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ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

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A Palestinian boy walks in a rubble-covered alley in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on Monday. AFP

MIDDLE EAST WAR

70 more Palestinians killed as Israel pounds south Gaza city

400,000 civilians ordered to flee ... but given no time before bombardment began

Arab News Jeddah

At least 70 Palestinians were killed and more than 200 injured on Monday as Israel pounded the city of Khan Younis in southern Gaza with tank shells and airstrikes.

Earlier Israeli forces ordered civilians to move out of the densely built-up area, where

about 400,000 people live but gave them no time to do so before the bombardment began

Tanks advanced for more than 2km into the eastern suburb of Bani Suhaila, forcing people to flee under fire. Some families did so on donkey carts, others on foot, carrying mattresses and other belongings.

"It is like doomsday," resident Abu Khaled said.

"Many are dead and wounded on the roads."

At Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, people stood outside the morgue to say farewell to dead relatives.

"We are tired, we are tired in Gaza, every day our children are killed, every day, every moment," said one of them, Ahmed Sammour.

"No one told us to evacuate. They brought four floors

crashing down on civilians."

Doctors at the hospital urged residents on Monday to donate blood because of the large number of casualties.

"A family, including children, were all torn to pieces while they were sleeping," said one man who arrived at the hospital in an ambulance carrying the bodies.

The Israeli military said it had launched the new bombardment

because Palestinian militants had fired rockets from eastern Khan Younis and were adjusting the boundaries of a designated humanitarian zone in nearby Mawasi to keep civilians away from combat areas.

Gaza civil emergency chiefs said the humanitarian areas, where 1.7 million refugees were sheltering, had been reduced from 65 square km to 48 square km.

UN WARNING

Iraq 'now top conduit' for drug trafficking

Arab News Jeddah

Iraq is becoming a major conduit for regional trafficking in illegal drugs, a UN report warned on Monday.

Authorities in Iraq seized a record 24 million Captagon tablets worth up to \$144 million in 2023, triple the amount seized the previous year and 34 times higher than in 2019.

"Iraq appears to be at the nexus of regional trafficking routes and is becoming a critical juncture in the complex trafficking dynamics in the Near and Middle East region,"

Iraq is becoming a critical juncture in the complex trafficking dynamics in the Near and Middle East region.

the UN Office on Drugs and Crime said.

Captagon is an amphetamine derived from a once-legal treatment for narcolepsy and attention disorder.

More than 80 percent of pills seized in the region are made in Syria, and Saudi Arabia is by far the biggest market.

Syria and Iraq have come under pressure from the Kingdom and other Gulf states to crack down on drug trafficking.

At a regional anti-drug conference, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohamed Shia Al-Sudani called for regional cooperation "to pursue and dismantle drug gangs."

The Brief

BOOK FAIR

The Madinah Book Fair will take place from July 30 to Aug. 5, featuring over 300 publishing houses and agencies across more than 200 booths. P4

RIOTERS JAILED

The UAE has imprisoned 57 Bangladeshis, including 3 for life, for inciting riots on Friday in several streets across the country. P7

SMART CITY PUSH

The Saudi National Housing Co. has partnered with South Korean tech firm Naver Corp. to enhance smart city solutions. P12

THREAT OF FAMINE

Civilians pay the price for Sudan's civil war

They face 'horrendous levels of violence' from both sides, medical charity says

Arab News Jeddah

Civilians in Sudan are facing "horrendous levels of violence" in the country's 15-month civil war, the medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres said in a report published on Monday.

"The price paid by civilians in this war qualifies a conflict seemingly between warring factions as a war on the people of Sudan," the charity said.

Fighting broke out in April 2023 between the regular army

under Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces led by his former deputy Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, usually referred to as Hemedti.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed, and more than seven million displaced.

Both sides have been accused of war crimes, including deliberately targeting civilians, indiscriminate shelling of residential areas, and blocking humanitarian aid, and there is

Nowhere is safe for communities trapped in Sudan conflict hot spots.

a threat of famine.

"The population has faced horrendous levels of violence, succumbing to widespread fighting and surviving repeated attacks, abuse, and exploitation," Medecins Sans Frontieres said.

Vickie Hawkins, the charity's general director in the Netherlands, said: "Nowhere is safe for

communities trapped in Sudan conflict hot spots. Patients recount horrific stories of inhuman treatment and violence perpetrated by armed groups."

These included "forced defections, looting and arson, degrading interrogation, arbitrary arrest, abduction, and torture on a systematic level," she said.

While many aid organizations closed operations in Sudan because of the war, Medecins Sans Frontieres continues to

operate in eight states across the country. It has treated thousands of conflict injuries, most caused by explosions, gunshots, and stabbings.

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I spoke to UK's Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds on the phone and discussed expanding opportunities for co-operation and joint work in promising fields.

Majid Al-Qasbi Saudi commerce minister



Radars

KSA today



Hail Musical night

Bahraini singer Hind, Qatari singer Fahad Al-Kubaisi, and Saudi singer Dhom Altasy will all perform at King Abdullah Cultural Hall on July 25. Visit @enjoy_saudi on Instagram for tickets and more details.



Dhahran Library workshop

Take your children to this workshop to sharpen their reading skills and show them how to take notes. Book through ithra.com.



Jeddah Al-Balad tour

This educational tour of Jeddah's Al-Balad district takes visitors on a journey through history, from the origins of Bayt Nassif to Al-Sham neighborhood and other historic sites. Book through experiences.suplift.com.



AIUla Helicopter tour

Take to the skies and experience breathtaking views of AIUla's stunning desert vistas and iconic landmarks, such as Elephant Rock and the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Hegra. Use the Visit Saudi app for bookings and more details.

The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Saudi Deputy Minister for Political Affairs Dr. Saud Al-Sati met Switzerland's ambassador to the Kingdom, Yasmine Chatila, in Riyadh on Monday.

During the meeting, they reviewed bilateral relations and issues of common interest, the Foreign Ministry reported on X.

Meanwhile, the Arab League's assistant secretary-general and head of the

international political affairs sector, Dr. Khaled Manzlawiy, met Iraq's permanent representative to the league, Qahtan Taha Janabi, in Cairo, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

Today's Number

1k

According to Saudi Press Agency, Saudi Arabia's Baha region generates around 20 percent of the Kingdom's annual honey production, which totals around 1,000 tonnes and contains 15 varieties of honey.

Review

Croi Bakehouse

NADA ALTURKI

Located in the bustling city of Riyadh, Croi Bakehouse offers a delightful escape into the world of artisanal pastries and gourmet coffee. Nestled in a cozy corner of the city, this bakery has quickly gained a reputation for its inviting ambiance and mouth-watering treats.

Upon entering the bakery, you're immediately struck by the inviting smell of freshly baked goods. The interior is tastefully decorated with a blend of modern and rustic elements, creating a relaxed environment perfect for enjoying a leisurely breakfast



or catching up with friends over afternoon tea or coffee.

The star of the show at Croi is undoubtedly their selection of viennoiseries, which are baked fresh daily. Whether you're craving a flaky croissant with a savory pesto and sundried tomato or a decadent chocolate tart, the bakery delivers on both taste and presentation.

People often recommend their berry Danish pastry, which is perfectly baked with mascarpone cheese, custard, raspberry jam, and pistachio nuts. The pastries are not only delicious but also beautifully crafted, showcasing a dedication to detail that is evident in every bite.

In addition to their sweet and savory pastry selection, Croi offers a range of beverages to complement the experience.

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



JUST MARRIED! Eyad Issa

G Syrian actor Eyad Issa has tied the knot with Nadine Tahseen Beck after falling in love on the set of the "Breaking Bones" series.

The couple were trending on social media as fans circulated pictures and videos of their nuptials on Sunday in Latakia, Syria.

While the groom, 32, donned a light gray suit, the bride, 46, went with a soft look, wearing a tight-fitting white dress at the top that draped into a wide skirt with layers of chiffon. She complemented the look with a floral tiara and veil on her head. Once the sun set behind the horizon, Beck changed her dress into a softer and shorter white dress but kept her floral tiara and veil.

'HEY, BABY' Laura Woods

G ITV sports presenter Laura Woods and her partner Adam Collard, the "Love Island" star, are expecting their first child.

The 37-year-old took to her Instagram page to share the news, posting a picture of her French bulldog and a sonogram photo with the caption "Hey, baby."

While it is not known when and how the couple met, they went public with their romance in October 2023. Since then they have not shied away from sharing their love on social media.

In an exclusive interview with The Sun, Collard revealed that he was the one who made the first move and messaged Woods on Instagram to get her attention.

He said: "The first time we met, I'll hold my hands up, I did DM her first and got a reply but then nothing happened. Then she

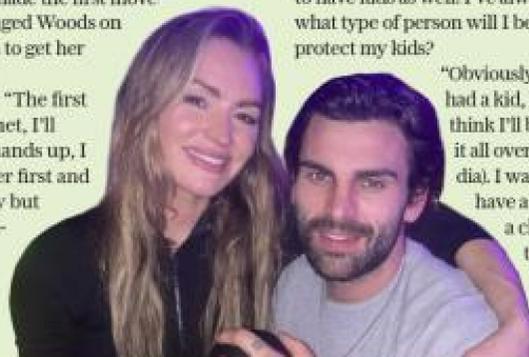
called us out for basically leaving her on read.

"It's hard to meet people, isn't it? I'm from Newcastle and eventually we met up, and then went on a very undercover date, and obviously what comes out in the press, comes out in the press, but it's not always the full story. I'm kind of glad in a way as well, as I feel like there's an element of having to hide too much now."

The pregnancy reveal came after Collard shared with the media that he intends to have a family with Woods.

"I'm protective, whether it's Laura, or my family, my friends," the reality show star said. "I want to get married, I want to have kids as well. I've always thought, what type of person will I be? How can I protect my kids?"

"Obviously I've never had a kid, but I don't think I'll be plastering it all over (social media). I want them to have a fair fight and a chance not to be judged straight away."



TheRegion

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Jeddah

- The Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts is a cultural beacon upholding the values of creativity to achieve sustainable development. The festival has been described as "a humanitarian space that blends the beauty of the past with the brightness of the future." Held in Jerash, Jordan, from July 24 to Aug. 3. For more details, visit calendar.jo.

dan, from July 24 to Aug. 3. For more details, visit calendar.jo.

- Moonwalk through a night of unparalleled performances, stunning visuals, and nostalgic moments as everyone celebrates the life and artistry of the global phenomenon Michael Jackson on July 24 at the historic Citadel in Amman, Jordan. Secure your tickets through the calendar.jo. Doors open at 6:30 p.m., and the show starts at 8 p.m. and ends at 10 p.m.

ets through the calendar.jo. Doors open at 6:30 p.m., and the show starts at 8 p.m. and ends at 10 p.m.

- EVA is a virtual reality gaming experience that will transport competitors, from esports veterans to newcomers, into massive arenas to face off against other players. The arena is located at Gardenia Plaza in Jidhafs, Bahrain.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

| July 23 | Fajr | Sunrise | Dhuhr | Asr | Maghreb | Isha |
|---------|------|---------|-------|------|---------|------|
| Makkah | 4:26 | 5:49 | 12:28 | 3:43 | 7:05 | 8:35 |
| Madinah | 4:18 | 5:44 | 12:28 | 3:52 | 7:11 | 8:41 |
| Riyadh | 3:49 | 5:16 | 12:00 | 3:24 | 6:43 | 8:13 |
| Abha | 4:23 | 5:44 | 12:17 | 3:32 | 6:49 | 8:19 |
| Dammam | 3:30 | 4:59 | 11:47 | 3:15 | 6:33 | 8:03 |

Spotlight

**JB PRITZKER**

Age 59

Governor of Illinois since 2019, entrepreneur, and philanthropist, previously co-chaired Hillary Clinton's 2008 presidential campaign. Also a prominent surrogate for Biden on the campaign trail. He is considered a possible pick for VP.

KAMALA HARRIS

Age 59

Vice president, former California senator, and former attorney general of California. Of mixed black and Asian heritage and from the liberal end of the political spectrum, she has won the endorsement of President Biden, Bill and Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama among others.

MICHELLE OBAMA

Age 60

Former first lady, best-selling author, and advocate. Although she has not thrown her hat into the ring, nor previously sought a nomination, a recent Ipsos poll found she is the only hypothetical candidate that would definitively defeat Donald Trump.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY CANDIDATE

If not Kamala Harris, who?

Three Arab American analysts assess the Democrats seeking to be the candidate who will challenge Donald Trump

Ephrem Kossalfy New York City
Ray Hanania Chicago

President Joe Biden's decision to end his reelection campaign and drop out of the US presidential race has created sufficient momentum for Vice President Kamala Harris to become the Democratic Party's presidential nominee, according to three Arab American analysts.

Biden, who endorsed Harris in his withdrawal announcement on Sunday, was trailing former President Donald Trump in opinion polls amid a growing Arab American #AbandonBiden movement, and wider demands he drop out of the 2024 race following his disastrous debate performance on June 27 in Atlanta.

