Rafah, a leader of the Rafah brigade of the Al-Qassam Brigades, using an image of the Egyptian media personality.

However, the Israeli media

immediately corrected the error, acknowledging the failure of the assassination attempt, as reported by Yedioth Ahronoth.

The blunder sparked an initial social media uproar, with the Egyptian sports audience recognizing Shabana, making a mockery of the incident.

The fiasco also raised doubts about the capabilities of Shin Bet, which not only posted the incorrect image of a Hamas leader but also failed in the assassination attempt.

Shabana told Arab News that he came across a photo of himself

trending on social media, accompanied by sarcastic comments about the Israeli army.

He said: "I did not understand what was happening and began reading to grasp what had occurred."

Shabana said some friends and family also contacted him over the phone to express their disbelief.

He added: "They joked that the Israeli security service had assassinated me, which made me laugh too. But it did not take long before I realized how ignorant and backward the Israeli security

agencies were, fabricating events, which makes me doubt everything they say.

"I know that Shin Bet is one of the strongest security agencies in Israel, and it's unnatural for them to make such a mistake.

"But I think the chaos in the Israeli state made them fabricate or even mishandle the accuracy of their publications. "Perhaps they Googled the name Mohammed Shabana, the leader in Hamas, and my photo popped up, so they published it, which is quite ridiculous."

Media expert Hassan Makawi

said: "What happened is a major blunder for the Israeli security forces. But the bigger blunder, in my opinion, is that of the Israeli media, which followed its agency without verifying the facts."

Makawi said a simple internet search would have "uncovered their appalling mistake."

Makawi told Arab News: "It's clear that Israel is not as strong as they claim, nor is their media as reliable as it describes itself.

"Therefore, we must scrutinize their statements and publications as they may contain many lies."



Students occupy the Collegium Broscianum area of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland, during a pro-Palestine protest on Friday. Academy for Palestine

SOLIDARITY

Polish students strike to cut ties with Israeli academia

Students set up encampments at the University of Warsaw and Jagiellonian University

Natalia Laskowska Warsaw

Polish students have joined the global movement to end partnerships with Israeli institutions and were occupying the country's top campuses on Saturday because of Israel's war on Gaza.

Students and alumni of 12 universities in Poland have been calling on their management to publicly disclose which Israeli academia, research centers, organizations and companies they have been cooperating with and in what scope.

In open letters to rectors, they demanded that the universities "boycott Israeli institutions at the national and international

level until the occupation of Palestine ends, recognize the right of Palestinians to equality and self-determination, and recognize the right of return for Palestinian refugees."

As no action followed from university authorities, on Friday evening they set up encampments at the campuses of the University of Warsaw — the country's largest academic institution — and of the Jagiellonian University — the oldest and most prestigious.

In a joint manifesto, the protesters said: "We will occupy the university space with our own bodies to demand action ... we consider opposing genocide as our highest obligation."

Israeli airstrikes and ground offensives in Gaza have since

October killed 36,000 Palestinians with more than 80,000 wounded, the vast majority children and women. Many have lost their lives as most of the hospitals have been flattened by bombardment and no medical

HIGHLIGHT

'We consider opposing genocide as our highest obligation,' students say.

assistance could reach them.

Protesting students say that failing to oppose the onslaught would mean tacit consent — and complicity.

The University of Warsaw is linked through a research project

to the Ben-Gurion University, whose Homeland Security Institute partners with the biggest Israeli arms manufacturers such as Elbit Systems, Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and the Israeli Ministry of Defense. It is also linked to the University of Haifa, which runs special programs for Israeli forces and intelligence.

"As a student, I feel I should have a say in what our university is investing and what its partners are. We know that the university is tied to the Israeli army, forces and apartheid system," Agnieszka, a sociology student and one of the coordinators of the strike at the University of Warsaw, told Arab News.

"That's why I'm here ... I hope it will change something."

RIGHTS

Millions of Indians beat extreme heat to cast votes

Sanjay Kumar New Delhi

Voters in Delhi braved a sweltering heatwave on Saturday as they queued at polling stations in the penultimate phase of India's general election.

The voting, which more than 968 million people have been eligible to do, started on April 19. Some of India's 28 states and eight federally governed territories completed the process in a single day, while others have spread it out.

The sixth phase of the poll covered the capital, Delhi, as well as the neighboring states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh,



Protesters stand in the shade to cast their vote on a hot summer Saturday in New Delhi, India. Reuters

Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal and Bihar in the country's east, and Jammu and Kashmir.

In Delhi, voters queued to cast their ballots despite the

temperature soaring to over 44 degrees Celsius — with humidity making it feel like 56 C, according to reports — prompting the Election Commission to deploy paramedics to some polling stations.

While there have been concerns over voter turnout

— with the first phase estimated to have seen at least 4 percent fewer people take part than in 2019's election — those who arrived to cast their votes said there was no way the heat could deter them.

"Voting is the only way we can convey our feelings towards governance. It is a decisive way. To spend one hour in the line after five years is not a big deal for us," said Karan Sharma, who was voting in the East Delhi constituency.

"We were complaining about the heat, but ... it's a duty, it's like eating food. After every five years, the festival comes, we have to participate in it."

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Territorial gains

Russia says captured village in east Ukraine

Russia said Saturday its army had captured another village in eastern Ukraine in the latest of a series of small territorial gains for Moscow.

The Russian Defense Ministry said that troops had "taken control of the village of Arkhangel'ske" in the Donetsk region.

The small frontline village is located near the town of Ocheretyne, which Russia claimed to have captured early this month.

Ukrainian police meanwhile said three people had been killed and two wounded in Russian attacks on Donetsk, where there had been over 1,800 strikes over the last day. **AFP**

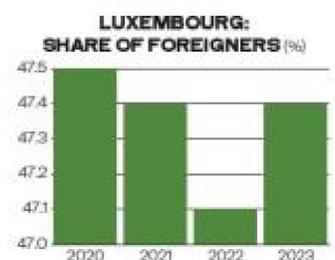
Regional tension

China ends military drills around Taiwan

China has ended two days of military drills around Taiwan that saw jets loaded with live munitions and warships practise seizing and isolating the self-ruled island. The exercises simulated strikes targeting Taiwan's leaders as well as its ports and airports to "cut off the island's 'blood vessels,'" Chinese military analysts told state media.

Beijing considers the democratic island part of its territory and has not ruled out using force to bring it under its control. Codenamed "Joint Sword-2024A", the exercises were launched three days after Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te took office. **AFP**

The Day's FIGURES



Source: Statista

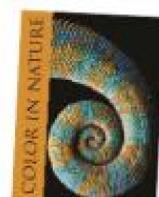
What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

'Color in Nature'

JUSTIN MARSHALL, THOMAS CRONIN, SONKE JOHNSEN, RON DOUGLAS, ANYA HURLBERT, JANE BODDY, AND FABIO CORTESI

This beautifully illustrated book unlocks nature's colorful purpose, revealing how creatures see color as well as shedding light



on the important part that it plays in animal behavior, from reproduction and communication to aggression and defense.

Support required

Maldives seeks easier funding to battle waves

The Maldives on Saturday demanded international funding to battle rising sea levels, saying the low-lying Indian Ocean archipelago was being unfairly excluded from the most generous support measures.

"The Maldives is liable for just 0.003 percent of global emissions, but is one of the first countries to endure the existential consequences of the climate crisis," President Mohamed Muizzu wrote in Britain's Guardian newspaper. "Wealthier nations have a moral responsibility to communities like ours." His comments came ahead of a conference on Small Island Developing States that he will co-chair in Antigua and Barbuda Monday. **AFP**

Vile act

Chile arrests two people accused in blaze

A firefighter and a forestry official were arrested in Chile Friday on suspicion of starting a blaze that killed 137 people in the resort city of Vina del Mar in February, authorities said.

