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ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

SINCE 1975

**FAST
FACT**

The target of Saturday's airstrike, Mohammed Deif, has survived seven Israeli assassination attempts, the most recent in 2021 and has topped Israel's most wanted list for decades.



People carry a body at the site of an Israeli strike at a tent camp in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, on Saturday. Reuters

DEFIANT MILITIA
Houthis target vessel twice with missiles, drones

Saeed Al-Batati Al-Mukalla

Yemen's Houthi militia targeted "vessel Charysalis" twice in both the Red Sea and the Bab Al-Mandab Strait with a number of ballistic and naval missiles and drones for breaching the group's prohibition on sailing to Israel, said the group's military spokesman Yahya Saree.

The militia has staged attacks on ships in the waters off the country for months in solidarity with Palestinians fighting Israel in Gaza.

US Central Command said that its forces had destroyed three uncrewed aerial vehicles in a Houthi-controlled part of Yemen.

Meanwhile, the militia on Saturday rejected a demand by UN Yemen envoy Hans Grundberg to hold discussions with the Yemeni government to resolve knotty economic problems, especially the government's punitive actions against Sanaa banks.

"We believe a dialogue, in good faith and without preconditions, is the best possible way to address several important economic issues, including the banking sector issue, and come to solutions that prioritize the interests of the Yemeni people," Mayy El-Sheikh, director of strategic communications and public information at Grundberg's office, told Arab News.

The Houthis have prevented the circulation of banknotes printed by the Yemeni government, attacked oil terminals, banned cooking gas imports, and prohibited traders in areas they control from importing goods through government ports, all in an effort to drive the Yemeni government into bankruptcy.

MIDDLE EAST WAR

90 slain in Israel's Gaza carnage

• Kingdom condemns 'genocidal massacres' • Netanyahu unsure if airstrike killed Hamas leader

Arab News Jeddah

An Israeli airstrike killed at least 90 Palestinians in a designated humanitarian zone in Gaza on Saturday, in an attack that Israel said targeted Hamas military chief Mohammed Deif.

The Saudi Foreign Ministry expressed the Kingdom's condemnation and denunciation in the strongest terms of the "continued genocidal massacres against the Palestinian people at the hands

of the Israeli war machine." Saudi Arabia renewed its call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire and the provision of protection to unarmed civilians in all occupied Palestinian territories.

The ministry also stressed the need to activate international accountability mechanisms regarding the continued Israeli violations of international humanitarian law and resolutions.

The Muslim World League also denounced the "heinous crime" and the Israeli occupation's "continued flagrant violations of

NUMBER

38,443

Palestinians have been killed in Israel's Gaza onslaught.

all international and humanitarian laws and norms."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said it was still not clear whether Deif and his deputy were killed in the strike. "Either way, we will get to the whole of the

leadership of Hamas," he said.

Hamas said that Israeli claims were false and aimed at justifying the attack, which was the deadliest Israeli attack in Gaza in weeks.

Displaced people sheltering in the area said their tents were torn down by the force of the strike, describing bodies and body parts strewn on the ground.

"I couldn't even tell where I was or what was happening," said Sheikh Youssef, a resident of Gaza City who is currently displaced in the Al-Mawasi area.

"I left the tent and looked

around; all the tents were knocked down, body parts, bodies everywhere, elderly women thrown on the floor, young children in pieces," he said.

The Israeli military said the strike against Deif also targeted Rafa Salama, the commander of Hamas' Khan Younis Brigade, describing them as two of the masterminds of the Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel that triggered the nine-month war in Gaza.

Related reports Pages 6 & 7

The Brief

BAHA TOURISM

With vast greenery, dense forest and mild climate, Raghadan Park is among Baha's most popular tourist destinations. **P5**

RICE FOR WASTE

Philippine green activists swap a bag of rice for every sack of waste collected by residents cleaning up the shores. **P8**

CREDIT FACILITIES

Credit facilities provided to micro, small, and medium enterprises in Saudi Arabia saw an annual rise of 16% in the first quarter of 2024. **P12**

STEADY GROWTH

KSA's edutech field opens up investment opportunities

Industry likely to massively boost economy, especially after education sector's privatization: expert

Nour El-Shaeri Riyadh

Saudi Arabia is making significant strides in education technology, with substantial investments aimed at transforming and enhancing the sector.

The Kingdom is actively promoting initiatives in this field, also known as edutech, recognizing their potential to revolutionize the schooling system.

According to industry experts, the Kingdom's edutech landscape offers numerous opportunities



The edutech sector is now one of the top five most-funded fields in the Kingdom, venture data platform MAGNITT has revealed. Supplied

for both local and foreign investors.

Salem Ghanem, CEO of Saudi-based edutech startup Faheem, told Arab News: "The edutech industry is likely to make a

significant contribution to the Saudi economy, especially after the privatization of the education sector following the Kingdom's Vision 2030."

He added: "The impact will

be apparent in the created job opportunities and the decreasing unemployment rates, taking into consideration that the tutoring market could create an estimated 45,000 to 60,000 job opportunities."

Mohamed Zohair, CEO and founder of Saudi-based YaSchools, told Arab News: "The Saudi market, in general, is an excellent market, and the current period is more mature than before, especially with the unprecedented support in

digital transformation, financial services, and accompanying legislation and regulations."

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We are excited to partner with the International Olympic Committee and plan together the first-ever Olympic Esports Games. A bright new era begins.
Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki
 Saudi sports minister



Radars

KSA today



Riyadh Nofa Park

Book a tour 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.



Al-Kharj Game on

Masks on, shields up, guns loaded, everyone at their positions on the paintball field of Al-Kharj. Doors open on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday for men, and on Sunday, Tuesday and Friday for women only. Details on the Hala Yalla app.



Riyadh Learn chess

Learn the basics of playing the game of chess and its history in a fun workshop on Sundays. Book through experiences.suplift.com.



Jeddah Time for padel

Sports enthusiasts are invited to try a game of padel. A racket sport of Mexican origin, it is typically played in pairs on an enclosed court. Further details can be found on experiences.suplift.com.

The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Saudi Deputy Minister for Political Affairs Dr. Saud Al-Sati recently met Turkiye's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Nut Yilmaz at the Turkish ministry's headquarters in

Ankara on Friday. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations between the two countries, regional and international developments, and issues of

common interest, the Saudi Foreign Ministry reported on X early on Saturday. Saudi Ambassador to Turkiye Fahad Abualnassr was among the officials present.

Today's Number

62.5k

Saudi aid agency Ksrelief distributed 25,000 packages of bread per day to Syrian and Palestinian families and host communities in northern Lebanon over the last week, benefiting 62,500 people, Saudi Press Agency reported.

Who's Who



Ahmad Alshubbar

Ahmad Alshubbar is the chief financial officer of Rawabi Holding Group, a diversified conglomerate headquartered in Alkhobar.

He is a member of the Rawabi Holding Board Investment Committee; the executive committee of Rawabi Electric; and the board of Rawabi Energy Co., Human Resources Business Support Co., and Equatoriale Energy in Singapore.

Alshubbar provides financial insight to the leadership of the group's core operating entities. He works with the C-suite in developing the future equity capital market and debt capital market transactions.

Alshubbar's journey in Rawabi Holding Group began in 2019 as the vice president of treasury and strategy. In this role, he contributed to the organic and inorganic growth initiatives, and deployed global best practices in corporate finance.

In 2017, he worked as Gulf International Bank Capital's vice president of debt capital markets offering debt origination, structuring, and distribution expertise.

He previously worked in Banque Saudi Fransi's corporate banking division as senior executive manager, serving high-tier corporate clients in the Eastern Province.

What's Trending Today's hot topics explained by Ameera Abid



MUSICAL TRIBUTE Harry Styles

English singer and actor Harry Styles joined US singer-songwriter Stevie Nicks at Hyde Park Concert to honor Nicks' former Fleetwood Mac bandmate Christine McVie on Friday.

Nicks surprised her audience by bringing Styles up on stage to perform a tribute to McVie, who passed away in 2022. McVie would have turned 81 this year.

Nicks and Styles sang "Dragging My Heart Around" and "Landslide." "At the end of (my shows), since the end of last year and since Christine passed away, I would say something about her," Nicks said to the audience. "I asked Harry to do this and it's always heavy to ask somebody to come and sing a song with you that you're singing about your best friend who died so suddenly."

CASE DISMISSED Alec Baldwin

A New Mexico judge has dismissed the charge of involuntary manslaughter against American actor Alec Baldwin after a shooting on the set of the film "Rust" that killed cinematographer Halyna Hutchins in 2021.

Baldwin was unknowingly using a revolver in rehearsals that was loaded with live rounds. According to Reuters, Baldwin was facing "unprecedented" criminal prosecution for an on-set shooting and his lawyers said prosecutors dragged him through a "cesspool of improprieties."

"The state's withholding of the evidence was wilful and deliberate," Judge Mary Marlowe Sommer said in delivering her decision. "There is no way for the court to right this wrong."

Breaking down in tears, the Emmy-award winning actor hugged his wife Hilaria as other family members wept

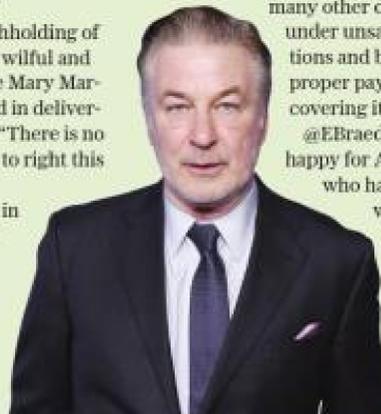
in the public gallery.

The actor's lawyer, Alex Spiro, told the court that the Santa Fe sheriff's office took possession of live rounds in March as evidence in the case but failed to list them in the "Rust" investigation file or disclose their existence to defense lawyers.

Baldwin left the court without speaking to the media.

@adamconover said, "What makes me angriest about the conditions on the 'Rust' set is that someone had to die for them to even become public. How many other crews are working under unsafe, negligent conditions and being cheated out of proper pay, but the press isn't covering it?"

@EBraeden posted, "I am very happy for Alec Baldwin. Anyone who has ever been on a set where guns are used, knows damn well that the armorer (prop person) shows the actor an empty gun, devoid of any bullets."



TheRegion

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Jeddah

The family-themed pop-up experience Modesh World, which is organized every year during the summer months, is offering a multitude of activities. Visit dwtc.com to find out more details about an experience that runs until Aug. 18 at the Dubai World Trade Centre.

Carre d'artistes Gallery Downtown Beirut is hosting an exhibition titled "Stardust Summer Reverie." It will take visitors on a journey filled with works by artists including Fauve, Marie-Pierre Kuhn, Fady Chammas, Christian Raffin and more. Doors open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. The exhibition runs until Aug. 31. Find

more details at lebtivity.com.

Enjoy the ultimate virtual reality gaming experience at Eva Bahrain, Manama, and get transported to massive arenas where you will face off against other players in epic battles. The experience will run until July 31. For tickets and more details, visit calendar.bh.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

July 14	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	4:21	5:46	12:27	3:42	7:07	8:37
Madinah	4:13	5:41	12:28	3:50	7:14	8:44
Riyadh	3:44	5:12	12:00	3:22	6:46	8:16
Abha	4:19	5:41	12:16	3:35	6:50	8:20
Dammam	3:25	4:55	11:46	3:13	6:36	8:06

If Israel attacks Iranian interests, figures, and citizens anywhere, we will retaliate from Iran.

Hossein Salami
IRGC commander-in-chief



Spotlight

RESEARCH & STUDIES
THE MIDDLE EAST, BETTER EXPLAINED

ARAB NEWS

IRAN VERSUS ISRAEL

Between rhetoric and reality

Experts divided on whether IRGC can retaliate for the serial elimination of senior officers in Syria and Lebanon

Anan Tello London

In one of his first statements since winning the runoff election earlier this month, Iran's President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian indicated that militant groups across the Middle East would not allow Israel's "criminal policies" toward the Palestinians to continue.

In a message to Hassan Nasrallah, leader of the Iran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah group, he said: "The Islamic Republic has always supported the resistance of the people of the region against the illegitimate Zionist regime."

So far, Iran's losses appear to outweigh greatly the cost it has been able to impose on the country suspected of inflicting them.

Two months after Israel and Iran appeared to be on the brink of all-out war, a suspected Israeli airstrike near Syria's northern city of Aleppo in June dealt another blow to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Saeed Abyar, who was in Syria on an "advisory mission," according to a statement issued by the IRGC, died in an attack on June 3, bringing the total number of key IRGC figures killed in suspected Israeli strikes since Oct. 7 last year to 19.

Damascus accused Israel of orchestrating the strikes from the southeast of Aleppo. Israel, however, rarely comments on individual attacks.

It came just days after Israel launched air attacks on Syria's central region as well as the coastal city of Baniyas on May 29, killing a child and injuring 10 civilians, according to Syrian state media.

"A closer look at the June 3 incident reveals that Israel targeted a copper factory and a weapons warehouse on the outskirts of Aleppo, attacking multiple times," Francesco Schiavi, an Italy-based geopolitical analyst, told Arab News.

"In these confusing conditions, General Abyar was among several individuals near the impact site, making his death more likely an indirect consequence of an operation against Iranian infrastructure in Syria rather than an intended target of the Israeli attack, generally conducted with high-precision weapons."