What was to be a coronation for the 81-year-old Biden at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago on Aug. 19 has now become an open contest in which nearly 4,700 party delegates will vote by state for the nominee of their choice to challenge Trump, the Republican Party nominee.

Harris moved quickly on Monday to lock up Democratic delegates behind her campaign for the White House as endorsements came in from Maryland

Governor Wes Moore, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker and Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear, leaving a dwindling list of potential rivals.

Rana Abtar, a talk show host in Washington DC for Asharq News, expects Harris to become the Democratic nominee, although several other candidates might also be considered. However, she believes the Democrats "must show unity" if they are to win the November election.

"Today, what we are noticing is that Democrats are starting to support Harris, one by one," she told Arab News. "There were some delegates in a couple of states who have already voted to support Harris. That means that their votes will reflect in the Democratic National Convention."

"The rest of the Democrats who have not supported Harris yet are expected to fall in line soon. At some point we will see all the Democrats, or most of the Democrats, line up behind Harris. It is very important for the Democrats to present a show of unity after the dilemma that their party was facing following President Biden's announcement that he will not seek a second term."

Biden's withdrawal from the race frees up his convention delegates from the nation's 50 states and provinces to support

any candidate during the convention. Many alternative names are being floated, including centrist Sen. Joe Manchin, former First Lady Michelle Obama, Pritzker and Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro.

Abtar said third-party candidates, such as independent candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Green Party candidate Dr. Jill Stein, are often viewed as "election spoilers" — people who might drain votes from Harris or even from Trump.

"Kennedy's numbers are considered pretty high for an independent candidate and his voters might make a difference in the election season by taking away votes from ... Trump or Harris ... if she gets the official nomination," Abtar said.

Firas Maksad, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, believes Harris is "all but certain" to replace Biden as the nominee, and suggested that Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer could be her running mate on the first "all woman ticket."

He told Arab News: "The speculation is heavily focused on who will be her vice-presidential running mate, including possibly an all-women ticket should she choose Whitmer. That's unprecedented and carries risks. But Whitmer could help deliver the key swing state of Michigan, and an all-woman team could re-energize the currently largely demoralized Democratic base."

CONVENTION PROCESS

- The Democratic National Convention takes place August 19-22 in Chicago.
- Had Biden remained in the race, delegates elected to support his candidacy in the primaries would have been 'mandated' to cast their vote for his nomination.
- Since Biden has withdrawn, it opens the way for an 'open convention' in which delegates are 'released' to vote for whomever they wish.
- On Wednesday, representatives of the 50 states and 7 territories are expected to announce who they support for president and VP.
- Whoever receives a majority will become the official nominee for president and for vice president.

He added: "Harris's likability ratings with the American public have never been high. But at this point, the decision by the Democratic Party and President Biden to put her name forward is largely based on funding and finances. She is the only one who will be able to qualify for all the money, the hundreds of millions of dollars, that have been raised so far. Therefore, her choice for a running mate will also be key

in terms of bringing around that Democratic base and for the general likability of that Democratic ticket."

Maksad believes Biden's withdrawal from the presidential race, and speculation about Whitmer's addition to the ticket, might hold sway over the strong Arab and Muslim vote in Michigan, many of whom voted against the Biden-Harris team in the Feb. 27 Democrat Party primary contest.

"Arab Americans are not monolithic," he said. "They are a diverse group with differing priorities spread out across four battleground states. Michigan gets a lot of attention, but also Florida, Virginia and Pennsylvania."

"In Michigan, where there are 100,000 of them, they have strong feelings about the war in Gaza and President Biden not doing enough to stop the war. Having Biden step aside opens up the potential for the Democratic Party to make inroads among Arab Americans in Michigan again. And should the vice president (choice) in fact be the governor of Michigan, that will then give Democrats even more opportunities to make inroads and win Michigan over again, as a key battleground state."

Amal Mudallali, a former ambassador to the UN and CEO of Bridges International Group, thinks Harris has a

"problem of perception."

She told Arab News: "The perception is that she was not a strong vice president, that she will not be a strong candidate and that she will not be able to defeat Trump."

Although Democrats seem to be moving fast to rally behind Harris, including former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's endorsement on Monday, Mudallali remains cautious.

"It's all up in the air because there are still very powerful Democrats calling for an open convention and to have an open field for everybody to throw their hats into the ring, and to see if they can get the strongest candidate for the Democratic Party to be able to defeat Trump," she said.

The impact of the independent candidates in the election cannot be written off either, she added.

"Let's say if Kennedy was able to get a lot of votes from the Democrats, this could hurt Democrats more and that will be a big problem for them," Mudallali said.

"But so far we don't know who the Democratic Party candidate will be. If the individual is a very strong candidate, the party might be able to unite the anti-Trump constituency, which will overwhelmingly vote for the candidate on the Democratic side. In that case, the independents will not make a difference."



CEO of the Saudi Real Estate Registry Mohammed Al-Sulaiman received the award from Esri CEO Jack Dangermond. SPA

VISION 2030

Prestigious award highlights Saudi Real Estate Registry's exceptional work

CEO discusses organization's innovative use of spatial technologies

Arab News Riyadh

The Saudi Real Estate Registry has been honored with the 2024 Special Achievement in GIS Award, presented by the Environmental Systems Research Institute, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

The accolade, awarded at the international Esri User Conference in the US, recognizes the registry's innovative application of geographic information system technology.

According to the SPA, Mohammed Al-Sulaiman, CEO of the Saudi Real Estate Registry, received the award from Esri CEO Jack Dangermond, highlighting the organization's exceptional use of spatial technologies and AI-supported geospatial data predictive analysis. The registry

HIGHLIGHTS

- The registry aims to produce a reliable and updated real estate map, the first of its kind in the Kingdom, covering more than 100,000 sq. km of urban areas.

- The initiative will enhance transparency and reliability in the real estate sector, ensuring its sustainability, the CEO said.

has developed a detailed geospatial map of Saudi Arabia's real estate using ArcGIS and Esri technologies.

"This award confirms our world-class implementation of GIS technologies," Al-Sulaiman said. "It supports our vision of creating a comprehensive real estate registry for all property data and information in the Kingdom, with geospatial

surveying as the foundation for property registration."

Since its inception, the Real Estate Registry has employed a range of advanced technologies in executing geospatial operations, including drones, digital geospatial solutions and systems, remote sensing, AI and satellite-based GPS, the SPA reported.

The registry aims to produce a reliable and updated real estate map, the first of its kind in the Kingdom, covering more than 100,000 sq. km of urban areas, encompassing 8 million plots and generating 5,000 terabytes of data.

Al-Sulaiman said that the initiative will enhance transparency and reliability in the real estate sector, ensuring its sustainability, and boosting its investment appeal and contribution to Saudi Arabia's gross domestic product, in line with the goals of the Kingdom's Vision 2030.

CULTURE

Madinah Book Fair to feature over 300 publishing houses

Arab News Jeddah

The third Madinah Book Fair will take place from July 30 to Aug. 5, the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission said on Monday.

The Saudi Press Agency reported that the event promises to be a cultural extravaganza, featuring over 300 Arab and international publishing houses and agencies spread across more than 200 booths.

Mohammed Hasan Alwan, CEO of the commission, emphasized the significance of the fair,

highlighting the continuous support the cultural sector receives.

He said the event showcases the cultural importance of Madinah and its role in enhancing the artistic movement and the Kingdom's growing status in the publishing industry.

The fair has become an annual event, attracting thousands of visitors from all walks of life.

Alwan explained that the commission has ensured the latest edition provides a rich and integrated knowledge experience for visitors of all ages, building

on the remarkable successes of previous fairs.

According to SPA, the Madinah Book Fair aims to be a cultural platform that encourages the community to take an interest in reading, highlighting the talents of Saudi writers and creators while attracting prominent writers and publishers from the Kingdom, the region, and the world.

The fair will feature cultural and intellectual activities aimed at enriching the cultural sector and knowledge production, promoting a reading culture.

TheSpace

Quantum leap by Saudia Group to enhance Hajj and Umrah services

BASIL M.K. AL-GHALAYINI



Earlier this year, Saudia Hajj and Umrah, a subsidiary of the holding company, obtained a license from the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah to serve pilgrims. The group aligns with the Kingdom's commitment to enhance the pilgrimage experience in all aspects including transportation.

Last week, Saudia Group and Lilium N.V., a leading electric-aircraft manufacturer and pioneer in Regional Air Mobility, signed an agreement for 50 Lilium Jets, with options for purchasing a further 50.

The contract was signed by Fahad Al-Jarboa, CEO of Saudia Private, and Lilium's CEO Klaus Roewe. This was in the presence of Ibrahim Al-Omar, director-general of Saudia Group, Michael Kindsgrab, the German ambassador to Saudi Arabia, and Lilium Chairman Tom Enders.

The sale agreement, which follows the memorandum of understanding between Saudia Group and Lilium signed in October 2022, marks the largest of its kind in the Middle East North Africa region. It also represents an important industry milestone as the largest reported order of eVTOL aircraft by an airline.

Al-Omar confirmed that Saudia Group would

acquire all-electric eVTOL jets. This reflects the national carrier's commitment to continuously reduce its carbon footprint and become an industry leader in regional electric aviation.

Besides the Hajj and Umrah seasons, Saudia Group plans to operate the all-electric aircraft on regional point-to-point air services, and in its hub airports for tourist flights associated with sporting and entertainment events, operating on routes of up to 175 km.

As part of its mission, Saudia Hajj and Umrah aims to deliver high-quality services to pilgrims. This includes offering packages that

The group is aligning with the Kingdom's commitment to enhance the pilgrimage experience in all aspects including transportation.

cover flight bookings at both domestic and international airports, accommodation, transportation between cities, and organizing visits to historical Islamic sites.

The development of Hajj and Umrah services for pilgrims and visitors in the Kingdom is expected to continue

unabated. It is among the top priorities of the government's vision for the sector.

Saudia Group's order of these electric flying taxis is a testimony to a quantum leap step in the mobility and logistics arena to provide further high-quality services with comfort for Hajj and Umrah pilgrims.

Basil M.K. Al-Ghalayini is chairman and CEO of BMG Financial Group.

The Day's FIGURES

SAUDI AID AGENCY PROJECTS IN YEMEN

May 2024



Source: ksrelief.org

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Major attraction Al-Baha Honey Festival to begin on Tuesday

Under the patronage of Al-Baha Gov. Prince Hussam bin Saud bin Abdulaziz, the 16th International Honey Festival begins on Tuesday, organized by the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture and held at the Cooperative Association of Beekeepers headquarters in Baljurashi governorate.

Fahd Al-Zahrani, director general of the ministry's Al-Baha branch, said the festival will continue for 14 days until Aug. 5.

He said the festival will witness the participation of 90 beekeepers from seven countries to showcase their products.

Al-Zahrani added that all types of honey exhibited are tested carefully to ensure quality. **SPA Al-Baha**

Sustainability Financial district in Riyadh earns top certification

The King Abdullah Financial District obtained the SmartScore Neighborhood certification by WiredScore, the world's leading authority on smart building technologies, for its excellence in advanced digital infrastructure that provides a robust network, sustainability and seamlessness.

With this certification, the financial district becomes the first development in the Middle East and Africa to receive WiredScore's SmartScore Neighborhood certification.

The recognition comes after a rigorous evaluation and certification process that started in Sept. 2023, when WiredScore announced at a Cityscape Global event in Riyadh that KAFD met the pre-certification criteria for the SmartScore Neighborhood certification. **SPA Riyadh**

Assistance KSrelief delivers essential aid to Syria and Sudan

Saudi Arabia's humanitarian agency KSrelief has delivered food and other aid to thousands of vulnerable people in Syria and Sudan.

In recent operations in Syria's Idlib, the aid agency distributed 1,078 food baskets and hygiene kits for 6,468 individuals, the Saudi Press Agency reported on Sunday.

Elsewhere, in northern state of Sudan, the agency provided 600 shelter bags for 3,450 individuals as a part of an ongoing aid project. Both efforts reflect Saudi Arabia's commitment, through KSrelief, to support vulnerable people worldwide, the SPA reported.

Earlier, the agency distributed 25,000 bags of bread in Akkar and Miniyeh regions in Lebanon. **SPA Riyadh**

News Saudi Arabia

FIN-TASTIC

Mermaids make waves in the Red Sea

First-of-its-kind diving course in Jeddah offers aquatic adventures for summer

Nada Hameed Jeddah

Inspired by mythical sea-dwelling creatures, a diving center in Jeddah is offering a first-of-its-kind mermaid diving course for those wanting to splash around in cool waters during the summer.

Scuba Schools International at Al-Haddad Scuba in the coastal city offers a whimsical yet invigorating experience for those in search of an aquatic adventure.

All over the world, mermaids represent beauty, danger, transformation, duality, and feminine power. Today they continue to inspire literature, film, fashion, and even marine conservation efforts.

Arab News spoke to Corinna Davids, an Austrian scuba diving and swimming instructor known for her groundbreaking approach to mermaid diving. She developed the SSI Mermaid Program after years of expertise in free diving and swimming.

Davids became an instructor in swimming and scuba diving at SSI when she was 18 and has since revolutionized the diving industry, making waves with her innovative techniques and passion for the sea.

