

OPINION
WEAPONIZED CYBER
REALM COULD SPELL
UNIMAGINABLE
DOOM
By Mohamed Chebaro
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ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

Since 1975

The situation
inside the
Kamal Adwan
Hospital and
its vicinity is
catastrophic.

A victim is
treated inside
the Kamal Adwan
hospital in the
northern Gaza
Strip, following
an Israeli strike
that hit the
medical complex
on Friday. AFP



MIDDLE EAST WAR

29 dead in Israeli strikes around key Gaza hospital

Bodies and wounded people lying in streets surrounding medical complex, director says

AFP Beit Lahia

Gaza's civil defense
agency said 29 people
were killed on Friday by
Israeli strikes around
a major hospital in the
northern city of Beit Lahia.

Kamal Adwan Hospital, one of
northern Gaza's last functioning
health centers, was hit by several
strikes in the morning, the agency
and the hospital director said.

"There was a series of airstrikes
on the northern and western
sides of the hospital, accompa-
nied by intense and direct fire,"
said hospital director Hossam
Abu Safieh, adding that four staff
were killed.

Bodies of people killed by
airstrikes littered the streets
outside, the director said.

Mahmud Bassal, the civil
defense agency's spokesman,
said: "At least 29 people were
killed and dozens were wounded

... since dawn on Friday as a
result of the continuing Israeli
shelling around Kamal Adwan
Hospital."

Bassal said that the Israeli army
entered the hospital, evacuated
patients, and arrested several
Palestinians.

Abu Safieh said no surgeons
were left at the facility following
the latest raid.

Beit Lahia has been the site of
an intense Israeli military opera-
tion for the past two months that

has again escalated in recent
days, forcing thousands to flee
amid bombing, the civil defense
agency said.

The latest strikes came just
days after the UN's World Health
Organization said an emergency
medical team had reached the
hospital for the first time in
60 days.

Dr. Faradina Sulistiyani, a
surgeon on the team, said from
Gaza City that all seven of her
team members left the premises

on foot as the bombing went on.

Rik Peepkorn, WHO repre-
sentative in the Palestinian terri-
tories, said from Geneva he had
"extremely concerning informa-
tion" from the Kamal Adwan.

Peepkorn said that a
"substantial amount" of people,
including patients and staff,
remained in the hospital, which
is still "minimum operational."

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• Opinion: Zaid M. Belbagi Page 10

CONFLICT

1.5 million Syrians 'could flee surge in fighting'

Reuters Geneva

Up to 1.5 million people could be
forced to flee a surge in fighting
in Syria, a senior UN official said
on Friday, as militants pressed
on with their lightning offensive
against government forces.

The violence has already
displaced 280,000 people since
it erupted in late November,
Samer Abdel Jaber, the World
Food Programme's director
for emergency coordination,
strategic analysis and humani-
tarian diplomacy, told reporters in
Geneva.

"If the situation continues
evolving (at the same) ... pace,

The violence has already
displaced 280,000
people since it erupted in
late November.

we're expecting collectively
around 1.5 million people that
will be displaced and require our
support," he added.

Aid agencies say they have only
been able to raise less than a third
of the \$4 billion they said they
needed to run programs in 2024
before the new fighting started.

Earlier this month, the UN
humanitarian office said it had
had to cut food rations in Syria
by up to 80 percent due to insuf-
ficient funds.

"The situation in Syria was not
easy before this escalation, so
we're looking at a crisis on top of a
crisis. And that's why we're really
emphasizing the urgent need for
funding," Abdel Jaber said.

The Brief

ALULA CAMPUS

The Ferrandi Paris Campus AlUla
will offer diplomas in culinary
arts, hospitality, and tourism —
specialist subjects that will equip
residents with key skills. P4

MEAL TRADITIONS

UNESCO has recognized Malay-
sia's breakfast culture as an impor-
tant part of the world's intangible
cultural heritage. P8

MEDIA MATTERS

The board of directors of the
Saudi Journalists Association has
approved draft regulations for the
Journalists Support Fund. P13

CREATIVITY

Misk Art Week begins with a spectacular display of local talent

This year's event is curated around the theme of art and technology

Nada Alturki Riyadh

The eighth annual Misk Art
Week began on Thursday and
runs until Dec. 10, featuring a
spectacular display of what is all
the latest on the local art scene.

Enthusiasts rushed to Prince
Faisal bin Fahd Arts Hall and
its neighboring venue to
explore new exhibitions, art
fairs, markets, and educational
programs, while the soothing
sounds of oud music added
charm to the evening

Ibrahim Al-Suhaibani,

executive director for
marketing, communication,
and user experience at Misk Art
Institute, told Arab News: "We
do have artists who are now
establishing their career in the
art and design market.

"So, we see ourselves
supporting and bridging
between the establishment and
the mature galleries, and in
between we support the artists
through all the value chain."

This year's event is curated
around the theme of art and
technology, pushing artists



to contemplate the aspects of
digital and media through an
artistic lens.

Al-Suhaibani added: "We
tackle the topic from different

angles: from a research angle,
before internet, post-internet,
what's the impact of the
technology and the media, how
this is helping artists to boost
their creativity or even block
them in any way, and how they
really reveal their creativity
after that blocking."

At the entrance of the space,
inspired by how nature is
alive and ever-changing, the
Canadian art studio Irregular
presents "As Water Falls," a free-
flowing digital waterfall.

While the digital installation

has been presented in seven
countries around the world this
year, an addition was created
specially for Misk Art Week,
Al-Suhaibani said.

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I met a group of young Saudi men and women ... our discussion reaffirmed the commitment of new generations to equip themselves for the job market and develop agility to adapt for the future.

Faisal Alibrahim

Saudi economy and planning minister

Radar

KSA

today

Riyadh

Magical experience

Visit "Harry Potter: A Riyadh Season Adventure" to explore iconic locations, the Sorting Hat, Quidditch, Butterbeer, exclusive merch, and more. For booking visit [webook.com](#).

Dhahran

Cosmic discovery

Ithra's "Under a Sky Full of Stars," opens up the cosmos with facts, colors, sizes, shapes and distances in an immersive, fun and educational manner. More details on the Ithra app.

Jeddah

The 9 Circus

The 9 Circus features Russian acrobats performing a host of impressive feats, including with aerial hoops. The circus will run until Jan. 13. To book, visit [jeddah.platinum-list.net](#).

AlUla

Giant swing

This experience in AlUla offers thrill-seekers the chance to swing 85 meters above the ground in a 70-meter arc. Visit [experiencealula.com](#) for booking.

TheRegister

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY

Saudi Minister of Communications and Information Technology Abdullah Al-Swaha met with Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla Motors and owner of social media platform X, the Ministry of Communications and Technology wrote on X on Friday.

During the meeting, they discussed advancing ongoing collaboration in space and artificial intelligence, the post noted.

Meanwhile, Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir met with Inger Andersen, executive director of UN Environment Program, and they discussed environmental priorities, including climate change and plastic negotiations, at COP16 in Riyadh, Andersen wrote on X on Friday.

What's Trending

Today's hot topics explained by Afshan Aziz

'DON'T WORRY ABOUT US'

Sunita Williams

G NASA astronauts Sunita Williams and Barry Wilmore are in good holiday spirits despite facing an unexpected extension of their mission. Stranded aboard the International Space Station since June due to a malfunction in their Starliner spacecraft, they have now spent six months in orbit on an unplanned journey that will extend until February 2025. The astronauts had initially planned for an eight-day mission, but a propulsion system leak in their Boeing Starliner turned the brief trip into a long-term stay. Despite the unforeseen challenges, Williams and Wilmore have embraced their extended time at the ISS, making the best of their unique situation.

'DISREPUTABLE EVIL TABLOIDS'

Selena Gomez

X Selena Gomez has stepped up to show her solidarity with Ariana Grande as the singer addresses swirling rumors about her relationship with "Wicked" co-star Ethan Slater. Gomez recently applauded Grande for speaking out against the relentless speculation, adding her voice to support the actress and singer's response to the media frenzy. Grande, who has been under scrutiny since her romance with Slater became public, condemned the sensationalized stories in a Vanity Fair interview. She took aim at "disreputable evil tabloids" for spreading misinformation about her relationship timeline and Slater's character. "There couldn't be a less accurate depiction of a human being than the one that the tabloids spread about him," she told the magazine. In a show of support, Gomez commented on social

media post quoting Grande's words, writing "Amen" with five clapping emojis. Her gesture added a positive note to the conversation, backing Grande's determination to address the false narratives. Grande, 31, and Slater, 32, reportedly started dating in 2023 after meeting on the "Wicked" set. Both had separated from their respective partners, Dalton Gomez and Lilly Jay, before beginning their relationship. Despite this, tabloids quickly stirred controversy around their personal lives, a tactic Ariana criticized as a way for outlets to "pay their bills." She said: "The most disappointing part was to see so many people believe the worst version of it. That was definitely a tough ride." She opened up about her personal growth during these challenges, describing the journey as "a lot of life changes" that shaped her resilience.

Today's

Number

9.6bn

The Kingdom has reduced its agricultural water usage by 9.6 billion cubic meters, the Saudi Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture recently wrote on X.

Review

Tanjiah

MARCO FERRARI

With thousands of five-star Google ratings, I was surprised to find Tanjiah in Riyadh's King Fahd district almost empty, even on a weeknight. After finishing a fantastic meal delivered with excellent service in an environment that could give Marrakesh's riads a run for their money, I'm even more surprised. Stepping in from the noise and commotion of Riyadh traffic, we were greeted with quintessential Moroccan zellij tilework adorning the floors and walls, ornamental lanterns hanging from the ceilings, cushions, and draped curtains creating enclaves of privacy for families. In no time at all, a bowl

of harira soup was delivered to the table, full of meaty heartiness with a rich tomato base, perfectly complemented with a sweet side of chebakia pastry. The sweet-savory combination was an irresistible theme of my favorite Moroccan dishes, I realized, as I tucked into an excellent chicken pastilla pastry topped with spices and powdered sugar. Any Moroccan chef worth their salt will surely be judged on the quality of their tajins, and two soon made their way to the table — lamb for myself and smoked kofta for my companion. The lamb, topped with prunes and cashews, was marvelously tender. The kofta lived up to its name and was too smoky for my liking.

TheRegion

The Middle East Roundup

- Arab News Jeddah
- Enjoy Cinema Al-Waha, an open-air cinema experience at Al-Ain Oasis in Abu Dhabi. The event showcases classic movies from around the world, bringing together diverse audiences in the scenic spaces of the oasis for a memorable viewing experience. More information is available at [visitabudhabi.ae](#).

• The WENWEEK festival is a thrilling carnival for the whole family. It offers a vibrant mix of shopping, entertainment, fun-filled activities and breathtaking fireworks. Enjoy live performances by local and regional bands, along with daily free games and prizes for kids. Join the fun at Bahrain International Circuit until Dec. 17.

• Visit the Qatar Balloon Festival 2024 at Katara Cultural Village for a breathtaking celebration of hot air balloons and sky spectacles. Enjoy sunrise flights, stunning night glow displays, daily entertainment, food and a variety of activities across the festival grounds. Runs until Dec. 21. Use [visitqatar.com](#) for more information.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

	Dec. 7	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah		5:24	6:44	12:12	3:17	5:39	7:09
Madinah		5:29	6:51	12:13	3:13	5:33	7:03
Riyadh		5:01	6:23	11:44	2:45	5:05	6:35
Abha		5:09	6:28	12:01	3:11	5:34	7:04
Dammam		4:50	6:13	11:31	2:29	4:48	6:18

Understanding the vulnerabilities and advantages of both corals and algae allows us to better comprehend the dynamics of reef ecosystems.

Taliba Alamoudi

PhD candidate in marine science, KAUST



Spotlight GREEN & BLUE

BEHAVIORAL AND PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES TO HYPOXIA

Nighttime hypoxia occurs temporarily when photosynthesis stops, and respiration continues.



Oxygen levels typically recover during the day when photosynthesis resumes.

While macroalgae can tolerate short-term hypoxia, persistent or severe oxygen depletion could negatively affect growth and broader ecosystem functioning.

In extreme cases the ability to perform photosynthesis (measured as photochemical efficiency) is affected, although lethal thresholds were not reached (during the study).

Affects localized areas, often near dense algal growth.

During periods of low oxygen, macroalgae experience physiological stress.



SAUDI ARABIA

Balancing Red Sea ecosystems

KAUST researcher explores algae's vital role in coral reef stability and the impact of climate change

Sulafa Alkhunaizi Riyadh

The Red Sea's rich marine life depends on maintaining a balanced environment to protect biodiversity and delicate habitats.