Although Israel is accused of targeting numerous Iranian commanders and cadres on Syrian soil in the past nine months, the June 3 attack was the first to kill an IRGC commander



(Main, below left and right) Israel is suspected of carrying out dozens of attacks inside Syria and Lebanon since Oct. 7, 2023, targeting key IRGC members, including Saeed Abyar, bottom. AFP/social media

since the April 1 strike on Iran's embassy annex in Damascus.

The suspected Israeli strike of April 1 eliminated seven IRGC officers, including Mohammad Reza Zahedi, the highest-ranking commander of the extraterritorial Quds Force to be killed since Qassem Soleimani died in a US drone strike in 2020.

Iran launched a massive retaliatory attack against Israel on April 13 — its first direct assault on Israeli territory, stoking fears of an all-out, region-wide conflict. The following day, IRGC chief Hossein Salami said his country "decided to create a new equation."

"From now on, if Israel attacks Iranian interests, figures, and citizens anywhere, we will retaliate from Iran," he said.

Observers, unsure how Iran might respond this time, remain on edge, especially as tensions mount in southern Lebanon, the stronghold of the Iran-backed Hezbollah militia, which has been trading cross-border fire with Israel since Oct. 8 last year.

"Tehran warned that a 'new equation' had been established whereby Iran would retaliate against any Israeli attacks on its interests in the region," said Schiavi.

"The lack of precedents makes

expert on the Middle East and Iran, believes the Israeli strike on the Iranian Embassy annex in Damascus had "changed the deterrence equation to Tehran's detriment."

"Tehran was compelled to retaliate, but even then did so with caution — by forewarning Israel and the US through neighboring countries," he told Arab News. "The aim was to send a message that Iran would not hesitate to strike Israel directly if it kept killing senior Iranian figures, in order to re-establish the deterrence."

Mamedov added: "To understand what scenarios could prompt Iran to retaliate against Israel for the elimination of IRGC officers in Syria and Lebanon, we need to take into account the overall context of Iranian presence there."

"It is primarily about the 'forward defense' strategy through allies such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and proxy groups in Syria, the aim of which is to deter Israel from attacking Iran and its nuclear installations directly."

Nevertheless, Mamedov believes Iran "is willing to avoid an all-out war with Israel and/or the US."

The death of Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash on May 19, along with the foreign minister and other senior officials, forced Tehran to bring forward its presidential elections, which had not been due until 2025.

"As Iran is immersed in preparing the ground for an inevitable leadership transition, it is wary of further regional destabilization," said Mamedov. "I do not think that this fundamental calculus has changed."

The past two months have been particularly tense on the Lebanese border, intensifying fears of an all-out war that would send shockwaves throughout the wider region.

On June 11, an Israeli airstrike on the Lebanese village of Jouya killed a senior Hezbollah commander, Taleb Abdullah, and three fighters.

A little over two weeks later, on June 27, Hezbollah fired dozens of Katyusha rockets at a military base in northern Israel. The group's leadership said the attack came "in response to the enemy attacks that targeted the city of Nabatieh and the village of Sohmor."

Unless Israel and Hamas reached a ceasefire, Koulouriotis said, "the dangerous escalation on the Lebanese-Israeli border" was an indicator that "we are closer than ever to war."

For now, the general consensus is that the actions of the IRGC will be more important than the harsh words of President-elect Pezeshkian in judging Iran's willingness or ability to challenge Israel militarily.



IN NUMBERS

19

Quds Force figures killed in suspected Israeli strikes since Oct. 7.

8

IRGC officers killed in single strike on Iran's embassy annex in Damascus on April 1.

it challenging to predict what this renewed Iranian approach might entail in practical terms."

As it has officially accused Israel of killing Abyar, Eva J. Koulouriotis, a political analyst specializing in the Middle East, believes the IRGC will now be "forced to respond" to the June 3 attack in order to bolster its deterrence — potentially setting off a new round of escalation.

"I understand that by this announcement and the threat to respond, Iran does not want the Israel Defense Forces to return to the equation before targeting the Iranian Consulate in Syria," when similar attacks had gone "unpunished," Koulouriotis told Arab News.

Eldar Mamedov, a Brussels-based

SUSTAINABILITY

Saudi ministry reviews plans for renewable water

Plans in Eastern Province are in line with Vision 2030

Arab News Riyadh

The Saudi Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture held a meeting to review the utilization of renewable water and how to maximize its economic value, as well as to plan supply and demand in all regions, the Saudi Press Agency reported on Saturday.



The review was held during a workshop organized by the ministry in Riyadh. SPA

According to the SPA, the ministry's plans are in line with the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030.

The review was held during a workshop organized by the ministry at its headquarters in Riyadh, in cooperation with the Sharqia Development Authority, which was attended by officials and specialists in the ministry, the Saudi Irrigation Organization, and the SDA.

The workshop addressed renewable-water plans across the Kingdom, and included a review of the results of the ministry's study into supply and demand in the Eastern Province.

Other topics addressed included proposed water transmission and distribution

FASTFACT

Other topics addressed included proposed water transmission and distribution systems and routes, the identification of current and potential beneficiaries of treated water in the Eastern Province, and the proposed mechanism and possible alternatives to transmit treated water to beneficiaries effectively and efficiently.

systems and routes, the identification of current and potential beneficiaries of treated water in the Eastern Province, and the proposed mechanism and

possible alternatives to transmit treated water to beneficiaries effectively and efficiently.

"The workshop's main objective is to enhance the compatibility of the outputs of the study in the preliminary outline of the supply and demand for renewable water in the Eastern Province," Dr. Saud Al-Murshid, director general of the planning department in the water sector, told the SPA.

Al-Murshid underlined the importance of guaranteeing the compatibility of these outputs with the region's strategic development plans to maximize the economic benefit of renewable water, and to support development plans in all sectors.

TheSpace

IMF praises Kingdom's economic transformation

TALAT ZAKI HAFIZ



A preliminary statement issued on June 14, 2024 by the International Monetary Fund under Article IV, affirmed that Saudi Arabia's unprecedented economic transformation is progressing well.

The statement praised the Kingdom's wise macroeconomic policies and its transformative changes, including the financial reforms and the regulatory business environment.

Headline inflation has decelerated rapidly despite some pressure pockets. After peaking at 3.4 percent in January 2023, year-on-year inflation receded to 1.6 percent in April 2024.

The preliminary statement affirmed that the efforts to diversify the economy have started to bear fruit and that building on these successes will be important to sustain the non-oil growth momentum.

Additionally, it will maintain financial sector stability, continue to mitigate the risk of overheating, reverse declining total factor productivity and ensure inter-generational equity.

The IMF pointed out that the Kingdom's economic activities will remain robust and that real non-oil growth decelerated from 5.3 percent in 2022 to a still robust 3.8 percent in 2023. This is driven mostly by private consumption and non-oil investment, with the latter tapering off to 11.5 percent (down from an exceptional 32 percent growth in 2022).

Oil GDP contracted by 9 percent in 2023 due primarily to Saudi Arabia's OPEC+ and voluntary oil production cuts, leading to a 0.8 percent contraction in overall GDP.

Conversely, the non-oil growth for the first quarter this year indicates some moderation in economic activity and the IMF estimates that the

output gap remains in positive territory, close to 2 percent of the non-oil potential GDP.

The statement touched favorably on unemployment in the Kingdom after it reached historic lows of 7.7 percent in 2023, inching closer to the 2030 Vision objective of 7 percent. Additionally, the Saudi economy added over one million jobs by 2023, primarily in the private sector and the women's rate still comfortably exceeding the Vision 2030 goal of 30 percent.

The IMF projected non-oil GDP to grow to about 3.5 percent in 2024 and that overall GDP growth will accelerate to about 4.5 percent in 2025 before stabilizing at 3.5 percent per year over the medium term.

The preliminary statement affirmed that the efforts to diversify the economy have started to bear fruit.

The Saudi Central Bank's holding of net foreign assets reached \$423.7 billion in April 2024, which was slightly above the end-2023 level. Reserves remain ample, representing 15.8 months of imports and 208 percent of the IMF's reserve adequacy metric by end-2023.

Despite the positive opinion of the Kingdom's economy and the reforms since the launch of Saudi Vision 2030 in 2016, the IMF statement draws attention to an expected current account shifting to a deficit in 2024, averaging about 2.3 percent of GDP between 2026 and 2029 due to lower oil export proceeds and increased investment-linked imports.

External buffers, however, are ample despite a weaker current account and international reserves will remain ample, averaging 13 months import cover over the medium term. Also, foreign assets held by the Public Investment Fund and other government-related entities offer strong additional buffers.

Talat Zaki Hafiz is an economist and financial analyst. X: @TalatHafiz



The event was 'a chance for Peruvians living in Saudi Arabia to get to know each other.' AN photo by Loai El-Kellawy

BROTHERLY NATIONS

Peruvian community celebrates National Day in Riyadh

Lama Alhamawi Riyadh

Peru's embassy opened its doors in Riyadh to Peruvians living in Saudi Arabia to celebrate its National Day and the Peruvian independence month of July.

"Today is a special occasion for the Peruvians, it's a gathering during this month. Why? Because July is the month of our independence," Carlos Zapata, the ambassador of Peru to Saudi Arabia, told Arab News.

"Our independence is on July 28 but we celebrate now because I

have the opportunity to gather lots of the Peruvians before they move for vacation," he said.

The ambassador said that the event was also a chance for Peruvians living in Saudi Arabia to get to know each other.

"This is an opportunity for them to join together and celebrate our national day," he said.

Peruvian

Carlos Zapata



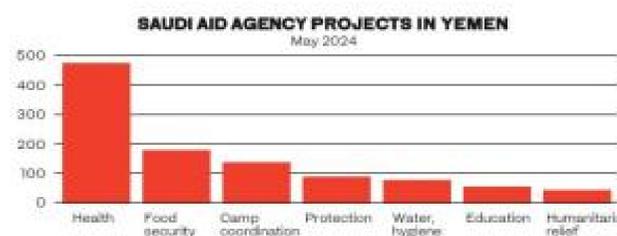
National Day falls on July 28 each year and marks the day Peru gained its independence from Spain in 1824.

During the national holiday, Peruvians enjoy authentic food and commemorate the occasion, and this celebratory tradition was carried out thousands of miles away in Saudi Arabia.

Zapata expressed what it meant for him to see so many Peruvians gathering to celebrate the National Day in the embassy in Riyadh.

The Day's FIGURES

Source: ksrelief.org



Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Employment Saudi Tourism Ministry launches diploma program

The Saudi Ministry of Tourism, in collaboration with Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, has introduced a two-year diploma course in travel and tourism.

The course, according to a statement, aims to "enhance human capabilities by qualifying highly efficient national cadres in the travel and tourism sector, according to the highest international standards, to provide a theoretical and practical educational experience in the fields of travel and tourism." SPA Riyadh

Assistance KSA aid agency distributes food in Chad

Saudi aid agency KStrelief has distributed 1,200 food parcels in the Beheira region of Chad, benefiting 7,200 people most in need, as part of a project to support food security in Chad in 2024, the SPA reported.

The assistance is part of a series of humanitarian projects Saudi Arabia implements through KStrelief to help countries and people worldwide. Separately, KStrelief recently signed an agreement with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to support the Yemen Humanitarian Fund. AN Riyadh

Empowerment Initiative for kids with disabilities launched in Al-Baha

The Children with Disability Association in Al-Baha has launched a new initiative, titled "Integration and Empowerment," in partnership with Al-Baha Municipality.

According to a statement, this initiative aims to "motivate, and engage children with disabilities with their peers, helping them reintegrate into society through recreational activities and events." Nujoud Al-Ghamdi, director of the association, said the initiative aims to strengthen cohesion. SPA Al-Baha

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News Saudi Arabia

MADE IN SAUDI ARABIA

Skill meets heritage in initiative boosting handicrafts sector

Saudi Artisanal Company is 'leveraging the country's cultural wealth to empower local artisans'

Nada Hameed Jeddah
Lama Alhamawi Riyadh

The Saudi Artisanal Company is playing a central role in the development of Saudi Arabia's flourishing handicrafts sector — a reminder of the Kingdom's rich heritage and commitment to honoring its traditions.

According to the company's acting CEO, Ibrahim Al-Dulajjan, the SAC is "leveraging the country's cultural wealth to empower Saudi artisans, build sustainable partnerships, and deliver Saudi-crafted goods that are an integral part of the nation's legacy."

"The company not only supports its skilled local artisans but also equips them with the latest technologies to create their pieces blending heritage, tradition, and innovation."

Al-Dulajjan told Arab News in a written statement: "Empowering local artisans and designers is a key element of the company's operations. We have activated a strategic partnership with the Royal Institute of Traditional Arts, through which practical training is provided for artisans, offering them practical and profitable opportunities in the artisanal field."

Part of the training includes extensive research on the history and cultural significance of various products.

"The team believes in the importance of preserving heritage and reviving and empowering crafts approved by the Heritage Authority. This belief is reflected in the communication, implementation, and supervision processes with artisans and designers," Al-Dulajjan added.

The resulting products "reflect genuine heritage" and "tell enriching stories," he said.

During a recent visit to the company's studio in Riyadh's JAX district, Arab News witnessed some of these skilled artisans at work.



Saudi Artisanal Company equips skilled local artisans with the latest technologies to create their pieces. AN photos by Loai Al-Kellawy



We aim to enhance our culture, preserve our identity, and pass on our heritage to future generations.