"An arrest warrant was issued today against the person who started the fires in February in the Valparaiso region," where Vina del Mar is located, police director Eduardo Cerna told a news conference. A little later, the Valparaiso regional prosecutor's office confirmed the arrest of a second suspect, an official of the National Forestry Corporation, the body responsible for fighting forest fires and managing national parks. **AFP**

إذا وجدت في قلبك ظلمة بعد معصية ارتكبتها،
فاطم أن في قلبك نوراً لولا ما وجدت تلك الظلمة.
(ابن الجوزي)

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

If you find a dark spot in your heart after committing a sin, know that within your heart there is also light that has allowed you to notice that spot.

Ibn Al-Jawzi
(12th-century Muslim jurist and historian)

Opinion

Europe's growing consensus on Palestinian statehood

ALISTAIR BURT



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The decision this week by Ireland, Norway, and Spain to recognize Palestinian statehood from May 28 came as little surprise in Europe. But while it was only those three governments adding to others that already recognize a Palestinian state, it would be wrong to focus entirely on the timing of these decisions as divisive rather than on the reasons behind them, and the growing consensus on the way forward.

That consensus, almost universal throughout Europe, is that there can be no return to the false status quo before Oct. 7; that only a comprehensive resolution of all issues concerning the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza itself will deliver the peace, security, and justice all Palestinians and Israelis deserve, and for that to happen, self-determination of the Palestinian people is vital, and a two-state process must be preserved.

Contrary to Israeli government statements, the background to this week's recognition of Palestine is not sympathy for Hamas or

terror, but the response of Israel to events. The revulsion of Europe to the horrors of Oct. 7 has been followed by a sense of powerlessness of how to stop the conflict's immense damage and suffering, and return to some track for peace in the region.

The Israeli government's determination to label all Palestinians as terrorists, and thus any Palestinian state as a terror state — a claim repeated in answer to the announcements — has lost sympathy abroad, as has its stated view that any such decisions only aid Hamas. Nothing could be further from the truth: The very fact of recognizing two states implies complete rejection of the Hamas narrative of Israel's destruction. Ireland's leaders went out of their way in their explanation to reemphasize Israel's "right to exist in peace and security," and the importance of the "unconditional release of hostages."

What is apparent in the announcements, however, is the growing sense of the inevitability of wider recognition, seeing it now not as the end of a process

of bilateral negotiation, but as an element within a peace process or a catalyst to restarting it. This is a change from the past narrative, and its most crucial aspect is that it removes an effective veto from those who have no interest in the success of bilateral negotiations.

Norway, not surprisingly remembering Oslo, emphasized the importance of process in its own statements, reinforcing the growing view that recognition is now vital in order to preserve and promote the two-state process. If states truly wish to encourage this, so the argument goes, then it is time to acknowledge fully both the two states involved.

But not all European states followed the lead set this week. The UK, France, and Germany believe that recognition of the state of Palestine is a huge decision, and they want such an act to either prompt something, or be part of a process that is moving forward. So, celebration in Palestine this week is understandable, but not sufficient. The Palestinian Authority

is unable to end the conflict, but it is absolutely essential to demonstrate, and pursue in company with regional and other friends, that it is doing all that it can to be fit and prepared to govern. If so, then that other European states will recognize Palestine becomes increasingly likely.

The UK is keen to cooperate on the issue, particularly with France and Germany, but the announcement of a UK election on July 4 complicates matters. First, no major foreign policy commitment is likely during the campaign, especially one that might bind an incoming government. But, second, should there be, as likely, a change of government to Labour, there will be greater pressure on it to recognize Palestine than on a conservative government.

This week's decisions, and the deliberations of others for the future, suggest there is strong and passionate support for a political and negotiated way out of the current catastrophe — but it will take a greater response from both Israeli and Palestinian leaders to deliver it.

The very fact of recognizing two states implies complete rejection of the Hamas narrative



COURTESY: ANASUD ANSAR/ASHARQ AL-AWSAT

The visit of the Saudi ambassador to Karbala marks an important milestone

Saudi Arabia's message of cooperation to all Iraqis

HASSAN AL-MUSTAFA



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The visit of Saudi Ambassador to Iraq Abdulaziz Al-Shammari to Karbala on May 13 was no ordinary visit. It was considered a significant and historic event. The visit of the Saudi ambassador to the shrine of Hussein bin Ali, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, was the highlight. The shrine is a significant pilgrimage destination for millions of Shiites, including Saudi citizens.

The visit of the Saudi ambassador to a city revered by Shiites marks an important milestone. By visiting the shrine of Imam Hussein and expressing admiration for its beauty, the ambassador sent a strong message of Saudi Arabia's inclusivity toward all Iraqi communities, regardless of their sect or cultural background. This visit demonstrates that the Kingdom remains impartial and does not favor any particular sect.

Iraqi sources expressed their support for the visit, stating that it reflected a shared

desire between Riyadh and Baghdad to enhance cooperation and strengthen official and popular relations. The same sources also indicated that the majority of Iraqis received news of the visit with great joy.

The religious authority in Najaf, which has great influence on millions of Shiite Muslims in Iraq and beyond, also endorsed the visit of Al-Shammari. A reliable source informed me that "the religious authority knew about the visit in advance and gave the green light to the officials at the Al-Husseiniya shrine to arrange the ambassador's arrival and reception in the best way possible." The source added: "The religious authority believes that Iraq should have strong relations with the Kingdom because it is in the interest of both peoples and the entire region."

Al-Shammari's visit to Karbala was part of the Kingdom's religious diplomacy, which aims to foster respectful relationships between moderate parties. The visit also

conveyed Riyadh's appreciation for religious diversity, its endorsement of communication between different groups, and its opposition to any extremist sectarian rhetoric that creates problems among Muslims.

This visit was preceded on April 26 by the Saudi Civil Aviation Authority announcing a plan for direct flights from Dammam in the east of the Kingdom to the Iraqi city of Najaf, where the headquarters of the "Hawza" (a seminary where Shiite Muslim clerics are trained) and the shrine of Caliph Ali bin Abi Taleb are located. Najaf holds a unique position due to its cultural, religious and historical significance.

The intention to operate direct flights via Saudi carriers from Dammam to Najaf comes within the context of strengthening popular relations. It could also boost future trade exchanges. The first direct Saudi flight to Najaf will be on June 1. Most likely, Al-Shammari will be there to welcome it, which means that the ambassador will visit

Najaf. If Al-Shammari were to visit Najaf, it would be a trip to the holiest city in Iraq for Shiite Muslims and would show that he is welcome by the religious authority there. This gesture goes beyond Al-Shammari individually and sends a positive message from the religious authority to the government of Saudi Arabia.

It is also possible that Al-Shammari will meet with Sheikh Ishaq Al-Fayyad in Najaf. Al-Fayyad holds a prominent position among Hawza scholars and is considered the second most influential religious authority in Iraq after Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani.

Of course, the extremists in both sects will not be happy with such meetings. However, they are part of a Saudi strategy, not just a temporary stance. This strategy aims to combat violent sectarian rhetoric and increase cooperation with all Iraqis. Riyadh considers this to be in the interests of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the Gulf.

Opinion

Gantz puts Netanyahu on a three-week notice

YOSSI MEKELBERG

When he called a press conference at the end of the Jewish sabbath last week, Benny Gantz, a member of Israel's war Cabinet and leader of the National Unity Party, raised expectations of a dramatic announcement.

Many anticipated that he and his party had decided to part company with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, as it has become obvious that the supposedly moderating influence of Gantz on the far-right tendencies of the coalition was no longer able to serve such a purpose, if it ever did.

True to his usual, hesitant form, however, Gantz could not find in himself the courage to resign from the government on the spot. Instead, he put Netanyahu on a three-week notice as he issued an ultimatum that included six conditions for their political partnership to continue. If they are not met by June 8, the government will revert to a "pure" far-right version, without the more moderate safety net provided by his party.