This interdependence prompted a Saudi researcher to explore the critical role of algae in shifting ecosystems and investigate the impact of nighttime hypoxia on macroalgae and crustose algae.

Taliba Alamoudi, a Saudi PhD candidate in marine science at King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, and her colleagues examined how algae play a vital role in coral

reef ecosystems, contributing to nutrient cycling and stability.

Alamoudi told Arab News the inspiration for her research was "the phase shifts occurring in coral reef ecosystems, where algae begin to dominate areas once rich with corals."

She said: "While it might seem that algae have an advantage over corals in warmer oceans, I believe the situation is more complicated. Algae, like corals, are also impacted by environmental stressors such as nighttime hypoxia, a drop in oxygen levels after sunset when photosynthesis ceases but respiration continues."

Her experiments showed that "macroalgae and crustose algae significantly mitigate

the impacts of ocean warming through substantial daytime oxygen production, often leading to oxygen supersaturation that enhances reef resilience."

However, she said, this benefit is offset at night when photosynthesis stops.

Climate change worsens nighttime hypoxia by raising sea temperatures, which in turn lower oxygen solubility and increase metabolic rates. Warmer water holds less dissolved oxygen, reducing its overall availability.

"Elevated temperatures increase the metabolic demands of the entire reef community, intensifying oxygen consumption and leading to nighttime hypoxia," Alamoudi said.

DID YOU KNOW?

1 Without sunlight, algae stop producing oxygen through photosynthesis but still consume oxygen through respiration, leading to low oxygen levels (hypoxia).

2 Areas with heavy macroalgae or crustose algae cover are prone to oxygen depletion, especially in low-flow environments.

3 Nighttime hypoxia can harm nearby marine organisms such as fish and invertebrates that rely on oxygen-rich waters.

"This hypoxic stress disrupts the algae's physiological processes and associated reef microbial communities, making them more vulnerable to additional stressors."

During peak summer temperatures, the research team observed that hypoxia worsens.

"Warmer water reduces oxygen solubility and increases the metabolic rates of the reef community, leading to greater oxygen consumption," Alamoudi said. "At night, without photosynthesis to produce oxygen, this intensifies hypoxia."

"Consequently, marine organisms experience increased stress during the hottest months, making them more vulnerable to

hypoxic conditions compared to cooler seasons."

By studying the impact of nighttime hypoxia on algae, Alamoudi aims to uncover their true role in these shifting ecosystems.

Alamoudi is one of six winners of the 2024 L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science Program. Currently a PhD student under the mentorship of Ibn Sina Distinguished Professor Carlos Duarte, she earned her undergraduate degree in marine biology from Oregon State University in 2018.

She gained experience in environmental consulting and aquaculture before joining KAUST in 2020.

Seaweed as a workhorse of the regenerative blue economy

CARLOS DUARTE

As Saudi Arabia positions itself as a leader in the regenerative blue economy, combining sea-based activities with sustainable development, all eyes are turning to a long-overlooked resource: seaweed.

Seaweed represents a group of about 10,000 photosynthetic multicellular species that grow in the lighted zone of the ocean.

While it has provided economic and cultural benefits to Asia-Pacific nations for millennia, most people around the world are only aware of seaweed as an ingredient in sushi or miso soup.

In the 21st century, seaweed is emerging as a valuable commodity, yet there remains massive untapped potential.

Every hectare of ocean can support seaweed farming, with the area that can be farmed sustainably estimated at 48 million sq. km, matching the global land area appropriated for agriculture.

Seaweed farming is a regenerative crop, as it removes excess nutrients and carbon dioxide from seawater and provides habitat for marine life, contributing to water quality while mitigating climate change.

Seaweed products are healthy for consumers and are climate-positive, carrying a near-zero water footprint, and a zero-chemical footprint, as synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides are not used in this industry.

Seaweed is rising as the Swiss army knife of marine biotechnology.



Carlos Duarte is executive director of the global coral reef research and development accelerator platform at King Abdullah University of Science and Technology

Saudi Arabia's aquaculture program under the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture includes seaweed farming, while Red Sea Global is exploring the potential of this regenerative marine crop.

Research led by the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology has identified a range of compounds for pharma, which we named Thuwalalenes, from the Red Sea algae Laurencia.

The Red Sea seaweed Asparagopsis is making headlines as a global climate solution.

Feeding one spoonful of dried Asparagopsis to cows and other ruminants every other day has been found to greatly reduce methane production — something which accounts for 18 percent

of global greenhouse gas emission.

Hence, a Red Sea seaweed farming industry can also be a tool to fight climate change at scale. This can be supported by the more than 200 species identified in the Red Sea, of which about 10 percent are unique to the region.

The blue economy of the Red Sea is open for business with huge investment opportunities. This includes regenerative tourism, nutrition, cosmetics, technology and energy.

Seaweed farming can contribute to many of these pillars, as a superfood, a source of material for biotechnology, biofuels, and, although historically overlooked, an intrinsic part of the natural capital of Saudi Arabia.



Ferrandi Paris Campus AlUla is aligned with Vision 2030 and RCU's successful community upskilling projects. Supplied

EXTENSIVE TRAINING

RCU partners with French School of Culinary Arts

Programs to be offered will equip Saudis with skills to enter expanding jobs market

Arab News AlUla

A pioneering new vocational training college will provide the AlUla community with the skills they need to forge new careers in Saudi Arabia's rapidly developing jobs ecosystem.

Announced during the 8th Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh, the upcoming Ferrandi Paris Campus AlUla is the result of an expansive, multi-year partnership between the Royal Commission for AlUla and the historic French School of Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management, Ferrandi Paris.

The college will provide extensive training in exciting fields to serve AlUla's growth as a global destination for tourism, investment, and discovery.

The college is set to welcome its first intake of 100 students in 2025, according to a statement by the RCU.

The Ferrandi Paris Campus AlUla

will offer diplomas in culinary arts, hospitality and tourism — specialist subjects that will cater to RCU's comprehensive regeneration goals and equip residents with key skills.

Programs include a preparatory year, followed by two years focused on specialization.

This initiative reflects RCU's broader commitment to investing in education at all levels, upskilling Saudi men and women in sectors including tourism, film, archeology, and hospitality.

Culinary arts students can expect to learn the traditions, processes, and techniques of preparing and serving classic French cuisine and pastry.

Hospitality and tourism classes will cover the full range of roles and services required to meet the needs of growing numbers of visitors to AlUla and destinations around Saudi Arabia.

Ferrandi Paris Campus AlUla is aligned with the goals of Saudi Vision 2030 and RCU's successful

FASTFACTS

- The college will provide extensive training in exciting fields to serve AlUla's growth as a global destination for tourism, investment, and discovery.
- The college is set to welcome its first intake of 100 students in 2025, according to a statement by the RCU.
- Culinary arts students can expect to learn the traditions, processes, and techniques of preparing and serving classic French cuisine and pastry.

community upskilling projects such as the Hammayah Program, which has engaged thousands of people from AlUla in cultural, heritage, and tourism initiatives.

Meanwhile, initiatives like the AlUla Scholarship Programme continue to enroll Saudi students at leading international universities.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Saudi commission showcases Taif rose heritage at UNESCO meeting in Paraguay

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's Culinary Arts Commission has unveiled a pavilion celebrating the newly recognized Taif rose at the 19th UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee meeting in Asuncion, Paraguay, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

According to the SPA, visitors in the Saudi pavilion are discovering a curated selection of traditional rose-based culinary creations.

The exhibition features specialty beverages including

rose-infused tea and lattes, alongside traditional sweets such as rose-flavored Saqदानah, all representing elements of Saudi national identity and contributing

HIGHLIGHT

The exhibition features specialty beverages including rose-infused tea and lattes, alongside traditional sweets such as rose-flavored Saqदानah, all representing elements of Saudi national identity.

to global cultural diversity.

The commission's presence at the forum highlights the importance of preserving the Kingdom's natural resources while promoting sustainable environmental practices in the cultivation of Taif roses.

By marketing local Saudi products internationally, the commission is highlighting the Kingdom's position as a source of premium agricultural products and stimulating investment in the national agricultural sector, the SPA reported.

TheSpace

Saudi Arabia redefines education; builds strategic partnerships

AHOUD ALSHAIKH



Saudi Arabia is witnessing a transformation in its educational landscape under Vision 2030, reflected in positive developments such as the Maarif acquisition, Riyadh Schools expansion, and PwC-Emkan merger. These milestones exemplify the growing role of the private sector in education, a key component of the Kingdom's public-private partnership framework. By encouraging private investments and collaborations, Saudi Arabia is fostering a sustainable, inclusive, and innovative education system. Such progress aligns with the Ministry of Education's broader commitment to supporting national transformation through education reform and economic growth.

As the Kingdom attracts foreign direct investment and builds local partnerships, it is setting a regional benchmark for leveraging education as a catalyst for sustainable development and national progress.

Saudi Arabia's journey toward a knowledge-based economy is rooted in initiatives supported by PPPs. These efforts, led by the Ministry of Education, have resulted in significant progress, including strategic mergers and acquisitions, increased foreign investments, and a broader range of educational offerings.

At the 28th World Investment Conference, Iyad Algarawi, assistant minister of education for investments and privatization, presented the Kingdom's vision for "The Future of Education and Sustainable Partnerships." He highlighted the importance of sustainable practices, innovative

financing models, and modern legislative frameworks to address the evolving needs of the sector. A key focus of these efforts are a commitment to improving education quality and learning outcomes, pillars essential to sustaining long-term national transformation.

The evolving educational landscape in Saudi Arabia reflects a robust environment for both private education investments and PPPs. This growing appetite is evidenced by developments such as the Maarif for Education and Training acquisition by Hassana Investment Company, the investment arm of the General Organization for Social

Insurance. Building on this, Maarif recently acquired Ibn Khaldoun Education Company, adding four schools and 13,000 students to its portfolio. Similarly, the expansion of Riyadh Schools, a private institution affiliated with Misk, and the PwC-Emkan merger highlight the Kingdom's strategy to enhance private sector participation.

Additionally, every year, new international schools and private equity firms are entering the market, further demonstrating the growing appetite for investment in Saudi Arabia's education sector.

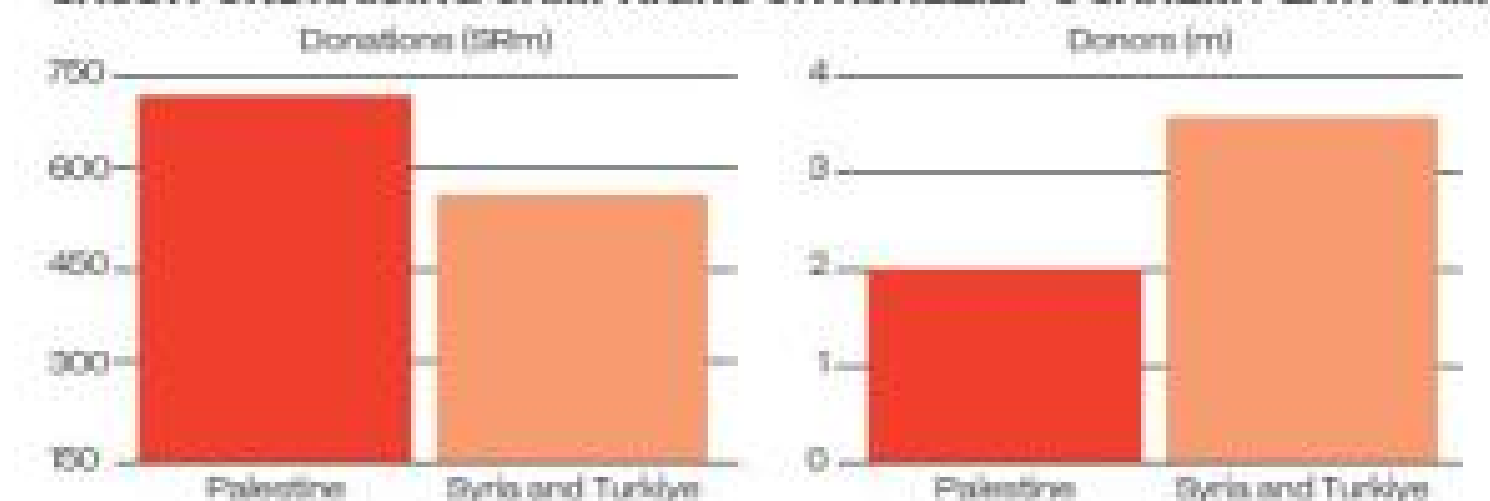
However, challenges remain. These include ensuring equitable access to quality education across underserved regions, addressing the shortage of skilled teachers, and adapting educational programs to meet the rapidly changing demands of the labor market.

