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## SPORT

TEST CRICKET CONTINUES TO STRUGGLE FOR RELEVANCE  
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FRIDAY, August 2, 2024  
Muharram 27, 1446  
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# ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

SINCE 1975

### MIDDLE EAST WAR

## Calls for revenge as Iran mourns Hamas chief

Militants urge 'day of furious rage'

Arab News Jeddah

**Iran staged a public funeral service on Thursday for assassinated Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh amid calls for revenge for his death.**

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei led prayers for Haniyeh after mourners including women shrouded in black carried posters and Palestinian flags in a procession that began at Tehran University. President Masoud Pezeshkian and Revolutionary Guards chief Gen. Hossein Salami attended the ceremony.

Haniyeh's body was then flown to Qatar, where he had lived and where he will be buried on Friday. Hamas called for a "day of furious rage" in the occupied Palestinian territories and across the region. "Let roaring anger marches start from every mosque," it said.

Haniyeh was assassinated in a presumed Israeli missile attack in Tehran on Wednesday, hours after senior Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukur was killed by an Israeli drone strike in south Beirut.

Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah, addressing Shukur's funeral on Thursday, said Israel

and "those who are behind it must await our inevitable response. You do not know what red lines you crossed."

Before the funerals, Iranian officials met in Tehran with representatives of the so-called "axis of resistance" to discuss their next steps. "Two scenarios were discussed: a simultaneous response from Iran and its allies or a staggered response from each

### SPEEDREAD

**Hezbollah chief Nasrallah said Israel and 'those who are behind it must await our inevitable response.'**

party," a Hezbollah source said.

Israel warned its adversaries they would "pay a very high price for any aggression." Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said: "Israel is at a very high level of preparation for any scenario, both defensive and offensive. Those who attack us, we will attack in return."

The foreign ministers of Jordan and Egypt blamed Israel for rising tensions, and called for "de-escalation."

• Related reports Pages 6 & 7  
• Opinion: Yossi Mekelberg Page 10



Supporters and relatives of Israelis held hostage by the Palestinian militant Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip since the Oct. 7 attacks demonstrate in Tel Aviv on Thursday demanding their release. AFP

### CIVIL WAR

## Famine officially declared in Sudan

Arab News Jeddah

The civil war in Sudan and restrictions on aid have caused famine in North Darfur, food security experts said on Thursday.

The finding, linked to an internationally recognized standard known as the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, is only the third time a famine determination has been made since the system was set up 20 years ago.

It shows how starvation and disease are taking a deadly toll in Sudan, where more than 15 months of war between the army and the paramilitary Rapid

### FASTFACT

**Some victims have been forced to eat leaves and soil, and satellite imagery showed cemeteries expanding fast as starvation and disease spread.**

Support Forces have created the world's biggest internal displacement crisis and left 25 million people — half the population — in urgent need of humanitarian aid.

An official review committee found there was acute malnutrition and deaths meeting famine criteria in the Zamzam camp, which houses 500,000 displaced people. Paramilitary forces are besieging the area and no aid has reached the camp for months.

The Islamic Relief charity said rising numbers of children needed treatment in clinics across Sudan. "It is not too late for them, but time is running out," it said.

## The Brief

### JEDDAH SEASON

Jeddah Season has emerged as a platform for youth employment and skill development, attracting young Saudi talents. **P4**

### PRISONER SWAP

US journalist Evan Gershkovich and former US marine Paul Whelan were released in one of the biggest East-West prisoner swaps since the Cold War. **P8**

### MIDEAST AIRLINES

Mideast airlines witnessed a 9.6 percent growth in passenger demand in June compared to the same period in 2023. **P11**

### BOOST FOR ECONOMY

## Iraq signs deal with oil giant to develop Kirkuk fields

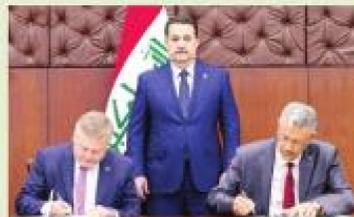
Previous agreement with BP was put on hold after Daesh seized swaths of country

Arab News Jeddah

Iraq signed an agreement with oil giant BP in Baghdad on Thursday to develop four oil and gas fields in the northern Kirkuk region.

The British company and Iraq's Oil Ministry had signed a letter of intent in 2013 to study the development of the giant Kirkuk oilfield, which contains about 9 billion barrels of recoverable oil.

But that deal was put on hold in 2014 when the Iraqi army



**The deal was signed by Iraq's Oil Minister Hayan Abdel Ghani and BP's CEO Murray Auchincloss in the presence of Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani.**

collapsed in the face of Daesh's sweeping advance in northern and western Iraq, allowing the Kurdish regional government to take control of the Kirkuk region.

Baghdad regained full control in 2017 after a failed Kurdish independence referendum.

BP will now start drawing up a major plan to boost output

capacity of crude oil and gas from the Kirkuk, Bai Hasan, Jambour and Khabbaz fields, Iraq Oil Ministry officials said.

The Kirkuk field's reservoir was discovered in 1927 and is where Iraq's oil industry was founded.

Iraq is the second-biggest OPEC producer behind Saudi Arabia, with the capacity to produce almost 5 million barrels of oil a day.

BP said rehabilitation of existing facilities and the construction of

new ones, including gas expansion projects and a drilling program in Kirkuk, had the potential to stabilize production and reverse previous decline.

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The GCC and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations are committed to strengthening cooperation to achieve mutually desired goals.

**Jassim Al-Budalwi**  
Secretary-general of GCC



# Radars

## KSA today



### Dhahran Aramco exhibition

"Aramcorama" exhibition celebrates the legacy of Saudi Aramco through carefully curated historical images, documents and artifacts that capture the creation of the company and its pioneering efforts.



### AIUla Helicopter tour

Take to the skies to experience the breath-taking views of stunning desert vistas and iconic landmarks of AIUla, such as Elephant Rock and World UNESCO site, Hegra.



### Jeddah The Laboratory

Challenge darkness and find out the truth behind the door of the secret laboratory, unravel the hidden secrets in the other dimensions that go beyond reality and imagination, and discover new worlds.



### Jeddah Haunted Pirates

An integrated and diverse horror zone in City Walk that includes a group of different experiences suitable for all age groups and gives visitors a thrilling and entertaining time.

## The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



The Saudi minister of Islamic affairs, dawah and guidance, Abdullatif Al-Asheikh, signed an agreement with Nigeria's Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in Jeddah on Thursday, with the aim of

strengthening cooperation between the nations in efforts to promote the understanding of Islam and its message of tolerance, and raising cultural awareness among Muslims.

The deal will include training for Nigerian imams and other religious

figures in topics such as preaching and teaching of the Arabic language. It also covers collaboration in affairs relating to mosques, including construction, maintenance and restoration, and the training and development of mosque staff.

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



### SUPERHEROES #SpiderManDay

Aug. 1 marks the day superhero fans celebrate the friendly neighborhood-swinging Spider-Man.

The character Spider-Man is one of the most widely loved superheroes across the globe, as the character allows any child, or adult, to put on the suit without the need to reveal ethnicity.

Spider-Man first appeared in Marvel Comics' "Amazing Fantasy #15" in August 1962, created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, and since then the character has captured the hearts of millions of people.

With the number of his admirers growing, X users flooded their feeds with Spider-Man content, making #SpiderManDay a globally trending hashtag.

### AURA Yusuf Dikec

The Turkish shooter Yusuf Dikec has captivated hearts with his casual attitude during the Olympics.

The 51-year-old garnered worldwide attention with his performance at the event's 10-meter air pistol mixed team competition, his relaxed stance being the notable feature.

The way he appeared with his hand in his pocket looking like a hitman from a movie, and had just regular eyeglasses and ear-plugs, unlike other competitors who were equipped with fancy eye and ear covers, won hearts.

Many commented that Dikec looked like he had walked out of the audience to participate in the Olympics, which spoke volumes for his confidence.

After sending the internet into meltdown with his chilled-out aura, Dikec claimed a silver

medal for his country.

Social media users flooded platforms with his picture and posts of praise, with one post on X reaching 48 million views.

"Turkish shooter Yusuf Dikec is a legend for this," wrote Bleacher Report on X, alongside a few pictures.

LADbible wrote: "This is what you call aura. Looking like he just came out of the crowd and gave it a go. He just casually took home silver at the Olympics."

Entrepreneur Joe Pompliano posted: "I love how everyone uses specialized lenses for shooting to avoid blur and increase precision. But then Türkiye sends out a guy who looks like he just picked up the gun for fun and wins silver."

Many impressed users made fan edits with his photos, making him look like a movie star, while others drew him as a hitman character from a comic book.



## Today's Number

# 50k

NEOM, the sustainable development project in northwest Saudi Arabia, has said that 50,000 people benefited from its social responsibility programs over the past year.

## Review

### Sunset Oasis

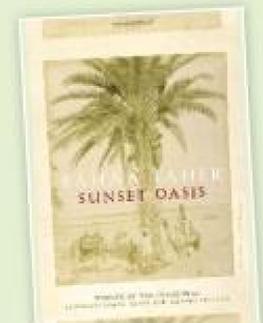
RAHAF JAMBI

"Sunset Oasis," by Bahaa Taher, is a captivating historical novel that transports readers to the captivating world of 19th-century Egypt. The story follows the life of Asma, a young woman who finds herself caught up in the turbulent events of the time.

Set in the Ottoman era, the novel opens with Asma living a quiet life in the remote oasis town of Siwa, tending her family's date palm grove and dreaming of a life beyond the confines of the desert. However, her world is upended when she is forced to flee Siwa and take refuge in the bustling city of Cairo. There, she encounters Mahmoud Abul Ala, a charismatic revolutionary who draws her into the growing resistance movement against the occupiers.

As Asma becomes more deeply involved in the fight for Egyptian independence, she must grapple with the ethical complexities of the conflict and the personal sacrifices it demands. Taher masterfully weaves together Asma's intimate personal journey with the larger historical forces at play, creating a richly textured narrative that explores themes of identity, duty, and the human costs of political upheaval.

One of the novel's strengths is its vivid and immersive depiction of 19th-century Egypt.



## The Region

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Jeddah

- EVA, the ultimate virtual reality gaming experience, is a groundbreaking new form of esports which will transport participants into massive arenas where they will face off against other players in epic battles. Whether you are a seasoned esports veteran or new to the

world of competitive gaming, EVA has something for everyone. The arena is located at Gardenia Plaza in Jidhafs, Bahrain.

- Local producers are selling fruits, vegetables, flowers, and household items every Sunday in a family environment at Badaro Farmers Market, which is located at College Saint Sauveur,

Beirut. The site also provides an opportunity to share a coffee with friends or have a bite, relax and enjoy the city. The market runs until Dec. 29.

- "A Sneak Peek" Exhibition at Qatar Auto Museum explores the past, present, and future of the automobile and its impact on global life and culture.

### Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

	Aug. 2	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	



These systems don't only protect users but encourage positive play.

**Maria Laura Scuri**  
Vice president of labs and community integrity at ESL FACEIT Group

# Spotlight **EYE ON AI**



SAUDI ARABIA

## Enter the AI moderator

Cheating and harassment in multiplayer online games could be a thing of the past thanks to automated analysis

Sulafa Alkhunaiji Riyadh

**As the world's leading online platform for competitive gaming, FACEIT is leveraging the power of AI to ensure a safe environment for its global 25 million user community.**

The FACEIT platform uses Minerva, a specialized AI technology that can understand in-game actions and other non-text chat behaviors, identifying trends that suggest poor sportsmanship. "Toxicity and harassment take many shapes and forms,

ranging from in-game actions (griefing and sabotaging teammates) to verbal and text abuse (mic spam, insults and cursing) to targeted attacks based on a player's identity (sexism, racism and more)," Maria Laura Scuri, vice president of labs and community integrity at ESL FACEIT Group, told Arab News.

FACEIT is the digital platform offering of ESL FACEIT Group, a gaming and esports company procured for \$1.5 billion in 2022 by Saudi Arabia's Savvy Games Group, which is 100 percent owned by the country's Public Investment Fund. Saudi Arabia is considered

a key market for gaming. A report by the US-Saudi Business Council found that more than 68 percent of young Saudi Arabia citizens and 58 percent of the population as a whole self-identify as gamers.