There was some rationale for National Unity to join the government in the immediate aftermath of the Oct. 7 attacks by Hamas,

given the need to respond to the outrage. It quickly became apparent that Netanyahu was barely functioning as a leader as he presided over a government that included far-right messianic-fanatic elements with hardly any diplomatic or military experience.

However, it could equally be argued that a decision to remain in opposition, as leader of the opposition Yair Lapid and his Yesh Atid party did, might have been even more effective.

Netanyahu, for his own egotistical reasons, has no interest in ending the war or securing the release of hostages

From that position, support for the government could have been provided when merited but, equally, constructive criticism could have been delivered when required.

Either way, when it became apparent that Netanyahu, for his own egotistical reasons, had no interest in ending the war or securing the release of hostages, and that the killing of innocent civilians in Gaza and the utter devastation inflicted on the tiny territory had become reckless, it was surely time for National Unity to leave the government to avoid becoming complicit in its actions and tainted by its disastrous conduct.

It was actually Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, from Netanyahu's own Likud party, who in a televised address this month confirmed what we have all known for some



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time: that Israel under its current prime minister has no plan for "the day after."

He urged Netanyahu to make "tough decisions" to advance the non-Hamas governance of Gaza, whatever the personal or political cost, because what he described as the "gains" of the war were being eroded, compromising Israel's long-term security.

In a rare demonstration of civil courage, which is a characteristic Netanyahu completely lacks, Gallant made it clear in no uncertain terms that he would not allow the establishment of Israeli military rule in the Gaza Strip because "the end of the military campaign must be a political act." Astonishingly, he then confirmed: "Unfortunately, no such plan has been brought for debate and, worse yet, no alternative has been presented in its place."

In other words, straight from the horse's mouth, more than seven months into the war, the Israeli government still has no plan for the day after.

Gantz, a former chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces, added his voice to this sentiment several days later when he stated the imperative need to establish a vision for ending the war and for the

future of Gaza as one of his conditions for remaining in the government.

Another is that the return of all remaining hostages is secured. Gantz knows full well that the chances of bringing any of them back alive are fading, which is something Netanyahu and the far-right elements in his government seem to be completely indifferent about.

Some of the strategic goals Gantz set out in his ultimatum to Netanyahu are unrealistic, and not even compatible with each other, as long as the current government remains in power. The overthrow of Hamas, for example, even if achievable would require many more months, or even years, of Israeli presence in Gaza.

This is, therefore, incompatible with his other demands for the establishment of a joint US, European, Arab, and Palestinian administration that would manage Gaza's civilian affairs, and the repatriation of residents of northern Israel who were evacuated from their homes.

Netanyahu's response to Gantz was utterly dismissive, which should be a clear indication to his party that its time is up and that its coalition government has passed its sell-by date.

Migration becomes a 'dirty war'

HAFED AL-GHWELL

In an era marked by geopolitical upheaval and humanitarian crises, the surge in migration from the areas around the Sahara to the southern shores of Europe perfectly encapsulates the distressing narratives of our time: struggle, desperation, and exploitation.

The mass movement of people along this migrant corridor, long a subject of international concern, has descended into what might most aptly be described as a "dirty war," given the convergence of conflict, political autocracy, and geopolitical maneuverings inherent to the issue; especially when we consider Russia's recent forays into a restless region abandoned by France, and later this year, those of the US.

The Sahel, a region that lies between the Sudan's savannas to the south and the Sahara to the north, and stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, remains fraught with multifaceted crises resulting from combinations of environmental degradation, extreme poverty, persistent jihadism, intercommunal violence, and decades of instability.

Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso bear the brunt of this, as malign actors continue to exploit local grievances and failures of governance to extend their own spheres of

influence, enhance their operations, and entrench themselves in the region's expansive ungoverned spaces.

Every year, thousands of people die and many more are displaced as a result of violent escalations linked to extremist groups. This persistent human insecurity not only devastates local economies but also uproots communities, compelling vast numbers of people to embark on perilous

journeys in the hope of finding refuge or a better life in Europe.

The exodus from the Sahel is intricately linked to shifting regional dynamics, including the political collapse and ensuing chaos in Libya that began in 2011, which has transformed the country into a key transit point for migrants. The

International Organization for Migration and other agencies consistently report on migrants in their thousands who attempt to traverse perilous routes via Libya, only to end up facing abhorrent human rights abuses. Many perish along the way.

Critics and humanitarian organizations also decry the fact that official data tends to underreport the severity of an unfolding crisis that is not fueled solely by the quest for better economic opportunities. Between untenable situations in their



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home countries and the horrific uncertainties about what lies in store at the end of their journeys, for many of the migrants who have already attempted dangerous journeys, and the many more sure to follow, their actions are a desperate bid simply to survive.

The relocation of European political discourse on the issue to the other side of the Mediterranean, by political leaders such as Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, is a tactical bid potentially futile attempt to manage migration flows at source and transit points.

Such measures are indicative of a broader European retreat from a cohesive policy on migration. This plays into the hands of autocrats and external powers such as Russia, which seem to be a step ahead in their geopolitical calculations.

What Europe should have done, and still could do, is approach migration management from the standpoint of regional collaboration, rather than attempt to compartmentalize engagement. This could help to discourage countries such as Tunisia from pushing migrants toward Libya and Algeria or, as an investigation by the Washington Post discovered was happening, simply abandoning

them in the middle of the desert.

By treating migration as the shared challenge it undoubtedly is, Brussels would then be able to speak and engage with one voice, both within the bloc and with nations in North Africa, to help insulate its coordinated efforts on migration from shifting political winds.

In the run up to the European elections in June, the issue of migration and the

bumbling responses to it have created a rift between the frontline countries that bear the brunt of the influx and countries in the north of the continent that are wary of funding futile interventions.

The dizzying web of political, military, and humanitarian issues that entangle the issue of migration from areas around the Sahara to Europe paints a very grim picture that is likely to get even worse as clandestine, opportunistic actors continue to capitalize on the collapse of state structures and the weakening of security.

Moreover, the decline of European willpower in its efforts to craft decisive policies on migration simply compounds a crisis that is as much about the displaced as it is about the geopolitics on which their fates are dependent.

Europe should approach migration management from the standpoint of regional collaboration

By treating migration as the shared challenge, Brussels would then be able to speak with one voice

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The fund's investment in Mepco reflects the attractive growth opportunities in promising sectors such as recycling, retail, and building materials.

Muhammad Aldawood
PIF's head of the industrials and mining sector



Business

VISION 2030

From tennis to paper, PIF pushes ahead with its diverse investments

Sovereign wealth fund continues to drive forward Kingdom's economic diversification agenda

Nirmal Narayanan Riyadh

Tennis, tech and paper production are just some of the areas Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund has reached into so far in 2024, as the body continues to drive forward the Kingdom's economic diversification agenda.

The sovereign wealth fund has continued with the momentum built up in 2023, which saw it make investments in companies as diverse as London's Heathrow Airport and Rocco Forte Hotels.

Its activities since the turn of the year saw PIF revise its asset size on its website, reaching \$925.2 billion after it climbed to the fifth spot in a ranking of state-owned investment organizations by the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute.

This monumental rise in the fund's standing followed its procurement of an additional 8 percent stake in Aramco, boosting its shareholding's estimated value to \$328 billion.

Here are some of the key announcements made by the wealth fund so far in 2024

PIF's deal with Bahrain Mumtalakat to enhance investments

One of the primary deals signed by PIF in the first quarter was a memorandum of understanding inked with Bahrain's sovereign wealth fund Mumtalakat in March.

The agreement aims to expand cooperation between the two parties, enable new and promising investment prospects in Bahrain, and create opportunities for private companies in both countries.