Sadiq Al-Hajri
Artisan supervisor, Saudi Artisanal Company



Each of them has dedicated years to perfecting their craft, whether working with wool, wicker, wood, plaster, or engraving.

Abeer Al-Rabiah, the product design manager at the company, spoke to Arab News about her background and approach to design.

Growing up in an artistic household, she was surrounded by art and design but also had a strong interest in science. Al-Rabiah felt torn between these passions

until discovering industrial design, which combines elements of both.

She emphasized that product design is not just about creating beautiful objects but also about considering their functionality and manufacturability.

Al-Rabiah highlighted the responsibility designers have toward the environment, especially when creating products for mass production.

"Handmade products are a lot more sustainable and eco-friendly than products designed in factories," she said.

"This is the main thing that drew me into the

crafts field — the materials used, usually natural materials. You're not using an entire factory that's producing a lot of toxins into the environment.

"We do a lot of research before making every product and try to connect our history, culture, and heritage into the design," she added. "Every product that we make either has a story or a meaning that is related to our heritage and culture. The fact that the products are handmade by Saudi hands, with crafts that have been in the region for years, also connects it to our heritage."

"We try to highlight parts of our

HIGHLIGHT

Saudi Artisanal Company's strategic partnership with the Royal Institute of Traditional Arts provides practical training to artisans.

heritage that are kind of forgotten or not widely talked about. A good example would be our Khawlani coffee collection. The Arabian Peninsula had a Golden Age when coffee was produced here and sent throughout the entire world."

The collection is an award-winning piece that celebrates

Saudi coffee. The 3D-modeled cover and hand-crafted wooden box reflect the mountainous terrains of the coffee-producing regions of the Kingdom, specifically Mount Talan.

Inside the box sit two porcelain coffee cups inspired by coffee fruits, along with coffee capsules filled with a blend of espresso and Saudi Khawlani coffee.

The Khawlani coffee collection won Best Luxury Item at the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism Awards earlier this year, while the dates bowls collection won Best Contemporary Interpretation and Design.

"It's a global award that we're very proud of," Al-Rabiah added.

The SAC also has an online store offering more than 100 products, with local and international shipping options available.

"The company also participates in certain seasons and events.

For example, we displayed artisans' products during this year's Hajj season," Al-Dulajjan said. "Additionally, we'll be opening stores in several cities in the Kingdom to serve citizens, residents, and tourists by providing high-quality artisanal products, supporting local products, and empowering local artisans and designers."

Fatima Al-Thubayani, production unit manager at the company's workshop, has eight years of experience in the field of handicrafts and an academic background in fashion design.

Al-Thubayani told Arab News, "To support the emerging generation, we use modern materials paired with traditional heritage patterns, creating contemporary and innovative outcomes. This approach integrates designers and artisans, providing sustainable job opportunities."

The company invites artisans and designers from all over the Kingdom to collaborate, whether by showcasing their products on various sales platforms, participating in training programs, or working on business opportunities together.



SUMMER ESCAPE

Natural beauty of Baha's Raghadan Park attracts visitors

Arab News Riyadh

With its vast green spaces, dense forest and mild climate, Raghadan Park is among Baha's most popular destinations for tourists looking for outdoor fun.

In an interview with the Saudi Press Agency, Ali Al-Sawat, the mayor of the Baha region, spoke of the municipal projects within Raghadan Forest Park.

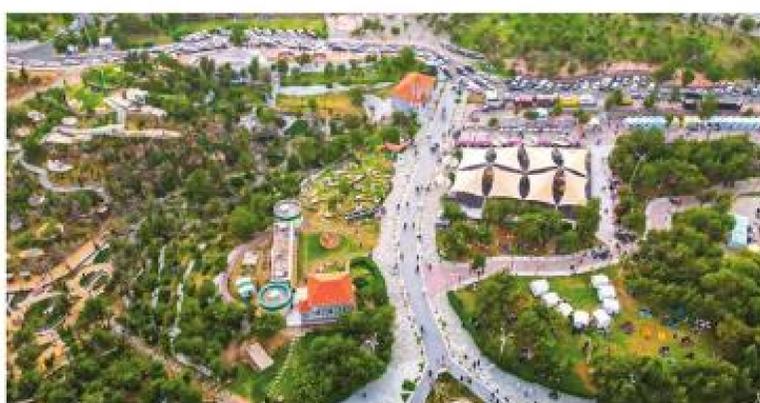
He said: "These projects encompass Bahjat Raghadan Park, which spans an estimated 20,000 sq. meters, (with a

700-meter main walkway, and 18,000 sq. meters of green spaces.

"The park also boasts a 30-meter waterfall, an interactive fountain, 156 decorative columns, three children's areas, three photography zones, and a 25-meter decorative pedestrian bridge."

The site, which includes cafes and eateries, also boasts a forest with a lavender garden and a central area which spans over 20,000 sq. meters, he added.

The central square covers



Raghadan Park in Baha boasts a forest with a lavender garden and a central area which spans over 20,000 sq. meters. SPA

8,000 sq. meters and is connected to the garden, which occupies some 5,000 sq. meters. Adjacent to it is a 500-meter walkway covered with natural stone and featuring waterfalls.

The project is illuminated by about 270 decorative lighting poles and includes statues, flower beds, seating areas, wooden bridges, and kiosks.

The mayor welcomes tourists and visitors to the location to enjoy its atmosphere, stunning views, valleys, and lush vegetation.

News Middle East

GRAVE RISKS

Israeli airstrike kills 2 civilians in southern Lebanon

Retaliatory rocket attacks target Kiryat Shmona in Upper Galilee

Najla Houssari Beirut

An Israeli airstrike killed two civilians in southern Lebanon on Saturday.

Najib Halawi and Musa Suleiman were targeted by an Israeli drone while driving on the Khirbet Daoud Road, which connects Nabatieh to Marjayoun and is used by travelers heading to the Western Bekaa region.

An initial security report said that the two victims routinely drove their jeep to a water spring in the village of Kafr Kila on the border to collect water for their livestock.

Halawi and Suleiman were, respectively, the father and uncle of Hezbollah member Mohammed Halawi, who was killed at the start of Israel's attacks in Lebanon's south. According to the National News Agency, Suleiman was a local council member for Hezbollah allies the Amal Movement in the nearby village of Kfar Kila. The

Amal Movement confirmed that one of its members, aged 60, had been killed.

A source close to Hezbollah stressed that both men were "civilians, not fighters." Hezbollah vowed to respond to the killing of civilians.

Elsewhere on Saturday, Israeli forces targeted the outskirts of the border town of Rmeich with machine guns from their positions in Al-Raheb and Hermon, causing damage to several houses.

Hezbollah, meanwhile, said that it targeted a group of Israeli soldiers in the vicinity of the Mitat Barracks with missile weapons and "successfully hit them."

Israeli sirens were activated in settlements opposite the town of Kafr Kila following the appearance of a series of drones, and three rockets reportedly fell near Kiryat Shmona in Upper Galilee.

The Lebanese Resistance Brigades, a non-sectarian group established by Hezbollah in 1997, issued a statement on Friday



Two Lebanese men inspect a damaged vehicle following an Israeli strike on Saturday close to the southern Lebanese border with Israel. AFP

FASTFACT

Hezbollah has traded almost daily fire with Israeli forces in support of Hamas since the Oct. 7 attack on Israel triggered war in the Gaza Strip.

night announcing the execution of its first military action against Israeli forces during the current fighting.

"The martyrs Abdul Aal group in the Lebanese Resistance Brigades attacked the Roueizat Al-Qarn site in the occupied Lebanese Shebaa Farms with rockets and directly hit it," the statement read.

Israeli army spokesman Avichay Adraee said two suspicious aerial targets that were on their way toward Israeli territory were intercepted on Friday night. Alarms were activated in an industrial area near Eilat, where air defenses and warplanes intercepted the two targets. There were no injuries.

Al-Arabiya quoted an American source on Saturday saying that Washington is refusing to deliver heavy bombs to Israel in order to prevent a war in Lebanon, but added that US forces in the region were working on evacuation plans in case such a war breaks out.

The US source told Al-Arabiya: "Israel is capable of launching a massive attack on Lebanon and capable of destroying Beirut Airport and the buildings in its vicinity and in the southern suburbs."

Hussein Hajj Hassan, head of Lebanon's Baalbek-Hermel parliamentary bloc, warned Israel against an escalation of aggression against Lebanon.

DIPLOMACY

Iran's new president ready for 'constructive dialogue' with Europe

AFP Tehran

Iran's new President Masoud Pezeshkian said he looks forward to improved relations with European nations, even though he accused them of reneging on commitments to mitigate the impact of US sanctions.

Pezeshkian won a runoff election against ultraconservative former nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili last week. The 69-year-old has called for "constructive relations" with Western countries to "get Iran out of its isolation" and favors reviving the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and global powers.

The US unilaterally withdrew from the accord in 2018, reimposing sanctions, which led Iran to reduce its commitment to the terms of the deal gradually. The agreement aimed to curb nuclear activity, which Tehran maintains is for peaceful purposes.

In an article published in the English-language Tehran Times newspaper, Pezeshkian said that after the US pullout from the 2015

FASTFACT

President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian described Russia as a 'valued strategic ally' and said he looked forward 'to collaborating more extensively' with China.

deal, European nations committed to trying to salvage it and mitigate the impact of US sanctions.

"European countries have reneged on all these commitments," Pezeshkian wrote.

"Despite these missteps, I look forward to engaging in constructive dialogue with European countries to set our relations on the right path, based on principles of mutual respect and equal footing."

He said the two sides could explore "numerous areas of cooperation" if the Europeans "set aside self-arrogated moral supremacy coupled with manufactured crises that have plagued our relations for so long." EU spokeswoman Nabila Massrali had earlier congratulated Pezeshkian on his election, saying the 27-member bloc was "ready to engage with the new government in line with EU policy of critical engagement."

The death of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash necessitated the July 6 election, which was not due until 2025.

In the runoff, Pezeshkian secured about 54 percent of the vote against Jalili's roughly 44 percent, with a turnout of just under half of Iran's 61 million electorate.

FUNDING GAP

UN chief: Israel is forcing Gazans 'to move like human pinballs'

AP New York

The UN chief appealed for funding for the beleaguered UN agency helping Palestinian refugees in Gaza and elsewhere in the Middle East, accusing Israel of issuing evacuation orders that force Palestinians "to move like human pinballs across a landscape of destruction and death."

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told a donor's conference that the agency, known as UNRWA, faces "a profound funding gap."

UNRWA Commissioner General Philippe Lazzarini said at the start of the conference that the agency only had funds to operate through August.

At the end, he told reporters that, while the total amount in pledges will not be known until next week, he is confident there will be enough new money in its \$850 million annual budget to keep the agency running until the end of September.

UNRWA's 30,000 staff provide education, primary healthcare, and other development activities to about 6 million Palestinian refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.

In the coming months, Lazzarini said UNRWA would be seeking funds to keep its operations going through December — and for



Palestinians gather on Saturday at the site of an Israeli airstrike on a UN school sheltering displaced people in Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip. Reuters

emergency appeals for \$1.2 billion for the Gaza war and \$460 million for the Syria crisis, which is only 20 percent funded.

Without financial support to

UNRWA, Secretary-General Guterres said Palestinian refugees "will lose a critical lifeline and the last ray of hope for a better future."

The UN chief reserved his

harshest words for Israel's ongoing military offensive in Gaza, which has affected its entire Palestinian refugee population.

"The extreme level of fighting and

devastation is incomprehensible and inexcusable — and the level of chaos is affecting every Palestinian in Gaza and all those desperately trying to get aid to them."

SEPARATIST THREAT

Turkiye to end northern Iraq operation soon, Erdogan says

AFP Istanbul

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday announced the imminent end to the Turkish forces' operation against Kurdish PKK fighters in northern Iraq and Syria.

Turkiye launched Operation Claw-Lock in April 2022 to secure its border with northern Iraq, from where it accused Kurdish separatists of launching attacks against Turkish territory.

"We will very soon complete the lockdown of the area of operation

in northern Iraq," the president said, adding that Kurdish forces were now "incapable of acting inside our borders."

Erdogan said that the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, had been "completely trapped" in both Iraq and Syria, telling young military

academy graduates that Turkish forces were "all over them."

"We will complete the missing points of the security belt along our southern border with Syria."

Since 2016, Ankara has also carried out successive ground operations to expel Kurdish

forces from border areas of northern Syria.

Erdogan warned on Thursday against conflict between NATO and Russia, telling an alliance summit aimed at bolstering Ukraine that diplomacy must also be an option.

News International

INVESTIGATION

Viral clip shows London police 'assaulting' pro-Palestine activist

• Man punched in head multiple times as officers stage arrest • 'Level of violence' seen in footage rapped

Arab News London

A video has surfaced online appearing to show a pro-Palestine campaigner being violently arrested by London's Metropolitan Police.

The clip, which was met with angered reaction across social media, follows a series of policing controversies in the UK capital amid weekly pro-Palestine rallies.

In the video, a man is seen protesting his arrest as he stands next to a convertible bearing a large Palestinian flag and a sign saying: "Free Palestine. Stop Gaza genocide."

A group of officers drag the man to the ground, punching him in the head as he shouts: "I haven't done nothing. I haven't done nothing."