Ahoud Alshaikh, Ph.D., M.Sc., M.A., Harvard CSML, is an education expert specializing in Edtech, educational assessment, public-private partnerships, and educational corporate governance.

The Kingdom is setting a regional benchmark for leveraging education as a catalyst for sustainable development and national progress.

The Day's FIGURES

SAUDI FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGNS ON KSRELIEF'S SAHEM PLATFORM



Source: ksrelief.org

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Awareness drive Najran marks International Volunteer Day

The Saudi Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture branch in Najran marked International Volunteer Day 2024, which takes place on Dec. 5.

Under the slogan "Generous Community," an event was held at the Najran Park Center, offering awareness-raising and educational activities about volunteering, its fields and objectives.

Brochures on the benefits of volunteering and its positive impact on individuals and society were also distributed to visitors.

SPA Najran

Challenges Healthcare education focus at Jazan University

Jazan University wrapped up its Saudi International Conference on Medical Education on Thursday.

The event, organized in collaboration with the Saudi Society for Medical Education, featured workshops and academic papers addressing key issues and challenges in the sector.

The participants explored vital themes, including the challenges and opportunities in implementing collaborative practices among healthcare professionals.

SPA Jazan

No to narcotics Attempt to smuggle 160kg of qat thwarted

Saudi Border Guards foiled an attempt to smuggle 160kg of qat in Al-Arda, Jazan, and another attempt to smuggle 561kg of hashish in Al-Daer, also in Jazan.

Preliminary procedures have been completed in both cases, and the seized drugs were handed to authorities.

Earlier, security officials in Jazan arrested a resident for selling 236 kilograms of qat plant in the Al-Dayer governorate. Legal procedures were completed, and the arrested suspect was referred to the relevant authorities.

SPA Jazan

News Saudi Arabia

ARTFULLY CURATED

Misk Art Week returns for artists, enthusiasts in Riyadh

'Seeing Riyadh' exhibition features photographs of Kingdom's capital down through the years

Nada Alturki Riyadh

The eighth annual Misk Art Week began on Thursday and runs until Dec. 10, featuring a spectacular display of what is all the latest on the local art scene.

Enthusiasts rushed to Prince Faisal bin Fahd Arts Hall and its neighboring venue to explore new exhibitions, art fairs, markets, and educational programs, while the soothing sounds of oud music added charm to the evening.

Ibrahim Al-Suhaibani, executive director for marketing, communication, and user experience at Misk Art Institute, told Arab News: "We do have artists who are now establishing their career in the art and design market."

"So, we see ourselves supporting and bridging between the establishment and the mature galleries, and in between we support the artists through all the value chain."

This year's event is curated around the theme of art and technology, pushing artists to contemplate the aspects of digital and media through an artistic lens.

Al-Suhaibani added: "We tackle the topic from different angles: from a research angle, before internet, post-internet, what's the impact of the technology and the media, how this is helping artists to boost their creativity or even block them in any way, and how they really reveal their creativity after that blocking."

At the entrance of the space, inspired by how nature is alive and ever-changing, the Canadian art studio Iregular presents "As Water Falls," a free-flowing digital waterfall that continuously evolves with alternating



Art enthusiasts in Riyadh rushed to Prince Faisal bin Fahd Arts Hall and its neighboring venue to explore new exhibitions, art fairs, markets, and educational programs for Misk Art Week. AN photos

patterns and visuals that will never be the same for at least 100 years.

While the digital installation has been presented in seven countries around the world this year, an addition was created especially for Misk Art Week, Al-Suhaibani said, and is being shown for the first time in Saudi Arabia.

Further into the outdoor space, the studio presents "Alternative Realities," an interactive experience that invites visitors to explore and create parallel worlds in real time through generative artificial intelligence.

By combining word prompts and arranging a variety of props at their disposal, participants can

HIGHLIGHTS

● At Misk Art Week, Canadian art studio Iregular is presenting 'As Water Falls,' a free-flowing digital waterfall that continuously evolves.

● 'Alternative Realities' invites visitors to explore and create parallel worlds in real-time through generative artificial intelligence.

● The 'Obsolete Technologies' showcase features works from local and international artists.

craft infinite combinations of realities that range from slightly different to wildly surreal.

Al-Suhaibani said: "We have four shows in total for Misk Art Week, all of them around media and technology in a different format."

The exhibitions include the Masaha Residency's "Obsolete Technologies" showcase, which features works from local and international artists; the "Seeing Riyadh" exhibition, which explores the city's significant transformation over the past decade through photography; the Misk Art Grant's "Digital Civilizations" outdoor exhibit, which taps into phenomena shaped by modern technology;

and "The Silent Age of Singularity" exhibition, which investigates the post-internet era.

Al-Suhaibani said: "Riyadh has been evolving in the past few years, especially now with the announcement of the metro starting to operate."

"Riyadh is hosting big events and has become a hub. So, we felt this year that we needed to highlight Riyadh, especially at the beginning of the '80s and '90s."

Additionally, the event includes an art book fair featuring a number of international, regional, and local publishers to celebrate the rich and diverse Arab art culture; and an extended art and design

market with 92 artists and entitles at which the local community can engage, sell, and commission unique works.

"We designed it in a way that anyone walking by the market can see everything. And there is a diversity between painting, photography, sculpting projects, and even design," Al-Suhaibani said.

The educational program and mentorship sessions are also part of the institute's strategy to educate, enable, and encourage new generations of artists.

The art fair space is bigger this year, and features works from 11 Saudi-based galleries including Hewar Art, Mono, Hafez, WRD Art, ATHR, and Dawi.

PAYING HOMAGE

Saudi director Hassan El-Hejaili on filming with kids — and eggs

Jasmine Bager AJUla

Saudi filmmaker Hassan El-Hejaili offers a quirky, nostalgic portrayal of childhood mischief in his seven-minute short, "The Extraordinary Misadventures of the Amazing Boy Super-Blurry," now screening at Jeddah's Red Sea International Film Festival.

The story follows a bored young Saudi, Zezo, who discovers that he can put his hand into boiling tea without being hurt.

"Tea is part of our culture ... we drink it so much that it's like it's in our veins," El-Hejaili told Arab News while sipping a cup of tea, explaining why he chose to begin the story with the beverage.

The audience is invited along



Saudi filmmaker Hassan El-Hejaili offers a quirky, nostalgic portrayal of childhood mischief in his seven-minute short, 'The Extraordinary Misadventures of the Amazing Boy Super-Blurry.' Supplied

on Zezo's adventures — or misadventures — with his siblings as the situation in their dysfunctional home escalates and his superpowers become even more impressive.

Filmed in black and white — aside from a saturated red tint in the tea — the aesthetic, which has shadows and different gradients, pays homage to classic cinema.

"I consider myself a cinema-lover," said El-Hejaili, who has written multiple books on cinema in Arabic, adding that he drew inspiration from vintage filmmakers such as Georges Melies, who died in 1938.

El-Hejaili chose a kitchen and bathroom as the primary settings, spaces not often seen in Saudi films.

"Those rooms are the heart of the home," he said, "but every time the family in the film gathers there, something goes wrong." The film's tight quarters

FASTFACTS

● Hassan El-Hejaili's short film follows a bored young Saudi, Zezo, who discovers that he can put his hand into boiling tea without being hurt.

● Filmed in black and white — aside from a saturated red tint in the tea — the aesthetic, which has shadows and different gradients, pays homage to classic cinema.

create a sense of closeness and chaotic spontaneity, capturing playful sibling rivalries, while the distracted parents are too absorbed in their smartphones to notice.

The portrayal of children in

the film diverges from typical Saudi cinema and doesn't spoon-feed everything to the audience — El-Hejaili trusts that they will be able to pour their own cups of tea and join in.

"In most Saudi films, kids are wise beyond their years," El-Hejaili explained. "I wanted them to lie, fight and break stuff — not in a way that destroys the world, but in a cute, real way. Siblings fight. It's natural."

One of the most memorable scenes during the two-day shoot was an egg fight sequence. "It was fun to film but a nightmare to clean," he said, laughing. "This was the first and last experiment and experience filming with kids — and eggs."

GRAVE RISKS

Lebanese defense minister condemns Israeli truce violations

• Ceasefire supervisory committee flies over South Litani sector • Army patrols stop infiltrators

Najla Houssari Beirut

The Lebanese Army will continue to cooperate with UNIFIL in southern Lebanon, government figures said on Friday in a meeting with visiting Italian officials.

Caretaker Defense Minister Maurice Slim highlighted Lebanon's full adherence to UN Resolution 1701 during talks with his Italian counterpart, Guido Crosetto.

He condemned recent Israeli actions on Lebanese territory as a "blatant violation of the ceasefire terms."

The meeting reviewed "military cooperation between Lebanon and Italy, along with the important role of the UNIFIL Italian contingent," according to Slim's office.

Crosetto briefed Slim on Italian efforts to reach a ceasefire agreement in Lebanon and "establish stability, particularly in the south, through existing cooperation between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Army."

Italy "will continue to support the Lebanese Army by organizing



People cross through the destroyed border crossing point between Lebanon and Syria in Arida, which was hit by an Israeli airstrike. AP

further conferences to enhance its capabilities, especially during this critical stage," said Crosetto.

Slim said the Lebanese Army "will cooperate as much as possible with UNIFIL, particularly at this critical juncture, as the army plays a central role in maintaining security and stability in the south."

Crosetto also met Lebanese Army Commander Gen. Joseph Aoun, Italian Army Chief Gen. Luciano Portolano was also present.

They discussed "ways to strengthen cooperation between the two countries' armies."

The diplomatic efforts

continued as Lebanon said it closed all land border crossings with Syria on Friday except for the central route linking Beirut to the Syrian capital, Damascus. The General Security Directorate said the Masnaa crossing will remain open for entries and exits.

The decision follows a series of Israeli airstrikes that targeted Lebanese-Syrian border crossings on Friday morning.

Closing all but one border crossing will ensure the safety of civilians, the directorate said.

Public Works Minister Ali

Hamieh told Reuters that the Israeli strikes targeted the Syrian side of the Aridah border crossing in the north and the Jousieh crossing on the eastern side.

According to Lebanon's National News Agency, the Lebanese Army set up checkpoints and dispatched patrols amid strict measures and procedures.

The agency said that the army was intensively deployed along the border area in Akkar and other villages and towns adjacent to Syrian territory.

In parallel to the Lebanese security measures, rapid military developments were taking place in Syria. Armed opposition factions were advancing toward Homs governorate, close to the Lebanese border. Fears of infiltration attempts into Lebanese territory and illegal immigration also mounted in Lebanon.

Lebanese Army Command said on Friday that "two army units, backed by two military intelligence units, arrested 36 Syrians, including 24 people detained at the Deir Ammar checkpoint in the north, for residing in Lebanon without legal documentation, as well as 12 others in Beit

Al-Tashm, Hermel, for clandestinely entering the country."

Israeli Army spokesperson Avichay Adraee claimed that Israel targeted Syrian routes used for transporting combat equipment, as well as infrastructure established near the border with Lebanon.

The ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel was signed more than a week ago but Israeli

of Nov. 27, resulting in the deaths of 15 people in a series of airstrikes, including one in Haris, which killed six civilians. On Friday morning, Israeli military vehicles and tanks advanced into Aitaroun in the Bint Jbeil district.

Aitaroun had been subjected to extensive Israeli combing operations with medium-caliber machine guns during the night.

The Israeli Army had prohibited residents of the border area from returning until further notice, continuing the demolition of buildings, houses and facilities it had begun before the ceasefire.

Lebanese Army Command said that the five-party committee overseeing the implementation of the ceasefire agreement, chaired by the US, would hold its first meeting early next week.

The committee conducted an aerial tour by helicopter over the South Litani sector and assessed the field situation.

It includes US Maj. Gen. Jasper Jeffers, French Brig. Gen. Guillaume Ponchin, and Lebanese representative and commander of the South Litani sector, Brig. Gen. Edgar Lowndes.

BACKGROUND

Israel stepped up its campaign in south Lebanon in late September after nearly a year of cross-border exchanges begun by Hezbollah in support of Hamas following the Oct. 7, 2023 attack on southern Israel.

violations by air and land continue.

On Thursday night, Israeli drones and jets flew at low altitudes across Lebanese airspace, from Shebaa in the far south to Hermel in the far northeast, passing through Beirut and its southern suburbs.

The number of Israeli violations exceeded 60 since the early hours

SUFFERING

Ailing kids wait months for Israeli permission to leave Gaza for treatment

AP Deir Al-Balah

The 12-year-old Palestinian boy was lying in a hospital bed in central Gaza, wracked with leukemia, malnourished, and whimpering in pain despite the morphine doctors were giving him, when Rosalia Bollen, a UNICEF official, said she saw him in late October.