Yazeed Al-Humied, deputy governor and head of MENA Investments at PIF, said the deal supports the wealth fund's objectives of building long-term strategic regional partnerships that bring additional value to local economies.

"It also enables the achievement of sustainable returns that further contribute to maximizing PIF's assets and diversifying the economy in line with the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030," said Al-Humied.

PIF acquired 40 percent stake in Zamil Offshore

In February, the wealth fund acquired a 40 percent stake in Zamil Offshore Co., a significant move that could boost marine support services in Saudi Arabia.

In a press statement, PIF revealed that this investment is part of the fund's broader strategy to contribute to the development of the



The sovereign wealth fund has continued with the momentum built up in 2023, which saw it make investments in companies as diverse as London's Heathrow Airport and Rocco Forte Hotels. Shutterstock

In February, PIF signed a multi-year strategic agreement with the Association of Tennis Professionals aimed at accelerating the growth of the sport globally. Supplied

Kingdom's energy base.

Zamil Offshore Co. is one of the largest Saudi-based offshore support providers, operating over 90 vessels in the Arabian Gulf.

Bakr Al-Muhanna, head of the Transport and Logistics Sector in Middle East and North Africa Investments at PIF, said that this investment will strengthen the offshore support industry, contributing to the fund's wider efforts to develop Saudi Arabia's energy ecosystem.

PIF's efforts to accelerate growth of global tennis sports

In February, the wealth fund signed a multi-year strategic agreement with the Association of Tennis Professionals aimed at accelerating the growth of the sport globally.

"Through our collaboration with ATP, PIF will be a catalyst for the growth of the global tennis landscape, developing talent,



fostering inclusivity and driving sustainable innovation. This strategic partnership aligns with our broader vision to enhance quality of life and drive transformation in sport both within Saudi and across the world," said Mohamed Al-Sayyad, head of corporate brand at PIF.

Under the deal, PIF will leverage ATP's expertise to develop further opportunities for young Saudis in wtennis, including the

development of state-of-the-art facilities and ensuring the availability of necessary coaching in the Kingdom.

The launch of Alat

Another significant development in February was the launch of Alat, a PIF firm aimed at turning Saudi Arabia into a global hub for sustainable technology manufacturing.

The company will prioritize constructing products



In January, PIF bought a 23.08 percent stake in the Middle East Paper Co. as the fund continued expanding its investments

tailored for local and international markets across seven strategic business units. These include advanced industries and semiconductors, smart appliances and health solutions, as well as smart devices and building technologies.

Alat will also manufacture more than 30 product categories that will serve vital sectors, including robotic and communication systems, advanced computers and digital entertainment, as well as advanced heavy machinery used in construction, building and mining.

Acquisition of Mepco in diversification push

In January, PIF bought a 23.08 percent stake in the Middle East Paper Co. as the fund continued expanding its investments in the Saudi economy's primary sectors.

According to a statement, the body acquired the stakes by increasing capital and

subscribing to new shares in Mepco. Muhammad Aldawood, PIF's head of the industrials and mining sector in the Middle East and North Africa region, said the fund's investment in Mepco reflects the attractive growth opportunities in promising sectors such as recycling, retail, and building materials.

The fund added that PIF's investment in Mepco will support the private sector in Saudi Arabia, boost local content, increase exports as well as improve quality and competitiveness.

Sami Al-Safran, CEO of MEPCO, said that PIF's investment will help the company become a national champion in the recycling industry.

"PIF's investment further enables the implementation of our expansion strategy and captures significant growth potential, both locally and regionally," said Al-Safran.

Completion of the acquisition of Dubai-based Kent

In February, Saudi contractor Nesma & Partners, backed by PIF, completed the acquisition of Kent, based in Dubai, after signing an agreement in 2023.

In a statement, Nesma said that the acquisition aligns with the company's strategic growth strategy and aims to position the firm as a global leader in the construction industry.

"The acquisition of Kent represents a significant milestone for Nesma & Partners, reinforcing our commitment to expanding our capabilities and enhancing our position in the global market," said Samer Abdul Samad, president and CEO of Nesma & Partners.

According to the acquisition details, Kent and Nesma do not plan to integrate operations, and both firms will continue their existing projects.

PIF aims to strengthen electric motorsports sector

In January, the wealth fund signed a multi-year agreement named Electric 360 with Formula E, Extreme E and E1 to support the growth of electric motorsports and their role in advancing the future of electric mobility.

In a press statement, PIF said the partnership will drive technological innovation and revolutionize sustainable transport and future mobility, ultimately reducing carbon emissions.

EXPANSION

Private aviation soars as more businesses take to the skies

Sector set to grow at compounded annual growth rate of 8.88 percent between 2025 and 2029

Dayan Abu Tine Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's business aviation sector is experiencing a surge fueled by the Kingdom's expanding economy, significant government investment on infrastructure, and a growing influx of high-net-worth individuals.

Valued at \$1.2 billion in 2023 according to TechSCI research, this segment is projected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate of 8.88 percent between 2025 and 2029.

It was also highlighted in the General Authority of Civil Aviation's roadmap unveiled at Riyadh's Future Aviation Forum in May. The roadmap aims to support the Kingdom's development as a global high-value business and tourist destination.

Additionally, it targets a tenfold increase in the contribution to gross domestic product by the general aviation sector to \$2 billion by 2030, covering the business jet segment, including charter, private, and corporate planes.

Farid Gharzeddine, captain and CEO of Dubai based private jet company SkyMark Executive, told Arab News: "Saudi Arabia's private aviation and charter business have always been thriving, serving individuals, business executives, government officials, and special missions."

He added: "In 2023, this sector experienced significant growth driven by the Kingdom's Vision 2030 and its efforts to diversify away from oil, particularly through the promotion of sectors such as tourism and entertainment. These initiatives had a substantial impact on the private charter industry, influencing both destinations and clientele."

During this timeframe, he explained that SkyMark Executive, functioning as a private aircraft provider, observed a significant uptick in requests for flights transporting tourists, entertainers, and artists from abroad to emerging destinations such as AlUla, the Red Sea airport, and others.

The Red Sea International Airport, located within three hours' flying time of 250 million people, launched its first international flights earlier this year.

With a capacity to serve 1 million guests annually, according to the group's CEO John Pagano, this milestone marks a significant step towards establishing Saudi Arabia as a premier global tourism destination.

According to a research by Mortor intelligence, the GCC region is highly promising for business aviation, and is also a lucrative market for the private



The Red Sea International Airport, located within three hours' flying time of 250 million people, launched its first international flights earlier this year. Supplied

aviation sector, due to the presence of a large number of high net worth and ultra-high net worth individuals in the region.

The influx of multinational companies establishing regional headquarters in Riyadh, driven by the Kingdom's efforts to increase foreign direct investment, may have boosted demand for private aviation. This stems from the need for efficient, flexible travel options for corporate executives and high-net-worth individuals, fueling growth in private jet and charter services.

Players are investing in technological advancements to enhance aircraft manufacturing, navigation, and maintenance, anticipating growth in demand for new business jet models offering increased cabin space and long-range capabilities.

Manufacturers such as Gulfstream, Bombardier, and Embraer are focusing on luxury, technology, and performance enhancements to appeal to GCC customers, positioning themselves for growth in the forecast period. Evidence of this is Qatar Executive's position as the largest operator in the world for two new models from Gulfstream, G500 and G650ER.

Gharzeddine commented that his company's clients from Saudi Arabia are often one of the most



Saudi Arabia's private aviation and charter business have always been thriving, serving individuals, business executives, government officials, and special missions.

Farid Gharzeddine
Captain and CEO of SkyMark Executive

Manufacturers are focusing on luxury, technology, and performance enhancements to appeal to GCC customers, positioning themselves for growth in the forecast period.



discerning clientele and prioritize state-of-the-art technological advancements when selecting aircraft for their travel needs.