The clip was filmed in the borough of Tower Hamlets, home to a large Muslim community.

Halima Khan, a former Labour Party staffer who ran as a parliamentary candidate in the UK general election last week, condemned the violence seen in the footage.

"The level of violence by the



Protesters wave Palestinian flags as they stand in front of Elizabeth Tower in central London at the end of the 'National March for Gaza.' File/AFP

hands of the London Metropolitan Police in East London, for just waving the flag of Palestine. Are we Britain or are we Israel," she wrote on X.

Other users responded to Khan's post, criticizing the Met

officers for their conduct. One said: "I am tired of answering that question. Is our police force trained in Israel? The Itamar Ben-Gvir school of policing."

Another said: "There should be

charges against that officer — you can clearly see his rage. That man didn't do anything."

The officer in question, who is seen in the clip throwing multiple punches at the activist's head, was accused by another X user of

wanting to cause "maximum damage" as part of a "premeditated" attack.

The Met Police, in an online statement, denied that the man was arrested for having a Palestinian flag.

Superintendent Brittany Clarke said: "We're aware of the video and commentary online following an incident that took place in Whitechapel Road ... A PCSO (police community support officer) requested urgent assistance from officer colleagues. A man was arrested for assault on police and is in custody at this time."

Clarke added that the Met's Directorate of Professional Standards is reviewing the footage and body-worn camera videos from the officers involved.

"I can assure local people that we are understanding of their concerns and that we will be working to establish the circumstances," she said.

The controversy is the latest to beset the Met Police, after the force was accused of using heavy-handed tactics to clamp down on the weekly pro-Palestine rallies that have taken place in London since last October.

SECURITY

Terrorism rampant in Sahel and spilling into West Africa coastal states: UN

AP New York

Terrorism and organized crime by violent extremist groups linked to Al-Qaeda and Daesh are a "pervasive threat" in Africa's volatile Sahel region and are spilling over to West Africa's coastal countries, the top UN envoy for the area warned Friday.

Leonardo Simao, the UN special representative for the Sahel and West Africa, said the focus on combating terrorism has had limited effect in stopping rampant illegal trafficking in the Sahel, and the effort needs more police.

"It's drugs, it's weapons, it's human beings, it's mineral resources and even food," Simao said after briefing the UN Security Council.

According to Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' new report on the Sahel and West Africa, hundreds of people have been killed in the first half of 2024 alone in terrorist attacks, many of them civilians.

The vast majority of deaths occurred in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, whose ruling military juntas in March announced a joint security force to fight terrorism. However, the force has yet to begin operations.

The three countries are increasingly cutting ties with the US military and allying with Russia on security challenges.

Last week, the three juntas doubled down on their decision to leave the Economic Community of

BACKGROUND

US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield supported ECOWAS and UN efforts in West Africa and the Sahel and said the Security Council 'must also step up.'



West African States, the nearly 50-year-old regional bloc known as ECOWAS, following the creation of their security partnership, the Alliance of Sahel States, in September.

Simao did not comment on the countries' international alliances but said their withdrawal from ECOWAS would be "harmful to both sides."

He lauded ECOWAS for taking a "vigorous approach" to engaging with Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger and urged the countries to maintain regional unity.

He called for the UN's continued support of the Accra Initiative, a military platform involving Burkina Faso and nearby coastal countries to contain the spread of extremism in the Sahel.

He also said the Security Council should pursue financing regionally led police operations.

US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield supported ECOWAS and UN efforts in West Africa and the Sahel and said the Security Council "must also step up."

Thomas-Greenfield urged increased funding and the appointment of a UN resident coordinator in the region, saying a UN presence is critical to support UN development efforts "and ensuring the delivery of much-needed humanitarian assistance."

Russia's deputy ambassador, Anna Evstigneeva, countered that international security efforts amount to an "attempt to continue imposing new colonial models" on Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

She accused Western donors of limiting assistance for "political reasons."

"Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger are conducting an uncompromising and coordinated fight against terrorist groups, and they are achieving success and stabilizing their territories," Evstigneeva said.

The region's deadliest terrorist attacks this year took place in Burkina Faso, where the terrorist groups Jama'at Nusrat Al-Islam Wal-Muslimin, which has ties to Al-Qaeda, and Daesh claim "extensive swaths" of territory, Guterres said in the report.

In February alone, major terrorist attacks killed 301 people, including a single assault that claimed 170 lives.

SOMALIA CRISIS

Five inmates, three guards killed in Mogadishu prison break shootout

AFP Mogadishu

Five inmates said to be from Somalia's Al-Shabab group and three guards were killed in a blaze of gunfire during an attempted breakout from the main prison in Mogadishu on Saturday, prison authorities and witnesses said.

Jailed members of the Al-Qaeda-linked group, which has been waging a bloody insurgency for years, managed to obtain weapons and launched what appeared to be a well-planned bid to escape the

prison, security sources said.

"Violent elements tried to stir terror in the central prison," Col. Abdiqani Khalaf, spokesman for the Custodian Corps, said at a brief press conference, adding that the situation has now returned to normal.

"Five prisoners and three soldiers died, and 18 other prisoners and three soldiers were wounded," he said.

"Investigations are ongoing, and the wounded are being treated now."

There was an explosion inside the prison, and a heavy exchange of gunfire followed.

Witnesses living near the compound reported hearing the sound of grenade explosions and machine gun fire.

Al-Shabab has carried out numerous bombings and other attacks in Mogadishu and other parts of the country, although few have been recorded in

recent months.

"There was an explosion inside the prison, and a heavy exchange of gunfire followed," said witness Abdurahman Ali.

"I was very close to the prison when the incident occurred, and I saw police reinforcement entering the prison a few minutes after the gunfire broke out," he said.

Another witness, Shuceyb Ahmed, also reported hearing grenade blasts and gunfire.

"I called my brother, who is a member of the prison guards, and

he told me that several Al-Shabab inmates secretly obtained weapons and grenades and tried to escape."

The Somali National News Agency published pictures of the bodies of the five alleged Al-Shabab gunmen.

The Somali Custodial Corps is a branch of the security forces responsible for running prisons in the country.

Al-Shabab has been fighting to oust the fragile central government in Mogadishu for more than 17 years.



A woman works on a beach in the Philippines as part of a coastal cleanup program that provides rice to volunteers in exchange for plastic waste. Reuters

COOPERATION

Philippine diving town trades plastic for rice to tackle ocean waste

Plastic Palit Bigas helps Mabini residents cut food spending while saving the sea

Samantha Beltran Manila

Campaigners in Mabini, one of the Philippines' most famous diving resorts, have found a new way to make the issue of plastic pollution everybody's business, as they swap rice for waste in a drive to clean up the town's shores.

Known for its pristine waters, the town in Batangas province — some 100 km south of Manila — is considered the birthplace of the Philippine scuba diving industry and every weekend draws crowds of tourists to enjoy its sandy beaches.

While they significantly contribute to Mabini's economy, many have been arriving and leaving behind trails of plastic waste, compounding the problem of ocean pollution, which was already threatening

the region's marine wildlife.

"Marine plastic washes up on shore. During the habagat (southwest monsoon) season, onshore winds can cause a lot of plastic to pile up on our beaches from faraway places, but we also noticed that tourists from all over the country spend the day at our beaches and sadly some of them leave garbage behind," said Ronald Necesito, the founder of Plastic Palit Bigas, an initiative to tackle the problem by mobilizing local communities.

Launched in mid-2022, Plastic Palit Bigas translates to "trade plastic for rice." It offers to exchange a bag of plastic waste collected by Mabini residents for a sack of rice.

Necesito told Arab News: "I just thought rice would encourage citizens to clean the shores and segregate household plastic. Everyone needs rice. This way, we can reduce pollution as well."

Poor waste management has plagued the Philippines' waterways for years. According to the Philippines' Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the country is the third-largest source of ocean waste worldwide. Every year it discards an estimated 3.3 kg of plastic waste per person, emitting

FASTFACT

The country is the third-largest source of ocean waste worldwide.

350,000 tonnes of non-degradable litter into the ocean.

Necesito's campaign is trying to address the issue on a local scale and is concentrated along a 3-km-long shoreline, which every Saturday will see a few dozen volunteers who, for 3 kg of the collected waste, can bring home 1 kg of rice.

The program is sustained by donations from individuals, local resorts and small enterprises.

"According to the families participating in this program, it is a big help for them because the cost they need to spend on buying rice is reduced," Necesito said.

"So far, it has greatly helped our environment and even the sea. We have noticed less plastic on our shores. Mabini relies heavily on tourism, so having clean beaches is very important to our economy as well."

The campaign has provided over 2,600 kg of rice to families in need to date.

Sheila Casa, a 35-year-old schoolteacher who regularly participates in the program, said that it had also helped raise awareness and incentivize people to care more as it reduces their food expenditure, with one sack of rice being enough to feed a family for a few days.

GOVERNMENT FORMATION

French PM eyes rebuilding political force after party backing

AFP Paris

France's prime minister on Saturday was elected leader of his party's National Assembly lawmakers as politicians from all sides jockeyed for position to form the next government.

Gabriel Attal was the only candidate in the vote by the Renaissance party parliamentary group, which he plans to use as the base from which to rebuild the political force that got roundly beaten in a snap election called by President Emmanuel Macron.

Of the 98 Renaissance deputies registered to vote, 84 backed Attal, who will start in his role next week.

As Attal and other ministers eye a future outside government, deep cracks have appeared between the 35-year-old premier and his former mentor Macron.

Macron did not get any mention in Attal's

message to Renaissance deputies outlining his leadership bid, with observers saying that the prime minister blames the president for calling the vote, which he said took the party to the brink of "extinction."

Sunday's election runoff left the National Assembly without any overall majority, but a broad alliance — called

New Popular Front of Socialists, Communists, Greens and the hard-left France Unbowed

won the most seats, with 193 in the 577-strong lower chamber.

Macron's allies came second with 164 seats and the far-right National Rally third at 143.

According to the constitution, Macron will appoint the next prime minister, who must be able to survive a confidence motion in parliament.

This appointment could come as early as next week when the new National Assembly session opens, but Macron could ask Attal to stay on while Paris hosts the Olympic Games starting July 26.

France's Prime Minister Gabriel Attal



Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Military strength

2 Russian warships in China for joint naval exercises

Two Russian warships have arrived in the southern Chinese port city of Zhanjiang to take part in joint naval exercises, the Russian Defense Ministry said Saturday.

China and Russia have greatly reinforced ties since the start of the Russian offensive in Ukraine that began in February 2022.

Their common goal is also to reduce the role of the United States and the West on the international stage. The first phase will take place from Monday-Wednesday and involve anti-air and anti-submarine attacks along with Chinese planes specialized in anti-submarine maneuvers. **AFP**

Illegal migrants

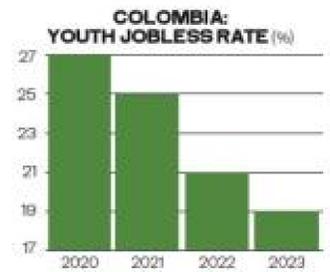
Malala calls for Pakistan to stop deporting Afghans

Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai called for Pakistan to stop deporting undocumented Afghans, saying she was especially concerned about the "dark future" awaiting women and girls sent back.

"It is deeply concerning that Pakistan is forcing Afghan refugees based in Pakistan back into Afghanistan, and I'm deeply concerned about the women and girls," the activist, who was awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 2014, said on Friday.

Despite extending leave for Afghan refugees with permits to stay in Pakistan for another year, Islamabad this week said it would remove illegal migrants. **AFP**

The Day's FIGURES



Source: Statista

What We're Reading Today

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

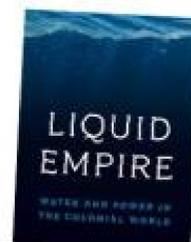
'Liquid Empire'

COREY ROSS

In the 19th and 20th centuries, a handful of powerful European states controlled more than a third of the land surface of the planet. These sprawling empires encompassed not only rainforests, deserts, and savannahs but

also some of the world's most magnificent rivers, lakes, marshes, and seas.

"Liquid Empire" tells the story of how the waters of the colonial world shaped the history of imperialism, and how this imperial past still haunts us today.



Ongoing investigation

Man held in UK with human remains

British police said Saturday they have arrested a man in connection with the deaths of two men whose remains were found in two suitcases in southwest England.

The Metropolitan Police said armed officers detained a 34-year-old suspect at a train station in the city of Bristol early Saturday. Police also said more human remains were found at an address in Shepherd's Bush, west London, the previous day, believed to be connected to those found in the suitcases dumped near the Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol on Wednesday.

The suspect "will be taken to London for questioning later today," police said in a statement. **AP**

Complicated rescue

Landslides in Vietnam kill 11 after heavy rain

Landslides triggered by torrential rains in mountainous northern Vietnam buried a 16-seater van, killing at least 11 people and leaving some missing on Saturday, state media reported.

Local authorities said the exact number of people in the van was not known and the aftermath of the heavy rains was complicating search and rescue efforts.

Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh urgently instructed local authorities and related government agencies to promptly deal with the disaster and stand ready to respond to more floods and landslides. **Reuter**

الألة أرقى عطفة من الإنسان، فهي إن
ضربت بعضها وقلقت جميعها عن العمل
(سعيد تقي الدين)

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

Any machine is more sympathetic than humans are, because, if any of its parts are damaged, all other parts stop working.