Scuri says AI tools like Minerva help human moderators make quicker and better decisions to fight toxicity. "These systems don't only protect users but encourage positive play, be it by acknowledging players' impact on improving their community and the FACEIT platform."

Scuri says the system is "almost human" in its judgment and performance

### DID YOU KNOW?

**1** FACEIT is an esports platform founded in 2012 that administers leagues for games including 'Counter-Strike 2.'

**2** In 2022, FACEIT and esports company ESL were acquired by Saudi Arabia's Savvy Games Group for \$1.5bn.

**3** FACEIT's Minerva is a specialized AI technology that analyzes and moderates text, audio and the behavioral data.

"thanks to the wealth of data Minerva has analyzed."

"The AI has a human-like understanding of interpersonal interactions. For example, not every curse word or piece of slang is malicious," she said.

"Instead, Minerva looks for patterns in behavior and the full context of text and voice messages to determine if behavior is worthy of a flag. As a whole, this work allows FACEIT to not only efficiently identify bad behavior, but do so at a scale that meaningfully shapes how players experience their favorite games."

Popular multiplayer first-person shooter game

"Counter-Strike 2" was released on the FACEIT platform in September last year. There are several punishments that Minerva can dish out if users act out.

Players who violate FACEIT's code of conduct may be temporarily banned, face multi-year suspension, or receive a warning. Meanwhile, "cooldowns" are time-based restrictions placed on accounts for smaller infractions.

It is hoped that the automatic detection of such violations by Minerva will make competitive gaming fairer and ensure the online environment is safe and enjoyable.

## Navigating ethical dilemmas in reproductive tech

RAFAEL HERNANDEZ DE SANTIAGO

Imagine a world where the miracle of childbirth is no longer bound by biology. Enter "The Pod Generation," a film worth watching, where artificial wombs (or pods) can be rented, allowing parents to continue their busy lives while their offspring gestate in sleek, transparent orbs.

On the surface, this seems like the epitome of convenience. No more morning sickness, no stretch marks and no labor pains. Just a quick swipe of the credit card and, nine months later, voila. Your baby is ready to pick up. But beneath this shiny veneer lies a nest of ethical conundrums.

The pod system promises unparalleled efficiency. Imagine balancing a high-powered career with family life, free from the physical constraints of pregnancy.

Women can shatter the glass ceiling without worrying about their biological clocks.

From an ethical standpoint, the pods could democratize reproduction. Individuals with infertility issues or health risks can experience the joys of parenthood without the barriers posed by traditional gestation. In a world obsessed with equality and inclusivity, this seems like a step in the right direction.

However, the pods, much like any AI, are only as good as their programming. AI, for all its promise, is not immune to bias. Reproductive technologies, influenced by the data and preferences they are fed, could inadvertently perpetuate societal biases.

Take, for example, the algorithms determining the optimal genetic traits. Who decides what is "optimal?" Do we



Rafael Hernandez de Santiago, Spanish national residing in Saudi Arabia and working at the Gulf Research Center.

risk sliding down the slippery slope of eugenics, crafting a generation of designer babies based on superficial ideals? If we are not vigilant, our silent acquiescence could lead us down a dark path.

Let us also address the elephant in the room — reproduction bias. AI systems trained on historical data often inherit the prejudices embedded within that data.

Imagine a pod system that, based on skewed data, favors certain genetic traits over others. This could exacerbate existing social inequalities, creating a society where diversity is sacrificed at the altar of artificial "perfection." In our quest for convenience, are we at risk of treating human life as a mere product?

Despite the marvels of AI, there is also an irreplaceable value in the

human touch. Pregnancy, with all its trials and tribulations, fosters a unique bond between mother and child. It is a connection that no sterile pod, however advanced, can replicate.

Perhaps it is through these natural processes, painful as they may be, that the essence of humanity is truly preserved.

The integration of AI into human reproduction is a balancing act, teetering between the utopian and the dystopian. The key lies in vigilance, empathy and ethical foresight.

The future is full of promise and peril. It is up to us to navigate this brave new world with wisdom and caution. Let us hope that in our forward march, we do not lose sight of the humanity that makes life worth living.

## ESPORTS WORLD CUP

# Qiddiya City to host Final Fantasy VII Rebirth exhibition

Role-playing game's producer and director to feature at event

Arab News Riyadh

**Qiddiya City, a destination for entertainment, sports and culture, has collaborated with international video game publisher Square Enix to bring "Final Fantasy VII Rebirth" to The Boulevard in the heart of Riyadh, during the 2024 Esports World Cup.**

The event will run from Aug. 11 with Final Fantasy VII Rebirth producer Yoshinori Kitase and director Naoki Hamaguchi making a special appearance at the event on Aug. 16.

Visitors can immerse themselves in the story of the role-playing game as the more than 15,000-square-foot retrospective experience takes the form of the legendary city of Midgar, complete with scaled replicas of the in-game vehicles Tiny Bronco and the Buggy.

Fans will have the opportunity to play the game at the event. Additionally, VIP ticket



holders can win prizes, including limited-edition signed posters and merchandise.

Fans can attend a one-night event featuring a special presentation and Q&A session with Kitase and Hamaguchi as they share their experiences of creating the game.

The event will take place at

## FASTFACT

**Fans will have the opportunity to play the game at the event. Additionally, VIP ticket holders can win prizes, including limited-edition signed posters and merchandise.**

Riyadh's Falcons Team HQ at 8 p.m. Tickets can be purchased from Aug. 1 on WeBook.com. For international fans, the event will be live-streamed on Twitch and supported by a live watch party featuring popular gaming influencers.

Arnab Bhattacharya, director of strategy for the Gaming & Esports District at Qiddiya, said: "The legend of Final Fantasy VII, with beloved relatable characters, an incredible story, stunning art and epic soundtrack, is exactly the type of interactive experience we aspire to deliver to gaming fans across the globe as we continue to develop the wonder and lore of Qiddiya City's Gaming & Esports District."



Commercial activities during the season range from food and beverage services to diverse marketing initiatives. SPA

## INTERACTION

## Jeddah Season boosts youth employment and skills development

SPA Jeddah

Jeddah Season 2024 has emerged as a significant platform for youth employment and skill development, attracting young talents and providing them with opportunities to showcase their creativity and gain valuable work experience.

The event has focused on recruiting young talents and creative individuals to participate in various activities, offering them chances to display their skills in product development and design. Additionally, it has

created numerous job opportunities, allowing youths to gain practical experience and financial benefits, particularly during the summer season.

The National Center for Events, through its "Matloob" platform, has opened registration for young men and women to work in various capacities during the Jeddah Season 2024. Roles include event organization, game operation and visitor reception, providing enriching professional experiences that enhance practical abilities.

The National Center for Events

is a Saudi entity that focuses on pioneering the development and growth of a promising world-class events sector.

Commercial activities during the season, ranging from food and beverage services to creative design exhibitions and diverse marketing initiatives, have seen notable competition among young Saudi nationals, including students. These young people are delivering high-quality, professional services and contributing to tourism guidance and event organization for visitors.

## TheSpace

### Transformation of the luxury industry throughout history

SAAD MAJDY BASLAW



The concept of luxury has been a fundamental part of human civilization for thousands of years, serving as a symbol of status, power and one's position in the societal hierarchy. From ancient times to the modern era, the definition of luxury has undergone major transformations. In this article, we will delve into the historical development of luxury, examining its changing nature, its basic functions, and the social implications it has had across different eras. We will explore how the concept of luxury has shifted, been reformulated, regulated and democratized, reflecting broader cultural, economic and social transformations.

#### Luxury origins in early societies

Luxury trade is one of the oldest forms of business, dating back to ancient civilizations. In early societies, luxury items were not just material possessions, but symbols of power and status. Precious jewelry, elaborate clothing and intricately designed antiques often accompanied the elite in life and death. They served as signs of their high social status.

**Ancient Egypt:** Luxury was embodied in splendor and exclusivity. The pharaohs and priests used luxury items such as perfumes and ornate antiques to indicate their high status and divine connection.

**Ancient Asian societies:** Jewelry and weapons. Luxury items such as jewelry and weapons found at archeological sites indicate high social standards, and the importance of luxury comes from its role in distinguishing between social classes.

In ancient Greece (the debate over luxury): The Greeks had a complex relationship with luxury. While some saw it as a positive force driving societal improvement, others saw it as a threat to virtue. This duality reflects much of the very early debate in human history about the interpretation and role of luxury and its broad effects on society.

#### Medieval and Renaissance views on luxury

**The Middle Ages:** Luxury was usually seen as a sin. During the Middle Ages, luxury was often equated with earthly pleasures and was viewed as a vice.

The Christian church called for humility and considered excessive wealth and luxury as moral hazards.

Laws were enacted to regulate and restrict luxury to maintain social order and prevent moral decay. These laws were designed

to reduce extravagance and ensure that luxury did not disrupt the social and moral fabric of society.

#### The Renaissance marked a shift in the concept of luxury, while it was still in a morphology.

#### The Renaissance Era: The era of luxury rebirth

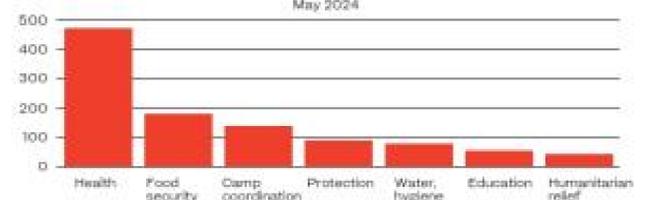
The Renaissance marked a shift in the concept of luxury, while it was still in a morphology and reformulation phase. Beauty and the joys of life began to be appreciated again, and aristocrats and the emerging bourgeoisie embraced luxury as a means of demonstrating power and sophistication.

Saad Majdy Baslaw has more than 10 years of leadership and specialist experience in complementary medicine practice. He holds a doctorate in traditional Chinese medicine, a master's in Chinese herbology, and a master's in acupuncture. For full version, log on to [www.arabnews.com/thespace](http://www.arabnews.com/thespace)

## The Day's FIGURES

### SAUDI AID AGENCY PROJECTS IN YEMEN

May 2024



Source: kareef.org

## Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

### LEARN 2024 Global experts to discuss education in Riyadh

Riyadh is set to host the educational conference LEARN 2024 on Oct. 6-7.

The two-day event aligns with Saudi Vision 2030's goals to improve the quality of life through educational excellence.

The event will feature more than 120 speakers from global government sectors, industry leaders, and academic pioneers, with around 2,000 attendees, including key stakeholders and industry influencers. The conference will explore education's role in achieving the targets of Saudi Vision 2030.

AN Riyadh

### Vision 2030 Asir's deputy emir discusses tourism challenges

The deputy emir of Asir, Prince Khalid bin Sattam, said that it is important to harness all local capabilities to ensure that tourists and other visitors to the region are able to fully enjoy all the attractions and services it has to offer.

He was speaking during his weekly meeting at the Royal Hall in Al-Khalidiya, Abha, that he hosts to discuss with residents and officials the issues and challenges facing the region and its people. Also present were representatives of government departments and the military, tourist guides. SPA Abha

### Investment Fish farming's vital food security role highlighted

Fish farming is vital for the Kingdom's food security needs, according to Riyadh Al-Fageeh, general director of the National Center of Fisheries.

Al-Fageeh said there are significant investment opportunities in the industry, in line with the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030 to boost agriculture, the Saudi Press Agency reported recently.

He said the center was formed four decades ago in Jeddah, and subsequently developed partnerships with a number of international organizations. SPA Jeddah

NEVER TOO LATE

# Shaqraa Tohari, aged 105, shatters literacy barriers in Jazan

Learning to read and write a key pillar of the government's efforts to empower elderly citizens

Tareq Al-Thaqafi Makkah

Over 800 elderly men and women, including a 105-year-old woman, participated in the literacy campaign held this summer by the Saudi Ministry of Education, represented by the General Administration of Education, in Jazan.

Around 233 male and 599 female students enrolled in 28 educational centers across the region in Samtah, Ahad al-Masariyah, Al-Harth and Al-Aridhah governorates.

Several educational, cultural, social and health activities and events were held in partnership with government agencies and the nonprofit sector.