"These clients prioritize excellence in service delivery, emphasizing both technological sophistication and exceptional service standards. They are committed to enhancing their travel experiences to achieve the utmost levels of comfort, safety, and luxury," he added.

Furthermore, this segment can benefit from Saudi Arabia's aviation strategy, which aims to expand connectivity to over 250 destinations by 2030. A key component of this plan is privatization, exemplified by the Kingdom's implementation of the first successful public-private partnership model in the Middle East.

GACA also announced during the Future Aviation Forum its targeted investments in six new specialized general aviation airports in the Kingdom, alongside other initiatives.

"These investments are anticipated to enhance infrastructure and service quality within the private aviation sector, making it more appealing to high-net-worth individuals and corporate clients," Gharzeddine commented.

"Improved facilities and services will likely drive increased demand for private jet charters and ownership,

HIGHLIGHT

\$2bn

The General Authority of Civil Aviation's roadmap targets a tenfold increase in the contribution to gross domestic product by the general aviation sector to \$2 billion by 2030, covering the business jet segment, including charter, private, and corporate planes.

boosting the overall efficiency and capacity of the aviation sector. Additionally, these developments will help position Saudi Arabia as a key hub for private aviation in the Gulf region," he added.

Charter business and sustainability

Leading the change in sustainable aviation growth, Saudi Arabia announced its finalization of a comprehensive plan in November to address environmental sustainability within its civil aviation sector, in line with international commitments such as the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Spearheaded by GACA, the Civil Aviation Environmental Sustainability Plan targets the reduction of greenhouse gas releases, with a zero-emissions goal by 2060.

Saudi Arabia's initiatives extend to hydrogen fuel infrastructure and green projects like the Circular Carbon Economy,

while major developments such as AMAALA and the Red Sea project reflect a commitment to net-zero emissions.

Global business and government leaders consider sustainable aviation fuel a key opportunity for significant reductions in air travel emissions, with numerous initiatives underway to make this energy product a reality.

SAF is derived from renewable hydrocarbon sources and can reduce carbon emissions by 75 percent compared to traditional fossil-based jet fuel. However, the primary challenge is supply and demand, as production needs to increase significantly to meet the set targets by 2030.

According to Gharzeddine, in addition to the limited supply, achieving economies of scale to reduce production costs is also an ongoing issue, as is the high charge of specialized processing required for biofuels.

Maryam Al-Balooshi, the UAE's lead negotiator for aviation climate change, also emphasized the urgent need for Gulf countries to produce SAF to compete in the Western-dominated market and support greener flights, as reported by the National News in February.

An important aspect to consider is how technology and artificial intelligence can play pivotal roles in driving sustainable aviation. Advanced flight planning systems use AI to optimize flight paths, reducing fuel consumption and minimizing carbon emissions.

Business News



In May 2022, SAMA went live with its open banking initiative, transforming the future of financial technology in the Kingdom and the wider region. File

FINTECH

Kingdom's open banking strategy a game-changer

Initiative enables customers to securely share their data with third parties

Nour El-Shaeri Cairo

Saudi Arabia's embracing of open banking has transformed the region's financial ecosystem, according to a top fintech CEO.

In an interview with Arab News, Abdulla Al-Moayed, head of Tarabut, praised the Kingdom's central bank for its inclusive regulatory impact on the financial sector.

In May 2022, the institution, also known as SAMA, went live with its open banking initiative, which has altered the future of financial technology in the Kingdom and the wider region.

Open banking is a technological innovation that enables customers to securely share their data with third parties.

"Open banking changes the very nature of relationships across the financial ecosystem for Saudi Arabia and for the region as a whole. This is only a good thing," said Al-Moayed.

Echoing those sentiments, CEO of US-based fintech Money-Hash Nader Abdelrazik, told Arab News: "Open banking (in Saudi Arabia) will significantly catalyze the relationship between banks and fintech, and it will open up a multitude of business use-cases."

He added: "Banking and finance innovation is highly dependent on access and adoption of open data frameworks. Once these frameworks are in place, not only the existing banks and fintechs will collaborate more, but it will also attract more banks and fintechs to expand to the market and embed their solutions."

Abdelrazik believes this will

increase the economy's digital sophistication and competitiveness, "but the real winner here is the consumer."

In its Open Banking Policy report, SAMA said its initiatives focus on "nurturing the rise of digital technologies and their impact on the new financial services enabled by them, as well as building the regulatory framework needed to adopt these initiatives."

The release further stated: "This opens the door to create and offer new financial services. Therefore, SAMA sees open banking as a pivotal role in the further development of the Kingdom's financial sector."

Al-Moayed explained that SAMA's efforts to standardize application programming interfaces or APIs, are enhancing the country's monetary platforms, which aim to broaden financial inclusion by facilitating secure, seamless, and affordable access to services and advice.

APIs allow different software applications to communicate with each other, facilitating the integration and sharing of data and functions.

"Standardized APIs enable interoperability between providers, leading to a more cohesive financial ecosystem," Al-Moayed said.

"This allows for the

development of innovative financial services and products that can cater to a wider range of customer needs. By opening access to financial data, these APIs are fostering an environment of innovation, allowing fintech startups to focus on end-user problems; away from the worries of connectivity and access to data," he added.

Being one of the region's leading providers of APIs, Tarabut has set a prime example for others to follow.

"Our mission is to enable the connections necessary to expand financial inclusion for everyone, by building the infrastructure that enables secure, seamless, and inexpensive financial services and advice. As with all financial and personal data, we should be clear that trust, security, and safety are a non-negotiable part of the process," Al-Moayed stated.

Regarding security, the CEO highlighted: "At Tarabut, we take a series of continuous steps to ensure security, such as ensuring that all transactions and data access requests are authenticated using multiple factors to enhance security, as well as the requirements to also employ state-of-the-art encryption standards to protect data during transmission and storage."

He further explained: "Data access controls, such as implementing strict controls on who can access specific data and for what purpose, ensure that customer data is not misused."

Al-Moayed added: "There

are also continuous and regular compliance checks and audits to ensure that all participants in the open banking ecosystem adhere to the highest security standards and regulatory requirements."

He also underscored the collaborative effort with SAMA during the regulatory sandbox period, which showcased the potential of open banking to transform financial accessibility.

Fostering symbiotic relationships

"Looking at Saudi Arabia, we see a nationwide ambition to promote a symbiotic relationship between banks and fintechs, by enabling data sharing and the adoption of innovative technology solutions," Al-Moayed said.

"Banks provide fintech companies with access to valuable financial data with customer consent, and the fintechs and the banks can work together to create more personalized and innovative financial products," he added.

Al-Moayed explained that banks looking to partner with a fintech company could lead to new revenue streams and open up customer segments, enhancing their market reach and product offerings — as well as ensuring adaptability and innovation for the young, digitally-native population of the Kingdom.

"Together, banks and fintech can reach underserved segments of the population, as well as those who could benefit from improved awareness and access to different services, providing each with the many benefits and impacts that are inaccessible by traditional means," he said.

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Major surprise

US SEC approves applications to list ether ETFs

The US Securities and Exchange Commission on Thursday approved applications from Nasdaq, CBOE and NYSE to list exchange-traded funds tied to the price of ether.

While the ETF issuers also have to get the green light before the products can launch, the approval is a major surprise for the cryptocurrency industry.

Nine issuers including VanEck, ARK Investments/21Shares and BlackRock, hope to launch ETFs after the SEC in January approved bitcoin ETFs in a watershed moment for the industry. **Reuters**

United front

EU G7 ministers warn over China trade war risks

European finance ministers from the Group of Seven wealthy democracies called on Friday for the G7 to stay united in the face of China's "unfair" industrial policies.

On the first day of a meeting of G7 finance chiefs in the northern Italian town of Stresa, ministers from Germany, France and hosts Italy all called for a common front against China's growing export strength.