Islam Al-Rayaben's family had asked Israeli authorities six times over the past months for permission to evacuate him from Gaza for a desperately needed stem cell transplant, Bollen said.

She said the request was refused six times for unexplained security reasons.

Islam died three days after she saw him, Bollen said.

Thousands of patients in Gaza are waiting for Israeli permission for urgently needed medical evacuation from Gaza for treatment of war wounds or chronic diseases they cannot get after the destruction of much of the territory's health care system by Israel's 15-month military campaign.

Among them are at least 2,500 children who UNICEF says must be transported immediately.

"They cannot afford to wait. These children will die. They are dying in waiting, and I find it

striking that the world is letting that happen," Bollen said.

The Israeli military often takes months to respond to medical evacuation requests, and the number of evacuations has plunged in recent months. In some cases, the military rejects either the patient or, in the case of children, the caregivers accompanying them on vague security grounds or with no explanation.

The Israeli decisions appear to be "arbitrary and are not made on criteria nor logic," said Moeen Mahmood, the Jordan country director for Doctors Without Borders.

COGAT, the Israeli military agency in charge of humanitarian affairs for Palestinians, said in a statement that it "makes every effort to approve the departure of children and their families for medical treatments, subject to a security check."

It did not respond when asked for details about Islam's case.

A military official said Israel's internal intelligence service reviews whether the patient or their escort has what he called "a connection to terrorism."

If one is found, they are refused.

Osaid Shaheen, who is nearly 2, now faces having his eyes removed after Israel rejected his



Palestinians wait for food on Friday at a distribution center in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip. AP

evacuation for treatment of cancer in his retinas.

The toddler was diagnosed with cancer in April after his mother, Sondos Abu Libda, noticed his left eyelid was droopy.

The World Health Organization requested his evacuation through the Rafah border crossing

in southern Gaza, but the crossing was shut down in May when Israeli troops took it over in an offensive, Abu Libda said.

WHO applied again, this time for Osaid to leave through the Kerem Shalom crossing into Israel, now the only route for evacuees to travel. During the long wait, the cancer spread to the child's other eye and reached stage 4.

Abu Libda was told Osaid was rejected on security grounds

HIGHLIGHTS

• WHO says 14,000 patients of all ages need medical evacuation from Gaza.

• The territory's Health Ministry puts the number higher, at 22,000, including 7,000 patients in extreme need who could die soon without treatment.

in November, and there was no further explanation.

She was stunned, she said. "I did not expect that a child could get a security rejection."

Doctors have given the boy three doses of chemotherapy. But with supplies short in Gaza, they're struggling to get more. If they can't, they will have to remove Osaid's eyes, or cancer will spread to other parts of his body, Abu Libda said.

News International

Israel's assault on Gaza has resulted in deaths of over 44,600 people, mostly civilians, according to data from the territory's Hamas-run Health Ministry, which the UN considers reliable. AFP



CONFLICT

Israeli troops force Indonesian medical team to leave north Gaza

Indonesians were the only surgeons left at Kamal Adwan Hospital in the enclave

Natalia Laskowska Dubai

Indonesian medics volunteering at the Kamal Adwan Hospital in north Gaza said they were forced by Israeli troops to leave the area on Friday, days after arriving with emergency assistance.

Like the rest of Gaza's north, the Kamal Adwan Hospital has been cut off from any supplies since early October, enduring multiple Israeli strikes and a siege and running out of fuel, among other necessities.

Five volunteers from the

Indonesian nongovernmental organization Medical Emergency Rescue Committee, or MER-C, arrived in the facility on Dec. 1 and were the first emergency medical team to reach it in 60 days.

They were forced to leave on Friday morning following two warnings. Dr. Faradina Sulistiyani, a surgeon from the MER-C, said in a video clip upon arrival in Gaza City.

"We walked from Kamal Adwan until Salah Al-Din Street," she said. "They are bombing the hospital now."

Most of the hospital's doctors have been detained by Israeli soldiers in raids since late October.

HIGHLIGHT

Like the rest of Gaza's north, the Kamal Adwan Hospital has been cut from any supplies since early October, enduring multiple Israeli strikes and a siege and running out of fuel, among other necessities.

The Indonesian team, comprising Sulistiyani, another surgeon, an obstetrician, and two nurses, were the only ones able to perform surgeries in the past days, the hospital's director, Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, said in a statement after their departure.

"No surgeons are left," he said, as he reported scores of casualties from Friday's attacks.

"Medical supplies are running out, and there are hundreds of victims."

From the Kamal Adwan Hospital, the Indonesian team walked to the nearby Indonesia Hospital — a facility that was funded and opened by MER-C in 2016. Heavily damaged by Israeli strikes last year, the hospital partly reopened in June. It has been targeted again since October.

Video footage shared by MER-C shows the Indonesian medics sheltering in the facility, amid strikes hitting the building.

"We have evacuated from the Kamal Adwan Hospital, now at Indonesia Hospital. God willing, we'll walk to Salah Al-Din," one of the volunteers said in the clip. "Dr. Hussam and other local medical staff remained in Kamal Adwan."

When they reached Salah Al-Din Road, the main highway of the Gaza Strip, they were picked up by a Palestine Red Crescent Society ambulance.

"There were still people walking some 300 meters behind us," Kamal Putra Pratama, a nurse from the team, said in a video from the car. "Hopefully the people who were in Kamal Adwan, the sick people, can be evacuated."

MIGRANT CRISIS

Dozens arrested across Britain in people-smuggling crackdown

AFP London

Police have arrested dozens of people in a cross-border crackdown against people-smuggling gangs exploiting free movement between the UK and Ireland, Britain's Interior Ministry said.

The crackdown "has led to the arrest of 35 people in multiple locations across the UK and Ireland," the UK Home Office said in a statement.

Immigration staff and police raided locations in Northern Ireland, England and Scotland as part of the three-day operation, it said.

It targeted criminal groups exploiting the Common Travel Area and abusing UK borders on all fronts, said the statement.

The CTA allows British and Irish citizens only to travel without passports between the islands of Ireland, Great Britain,

SPEEDREAD

• Earlier this year, after a surge in people applying for asylum in the republic, Dublin said most had come over the land border with Northern Ireland.

• The Home Office said that checks at major ports, airports, road networks and private addresses across the country had detected the gangs' activities.

• Operating in the UK and internationally, they exploit vulnerable migrants.

ECONOMIC WOES

Ghanaians see presidential vote as a way out of hardship

AP Accra

Joseph Antwi knows what he wants as a young person in Ghana casting his vote for the first time on Saturday when the West African nation elects its next president.

What he is not sure of, though, is whether the election's outcome would improve the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation in Ghana, one of the region's economic powerhouses which has struggled in recent years with high public debt, a weakened local currency and high inflation.

"I want to vote to kick out the current government because they have not been kind to young people," said Antwi, a trader in the capital of Accra, accusing the outgoing government of President Nana Addo Akufo-Addo of breaking its electoral promises since it was first elected eight years ago.

But the options for a candidate that will bring change are limited, he said, echoing the concerns of some of the 18.7 million people registered to vote for both president and members of parliament.

Ghana's presidential elections



Supporters of the former Ghana President and presidential candidate for the National Democratic Congress, John Mahama, in Accra. AP

have historically been two-horse races. This time is no different.

Although 12 candidates are running to become Ghana's next president, it is seen as a

tight race between Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia of the ruling New Patriotic Party government that has struggled to resolve the economic crisis, and

immediate past President John Mahama, the leader of the main opposition National Democratic Congress.

In their final campaign rallies on Thursday, both candidates made a last push to pitch their political parties as the answer to Ghana's economic woes.

Bawumia, a former deputy governor of the central bank, promised to build on the outgoing administration's efforts and stabilize the economy. "I know what I want to do from day one in the presidency," Bawumia, 61, told cheering supporters in Accra.

the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

But it has sparked unease in Ireland amid allegations that migrants are using Belfast as a backdoor to the republic, and in the other direction into Britain.

Earlier this year, after a surge in people applying for asylum in the republic, Dublin said most had come over the land border with Northern Ireland.

The Home Office said that checks at major ports, airports, road networks and private addresses across the country had detected the gangs' activities.

Operating in the UK and internationally, they exploit vulnerable migrants, charging them thousands of pounds to enter the UK illegally, it added.

HONORED

London's Muslim mayor set for knighthood

Arab News London

London Mayor Sadiq Khan is reportedly set to receive a knighthood in the New Year Honours List to be announced by King Charles.

Khan, the first Muslim mayor of the UK capital, is believed to have made the annual list

of those recognized by the monarch for public service, alongside other prominent current and former British politicians.

Sources close to the mayor did not deny he was in line for the knighthood when approached by the Financial Times.

Khan, 54, has been a prominent

FASTFACT

Sadiq Khan, 54, has been a prominent face in UK politics for two decades, having been elected to Parliament in 2005 to represent his home borough of Tooting in London.



face in UK politics for two decades, having been elected to Parliament in 2005 to represent his home borough of Tooting in London.

He served as a government minister under Gordon Brown,

became mayor of London in 2016, and won a historic third term in May this year.

The FT said the draft of the list has yet to receive final approval by King Charles or Prime Minister Keir Starmer. A government spokesman said: "We do not comment on speculation on honours."

DIPLOMACY

Indonesia, Philippines agree to repatriate Filipino on death row

Yusril: We agree to return the person concerned to the Philippines

AFP Jakarta.

A Filipino on death row in Indonesia could be home before Christmas after Manila and Jakarta signed an agreement to repatriate her, officials said Friday.

Mother of two Mary Jane Veloso was arrested in 2010 after the suitcase she was carrying was found to be lined with 2.6 kilograms (5.7 pounds) of heroin.

Her supporters claim she was duped by an international drug syndicate, and in 2015, she narrowly escaped execution after her suspected recruiter was arrested.

"We agree to return the person concerned to the Philippines," Indonesia's senior law and human rights minister Yusril Ihza Mahendra told reporters after signing a "practical arrangement" for Veloso's repatriation in Jakarta.

"Mary Jane Veloso becomes the responsibility of the Philippines," he said, adding that he had heard that the death penalty would be changed into life imprisonment.

Yusril said the transfer could be carried out "before Christmas."

"Maybe around Dec. 20 it can be realized."

Veloso's mother told AFP she was "elated and surprised" to hear of her daughter's homecoming.

"We can finally be together this Christmas," Celia Veloso, 65, said. "This might be the happiest Christmas we will ever have as a family."

Veloso's case sparked uproar in the Philippines, with rallies of support and world boxing superstar Manny Pacquiao



Correctional Affairs' Yusril Ihza Mahendra, left, shakes hands with Philippines' Justice Undersecretary Raul Vasquez during the signing ceremony of a deal to send home Mary Jane Veloso, in Jakarta, Friday. AP

pleading for her life.

Her supporters said she was headed to work as a maid when she was arrested in Indonesia.

She was due to face the firing squad in 2015 but the Philippine government won a last-minute reprieve for her after a woman suspected of recruiting her was arrested and put on trial for human trafficking and Veloso was named a prosecution witness.

The Philippines' Department of Justice Undersecretary Raul Vasquez expressed "heartfelt gratitude" over Veloso's repatriation.

"We are hopeful that we will be able to do this before Christmas so that it will be a happier Christmas for everyone," he said.

HIGHLIGHT

Philippines' Department of Justice Undersecretary Raul Vasquez expressed 'heartfelt gratitude' over Veloso's repatriation.

The Velosos have "long been wanting to see their family back and hold her in their arms."

Vasquez said Veloso would serve her sentence "as agreed upon, in accordance with Philippine laws."

"We do understand and we respect the decision of the Indonesian courts with respect to the sentence that was meted on our citizen Mary Jane Veloso," he said.

Indonesia has some of the world's toughest drug laws including the death penalty for traffickers.

At least 530 people were on death row in the Southeast Asian nation, mostly for drug-related crimes, according to data from rights group KontraS, citing official figures.

As of early November, 96 foreigners were on death row in Indonesia, all on drugs charges, according to data from the Ministry of Immigration and Corrections.

Indonesia is also in talks with Australia and France after President Prabowo Subianto had agreed to fulfill their requests to hand back some prisoners who were sentenced on drug charges.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Political crisis

Defiant Macron seeks new French prime minister

President Emmanuel Macron on Friday was holding talks with French political leaders on the left and right as he seeks to name a new prime minister and find a way out of France's political crisis.

Macron adopted a defiant tone in an address to the nation late Thursday, 24 hours after Prime Minister Michel Barnier's government was ousted in a historic no-confidence vote.