Mermaid diving, she explained, is an art form that combines the technique of dolphin kick used in swimming with an exaggerated, aesthetically pleasing movement. This unique style not only looks beautiful but also ensures efficiency and safety.

"By mastering various fun

skills and tricks, SSI mermaids can perform beautifully while maintaining safety protocols," she told Arab News.

Davids says that to become a mermaid one needs only basic water confidence. "The program is easily accessible, and to become a mermaid instructor, one needs to complete additional steps after becoming a mermaid," she added.

The mermaid diving experience is incomplete without the mermaid costume. She recommends using high-quality monofins, such as the Mahina Monofin, which provides efficiency and aesthetic appeal. The tail skin, made from Lycra or scuba fabric, completes the look and will give mermaids the confidence to shine.

In April, Davids held the first mermaid diving course for instructors in Saudi Arabia, focusing on safety, technique and teaching methods to ensure that trainees are able to teach mermaid diving to students of all levels. The course comprises extensive theory sessions, in-water training, and evaluations of teaching abilities.

"The course received an overwhelmingly positive response from the trainees, who showed significant improvement throughout the program," she said.

The newly certified instructors will be able to teach the mermaid diving program throughout Saudi Arabia.

"The primary aim of conducting this course in Saudi Arabia was to introduce a new, fun program that would appeal to kids and adults alike. Mermaid diving offers an

exciting experience for those



Corinna Davids, an Austrian scuba diving and swimming instructor, developed the Scuba Schools International Mermaid Program after years of expertise in free diving and swimming. Instagram/corinna.flowrebels



Initiatives such as the Vision 2030 plan aim to diversify the economy and promote tourism, which includes the development of new recreational activities like mermaid diving.

Ali Ayoub
Al-Haddad Scuba, certified mermaid diver

exciting experience for those who may be hesitant to try scuba diving or freediving," Davids said.

Four participants from diverse backgrounds took part in the

course, including a swimming instructor and lifeguard, two scuba instructors (one of whom is a doctor), and a free-diving instructor who is also an air traffic controller.

Ali Ayoub, a certified mermaid diver and scuba instructor from Al-Haddad Scuba, told Arab News: "Saudi Arabia has been undergoing considerable social and cultural transformations, with more emphasis on leisure and recreational activities.

"Initiatives such as the Vision 2030 plan aim to diversify the economy and promote tourism, which includes the development of new recreational activities like mermaid diving."

Ayoub added that mermaid diving requires strong swimming abilities and good physical fitness. "Practice swimming regularly, work on your breath-holding techniques, and consider taking free-diving courses to improve your underwater endurance," he advised.

He added that mermaid divers

HIGHLIGHTS

• In April, Corinna Davids held the first mermaid diving course for instructors in Saudi Arabia.

• The course comprises extensive theory sessions, in-water training, and evaluations of teaching abilities.

Saudi model Wafaa Al-Masry said the mermaid diving course was "a fun and unique experience." Supplied



can participate in educational programs for schools, community groups, and public events: "They can share information about marine ecosystems, the threats they face, and how individuals can help. Their captivating presence can make learning about these issues more engaging and memorable."

Wafaa Al-Masry, 22, a Saudi model, took the mermaid diving course under the supervision of coach Ayoub. She told Arab News: "It was a fun and unique experience. Initially, I thought it would be difficult, but with the training and the coach's guidance, I found it easy and enjoyable."

She said that breathing techniques, relaxation, and mastering the fin method were new skills she managed differently throughout the mermaid course. "The trainer was excellent in providing instruction, making the experience fun, and delivering valuable information," she added.

AGRICULTURAL INGENUITY

Saudi farmer turns worm waste into wealth in innovative move

Arab News Riyadh

A Saudi farmer has developed a technique that transforms a common garden nuisance into a useful resource.

Mohammed Al-Shaer, of Al-Dhafir village in Baha, has established a thriving vermicomposting operation on his farm, producing high-quality organic fertilizer from earthworms, according to a report by the Saudi Press Agency.

Al-Shaer's venture began approximately a year ago with a simple setup: a single 5-meter-long, 60 cm-high tank housing

roughly 2,000 worms. The worms were fed a diet of dry leaves, organic waste, and food scraps and were closely monitored for four months, yielding over 300 kg of nutrient-rich compost and a tenfold increase in their population.

"Through extensive field trials and research into global best practices, I have gained insights into worm behavior, needs, and breeding techniques," Al-Shaer explained in an interview with the SPA. His operation has since expanded to four tanks, producing enough vermicompost to fertilize roughly 250 trees on his property.

Baha farmer Mohammed Al-Shaer's worm compost accelerates plant growth, enhances fruit production, and improves overall soil health. SPA



FASTFACT

Mohammed Al-Shaer's venture began approximately a year ago with a simple setup: a single 5-meter-long, 60 cm-high tank housing roughly 2,000 worms.

The benefits of this organic fertilizer are manifold. It accelerates plant growth, enhances fruit production, and improves overall soil health.

Al-Shaer added: "The worms naturally enhance soil quality, optimize nutrient cycling for

crops, and develop sound agricultural practices to enhance the production of fruits and vegetables."

Looking ahead, the farmer aims to scale up his project to develop it into a comprehensive operation that produces large quantities of worm compost.

He also intends to raise awareness about this ecofriendly practice among fellow farmers through agricultural festivals in Saudi Arabia, encouraging his contemporaries to use organic fertilizer as an alternative to chemical fertilizers, which can harm soil, plants, and human health.

News Middle East

STRUGGLE

West Bank village lives in constant fear of Israeli settler raids

AFP Susya, Palestinian Territories

The stress shows on the face of Samiha Ismail, who since Oct. 7 has been stuck in her home in an occupied West Bank village that lives in constant fear of attack by Israeli settlers.

The day after the Hamas raid into southern Israel, settlers entered Susya, a hilltop village in the south of the West Bank, vowing retribution and "humiliation," the 53-year-old Palestinian recalled.

More than nine months on, Ismail is among 450 inhabitants who spend most of the day indoors. Even their sheep are not allowed out of their sheds.

"Every time we take them to pasture, the settlers chase us," said the panicked Ismail.

Instead, the sheep of Israeli settlers now dot the nearby hills.

Susya's inhabitants say their livelihood has gone.

One international aid group has sent counselors to help Susya residents with their mental health.

"Before the war, we would have defended our land, but today, nobody moves," she said.

The settlers are armed and protected by the army, she added, and her husband and son have been "beaten up" several times.

Since the start of the Gaza war, Israeli settlement of the occupied West Bank — considered illegal under international law — has hit new records.

Excluding annexed East Jerusalem, some 490,000 Israeli settlers live in the West Bank alongside some 3 million Palestinians.

In June, the Israeli government declared more than 12 sq. km. of the West Bank to be state land, the largest land appropriation since the 1993 Oslo Accords set out the foundations for land use in the territory.

Land that is declared as Israeli state property can be used for more settlements.

In addition, 25 settlement outposts — not even authorized by Israel — have sprung up across



Israeli security forces close off a main entrance to Huwara town in the occupied West Bank following reported attacks by extremist settlers. File/AFP

SPEEDREAD

Since the start of the Gaza war, Israeli settlement of the occupied West Bank — considered illegal under international law — has hit new records.

the West Bank since the start of the year, according to Peace Now, a settlement watchdog.

Men in military fatigues have meanwhile raided Susya at night, kicking down doors and looting

property, including donkeys and mules, locals said.

Some have even entered houses at night to intimidate residents.

"Most of us no longer sleep at night," Ismail said.

Mohamed Al-Nawajaa, 78, was born before the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians when Israel was created in 1948 — known as the Nakba, or catastrophe, to Palestinians.

"After October 7, they took all these hills. We were kicked out in 1948, 1967 ... and again in 2024. But this land is ours," the

shepherd said, his head wrapped in a traditional keffiyeh scarf.

Israel's offensive has killed at least 39,006 people in Gaza since Oct. 7, according to data from the Health Ministry in the territory.

Since the war erupted, violence has soared in the West Bank, with at least 579 Palestinians killed in violence with settlers or Israeli troops, according to the Palestinian authorities.

At least 16 Israelis, including soldiers, have been killed in attacks involving Palestinians, according to official Israeli figures.

Nawajaa said his biggest concern is his grandchildren. He does not let them leave the house.

He said the settlers had struck him and left him lying on the floor of his house. Others in the village have had similar experiences.

"They come at night, around 3 a.m. They say, 'this house is mine,'" he said.

The harassment has frayed nerves in Susya. The Doctors Without Borders, or MSF, charity set up tent clinics this year due to

concerns for the villagers' mental health.

"There is no doubt that this is the biggest problem here," said Simona Onidi, an MSF coordinator.

"We can't talk about post-traumatic disorder here. It's never post; it's a permanent trauma."

Abdul Rahim Al-Nawajaa is despondent about the future. "The suffering is endless," said the 60-year-old Bedouin as he pruned his acacia tree, the only one left standing since his olive trees were "vandalized."

Settlers killed his father a few years ago in a dispute over a sheep and have demolished Abdul's house "several times."

"The settlers act in total impunity. A soldier might put a gun to your head, and you can't do anything," the shepherd said.

Fears of a new forced exodus stalk Susya. But Mohamed Al-Nawajaa defiantly declared: "We will stay in our houses."

GROWING RISKS

Sonic booms heard over Beirut as Israeli raids on Lebanon continue

Lebanon expects extension of UN interim force's mandate for another year, PM Makati says

Najla Houssari Beirut

Israeli warplanes broke the sound barrier over Beirut, Sidon and other parts of Lebanon on Monday.

The planes conducted mock raids over the Hachbaya area and the occupied Shebaa Farms, reaching as far as Bekaa.

Although hostile operations on the southern front have significantly decreased, sporadic strikes continue.

One Israeli air raid targeted a house in the town of Chihine in the Tyre district.

The raid resulted in injuries, and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party reported that one of its members was killed.

A Lebanese Army unit, meanwhile, found the wreckage of a drone in the town of Aaiha in the Rashaya district. Army command did not clarify the nature of the drone or whether it was Israeli-made or from another source.

A Lebanese Army watchtower was attacked by Israel on Sunday night on the outskirts of the town of Alma Al-Shaab in southern Lebanon, resulting in "moderate injuries to two soldiers, who were transferred to a hospital for treatment," according to the military.

Hezbollah, meanwhile, targeted the Israeli military site of Al-Malikiyah with an attack drone, hitting one of its bunkers.

The developments in the south and the issue of renewing UNIFIL's mandate, which is on the UN Security Council's agenda, have been the focus of internal political attention.



Residents check a destroyed vehicle in the aftermath of an Israeli airstrike near Lebanon's southern village of Jmajmeh amid ongoing cross-border clashes. AFP

Caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati said at a meeting with key officials that recent developments "naturally call for caution, but we continue to discuss with concerned parties and engage in necessary diplomatic contacts to prevent matters from spiraling into undesirable consequences."

He added: "We cannot say there are reassurances and guarantees, as no one can guarantee the Israeli enemy's intentions. However, we continue our diligent efforts to address the situation."

Regarding the renewal of the mandate for the international forces operating in the south of Lebanon, Mikati said: "We continue diplomatic contacts to ensure a calm extension of UNIFIL's mandate, whose essential role in the south we highly appreciate, along with the fruitful cooperation between them and the army."

"From the contacts we have made, we have sensed a keenness to maintain this role, especially under the delicate circumstances the south is going through."

Speaking after a meeting with Mikati, Foreign Minister Abdullah Bou Habib said he informed the prime minister that "there is a quasi-agreement to renew the work of UNIFIL forces for one year, under the same conditions and without any modifications."

Bou Habib, who briefed Mikati upon his return from New York, also said that US and European officials he met with emphasized "the importance of not expanding the war and working to avoid escalating military

actions in the south."

He added: "There is a kind of optimism, or less pessimism, about the outbreak of a wide war in Lebanon."

Also on Monday, a group of opposition MPs submitted a petition requesting Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri hold a session to discuss the repercussions of the ongoing conflict between Hezbollah and the Israeli military, now in its 10th month.

The opposition MPs — Georges Okais, Mark Daou, Ashraf Rifi,

and Salim Sayegh — demanded Berri "hold a parliamentary session at the earliest opportunity to discuss the ongoing war, prevent its escalation, and ensure that the government fulfills its constitutional duties."

In their petition, the parliamentarians called for diplomatic efforts to return to the 1949 ceasefire agreement and fully implement UN Resolution 1701.

They stressed the need to put an end to military actions "outside the framework of the Lebanese state and its institutions, declare a state of emergency in the south, hand over control to the army, and allow it to respond to any attack on Lebanese territory."

They referred to the "escalation and threats reaching the highest level since Oct. 8, and the increasing fears of the expansion of the ongoing war, which has cost us hundreds of Lebanese lives and thousands of destroyed residential units so far, in addition to the economic and environmental damage caused by daily Israeli attacks, and the repercussions of this in light of the political and economic crises plaguing the country, and the obstruction of electing a president for the country."