These activities aim to develop



Shaqraa Tohari, 105, enrolled at Al-Dabra educational center in Ahad Al-Masariyah, reflecting her strong desire to learn reading and writing. Supplied

the beneficiaries' life skills and ensure they achieve their educational and cultural goals to guarantee their equitable and comprehensive quality education.

One such student was 105-year-old Shaqraa Tohari, who enrolled at Al-Dabra educational center in Ahad Al-Masariyah, reflecting her strong desire to learn reading and writing.

She said she felt elated standing next to the board to write the alphabet, or sitting on her seat to write and read numbers, or read Surah Al-Fatiha or short surahs from the Holy Qur'an, while enjoying the support of her teachers.

"I was passionate about learning how to read and write, even if I am past 100 years old. It is a dream I have waited to realize for many years and decades," she said.

"Despite all the challenges and the fact of me getting older, this dream has become a reality. It is a golden opportunity that I could have never missed," said Tohari.

The centurion revealed that she spent her life raising her five sons and four daughters. She educated them and dedicated her life for them.

However, in the depth of her

## FASTFACT

Mother of nine is just one of more than 800 elderly people in the region to take part in literacy campaign.

soul, she always wished to be able to teach them and help them do their homework.

"The Kingdom's interest in providing education for all and eradicating illiteracy helped me achieve my dream. It motivated me and the women from my village to move forward in terms of learning and catch up with what we have missed.

"Education and learning are everyone's dream, aimed towards eradicating ignorance and illiteracy.

"(We) have been enriching our knowledge with simple science

facts provided by their teacher in the elderly education center," she added.

Tohari's son, Ibrahim, said that his mother was extremely happy to enroll in the adult education program, as it represents the dream she has been waiting to achieve for many decades, believing in her right to learn, write and read, like other women.

Ibrahim's sister, Nourah, drives their mother to the educational center every afternoon, and her other children help her with schoolwork.

On successfully completing her first year, Ibrahim said, the women of the village were extremely proud of his mother.

Ibrahim stated that what distinguishes his mother is her keenness and determination to complete her studies and learn new subjects.



## FASTFACT

Juniper trees have stood the test of time, creating vital habitats across the provinces of Taif, Al-Baha and Asir.

Thriving in various environments, these steadfast evergreens embody the essence of the area's ecosystem. SPA

RICH BIODIVERSITY

## 'Lady of Trees' are nature's sentinels in Sarawat Mountains

SPA Taif

The juniper tree, revered as the "Lady of Trees" and a symbol of lush forests and towering mountains in Saudi Arabia, plays a pivotal role in maintaining the delicate balance of terrestrial ecosystems.

Serving as a refuge for wildlife, these ancient trees have stood the test of time, creating vital habitats across the provinces of Taif, Al-Baha and Asir, the Saudi Press Agency recently reported.

Under the watchful care of

the National Center for Vegetation Cover Development and Combating Desertification, the venerable junipers are nurtured to ensure their longevity and safeguard natural resources.

Preventing detrimental practices and fostering continuous guidance and awareness, especially amidst the influx of tourists to the Al-Hada and Al-Shafa villages in the Makkah region, remains a top priority.

Dr. Ahmed Al-Ghamdi, director-general of research and innovation at the NCVC, emphasized



An officer of the National Center for Vegetation Cover Development and Combating Desertification on patrol at the Sarawat mountains. SPA

the significance of the juniper tree and the threats it faces. This includes the significant degradation of juniper environments in the Kingdom's southwestern highlands due to human activities and climatic factors.

This degradation has led to dieback in junipers, visible in degraded areas with lifeless trees.

Al-Ghamdi said that despite being a new entity, the NCVC is actively involved in rehabilitation efforts. It aims to address the causes of degradation and expand forest coverage with

juniper trees, in line with the Saudi Green Initiative's goal of planting 10 billion trees in the Kingdom.

Dr. Saleh Al-Shaeel, a botany enthusiast, said that juniper trees in the Sarawat Mountains embody the region's natural beauty and resilience, nurture a rich biodiversity and have significant influence on the local climate.

Thriving in various environments, these steadfast evergreens embody the essence of the area's ecosystem.

## News Middle East

## APPRECIATION

## Joy in Yemen as UN lifts sanctions on former president, son

Saeed Al-Batati Al-Mukalla

Yemen's internationally recognized Presidential Leadership Council and political parties have hailed a UN decision to lift sanctions against former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his son.

The UN Security Council's Yemen sanctions committee removed both men from its list of sanctioned individuals and businesses on Tuesday, sparking celebration among Yemenis, particularly the former president's loyalists.

A decade ago, the UN Security Council sanctioned Saleh, who ruled Yemen for 33 years before being deposed in 2011 following Arab Spring-inspired protests, and his son Ahmed, commander of the elite Republic Guards and later Yemen's ambassador to the UAE, for impeding

political transition in Yemen and supporting the Houthis during their expansion across the country.

In late 2017, Saleh switched sides and launched a military uprising against the Houthis in Sanaa, which ended days after he was killed.

The Yemeni government recently asked the UN sanctions committee to waive sanctions on Saleh and his son, who lives in the UAE.

Yemeni government officials and political party leaders were among those who applauded the UN committee's decision.

Tareq Mohammed Abdullah Saleh, the former president's nephew and former commander of his bodyguards who is also a PLC member, praised the presidential council, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE for persuading the UN committee to lift its sanctions



Yemeni farmers pack dates during the annual harvest season in Marib. AFP

against the two individuals.

"I would like to express my gratitude to the (presidential) Leadership Council for all of their efforts, as well as to our brothers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates," he said.

According to the official news agency, PLC member Othman Mujalli contacted Ahmed to congratulate him, as well as to express appreciation to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and to rally Yemenis to fight the Houthis.

Former Vice President Ali

Mohsen Al-Ahmer, who backed anti-Saleh rallies in 2011, praised the UN decision in a post on X on Thursday.

Lt. Gen. Sagheer bin Aziz, chief of staff of the Yemeni army, and Sultan Al-Barakani, the parliamentary speaker, also expressed delight at the move.

This comes as the US Treasury Department on Wednesday announced sanctions on two people and four firms headquartered in China and Yemen for helping the Houthi militia acquire components for weapons used in its attacks on ships.

"The Houthis have sought to exploit key jurisdictions like the PRC (People's Republic of China) and Hong Kong in order to source and transport the components necessary for their deadly weapons systems," Under Secretary of the Treasury for

Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson said in a statement.

Sanctions were imposed on Ahmed Khaled Yahya Al-Shahare and Maher Yahya Muhammad Mutahar Al-Kinai, while Al-Shahari United Corp. Ltd, Guangzhou Alshahari United Corp. Ltd, Hongkong Alshahari United Corp. Ltd, and Yemen Telecommunication Asset Co. for Information Technology were also blacklisted.

In response to Houthi attacks on ships in international shipping lanes, the US led a coalition of marine task forces to provide protection, designated the Houthi militia as a terrorist organization, imposed sanctions on firms and individuals who assisted the militia in obtaining weapons, and launched strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen.

## GRAVE CRISIS

## Fears mount in Lebanon of a wider war as Hezbollah vows retaliation

In talks with British delegation, Mikati urges international community to press Israel to stop aggression

Najla Houssari Beirut

**Security measures in Lebanon increased on Thursday following the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran on Wednesday morning. This, in turn, came after the assassination of senior Hezbollah military commander Fouad Shukur on Tuesday night in Beirut's southern suburbs.**

Hezbollah asked those in southern towns not to film security events and to disconnect fixed surveillance cameras from the internet, which it claimed was "infiltrated by Israel."

Caution prevailed on the southern front, interrupted by Israeli raids and shelling on border towns.

In an effort to contain any deterioration in security, British Foreign Secretary David Lammy and Defense Secretary John Healey arrived in Beirut for talks with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, Prime Minister Najib Mikati, and Foreign Minister Abdullah Bou Habib. Lammy called on "all parties to respect and implement Resolution 1701 and all its provisions and stipulations."

Healy commended "the partnership between the Lebanese and British armies" and called for "addressing all conflicts through dialogue and diplomatic means, as the violence will have dire consequences for everyone."

Berri informed the British delegation "that Lebanon does not want war but is ready to defend itself, and Israeli arrogance is dragging the region toward unpredictable dangers."



Lebanese Red Cross staff walk toward a burning vehicle following an Israeli air raid on a town in southern Lebanon on Thursday. AFP

Mikati said Lebanon appreciated the message of support from British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, conveyed by the two secretaries of state.

He stressed that "Israel has violated Lebanese sovereignty and attacked our land, in violation of international laws, and it assaults civilians blatantly every day" and added: "The solution can only be political by implementing international resolutions, including UN Resolution 1701."

He called on Britain and the international community to "put pressure on Israel to stop its aggression."

Mikati's appeal came as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs filed a complaint with the UN Security Council and the UN secretary-general through its permanent

## FASTFACT

**UK Defense Secretary John Healey commended 'the partnership between the Lebanese and British armies' and called for 'addressing all conflicts through dialogue and diplomatic means, as the violence will have dire consequences for everyone.'**

mission in New York.

The ministry called on Security Council members "to condemn the Israeli cyberattacks on Lebanon, which pose a serious threat to civil aviation services and endanger the security and safety of communication networks, devices, applications, and electronic data in vital Lebanese facilities."

The ministry's actions are based on a report from the Lebanese Ministry of Telecommunications, which revealed: "The source of GPS jamming is in northern Israel and caused a decline in the accuracy of positioning in Lebanon, affecting transport and communication services."

"Repeated warnings from the Network Time Protocol server were reported, showing the frequent loss of GPS signals and a decline in the quality of service and user experience for mobile network operators."

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also requested its permanent mission in Geneva to file a complaint with the International Telecommunication Union, calling for necessary technical measures to stop such attacks and

assist Lebanon in ensuring proper functioning of its communication networks.

Also on Thursday, Egyptian Ambassador to Lebanon Alaa Moussa discussed the latest developments with Berri.

The envoy affirmed Egypt's rejection of any aggression against Lebanon and highlighted Egypt's support. Moussa stressed the importance of calm as expansion of the conflict would result in dire consequences for both Lebanon and the entire region.

He said: "We have already warned that the Israeli aggression against Gaza will expand the cycle of violence circle and confrontations on many and multiple fronts, which actually happened in the past days."

The ambassador conveyed a

message from Egypt that warned "resorting to political assassinations and the consequences resulting of this approach that will lead us into a vicious circle."

Moussa added the international community must assume their responsibilities through the UN Security Council by issuing a binding resolution to reach a ceasefire in Gaza, achieving de-escalation on all fronts and especially in south Lebanon.

The body of Hezbollah's Fouad Shukur was found under the debris of a residential building in Haret Hreik, along with a second body that was identified as Iranian adviser Milad Bedi. The bodies of Hanaa Bashire and her daughter, Dr. Salwa Zuhair Al-Bitar, who lived in the targeted building, were also recovered. This brings the total number of Israeli airstrike victims to eight, two of whom were children.

Iranian news agencies reported that Bedi was a "military adviser of Al-Quds Force, the overseas arm of the Revolutionary Guards."

Shortly before Shukur's funeral, Hezbollah hung giant portraits of him bearing the words "Fuad Al-Muqawama" — Arabic for "the heart of resilience" — on roads to the south.

The Lebanese people held their breath on Thursday amid fears of retaliation from Hezbollah and Iran.

Private institutions in Beirut shortened working hours for employees to 4 p.m., an hour before Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah's speech at Shukur's funeral procession.

Nasrallah warned the group was bound to respond to the killing and said the deaths of both Shukur and the Hamas leader "crossed red lines."

STRAINED TIES

# Turkiye blocks NATO-Israel cooperation over Gaza war

Ankara 'will not allow Israel to continue its interaction with NATO until there is an end to the conflict,' source says

Reuters Ankara

**Turkiye has blocked cooperation between NATO and Israel since October because of the war in Gaza and said the alliance should not engage with Israel as a partner until there is an end to the conflict, sources familiar with the process said.**

Israel carries the status of NATO partner and has fostered close relations with the military alliance and some of its members, notably its biggest ally the US.

Prior to Israel's offensive in Gaza — prompted by Hamas' Oct. 7 rampage — NATO member Turkiye had been working to mend its long-strained ties with Israel.