Said Takieddine

(20th-century Lebanese intellectual and writer)

Opinion

Decisive UK results leave many questions unanswered

YOSSI MEKELBERG

Labour's landslide victory in the UK general election on July 4 confirmed the most optimistic forecasts, and represented a sense of hope and trust in Sir Keir Starmer and his party to rejuvenate the country during the five-year term it has won.

It was a great night for Labour, as the party celebrated its first general election victory since 2005, and after being out of office since 2010. It was equally, if not more so, a complete rejection of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's premiership and his government, and of his chaotic and deeply divided Conservative Party.

The election campaign provided a vivid illustration of the huge differences between the two dominant parties in British politics. The Conservative Party had lost its way. Led by its third prime minister in the five years since the last election, it looked out of its depth and rudderless, and ran a truly shambolic election campaign.

Meanwhile, the cautious (some would say too cautious) Starmer proved that his way of

quietly but ruthlessly transforming his party, and his belief that elections would be won by positioning Labour closer to the center of the political spectrum, was more than vindicated.

Winning 412 of the 650 seats in the House of Commons gives the new government a stable majority that should allow it to implement its agenda almost with a free hand. Furthermore, the margin of victory leaves Labour with the prospect of being able to consolidate its vision of change during not only one term but most likely two, if not more.

Its victory was astonishing, surpassing even that of Tony Blair in 1997, because at that time Labour was on an upward trajectory, while in the 2019 general election, under the stewardship of former leader Jeremy Corbyn, the party suffered its worst defeat since 1935.

For both the major parties in British politics there is the danger they might draw the wrong conclusions from their spectacular, entirely opposite, results in the election. For Starmer, electoral success through caution might lead to policies that are not sufficiently daring or visionary; although judging by the first week of his government, it has hit the



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

ground running. It got off to an impressive start with a smooth transition, packed with new initiatives on a range of issues.

The Conservatives are faced with the mammoth task of clawing their way back to political relevance if they are at some point in the future to once again be viewed as a viable contender for power. Their ranks in Parliament have been greatly depleted. After losing, for better or for worse, some of their most prominent MPs, especially those with experience in government, there is a very small pool from which to select their next leader and shadow government.

The Conservatives run the risk of concluding from the relative success of the populist, anti-migrant Reform UK party that to counter their decline they should veer even further to the right. Nigel Farage and his lieutenants are a one-trick, xenophobic media machine. They are chancers who offer no real solutions, opportunists who found a niche that eventually helped them to gain five seats in Parliament and 14 percent of the popular vote.

Several Conservative politicians have

suggested that their party hemorrhaged votes to Reform because it was "not conservative enough." This could not be further from the truth; the opposite is the case. Whether through opportunism or ideology, while in government the Conservatives released the racist, anti-immigration genie from the bottle and, with it, their attacks on multiculturalism.

This played straight into the hands of Reform, which positioned itself as the "can-do-it-better" party. Its leaders know there are no boundaries to the claims and promises they can make as they will never be tested in practice.

If the Conservatives attempt to out-Farage Farage, they will fail and fall into Reform's demagogical trap. They need to address the concerns of his voters with pragmatism and a moral compass.

All we can wish for ourselves is that after 14 chaotic and toxic years, the new government will deliver what Prime Minister Starmer promised the day he entered office: "A Britain once more in the service of working people. Country first, party second."

If the Conservatives attempt to out-Farage Farage, they will fail and fall into Reform's demagogical trap



European nations should recalibrate their approach and focus on the reasons why people undertake these desperate journeys in the first place

The unspoken horrors of migration

HAFED AL-GHWELL

As thousands of migrants continue to embark on treacherous journeys to Europe, seeking refuge and opportunities, their paths often lead them not to safety but further, imminent danger.

Pushed by dire circumstances at home to seek better lives elsewhere, these desperate masses are met with equal measures of peril along the way. Despite this, Europe still stands as a symbol of hope for so many, even when the harsh realities of the journeys they face, including systemic abuse and a catalog of human rights violations, paint a grim picture.

In their quest for a better life, thousands continue to set off on journeys that, paradoxically, are likely to bring them closer to death than the hopes and dreams they are chasing. In the past six months alone, migrant arrivals have surged by 174 percent along the West African route, and 61 percent in the central Mediterranean. Unfortunately, recent

reports and investigations indicate that EU funding earmarked for efforts to curb irregular migrant flows along these two routes is instead being used to sustain punitive detentions and expulsions in situations where the principles of the rule of law, accountability and transparency are sidelined.

From Tunisia to Mauritania, migrants are not only detained but forcibly transported to, and abandoned in, harsh, remote desert areas where basic human necessities, including food and water, are frightfully scarce.

Yet the EU money continues to flow, from €400 million (\$436 million) between 2015 and 2021, to more recent allocations in the billions to North African countries in anticipation of the implementation of the new Pact on Migration and Asylum, ostensibly for the management of migration but with little regard for the grave implications for migrants' welfare.

The collective expulsion operations funded by European money are responsible for the dumping of dozens of migrants at a



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time in remote desert areas, among other rights violations that have been corroborated by visual evidence and the testimonies of those who survive to tell of the horrors.

As Europe continues to face persistent challenges along its southern borders, the limits of the present strategy of border reinforcement have been revealed. Despite efforts to outsource EU border controls to North African countries, irregular migration via the treacherous central Mediterranean route has surged since 2020, calling into question the efficacy of this border externalization. The approach has not only failed to curb migration but continues to increase human suffering, as resource allocation focuses on securitization over addressing the root causes of displacement. Rather than doubling down on permanent solutions that attempt to seal borders, European nations should recalibrate their approach and focus on the reasons why people undertake these desperate journeys in the first place.

If Europe is to align its migration policies with its professed values and long-term geopolitical aims, it must consider investments in capacity building for democratic institutions, sustainable economic development, and climate adaptation in countries of origin and transit.

Brussels can also reallocate resources to create viable pathways for legal migration, such as visa schemes, that deter the dangerous crossings managed by smugglers and traffickers while simultaneously helping the bloc to address growing shortages in skilled labor. By partnering with nations in North Africa, the EU can balance its immediate migration-management needs with longer-term investments that dismantle the political economy of migration.

By tackling irregular migration through a comprehensive framework that emphasizes partnerships over unilateral security concerns, Europe can shape a resilient and cooperative regional environment that lessens the imperative for migration.

Opinion

Jeddah talks a viable path to resolving Sudan conflict

DR. MAJID RAFIZADEH



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The conflict in Sudan, which began more than a year ago between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, continues unabated as both factions strive to dominate the nation. This prolonged struggle has led to catastrophic outcomes, with millions forced to flee their homes, resulting in what is being characterized as the worst displacement crisis in the world. Resuming and prioritizing the Jeddah talks, a diplomatic initiative led by Saudi Arabia, is paramount. Equally essential is an intensified international commitment to reengage diplomatically and advocate forcefully for an immediate ceasefire to effectively address the unfolding humanitarian crisis.

To fully grasp the present humanitarian crisis in Sudan, it is essential to recognize that the country was already in a dire state even before the ongoing conflict erupted. Prolonged political instability and relentless economic hardships had left Sudan teetering on the edge, with nearly 16 million people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. These conditions have only been exacerbated by the violence,

which is amplifying the suffering and desperation of the Sudanese people.

Currently, nearly 25 million individuals — more than half of Sudan's entire population — are in desperate need of assistance. The brutal ongoing conflict has claimed the lives of tens of thousands, creating a tragic toll of death and destruction. Moreover, the violence has driven millions from their homes, resulting in a

staggering displacement crisis. According to data from June, about 12 million people have been forcibly displaced, highlighting the profound and widespread impact of the turmoil on Sudan's population.

Another significant risk is that the war in Sudan has repercussions that extend beyond its borders, precipitating a

widespread refugee crisis that impacts neighboring countries, especially Chad, which has seen a substantial influx of people seeking refuge. This sudden and massive arrival of refugees has placed an enormous strain on Chad's already fragile economy and its limited resources. This situation exacerbates existing hardships and creates a precarious environment for both the refugees and the host communities, highlighting the far-reaching and

The violence has driven millions from their homes, resulting in a staggering displacement crisis

Children are increasingly vulnerable to abuse, compounding the humanitarian crisis

destabilizing effects of the conflict in Sudan. The conflict has also wreaked havoc on the country's infrastructure. Among the hardest-hit areas is the healthcare system, which is now largely nonfunctional. The medical sector is grappling with a dire shortage of personnel, financial resources and essential medical supplies. This already grim situation is compounded by frequent assaults and looting, rendering medical staff unable to provide even basic care.

It is also essential to highlight the grave risks faced by children in Sudan, who are among the most vulnerable in the conflict. The violence has forced the closure of thousands of schools in the affected regions, disrupting the education of millions. It is estimated that about 20 million children are being deprived of their right to education. This lack of schooling not only hampers their academic growth, but also exposes them to heightened risks and various forms of harm and exploitation. Without the protective environment that schools and a stable environment provide, these children are increasingly vulnerable to abuse, compounding the humanitarian crisis and threatening the future of an entire generation.

The final and perhaps most alarming threat posed by the ongoing conflict in Sudan is the potential for the country to become a breeding ground for terrorist and militia groups. As the war drags on, Sudan risks transforming into a completely lawless region where extremist groups can easily establish a foothold.

Central to the Jeddah talks is the Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan, which is firmly grounded in international human rights principles. It places significant emphasis on crucial aspects, such as the differentiation between civilians and combatants, ensuring the unhindered movement and safety of civilians, safeguarding medical personnel, facilitating the delivery of vital humanitarian aid to the population in need, and staunchly opposing the recruitment of children into armed conflict.

By adhering to these provisions, the Jeddah Declaration is not only seeking to mitigate the immediate suffering, but also lay the groundwork for sustainable peace and stability in Sudan, underscoring the importance of international collaboration and humanitarian imperatives in achieving these goals.

Biden, Trump loom large over NATO summit

ANDREW HAMMOND



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Western leaders this week marked the 75th anniversary of NATO. Yet most of the attention during the organization's annual summit in Washington was focused on US President Joe Biden.

Several US allies around the world were alarmed by his poor performance during the recent presidential debate, which cemented a growing belief that should he remain the Democrat candidate, he will lose the election in November to his Republican rival, the NATO-skeptic Donald Trump — so much so that some in the military alliance are already predicting transatlantic turmoil at the next NATO summit, due to take place in The Hague in June next year.

Former Trump administration officials, including National Security Adviser John Bolton, have confirmed that the former president came close to announcing a US withdrawal from the alliance while he was in power between 2017 and 2021. Despite the strength of other NATO members, there is no question that a US exit would be a body blow to its credibility.

Behind the scenes, there is much

scenario-planning going on in Western capitals regarding the feasibility of a NATO without US participation. It is possible that the alliance could try to remain functional for a few years in the hope that a successor to a second Trump presidency might return the US to the fold.

However, there are splits within the alliance on these issues, as illustrated by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban,

whose nation currently holds the rotating, six-month presidency of the EU. Orban made a controversial visit to Moscow this week to meet President Vladimir Putin. Last month, he leveraged his power to veto the appointment of Mark Rutte as secretary-general of NATO to secure an opt-out for Hungary

from the alliance's activities in support of Ukraine. He has also voiced opposition to NATO's growing focus on China.

One of the few subjects on which Trump, while president, agreed with NATO was its newfound focus on China. He will therefore potentially be pleased that a key item on the agenda during the summit this week was the threat posed by Beijing, including its sale of tools and technology to Russia.

For a third year in a row, top officials from key Western allies in the Asia-Pacific

— Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea — attended the NATO summit. The alliance has low-level partnerships with all four and wants to build on this.

However, it was Ukraine and NATO's broader future that were the main items on the agenda and here there were some positive announcements, despite the uncertainty about a possible Trump presidential victory.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, northern European membership of NATO has grown, and the alliance welcomed Sweden to the first summit it has attended as a formal member.

The leaders of the 32 member states also highlighted progress on defense budgets. This year, 23 of them are on course to meet the NATO target of spending 2 percent of gross domestic product on defense. Key exceptions remain Canada, Italy, and Spain.

On the issue of Ukraine, a major, one-year, €40 billion (\$43.6 billion) pledge of support was announced. While this is less ambitious than the initial proposal for a multi-year, €92 billion package, it nonetheless provides some future clarity for Kyiv.

The alliance also agreed to take over much of the coordination of arms

deliveries from the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, a coalition of about 50 nations. This gives NATO a more direct role in the war against Russia while still falling well short of committing its own forces.

So the good news for incoming NATO chief Rutte is that the context for the debate about the organization's future has been transformed in recent years. As recently as 2019, there was widespread

concern about its purpose, with French President Emmanuel Macron suggesting it was "brain dead" as a result of the rapidly changing geopolitical landscape, in particular the diminished commitment of the US under Trump. Fast forward to today and Macron has said Russia's invasion of Ukraine woke up NATO

with the "worst of electroshocks." It has been an unexpected turnaround of fortunes, in the most serious of circumstances, and one that could further be fueled by Western concerns about China.

The war in Ukraine has underlined the continuing relevance of NATO, the members of which have a collective population of about 1 billion. For all its remaining weaknesses, the alliance remains one of the most successful military organizations in history.