Macron vowed to name a new prime minister in the "coming days," rejected growing pressure from the opposition to resign. **AFP**

Heritage

Prince William to attend cathedral reopening

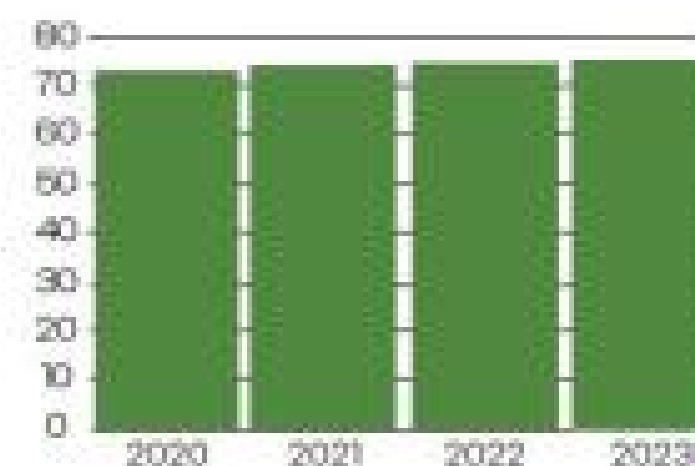
The UK's Prince William will attend Saturday's re-opening of Notre Dame cathedral in Paris, Kensington Palace said on Friday, but his wife, Catherine, will not accompany him.

"The Prince of Wales will travel to Paris tomorrow to attend the ceremony marking the reopening of the Notre Dame Cathedral," the palace said in a statement.

"His Royal Highness is traveling at the request of His Majesty's Government on behalf of the United Kingdom," it added. **AFP**

The Day's FIGURES

ALGERIA: URBANIZATION (%)



Source: Statista

What We're Reading Today

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities

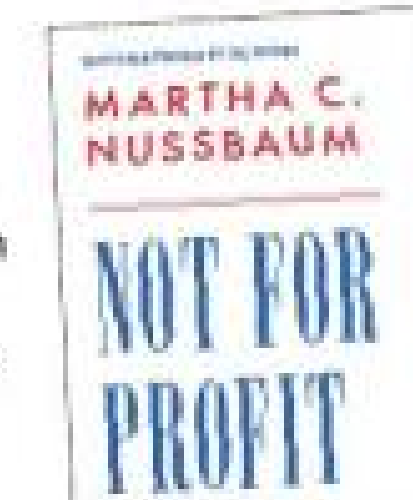
MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM

In this short and powerful book, celebrated philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum makes a passionate case for the importance of the liberal arts at all levels of education.

Historically, the humanities have been central to education because they have been seen as essential for creating competent

democratic citizens.

But recently, Nussbaum argues, thinking about the aims of education has gone disturbingly awry in the US and abroad. We increasingly treat education as though its primary goal were to teach students to be economically productive rather than to think critically.



Impeach threat looms

SK's Yoon under pressure to resign

South Korea's ruling party leader said President Yoon Suk Yeol needed to be removed from power for trying to impose martial law, increasing the pressure on him to quit even though members of his People Power Party late on Friday reaffirmed its formal opposition to his impeachment.

On Saturday, lawmakers will vote on the main opposition Democratic Party's motion to impeach Yoon, who shocked the nation late on Tuesday when he gave the military sweeping emergency powers in order to root out what he called "anti-state forces" and obstructionist opponents. **Reuters**

After graft probe

Croatia PM survives no-confidence vote

Croatia's conservative Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic survived a no-confidence vote in parliament Friday that was called by the opposition following a high-profile graft investigation.

Croatia has long struggled to contain rampant government corruption, with more than a dozen ministers from Plenkovic's center-right HDZ party stepping down since 2016.

During that time two ministers suspected of corruption were arrested, including Health Minister Vili Beris who was taken into custody last month. **AFP**

HISTORIC MILESTONE

'We love our food': Malaysians cheer as breakfast culture joins UNESCO list

Kanyakumari Damordaran
Kuala Lumpur

For many Malaysians, breakfast has always been the highlight of the day — and now, it is also a source of pride after gaining a place on UNESCO's cultural heritage list.

The UN body voted on Thursday to include Malaysia's breakfast culture, "a living heritage related to the traditional dietary practices," on its list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The recognition was immediately welcomed by the Ministry of Culture as a "historic

milestone" as it was Malaysia's first UNESCO entry related to food and gastronomy. It also drew delighted responses from all those from whom breakfast is an integral part of family and social life.

Heng Wei Boon, a 47-year-old engineer, still remembers the food his mother used to prepare when he was growing up in Penang.

The usual menu was half-boiled eggs with toast, porridge, or noodle soup. All three dishes until now remain his breakfast favorites until now.

"It did not matter if it was a

school day. If it is, breakfast is at 6:30 a.m. If not, it's around 7:45 or 8 a.m.," he said.

"It is a meal to start the day and here in Malaysia, we take it very seriously."

From home kitchens to kopitiams — traditional coffee houses — to roadside stalls and office cafeterias, the first meal of the day is like a ritual in all of Malaysia's multi-ethnic communities.

"I grew up in a kampung (village) neighborhood, in the city, and back then, sometimes, some of the moms took turns making breakfast for the kids ... It was such a fun time, and

it is a memory so many of us cherish and still talk about," Nur Natasha Siraj, a 35-year old pharmacist in the Klang Valley told Arab News.

"Now, as a working adult, taking that time for breakfast — to sit and share a meal to start my day — is an important part of my routine, as it is for many Malaysians. The boomers in my hospital would never not go for breakfast and even give us a scolding for missing breakfast. Not so much because they care about our health, but because it is our time to check in with one another and bond before the rush of the day begins."

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

Freedom, father, is to be
able to make mistakes.

Elias Khoury
(Lebanese novelist)

Opinion

Weaponized cyber realm could spell unimaginable doom

MOHAMED CHEBARO



Mohamed Chebaro is a British-Lebanese journalist with more than 25 years of experience covering war, terrorism, defense, current affairs and diplomacy. He is also a media consultant and trainer.

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www.arabnews.com/opinion

Everyday I look with fear at news reports of cybersecurity incidents of hacking, online threats, and infrastructure damage — intentional or unintentional — across key regions of the world. Some are said to emanate from hostile states, others from criminal actors on behalf of states or simply committed by gangs intent on theft, blackmail or onward sale of sensitive data to be used by third parties in an increasingly dark side of the tech world and internet.

Not a single day passes without a report of another hack or attempt to steal data and penetrate key infrastructure to test vulnerability and/or to exert pressure, or to simply disrupt or sow chaos. In recent weeks, the US deputy national security adviser for cyber and emerging technology, Anne Neuberger, has confirmed that state hackers have compromised telecommunications infrastructure across the US as part of a

massive espionage campaign affecting dozens of countries and a multitude of companies. This is to exploit vulnerability in their system, harvest data or simply enhance penetrability of often civilian infrastructure like telecommunication connectivity or health infrastructure, surely with the aim of using it as a weapon of coercion or maybe even war.

On this side of the Atlantic, the new UK head of the National Cyber Security Centre, Richard Horne, revealed in a report this week that enemy digital operations emanating from Russian "aggression and recklessness" and China's "highly sophisticated" digital operations have trebled.

The NCSC's annual report shows that the wide-ranging danger is underestimated by the public as well as by the private sector. Horne calls for his country "to increase the pace to keep ahead of adversaries."

He said: "There is no room for complacency about the severity of state-led threats or the volume of the threat

posed by cyber criminals," and added the "defense and resilience of critical infrastructure, supply chains, the public sector, and wider economy must improve." He cites examples of hacks that affected the British library in 2023, and another incident in 2024 when state-sponsored gangs carried out ransomware attacks to disrupt the UK's health service.

But could state and regulatory bodies keep up with and control or limit those threats? And at what cost, in an age of dwindling resources and the continued blurring of lines between what could be considered private sector and sensitive state infrastructure, often built and managed by huge international corporations with government clients?

More dangerous is that such warnings often coincide with reports of serious intentional or unintentional damage affecting critical infrastructure where authorities were often unable to find sufficient proof of malicious intent.

The world should be able to conclude

that the tech realm has had tremendous benefits for all and that digital technology, despite its many advantages, has innumerable downsides. Cell phones enable location tracking that erodes privacy. Data can be manipulated and destroyed. Mechanical systems can be hijacked by those with malicious intent who find loopholes in the many layers of digital defenses.

But as these technologies have become essential to our day-to-day lives and continue to boost economic growth, they remain vital for societal productivity, allowing all to access information on an unprecedented scale.

Should reason therefore not prevail to limit the intrusion and weaponization of those systems for the safety of all? There is a need to neutralize the threats to digital services, tools, and infrastructure through global governance. After all, these are crucial for mankind and its continued existence and prosperity, despite their being attractive soft targets.

Mechanical systems can be hijacked by those with malicious intent who find loopholes in the many layers of digital defenses



COURTESY: AMALAD RASMI/ASHARQ AL-AWSAT

It would be a tragic irony if the Budapest Memorandum ended up accelerating nuclear proliferation

Impact of Russia-Ukraine conflict on nuclear proliferation

LUKE COFFEY



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

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has led to numerous unintended global consequences. Among these are heightened concerns about food insecurity, especially in vulnerable regions, and an acute energy crisis in Europe, which is only now being addressed through a complete restructuring of the continent's energy imports. Economic uncertainty and inflation have surged, particularly in Africa and the Middle East.

However, one consequence that has escaped widespread discussion is the impact on efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation. To understand this issue, it is essential to examine the recent history of nuclear weapons in the former Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, 15 newly independent states emerged, three of

which — Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus — found themselves in possession of sizable numbers of Soviet nuclear weapons. While Kazakhstan and Belarus quickly transferred control of their nuclear arsenals to Moscow, Ukraine's situation was different.

At the time, Ukraine unexpectedly became the world's third largest nuclear power. This triggered an internal debate about the country's nuclear future. On the one hand, many of these weapons were nearing the end of their operational life, and Ukraine lacked the resources to modernize and maintain them. On the other hand, there was significant support for retaining a nuclear deterrent to ensure the nation's security and defense.

Ultimately, after significant international pressure, Ukraine agreed to relinquish all its inherited nuclear weapons in exchange for substantial economic support and

security guarantees from Russia, the US and the UK. This agreement culminated in the signing of the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances on Dec. 5, 1994.

This week marks the 30th anniversary of the agreement. According to the memorandum, Russia, the UK and the US agreed to "reaffirm their obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine, and that none of their weapons will ever be used against Ukraine except in self-defense or otherwise in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations."

However, as time went on, the Budapest Memorandum became fraught with ambiguities. It meant different things to different parties. Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Ukrainians have accused

their Western partners of failing to honor the memorandum's security guarantees.

From the US perspective, the Budapest Memorandum was a memorandum — not a legally binding treaty. For the US, obligations under such agreements require Senate ratification to carry the force of law. While the US and UK argue that it is Russia, not them, that has violated the memorandum, this distinction remains a sore point for Ukraine.

This week, during a NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha held up the country's original copy of the Budapest Memorandum, as a symbolic reminder to the world of the commitments made three decades ago.

It would be a tragic irony if the Budapest Memorandum, designed to reduce the number of nuclear-armed states, ended up accelerating nuclear proliferation.

Opinion

Anticipating Trump's foreign policy

JOSEPH S. NYE JR.

Prediction is always difficult, but doubly so in the case of the US president-elect. Donald Trump not only changes his positions often, he also considers unpredictability to be a useful bargaining tool. Still, one can try to get a sense of what his foreign policy will look like from his campaign statements, his high-level appointments and his first term.

In Washington, it is often said that "personnel is policy." But while we already know whom Trump wants for key positions, the problem is that their stated views sometimes conflict with each other. With Trump making every effort to avoid the traditional Republicans who hemmed him in during his first term, the common denominator among his choices this time is personal loyalty. But even this quality does not help us predict policy.

Consider the question of China. Trump's choices for secretary of state and national security adviser — Sen. Marco Rubio and Rep. Michael Waltz, respectively — are well-known "hawks" who see China as a dominant threat that demands a strong response. We also know from his campaign that Trump is eager to introduce new tariffs on imports from allies, with even higher tariffs on goods from China.

With Trump already announcing plans to slap tariffs on imports from Mexico, Canada and China, we should certainly expect some new levies to be imposed. But the tariffs' rates, duration and exemptions remain uncertain and subject to both domestic political pressures and Trump's personal whims. As his designee for treasury secretary, Scott Bessent, recently said: "I think a lot of what he's

doing is to escalate to de-escalate, and my goal for his administration would be to save international trade."