Nabil Qaouk, a member of the Central Council of Hezbollah, stated that Israel had put the region "on a path of escalation."

He said that "the support fronts in Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen have entered a new phase, introducing new field equations through which we hope to increase pressure on the Israeli enemy to stop the aggression on the Gaza Strip."

News Middle East

DIPLOMACY

Egypt 'keen to work with partners to find swift solution to Sudan crisis'

African Union official praises Cairo for its pivotal role in efforts to enhance regional security and stability

Gobran Mohamed Cairo

Egypt earned praise during talks on Monday in Accra, Ghana, for the pivotal role it plays in efforts to enhance security and stability on the African continent.

Bankole Adeoye, the African Union's commissioner for political affairs, peace and security, said he was keen to continue to coordinate with Cairo on all priority issues related to the bloc.

It came as he held talks with Badr Abdelatty, Egypt's minister of foreign affairs, emigration and Egyptian expatriates, on the sidelines of the sixth Mid-Year Coordination Meeting of the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities.

They discussed the latest political and security developments in the crisis in Sudan and agreed on the need to unite the country's civil political forces, preserve national unity and institutions, and coordinate regional and international mediation.

Abdelatty said Egypt was aware of the seriousness of the situation and eager to work with all partners and mechanisms to resolve the crisis swiftly. He stressed the importance of



Volunteers provide meals at a displacement camp in Gedaref city in the east of Sudan. The war has left tens of thousands dead and displaced more than 10 million people. AFP

fully involving Sudan in talks about ways to resolve the situation, to preserve "our Sudanese brothers' ownership of these solutions and proposals."

The minister welcomed consultations and coordination with the African Union's commissioner on peace and security in Africa. He said

Egypt remains committed to support the organization and its agencies, and to participation in its Peace and Security Council, in pursuit of peace and stability.

Abdelatty emphasized the need for increased consultation and coordination between member states and the union's agencies in response to

escalating security challenges on the continent, the expanding scope of conflicts and the associated human suffering.

He also outlined Egypt's agenda and planned activities for its chairmanship of the Peace and Security Council in October. He said its plans prioritize the operationalization of the African Union Center for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development, an effort that President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has led within the union to support countries facing multiple crises.

Egypt welcomed the approval by the Peace and Security Council of a request from the Somali government to extend the time frame for the third phase of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia, Abdelatty said. He highlighted plans for the deployment of a new mission in the country when the current one expires, and emphasized the need to support the Somali government's efforts to enhance security and stability.

Adeoye and Abdelatty also discussed other issues of mutual concern, including the Great Lakes issue, the Renaissance Dam, security challenges in the Red Sea, and the situation in the Horn of Africa.

TESTING TIMES

Iraq resumes rice cultivation with new climate-friendly strain

Reuters Baghdad

Iraq has resumed rice cultivation after a two-year ban prompted by water scarcity and is testing out a strain of the grain that consumes less water than traditionally planted versions.

Deputy Agriculture Minister Mahdi Sahar Al-Jubouri said the country had earmarked 150 sq km for rice growing this season and forecast a yield of 150,000 tonnes, as officials said water is more abundant due to heavy winter rainfall and the promise of more water flows from Turkiye.

This follows a two-year production ban that saw just 5 to 10 sq km of rice planted annually for seed extraction amid a water crisis that experts say was tied to upstream dams built by Turkiye and Iran, less rainfall, and other climate change-driven factors.

Iraq is one of the world's top 10 importers of rice and wheat, to supply a huge food rationing program held over from the era of Saddam Hussein.

Decades ago, the country grew most of its rice and exported wheat and barley and at one time was the world's top exporter of dates, until problems with soil



Iraq agricultural scientists have developed a new strain of rice named Ghiri. Reuters

salinity, poor irrigation systems, drought, and decades of conflict all hit its agricultural sector and made it a major buyer on world markets.

Grain board officials said that Iraq will still need to import around 1.25 million tonnes of rice this year to meet domestic demand, the same as last year.

Rice farming in Iraq typically begins in June and concludes with a harvest in November.

Several rice varieties are grown, with Amber rice, known for its unique aroma and flavor,

the most popular.

Iraqi agricultural scientists have developed a new strain of rice named Ghiri, a hybrid of the Amber and Jasmine varieties that can be planted using fixed sprayers without flooding.

It was planted on a small scale this season and is under trial after being tested at the Al-Mishkhab Research Station last year.

Plans are in place to broaden its cultivation in future seasons, Jubouri said in an interview with Reuters.

The government aims for the sector to transition from the traditional irrigation method, which involves flooding the crop with water, to using fixed irrigation systems and mechanical seeders.

Farmers adopting modern agricultural methods like sprinkler systems will be offered incentives akin to the support provided for wheat production, such as higher prices for their produce, Jubouri said.

For the 2024 season, rice farming has been permitted in five provinces: Najaf, Diwaniyah, Muthanna, Dhi Qar, and Babel.

Najaf province has been allocated the largest share.

Muhsin Abdul Ameer, head of the farmers' association in Najaf province, said that approximately 80 sq km of agricultural land in the province has been planted, representing about 37 percent of the total agricultural land allocated across the country. The planted varieties include Amber, Jasmine, and Euphrates rice.

Abdul Ameer said the planting season in Najaf province, which began in the middle of June, has now been completed.

INVESTIGATION

UAE authorities jail 57 Bangladeshis, including 3 for life, over riots

Arab News Abu Dhabi

The UAE has imprisoned 57 Bangladeshis, including three for life, for inciting riots on Friday in several streets across the country, state news agency WAM reported.

The Abu Dhabi Federal Court of Appeal handed the life imprisonment terms to three people who called for the demonstrations to pressure their home government.

The remaining 53 defendants received 10-year prison terms, with one, who entered the country illegally and took part in the riot, being sentenced to 11 years.

The Bangladeshi nationals will be deported after serving their sentences, WAM reported.

On Friday, UAE Attorney-General Hamad Saif Al-Shamsi ordered an investigation into the arrest of several Bangladeshi nationals who were apprehended for inciting riots against their home country, which has been struggling to quell violent student-led protests over a controversial job quota scheme.

The investigation, led by a team of 30, confirmed the

defendants' involvement in assembling in public spaces, "inciting unrest, disrupting public security, and promoting such gatherings and protests," WAM said.

They recorded and published audiovisual footage of their actions online. A court witness during the trial said that demonstrators did not respond to a police warning to disperse, according to WAM.

The witness confirmed that

FASTFACT

UAE Attorney-General Hamad Saif Al-Shamsi ordered an investigation into the arrest of several Bangladeshi nationals who were apprehended for inciting riots against their home country.

the defendants gathered and organised large-scale marches in several streets across the UAE in protest against decisions made by the Bangladeshi government.

Several of the defendants confessed to the crimes with which they were accused.

TENSE SITUATION

Bangladesh continues curfew as students await notice on govt job reforms

Main student group says not all of their demands have been met

Shehab Sumon Dhaka

Bangladesh remains under curfew and a widespread communications blackout on Monday, a day after the Supreme Court scaled back a controversial job-quota system following deadly clashes that have killed more than 100 people over the past week.

University students have been demonstrating since the beginning of this month to demand a reformation of the quota system that reserved 30 percent of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's 1971 liberation war.

The peaceful protests turned violent last week, with clashes between student protesters and security forces killing 174 people and injuring thousands, according to a count by Bengali daily Prothom



A Bangladeshi army personnel stands guard near the parliament house amid a curfew following clashes between police and protesters in Dhaka on Monday. AFP

Alo, which reported over a dozen deaths on Sunday alone.

Bangladesh was still under curfew for a third day on Monday, with military personnel patrolling the capital and other areas, while internet connection remained suspended across the country since it was disrupted from Thursday night.

"Everything is in order today across the country, except a few separate incidents in Dhaka, Narayanganj and Narsingdi,"

Biplab Barua, special assistant to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, told Arab News.

On Sunday, the Supreme Court ordered for the quota reserved for relatives of veterans to be cut to 5 percent and for 93 percent of jobs to be allocated on merit, while the remaining 2 percent will be reserved for members of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.

Bangladesh's top court was ruling on an appeal. The

government had abolished the quotas following student protests in 2018 but they were reinstated by the High Court in June, setting off a fresh round of demonstrations.

"Our students are not responsible for the anarchy and atrocities on the streets. It's the opposition parties ... which hijacked the movement from the students," Barua said.

"Students' demands have been fulfilled by the court, and the government will issue a circular by Tuesday regarding the quota system in the government job."

Students Against Discrimination, the main protest organizing group, said on Monday that some of their demands are still unmet, including the reopening of universities as well as investigations into the deadly crackdown.

Student protesters are also waiting for the government to issue an official notification on the Supreme Court decision.



Nature's fury People wade across flood water after the Kobe River overflowed following heavy rains in Lukulamo, North Maluku, Indonesia, on Monday. Infrastructure was affected by floodwaters. AFP

DEFENSE

Blinken, Austin to meet Japanese counterparts for talks

AFP Tokyo

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin will meet their Japanese counterparts for four-way talks this month, Tokyo's Foreign Ministry said Monday.

Meeting in Japan on July 28, they will discuss "security challenges facing the two countries" and the "strengthening of the deterrence and

response capabilities of the Japan-US alliance," a ministry statement said.

It follows a state visit by Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to Washington in April.

At that meeting, Kishida and President Joe Biden unveiled plans to restructure the US military command in Japan, the biggest such change since the 1960s.

The move was aimed at making US and Japanese forces

more nimble in the event of threats, such as a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

Blinken and Austin will also hold a "ministerial meeting on extended deterrence" when they meet Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa and Defence Minister Minoru Kihara, Monday's statement said.

"The four Ministers will discuss bilateral cooperation to further strengthen US extended

deterrence, bolstered by Japan's defense capabilities," it said.

Japan plans to double its defense spending to the NATO standard of 2 percent of GDP by 2027, although the falling value of the yen may dent its purchasing power.

Blinken will be in Japan from July 28-29 as part of a trip that also includes an Association of Southeast Asian Nations ministerial meeting in Laos this week.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Strong allies

Belarus FM to visit North Korea today

Moscow ally Belarus' foreign minister will on Tuesday go to North Korea, a pariah state with which Russia has strengthened ties, for a three-day visit, the Belarusian Foreign Ministry said.

"On 23-25 July 2024, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, Maxim Ryzhenkov, will pay an official return visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK," the ministry said in a statement in English, referring to the acronym of North Korea's official name. Russia used Belarus as a launchpad for its invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

AFP

Facing criticism

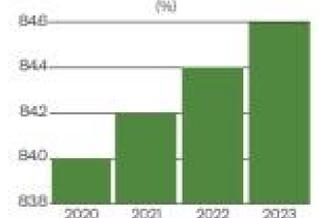
India blocks rule dividing eateries by religion

India's top court on Monday temporarily suspended directives issued by two state governments requiring eateries to display the names of their owners following criticism the rule was intended to divide restaurants by religion.

In its interim order Monday, the Supreme Court said that while shops need not specify their owners' names outside, they should display the food items on offer, the legal website LiveLaw reported. The Uttar Pradesh government said it was meant to maintain the purity of the faith of the pilgrims, known as "kanwaris." But detractors of the move, including allies of the Hindu-nationalist BJP, said it was meant to stop the pilgrims from patronizing eateries owned by Muslims. AFP

The Day's FIGURES

UK: URBANIZATION (%)



Source: Statista

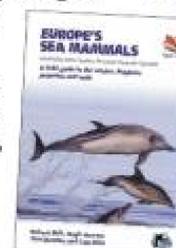
What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

'Europe's Sea Mammals'

ROBERT STILL, HUGH HARROP, LUIS DIAS, AND TIM STENTON

This cutting-edge photographic identification guide to Europe's sea mammals—the only such guide of its kind—covers the 39 species of whales, dolphins and porpoises and 9 species of seals found in the region, which spans the eastern Atlantic



from Iceland to Macaronesia, and the Mediterranean, Caspian and Baltic seas. Written and illustrated by a team of professional tour guides with extensive experience presenting the region's sea mammals, the guide features more than 180 color photographs, maps and graphics.

Ongoing investigation

Five killed in Croatian nursing home

An assailant entered an elderly care home on Monday in central Croatia and shot five people dead, Croatian media reports said.

The Index news portal said five people died immediately, while others were still receiving medical assistance.

The suspect fled the scene, but the police soon caught him in a cafe near the facility in the town of Daruvar, the report said.

Authorities are investigating the motive behind the attack. AP

Corruption inquiry

Spanish PM to testify in graft case against wife

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez will testify on July 30 in a preliminary corruption inquiry into his wife Begona Gomez's business ties, a Madrid court said Monday. Judge Juan Carlos Peinado will hear Sanchez as a "witness" at his official residence at 11:00 a.m. on July 30, a court statement said.

He will be questioned over suspected influence peddling by his wife.

AFP

فأخمل النفس على مكرورها
إن حلو الغيش محفوف بمر
(بشار بن برد)

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

Force yourself to bear the undesired, because the sweetest times are tinged with bitterness.