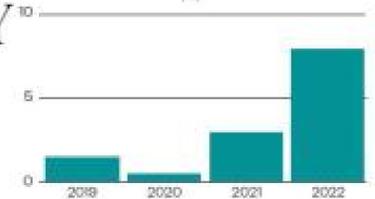
French Finance Minister Le Maire said it was important to avoid a trade war with Beijing, but the G7 needed to protect its industrial interests. **Reuters**

Chart of THE DAY

In 2022, Germany's inflation rate was nearly at 8%. This was the highest figure since 1992.

Source: Statista

INFLATION RATE IN GERMANY (%)



What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

New Cold Wars

DAVID E. SANGER

David E. Sanger's "New Cold Wars" is a compelling account of America's plunge into simultaneous Cold Wars against two very different adversaries — Xi Jinping's China and Vladimir Putin's Russia — based on

reporting from inside the White House, US intelligence agencies, technology firms, and foreign governments.

The book chronicles America's return to superpower conflict and what is at stake for it and the world.



Energy networks

UK's National Grid plans \$9bn rights issue

Britain's National Grid plans to raise about 7 billion pounds (\$8.9 billion) through a fully underwritten rights issue of 1.09 billion new shares as it gears up to invest 60 billion pounds in energy network infrastructure.

The rights issue is at 645 pence per share on the basis of seven new shares for every 24 existing shares representing a discount of about 42 percent to Wednesday's closing price.

The London-based company also said it intends to sell its GrainLNG terminal and its US onshore renewables business as the group shifts its focus to networks business. **Reuters**

Cobalt mining

Moroccan miner revenues fall in Q1

Managem, Morocco's largest mining company, reported on Friday a 13 percent drop in revenue to 1.935 billion dirhams (\$194 million) in the first three months of this year, citing lower cobalt output.

Production at its Bou Azzer cobalt mine in the Atlas mountains has been reduced "to preserve resources," amid low prices in the international market, the company said in a statement.

The Bou Azzer mine supplies German automaker BMW with cobalt, widely used in electric car batteries. The company also plans to supply Renault in 2025. **Reuters**

Open banking changes the very nature of relationships across the financial ecosystem for Saudi Arabia and for the region as a whole.

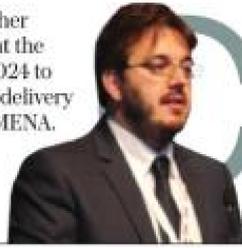
Abdulla Al-Moayed
Head of Tarabut



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We are excited to bring together construction industry leaders at the MENA Construction Summit 2024 to change the way we look at project delivery of construction projects across MENA.

Ed James
Head of Content and Research
MEA at MEED – GlobalData.



PRESS RELEASES FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

5th MENA Construction Summit spotlights sustainable project delivery

The fifth MENA Construction Summit 2024, the region's premier event bringing together key construction industry stakeholders, was held last week at Hilton Riyadh Hotel and Residences. The summit, organized by MEED and Enso Events Solutions, focused on the effective delivery of key regional construction projects on time, in budget and with elevated standards of sustainability and efficiency. Riyadh Region Municipality was the diamond partner for the MENA Construction Summit 2024.

Inspired by ambitious national visions, construction spending is surging across the MENA region, driven by huge master plan developments and Saudi Arabia's giga-projects program. The convergence of a number of factors, however, including the need for intricate supply chain management, urgency due to time-sensitive roadmaps, simultaneous execution of multiple projects and funding complexities, has forced a rethink of the traditional approach to project delivery.

Under the theme "Reimagining Project Delivery," more than 600 attendees from over 150 companies gained actionable insights into the latest trends, research, innovations, opportunities, and challenges driving improvements in productivity, quality, reliability, cost-savings, waste reduction, and energy efficiency — and how these methods can



The summit focussed on the effective delivery of key regional construction projects on time, in budget and with elevated standards of sustainability and efficiency.

be employed in ground-breaking projects across the region.

In the opening keynote fireside chat, Fahad Al-Solaie, deputy mayor for digital transformation and smart cities, Riyadh Municipality, was interviewed by Dr. Abdulrahman Albawardi, assistant professor at King Saud University, in the session titled "The Transformation of Riyadh City under Saudi Vision 2030." Al-Solaie discussed innovative and sustainable urban planning strategies for the Riyadh Municipality, in line with the

NUMBER

600

decision-makers from over 150 companies explored approaches to successful construction project delivery in the region at the summit.

giga- and mega-projects, and the goals of Saudi Vision 2030.

Al-Solaie said: "To support the city development, the municipality is planning to enable aerial management of construction projects using drones with AI capabilities, which will enhance project delivery efficiency and assist in monitoring the project staff safety on the project site."

Later in the morning, the keynote leaders panel session provided a deep dive on the opportunities and complexities

of smart city development, and the need for a holistic approach that addresses social, economic and environmental sustainability. Panelists included Hani Rizkallah, president — KSA infrastructure at Bechtel; Dr. Hossam Abdel Gawad, vice president of technology and innovation at SETS; Dr. Mohammed Al-Surf, founder and president of Sustainability Professionals of Saudi Arabia; and Sherief Elabd, director — industry and innovation strategy at Oracle.

GREEN MOBILITY

Jeeny to swap 50% cars for EVs by 2028

Rashid Hassan Riyadh

Saudi ride-hailing app Jeeny plans to swap all its cars for electric vehicles by 2030. Speaking at a media gathering in Riyadh, Hammad Ehtesham, Jeeny's CEO, said: "At Jeeny, we are dedicated to sustainability: we will swap 50 percent of cars for electric vehicles by 2028 and aim for full electrification by 2030, supporting the government's green initiatives and investing in the necessary infrastructure."

Speaking to Arab News about the company's contribution to Saudi Vision 2030, Ehtesham said: "Jeeny's vision for the Kingdom is clear, we aim to integrate various mobility options within a single app, support the Saudi government and relevant authorities in achieving the objectives of Vision 2030, and reduce the carbon footprint of Jeeny and the overall transportation industry."

"We aim to deliver unparalleled service quality across the Kingdom, ensure transportation is accessible and affordable for everyone, minimize cancellations and enhance car availability to provide the best transportation services in the region, and collaborate with regulatory authorities," he added.

When asked if replacing regular cars with electric vehicles will cost extra to the riders, Ehtesham said: "In fact, it will be more profitable for the drivers, the prices will be unchanged for the riders, and it will help reduce the carbon footprint. I can say this from our experience in other countries."

The CEO said that to meet the diverse needs of passengers in the Kingdom, Jeeny has introduced three distinct ride-hailing services: Ecolite — offering a quick and affordable ride, Smart — a reliable and convenient ride, and Elite — offering luxury and comfort.

Bentley Saudi Arabia has unveiled the third coachbuilt Bentley of the modern era — the Batur Convertible. Created by Mulliner, Bentley's in-house bespoke division and the longest standing coachbuilder in the world, the Batur Convertible follows the exquisitely hand-crafted Bacalar barchetta and Batur coupe. With the Batur Convertible, Mulliner continues its long tradition of crafting truly individual cars, tailored to the wishes of each of its clients.

The Batur Convertible furthers the innovative design DNA introduced by its coupe sibling that will ultimately guide the design of Bentley's future cars. The Batur Convertible retains the most powerful version of Bentley's iconic W12, with a 750 PS and a hand-assembled 6-liter twin-turbocharged engine that has metaphorically and literally powered Bentley's success for the last two decades.

LUXURY AUTOMOBILE

Bentley Saudi Arabia unveils Batur Convertible



The Batur Convertible retains the most powerful version of Bentley's iconic W12.

With the engine to finish production this summer, the Batur Convertible will be one of the last ever Bentleys to use this incredible powertrain.