For all its weaknesses, NATO remains one of the most successful military organizations in history

In an unexpected turnaround of fortunes, the war in Ukraine has underlined the continuing relevance of NATO

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Business



The Saudi market, in general, is an excellent market, and the current period is more mature than before.

Mohamed Zohair
CEO and founder of YaSchools



By supporting innovative edutech solutions, investors play a crucial role in shaping the future of education and providing Saudis with modern, accessible, and personalized learning experiences. AFP

TRANSFORMATION

KSA's digital lead in education opens up investment opportunities

Kingdom's edutech landscape offers numerous opportunities for both local and foreign investors

Nour El-Shaerl Cairo

Saudi Arabia is making significant strides in education technology, with substantial investments aimed at transforming and enhancing the sector.

The Kingdom's government is actively promoting initiatives in this field, also known as edutech, recognizing their potential to revolutionize the schooling system.

According to industry experts, the Kingdom's edutech landscape offers numerous opportunities for both local and foreign investors.

Venture data platform MAGNITT has revealed the edutech sector is now one of the top five most-funded fields in the Kingdom.

In 2023, the industry saw a total of \$50 million raised by Saudi-based startups, a 6 percent growth from the year before. Furthermore, the edutech sector in the Kingdom witnessed substantial growth in 2022, surging by 2,069 percent compared to the previous year.

Nasser Al-Shareef, senior adviser of investment and privatization at the Saudi Ministry of Education, reiterated the possibilities for the industry in an article for Arab News earlier this year.

"By investing in education technology, both local and international investors can tap into a rapidly growing market with a high demand for innovative educational solutions. Saudi Arabia's large youth population, coupled with its strong focus on education and digital transformation, creates a fertile ground for edutech investments," he said.

"The Saudi government is supporting the growth of the edutech sector through various initiatives, policies, and funding programs. This support includes financial incentives, regulatory reforms, and partnerships with educational institutions. These measures not only attract investment but also provide a conducive environment for edutech startups to flourish," he added.

Al-Shareef further stated that investing in the Kingdom's edutech field offers opportunities across various segments of the education ecosystem.

This includes online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and adaptive learning technologies, as well as educational content development, teachers' training, and more.

"The potential for scalability and market penetration is significant, considering the increasing adoption of technology in schools, universities, and lifelong learning programs," he added.

A national vision

Investing in Saudi edutech aligns with the Kingdom's vision of establishing a knowledge-based economy, according to Al-Shareef.

By supporting innovative edutech solutions, investors play a crucial role in shaping the future of education and providing Saudis with modern, accessible, and personalized learning experiences.

The Vision 2030 initiative, which seeks to diversify the economy and reduce reliance on oil, is a significant driver behind the Kingdom's investment in edutech.

The Saudi government has identified the development of a knowledge-based economy and the improvement of

education quality as essential goals. Edutech is considered a key enabler in achieving these objectives.

Various government programs and initiatives have been launched to support the growth of edutech startups and companies in the country, Al-Shareef explained.

"For example, the Ministry of Investment has introduced initiatives to attract foreign investment in the edutech sector. These initiatives include offering incentives and streamlined processes for setting up edutech companies in the Kingdom," he said.

An entrepreneurial spirit

Private investors have also shown increasing interest in the Saudi edutech sector. Venture capital firms and private equity holders are actively investing in edutech startups, recognizing the sector's growth potential, Al-Shareef added.

Speaking to Arab News, Salem Ghanem - CEO of Saudi-based edutech startup Faheem - emphasized the critical role of digital tools in supporting the national vision.

"The edutech industry is likely to make a

significant contribution to the Saudi economy, especially after the privatization of the education sector following the Kingdom's Vision 2030," Ghanem said.

He added: "The impact will be apparent in the created job opportunities and the decreasing unemployment rates, taking into consideration that the tutoring market could create an estimated 45,000 to 60,000 job opportunities."

In an interview with Arab News, Mohamed Zohair, CEO and founder of Saudi-based YaSchools, emphasized the significant rise of the Kingdom's edutech sector.

"The Saudi market, in general, is an excellent market, and the current period is more mature than before, especially with the unprecedented support in digital transformation, financial services, and accompanying legislation and regulations," Zohair said.

Al-Shareef further emphasized Zohair's point, stating that Saudi Arabia has witnessed a surge in venture capital investments in edutech startups, with three of the top 10 most-funded startups in the Middle East and North Africa region originating from the Kingdom.

"The increase in venture capital investments has had a significant impact on the sector in Saudi Arabia. It has provided a boost to the growth and

development of edutech startups by injecting much-needed funding and resources into the sector," Al-Shareef explained.

"With greater access to capital, these startups have been able to innovate, expand their operations, and enhance their technological solutions," he added.

According to Al-Shareef, the influx of venture capital has drawn attention from both local and international investors, creating a favorable investment climate for the edutech sector in Saudi Arabia.

This increased investor interest has provided financial support and brought valuable expertise, mentorship, and networking opportunities to startups.

Furthermore, the availability of venture capital has enabled startups to attract and retain top talent by offering competitive salaries, benefits, and career growth opportunities.

This has helped build a skilled workforce in the edutech sector and drive innovation.

Overall, the rise in venture capital investments has fueled the growth and transformation of the edutech industry in Saudi Arabia, positioning it as a key player in the regional digital schooling landscape and contributing to the advancement of education and learning technologies in the Kingdom.

The edutech industry is likely to make a significant contribution to the Saudi economy, especially after the privatization of the education sector.

Salem Ghanem
CEO of Faheem



EXPANSION

Saudi MSMEs see 16% growth in credit offerings in 1st quarter

Saudi banks extended 94 percent of credit facilities, with the remaining 6 percent granted by finance companies

Dayan Abou Tine Riyadh

Credit facilities provided to micro, small, and medium enterprises in Saudi Arabia saw an annual rise of 16 percent in the first three months of 2024, according to recent data.

Figures from the Kingdom's central bank, known as SAMA, indicated that borrowing lines allocated to this sector totaled SR293.43 billion (\$78.25 billion), up from SR252.02 billion in the first quarter of 2023.

According to SAMA data, Saudi banks extended 94 percent of these credit facilities, with the remaining 6 percent granted by finance companies.

Medium enterprises received the majority share of the sector's total granted facilities at 55 percent, amounting to SR160.6 billion, with the most notable annual growth observed in small companies, which saw 32 percent increase to reach SR103.5 billion.

Credit extended to micro enterprises, constituting 10 percent of the overall share of MSME financing, increased by 30 percent during this period, reaching a total of SR29.4 billion.

Micro enterprises are characterized by revenues up to SR3 million and a workforce of no more than five full-time employees.

Small enterprises, on the other hand, exhibit earnings ranging from SR3 million to SR40 million, accompanied by up to 49 full-time workers.

In contrast, medium enterprises have revenues falling within the range of SR40 million to SR200 million, with employee numbers ranging from 50 to 249.

Saudi Arabia is heavily investing in its SMEs to diversify its economy away from oil and foster a competitive funding environment.

Reforms have significantly simplified business investment and startup processes, boosting this sector's share of GDP from 21 percent in 2013 with a Vision 2030 goal of reaching 35 percent.

The government is urging financial institutions to allocate 20 percent of their loan portfolios to this sector, demonstrating strong and ongoing support for these enterprises.

Currently, advances to MSMEs account for 8.6 percent of total credit from Saudi banks in what is an annual rise of 8.3 percent. Additionally, they represent



FAST FACT

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Saudi Arabia is heavily investing in SMEs to diversify its economy away from oil and foster a competitive funding environment. SPA

20 percent of advances from finance companies, a slight decrease from 22 percent.

Monsha'at key figures

In the first quarter of 2024, the Small and Medium Enterprises General Authority, also known as Monsha'at, reported that 9,644 SMEs benefited from dedicated support centers, 15,766 trainees used the e-Academy, and 1,558 accessed the Mazaya platform.

Some 719 also qualified for the Jadeer service, and 555 utilized the Commercial Innovation Portal.

Additionally, 463 SMEs joined the Tomoh program, facilitating Nomu market offerings.

The report highlighted that despite a regional dip in total

Venture Capital funding this quarter, Saudi Arabia led MENA in capital deployed, securing 35 deals worth \$240 million, according to Magnitt's Q1 2024 KSA Venture Investment Report.

The Kingdom's startup scene showed remarkable progress, highlighted by Salla app's \$130 million pre-initial public offering fundraiser, which was the region's sole mega deal.

In this quarter, 65 percent of capital deployed in MENA went to Saudi-based firms. This investment, though significant, reflected a 70 percent quarterly drop from the fourth quarter of

2023 and a 42 percent year-on-year decline, mirroring broader regional trends.

Phillip Bahoshy, founder and CEO of MAGNITT, highlighted that despite Saudi Arabia maintaining its position as the leading investment destination in MENA, there is a noticeable downturn.

Notably, \$33 million was allocated to six early-stage venture and Series A deals. In a comment in Monsha'at's report, Bahoshy observed that despite the funding downturn, deal flow in Saudi Arabia experienced only a modest 13 percent decrease compared to the same quarter of 2023.

This suggests that the Kingdom's entrepreneurial ecosystem remains attractive to investors. The smaller average ticket sizes reflect a recalibration rather than a retreat in investor sentiment.

Key enablers

The Kafalah Program is one of the many government initiatives designed to support this sector by mitigating risk through guarantees that can cover up to 95 percent of the loan amount.

Additionally, Monsha'at, a key enabler to Saudi Arabia's ambitious Vision 2030, plays a pivotal role in the SME ecosystem by enhancing access to finance,

promoting entrepreneurship, and providing crucial support for business development.

The authority enhances funding to this sector through partnerships with financial institutions and initiatives like the Kafalah Program, which increases lending. It prioritizes up-skilling SMEs via training programs and advocates for regulatory reforms to improve the business environment.

The institution also promotes market expansion by linking SMEs to opportunities and encouraging collaboration through networking events and trade platforms. Additionally, it cultivates an entrepreneurial culture with mentorship and advisory services, aiming to bolster the capacity and resilience of Saudi SMEs.

Global trends boosting SME growth

In the first quarter of 2024, Monsha'at highlighted how new technologies are empowering Saudi SMEs to scale, expand their market presence, and compete effectively against larger firms.

The Kingdom's rapid advancements in IT and digitalization are particularly beneficial, fostering trends such as hybrid work models that enhance flexibility and resilience.

Furthermore, a significant

number of SMEs are embracing e-commerce to drive growth, with 75 percent planning to adopt online shopping globally, as reported by the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs study.

Saudi SMEs are strategically positioned to capitalize on international opportunities across several sectors due to the Kingdom's expanding global influence. In renewables, they can leverage local expertise in solar and wind energy before venturing abroad.

The logistics sector also presents opportunities as Saudi Arabia aims to establish itself as a global hub. Leveraging the Kingdom's rich fashion heritage, SMEs can explore growth prospects in the fashion industry, the report stated.

In Islamic finance and fintech, there are openings for SMEs to innovate and develop new products for regional markets. The healthcare and biotech sectors offer expansion opportunities through initiatives like the Health Sector Transformation Program.

The report also noted that regional investments in agritech support growth, while rising interest in e-learning and edtech, exemplified by successes like the iStoria app, indicates a promising sector for Saudi SMEs.

Business News



Launched by the MAGRABI Retail Group in 2021 in Saudi Arabia, Doctor M now employs over 300 staff members across the Middle East region. Supplied

LIFESTYLE BRAND

MAGRABi to expand with 36 new Doctor M stores

Expansion plan driven by market potential and size of the targeted segment

Reina Takla, Nadin Hassan Riyadh

Middle East eyewear retailer MAGRABI Retail Group is planning to open 36 new stores in 2024, expanding its footprint across the region and meeting increasing consumer demand for eyewear through its lifestyle brand, Doctor M.

In an interview with Arab News, Souha Hasan, vice president of Mainstream Business at the company, noted that expansion plan is driven by the market potential and size of the targeted segment.

Launched by the MAGRABI Retail Group in 2021 in Saudi Arabia, Doctor M now employs over 300 staff members across the Middle East region.

The company's VP confirmed the firm is rolling out Doctor M stores across major cities in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Egypt, with the goal of having 300 outlets across the MENA region by 2030.

Currently, the group has 65 Doctor M stores and are opening new branches every month. The goal is to increase the total number of stores to 80 by the end of 2024, with 50 of those stores located in Saudi Arabia.

In 2023, the group invested SR115 million (\$30.66 million) in new store openings, refurbishments, and transformation projects, laying a foundation for future growth and scalability.

"Our selection criteria for new stores are based on demographic insights and understanding the target customers of each location to ensure it aligns with Doctor M's target personas," Hasan said.

She continued: "We conduct a deep-dive analysis of each location from a real estate perspective, considering factors such as format, footfall, accessibility, and adjacency, which impact our sales forecasts."

Hasan underscored key consumer trends that have significantly influenced the company's strategy include a rising demand for modern urban eyewear stores offering distinctive value propositions, like Doctor M.

"We also recognize the preference for convenience, which drives our expansion strategy and our presence in various retail formats to meet our customers and showcase our services and product offerings," Hasan told Arab News.

Furthermore, Hasan outlined several key trends shaping the eyewear retail market in the Middle East such as digital transformation, where retailers and brands are enhancing their e-commerce and digital channel experiences and presence.

Our selection criteria for new stores are based on demographic insights and understanding the target customers of each location to ensure it aligns with Doctor M's target personas.