Since then, Ankara has been fiercely critical of Israel's operation in Gaza, which it says amounts to a genocide, and has halted all bilateral trade.

It has also slammed many Western allies for their support of Israel.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the sources said Turkiye had vetoed all NATO engagement with Israel since October, including joint meetings and exercises, viewing Israel's "massacre" of Palestinians in Gaza as a violation of



Displaced Palestinians return to the eastern side of Khan Younis after Israeli forces pulled out from the area. File/Reuters

NATO's founding principles.

A UN inquiry in June found that both Israel and Hamas had committed war crimes in the early stages of the Gaza war.

It said Israel's actions constituted crimes against humanity because of the immense civilian losses. Israel rejects this and

## BACKGROUND

**Turkey has been fiercely critical of Israel's operation in Gaza, which it says amounts to a genocide, and has halted all bilateral trade.**

says its operation in Gaza, which has killed nearly 40,000 people, aims to eradicate Hamas.

The sources said Turkiye would maintain this block and not allow Israel to continue or advance its interaction with NATO until there was an end to the conflict, as it believes Israel's

actions in Gaza violate international law and universal human rights.

After a NATO summit in Washington in July, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said it was not possible for NATO to continue its partnership with the Israeli administration.

Earlier this week, Israel's foreign minister urged the alliance to expel Turkiye after Erdogan appeared to threaten to enter Israel, as it had Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh in the past.

Erdogan has condemned the "perfidious assassination" in Tehran of his close ally and "brother" Ismail Haniyeh, the political leader of Hamas.

"May God have mercy on my brother Ismail Haniyeh, fallen in martyrdom after this odious attack," Erdogan wrote on the X social media platform, denouncing "Zionist barbarity."

"This shameful act aims to sabotage the Palestinian cause, the glorious Gazan resistance and our Palestinian brothers' just fight, and to intimidate Palestinians," Erdogan added.

Thousands of protesters marched after evening prayers in Istanbul to condemn the killing, many waving Turkish and Palestinian flags and chanting slogans hostile to Israel, while an Israeli flag was burned.

"I am here because Israel martyred the representative of the Palestinian people," said 44-year-old demonstrator Mehmet.

"The great powers have an important role to play. If they don't prevent these massacres ... history will accuse us of looking on."

STRUGGLE

## Supporters say Iranian Nobel winner's health deteriorating in prison

AFP Paris

The health of jailed Iranian Nobel laureate Narges Mohammadi has deteriorated in prison, supporters said Thursday, demanding her freedom and calling to give her access to medical care "without delay."

Rights activist Mohammadi, 52, has been jailed since November 2021, and has spent much of the past decade

in and out of prison.

A group of supporters of Mohammadi, who in 2023 won the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her advocacy work, said they had been informed of the results of medical tests carried out last month "which showed a worrying deterioration of her health."

"The Free Narges Coalition is extremely worried about the deterioration of Narges

Mohammadi's health in detention," the group said in a statement, noting cardiovascular, gastrointestinal and other risks. Mohammadi, who is held in Tehran's Evin Prison, should be released "immediately" and have access to medical care "without delay," the coalition added.

In the past eight months, Mohammadi has been suffering from acute back and knee pain,

**In the past eight months, Narges Mohammadi has been suffering from acute back and knee pain, including a herniated spinal disc.**

including a herniated spinal disc, the supporters said.

Mohammadi has kept campaigning even behind bars and strongly supported the

protests that erupted across Iran following the September 2022 death in custody of Mahsa Amini who had been arrested for allegedly violating the Islamic republic's strict dress rules for women.

In recent weeks, Mohammadi and other women held with her at Evin have staged protests in the prison yard against death sentences handed to two Iranian Kurdish activists, Pakhshan

Azizi and Sharifeh Mohammadi who were tried for membership of an illegal armed group.

Narges Mohammadi in June received a new one-year prison term for "propaganda against the state," on top of a litany of other verdicts that already amounted to 12 years and three months of imprisonment, 154 lashes, two years of exile and various social and political restrictions.

UNREST

## Police fire tear gas at protesters in Abuja

AFP Abuja

Nigerian police fired tear gas to break up protesters in the capital Abuja and the northern city of Kano on Thursday as thousands of demonstrators in cities across the country joined rallies against the high cost of living.

Africa's most populous country is struggling with soaring inflation and a sharply devalued naira after President Bola Ahmed Tinubu ended a costly fuel subsidy and liberalized the currency more than a year ago to improve the economy.

Tagged #EndBadGovernance in Nigeria, the protest movement won support with an online



Thousands of people staged protests across Nigeria on Thursday. AP

campaign, but officials had warned against attempts to copy recent violent demonstrations in Kenya, where protesters forced the government to abandon new taxes.

Many Nigerians are struggling

with high costs — food inflation is at 40 percent and fuel is triple the price from a year ago — but many people were also wary about insecurity around protests.

In Kano, the country's second largest city, protesters set fire

to tires outside the state governor's office and police responded with tear gas, forcing most of the demonstrators back, an AFP correspondent at the scene said.

"We are hungry — even the police are hungry, the army are hungry," said factory worker Jite Omoze, 38.

"I have two children and a wife but I can't feed them anymore," he said, calling for the government to reduce fuel prices.

Protesters later torched and ransacked a digital center of the Nigeria Communications Commission near the governor's office and police fired shots in the air to disperse them.

Police reported pockets of

looting and arson in the city and arrested 13 people.

In Abuja, security forces blocked off roads leading to Eagle Square — one of the planned protest sites — and fired tear gas and set up barbed wire fencing to prevent several hundred protesters from reaching the park.

Security forces also fired tear gas to disperse crowds in Mararaba on the outskirts of the capital, an AFP reporter said.

Around 1,000 people marched peacefully in the mainland area of the economic capital Lagos, where they chanted "Timubu Ole," the Yoruba language word for thief.



Turkiye has coordinated in Ankara an exchange of twenty-six prisoners between Russia and several Western countries, on Thursday. AFP

COORDINATION

# Russia frees US reporter in major prisoner swap with West

Turkiye's presidency says swap 'carried out' by its intelligence service

AFP Ankara

**US journalist Evan Gershkovich and former US marine Paul Whelan were released Thursday, the Turkish government announced, in one of the biggest East-West prisoner swaps since the Cold War.**

Prisoners from the US, Germany, Poland, Slovenia, Norway, Belarus and Russia were involved in the swap "carried out" by Turkiye's MIT intelligence service, Turkiye's presidency said.

There was no immediate

confirmation from US officials, although the swap was widely reported by US television networks. The Kremlin declined to comment on any exchange.

Wall Street Journal reporter Gershkovich, 32, was detained in March 2023 and convicted in July on spying charges in a fast-track trial denounced as a sham by the United States.

Signs of an imminent prisoner swap had picked up momentum earlier Thursday, amid reports a plane used in a previous exchange deal had landed in the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad.

Hopes had also risen in recent days after a number of high-profile prisoners in Russia,

including Whelan, went missing from prisons where they were serving long terms, fueling speculation they were being moved ahead of a swap.

As a rule, swaps can only happen after a conviction in Russia, and the disappearance of several high-profile political prisoners at once is extremely rare.

Among those expected to be returned to Russia in exchange is Vadim Krasikov, a Russian citizen imprisoned in Germany for killing a former Chechen rebel commander in a brazen assassination.

The exchange would be a victory for President Joe Biden,

whose vice president, Kamala Harris, faces Republican Donald Trump in the November election.

This would be the first prisoner exchange between Russia and the West since star US basketball player Brittney Griner was swapped in return for convicted Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout in December 2022.

It would also be the biggest exchange since 2010, when 14 alleged spies were exchanged between Russia and the West. They included double agent Sergei Skripal, who was sent by Moscow to Britain and undercover Russian agent Anna Chapman, sent by Washington to Russia.

JOB QUOTA

# Teachers, TV stars rally against student arrests as Bangladesh protests resume

Shehab Sumon Dhaka

Hundreds of Bangladeshi university teachers and TV stars held demonstrations in Dhaka on Thursday, demanding the withdrawal of police from campuses and the release of students arrested in a crackdown over last month's mass protests.

Students have been demonstrating since the beginning of July against a rule that reserved the bulk of government jobs for the descendants of those who fought in the country's 1971 liberation war.

The protests turned violent in mid-July, when nationwide campus rallies were attacked by pro-government groups, leading to clashes with security forces,

a week-long communications blackout, a curfew, and more than 200 deaths.

The Supreme Court eventually scrapped most of the quotas last week to open civil service positions to candidates on merit, but this was followed by a crackdown on student leaders and protesters, with thousands arrested.

Demonstrations resumed this week, with more groups joining the students and holding separate rallies across Dhaka and in other cities to demand accountability for the violence and the release of those arrested.

"Around 200 teachers from Dhaka University and some other universities joined with us... This

teachers' protest is to express solidarity with the students facing oppression, arrest," Samina Lutfu, a lecturer in the sociology department of Dhaka University, told Arab News.

The teachers' protest in Dhaka

## FASTFACT

**At least 11,000 people arrested following last month's job quota protests.**

took place in front of the Aparajeyo Bangla, a sculpture on the university campus and a memorial to those who fought in the 1971 liberation war against Pakistan that resulted in Bangladesh's independence.

They also demonstrated against the presence of security forces, which entered the campus two weeks ago to expel protesting students.

"We demanded immediate withdrawal of police force from the Dhaka University campus," Lutfu said.

"Teachers from many other universities also organized protests at their campuses today. I have already received information from Rajshahi University, Jahangirnagar University, North South University, Independent University. Teachers from both public and private universities joined the protest."

At least 11,000 people, mostly students, have been arrested following the job quota protests.

## Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

### Monsoon rains

#### Lahore sees record rainfall, street floodings

Pakistan's cultural city of Lahore saw record-high rainfall early Thursday, leaving at least three people dead, while flooding streets, disrupting traffic and affecting normal life, officials said, as the death toll from rain-related incidents over the past month surpassed 100.

In July, 99 people died in rain-related incidents and most of the deaths were reported in eastern Punjab and northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, the National Disaster Management Authority said. In an advisory, it said the rains are likely to cause flash flooding and landslides. **AP**

### Extreme weather

#### Dozens dead, missing in central China

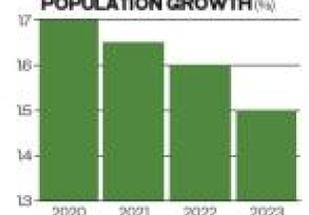
At least 30 people are dead and 35 are missing in central China, state media reported Thursday, following days of torrential rain that lashed the country earlier this week.

The downpours were triggered by Typhoon Gaemi, which moved on from the Philippines and Taiwan to make landfall in eastern China a week ago, with hilly, landlocked Hunan province hit particularly hard.

Many roads connecting townships in the Zixing area were temporarily cut off by the extreme weather, which also affected the power supply and communications infrastructure. **AFP**

## The Day's FIGURES

### ALGERIA: POPULATION GROWTH (%)



Source: Statista

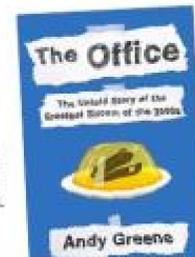
## What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

### The Office

ANDY GREENE

Andy Greene's "The Office" gives us the true inside story behind the entire show, from its origins on the BBC through its impressive nine-season run in America, with in-depth research and exclusive interviews.



The book gives fans and pop culture buffs a front-row seat to the sequence of events that launched the series into wild popularity, changing the face of television and how we all see our office lives for decades to come.

### Knife attack

#### UK charges 17-year-old in child killings

A 17-year-old boy appeared in an English court on Thursday charged with the murder of three young girls at a summer dance class that has sparked two nights of violent protests.

Axel Rudakubana first appeared at Liverpool Magistrates' Court on Thursday over Monday's incident at a "Taylor Swift yoga and dance workshop" summer vacation event for children in Southport.

He is charged with three counts of murder, 10 counts of attempted murder and one of possession of a bladed article. **Reuters**

### Extradition request

#### Japan seeks anti-whaling activist Watson

Denmark's Justice Ministry said Thursday that it had received Japan's extradition request for anti-whaling activist Paul Watson, who was detained in Greenland last month on an international arrest warrant.