Equally uncertain is how Trump might respond to retaliation by America's trade partners. If tit-for-tat trade wars drive tariffs and prices higher, the return of inflation may trigger a domestic political backlash. Since Trump prides himself on his deal-making prowess, he may seek compromises. Would he offer his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, weaker US support for Taiwan in exchange for a trade deal that he could hold up as a victory? Some of America's Asian allies worry about precisely this scenario.

Judging by Trump's campaign statements and previous term in the White House, we should also expect him to devalue multilateralism and alliances. He has promised to again withdraw from the Paris climate agreement and to increase domestic



Joseph S. Nye Jr., Professor Emeritus at Harvard University, is a former US assistant secretary of defense and author of the memoir "A Life in the American Century" (Polity Press, 2024). ©Project Syndicate

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production and exports of oil and gas. While the price of renewable energy has been declining in the US, it remains to be seen whether his policies will cancel out that beneficial market effect by reducing these industries' relative cost competitiveness.

Turning to Europe and NATO, Trump said during the campaign that he would end the war in Ukraine "in one day." We know that will not happen, but there is deep uncertainty about how he will try to negotiate an armistice. One possibility is to reduce assistance to Ukraine and weaken its bargaining position so that it must accept Russian terms. Or Trump could temporarily extend support for Ukraine while moving toward a "Korean solution."

In the latter scenario, the current front line would become a demilitarized zone staffed by UN or European peacekeepers that Russia would have to force out if it wanted to restart the war. Ukraine could continue to assert sovereignty over areas like the Donbas, but it would most likely be unable to join NATO; instead, perhaps some subset of countries ("friends of Ukraine") could offer to come to its aid if Russia violated the demilitarized zone. It is unclear whether Trump will use his bargaining power vis-a-vis Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin to produce such a

compromise. But securing a deal will certainly be attractive if he is thinking about his legacy.

Even if predictions based on campaign statements and personnel leave us uncertain, we can at least locate Trump in the historical traditions of US foreign policy. Recall his first inaugural address, when he proclaimed that "from this moment on, it's going to be America first ... we do not seek to impose

our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example." This view accords with the "city-on-the-hill" approach to US foreign policy, which has a long pedigree. It is not isolationism, but it eschews activism.

By contrast, in the 20th century, Woodrow Wilson sought a foreign policy that would make democracy safe in the world and John F. Kennedy urged Americans to consider what they could do for the rest of the world, establishing the Peace Corps in 1961. Jimmy Carter made human rights a core concern of US foreign policy and George W. Bush's international strategy rested on the twin pillars of leading a growing global community of democracies and promoting freedom, justice and human dignity.

The one prediction that seems safe is that Trump's approach to the world will be more in keeping with the first of these traditions than the second.

Trump undoubtedly wants to extend his prior success in the region, but it is anyone's guess how he will go about it

His view accords with the 'city-on-the-hill' approach to US foreign policy. It is not isolationism, but it eschews activism

Lebanon's economic crisis returns to prominence

ZAID M. BELBAGI

Last week's ceasefire deal has refocused minds on Lebanon's dire economic situation. Though formal hostilities have drawn to a close, questions over Israel's continued presence in the south of the country and questions as to the military and political future of Hezbollah raise the specter of ongoing uncertainty. With almost 1 million Lebanese displaced and with yet more capital flight, Lebanon, whose economy has been in freefall since 2019, is facing an unprecedented crisis. Within this context, efforts to bolster its post-war economy are critical to improving the lives of its long-suffering citizens.

According to the World Bank, Lebanon's prewar financial crisis ranked "among the worst economic crises globally since the mid-19th century." Following the 14-month Hezbollah-Israel conflict, this crisis is all the more acute. Today, it is estimated that Lebanon faces a reconstruction bill of more than \$25 billion, compounding the economic losses of \$8.5 billion and including \$2.8 billion in damage to housing infrastructure.

With Israel having struck Lebanon again since the deal came into effect, sending the lira plummeting further, the fragility of the peace highlights the essential nature of political reforms and institutional stability. These are needed to create the suitable conditions for a window of recovery that the country so desperately needs.

While Lebanon's towns and cities show significant bomb damage, the tourism industry, once a key economic pillar, has collapsed due to heightened insecurity. Following a welcome increase in 2022, visitor numbers have fallen, with the World Travel and Tourism Council estimating that tourism's share of Lebanon's national economy will

decrease from 6.6 percent in 2023 to 5.5 percent in 2024.

This downturn has had the knock-on effect of a dramatic rise in hotel and flight cancellations, with the tracked-to-scheduled flights ratio dropping from 98.8 percent to 63.3 percent in the first month of the war. This decline, which has been more pronounced than in other countries neighboring the conflict, is



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likely to persist throughout the first quarter of 2025, resulting in significant job losses and reduced income for those reliant on the sector, such as hotel and restaurant workers.

The warnings of countries like the US, the UK and France for their citizens not to travel to Lebanon due to regional instability have had a significant effect on the economy, as 63 percent of Lebanon's international arrivals in 2022 were expatriates. This community, which numbers some 10 to 18 million people, is much larger than the population within Lebanon and has a critical part to play in the small country's economy.

The cyclical nature of conflict and corruption, which has crippled political life in Lebanon, has also hampered the efficacy of international aid, of which Lebanon has been a significant recipient. In circumstances where the politics of the region do not precipitate aid from international donors and Lebanon's internal dynamics and realities are contrary to the political views of its wealthier neighbors, a concerted effort to court the economic

force of the diaspora is necessary.

This is supported by a June report by Bodhi Global Analysis and the Danish Refugee Council, which highlighted widespread dissatisfaction with traditional aid mechanisms and a preference for direct involvement in recovery efforts. This approach reflects a shift away from the frequent fundraising efforts of Lebanon's

self-serving political elite and toward a growth in community-driven solutions, emphasizing local agency (and that of the diaspora in particular) over external dependencies. In this context, a combination of for-profit and philanthropic models can provide the support the hollowed-out state needs to create profitable ventures that stimulate the local economy.

Though the state can play an important role in mobilizing the diaspora — much as the parliament speaker recently called on Lebanese abroad to support the displaced — Lebanon must overcome the political impasses that have stunted its development and encouraged militia movements in order to cease or at least spread out the country's debt and conflict cycles.

The fragility of the peace highlights the essential nature of political reforms and institutional stability

Lebanon must overcome the political impasses that have stunted its development and encouraged militia movements

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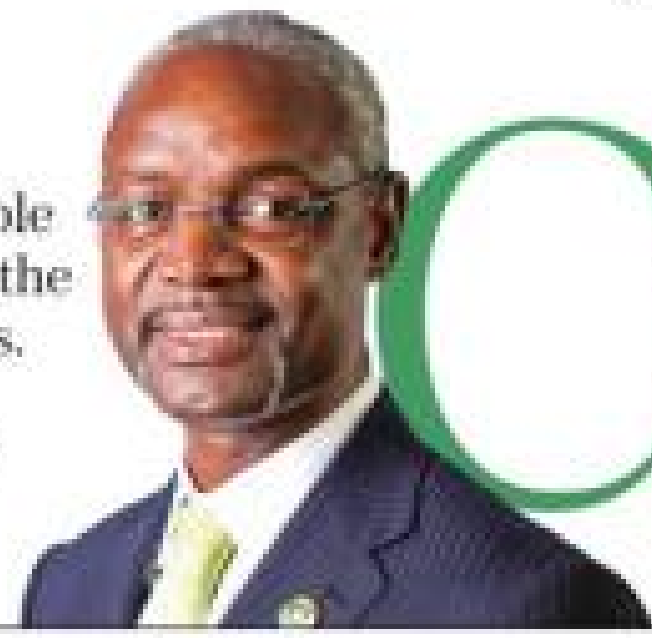
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Saudi Arabia is leading by example in integrating young people into the heart of its sustainability efforts.

Ibrahim Thiaw
Executive secretary of the United Nations
Convention to Combat Desertification



COP16

SPECIAL COVERAGE

COLLABORATION

Youth empowerment takes center stage

Conference highlights innovative youth-led initiatives and addresses systemic challenges faced by young leaders

Manal Al-Barakatli Riyadh

Youth empowerment has emerged as a focal point at the UN Convention to Combat Desertification conference.

COP16 has highlighted innovative youth-led initiatives and addressed the systemic challenges faced by young leaders in advancing sustainable land management.

The conference, which began on Dec. 2, aligns with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the Kingdom's commitment to engaging its youth in tackling climate challenges. Key discussions have underscored the importance of integrating young voices into policymaking and decision-making processes.

Catalysts for change

Among the most pressing topics discussed at COP16 is the need to give young people a seat at the decision-making table.

Speaking during the lead-up to the conference, Catarina Lorenzo, a 16-year-old youth climate champion, made a passionate case for including younger generations in the shaping of solutions to the environmental crises they will inherit.

"When we bring children to the table, we also bring the voice of nature," she explained. "Effective actions have to be made now. We want to join in the negotiation spaces, and beyond that we want to be taken seriously."

This urgency was echoed by Jorge Leyva of the International Forestry Students' Association, who said that while young voices were increasingly visible at global forums, their influence on actual policy decisions remained limited.

"We are the next generation, and we are not going to wait," he said. "If we don't have a seat at the table now, how will we know what comes next?" Leyva emphasized the frustration felt by many young leaders, who are often relegated to observation roles rather than being involved in substantive discussions.

Youth empowerment

As COP16's host nation, Saudi Arabia has highlighted its commitment to empowering young people through initiatives such as the Green Saudi Initiative, which have mobilized thousands of young Saudis in afforestation and land restoration projects.

"Saudi Arabia is leading by example in integrating



Among the most pressing topics discussed at COP16 is the need to give young people a seat at the decision-making table. AN photo

young people into the heart of its sustainability efforts," said Ibrahim Thiaw, executive secretary of the UNCCD. "Empowering youth is essential for achieving sustainable land management. Their voices bring fresh perspectives and the drive to innovate that is indispensable for addressing the challenges we face today."

Among the initiatives highlighted was a project by young Saudis that uses drones to plant seeds in degraded areas, blending technology with traditional land restoration techniques.

Youth-led initiatives

COP16 has also provided a platform for young leaders from across the globe to share their solutions to land degradation.

Lorenzo highlighted the unique knowledge children and youth bring to the discussion. "Children are often the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, from floods to loss of education opportunities," she explained. "We are the best people to talk about the impact we receive and what our communities need."

These perspectives are not only vital but also often transformative,

From using social media to raise awareness about local environmental challenges to leveraging indigenous knowledge in land management, youth-led projects have demonstrated the power of combining grassroots activism with innovative technologies.

Despite the successes, COP16 participants have pointed out significant barriers to youth involvement. Lorenzo

highlighted the lack of financial support for youth-led projects, noting that only 2 percent of global philanthropic funding directly benefited children and youth.

"This needs to change," she said.

Leyva added that young leaders often felt dismissed by older decision-makers: "They think that because we are students or maybe so young, we don't have the knowledge to contribute. But we have a different perspective — one rooted in today's realities and challenges, which older generations may not fully grasp."

To address these gaps, COP16 has introduced measures to boost youth participation, including mentorship programs to develop technical expertise in sustainable land management and commitments to integrate youth perspectives into policy frameworks.

International collaboration

The conference has also facilitated cross-border knowledge sharing, with young representatives from Africa, Asia and Latin America discussing their approaches to

HIGHLIGHTS

● As COP16's host nation, Saudi Arabia has highlighted its commitment to empowering young people through initiatives such as the Green Saudi Initiative, which have mobilized thousands of young Saudis in afforestation and land restoration projects.

● By providing a platform for young leaders to connect with global stakeholders and share their ideas, COP16 has taken an important step toward fostering intergenerational collaboration.

combating land degradation.

Delegates from Burkina Faso, for example, shared how combining traditional agricultural practices with modern tools has helped build drought resilience.

"When we share our experiences and knowledge across borders, we create a stronger foundation for sustainable action," said one delegate.

Driving tangible outcomes

In addition to its national programs, Saudi Arabia has taken a leadership role in the region by

promoting youth engagement in environmental sustainability. The Kingdom's National Afforestation Project, which aims to plant 10 billion trees, has actively involved young people in both planning and implementation.

Saudi youth delegates expressed pride in their country's efforts and, as COP16 progresses, the focus on youth empowerment remains a key theme. For young leaders like Lorenzo and Leyva, the event represents a vital opportunity to amplify their voices and push for tangible outcomes. However, they emphasize that their participation must lead to action, not just recognition.

"Negotiators clap for our speeches," Lorenzo noted, "but when it comes time to create resolutions, our input is often overlooked. That has to change."

By providing a platform for young leaders to connect with global stakeholders and share their ideas, COP16 has taken an important step toward fostering intergenerational collaboration.