Bentley has a rich history of open-cockpit cars, from the very first Bentley of 1919, through the company's foundation years in the 1920s, to the most recent — the Bacalar. The architecture of the Batur Convertible has allowed Mulliner's designers to seize the opportunity to create a theme that not only blends the design of the

Bacalar and Batur but includes the usability of a convertible. The designers also chose to highlight the two-seater character with a "wraparound" cockpit inspired by the design of the Bacalar.

Bentley Saudi Arabia's customers will be able to specify the color and finish of practically every surface of the Batur Convertible, to create a car as individual as they are. Beyond the exterior form of the car lies an almost endless array of choices for each car's future owner to make.

Corporate Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Seasonal Campaign Volkswagen welcomes spring in style

As spring unfolds, Volkswagen Saudi Arabia has announced the launch of its spring campaign, featuring a carefully selected array of vehicles designed to meet the diverse driving demands of the season. This campaign introduces models such as the new Teramont and Amarok, each perfectly suited for the scenic drives and outdoor activities that spring invites.

The new Teramont offers spacious comfort and robust performance, making it ideal for family adventures. The redesigned Amarok provides an adventurous experience and enhanced capabilities for both on-road and off-road travels, while both models remain a stylish and compact choice that blends agility with urban appeal.

Islamic Finance

Ajman Bank wins award for digital banking

Ajman Bank has been declared winner of the coveted Islamic Digital Banking Provider of the Year Award at the MEA Finance Banking Technology Summit & Awards 2024.

The awards ceremony took place at the Ritz Carlton DIFC in Dubai and was attended by more than 300 senior executives and guests from across the region's banking and financial technology sectors.

Mustafa Al-Khalfawi, CEO of Ajman Bank, said: "We are proud to receive the Islamic Digital Banking Provider of the Year award."

Digital Innovation

IDC Kuwait CIO Summit 2024 held

More than 250 of Kuwait's foremost IT and telecom leaders, digital government pioneers, regulators, and industry luminaries gathered at the Courtyard by Marriott this week for the IDC Kuwait CIO Summit 2024. Addressing the theme "The Future of IT: Rethinking Digitization for an AI Everywhere World," this pivotal event explored the profound impact of AI on digital innovation and the evolving role of the modern CIO.

Supported by Kuwait's Central Agency for Information Technology, the summit brought together a distinguished lineup of speakers and thought leaders at the forefront of digital transformation.



SAUDI PRO LEAGUE

Al-Hilal's Mitrovic, Neves praise new Saudi lifestyles

Arab News London

Football stars Aleksandar Mitrovic and Ruben Neves have praised their moves to the Saudi Pro League, speaking highly of their new lives in the Kingdom.

In an interview with Sky News, the two Al-Hilal players — who left Fulham and Wolves, respectively — discussed the lifestyle differences between England and Saudi Arabia.

Last year, more than 23 European players moved to the Kingdom's top football league in a major coup for Saudi sporting administrators.

"After seven years in England I think the first thing was the sun. I never had summer sun in my life," Mitrovic said.

"It's been different you know, different culture, different football, the mentality of people as well, but so far I'm really happy.

"My family is happy. The club is

amazing. So far, it's a great experience and looking forward to more years."

The Serbian international praised the privacy and laid-back way of life in Riyadh. "The people here are crazy about football but you have a bit more privacy here. We live on a compound, we're a little bit more isolated, and people from Europe and around the world live there you know, the life is really nice," he said. "You wake up, have breakfast,

a little workout, then recovery in the pool in the sun."

One difference from the European training standard is that clubs in the Kingdom train in the evening, avoiding the midday heat.

Neves told Sky News that Al-Hilal's regime gives him more time to spend with his family. "It's a bit different to the routine from Europe here because of the weather, of course," he said.

"We train most of the time after

6 p.m. I like it because I can spend the day at home relaxing. I can take the kids to school, I can pick them up from school, and I can be a little bit with them before I come to training. We have a lot of things to do here because it's a big, massive city, so we are enjoying it."

Though both players said the Premier League is the world's best, they believe that the SPL is not far behind — and is on par with some European leagues.



Manchester United will also qualify for the Europa League, avoiding a first season without European action since 2014-15. They benefitted from an unusually tepid City performance. AP

'FANTASTIC SEASON'

Man Utd stun rivals City to win FA Cup final

Goals from Garnacho and Mainoo put Red Devils on course to win the cup for first time in 8 years

AFP London

Erik ten Hag made a convincing case to be spared the sack as Manchester United upset Manchester City to take the FA Cup with a shock 2-1 victory in Saturday's final.

Ten Hag was reportedly set to be dismissed regardless of the result at Wembley after a troubled campaign that even the United manager described as "terrible" this week. But United's hierarchy might be having second thoughts after Ten Hag's tactical masterclass ruined City's history bid.

City were hot favorites to win a second successive Premier League and FA Cup double.

Yet Ten Hag found a way to neutralize Pep Guardiola's side as first half goals from Alejandro

Garnacho and Kobbie Mainoo put United on course to win the FA Cup for the first time in eight years.

Jeremy Doku squeezed an 87th minute strike past Andre Onana's weak attempted save but it was too late to rescue City.

Having ended a turbulent season on a high note, if Ten Hag's two-year reign does end, his exit would provoke memories of fellow Dutchman Louis van Gaal's Old Trafford departure.

Van Gaal was fired just two days after United's FA Cup final victory against Crystal Palace in 2016.

Ten Hag will hope a more apt comparison is Alex Ferguson's 1990 FA Cup final win against Palace, which kick-started his remarkable run after calls for his sacking earlier that season.

Ferguson was in attendance as a match labelled Ten Hag's funeral turned into a triumph for the

HIGHLIGHTS

• Ten Hag was reportedly set to be dismissed regardless of the result at Wembley after a troubled campaign.

• But United's hierarchy might be having second thoughts after Ten Hag's tactical masterclass ruined City's history bid.

• United will also qualify for the Europa League, avoiding a first season without European action since 2014-15.

much-maligned Dutchman.

United shareholder Jim Ratcliffe, who has control of football operations at Old Trafford, was also watching from the stands alongside co-owners Joel and Avie Glazer.

Linked with Thomas Tuchel,

Mauricio Pochettino and Gareth Southgate, among others, there is still plenty for Ratcliffe to ponder after United finished eighth in the Premier League this season — their lowest final position since 1990 — and crashed out of the Champions League in the group stage.

Ten Hag believes a lengthy injury list was the root of the problems and can point to the two trophies he has won in three cup final appearances with United as proof of what he can do when his team are at full strength.

Ten Hag ended United's six-year trophy drought by winning the League Cup last year and has now avenged their 2-1 loss to City in the FA Cup final 12 months ago despite finishing 31 points behind the champions this term.

United will also qualify for the Europa League, avoiding a first season without European action

since 2014-15.

They benefitted from an unusually tepid City performance as their double bid fell flat in their first domestic defeat since losing at Aston Villa in the league 171 days ago.

Last weekend, City became the first team to win the Premier League in four consecutive seasons.

But Guardiola's men looked hungover after the celebrations that followed their sixth title in seven years.

City were furious when their strong penalty appeal was rejected inside the first minute after Lisandro Martinez's shove sent Erling Haaland sprawling.

Content to sit deep with all 11 men behind the ball, United stifled City impressively and gleefully accepted their gift-wrapped opener in the 30th minute.

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

French Open

Nadal not 'closing door' on extending career

Rafael Nadal said on Saturday that he is likely appearing at the French Open for the final time but cautioned it was "not 100 percent" certain, describing the tournament where he has been champion 14 times as a "magical place." "It's a big, big chance that this is going to be my last Roland Garros, sorry, but I will not, because I cannot predict what's going on. I hope you understand," said the Spaniard.