Watson, the 73-year-old American-Canadian founder of the Sea Shepherd activist group, was arrested on July 21 in Greenland over a 2010 altercation with Japanese whaling ships.

Watson, who featured in the reality TV series "Whale Wars," is known for confrontations with whaling ships at sea. **AFP**

الذين يفهمون "الماضي" فعلاً يدركون أنه ماضي ..  
وأن مسؤولية الحاضر هي بناء المستقبل ليكون  
أفضل من الحاضر القاصر و"الماضي" الذي مضى.  
(د. ثريا المرعشي)

**YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB**

*Those who truly understand the past realize that it has passed, and the responsibility of those present is to build a future that is better than both the inadequate present and the bygone past.*

Dr. Thuraya Al-Arwayd (Saudi academic and writer)

# Opinion

## Africa looks at the GCC as a partner without greed

KHALED ABOU ZAHR



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For full version, log on to [www.arabnews.com/opinion](http://www.arabnews.com/opinion)

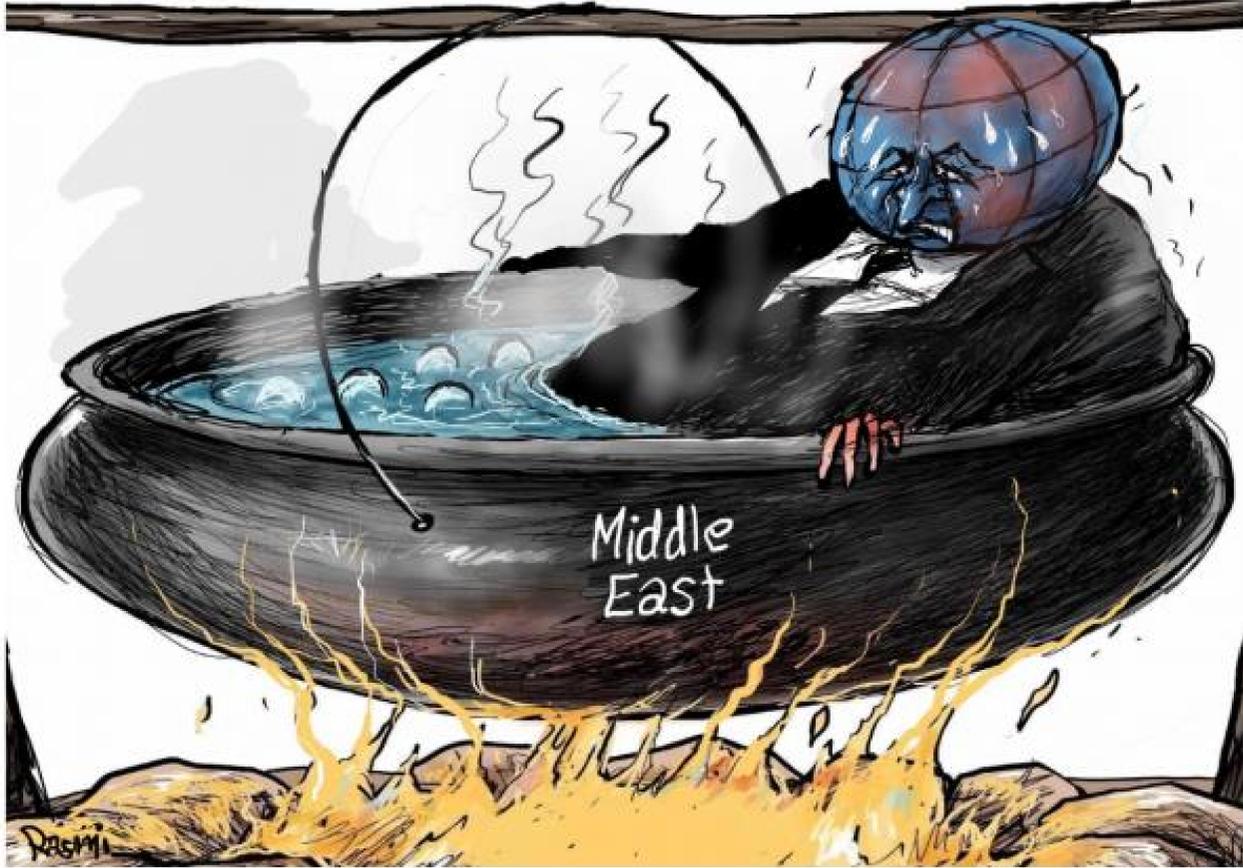
**G**ruesome video footage emerged this week of rebel fighters in Africa surrounded by dead bodies, while gunshots were audible in the background. The scenes were from a battle in northern Mali, where Wagner mercenaries, accompanying Malian troops, were ambushed by a coalition of Tuareg rebels and an Al-Qaeda affiliate known as JNIM. JNIM claimed the ambush killed 50 Russians and several Malian soldiers, while it also captured some survivors. Ukrainian intelligence allegedly aided the rebels. Wagner Group channels reported heavy losses, including the death of their commander and a prominent military blogger. While exact casualty numbers remain unverified, this attack marks one of the worst setbacks for Russian paramilitaries in Africa, as well as highlighting the extremely volatile situation in the continent. This footage outlines the main issues faced in Africa and the shifting of geopolitical equilibrium. France, the UK and, more

recently, the US are looking to stop China and Russia's advance. This great power competition is causing great misery for the African people and is creating disastrous outcomes. Foreign interference and proxy wars, mostly conducted to access key resources and logistics routes, have grown in intensity in the past years. There is, nevertheless, no doubt that something is changing. Indeed, there is a new vision that looks to build Africa and develop an African voice. In this new and third route, African capitals are coming to the realization that Gulf Cooperation Council countries are solid and valid partners that can support a development that great power competition has never allowed. It is an alignment of a corridor of middle powers that have suffered the same ills and look at the development of their countries as a priority. Gulf countries have an excellent understanding of the intricate issues that come with natural resources and the economic transformation and diversification needed to bring their countries to the next phase of growth. They have also shown the capacity

to rebalance the equilibrium of relations. And so, since their independence, they have built true and respectful partnerships with foreign countries. It is a lesson African countries can learn from. Moreover, GCC countries' approach to Africa comes without greed and even with goodwill. They are looking to support the development of these countries and establish mutually beneficial relations. This is an approach that is set on the long term, unlike those of some other actors. There are two keys to this approach: the political aspect and the economic, and they go hand in hand. We have noticed stronger political relations between GCC and African countries emanating from an understanding of the risks of instability for both regions. We have witnessed strategic alliances and diplomatic engagements that are mutually beneficial. The GCC nations, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have strengthened political ties with African nations to enhance regional security. This has included signing defense agreements, establishing

military cooperation and mediating regional conflicts. These political engagements are part of a broader strategy to build stability in key African regions, while also addressing security and political challenges that impact both the Middle East and Africa. The other aspect of this engagement is on the economic side. Saudi Arabia has significantly increased its investments in Africa, contributing to economic development and regional stability through various strategic initiatives. This is making African countries look toward the GCC as a reliable partner and even a mediator. While the road ahead is still filled with difficulties and images of destruction will continue to be present, there is no doubt that the Africa-GCC corridor has the potential to create historical opportunities for Africa. A continent that could feed itself and the Middle East is unfortunately still a net importer. It is key issues and opportunities such as this that GCC public-private partnerships are looking to develop. Already, African capitals know that they have a partner without greed but with hope.

**Great power competition is causing great misery for the African people and is creating disastrous outcomes**



**The most pressing challenge is related to the economic situation and the living standards of ordinary Iranians**

## Pezeshkian's major challenges as Iranian president

DR. MAJID RAFIZADEH



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For full version, log on to [www.arabnews.com/opinion](http://www.arabnews.com/opinion)

**M**asoud Pezeshkian was this week officially inaugurated as the ninth president of Iran by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei after taking the oath in parliament. He faces several significant challenges domestically, regionally and globally. What are these major challenges and what are the prospects of him effectively addressing them? The most pressing challenge is related to the economic situation and the living standards of ordinary Iranians. The recent presidential and parliamentary elections in Iran saw a historically low voter turnout. Several factors contributed to this low engagement, with widespread dissatisfaction over the economic situation being one of the primary reasons. The second major challenge is the widespread sense of sociopolitical dissatisfaction among the Iranian population. This is most likely linked to the imposition of strict

religious laws, particularly those affecting women, which has previously sparked widespread protests and international concern. The sociopolitical landscape in Iran is dominated by conservative and hard-line ideologies, which many citizens view as disconnected from their contemporary societal values. On the global stage, a critical issue is Iran's nuclear program and the potential revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action nuclear deal. Tensions with the West have escalated due to Tehran's ongoing advancement of its nuclear activities, with the Islamic Republic not fully cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency. One of Pezeshkian's campaign promises was to improve relations with the West in a bid to ease sanctions. However, this would require addressing concerns about Iran's nuclear program and complying with IAEA regulations.

Another significant challenge is the escalating tensions between Iran and Israel. In a highly significant event, Hamas' top political leader Ismail Haniyeh was killed in Iran on Wednesday, sparking concerns of a possible escalation to a full-scale war between Israel and Iran, which could turn into a regional conflagration. These tensions also spiraled out of control earlier this year, leading to direct confrontations between the two rivals before reverting to an indirect but intensified conflict. A war between Iran and Israel would have severe repercussions for Tehran and the region. For Iran, such a conflict would likely lead to devastating economic and infrastructural damage, exacerbating existing economic hardships and potentially destabilizing the government. Regionally, a war could disrupt the delicate balance of power in the Middle East, leading to widespread instability. It could draw in neighboring countries and

global powers, potentially escalating into a larger regional or even international conflict. Expectations that Pezeshkian will be able to address these challenges effectively are not high. Iran's domestic and foreign policies are primarily influenced by two powerful entities: Khamenei and the senior leadership of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The role of Iran's president is largely to advance the geopolitical, strategic and ideological interests of the supreme leader and the IRGC. In a nutshell, Iran's new president faces numerous challenges on the domestic, regional and global fronts. The entrenched influence of some particular conservative elements within the country's power structure complicates the implementation of fundamental and significant policy reforms. As a result, in spite of the critical need for change and progress, Pezeshkian's ability to potentially navigate these challenges and deliver substantial results remains uncertain.

## Opinion

## Israeli far right's 'miracle' is a disaster for everyone else

YOSSI MEKELBERG



It would take extreme (and probably unfounded) optimism, or more probably sheer insanity, to find any positives in what is currently taking place between Israel and the Palestinians. To portray it as a "miracle" brings insane ideological extremism to new heights altogether.

You are probably more familiar with Israeli ministers like Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, the more recognizable faces of the religious messianic ultranationalist elements of the Israeli political scene, than Orit Strook. But whenever she speaks in public — and I dare not imagine what she says in private — she makes the other two look almost reasonable.

She was recently recorded as saying, during a visit to one of the settlements in the Occupied Territories, that how we live now is "like a period of miracles. I feel like someone standing at a traffic light ... and then there is a green light," referring to the increase in settlement building in the West Bank. "We want to do as much as possible," Strook added.

Strook's reasoning for her distorted views is that, thanks to the ongoing war, new conditions have been created that are conducive to the expansion

of settlements and, by extension, the annexation of the West Bank and possibly the Gaza Strip. Thus, a peace based on a two-state solution, or indeed any political arrangement that would grant Palestinians political, civil and human rights, is being rendered impossible. This person's euphoria that such levels of human suffering have created a spinoff she delights in is shocking beyond words.

The members of the camp that Strook belongs to might not all agree with her on the miraculous nature of the current situation, but they still agree that it is an opportune moment to complete what they started more than 50 years ago with a settlement project that is by now one of monstrous proportions.

It is a project that, in one way or another, is dictating the nature of relations between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

And while the eyes of the world are focused on what is taking place in Gaza, on the border with Lebanon and even in Yemen, the settler movement sees the green light (not that any red light ever stopped it) for its project that will lead to the disappearance of the Green Line. They have sneakily, step by step, created irreversible facts on the ground, not only in terms of real estate, but

equally structurally and legally, while intimidating the local population into submission.

The current government was born in the sin of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's legitimization of the far right in order to allow him to escape justice. To this end, he caves in to most of their demands, including giving the enemies of peace within Israeli politics disproportionate powers over the West Bank. Being in charge of the Ministry of National Security, as well as that for settlements, gives them immense power to dictate the future of the Occupied Territories.