Bashshar bin Burd
(Abbasid-era poet)

Opinion

People of the Gulf, beware

KHALAF AHMAD AL-HABTOOR

The recent escalation of tensions in our region compels me to reiterate a warning I have sounded for years about the threats we face, which jeopardize our security in the Gulf Cooperation Council. Today, more than ever, I sense we are on the brink of a significant confrontation in our area.

Following the Israeli airstrikes on Yemen's Red Sea port city of Hodeidah on Saturday, there are growing fears that a regional war could ignite. We might know when it starts, but we cannot predict how or when it will end.

Statements accusing Arab countries of aiding Israeli aviation in its attacks on Yemen are emerging. These accusations set the stage for a dangerous scenario, aligning with the long-standing incitement policy pursued by Iranian militia platforms in the region, including the

Houthis in Yemen, the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon. These groups accuse our Gulf nations of treason and issue explicit threats against us.

Despite our attempts to mend relations with the Iranian regime, its proxies continue to fight us. Trust is impossible with those who practice duplicity in their dealings.

Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, in a televised speech, openly threatened Saudi Arabia, claiming it incited and funded Israel for its attacks on Hezbollah. The Houthis have vowed to strike Saudi Arabia again. And Iranian-backed Shiite militias in Iraq provoke and threaten our countries with baseless accusations. Clerics there exploit Ashura's commemoration, using platforms to spread lies against Gulf countries. Muqtada Al-Sadr's recent speech is a glaring example of their provocations and



Khalaf Ahmad Al-Habtoor is a prominent UAE businessman and chairman of the Al-Habtoor Group and Dubai National Insurance and Reinsurance Company. He was the only non-US member of the World Board of Governors of the American United Service Organizations from 1984 to 1997.

insults, especially when he distorts verses of the Holy Qur'an, compares Najaf to Makkah and curses the Umayyads entirely, insisting on entering God's house only through Ali's gate.

Moreover, statements from Ahmed Alam Al-Huda, a member of Iran's Council of Experts and representative of the supreme leader for Razavi Khorasan province, openly admit that Hezbollah, the Houthis, the Popular Mobilization Forces and others are working for Iran against the countries they are present in. He boasts that Iran has surrounded the Arabian Gulf nations with the goal of dismantling them.

Given that these militias are directed by Iran, one must question where the promises of a new relationship stand. Iran's method of waging war through proxies indicates its aim to turn our Arab lands into battlegrounds to further its agenda.

Everything I am warning about today I

highlighted decades ago, compiled into a book titled "Is Anybody Listening?" The fundamental question remains: What are we doing to counter the danger that threatens our security and existence?

We must revive the unification of our military forces within the Gulf as a deterrent against any acts of aggression. We are strong and not weak; our reach can extend everywhere, but we must remain vigilant and cautious.

I urge our leaders to focus on the Iraqi border, where the threat of an Iranian proxy war against us is brewing. Pay attention to the statements of the Iranian militia leaders in Iraq and their clerics. Understand the gravity of their threats and you will understand the urgency of my warnings.

We must act now to ensure we do not fail to recognize the seriousness of the situation before it is too late. But the question remains: "Is anybody listening?"

Despite our attempts to mend relations with the Iranian regime, its proxies continue to fight us

COURTESY: AHMAD RASHID/ASHARQ AL-AWSAT



This could be one of the most profound opinions the court has ever delivered. It did so with near unanimity

Key states now have a duty to act on Israel's occupation

CHRIS DOYLE

Another pinch yourself moment. Palestinians and those who support their rights have despaired of international institutions watering down the legal rights to which they are entitled. Last week, however, the International Court of Justice did not blink. It delivered.

The shock was not in the legal advice. Nobody should be shocked at its contents, more the courage to stand up to huge pressure. This could be one of the most profound opinions the court has ever delivered. It did so with near unanimity.

The court, the top judicial body in the world, was issuing a legal opinion following a December 2022 request by the UN General Assembly. It is not binding but its authoritative legal status should become the benchmark for all states to assess the legal consequences of Israel's 57-year-old occupation.

The key findings were as follows: Israel's continued presence in the Occupied

Territories is unlawful. It must end the occupation and is under an obligation to bring to an end its unlawful presence as rapidly as possible. Israel is under an obligation to immediately cease all new settlement activities and to evacuate all settlers. The court also determined that Israeli policies and practices amounted to annexation of large parts of the Occupied Territories. Israel also has the obligation to provide full reparation for the damage caused to "all natural or legal persons concerned."

The International Court of Justice also advised international bodies and third-party states that they were "under an obligation not to recognize as legal the situation arising from the unlawful presence of the State of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation."

This means the International Court of Justice can be added to the extensive list of legal bodies and human rights groups that



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

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

consider Israel to be imposing systematic discrimination, perhaps a system of apartheid, in the Occupied Territories. It did not examine the situation within Israel itself.

The official Israeli reaction (spoiler alert: Israel rejected the opinion) was laughingly predictable. Its leaders' contempt for international law is matched by their contempt for international bodies and human rights organizations.

Palestinians are rightly asking whether this will make any difference, with most believing it will not. Yet, the clarity of this opinion hardens the legal position. No serious legal body or lawyer can now seriously claim that Israel's occupation is legal. The legal debate should be over, but the politics is way behind.

Third-party states have a duty to act. As the court determined, states must not "render aid or assistance" toward Israel maintaining its presence in the Occupied Territories.

The omens are not great. The US, UK and Canada had argued that the court should

not issue an opinion; given the result, it is clear why. The US claimed to respect the court but said the opinion "will complicate efforts to resolve the conflict," as opposed to the illegal actions of its ally. The freshly installed UK government merely stated it was reviewing the opinion. The EU issued perhaps the most supportive statement: "It is our moral duty to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to all ICJ decisions in a consistent manner, irrespective of the subject in question." Will it act on this fine principle?

One wonders if America or any European states will insist that Israel end its occupation or pay reparations.

To give meaning to this opinion, key states have to change their language and policy. Will any of them implement a ban on settlement trade? That is the logical conclusion of this opinion, and it would be long overdue. It is time for all European countries to recognize the state of Palestine on the 1967 borders and demand that the occupation of that state be terminated.

Opinion

Arab and Muslim Americans key to US election

RAY HANANIA



Ray Hanania is an award-winning former Chicago City Hall political reporter and columnist. He can be reached on his personal website at www.Hanania.com.
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US President Joe Biden's much-criticized performance in last month's debate with former President Donald Trump undoubtedly raised concerns among many Democrats about his ability to win November's election.

However, the truth is that we did not need to see Biden's debate performance to know that he was in trouble. His unelectability had already been determined in the primary elections as a consequence of the #Abandon-Biden movement, which encouraged Democrats to withdraw their support of Biden in several key swing states.

This movement siphoned Arab and Muslim votes away from Biden in states such as Michigan, Arizona, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Georgia, New Jersey and Nevada. Without their return, Biden's reelection hopes were doomed.

Monday's momentous decision by Biden to withdraw from the race and not seek a

second term in the White House should put the spotlight on the role Arab and Muslim American voters will play in the election.

Without the support of Arab and Muslim Americans, Biden would have lost those key states, even if they did not switch to Trump and instead voted for a third-party candidate such as Dr. Jill Stein, a progressive Jewish independent who opposes

Israel's government and supports the two-state solution for Palestinians.

Instead of recognizing this fact — that the abandonment of Biden by Arab and Muslim voters doomed his reelection bid — the media and politicians are focused only on Biden's dismal debate performance. Arabs and Muslims

are among the most marginalized voter constituencies in America. They are ignored by the mainstream news media and by the political system.

This was demonstrated in the aftermath of the brutal Hamas violence against Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. Tel Aviv has used that act of violence, which was one of a series of

violent acts perpetrated by both Hamas and Israel, as justification to seek the ethnic cleansing of Gaza's Christian and Muslim Palestinians, hoping to push them out in order to annex the important coastal land.

The Biden administration subsequently failed to use its influence to force Israel's government to restrain its response, which has resulted in the murder of at least 39,000 Gazans — and perhaps as many as 186,000 — and the destruction of the homes and lives of more than 1.5 million.

Demands in the early weeks of the Israeli carnage for a ceasefire that might have prevented so many deaths were ignored by the Biden administration. This angered Arab and Muslim Americans so much that they significantly undermined Biden's election chances by not voting for him in the swing state primaries. Instead, they voted for other candidates or even cast blank votes for "undecided" or "uncommitted."

Now that Biden has withdrawn from the election, there is a campaign by

some Democrats to put Vice President Kamala Harris in his place. Biden has endorsed Harris to replace him on the ballot and Harris announced her intention to run. But for Arabs and Muslims, Harris is no different than Biden. She was silent on the call for a ceasefire and has been in lockstep with Biden.

Alternate candidates are expected to surface as contenders to succeed Biden,

including third-party independent Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Sen. Joe Manchin, former First Lady Michelle Obama and former Democratic hopeful Sen. Bernie Sanders.

Yet, no matter who the party rallies around to succeed Biden, no Democratic candidate can win the White House

unless they address the concerns of Arabs and Muslims and the powerful voter display seen during the primary elections.

Without a major realignment of American foreign policy toward Palestine, Israel and the Middle East, the Democrats are in for an uphill election fight they are almost certain to lose.

The truth is that we did not need to see Biden's debate performance to know that he was in trouble

No Democratic candidate can win the White House unless they address the concerns of Arabs and Muslims

Orban's 'peace mission' exposes EU divisions

DR. MOHAMMED AL-SULAMI

The EU is considering taking action against Hungary regarding its presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2024 due to concerns over Budapest's adherence to EU values and the rule of law. The last European Parliament passed a resolution questioning Hungary's ability to credibly fulfill the role of the council's presidency, citing democratic backsliding and rule-of-law violations by Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government.

This issue was further ignited after the Hungarian PM this month made a series of visits to Kyiv (Ukraine), Moscow (Russia), Shusha (Azerbaijan), Beijing (China) and Washington (the US). The talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin were part of what Orban described as a "peace mission" over Russia's war in Ukraine and also involved meetings with Chinese President Xi Jinping and former US President Donald Trump.

The European debate is related to Hungary's role as the council's president. Orban's foreign trips were ambiguous in terms of their goal, as well as their bilateral and/or European dimensions. EU member states were concerned that Orban appeared to use his country's presidency to add weight to his diplomatic projects. The six-month presidency is temporary and does not mean

the holder represents the entire bloc.

Despite the official explanation outlining the bilateral dimension of the so-called peace mission, the EU is pondering the option of suspending Hungary's presidency of the council. Indeed, it appears that the Spanish and Belgian governments could act against Hungary's presidency, as they form — together with Hungary — the presidency trio, with a common program. Moreover, following a request from Poland, the council's legal service explained that Orban's peace mission violated EU treaties

and common foreign policy. For now, top EU officials have decided to boycott Hungary's meetings as a result of Orban's visit to Putin.

Some EU member states have complained about the European Commission's decision to boycott the Hungarian presidency. The European Commission has announced that it will not send its commissioners to informal council meetings during Hungary's presidency and that it has canceled its trip to Budapest, a routine visit that the commission undertakes at the beginning of each new council presidency. This decision was seen by some EU member states as an electoral move to support the candidacy of Ursula von der Leyen as president of the European Commission.

Other EU leaders criticized Orban for his peace mission because he had no official mandate from the EU. The most vocal



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criticism came from Poland, Germany, France, Italy, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. All insisted that the Hungarian PM was not representative of the EU. According to former Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas: "In Moscow, Viktor Orban in no way represents the EU or the EU's positions. He is exploiting the EU presidency position to sow confusion. The EU is united, clearly behind Ukraine and against Russian aggression."

The political boycott of events and meetings during the six months of the rotating Hungarian presidency is the most likely consequence of the widespread criticism from Orban's counterparts regarding his peace mission. While some experts suggest options like suspending Hungary's presidency or limiting its powers, concrete measures have yet to be decided. The debate continues within the EU on the best course of action to address these concerns, while maintaining the integrity and functionality of the rotating presidential system.

This broad European criticism directed at Orban had one important exception, namely Slovakia. Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico explained that "there is no military solution to the conflict in Ukraine. I am among the politicians who support an immediate ceasefire and the start of peace negotiations involving Ukraine, the Russian

Federation, the US, China and the EU."

Hungary's limited support inside the EU could change in the event of Trump's reelection. After November, Budapest may have the confidence to use its presidency of the council to secure a rapprochement with a future Republican administration that is more supportive of strong peace efforts to end the war in Ukraine. Other EU member states should prepare for this scenario to avoid undermining the bloc's credibility in militarily supporting Ukraine.

On the internal front, the rise of far-right political parties is also a signal that, even if Orban remains isolated among the European elite, his strategic thinking is popular among a significant part of the European public.

Most EU officials have not read the internal European scene well. Beyond the formal message of unity, with the notable exception of Slovakia, there is a state of disunity in the EU toward the Ukrainian crisis.

Hungary is leading this rift and we will see more "peace efforts" with the rise of far-right extremists across the continent. Indeed, most of the European public does not see the need for a long war against Russia.

The widespread official criticism of Hungary's peace mission is therefore not so much of a sign of unity among EU member states but rather a manifestation of a widening gap between most European citizens and the Brussels technocratic elite.