Nadal, who will celebrate his 38th birthday on June 3, faces world No. 4 Alexander Zverev in the first round in Paris on Monday. **AFP**

Motorsports

Alex Espargaro wins Catalunya MotoGP sprint

Spanish rider Alex Espargaro, who announced he was retiring at the end of the season earlier in the week, won the Catalunya MotoGP sprint race on Saturday.

The 34-year-old Aprilia rider — who hails from Catalonia — benefitted from a final-lap crash by two-time defending world champion Francesco Bagnaia. **AFP**



NBA

Mavericks edge T'Wolves for series lead

Luka Dončić drained the go-ahead three-pointer with 3.8 seconds remaining to lift Dallas to a 109-108 victory over Minnesota in another NBA Western Conference finals thriller.

Dončić delivered a triple-double of 32 points, 10 rebounds and 13 assists, and the Mavericks — who trailed by 18 in the second quarter — handed the Timberwolves a second straight home defeat to take a 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven series.

Kyrie Irving got off to a slow start and was hindered by foul trouble, but he scored 13 of his 20 points in the frantic fourth quarter, which featured 11 lead changes. **AFP**

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Congratulations are in order for Sofia Richie and her husband Elliot Grainge, who welcomed their first child, a baby girl named Eloise Samantha Grainge, this week.



Finally

The Six

Soap picks

From luxury botanical products to organic blends, here are several soap brands available in the Kingdom.



Aesop

Aesop this week opened its first Saudi boutique in Riyadh. The brand's premium soaps feature botanical extracts and essential oils.



Teeb Made

This Saudi brand offers a set of soaps featuring six varieties: oud, camel milk, moringa, coffee, date, and olive oil-infused.



Mayassem

Saudi founder Mayssam Tamim produces handmade soaps from Kingdom-sourced natural ingredients, like extra virgin olive oil from Al-Jouf and camel milk from Janadriyah.



L'Arab Boutique

The UK-based, Saudi-founded brand presents a charcoal and black seed soap formulated to deeply cleanse pores, removing impurities and promoting the skin's radiance.



Nunu

Well known for its baby products, this brand offers gentle, hypoallergenic soaps enriched with natural extracts, providing moisturizing care for infants.



MZN Bodycare

Founded by Saudi entrepreneur Muzon Ashgar, MZN Bodycare crafts natural and organic soaps enriched with ingredients such as aloe vera, pink clay, charcoal, tea tree, and an array of other botanical extracts.

CLOSE UP

Saudi film 'Norah' receives accolade at Cannes



The cast and crew, accompanied by director Tawfik Al-Zaidi, stepped onto the stage to accept the accolade. AN photo by Ammar Abd Rabbo

Arab News Dubai

Saudi film "Norah," starring actress Maria Bahrawi, this week received the Special Mention accolade, which recognizes films for outstanding achievements, at the 77th Cannes Film Festival's Un Certain Regard awards.

The cast and crew, accompanied by director Tawfik Al-Zaidi, stepped onto the stage to accept the accolade in front of a full house.

The film, shot entirely in AlUla, is set in 1990s Saudi Arabia when conservatism ruled and the professional pursuit of all art, including painting, was frowned upon. Besides Bahrawi, the movie also stars Yaqoub Al-Farhan and Abdullah Al-Satian. It follows the story of Norah and failed artist Nader as they encourage each other to realize their artistic potential in rural Saudi Arabia.

"Norah" had its official screening at the festival on Thursday, becoming the first film from the Kingdom to screen as part of the official calendar at the event.

The movie was backed by the Red Sea Fund — one of the Red Sea Film Foundation's programs — and was filmed entirely in AlUla in northwest Saudi Arabia with an all-Saudi cast and a 40-

percent Saudi crew.

Un Certain Regard's mission is to highlight new trends in cinema and encourage innovative cinematic works.

Chaired by Canadian actor, director, screenwriter and producer Xavier Dolan, the jury included French Senegalese screenwriter and director Maimouna Doucoure, Moroccan director, screenwriter and producer Asmae El Moudir, German-Luxembourg actress Vicky Krieps, and American film critic, director and writer Todd McCarthy.

Chinese director Guan Hu's "Black Dog" won the top prize in the Un Certain Regard section.

Marking Guan's debut at Cannes, the film follows a former convict who forms an unexpected bond with the titular animal while clearing stray dogs in his remote hometown on the edge of the Gobi Desert.

The jury prize was awarded to "The Story of Souleymane," directed by Boris Lojkine, marking his return to the festival after a decade since his 2014 feature "Hope."

The film portrays the journey of a Guinean food delivery man who must create a compelling narrative for his asylum application interview in Lyon within a two-day timeframe.

Maria Bahrawi stars as Norah in the film. Getty Images



BIG WIN

Bruce Springsteen, Lana Del Rey honored at Ivor awards

Reuters London

Bruce Springsteen, Lana Del Rey and Raye were among the music stars honored at the Ivors in London this week, the annual awards for songwriters and screen composers.

US rocker Springsteen became the first international songwriter to receive an Ivors Academy Fellowship, the highest honor bestowed by the UK-based association.

Springsteen was recognized for "his outstanding contribution to the craft of songwriting and impact on the UK's cultural landscape."

Del Rey received the special international award in recognition of her career and influence, while Raye was named songwriter of the year.

COURT CASE

Judge denies Baldwin's request to drop 'Rust' shooting indictment

Reuters Los Angeles

A New Mexico judge this week rejected Alec Baldwin's bid to dismiss an involuntary manslaughter charge for the 2021 shooting of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins, opening the way for an unprecedented trial of a Hollywood actor for an on-set death. Baldwin's lawyers argued at a May 17 hearing that a grand jury indictment of the actor was "a sham" as a New Mexico state prosecutor failed to tell jurors they could question defense witnesses and stopped them hearing evidence helpful to the actor's case.

District court Judge Mary Marlowe Sommer, in a court filing, denied the request.

INTERVIEW

Will Smith and Martin Lawrence talk 'Bad Boys' in Riyadh

Nada Al-Turki Riyadh

Ahead of the release of "Bad Boys: Ride or Die" in Saudi cinemas on June 6, Hollywood stars Will Smith and Martin Lawrence sat down with Arab News to discuss how the characters in the fourth installment of the film franchise have evolved over the years and their experience working with Moroccan Belgian director duo Bilal Fallah and Adil El-Arbi.

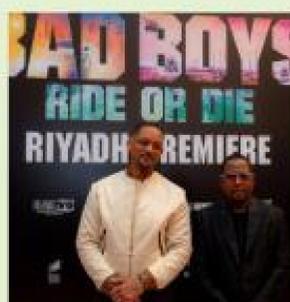
The film premiered on Friday night at VOX Cinema in Roshn

Front, Riyadh. The movie arrives 30 years after Mike Lowrey and Marcus Burnett, played by Smith and Lawrence, respectively, teamed up as the infamous buddy cops. The latest film shows how the characters have changed over the years.

"Their backs have gotten weaker, and their knees hurt more," Smith said jokingly.

"Part of what we wanted to do with the franchise is to have the characters grow in an age-appropriate way," he said.

"We are trusting that the



Will Smith and Martin Lawrence attended the film premiere in Riyadh. AN/ Abdulrhman Bin Shalhuob

audience wants to grow with us, wants to go with us, and wants to follow the natural progression of life and what these characters would be going through."

The film continues to mix action, drama and comedy, but also allows the characters to grow and develop.

"The core of the movie is about friendship, love, and family," Smith said.

"And would you ride or die for your partner?" Lawrence added. The film builds on the success

of the third installment, "Bad Boys For Life," released in 2020, with the directors reportedly inspired by video games.

Lawrence said the "top notch" directors were great to work with, and inspired the actors to "come up with magic."

Smith added: "It's interesting working with non-American directors; there's such a different perspective... You know, they were (young) when the first movie came out, so there's such a reverence for the original films."