This power was further increased when Netanyahu transferred to one of the most zealous Religious Zionist leaders, Smotrich, all governing powers in the West Bank except those directly relating to security.

For decades, the settlers have perfected their exploitation of administrative-bureaucratic procedures and mechanisms, with the tacit support or apathy of most Israelis, to advance their strategic aims: to grab more land, build more settlements, expand them and, by that, control the occupied land and people.

Earlier this month, the Israeli nongovernmental organization Peace Now revealed

that not only does the Israeli government finance settlements that in its own eyes — and only its own eyes — are legal, but is also financing 68 farms it considers to be illegal to the tune of 39 million shekels (\$10.4 million) in 2024. This makes a mockery of the rule of Israeli law and of the international community that is united in its objection to these settlements.

Last week, at long last, the International Court of Justice published its advisory opinion clearly asserting that the Israeli settlements are illegal under international law. The court called on Israel to end the occupation and evacuate all of its settlers from the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In addition, it called for Israel to pay reparations to Palestinians for damages caused by the occupation.

Israel's government is operating in a parallel universe and believes it can indefinitely defy international law, morality and the need for security and prosperity through peace and political logic. And it does so because it is allowed complete impunity. If you believe in miracles, the one that Israel and the Palestinians really need is one that will remove the warmongers and put people who desire peace in power instead.

Any political arrangement that would grant Palestinians political, civil and human rights is being rendered impossible

Israel's government was born in the sin of Netanyahu's legitimization of the far right in order to allow him to escape justice

## The key issues as Harris mulls her vice presidential pick

MARIA MAALOUF



After President Joe Biden last month dropped out of the US presidential race, Vice President Kamala Harris became the presumptive Democratic nominee. She has received a slew of endorsements from influential figures in her party, including former Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. Harris has now requested vetting material for several prominent Democrats for her consideration as to who could be her running mate. Her campaign has announced that the name of her vice presidential candidate will be announced by Aug. 7.

Among those being vetted are Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, Arizona Sen. Mark Kelly, North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, while the name of Michigan Sen. Gary Peters has also been mentioned recently. Other Democratic leaders could be contacted, but their names are being kept secret. Harris is fully cognizant

that she must win in the following seven swing states: Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

There are limitations on Harris as she deliberates her choices. It would be very odd if she selected former First Lady Michelle Obama or Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, as voters might not accept a two-woman presidential ticket. Each of the candidates have strengths and weaknesses. None of them are well known on a national scale. Cooper has already withdrawn from consideration as a potential vice presidential nominee. All of them share Harris' liberal views, such as the right

of women to have abortions, legalizing recreational or medical marijuana and hindering the ability to have access to weapons unless there is a need for them. Notably, all of them support President Biden's backing of the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu in its war against the Palestinians in Gaza.

These candidates have many vulnerabilities. All lack foreign policy and

national security experience.

Kelly will resign his Senate seat if chosen, allowing the Republican governor of Arizona to select a Republican to replace him. This would deprive the Democrats of their majority in the Senate. Meanwhile, Peters has many credentials, among them being his family's long history in America. One of his ancestors fought alongside George Washington during the Revolutionary War. However, this is not a reason to vote for him. He has been losing popularity and barely won his Senate seat in 2020. By selecting him, Harris would aim to win the 15 electoral votes of Michigan. But people in America vote for the president, not the vice president.

Beshear in 2019 signed an executive order that restored the voting rights of more than 140,000 people convicted of a felony crime. He justified this by saying that they had served their sentences and that their voting rights should not be denied. Nevertheless, many Americans fear that there could be loopholes and errors in a

system granting voting rights to felons.

There is no electoral advantage in choosing Walz, as Minnesota has voted Democratic since 1972. And there is no guarantee that his selection would help Harris win the two neighboring states of Wisconsin and Michigan.

Importantly, the vice presidential nominee selected by Harris will have to debate against Republican counterpart J.D. Vance. So far, Vance has been on the attack against the Democrats. He is putting them on the defensive in each argument he enters. The problem for Harris is that she cannot find a vice presidential candidate who is more conservative than her. She is not deliberating

the choice of a centrist Democrat. This represents a governing dilemma for the Democratic Party, which is now adopting many left-wing and radical liberal ideas and policies. The party's ticket for US president could alienate many conservative-leaning Democrats, who might find it more rewarding to vote for Donald Trump if Harris is joined on the ticket by another liberal politician with similar convictions.

Each of the candidates have strengths and weaknesses. None of them are well known on a national scale

The problem for Harris is that she cannot find a vice presidential candidate who is more conservative than her

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Demand grew across all regions as the peak northern summer travel season began in June.

Willie Walsh  
IATA director general



# Business



## FAST FACT

Load factor is a metric used in the aviation sector that measures the percentage of available seating capacity that has been filled with passengers. A high load factor signifies that an airline has sold most of its available seats.

Capacity among air carriers in the Asia-Pacific region was up 22.9 percent year on year in June, making the Africa-Asia route the fastest expanding regional pair. Shutterstock

## REPORT

# Mideast airlines witness 9.6% passenger demand surge

Load factor among carriers in the region stood at 79.7 percent in June: IATA

Nirmal Narayanan Riyadh

**Airlines operating in the Middle East witnessed a 9.6 percent growth in passenger demand in June compared to the same period in 2023, driven by the summer holiday season, according to an industry body.**

The International Air Transport Association revealed that the total capacity of Middle Eastern flights also surged by 9.4 percent year on year in June.

IATA said that the total load factor among carriers in the region stood at 79.7 percent in June, representing a marginal increase of 0.1 percentage point compared to the same month of the previous year.

The load factor is a metric used in the aviation sector that measures the percentage of available seating capacity that has been filled with passengers. A high load factor signifies that an airline has sold most of its available seats.

Strengthening the aviation sector is crucial for Middle Eastern countries, including

Saudi Arabia, as nations aim to diversify their economies and lessen their reliance on oil revenues.

The Kingdom's ambitious aviation strategy aims to triple the number of passengers by 2030 compared to 2019. It also foresees handling 4.5 million tonnes of cargo and establishing over 250 direct destinations from airports in Saudi Arabia.

In May, the Kingdom's General Authority of Civil Aviation revealed that the aviation sector contributed \$21 billion to the country's gross domestic product in 2023.

According to the report, carriers in the Middle East region handled 9.4 percent of the passengers globally in June, a figure that remained unchanged from May.

IATA said that total demand growth worldwide increased by 9.1 percent in June compared to the same period in 2023.

"Demand grew across all regions as the peak northern summer travel season began in June, and with overall capacity growth lagging demand, we saw a very strong average load factor of 85 percent achieved in both domestic and

international operations," said Willie Walsh, IATA's director general.

He added: "Operating with such high load factors is both good and challenging. It makes it even more important for all the stakeholders to operate with equal levels of efficiency to minimize delays and get travelers to their destinations on schedule."

The analysis further said that demand for international travel rose annually by 12.3 percent, while total capacity edged up by 12.7 percent during the same period.

IATA said that domestic demand increased by 4.3 percent year on year in June.

### Leading from the front

According to the industry body, flights operating in the Asia-Pacific region posted strong growth in June, with passenger demand rising by 22.6 percent year on year.

Capacity among air carriers in the Asia-Pacific region was up 22.9 percent year on year in June, making the Africa-Asia route the fastest expanding regional pair, growing at 38.1 percent during the same period.

## HIGHLIGHTS

• According to IATA report, carriers in the Middle East handled 9.4 percent of the passengers globally in June.

• Demand for international travel rose annually by 12.3 percent, while total capacity edged up by 12.7 percent during the same period.

• Middle Eastern carriers saw 13.8 percent year-on-year demand growth for air cargo in June, while the capacity rose by 6.9 percent during the same period.

Flights operating in the region also handled 31.7 percent of the passengers globally in June, a figure that remained unchanged from last month.

European air carriers handled 27.1 percent of the overall travelers in June, followed by North America at 24.2 percent.

African air carriers witnessed a 16.9 percent year-on-year passenger demand growth in June, while the capacity edged up by 5.8 percent.

Airlines from the Latin

American region witnessed a traveler requirement growth of 15.3 percent in June compared to the same period the previous year. The total capacity of these flights also rose by 15.6 percent in the same month.

The load factor among Latin American airlines, however, decreased by 0.2 percentage points to 85.1 percent.

European carriers saw a 9.1 percent year-on-year increase in demand in June, while their capacity surged by 9.8 percent during the same year.

North American carriers witnessed a 6.6 percent year-on-year increase in traveler demand in June. The total capacity of these flights edged up by 8.6 percent, while the load factor stood at 88.7 percent, the highest among all regions.

IATA said that it is optimistic about the increase of future passenger growth globally.

"Overall, international travel demand is strong and keeps showing promise for the future," said the industry body.

### Cargo demand surges

On June 30, the organization released another report, saying that global air cargo markets

saw a 14.1 percent growth in total demand, measured in cargo tonne-kilometers, compared to the year-ago period. This is the seventh consecutive month of double-digit year-on-year growth.

According to the analysis, this surge in the requirement for air cargo was driven by maritime shipping constraints.

"Air cargo demand surged in June. Strong growth across all regions and major trade lanes combined for a record-breaking first half performance in terms of CTKs. Maritime shipping constraints and a booming e-commerce sector are among the strongest growth drivers," said Walsh.

The report revealed that total air cargo demand growth in the first half of this year increased by 13.4 percent compared to the first six months of 2023.

Capacity, measured in available cargo tonne-kilometers, rose 8.8 percent year on year in June.

According to IATA, Middle Eastern carriers saw 13.8 percent year-on-year demand growth for air cargo in June, while the capacity rose by 6.9 percent during the same period.

## STATISTICS

# Saudi Arabia's real estate price index rises 1.7% in Q2

Housing sector prices increased by 2.8 percent year on year: official data

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's real estate price index edged up by 1.7 percent in the second quarter of 2024, compared to the same period last year, driven by a surge in residential sector costs, official data showed.

According to the General Authority for Statistics, housing sector prices increased by 2.8 percent year on year in the second quarter, mainly due to a 2.8 percent rise in land plot costs.

The development of the residential sector is crucial for Saudi Arabia's economic diversification as it evolves into a tourism and business hub.

The Kingdom's real estate industry is among the

The prices of commercial buildings stabilized in the second quarter of this year, and no significant relative change was recorded. Shutterstock



fastest-growing sectors in the Middle East. Its market volume is projected to reach \$69.51 billion in 2024 and \$101.62 billion by 2029, with an estimated compound annual growth rate of 8 percent, according to the Real Estate General Authority.

"Given the heavy weight of the residential sector in the general index, it had a significant impact on the rise in the general index," stated GASTAT.

Apartment prices increased by 2.9 percent year on year in the second quarter.

GASTAT, however, noted that

the real estate prices in the commercial sector decreased by 0.4 percent year on year in the second quarter, affected by the decrease in the prices of commercial land plots by 0.4 percent.

The report highlighted that the prices of commercial

## FASTFACTS

• Apartment prices in the Kingdom increased by 2.9 percent year on year in the second quarter.

• Agricultural land prices rose by 1.6 percent in the second quarter compared to the first quarter.

• Saudi Arabia's real estate market volume is projected to reach \$69.51 billion in 2024 and \$101.62 billion by 2029.

buildings and commercial centers stabilized in the second quarter of this year, and no significant relative change was recorded.

Agricultural land plot prices increased by 1.5 percent year on year in the second quarter.

Compared to the first three

months of this year, the real estate price index surged by 1.1 percent in the second quarter.

"The quarterly real estate index was affected by the rise in residential sector prices by 1.6 percent, influenced by the rise in prices of residential land plots, which rose by 1.6 percent," said GASTAT.

The prices for apartments increased by 2.1 percent quarter on quarter in the second quarter, while the purchasing costs of villas edged up by 0.1 percent.

Commercial sector prices recorded stability and did not record any significant relative change in the second quarter compared to the first three months.

Agricultural land prices rose by 1.6 percent in the second quarter compared to the first quarter.