Orban's foreign trips were ambiguous in terms of their goal, as well as their bilateral and/or European dimensions

Political boycotts during the six months of the rotating Hungarian presidency are the most likely consequence

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Emerging markets are gaining traction, with funds adopting a selective approach.

Josette Rizk
Head of Middle East and Africa at Invesco



Business



Invesco's findings are based on the views of 140 chief investment officers, heads of asset classes, and senior portfolio strategists at 83 sovereign wealth funds and 57 central banks. Reuters

CHALLENGES

Sovereign investors in Mideast exploring emerging markets

Geopolitical tensions are most serious risk to economic growth, study says

Nirmal Narayanan Riyadh

Middle Eastern sovereign investors are following their global counterparts by prioritizing India and other emerging markets amid concerns over geopolitical tensions, an analysis said.

In its latest report, Invesco, a US-based investment management firm, said that 88 percent of global wealth funds, including 100 percent of those in the Middle East region, consider the South Asian country the most attractive destination for investments among emerging economies.

Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund has already expressed its appetite in emerging nations like India. In September 2023, the Kingdom's Investment Minister Khalid Al-Falih expressed the possibility of establishing a sovereign wealth fund office in the Asian country, as well as investing in Indian startups that cater to the Saudi markets via venture capital funds.

Commenting on her firm's report, Josette Rizk, head of Middle East and Africa at Invesco, said: "Amid an unpredictable macro environment, sovereign investors are recalibrating their portfolios, pivoting toward equities, private credit, and hedge funds."



The study said the US is the most attractive market for private credit. AFP

Sovereign investors in the region are increasingly adopting AI in their investment processes, recognizing its potential to become an essential tool.

Josette Rizk
Head of Middle East and Africa at Invesco

She said: "Emerging markets are gaining traction, with funds adopting a selective approach."

According to the report, wealth funds are looking to reshape their portfolios to reflect the new macro environment, with 27 percent and 50 percent in the Middle East planning to increase allocations to infrastructure over the next year.

Invesco's findings are based on the views of 140 chief investment officers, heads of asset classes, and senior portfolio strategists at 83 sovereign wealth funds and 57 central banks, who together manage \$22 trillion in assets.

Geopolitical tensions

The analysis revealed that 95 percent of sovereign investors in the Middle East region opined geopolitical tensions as the most serious risk to economic growth over the next 12 months.

According to the report, inflation also remains a significant concern for these investors, with 43 percent of sovereign wealth funds and central banks globally and 68 percent in the Middle East expecting it to settle above apex banks' targets.

The study further noted that almost three-quarters of investors — 71 percent worldwide and 70 percent in the Middle East — anticipate interest rates and bond yields to remain in the mid-single digits over the long term, indicating a shift in expectations.

The rise of private credit

The report noted that private credit is also gaining popularity, with only 35 percent of sovereign

wealth funds globally and 22 percent in the Middle East currently having no investments in private credit.

Invesco opined that the appeal of private credit is driven by diversification from traditional fixed income and its relative value compared to conventional debts.

The study said that the US is the most attractive market for private credit, with the country being rated the favorite option by 67 percent of the wealth funds globally and 71 percent in the Middle East.

However, Invesco said there is a growing interest in emerging market private debt, as more than half of the respondents, including 58 percent in the Middle East region, believe there are unexplored opportunities in these countries.

"Private credit is increasingly attractive to sovereign wealth funds, with many investing through funds and direct deals.

Sovereign wealth funds in the region developed markets but are also exploring emerging markets while balancing defensive and opportunistic strategies to navigate the competitive landscape," Rizk said.

The implementation of AI

Invesco also noted that more than one-third of sovereign investors globally are using advanced technologies like

FASTFACTS

● In 2023, Saudi Investment Minister Khalid Al-Falih expressed the possibility of establishing a sovereign wealth fund office in India.

● Wealth funds are looking to reshape their portfolios to reflect the new macro environment, with 27 percent and 50 percent in the Middle East planning.

● The study noted that almost three-quarters of investors anticipate interest rates and bond yields to remain in the mid-single digits over the long term.

artificial intelligence in their investment process.

The vast majority — 93 percent worldwide and 100 percent in the Middle East — believe AI will eventually play a role in their organization.

The rise of generative AI has prompted 66 percent of sovereign wealth funds and central banks globally and 83 percent in the Middle East to reevaluate their current AI strategies and explore new applications for this technology.

The survey also found that half of these investors globally and 80 percent in the Middle East are confident that the implementation of AI can enhance returns.

"Sovereign investors in the region are increasingly adopting AI in their investment processes, recognizing its potential to become an essential tool. While challenges exist, funds are investing in training and partnerships to overcome barriers," Rizk said.

Growing importance of ESG

Invesco said that investors who took part in the study consider greenwashing to be one of the biggest challenges, as cited by 84 percent of the wealth funds worldwide and 94 percent in the Middle East.

The report also found that sovereign investors are moving toward greater accountability, with 50 percent of accounts in the Middle East modeling and tracking their portfolios to combat climate change.

"ESG (environmental, social, and governance) adoption continues to rise among the Middle East's central banks, while SWFs refine their approach as the market matures," Rizk said.

She said: "Investors are increasingly recognizing climate risk as a material factor and aligning portfolios with global climate goals. Engagement with and allocation to renewables are preferred over complete divestment to drive the energy transition."

Business Saudi Arabia

PARTNERSHIP

Saudi Arabia, Egypt to boost energy cooperation

Measures to diversify energy mix and will address challenges in energy sector

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi Arabia and Egypt are set to boost energy cooperation following a meeting between top officials to expand ties in petroleum, gas, electricity, renewable energy, and hydrogen.

On July 21, Saudi Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman met with Egypt's Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources Karim Badawi and Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy Mahmoud Esmat at his ministry's headquarters in Riyadh.

This comes as Saudi Arabia and Egypt deepen their energy cooperation, with Egypt signing a \$4 billion deal with Saudi Arabia's ACWA Power in December 2023 to develop a green hydrogen project. The agreement includes a work plan for the first phase, targeting a production capacity of up to 600,000 tonnes annually of green ammonia.

During the meeting, the ministers discussed various aspects of cooperation between the two countries, aiming to align their efforts with the shared visions of their leadership and the ambitions of their peoples, according to a statement from the Saudi Energy Ministry.

"The energy strategies of both countries were reviewed, and key work areas and measures to diversify the energy mix and address challenges in the energy sector were discussed, all within the framework of ensuring sustainable and affordable energy sources," said the statement.

The recent Riyadh meeting also reviewed the progress of



Saudi Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman met with Egypt's Minister of Petroleum Karim Badawi and Minister of Electricity Mahmoud Esmat. Supplied

joint projects, including the electrical interconnection between the Saudi and Egyptian grids — the largest in the region.

This initiative aims to enhance the stability and reliability of the electrical supply between the two countries and maximize the economic and developmental benefits of their collaborative electrical undertakings, the statement added.

In a similar statement issued by the Egyptian Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, Badawi emphasized the depth of the partnership and the distinguished relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which have spanned decades across various fields, particularly in energy.

He said that the strategies of both countries were reviewed,

FASTFACTS

- Saudi Arabia and Egypt deepen their energy cooperation, with Egypt signing a \$4 billion deal with Saudi Arabia's ACWA Power in December 2023 to develop a green hydrogen project.

- The agreement includes a work plan for the first phase, targeting a production capacity of up to 600,000 tonnes annually of green ammonia.

including key work areas and measures to diversify the energy mix and address challenges in the sector to ensure sustainable and affordable energy sources.

The minister said that his ministry's priorities include

increasing production, accelerating exploration activities, and utilizing available capacities in refineries and petrochemical plants.

Badawi also stressed the importance of enhancing cooperation with the Kingdom and other allied countries, as well as exchanging expertise and sharing success stories to maximize integration between the two nations and increase the added value of natural resources.

The Egyptian statement also underlined the importance of developing action plans with realistic and fundamental solutions grounded in economic principles to ensure sustainability, and the need for continued investment in human resources, the development

of young talent, and women's empowerment.

The meeting agreed on the need to optimize the use of petroleum resources while observing environmental considerations. It discussed expanding programs and initiatives to reduce carbon emissions, including improving energy efficiency and enhancing the value of carbon through modern technologies and innovative methods such as enhanced oil recovery, the Egyptian ministry added in its statement.

The meeting concluded with the formation of joint working groups to focus on priority areas of cooperation that will develop implementation mechanisms to ensure actionable outcomes are achieved.

SMART CITY SOLUTIONS

National Housing Co. partners with Korean firm Naver

Arab News Riyadh

The Saudi real estate sector is set to embrace advanced technologies after the National Housing Co. partnered with Korean tech firm Naver Corp. to enhance smart city solutions.

The collaboration, formalized in the presence of Housing Minister Majid Al-Hogail, will integrate Digital Twin technology, utilizing Naver's advanced cloud system.

The technology mirrors real-world entities in a virtual environment, supporting real-time decision-making through

SPEEDREAD

- The collaboration will integrate Digital Twin technology, utilizing Naver's advanced cloud system.

- The technology mirrors real-world entities in a virtual environment, supporting real-time decision-making through data analysis.

- This move aligns with Vision 2030 goals, aiming to use this technology for urban planning and flood predictions.

data analysis, prediction, and optimization. It will be cloud-based, with a focus on three-dimensional digital modeling.

This move aligns with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 goals, aiming to use this technology for urban planning and flood predictions while advancing smart city development.

The integration of Digital Twin technology is part of the Kingdom's broader strategy to modernize its real estate sector and adopt cutting-edge solutions to enhance urban management and infrastructure efficiency.

TADAWUL

Saudi main index slips to close at 12,174

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's Tadawul All Share Index slipped on Monday, losing 28.17 points, or 0.23 percent, to close at 12,174.76.

The total trading turnover of the benchmark index was SR8.34 billion (\$2.22 billion) as 127 of the stocks advanced, while 96 retreated.

The Kingdom's parallel market Nomu rose 277.53 points, or 1.08 percent, to close at 26,040.47. This comes as 35 of the listed stocks advanced, while 30 fell.

The MSCI Tadawul Index lost 6.03 points, or 0.39 percent, to

The total trading turnover of the benchmark index was SR8.34 billion. Getty Images



close at 1,523.43.

The best-performing stock of the day was Dr. Soliman Abdel Kader Fakeeh Hospital Co. The company's share price surged 7.02 percent to SR64.

Other top performers were

Sadr Logistics Co. as well as United Cooperative Assurance Co.

The worst performer was Al Sagr Cooperative Insurance Co., whose share price dropped by 4.78 percent to SR21.90.

Other stocks to fall were Miahona Co. and ACWA Power Co.

On the announcements front, Aldrees Petroleum and Transport Services Co. has announced its interim financial results for the period ending on June 30.

According to a Tadawul statement, the firm's net profit stood at SR159.8 million at the end of the first six months of 2024, up 13.4 percent from the corresponding period in 2023.

The increase in net profit is due to the rise in petrol and transport division sales, deposit income, and sukuk, as well as revenue from joint

HIGHLIGHTS

- The best-performing stock of the day was Dr. Soliman Abdel Kader Fakeeh Hospital Co.

- Other top performers were Sadr Logistics Co. as well as United Cooperative Assurance Co.

venture project investment.

There was a decrease in the other income and increase marketing, selling, and general costs as well as administrative, financing, and zakat expenses.

Saudi Exchange also

announced the listing and trading units of SEDCO Capital Multi Asset Traded Fund as a closed ended investment traded fund on the main market on July 24 with the symbol 4703 and ISIN Code SA162G529FL8, and with +/- 30 percent daily price fluctuation limits and +/- 10 percent static price fluctuation limits.

A bourse filing revealed that these fluctuation limits will be applied during the first three days of listing, and from the fourth trading day onwards, the daily price fluctuation limits will revert to +/- 10 percent and the static price fluctuation limits will no longer apply.

Semafor features expert distillation and curation of the best content out there along with its original content.

Justin Smith
CEO of Semafor



Media



News platform Semafor Gulf will feature original reporting and a thrice-weekly newsletter that will analyze the region's financial, business and geopolitical scenarios and their impact around the world. Shutterstock

BALANCED REPORTING

Semafor to launch Gulf edition as third instalment in global expansion

Former Dow Jones reporter Mohammed Sergie set to lead platform

Tarek Ali Ahmad London

News platform Semafor will launch in the Middle East on Sept. 16 with former Dow Jones reporter Mohammed Sergie as editor, marking the firm's third edition in addition to the US and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Semafor Gulf will feature original reporting and a thrice-weekly newsletter that will analyze the region's financial, business and geopolitical scenarios and their impact around the world.

"The core of our editorial idea and model around the international news opportunity is this notion that most of the existing dominant English-language news media was created and designed in the 19th century by American and British newspapers, to a large extent, that were domestic news brands," said Justin Smith, co-founder and CEO of Semafor.

These news brands would then "re-export their content to the rest of the world" almost as an afterthought and send their correspondents around the world to report back for their home country, he told Arab News.