Souha Hasan
MAGRABi Retail Group
VP of Mainstream
Business



"The wellness trend has increased awareness of eye health, driving demand for quality eyewear. For instance, we see that brands are prioritizing the eye protection narrative," Hasan said.

She added: "Furthermore, fashion and style play a significant role; eyewear is not just functional, it's a fashion statement. We are expected to blend style, fashion, and functionality to attract different customer segments and personas."

When asked on the expected financial impact of this expansion, she noted the firm is doubling its revenues in 2024 in line with the company's three-year business plan.

In the past year, the brand has effectively implemented its growth strategy, doubling its store count and achieving an impressive 160 percent revenue increase in the first quarter of 2024 compared to the previous year.

Hasan further elaborated on the operational challenges anticipated during the rapid expansion of Doctor M.

These challenges include talent acquisition, focusing on recruiting personnel who align with the brand's values and customer-focused approach.

"We address this challenge by anticipating the recruitment process ahead of time and targeting the appropriate staffing channels when hiring for specialty retail," Hasan said.

She added:

"For technical profiles, for instance, we collaborate closely with official institutes in each country to ensure the quality of optometry and deliver our promise to customers."

Another challenge is maintaining consistency and standardization across all stores, addressed through the development of operational guidelines and maintaining close communication with store teams to monitor and respond to customer feedback effectively.

"Talent acquisition is one of our main priorities as we progress with the expansion plan. We work closely with our People & Culture teams across the region to ensure the fulfillment process," she stressed.

Moreover, Hasan highlighted the importance placed on maintaining high-quality customer service and enhancing the overall shopping experience at all stores.

"We continuously work to meet customers' expectations through our new retail concept stores, where the exploration of both vision correction and stylish frames is curated in line with our strategic positioning of lifestyle," she said.

"This involves standardized and customized training models per country for our teams and consistent monitoring of customer feedback through our net promoter score and CRM channels."

In addition to its physical footprint, the company has made significant strides in the digital sphere by using technology, such as advanced inventory systems and customer relationship management tools, to make operations more efficient.

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Final tranche Pakistan reaches new \$7bn loan deal with IMF

Pakistan has reached a staff-level agreement for a new \$7 billion loan deal, the International Monetary Fund said Friday, the country's latest turn to the global lender for help in propping up its economy and dealing with its debts.

Earlier this year, the IMF approved the release of the final \$1.1 billion tranche of a \$3 billion bailout to Pakistan. Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb said the government planned to seek a long-term loan to help stabilize the economy after the end of that bailout package.

The new loan deal will last for 37 months. **AP**

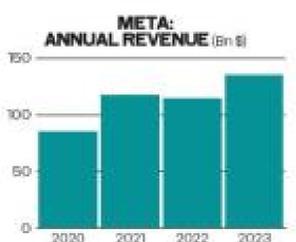
Inflation data US stocks flirt with fresh records

Global stock markets mostly powered ahead on Friday, lifting the Dow above 40,000 and near a fresh record despite disappointing US inflation data and a lackluster market reaction to American bank earnings. All three major US indices climbed after both Paris and Frankfurt packed on more than one percent.

US wholesale inflation rose 0.2 percent in June, according to Labor Department data. Friday's data was not bad enough to overshadow Thursday's benign consumer price index report that boosted expectations for Federal Reserve interest rate cuts, analysts said. **AFP**

Chart of THE DAY

In 2022, Meta's revenue stood at \$118 billion.



Source: Statista

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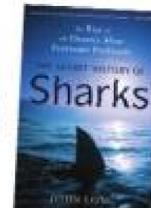
FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

The Secret History of Sharks

JOHN LONG

John Long's "The Secret History of Sharks" showcases the global search to discover sharks' largely unknown evolution, led by Long and dozens of other scientists who embark on digs in all seven continents,

investigating layers of rock to reveal new fossils and clues to sharks' singular story. The book is a riveting look at scientific discovery with insights into the threats to sharks today and how they can contribute to medical advances.



Investments JPMorgan beats estimates for Q2 profit

JPMorgan Chase beat estimates for second quarter profit on Friday as a resurgence in dealmaking and strong capital markets fueled record results.

More companies are seeking to raise funds through debt or equity offerings and striking takeover deals.

Investment banking revenue grew 46 percent to \$2.5 billion, exceeding the company's earlier predictions.

The Wall Street operations even propelled overall profits to an all-time high. JPMorgan also benefited from a one-time accounting gains on transactions related to payments network Visa. **Reuters**

Production issues Boeing starts 777-9 flight trials for certification

Boeing has started certification flight testing of its long-delayed 777-9 with US aviation regulators onboard, the US planemaker said in an emailed statement.

The development is a boost for Boeing, which has been grappling with production and legal issues since a Jan. 5 mid-air panel blowout on a 737 MAX plane.

The 777-9 is part of the 777X project to upgrade the 777 wide-body jet. The project has been in development since 2013 but has faced multiple hold-ups, including certification delays. **Reuters**

We are thrilled to expand our presence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with the opening of our store in U Walk Jeddah.

Stuart Henwood
Regional General Manager of
New Balance in the MEA, India



Corporate
PRESS RELEASES FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

WORLD-CLASS FACILITY

Emirates brings signature lounge experience to Jeddah

Emirates has officially opened the doors to its first ever lounge in the region at King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah. The airline's newest dedicated lounge will accommodate customers flying on its triple daily A380 services.

The 900-square-meter lounge, worth 20 million dirhams (\$5.4 million), located in the airport's new Terminal 1 will cater to the airline's first and business class passengers, as well as Emirates Skywards Platinum and Gold members, with the capacity to accommodate more than 190 guests at any one time, in a variety of seating options.

The investment reflects the airline's commitment to progressively growing its presence in the Kingdom, supporting aviation goals of Saudi Vision 2030, and its ongoing dedication to ensuring a thoughtful and welcoming Emirates experience on the ground for customers flying from one of Emirates' most important markets globally. This year, Emirates is also celebrating a milestone in its operations to Saudi Arabia, marking 35 years of service to Jeddah.

The official opening of the lounge was attended by Nasser Huwaiden Al-Ketbi, consul general of the UAE in Jeddah; Raed bin Ibrahim Al-Mudalheem, chairman of the board of directors of Jeddah Airports Company; Mohammed Mattar, divisional senior vice president



The new Emirates lounge features a refreshed and sophisticated design, anchored in contemporary elements with regional design influences.

— airport services at Emirates; Mazen Johar, CEO of JEDCO; Sami Aqil Abdulla, senior vice president — airport services for outstations and business support; Jabr Al-Azeeby, vice president — commercial operations for Emirates in Saudi Arabia; and Amer Al-Arai, airport services manager for Emirates at King Abdulaziz International Airport.

Mattar said: "Jeddah was our first gateway into the Kingdom 35 years ago, so it's fitting that the King Abdulaziz International Airport, a world-class facility, is the first airport in the region

outside of Dubai to feature an Emirates dedicated lounge. The lounge, comfortably situated at the center of Terminal 1, is beautifully designed to deliver an industry-leading experience and Emirates' signature hospitality for our customers from the moment they step inside. We thank the airport authorities for their support in helping us open our doors to officially welcome customers and provide them with a memorable travel experience on the ground."

Meanwhile, Johar said: "The launch of Emirates lounge at King Abdulaziz International

Airport reflects the 35-year-long strategic relationship of providing multiple travel options to passengers through the airline's three daily flights. The lounge is a significant addition to the airport's services and supports the comprehensive development efforts at the airport, aimed at providing an enjoyable and seamless travel experience for passengers from all over the world."

The new lounge features a refreshed and sophisticated design, anchored in contemporary elements with regional design influences. The

welcoming space offers a variety of seating configurations, including dining, lounging, and quiet spaces for relaxation. Inside the lounge, customers can look forward to a wide range of dining options, luxurious shower facilities, a prayer room, and other amenities.

The buffet offers a wide variety of Middle Eastern, local, and international delicacies to choose from, including lamb kabsa, spinach and ricotta tortellini, Moroccan lemon chicken, prawn machbous, Saint Sebastian cheesecake, and Tiramisu cake, among many others.

The lounge is located on the third floor of King Abdulaziz International Airport's Terminal 1 Departure area and is just a 10-minute walk from the terminal's entrance and a 3 to 5-minute walk to the boarding gates, A28B and A38B, where Emirates' three daily flights are situated during the day.

MOBILE CONNECTIVITY

Report reveals impressive 5G speeds and network advancements across Kingdom

Opensignal, a global authority on mobile network experience, has released its latest analysis on the performance of 5G speeds in Saudi Arabia compared to those in neighboring regional markets of Europe, the Middle East and Africa. It found that Saudi Arabia ranks third for 5G download speed among comparable markets in the EMEA region, showcasing the country's impressive progress in 5G deployment.

According to the report, which covers 57 markets, Saudi Arabia has seen significant improvements in 5G speeds and overall network advancements across the country. This achievement underscores the concerted efforts of the Kingdom's mobile network operators in enhancing their 5G infrastructure and delivering faster download

speeds to users. The report further highlights that all GCC markets, with the exception of Oman, have seen average 5G download speeds exceed 200 Mbps, with Saudi Arabia's download speeds rising by 5 percent year-over-year.

Sam Fenwick, principal analyst at Opensignal, said: "The latest findings from our analysis highlight the substantial advancements made by Saudi Arabia's mobile network operators in delivering exceptional 5G experiences to users across the country. The impressive 5G download speeds and the overall improvements in network performance demonstrate the operators' commitment to providing world-class connectivity, supporting the nation's digital transformation initiatives."

IMMERSIVE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

New Balance expands in KSA with new Jeddah store

New Balance has announced the opening of its fifth store in the Kingdom and its second store in the vibrant city of Jeddah. Strategically located within the popular U Walk Jeddah, the new store offers a memorable shopping experience for residents and visitors alike.

As New Balance continues its expansion within the MENA region, its glocalization strategy has brought the brand closer to the communities within several countries. As a key market within the region, Saudi Arabia presents significant opportunities for New Balance to deepen its connection and strengthen its presence in the country.

Jeddah, a dynamic city with a growing passion for sports and fitness, is an ideal location for



The store features New Balance's innovative Metro Flex concept.

New Balance's fifth store in the Kingdom. With U Walk Jeddah being a popular destination for retail, the addition of the New Balance store will enhance the shopping experience, providing

consumers access to high-quality footwear, apparel and accessories.

The store features New Balance's innovative Metro Flex concept, allowing consumers to shop the full brand collection in an immersive environment.

Customers can discover a comprehensive selection of performance running shoes, walking shoes, training footwear, and stylish lifestyle sneakers, alongside a curated collection of performance and athleisure apparel.

Stuart Henwood, regional general manager of New Balance in the Middle East, Africa and India, said: "We are thrilled to expand our presence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with the opening of our store in U Walk Jeddah."

Corporate Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Hospitality

Hilton expands global luxury portfolio

Hilton is dramatically expanding its portfolio of luxury hotel experiences with the addition of nearly 400 boutique properties from the exquisite Small Luxury Hotels of the World collection. Hundreds of these properties are now available on all Hilton direct booking channels, including Hilton.com and the Hilton Honors app.

Joining Hilton's luxury brand portfolio — Waldorf Astoria Hotels and Resorts, Conrad Hotels and Resorts, LXR Hotels and Resorts and Signia by Hilton — the diverse collection of participating SLH hotels offers travelers new ways of staying with Hilton in intimate spaces and unique places — from rustic huts and woodland treehouses to rainforest retreats and coastal villas.

Gaming Competition

AppGallery hosts esports tournament in Iraq

Huawei AppGallery, the official app distribution platform for Huawei and one of the world's top 3 app marketplaces, teamed up with Top Battle Royale Game to present the AppGallery Gamers Cup 2024 event in Baghdad. Committed to providing unique experiences for gamers, AppGallery hosted an offline tournament at the popular Djlal Village on June 28, with the sponsorship of Viu, a pan-regional over-the-top video streaming service, and Supercell, the Iraq Network Provider.

Cybersecurity

Govt. institutions main targets of APT groups

Researchers at Kaspersky, who keep a close eye on advanced persistent threats, observed 19 active threat actors that currently target organizations within the Middle East. Whilst these threat actors target a wide range of entities, Kaspersky researchers identified government, telecommunications and diplomatic institutions as the top targets in the region, followed by those in the energy sector.

APT groups are complex threat actors that deploy targeted attacks, active for years on end. These groups are often motivated by espionage, monetary gain, or in some cases, hacktivism.

Kingdom's hosting of the inaugural Esports Olympic Games in 2025 consolidates its position as a destination for leading global esports events.

Faisal bin Bandar bin Sultan Chairman of Saudi Esports Federation



Sport News

TOP GAMING HUB

Esports Olympic Games in Saudi Arabia to 'entirely reimagine' the gaming landscape

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's hosting of the inaugural Esports Olympic Games in 2025 will "entirely reimagine" the gaming and esports landscape, says Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Sultan, chairman of the Saudi Esports Federation.

The news was announced recently by the International Olympic Committee. The IOC has partnered with the Saudi Arabian Olympic & Paralympic Committee under an ambitious 12-year agreement — with the Esports Olympic Games set to be held regularly throughout this time.

Saudi Arabia is currently hosting the inaugural Esports World Cup, at Boulevard Riyadh City until Aug. 25, and Prince Faisal said this latest news consolidated the Kingdom's position as a destination of leading global esports events.