## تقرير واشنطن WASHINGTON REPORT

مع رنا أبتير

## الانتخابات التشريعية والعلاقة مع البيت الأبيض

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## Business News



Saudi Arabia led in ESG sukuk issuance, accounting for 42.7 percent of the Fitch-rated bonds, followed by the UAE at 33.8 percent. Shutterstock

## BONDS

# Global ESG sukuk market grows 41% in H1

Fitch Ratings expects slowdown in third quarter of 2024

Arab News Riyadh

**The global environmental, social, and governance sukuk market saw significant growth in the first half of 2024 — rising 41 percent year on year to reach \$43 billion, according to Fitch.**

Data from the credit rating agency indicates that this growth underscores the increasing interest and dedication of governments and issuers to sustainable finance.

By the end of 2023, outstanding ESG sukuk expanded by 56.8 percent year on year to reach \$36.1 billion globally, with 66.2 percent denominated in hard currency, primarily US dollars.

#### Market dynamics

Despite the robust growth in the first half of this year, Fitch

Ratings anticipated a slowdown in ESG sukuk issuance in the third quarter of 2024. This expected deceleration aligns with the typical seasonality observed in the global bonds environment.

However, the market is predicted to regain momentum in the fourth quarter of 2024.

"The medium-term growth potential for ESG debt issuance remains promising," Fitch said.

This optimism is underpinned by the increasing governmental commitments to sustainability and the efforts of issuers to meet green mandates and diversify their funding sources.

Nevertheless, the adoption of ESG debt in emerging markets remains at a nascent stage compared to developed markets.

Fitch Ratings also predicted lower oil prices, with predictions of \$80 per barrel in 2024

#### FASTFACTS

- By the end of 2023, outstanding ESG sukuk expanded by 56.8 percent year on year to reach \$36.1 billion globally, with 66.2 percent denominated in hard currency, primarily US dollars.

- Expected interest rate cuts in the third quarter of 2024 could contribute to a rise in debt issuance, including green sukuk.

- In 2023, 98.3 percent of those were investment-grade, reflecting strong credit quality, with a significant concentration in the Middle East and Asia.

and \$70 per barrel in 2025.

Additionally, expected interest rate cuts in the third quarter of 2024 could contribute to a rise in debt issuance, including green sukuk, over the final three months of 2024 and the first quarter of 2025.

#### Issuance trends

In the first half of this year, 99 percent of all Fitch-rated green sukuk were investment-grade, demonstrating strong credit quality in this segment.

In 2023, 98.3 percent of those were investment-grade, reflecting strong credit quality, with a significant concentration in the Middle East and Asia.

During the first six months of 2024, Fitch rated approximately 90 percent of the global green sukuk issued in hard currency, totaling \$26.1 billion, up 50 percent year on year.

## COOPERATION

## GCC, Turkiye FTA talks conclude on positive note

Arab News Riyadh

The first round of negotiations for a free trade agreement between the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Turkiye concluded with a positive atmosphere.



The discussions took place in Ankara from July 29-31. SPA

The discussions, which took place in Ankara from July 29 to 31, involved significant participation from Saudi Arabia, represented by the General Authority for Foreign Trade, along with nine other government entities.

The discussions covered a range of topics, including trade in goods and services, investment, rules of origin, technical barriers to trade, and sanitary and phytosanitary measures, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

This initial round aimed to establish the principles and foundations guiding future discussions on these topics and the parties sought to set a framework for upcoming negotiation rounds.

"The first round of negotiations was characterized by positivity, with high flexibility from all parties, recognizing the importance of concluding the agreement at the target time; to increase the level of integration between all parties," said the SPA report.

The round came after years of mending economic ties between the two parties and the signing of a joint statement to initiate the free trade pact in March.

The GCC has been actively engaging with neighboring countries to increase regional trade and strengthen relations.

## BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

#### Energy

### Russian gas exports to Europe up 5.7%

Russian energy giant Gazprom's average daily natural gas supplies to Europe in July reached their highest this year, up 5.7 percent compared with a year ago and 12 percent higher than in June, Reuters calculations showed.

The month-on-month increase reflected the end of maintenance on the Turkstream pipeline from Russia to Turkey, and analysts also cited a seasonal increase in demand.

The calculations showed average daily pipeline exports increased to 91.5 million cubic meters last month from 86.6 mcm in July 2023. **Reuters**

#### Deal

### BP to develop new oil, gas fields in Iraq

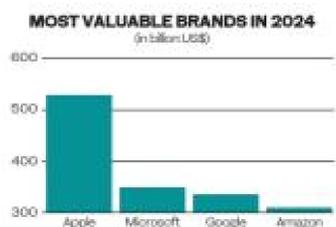
Iraq signed an agreement with British Petroleum on Thursday to develop four oil and gas fields in Kirkuk.

A memorandum of understanding was signed by Iraq's Oil Minister Hayan Abdel Ghani and BP CEO Murray Auchincloss, Prime Minister Mohamed Shia Al-Sudani's media office said. "The memorandum includes the rehabilitation and development of the four oilfields under the North Oil Co. in Kirkuk: the Kirkuk oilfield, Bai Hassan, Jambur and Khabbaz oilfields," the statement said. BP is one of the biggest players in Iraq's oil sector. **AFF**

### Chart of THE DAY

In 2024, according to the source's ranking, Apple overtook Amazon's position as the most valuable brand in the world.

Source: Statista



## What We're Reading

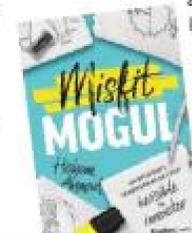
FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

### Misfit Mogul

HISHAM AHMAD

"Misfit Mogul" is a guide for all kids who do not understand why they are bored in class, adults who do not understand why they are bored in general, and those seeking mega-success when

it feels out of reach. It reveals the hidden truths about finance, and lasting success. It will take you to your "new school," a place where you are catapulted from invisible to innovator, says a review published on goodreads.com.



#### Survey

### Turkish factory activity contracts in July

Turkish factory activity contracted for the fourth month in a row in July as demand weakness continued to impact orders, output and employment, a survey showed on Thursday.

The Purchasing Managers' Index for Turkish manufacturing fell to 47.2 from 47.9 in June, according to a survey by the Istanbul Chamber of Industry and S&P Global, dropping further below the 50-point level that marks growth in activity.

Purchasing activity was scaled back markedly, and to the largest degree since November 2022, the survey showed.

**Reuters**

#### Cut

### BoE lowers its main interest rate to 5%

The Bank of England has cut interest rates for the first time since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020.

In a statement on Thursday, the bank said that by a 5-4 margin, its nine-member policymaking panel backed a quarter-point reduction in its main interest rate to 5 percent, from the 16-year of 5.25.

Though inflation has reached the bank's target of 2 percent, several members of the nine-member policymaking panel have voiced ongoing concerns about persistent price pressures in the services sector. **AP**

# Jon Pike's Cricket Weekly



ANALYSIS

## Test cricket continues to struggle for relevance

Despite thrilling recent matches, the long format is losing more ground to limited-overs

Jon Pike London

Devotees of Test-match cricket live in troubled times. Despite July having a thrilling match between Ireland and Zimbabwe in Belfast and a three-match series between England and the West Indies, the matches raised serious questions about the sustainability of the format. These questions are not new but are being observed in sharper relief.

It is the norm to allot five days for men's Test matches. The one in Belfast lasted until a third of the way into the fourth day. The first one in England was concluded in slightly over two days, the second one at the end of the fourth day, and the third one by tea time on the third day.

A Test match is costly to put on and relies on not just broadcasting and sponsorship revenues but also on income from ticket sales, hospitality and in-ground sales of drinks and food. Tests which finish on day two or three mean less exposure for advertisers and sponsors, lower in-ground sales and, depending on when the match finishes, refunding of ticket income to buyers.

### Full distance

The reasons why the matches did not go the full distance reflect several judgmental but reasonably arguable factors.

In the case of England and the West Indies, it is obvious that the latter team were inexperienced both in Test cricket and English conditions, shorn of their best players who chose to play franchise cricket.

They were also under-prepared, some players arriving



late from the Caribbean because of flights delayed by Hurricane Beryl.

These factors coalesced to produce a tepid performance in the first Test. Much improvement came in the second, marked by several outstanding batting achievements in the first innings that dissipated in the second.

Fighting spirit was evident in the third match, to the point where England were on the rack, only to be let off by a failure to review a decision against masterful batter, Joe Root, now seventh in the all-time list of Test match run scorers.

England turned the screw and claimed victory on the third afternoon in merciless fashion. Requiring 84 to win, the target was reached in a mere 7.2 overs.

England's Ben Stokes celebrates reaching his half century during the third Test between England and West Indies at Edgbaston Cricket Ground. This was the fastest 50 runs scored in English Test cricket history. Reuters

### Entertainment

If the England team were keen to return home early, the spectators were probably not, having been deprived of a full day's play. No doubt, the players would argue that they provided the spectators with entertainment.

In Belfast, rich entertainment was provided in a match which ebbed and flowed in the true spirit of Test cricket.

Both teams suffered batting collapses at critical times, Zimbabwe's lower order

proving to be especially inept.

By contrast, Ireland's top order collapsed in the fourth and final innings. Chasing 158 for victory, they were reduced to 21 for five. The following morning, Ireland's batters took advantage of more favorable batting conditions to achieve a memorable victory, their second in a row out of nine played.

All 12 International Cricket Council full members have a remit to play Test cricket. It is something to which new and potential full members aspire and it remains at the pinnacle of cricket for many players and spectators alike.

### ICC event

However, the bonds are weakening. The World

Cricketers Association conducts regular surveys among a sample of players.

A recent survey reveals that, in the past five years, there has been a sharp increase in the proportion, especially among young players, who consider the T20 World Cup to be the most important ICC event.

In 2019, 85 percent of respondents ranked the 50-over World Cup as the most important ICC event, compared to 15 percent who chose the T20 World Cup. In 2024, the importance given to the ODI World Cup had fallen to 50 percent, compared with 35 percent who chose the T20 World Cup. The balance of 15 percent voted for the World Test Championship.

### EQUESTRIAN

## Saudi showjumpers stumble in Paris Olympics

Arab News Paris

Saudi Arabia's showjumping team, buoyed by high hopes and strong preparation, encountered a challenging day at the Paris 2024 Olympics, ultimately finishing in 19th place in Thursday's equestrian competition.

Despite their best efforts and a strong lineup, the team fell short of their target at the Palace of Versailles.

Abdulrahman Al-Rajhi finished on 77.06 seconds, securing the first point in the



Abdulrahman Al-Rajhi.

qualifying round of the competition with eight penalties.

Shortly after, Khaled Al-Mobty in the second round finished on 90.59 seconds with 20 penalties,

putting the Saudi team in 15th place.

Ramzy Al-Duhami, whose experience was expected to be invaluable for the team, did not participate in the final qualifying round, which wrapped up the team's games with a total time of 167.65 seconds and 28 penalties, pushing them to 19th place — only the top 10 qualify for the final.

Al-Duhami, a stalwart in the sport, returned to the Olympics for the sixth time at the age of 52. His Olympic journey

began at Atlanta 1996.

In a setback for rider Abdullah Alsharbatly, 41, an injury to his horse also ruled him out of the competition, according to the Saudi Olympic and Paralympic Committee.

The bronze medalist from the 2012 London Games was expected to be a key competitor in Thursday's qualifying rounds, but following a series of diagnostic tests, it was determined that his horse requires an extended period of rehabilitation.

## Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

### As Italian PM hits out Algeria boxer in gender row wins in 46 seconds

Algerian boxer Imane Khelif, who failed a gender eligibility test last year, pummeled her Italian opponent in 46 seconds at the Paris Olympics on Thursday to spark an angry reaction from Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

A distraught and hurt Angela Carini shrugged off attempts by the Algerian to shake her hand and collapsed to her knees and sobbed before breaking into tears again in front of dozens of reporters. AFP

### Olympic tennis Zheng makes China history by reaching final

Zheng Qinwen stunned women's world No. 1 Iga Swiatek on Thursday to become the first Chinese player to reach an Olympic Games tennis singles final.

Seventh-ranked Zheng triumphed 6-2, 7-5 and will face either Croatia's Donna Vekic or Anna Karolina Schmiedlova of Slovakia in the gold medal match.