As the world has changed and the number of English-language readers has multiplied, he continued, there is a need for a new model where international reporting "is not done exclusively to report back news for the home country, but rather is created for people around the world — news



There will 'definitely be a geopolitical aspect' to Semafor Gulf's coverage, said Mohammed Sergie. The firm will hire 'at least half a dozen journalists across the region.'

consumers in the regions where those journalists are, in addition to people who are interested in that region.

"This notion of a foreign correspondent in 2024 is outdated and not as relevant."

Semafor Gulf, led by Sergie, will launch with a team of staff reporters as well as columnists covering Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar, and will continue to expand through 2025.

Sergie, who began his career in the UAE, previously established the Saudi Arabia bureau for Dow Jones in 2008 and served as an editor at Bloomberg News.

Semafor is, in some ways, different from other news brands in that it is "source-agnostic" and is "trying to tell the story a little bit differently, engaging with a sophisticated audience," said Sergie.

Being a "multi-source media platform," Semafor features "expert distillation and curation of the best content out there"

along with its original content in order to provide a holistic understanding of a particular story, explained Justin Smith.

And currently, Sergie added, "there is a gap in the market of a smart read that brings in information from all sources."

For example, in Saudi Arabia, officials often share information through podcasts, which does not necessarily feature in "the traditional media diet people have," he explained. There is also a different "scene" in each country across the Gulf — a "renaissance" of sorts across different industries — that Semafor wants to capture and bring to the audience, Sergie told Arab News.

In addition to culture and business, the Middle East is a geopolitically charged region posing both challenges and opportunities to news platforms.

"The Gulf is this incredibly important site for politics, and these things (politics and other topics like economy and business)

are intertwined," said Ben Smith, co-founder and editor-in-chief of Semafor.

There will "definitely be a geopolitical aspect" to Semafor Gulf's coverage, Sergie added.

The firm will hire "at least half a dozen journalists across the region," Justin Smith said, and roughly half of them will be based in Saudi Arabia owing to it possessing the largest share in the Gulf market.

In line with catering to the region, Sergie said the company would "probably experiment with some other channels" such as WhatsApp to reach a broader audience, specifically in the Gulf Cooperation Council area.

Based on his non-journalistic experience, he believes that most corporate and political leaders are "glued to their email," so will "always consume that way." And while he agreed that the average reader does not consume news through email, they are not Semafor's target audience, he said.

The news brand's coverage is carefully curated for a specific

FASTFACT

Semafor Gulf will launch with a team of staff reporters and columnists covering Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar, and will continue to expand through 2025.

type of reader. "We see the audience as everybody who is obsessed with this story, which certainly includes lots of people in the region, but also includes lots of people outside the region," said Ben Smith.

Moreover, Justin Smith asserted: "We are not a mass news brand. We're not interested in reaching every single person."

Semafor is for the leadership class and for those people who are based in the region as well as those based outside it, but still "deeply interested" in it, he explained. And that is a key factor differentiating Semafor Gulf from other English-language news companies in the region.

Semafor Gulf's approach is to tailor its content for readers who

are sophisticated and passionate about the region while removing the filter that the US or UK might apply to a regional story to make it

more

relevant for readers in their home base, explained Ben Smith.

Global news outlets often contextualize stories of and about the region in ways that make them more "exotic" or relevant to readers in their home country, he said.

These global media outlets are in a phase where they are "constantly rediscovering the shifts in Saudi Arabia" as if it is a new story; but Semafor Gulf would like to "write with the assumption that people (readers) actually know what's going on," Ben Smith explained.

In terms of distinguishing itself from regional media outlets, Justin Smith said, Semafor Gulf will add a "global lens" and "connect the dots" between global and regional stories resulting in a more international "macro-sensibility" that is less "Western-centric."

He continued: "Semafor is a mosaic of multiple sources put together very carefully and very intentionally to bring ideological balance, and so you will see us looking to bring that kind of geographic and ideological balance together, even in the Gulf."

And so, Justin Smith added, Semafor describes itself as an "intelligent service, as much as a news brand" because as "readers try to triangulate this incredibly complicated news landscape," Semafor offers a multitude of expert content for readers to consume "quickly and get a much deeper, more insightful, more balanced understanding of any given news story."

Semafor is different from other news brands in that it is source-agnostic and is trying to tell the story a little bit differently, engaging with a sophisticated audience.

Mohammed Sergie
Editor of Semafor Gulf



Saudi Arabia's ambitious economic transformation presents significant opportunities.

Faizal Bhana
Director, Jersey Finance
— MEA and India

Corporate

PRESS RELEASES FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

FIGHT AGAINST CYBERTHREATS

MENA ISC 2024 returns to support KSA's digital transformation

The MENA Information Security Conference, one of the oldest and most trusted events among chief information security officers and cybersecurity professionals in the region, will once again bring together top industry leaders and decision-makers, for its 12th edition, to discuss the latest cybersecurity challenges and share ground-breaking solutions.

With the theme, "Hyper-resilient Cyber: Navigating the Evolving Threat Landscape of the Interconnected World of IT, OT, IoT, IIoT, and Hybrid Cloud," MENA ISC 2024 will address the rapidly changing cybersecurity landscape and its implications for the Kingdom's thriving businesses and critical infrastructure. The event will be held in Riyadh from Sept. 10-11.

The unemployment rate for Saudis dropped to 7.7 percent in the last quarter of 2023, nearing the objective of 7 percent as set for Vision 2030. The nation is set to grow by 4.4 percent in 2024, fueled by substantial investments in non-oil sectors and the ambitious Vision 2030 initiative aimed at economic diversification. As Saudi Arabia's economy continues to flourish, this economic upturn is further supported by robust consumer spending, stabilized oil prices, easing inflation and a highly digitalized public and private sector.

As a digitally advanced nation, the Kingdom's residents have technology integrated into



MENA ISC 2023 took place in person at Hilton Riyadh Hotel and Residences, bringing together an impressive gathering of more than 2,880 delegates.

everyday life, from government services on platforms like Absher to various mobile applications for healthcare, finance, insurance and other services. Saudi Arabia is recognized globally for its digital advancements, ranking third in the World Bank's GovTech Maturity Index for digital government transformation and first in the Arab world for digital competitiveness. This widespread digital integration necessitates the need for a resilient cybersecurity infrastructure to ensure the secure functioning of digital services.

The rapid expansion is also driven by the implementation of advanced technologies such as

HIGHLIGHT

MENA ISC 2024 will address the rapidly changing cybersecurity landscape and its implications for the Kingdom's thriving businesses and critical infrastructure.

artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, Industrial Internet of Things, and hybrid cloud, in both public and private sectors. Reflecting this trend, the cybersecurity market in Saudi Arabia is witnessing unprecedented growth, with a compound annual growth rate of 13.78 percent and

a market size of SR21 billion (\$5.6 billion) at the end of 2023.

The Kingdom's rapid digital transformation and economic diversification under Vision 2030, increase the vulnerability of its digital infrastructure, making it a prime target, with the average cost of a cyberattack in Saudi Arabia being significantly higher than the global average, highlighting the critical need for cybersecurity measures such as the government's significant investments in developing cyber-secure infrastructure and the establishment of the National Cybersecurity Authority.

Four new special economic zones in Saudi Arabia were also

launched at the end of 2023, including the Cloud SEZ, which aims to attract leading global cloud computing companies to start their commercial operations with the capability to build and operate data centers throughout the Kingdom. This was followed by major global companies like Oracle announcing a SR6 billion investment toward developing local cloud computing centers, AWS announcing a SR20 billion investment toward building data centers and a significant cloud presence, and Google launching a new cloud region in Dammam, which is estimated to add SR409 billion to the country's GDP between 2024 and 2030.



The event at 33 St. James's Square, gathered experts from the Kingdom.

KNOWLEDGE SHARING

London roundtable facilitates financial firms' entry into Saudi market

Jersey Finance, an international financial center, partnered with the Saudi British Joint Business Council to host a roundtable in London titled "Setting up in Saudi — Practical Insights for Financial Service Firms."

The event at 33 St. James's Square, brought together experts from Saudi Arabia, including government representatives, to discuss the practical requirements and support available for finance firms looking to establish operations in the Kingdom.

The roundtable was led by Faizal Bhana, Jersey Finance's director — Middle East, Africa and India. "These events are crucial in providing financial services firms with the

knowledge and connections they need to successfully navigate the process of setting up in the dynamic Saudi market," said Bhana.

He added: "Saudi Arabia's ambitious economic transformation presents significant opportunities, and we are committed to helping firms leverage Jersey's expertise to establish a presence in the Kingdom."

The event featured speakers from the Saudi Embassy in London and the Ministry of Investment, as well as leading law firms and advisory firms. Abdullah Masood, commercial attaché at the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in London, highlighted the embassy's support for establishing financial services in the Kingdom.

ESPORTS TOURNAMENT

Mastercard supports Saudi gaming with EWC partnership

The Esports World Cup Foundation has announced Mastercard as an official partner of this year's Esports World Cup, the world's largest gaming festival taking place this summer in Riyadh. Through curating an exciting, one-of-a-kind gaming journey, Mastercard is helping create an accessible and enjoyable experience for all EWC attendees.

The EWC provides an ideal opportunity to showcase Saudi Arabia's rapidly growing esports industry, highlighting the nation's progress in developing its digital economy and infrastructure.

Mastercard's sponsorship will

Maria Medvedeva, country manager, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, Mastercard, and Mohammed Al-Nimer, sales director, Esports World Cup Foundation.

enable enhanced experiences for attendees, including seamless digital payments, and the chance to win valuable prizes by competing in a broad selection of rousing challenges. Meanwhile, a dedicated Mastercard booth, located in the Esports Arena, is hosting on-ground activations and meet-and-greets with Saudi esports stars and gaming personalities.

In addition to holding weekly tournaments that put gamers' skills to the test, Mastercard will also reward game lovers for their passion and enthusiasm for esports with an array of prizes.

The technology company will also challenge visitors to demonstrate their teamwork abilities by taking on a novel,

exciting game called "Gen Blend," with the aim being to play and win together.

"Mastercard's sponsorship is a significant milestone for EWC, supporting our goals and harmonizing with Saudi Vision 2030's focus on diversity, inclusion, and digital innovation," said Mohammed Al-Nimer, sales director, EWCF. "We look forward to welcoming a diverse audience of gamers, tech aficionados, and industry professionals to EWC, casting a bright spotlight on the Kingdom's digital prowess and cultural vibrancy."

"At Mastercard, we are committed to connecting people to their passions," said Maria Medvedeva, country manager, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, Mastercard.



Corporate Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

High-end Audio

Dyson launches first headphones 'OnTrac'

Dyson has unveiled its first high-fidelity, audio-only headphones: the Dyson OnTrac headphones. Offering best-in-class noise cancellation, these headphones deliver up to 55 hours of immersive listening.

With more than 2,000 customizable color combinations for outer caps and ear cushions, each ear cushion is crafted from ultra-soft microfiber and high-grade foam for superior comfort and acoustic seal. Multi-pivot gimbal arms and a uniquely positioned battery in the headband ensure balanced weight distribution.

Chief Engineer Jake Dyson said: "Dyson's audio engineering mission is to preserve the integrity of the artist's sound wave, free from interference."

Cybercrime

Kaspersky uncovers Olympics scams

The first in-person Summer Olympics since the lifting of pandemic restrictions is set to begin on July 26, attracting millions of sports enthusiasts. Kaspersky experts have noted a surge in scamming activity surrounding the event, with fraudsters targeting users' money and data.

With the Olympic Committee warning of fake ticket offers and news of a UK swimmer's family being scammed out of 2,500 British pounds (\$3,230) while attempting to purchase tickets for the Paris Olympics, Kaspersky's telemetry confirmed that fraudsters are actively crafting phishing websites.

Technical Support

Meeram launches Huawei service center in UAE

Meeram Technologies has emerged as the new Huawei Authorized Service Center in the UAE to serve as the extended technical support and resources for all tier partners of Huawei. The center will provide comprehensive solutions, manage service requirements and explore unlimited opportunities for business growth in the commercial market.

Meeram Technology, as a Huawei Authorized Service Center, provides high-quality services in critical technology domains, including ATIL/agile methodology, cloud solutions, security, audit, compliance, data governance, network analysis, forensics, enterprise IT, and installation/maintenance.



France's President Emmanuel Macron during a reception for international journalists accredited for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the Elysee Presidential Palace in Paris on Monday.

BIG FAN

Neymar revels in Esports World Cup action in Riyadh

Arab News Riyadh

Neymar, the Brazilian superstar footballer who plays for Al-Hilal in the Saudi Pro League, was a delighted spectator in Riyadh at the inaugural Esports World Cup, the globe's largest gaming festival. The No. 10 joined packed

crowds to watch the action at Boulevard Riyadh City, as teams in the "Dota2 Riyadh Masters" and "Counter-Strike 2" contests battled it out in the finals.

He also met Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Sultan, chairman of the Saudi Esports Federation.

The world event features a

HIGHLIGHT

Al-Hilal's Brazilian superstar was avid spectator at the largest gaming and esports festival in the world.

unique cross-game structure pitting the top clubs and players against one another across 22 global competitions in 21 leading games. Held at the 8,000-capacity SEF Arena in Boulevard Riyadh City, the event runs until Aug. 25, and has a tournament prize pool of \$60 million, the largest

in the history of esports.