"The opportunity to host an

Gaming and esports are one of 13 sectors prioritized under the transformational socio-economic framework. Supplied



SPEED READ

'The opportunity to host an event of this magnitude is a proud and humbling moment for the Kingdom.'

event of this magnitude is a proud and humbling moment for Saudi Arabia — it's something that has captured the attention and imagination of game enthusiasts all around the world," he said.

"Beginning next year, there's no doubt this brand-new event is destined to be a spectacle that entirely reimagines gaming and esports as we know it. It will bring the entire global community even closer together as the spirit of elite competition and

international cooperation shines bright while the world's best athletes provide moments of esports excellence that entertain, delight and inspire."

In line with the Kingdom's Vision 2030, gaming and esports are one of 13 sectors being prioritized under the transformational socio-economic framework. From launching talent and infrastructure development projects to hosting international competitions, recent years have

seen the Kingdom emerge as a global gaming and esports hub — supported by SEF and the ambitious National Gaming and Esports Strategy launched in 2022 by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

With the Esports Olympic Games officially confirmed as a regular mainstay on the global calendar from next year onwards, Prince Faisal said the Saudi-based Esports Olympics could mirror the success of the Summer

Olympics by bringing the global community together for inspirational sporting events.

"For countless generations, the Olympic Games has been widely considered as the grandest stage in all of sport," Prince Faisal said. "They represent something truly special and spectacular — an occasion where the world comes together to watch moments of magnificence that epitomize talent, teamwork, dedication and belief in one's abilities to fulfill their dreams and aspirations.

"I sincerely believe the Esports Olympic Games will have a similar influence and impact. We've already seen esports — the new global sport — morph into a modern-day phenomenon where opportunities are there like never before for athletes to compete, excel and succeed. The Esports Olympic Games will continue this legacy — and we look forward to the honor and privilege of hosting the first-ever edition," he said.

NERVY MATCH

Krejcikova wins Wimbledon for 2nd Grand Slam singles title

Czech star secures title in final service game on 3rd championship point

AFP London

Barbora Krejcikova of the Czech Republic defeated Italy's Jasmine Paolini to win the Wimbledon women's title on Saturday for her second Grand Slam singles triumph.

Krejcikova, the 31st seed, won 6-2, 2-6, 6-4 to add the 2024 All England Club crown to her 2021 French Open victory.

Her win comes 26 years after her mentor Jana Novotna, who died of cancer in 2017, claimed the Wimbledon title.

"Before she passed away, she told me to go and win a Slam. I did that in Paris in 2021 but I never dreamed of winning the same trophy that Jana did," said the 28-year-old Krejcikova, who secured the title in a nervy final service game on a third championship point.

"It's unreal what just happened. The best day of my tennis career and the best day of my life. "I was just telling myself to be brave. It was such a difficult match, a great final, a great competition and I'm super happy to be standing here enjoying this moment."

Krejcikova, who will return to the top 10 following her victory, came into Wimbledon after a testing season.

A back injury and illness meant she went winless on the tour from February until June.

"I was injured and ill and didn't have a good start to the season and now I'm Wimbledon winner. How did that happen?" "I think



'It was a great final and I'm super happy to be standing here enjoying this moment,' Barbora Krejcikova said. Reuters

nobody's going to believe I won Wimbledon. I still can't believe it. Two weeks ago (first round) I had a very tough match, 7-5 in the third set and I wasn't in good shape."

The result means seventh-seeded Paolini has lost two Grand Slam finals back-to-back after coming off second best to Iga Swiatek at the French Open last month.

"I'm a little bit sad but I try to keep smiling. I have to remember today is still a good day," said

FASTFACTS

• Krejcikova, who will return to the top 10 following her victory, came into Wimbledon after a testing season.

• A back injury and illness meant she went winless on the tour from February until June.

Paolini, who had never won a grass-court match in her career until last month.

"I remember watching Wimbledon as a kid cheering for Roger Federer, so to be here now is crazy. It's been a beautiful two weeks."

She added: "Barbora, you played unbelievable. You play such beautiful tennis. Congrats to you and your team."

Krejcikova set the tone at the start of the match by breaking the Italian in the opening game and

backing up the advantage with a hold to love.

Paolini, the first Italian woman to reach a Wimbledon singles final, had to save two break points in the third game but she cracked under the strain again as the composed Czech stormed into a double-break ahead for 4-1.

Krejcikova moved to three set points in the eighth game and only needed one as Paolini dumped a backhand return into the net.

The nerve-wracked Italian managed to claim just four points on the Czech's serve in the 35-minute opener. Krejcikova hit 10 winners to the Italian's five.

Paolini dashed off Center Court for a bathroom break and returned re-energised.

She had also dropped the first set in her marathon semifinal triumph over Donna Vekic and on Saturday she launched another second set fightback.

Breaks in the second and eighth games leveled the final after a set in which Krejcikova made 14 unforced errors to seven for her opponent, taking her double-fault count to a tournament-high of 33.

The Czech managed just four winners in the set as she went spectacularly off the boil.

However, momentum shifted dramatically back in her favor in the decider when Paolini double-faulted to surrender a break and fall 3-4 behind.

Krejcikova held to love for 5-3 but endured a nervy conclusion, requiring three championship points and saving two break points in the 10th game to seal the title.

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Euro 2024

Spain's Rodri finally in charge at Berlin final

Finally handed the keys to Spain's midfield at a major tournament, Rodri Hernandez has driven the side to the verge of Euro 2024 glory.

La Roja are bidding for a record fourth Euros triumph against England in Sunday's Berlin final and Rodri is both the engine and the brains behind the competition's strongest side to this point.

After Luis Enrique used Rodri at center-back at the 2022 World Cup with veteran Sergio Busquets still the first choice defensive midfielder, coach Luis de la Fuente has installed Rodri in his best position. **AFP**



Olympics preparations

US basketball team arrives in Abu Dhabi

The US men's national basketball team arrived in Abu Dhabi as part of their preparations for the 2024 Summer Olympics.

The Americans will face Australia and Serbia on July 15 and 17, respectively. Australia and Serbia will face off on July 16. The games will be played at Yas Viceroy Hotel's Etihad Arena. The team's visit, as part of the USA Basketball Showcase, highlights Abu Dhabi's growing prominence as a hub for world-class sporting events. **AN Riyadh**

Rugby

Georgia beat 14-man Japan 25-23 in Sendai

Georgia denied Eddie Jones his first win of his second stint as Japan head coach after scoring a late try to claim a 25-23 victory in Sendai on Saturday.

The feisty Australian was leading Japan out for the second time, after suffering a thrashing at the hands of his former team England in Tokyo three weeks ago.

Japan were reduced to 14 men midway through the first half but fought back and led until Giorgi Javakhia's try with six minutes left gave Georgia an easy conversion to win the game. **AFP**

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At the London premiere of 'Deadpool & Wolverine,' Ryan Reynolds said the film was about 'friendship,' adding: 'There's so many moments in the movie where it's hard to tell if Deadpool's talking to Wolverine or it's Hugh and Ryan talking to each other. And I'm really proud of those moments.'



& Finally

The Six

Lip array

The quest for the perfect lip product is never-ending, and Arab beauty brands offer a diverse range of options to cater to every preference and need.



Mond

The Egyptian brand offers seven shades of lip gloss, ranging from neutrals to red and rose. They are available in two types of containers: a squeeze tube or a brush tube.



L'Arab Boutique

For those seeking nourishing lip care, the UK-based Saudi brand offers a range of balms infused with pomegranate, sidr honey, jasmine, coconut, argan and rosele.



Nadin Njeim

The beauty brand of the Lebanese star features a Lip Glow Gloss available in four colors, formulated with hyaluronic acid known for its lip-plumping properties.



Asteri Beauty

The Sweet Oasis Lip Gloss from the Saudi brand ensures to shield the lips from dehydration caused by extreme heat and dryness.



Huda Beauty

For a filtered look without emphasizing lines, the new Huda Beauty Faux Filter lip glosses blur and smooth fine lines, providing a lip filler effect without the tingling sensation.



Bex Beauty

If you do not mind the tingling sensation, consider trying Bex Beauty's B Berry lip plumpers, available in shades of strawberry, cranberry, blueberry and raspberry.



CLOSE UP

Daisy Ridley takes a chic turn in Elie Saab

Arab News Dubai

British actress Daisy Ridley stunned in an elegant Elie Saab look while presenting at the 2024 ESPY Awards in Los Angeles.

The ESPY Awards, the Excellence in Sports Performance Yearly, is an event honoring the top athletes and sport performances of the year.

The 32-year-old "Star Wars" actress skipped the red carpet at the ceremony, held at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood. She did take the stage, though, to present an award with Buffalo Bills player, Damar Hamlin, during the telecast.

Ridley wore a sleeveless cobalt-blue gown from Lebanese designer Elie Saab. The actress had her hair pulled back into a tight bun as she accessorized the look with blue gem earrings. She completed the ensemble with black heels.

In an interview with Reuters last month, Ridley talked about reprising her role as Jedi hero, Rey, and said that it feels "exciting and nerve-racking" as she returns to the "Star Wars" franchise for a new film.

Walt Disney Co., which purchased Star Wars producer Lucasfilm in 2012 and released three movies starring Ridley from 2015 to 2019 as well as a different TV series, announced new plans for the franchise last year.

"I'm very excited, it feels like a new adventure," Ridley told Reuters at the London premiere of another Disney film, "Young Woman and the Sea."

"It's a world that I'm familiar with, I'm coming back to, but also it feels like a new start. So, it feels exciting and nerve-racking and I'm excited."

In "Young Woman and the Sea" Ridley plays American swimmer Gertrude Trudy Ederle, an Olympic gold medalist who became the first

woman to swim the English Channel.

In 1926, Ederle set off from northern France for the southern English coast, making the crossing in 14 hours, 31 minutes, and beating the men's world record by one hour and 59 minutes.

Despite a huge celebratory parade in New York on her return, Ederle's name and accomplishments are not as well known to the public as those of other sports figures. Ederle died in 2003.

"Playing someone who is determined and resilient ... who has a real joy for what they're doing, is wonderful," Ridley said, adding that she had undergone a "pretty grueling" swimming training schedule for the role.

Ridley found fame when she took on the role of Rey in the 'Star Wars' franchise. Courtesy of Disney

Below: Daisy Ridley wears Elie Saab at the 2024 ESPY Awards in Los Angeles. Getty Images



A still from 'Hounds.'

AWARD

Amman film fest announces winners

Arab News Dubai

The Amman International Film Festival announced its winners at the end of its nine-day festival this week.

Moroccan filmmaker Kamal Lazraq's "Hounds," which follows the story of a father and son who become embroiled in a kidnapping assignment, won the Black Iris Award in the Arab Feature-Length Narrative Competition.

Yemeni film "The Burdened," directed by Amr Gamal, took home the Jury Award in the same category. The film follows a couple who become pregnant with their fourth child and, already facing difficulties in meeting their daily needs, decide to terminate the pregnancy.

The annual award ceremony took place at the Royal Film Commission in Jordan. The festival screened more than 50 films from 28 countries.

The Audience Award in the Arab Feature-Length Narrative Competition was given to "Inshallah a Boy," directed by Anjad Al-Rasheed.

"Inshallah a Boy" made history last year at the Cannes Film Festival as the first Jordanian feature to participate in the Critics' Week section, securing the Gan Foundation Award and the Rail D'Or for Best Feature Film.

Nada Doumani, festival director, speaking at the awards ceremony, said: "The fact that four projects which had won awards in previous editions are now being showcased at the festival is the biggest proof of the success of the pitching platforms. Additionally, the large attendance at all the activities is another indicator of the success of the events targeting professionals."

INTERVIEW

'This has been a journey for me,' Kevin Costner says of passion project

Raffi Boghosian Los Angeles

Oscar-winner Kevin Costner brought his passion project "Horizon: An American Saga" to the big screen this summer. A labor of love since 1988, Costner wrote, produced, financed, starred in, and directed the film.

His dedication paid off at the Cannes Film Festival, where it received an 11-minute standing ovation.

"This has been a journey for me and for the people to stand and



Oscar-winner Kevin Costner in 'Horizon: An American Saga.'

clap and not stop. And I basically shut out the noise for a while and walked my life backwards and thought about my journey professionally and the journey for

'Horizon.' And I was just really grateful at the end of the day that I stayed true to it," Costner said of the lengthy standing ovation at Cannes.

Costner tells a Western story and focuses on the experiences of Indigenous Americans during colonization. The film meticulously explores a 12-year span during which white settlers encroached upon indigenous lands.

"We're just playing dress ups and telling a story version. But,

you know, the frontier was actually founded on people taking wagon trains across through these uncharted territory. So you really get a bit of empathy towards what actually happened," actor Sam Worthington said.

"Horizon: An American Saga" takes its time to set the tone for an engaging journey into a pivotal era of American history. Despite its three-hour runtime and slow pace, British actress Sienna Miller says she enjoyed

the process.

"I realized there were a lot of characters and there were long scenes and people had long monologues. But I like that," Miller said.

"It was a massive, epic ... sized film to be doing. It's like hundreds of actors and cattle everywhere, and we're in the elements. But then as an actor, he just slides into the scene. He's got this deep relaxation about the way that he works," actress Abbey Lee said.