"I feel more than just happy — happy isn't enough to describe how I feel," said Zheng, who had played back-to-back three-hour matches to make the semifinal. "If you ask me to play another three hours for my country, I would. AFP



### Olympic basketball US ease past South Sudan to reach quarters

Bam Adebayo led the US with 18 points in a 103-86 win over South Sudan on Wednesday as the reigning champions sailed into the quarterfinals of the Olympic men's basketball tournament.

Team USA have never lost to an African side at the Olympics but they had a scare when they played South Sudan in a warmup game in London on July 20. However, there was never any threat of an upset in Lille as LeBron James got the US off to a fast start in the first quarter and never looked back. AFP

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Zoey Deschanel stars in 'Harold and the Purple Crayon,' in cinemas now.



# Weekend Lifestyle, Art & Culture

DESIGN

## Saudi graphic designer Shoug Almutairi on her prize-winning work

'Posters need to be built not on aesthetics, but logic,' Almutairi says

Rawaa Talass Dubai

Ever since she was a child, Saudi graphic designer Shoug Almutairi has had trouble expressing herself verbally, she tells Arab News.

"I have been diagnosed with ADHD (Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder), so conveying anything is not very easy for me," the Riyadh-based Almutairi says. "It's easier to use visual tools to express myself."

Born in 1999, Almutairi grew up in a family of engineers and finance experts. "I'm the only design person in the family," she says. "But I never thought of myself as a person who would indulge in the arts. Since childhood, I was really focused on math, logic and science. I never thought that I could combine all of these components and utilize them in a different visual language."

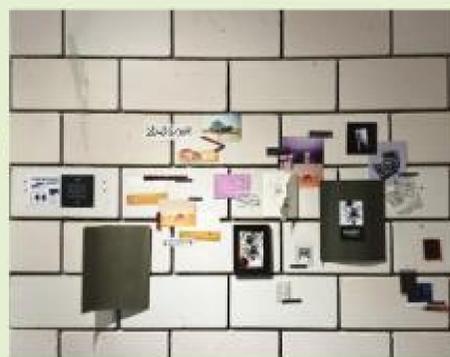
Almutairi had dreams of pursuing architecture, since she believed it was the perfect fit — combining art and math. However, by 2017 she was studying graphic design at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University in Riyadh.

"My perspective on graphic design is, always, function above aesthetics," she explains. "To me, aesthetics don't mean a thing if they don't have any justification behind them. Posters that are impactful are the ones that can reach people as fast as possible and can convey the message as fast as possible. They need to be built not on aesthetics, but logic."

During her college days, Almutairi launched an online platform called "Dar Mdrban" (the second word means "gateway" in Bedouin Arabic) with the aim of creating a visual library that reflects Saudi Arabia's typography landscape, contemporary culture, storied heritage and intangible culture.



(Above) Shoug Almutairi's winning poster on display in Dubai as part of the Tasmeem exhibition. (Right) Almutairi's work in progress on the poster. Images supplied



"I started this project because, growing up, I didn't see myself being represented in culture," Almutairi says. "I wanted it to be a gateway for contemporary design and experimentation."

One of Almutairi's illustrations is currently on view at a group exhibition, running until Aug. 30, in Dubai's ICD Brookfield Place Arts Space. Inspired by personal memories and cultural treasures, the show is called "Memory Box," acting as a third iteration of the

venue's annual Tasmeem initiative. Tasmeem is a graphic design and poster show that highlights up-and-coming designers and illustrators from the region.

"As we transition from childhood to adulthood, the experiences and narratives we encounter shape our existence," reads a statement published by organizers. "This year's exhibition explores the folkloric tales, dances, music, proverbs, and games integral to our upbringing, revealing the shared experiences that thread through our lives."

For this project, Almutairi was inspired by her father, and her winning poster is something of an homage to him. One day, she came across his old suitcase, full of personal items close to his heart — cameras, photographs and other personal documents, including one of the invitations to his wedding.

"I wanted to explore my father's history," she says. "I wanted to explore his suitcase and the adventures that he had and to dissect the secrets that he had in his childhood."

The monochromatic artwork has a central text, executed in cursive Arabic calligraphy, which reads, "Every home has its secrets." Almutairi knows that the phrase has a negative connotation, but she wanted to create a relatable work.

"I wanted something that would touch every household, not just mine," she says.

Made up of a variety of geometric shapes, the image is — intentionally — heavily pixelated to give a retro feel, harking back to a time when typography wasn't exact. In the center, a suitcase is wide open, with components based on what Almutairi found among her father's belongings spilling out. The camel pictures, for instance, are based on images she took with her father on a trip.

"He has his whole life in this suitcase," she says. "I see my father's life scattered throughout this poster."

### Screen SceneE

WHAT'S ON IN CINEMAS



Harold and the Purple Crayon

**Starring:** Zachary Levi  
**Director:** Carlos Saldanha  
Fantasy comedy based on Crockett Johnson's book about a boy whose magic crayon allows him to draw himself off the page into the real world.



Late Night with the Devil

**Starring:** David Dastmalchian  
**Directors:** Colin and Cameron Calmes

Supernatural horror following the events of a late-night talk show airing on Halloween 1977. The host — desperate to boost ratings — invites an allegedly possessed girl onto the show.



Il Signore

**Starring:** Yasir Alsaggaf, Bayoumi Fouad  
**Director:** Aymen Khoja

Desperate for work, Salem, a Saudi engineer, disguises himself as an Italian expert, Pablo, to land a role with a major company. His deception leads him to become involved with a dangerous gang.



Trap

**Starring:** Josh Hartnett, Ariel Donoghue, Saleka Shyamalan  
**Director:** M. Night Shyamalan

A serial killer known as 'The Butcher' takes his teenage daughter to a concert by pop star Lady Raven. He then learns the event has been staged by police in order to catch him.

REVIEW

## 'Time Bandits' adaptation channels its Monty Python roots

Matt Ross London

It's hard to think of many people better suited to breathe new life into Terry Gilliam's 1981 surrealist comedy film "Time Bandits" than Jermaine Clement and Taika Waititi (creators and stars of "What We Do in the Shadows"), and Iain Morris (co-creator of "The Inbetweeners"). After all, helmers like that clearly know how to tread the fine line between silly fun and silly stupid, and the backing of Apple TV+ means none of the low-tech effects and plywood

sets typical of the original movie. Although some might argue that its '80s aesthetic gives Gilliam's film much of its now-beloved charm.

So all the signs for this big-budget remake series — which follows a cohort of time-traveling thieves and a starry-eyed nerdy kid who ends up being their newest recruit — are good. Kevin (newcomer Kal-EI Tuck) is a history-obsessed 11-year-old with no friends, and a family that doesn't get him. So when the Time Bandits, led by Penelope (Lisa Kudrow), stumble into

Lisa Kudrow (left) and Kal-EI Tuck (front, center) in 'Time Bandits'. Apple TV+



his bedroom as they traverse time and space, Kevin wastes no time in tagging along. As he learns, the troupe have stolen a map of the universe from the

supreme being (Waititi), and attracted the attention of the sinister Pure Evil (Clement). They now find themselves pursued by an array of

wondrous and terrifying characters as they hopscotch through the history books Kevin loves so much.

With 10 episodes (two of which were available at the time of writing) to play with, instead of a 90-minute movie, Clement, Waititi and Morris have much more freedom to indulge their silly imaginations — and they manage a good approximation of that post-Monty Python, Gilliam-esque humor — as they lampoon historical figures from across the ages.

In Tuck they have a pleasant-enough child star, but the real master stroke here is the casting of Kudrow as the ceaselessly sardonic leader of the Bandits. For while the script is decent, it's Penelope's wearied frustrations with her fellow thieves — and her hilariously unfounded distrust of a very polite 11-year-old boy — that give this show its hook, thanks to Kudrow's comedy chops.

The new "Time Bandits" might have streaming-money polish, but it's still got that unerringly charming, wonderfully silly, Gilliam heart.



# Weekend



CULTURE

## Villa Hegra celebrates a year of cultural exchange in the heart of AlUla

The CEO of the Saudi-French cultural hub discusses its achievements so far and plans for the future

Zelna Zbilbo AlUla

**The Saudi-French cultural institution Villa Hegra — intended as “an incubator for artists and creators” — celebrated the first anniversary of its pre-opening program in July.**

It has been a year marked by a wide range of cultural activities and concerts, artistic retreats and research programs in the heart of AlUla as part of Villa Hegra's first pre-opening cycle, which runs until the end of this year.

Villa Hegra was officially established in an intergovernmental agreement signed on Dec. 4, 2021, by Saudi Arabia's Minister of Culture Prince Badr bin Abdullah Al-Saud and Jean-Yves Le Drian, then-French minister of foreign affairs, now president of AfaAlula (the French Agency for AlUla Development). One of Villa Hegra's goals is to foster cultural dialogue between Saudi Arabia and France.

“It is not a private initiative. It is a state-to-state initiative that represents the willingness of two parties to collaborate at the cultural level,” Fériel Fodil, CEO of Villa Hegra, told Arab News' French edition. “The villa will be a cluster of three assets: the cultural center, where the artist residencies will take place, and which will include a school for tourism and hospitality (Firendi

Artists from the Opéra national de Paris meet with students of the AlUla Music Hub as part of Villa Hegra's partnership with the Opéra National de Paris. Supplied



AlUla); an apartment hotel with 80 rooms; and the villa itself.”

The ultimate aim is to foster dialogue between both international and regional artists, local communities, and the oasis of AlUla.

“When I think about architects, I go back to their ethos around working with nature rather than against it. When I think about the villa, I want to build humble yet impactful programs (for it),” Fodil said. “Architects in AlUla add, complete, and transform. They build around trees to preserve the oasis.”

Villa Hegra will be home to spaces for the performing arts, dancing, research, a digital studio, visual arts exhibitions, and yoga and fitness. It will also host artist residencies. The cultural center and the

artist residencies are scheduled to launch towards the end of 2026, following the year-long second cycle of the pre-opening program. The hotel and Firendi AlUla should open in 2027.

Part of Villa Hegra will also be dedicated to a regeneration of the town's oasis, and the 10-hectare site itself will connect two fundamental elements of AlUla's landscape: the urban and the natural.

“We are not (an add-on), we are rooted within the town,” said Fodil. “It is a very dense plot, and then very scattered in the oasis part. That (design) is going back to the heritage of AlUla where you have a winter farm and a ‘rihla’ — or journey — between the winter farm and the summer farm.”

Villa Hegra has already initiated research into the cultural

and socio-economic impact of cultural activations by the Royal Commission for AlUla on the local community. “The cultural center's main objective is to engage with the community. We are working on the cultural program to reach the villa's local and international ambition equally,” Fodil said.

American Saudi artist Sarah Brahm and French artist Ugo Schiavi were the first artists in residence at Villa Hegra in AlUla. Supplied



“We are trying to have a number of pre-opening programs — exhibitions for artist residencies, and public outreach activities, around podcasts, publications, and cinema,” she continued.

Naturally, French culture will play a major role. Following a successful concert organized by Villa Hegra at Maraya Concert Hall in January, the Opéra national de Paris will be back in AlUla to perform and to hold further workshops. The villa's partnership with the Opéra national de Paris is in line with the Kingdom's cultural ambitions, with the Royal Diriyah Opera House set to open in 2028.

And over the past year, Villa Hegra has partnered with several leading French institutions to offer unique cultural initiatives, enrich AlUla's cultural landscape, and facilitate the exchange of knowledge

between Saudi Arabia and France. More than 20 French and Saudi artists have been collaborating and sharing knowledge at the villa, and more than 300 children and teenagers from the local community have participated in multidisciplinary workshops. There have also been talks given by experts in the fields of music, cinema, visual arts, architecture and the performing arts.

As part of its second pre-opening cycle, along with the performance from the Opéra national de Paris, the villa will also host a science and arts workshop for children and teenagers, and a week of initiation into filmmaking and the history of cinema.

The distinctiveness of the villa lies in its duality — Saudi and French, urban and oasis, open to children and adults, and with a local and international outreach.

Partnerships are essential to the cultural identity of Villa Hegra. Whether through student exchange programs, research, or live events, the objective is to build momentum around art in the region.

“We are also trying to find partners from the Saudi side, such as Hayy Jameel in Jeddah,” Fodil said. “We are looking for partnerships that have a look and feel of dialogue and have a training component to them, while bringing the best of both French and Saudi expertise.”