More than 1,500 players, of over 60 nationalities, are participating at the Esports World Cup.

As well as the "Dota 2 Riyadh Masters," week three of the competition featured elite action in the "Counter Strike 2" and "PUBG Mobile" contests.

ESPORTS WORLD CUP

Ukraine's Natus Vincere clinch Counter-Strike 2 championship

Vincere beat G2 in the best-of-3 showdown 2-1 to claim \$400,000 prize

Arab News Riyadh

Natus Vincere of Ukraine etched their name in the esports history books on Sunday after overcoming G2 to win the Esports World Cup Counter-Strike 2 competition.

Global audiences and another capacity crowd at the SEF Arena in Boulevard Riyadh City enjoyed an exciting battle as the two teams faced off in an all-European showdown — the first in an Esports World Cup Grand Final.

With both registering impressive performances and eliminating some CS2 heavyweights en route to the final, the match closed out week three of the Esports World Cup.

With a \$400,000 prize and vital EWC Club Championship points at stake, NAVI came from behind to win the best of three grand final 2-1 and clinch the CS2 title.

Reflecting on the victory at the Esports World Cup, iM of NAVI said: "It feels amazing to win — we took this tournament seriously. We had high expectations from the start and we kept the same standards throughout. To win the tournament is a great feeling — for me individually and for us as a team — because it shows that the hard work we've been putting in is paying off."

"G2 played some very good CS2 tonight. They provided a type of test we'd not experienced



Natus Vincere of Ukraine etched their name in the esports history books, beating G2 to win Counter-Strike 2 title. Supplied

this week until the grand final. But we came back and we're delighted."

For NAVI, winning CS2 capped off a memorable week in Riyadh. Since the 15-team \$1 million tournament began on Wednesday, the Ukrainian club beat FURIA 2-0 in the opening stage before overcoming FaZe Clan 2-0 and MOUZ 2-1 in the quarterfinals and semifinals, respectively.

The NAVI lineup consists

BACKGROUND

Since the 15-team \$1 million tournament began on Wednesday, the Ukrainian club beat FURIA 2-0 in the opening stage before overcoming FaZe Clan 2-0 and MOUZ 2-1 in the quarterfinals and semifinals, respectively.

of: bit (Valerij Vakhovskiy, Ukraine); Aleksib (Aleksi Virolainen, Finland); JL (Justinas Lekavicius, Lithuania); iM (Mihai Ivan, Romania); and w0nderful (Ihor Zhandov, Ukraine).

When asked about the reasons behind their consistent form and brilliant performances, JL said: "We showed a mental edge over our opponents. We went behind in matches this week but showed resilience and came back every time. This is a credit

to the psychology of this team.

"We've also been in great form over the last six months. Winning here this week shows that we're doing things right — both between tournaments and when we're out there competing."

The Esports World Cup is running from July 3 to Aug. 25 with 22 tournaments across 21 titles throughout its eight-week duration. Week four begins on July 23 with three tournaments taking place daily until July 28.

CHAMPIONS

Gaimin Gladiators celebrate 'Dota 2 Riyadh Masters' triumph

Arab News Riyadh

Gaimin Gladiators celebrated a deserved "Dota 2 Riyadh Masters" triumph on Sunday night at the Esports World Cup after whitewashing Team Liquid 3-0 in the final.

After nearly two weeks of "Dota 2 Riyadh Masters" competition at Boulevard Riyadh City, Gaimin Gladiators took the lion's share of the \$5 million tournament prize pool — earning a cool \$1.5 million.

Team Liquid claimed \$800,000 for finishing second, and Saudi Arabia side Team Falcons earned \$600,000 for coming third.

Gaimin Gladiators had qualified for the Grand Final after defeating Team Liquid 2-0 in



Dota 2 Riyadh Masters winners Gaimin Gladiators. Supplied

the Upper Bracket Final earlier on Sunday.

Team Liquid then earned a rematch after beating Team Falcons 2-0 in the Lower Bracket Final — but to no avail as the Canadian club brought their A-game when it mattered most.

Speaking at the post-final press conference, Quinn, Gaimin

Gladiators' Solo Middle player, said: "I think it's nice to prove to ourselves that we can grind from the bottom back up to the top again."

"We had a tough year with some issues, so just to grind back up to the top was nice. It's cool, it's satisfying."

Coach Cy added: "We want

to always be the best. We try to be the best. As long as we're together in this roster we should be aligned with that idea. It's okay if we don't achieve that but we have to put in the work to try and achieve that."

Toftu, the Support player for Gaimin Gladiators, praised the organization at Boulevard Riyadh City for the Esports World Cup. "Everything went super smoothly."

The Gaimin Gladiators' lineup consists of: Coach Cy (Aske Larsen, Denmark), dyrachyo (Anton Shkredov, Russia), Quinn (Quinn Callahan, US), Ace (Marcus Hoelgaard, Denmark), toftu (Erik Engel, Germany), and Seleri (Melchior Hillenkamp, Netherlands).

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

All set

Macron: France ready to host Olympics

President Emmanuel Macron said on Monday that France was ready to host the Paris Olympics as he visited the Athletes' Village four days before the Games begin.

"We are ready and we will be ready throughout the Games," Macron said.

"We have been working on these Games for years now and we are at the start of a decisive week which on Friday will see the opening ceremony and then the Olympiad which will be held in Paris, 100 years since the last one." AFP

Cycling

Pogacar hails 'golden age' after third Tour

Tadej Pogacar hailed a new "golden age" for cycling after securing a third Tour de France title on Sunday to add to his 2020 and 2021 triumphs.

The 25-year-old won the final day's time-trial with defending champion Jonas Vingegaard coming second at 1 minute 03 seconds on the day to seal second overall ahead of Remco Evenepoel, third on the day and also third overall. AFP



For 'non-compliance'

ICC puts USA Cricket on notice

The International Cricket Council put USA Cricket on notice Monday to comply with the world body's membership rules, just weeks after the country co-hosted the T20 World Cup.

The US board and Cricket Chile "have been formally put on notice and have 12 months to rectify their current non-compliance with the ICC Membership Criteria," the ICC said in a statement following its annual conference in Colombo.

"Neither Member is considered to have in place a fit for purpose detailed governance and administrative structure and systems." AFP

Follow Arab News Briefs all through the day @ArabNews

Robert De Niro praised US President Joe Biden's decision to step down from the presidential race, telling *The Hollywood Reporter*, 'In an act of shrewd politics and selfless patriotism, Joe Biden is stepping aside to clear the path for another Democrat to become president.'

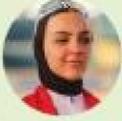


Finally

The Six

Olympic stars

These female sports stars from the Arab region are heading to the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris.



Safiya Al-Sayegh

The Emirati cyclist made history last year when she became the first female cyclist, and the second rider from the country, to qualify for the Olympics.



Dunya Aboutaleb

Taekwondo star Dunya Aboutaleb will take to the mat for Saudi Arabia at the women's 49kg event in the Taekwondo competition at the Olympics.



Ray Bassil

Lebanese trap shooter Ray Bassil will represent her country for the fourth time at the Olympics, having qualified due to her result at the 2023 Asian Shooting Championships.



Julyana Al-Sadeq

Asian Games gold medalist Julyana Al-Sadeq will represent Jordan in the women's 67kg taekwondo event.



Yomna Ayad

Egyptian boxer Yomna Ayad secured her spot in the 2024 Olympics in September last year after making a name for herself on the country's national boxing team.



Noor Slaoui

Moroccan-born eventing rider Noor Slaoui is the first-ever representative from the MENA region in the equestrian discipline of eventing at the Olympics.

CLOSE UP

Mona Tougaard nabs new campaign

Arab News Dubai

Model Mona Tougaard is the face of Marc Jacobs' Fall 2024 eyewear collection 'The Sunglasses.'

The catwalk star, who has Danish, Turkish, Somali and Ethiopian ancestry, took to Instagram to announce the campaign, posting a photo along with a simple heart emoji.

Last month, Berlin-based magazine-turned-fashion label 032c presented its menswear spring/summer 2025 collection at Paris Fashion Week, where Tougaard featured.

She strutted down the runway in a form-fitting suit with a cropped blazer and a blue buttoned-shirt layered underneath. The look was complemented with dark shades and her hair was slicked back in a low bun.

She was not the only regional model on the runway; Tougaard was joined by British-Moroccan model Nora Attal, who wore a sheer, reflective fishnet-like black dress.

The collection, designed by



Maria Koch, is titled "Everything Counts" and included outerwear, feminine suiting and versatile denim co-ords suitable for day and night wear.

Collarless 032c jackets featured tonal gothic lettering, while army parkas and deconstructable cargo pants were paired with boxy vinyl tops.

Last month, 032c also announced on Instagram that Tougaard had been named the artistic talent director for the collection.

"Tougaard is an inherent member of the 032c universe, who has starred on our magazine covers, our editorials, and our previous FW-24 show. It is an organic progression to involve Tougaard more closely in 032c's creative processes together with creative director Maria Koch and fashion director Ras Bartram," the post read.

Tougaard started 2024 with a bang, gracing the runway for Chanel during Paris Haute Couture Week in January. Tougaard wore a black thigh-high coat-style dress with white buttons and a sheer white skirt underneath, teamed with white stockings and black heeled sandals.

Tougaard started her modeling career in 2017 after winning the Elite Model Look Denmark competition at the age of 15. Since then, she has become a prominent figure in the fashion industry, known for her work with top designers and luxury brands including Prada, Louis Vuitton, Fendi, Chanel and Valentino.



Model Mona Tougaard has nabbed a new fashion campaign. Getty Images

Below: The new Marc Jacobs eyewear Fall 2024 line is called 'The Sunglasses.' Supplied

DC FILM

Halle Berry looks back on 'Catwoman'

Arab News Dubai

Two decades after the film's release, US actress Halle Berry looks back at her DC solo outing with "Catwoman" in 2004, and what went wrong.

"I always thought the idea of Catwoman saving women from a face cream felt a bit soft," the Academy Award winner told *Entertainment Weekly*. "All the other superheroes save the world; they don't just save women from cracked faces. I always knew that was a soft superhero plight, but at that time in my career, I didn't have the agency I have today or believe that I could challenge that, so I went along with it."

"Catwoman" made \$82 million worldwide against a \$100 million budget, in addition to winning Razzie Awards for Worst Picture, Worst Actress, Worst Director and Worst Screenplay.



Halle Berry

SECOND SEASON

'Gen V' to return next year

Arab News Dubai

The second season of "Gen V" - "The Boys" spin-off series from Amazon - is officially in production. Amazon MGM Studios' boss Vernon Sanders confirmed recently that the show's second batch of episodes are now filming.

"We love 'Gen V'; Season 2 is turning out to be really strong. They've had their hardships obviously with the loss of Chance (Perdomo) but ultimately I think all fans of 'The Boys' are really going to love that second season," he said to *The Wrap*.

INTERVIEW

'Those About to Die' stars talk Roman epic series

Shyama Krishna Kumar Dubai

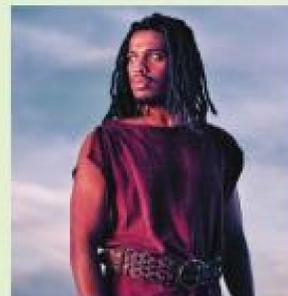
British Yemeni actor Moe Hashim ("Ted Lasso") and Iceland's Johannes Haukar Johannesson ("Succession") spoke to Arab News recently about playing gladiator frenemies in new swords-and-sandal series "Those About to Die," streaming in the Middle East on Starzplay.

The action-packed series set in Rome in 79 A.D., stars the legendary Anthony Hopkins as Emperor Vespasian, the founder

of the Flavian dynasty, and is inspired by Daniel Mannix's classic nonfiction book of the same name.

Hashim, known for his minor role as footballer Moe Bumbercatch in hit Apple TV+ series "Ted Lasso," plays Kwame, a lion tracker, who has been taken to train as a gladiator and now faces an existence that means fighting for his life every day.

When asked what drew him to the series, Hashim said: "For me, (it was) Kwame - where he was



British Yemeni actor Moe Hashim as Kwame in 'Those About to Die.' Supplied

from and what he represents. And I was very excited because I was like: 'This is a character that is not really spoken about or has been documented too much in the Roman Empire.'

"And when I did the research on North Africans and the influence they had in the Roman Empire, I was like: 'Oh, I definitely want to be part of this for sure.'

The show also marks the television directorial debut of blockbuster director Roland Emmerich ("Moonfall," "The Day After

Tomorrow," "Independence Day").

Said Johannesson: "Roland is a whirlwind to work with. He sweeps you along. He's very intense, which is enjoyable. You sort of step on set, and you just jump on the Roland Emmerich train. It's an express train."

Added Hashim: "It was also fun getting to know him on a personal level. We practically did a tour of every restaurant in Rome; we had all types of pasta and, you know, during those dinners, you kind of get to see who Roland really is."