While significant challenges remain, the initiatives and discussions shown so far demonstrate a clear path toward building a more resilient and sustainable world — led, in part, by the energy and creativity of youth.

When we bring children to the table, we also bring the voice of nature.

Catarina Lorenzo
Global climate activist



EXPANSION

KSA's real estate loans hit \$226bn, fueled by retail and corporate demand

Lending to individuals made up the lion's share, accounting for 78 percent of the total at SR656.88 billion

Dayan Abou Tine Riyadh

Saudi banks' real estate loans surged to a record SR846.48 billion (\$225.73 billion) in the third quarter of 2024, marking a 13.29 percent annual increase, official data showed.

Data from the Saudi Central Bank, also known as SAMA, indicated that this growth was driven by both retail and corporate lending, with corporate loans experiencing a 22 percent increase to reach SR189.6 billion.

Lending to individuals made up the lion's share, accounting for 78 percent of the total at SR656.88 billion, reflecting an annual growth rate of 11.02 percent.

Real estate loans now comprise 29.67 percent of Saudi banks' total loan portfolio, which stood at SR2.85 trillion by the end of the third quarter.

The sector's unprecedented expansion is underpinned by government-backed initiatives under Vision 2030, which aim to diversify the economy and address the Kingdom's growing housing demand.

A pivotal regulatory milestone came in 2018, when the Saudi Central Bank increased the maximum loan-to-value ratio for first-time homebuyers from 85 percent to 90 percent.

This strategic move was designed to stimulate mortgage lending, making homeownership more accessible to Saudi citizens while aligning with the Kingdom's broader economic reform plans.

By enabling more citizens to secure financing for their first homes, the initiative directly supported the national housing strategy, which aims to boost homeownership rates and expand housing options across the country.

SAMA emphasized maintaining financial stability, ensuring that this policy shift would not compromise the resilience of the banking sector or lead to unsustainable lending practices.

Another factor supporting the real estate sector's growth is recent monetary easing. After two years of aggressive rate hikes to curb inflation, SAMA lowered interest rates by 50 basis points in September and another 25 basis points in November, mirroring the US Federal Reserve's monetary policy.

These cuts have made borrowing cheaper, spurring demand for real estate loans.

However, this surge in demand has a dual effect. While it boosts credit uptake, it also exerts upward pressure on housing prices, contributing to inflation.

Saudi Arabia's annual inflation rate reached 1.9 percent in October, driven primarily by higher housing costs, according



Riyadh has emerged as a focal point of this surge, fueled by robust population and employment growth that has intensified demand for housing. SPA

FASTFACTS

• The sector's unprecedented expansion is underpinned by government-backed initiatives under Vision 2030, which aim to diversify the economy and address the Kingdom's growing housing demand.

• A pivotal regulatory milestone came in 2018, when the Saudi Central Bank increased the maximum loan-to-value ratio for first-time homebuyers from 85 percent to 90 percent.

• Saudi banks issued SR8.14 billion in new residential mortgages in October, marking the highest monthly figure in 21 months and a 20.33 percent increase from October last year.

billion, reflecting an 11.34 percent increase compared to the same period last year. This growth was largely driven by demand for apartments, with lending in this segment soaring 58.76 percent year on year to SR7.25 billion.

While lending for land rose 19.16 percent to SR1.19 billion during the quarter, loans for houses declined 6.13 percent to SR12.06 billion.

The increasing prominence of apartment financing highlights a shift in Saudi Arabia's housing market, reflecting evolving demographics and lifestyle preferences. Apartments appeal to expatriates and smaller families while also addressing affordability concerns.

According to S&P Global, population growth, averaging 3.3 percent annually through 2027,

and a surge in expatriate inflows are fueling demand, particularly in Riyadh.

This factor, coupled with job opportunities, is outpacing the delivery of new housing units.

According to JLL's KSA market dynamics report for the first half of 2024, 16,200 units were added in Riyadh and 11,300 in Jeddah during this period, with another 16,000 units expected in both cities by the end of the year.

However, despite this growth, supply constraints continue to push prices higher. High construction costs and competition with Vision 2030 projects are limiting housing affordability.

Additionally, Saudi Arabia's real estate market is navigating regulatory changes to attract foreign direct investment. While FDI inflows currently average 2 percent of GDP, they are expected to grow as reforms unfold, including new residency visa options tied to real estate investments, according to S&P Global.

As mortgage infrastructure matures, spearheaded by entities like the Saudi Real Estate Refinance Co., the market is poised for increased liquidity and growth.

Secondary mortgage market

Saudi Arabia is embarking on a transformative journey to

establish a secondary mortgage market, a move set to redefine the Kingdom's housing and financial sectors. With two major agreements in place, the country is strategically aligning global expertise with local execution to ensure liquidity in housing finance, boost homeownership, and foster economic diversification in line with Vision 2030.

In a landmark development, the Saudi Real Estate Refinance Co., a subsidiary of the Public Investment Fund, signed a memorandum of understanding with BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager.

The agreement, finalized during a high-profile visit by Majid Al-Hogail, minister of municipal and rural affairs and housing, to the US, underscores the Kingdom's commitment to leveraging global expertise to develop its mortgage finance ecosystem.

The partnership with BlackRock is expected to play a pivotal role in creating a functional secondary mortgage market by laying the groundwork for mortgage-backed securities.

BlackRock's extensive knowledge of global financial markets will be instrumental in structuring these securities, designed to improve market liquidity by enabling banks to sell bundled mortgage loans to investors.

This influx of liquidity is anticipated to reduce borrowing costs for Saudi families, making homeownership more affordable.

Robert Kapito, BlackRock's president, described the collaboration as a key step in aligning Saudi Arabia's real estate finance market with international capital markets. He emphasized the potential for this initiative to not only support local housing goals but also attract global investment.

Meanwhile, SRC has also signed a separate agreement with Al-Ahli Bank and the Real Estate Development Fund to operationalize the secondary mortgage market at a local level.

This tripartite partnership focuses on creating and refinancing mortgage portfolios, ensuring the housing finance market has continuous access to funding.

The initiative is also set to fast-track the issuance of mortgage-backed securities in the domestic market, laying a solid foundation for sustainable growth in the sector.

As mortgage origination grows, so does the need for a secondary market to manage liquidity effectively.

SRC CEO Majeed Al-Abduljabbar described the partnership with Al-Ahli Bank as a critical step in addressing these challenges. By enabling banks to securitize mortgages and sell them as MBS, the initiative will enhance liquidity, reduce financing costs, and expand housing options for citizens.



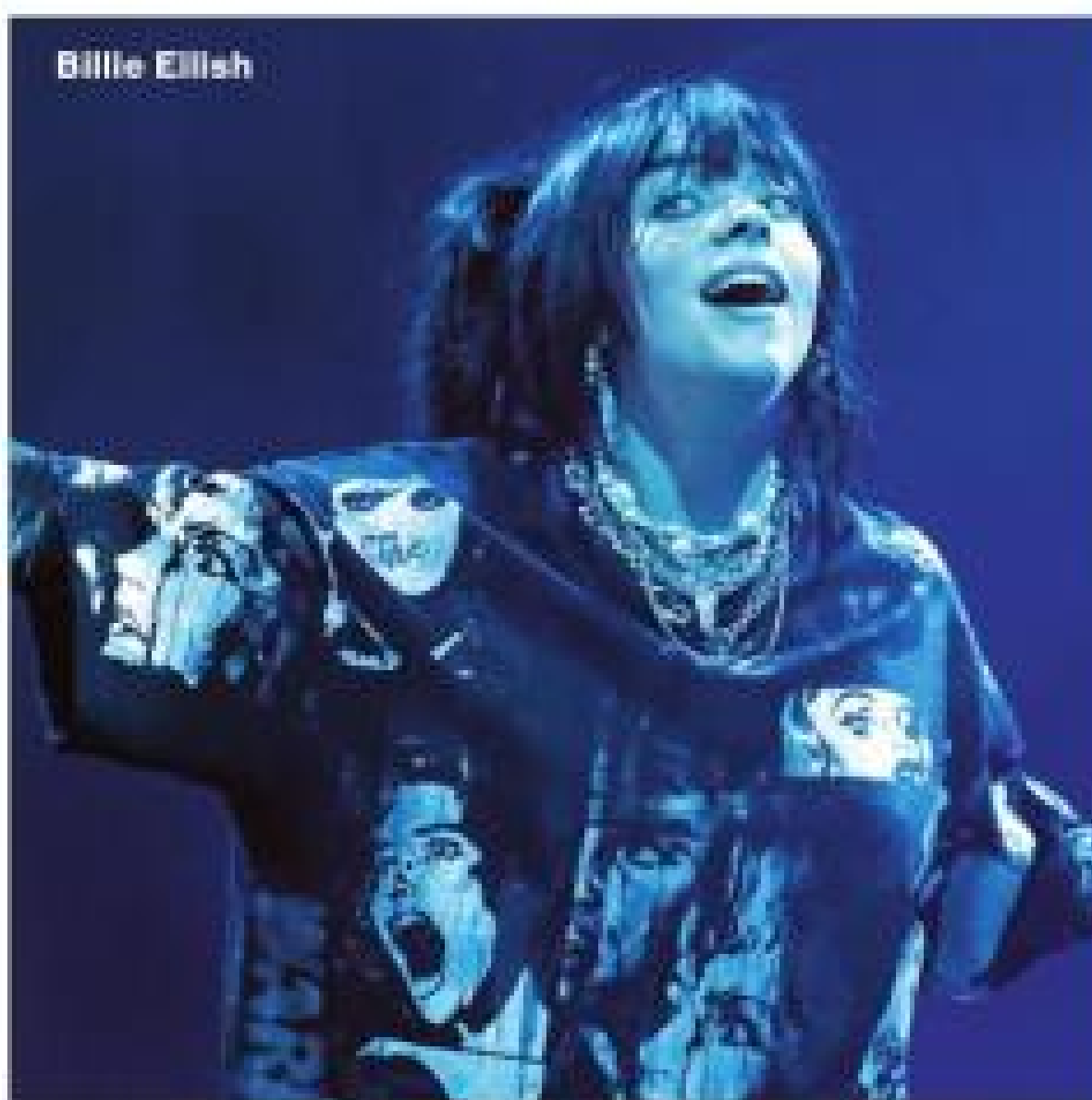
Apartment financing saw the most significant annual growth, surging 47 percent year on year to SR2.86 billion. SPA

Media

Each year, the podcast landscape in Saudi Arabia increasingly reflects the country's cultural shifts.

Rhea Chedid

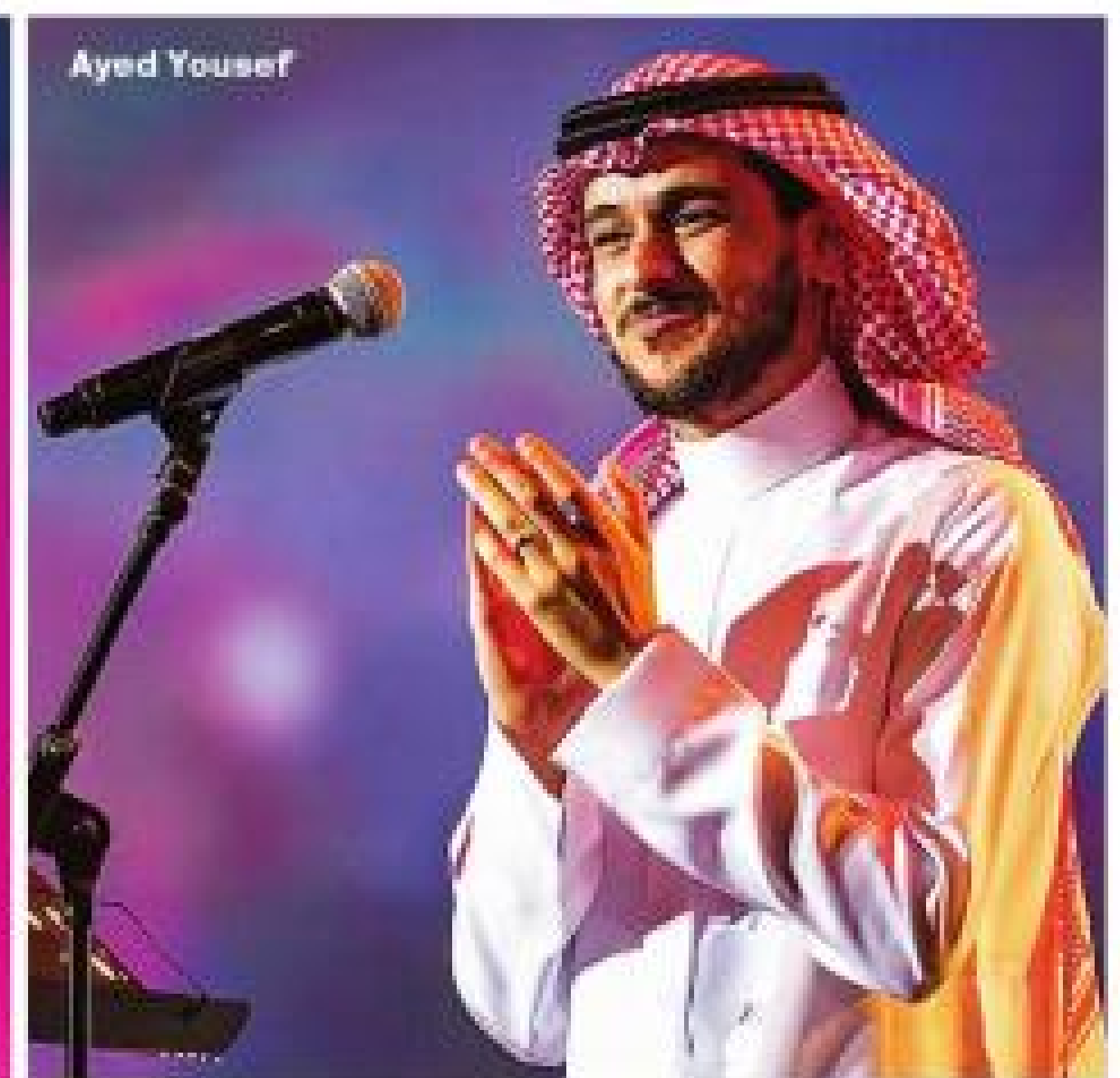
Spotify's editorial lead and senior podcast manager for the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia



Billie Eilish



Taylor Swift



Ayed Yousef



The Weeknd



Abdul Majeed Abdullah

WRAPPED

Spotify announces Taylor Swift as Saudi's most-streamed artist

Saudi listening habits are consistent with global trends with Swift ranking first, followed by The Weeknd

Zaira Lakhpatwala Dubai

Spotify has released its annual Wrapped report, a roundup of the most popular artists, songs, albums and podcasts streamed in each country over the past year, as well as a personalized experience for each user based on their own activity on the platform during that time.

Taylor Swift has topped the chart as the most-streamed artist in Saudi Arabia for the

second year in a row.

Saudi listening habits are consistent with global trends with Swift ranking first, followed by Canadian artist The Weeknd in the Kingdom and globally.

Billie Eilish comes in third, followed by Travis Scott and Drake who rank fourth and fifth as the most-streamed artists of 2024 in the Kingdom.

Globally, Puerto Rican sensation Bad Bunny comes in third, followed by Eilish and Drake.

This year, podcasts have grown in popularity in the Kingdom with "Finjan Ma"



Spotify's Wrapped report is a roundup of the most popular artists, songs, albums and podcasts streamed in each country over the past year. Supplied/ Gettyimages/ AFP

Abdel El Rahman Abo Maleh" topping the charts for the second consecutive year.

"Each year, the podcast landscape in Saudi Arabia increasingly reflects the country's cultural shifts," said Rhea Chedid, Spotify's editorial lead and senior podcast manager for the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia.

The report revealed "a resounding preference for Arabic podcasts, particularly those that weave long stories, highlighting Saudis' love for rich, narrative-driven content," she told Arab News.

There has been a surge in the popularity of music-related podcasts reflecting the burgeoning music scene in the Kingdom and ongoing efforts to nurture it, Chedid added.

Ayed Yousef tops the list of most-streamed Arab artists in Saudi Arabia, with his songs "Lammah" and "Rdy" ranking among Spotify's most-streamed Arabic songs in the Kingdom.

He is followed by Abdul Majeed Abdullah and Rashed Al-Majed in second and third place, and Assala and Majid Al-Mohandis in fourth and fifth place respectively.

FULL SUPPORT

Saudi Journalists Association approves draft regulations

Arab News Riyadh

The board of directors of the Saudi Journalists Association approved draft regulations for the Journalists Support Fund as well as discussed other topics during its meeting on Wednesday.

The regulations approved at the meeting — chaired by Adhwan Al-Ahmari — intend to provide various services and support to fellow journalists across the Kingdom. The board also adopted a comprehensive strategy for the SJA's work on different levels for the next three years.

Other items discussed were



The regulations approved at the meeting intend to provide various services and support to fellow journalists across the Kingdom. Supplied

FASTFACT

The meeting reaffirmed the association's commitment to continuing to develop performance and enhance its role in supporting journalists, keeping up with changes in the media sector, and serving the interests of the journalistic community.

the approval of the Human Capital Development Initiative, proposed by the chairman in collaboration with several entities. In the context of expanding the SJA's activities,

the board also approved the opening of a new branch in Jeddah. Additionally, the board approved a plan to invest the association's assets into some parts of the main building in Riyadh, and authorized the Investment and Resource Development Committee to oversee the implementation.

Members also reviewed the performance and review report of various committees' activities during the past period and commended the efforts made, emphasizing the importance of enhancing quality programs and activities that meet current needs.

Inter Miami CF forward Lionel Messi with the London Donovan MVP Award during a presentation ceremony at Chase Stadium.



Sport News



Officials from the the Emirates Motorsport Organization team at the F1 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. The group's responsibilities include helping ensure the drivers' safety on track. Supplied

MOTOR RACING

The Emirati officials putting safety at the heart of Formula 1 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix

Heba Abbas Bahaj and Shuhab Ahmed Al-Shehhi explain the vital roles they play during race week at Yas Marina Circuit

Arab News Abu Dhabi

As the Formula 1 action begins at Yas Marina Circuit, Emirate officials will proudly represent the UAE as part of a strong and diverse team working behind the scenes to ensure everything runs smoothly and safely.

Among those playing a crucial role at the Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix weekend are Heba Abbas Bahaj and Shuhab Ahmed Al-Shehhi. As members of the Emirates Motorsport Organization, their responsibilities include helping ensure the drivers' safety on track and keeping the public out of harm's way.

Heba, who has 16 years of experience, will have the best seat in the house when the lights go out at the start of the race, and

when the checkered flag waves at the end. As chief flag official, one of her responsibilities is to monitor the start and finish of all sessions and races over the weekend, liaising closely with race control.

"A lot of preparation goes into what is essentially the biggest motorsport event in our race calendar," said Heba, 41, who volunteered at the first Abu Dhabi Grand Prix in 2009 before starting her career as an EMSO official.

"For my position, the training sessions include 'flag refresher,' 'communication' and 'pit lane' and they span over two months, culminating in a practical shake-down session at the end. We had to pass a written exam to be ready for the event."

From Friday to Sunday, Heba says she expects to get approximately four hours of sleep each night, leaving her house at 6 a.m.

and returning late in the evening. Despite the long, hectic days it is a job she loves, and she is looking forward to helping make sure the event is a success.

She said: "Yes, we have the best seat at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, but it's not all glamour and easy. As officials, it's our responsibility to ensure everyone is safe, as well as the safety of the track section we are responsible for. Therefore, we need to be vigilant and attentive at all times, which means standing on our feet for long periods of time, monitoring, and reporting on incidents we see that might affect the safety or integrity of the race."

"As start and finish line officials, we need to be super attentive and monitor what's going on (on) track, especially when it's a close finish and the leader is approaching our location. Now, imagine having to do all of this under the watchful

eyes of millions of people — yes, it's a fun and enjoyable time, but it's also a lot of pressure and responsibility."

Joining Heba on the EMSO team of officials is Shuhab Ahmed Al-Shehhi. With 12 years' experience, the 38-year-old enters the F1 season finale as the event's F1 sector chief.

His main priorities during race week include ensuring his team understand their roles and have the correct equipment for going trackside, monitoring areas for hazardous materials, and attending a daily debrief.

He said: "I am really excited about this week's Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, although it will be a busy period. I always try to pass on positive vibes to people that I meet as that is very important and sets the tone ahead."

"Having been in this field for 12 years, what pleases me the most is the dedication of each official and

their determination to do their job to the best of their ability, and I believe anyone who wants to be an EMSO official marshal in the future must be willing to learn, be a team player, and be honest.

"More importantly, they must possess a deep passion for motorsports. I recall the first time I sat in an F1 car many years ago, which ignited my love for the sport. Now, I am serving as a race official for the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix in my home country."

Mahir Badri, EMSO chief executive, added: "Since the inaugural Formula 1 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix in 2009, our collaboration with (Grand Prix organizers) Ethara and Abu Dhabi Motorsports Management has been instrumental in developing a robust team of officials. Today, we are proud to say that our UAE teams are among the best in the world — highly skilled and respected internationally."

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Recognition

Lionel Messi wins MLS MVP award

It was a rare instance of Lionel Messi stepping on a soccer field and having no idea what was happening.

There they were, more than 250 Inter Miami academy players, a slew of kids lined up at midfield in a formation that spelled out three letters: MVP. And when Messi saw his children, he realized they were holding a trophy.

"Truly, it is an honor for me to receive this award from all of you," Messi told the academy players. **AP**



After missing penalties

Ancelotti says Mbappe 'aware' must play better

Carlo Ancelotti is convinced Kylian Mbappe will find a way out of the rut that has included two big penalty misses since his highly anticipated move to Real Madrid, the Italian coach said Friday.

Mbappe had spot kicks saved in losses at Liverpool and, most recently, Athletic Bilbao this week. After the 2-1 defeat in Bilbao the France star said on social media that he took "full responsibility" for another disappointing performance.

"He is aware of what is going on. His post after the Athletic game is one of a player who knows how he is playing and that he can play better," Ancelotti said a day before Madrid visit Girona in La Liga. **AP**

Since 2019 fallout

NBA to return to China for first time

The NBA will stage two pre-season games in Macau next October, its deputy commissioner said on Friday, marking its return to China after being frozen out for more than five years.

No NBA games have been held in China since two pre-season contests in 2019 after a tweet from then-Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey supporting pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong. **AFP**

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SETBACK

Leclerc handed 10-place penalty for Abu Dhabi Grand Prix

Arab News Abu Dhabi

Ferrari driver Charles Leclerc topped the first practice session at Yas Marina Circuit ahead of Sunday's Formula 1 Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, but later received a 10-place grid penalty for the race.

The Monegasque driver recorded a time of 1:24.321 with McLaren's Lando Norris 0.221 seconds adrift. Lewis Hamilton, in his last F1 weekend with Mercedes before his move to Ferrari next season, was third fastest.

The penalty decision came

Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc drives during the second practice session ahead of the Abu Dhabi Formula One Grand Prix at the Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi on Friday. **AFP**



minutes after the session ended and put a dent in Ferrari's hopes of taking this year's Constructors' Championship. They currently lie second in the standings, 21 points

behind McLaren, with 44 points up for grabs.

Six teams put rookies in one of their cars for the weekend's first practice session. They were

Ryo Hirakawa (McLaren), Arthur Leclerc (Ferrari), Isack Hadjar (Red Bull), Felipe Drugovich (Aston Martin), Ayumu Iwasa (RB) and Luke Browning (Williams).

In the second practice session, Norris led his teammate Oscar Piastri to finish 1-2, with a time of 1:23.517. Nico Hulkenberg came third for Haas.

FAST FACT

The Monegasque topped first practice but was penalized after Ferrari fitted a new battery pack to his car.

Keira Knightley stars
in 'Black Doves,' now
streaming on Netflix.



Weekend Lifestyle, Art & Culture

EAT, PLAY, LOVE

Recipes for success: Chef Clet Laborde

The executive chef of Sushi Samba Riyadh talks preparation, adaptation, and Peruvian cuisine

Hams Saleh Riyadh

Encouraged by a mentor who recognized his potential during a culinary competition in Brazil, French-Brazilian chef Clet Laborde pursued formal training at the renowned Institut Paul Bocuse in Lyon, France. He went on to work with legendary chefs Yannick Alléno and Alain Ducasse in France, before expanding his horizons in Brazil and Peru.

In January 2023, the chef moved to Saudi Arabia. "I really love this country. It is very nice. It is a safe place. It's a very good country to live in with the family and kids. I'm very happy to be here," he told Arab News. He is now the executive chef of Sushi Samba Riyadh, where he crafts dishes that blend Japanese, Peruvian and Brazilian flavors. Here, the chef discusses mistakes, his favorite cuisines, and offers tips for amateur chefs.

When you started out, what was the most common mistake you made?

Organization is the most important thing in the kitchen. A very big mistake that is common in the beginning is that you don't have everything ready to make the dish. We call it the "mise en

place." So, you don't need to run around or be desperate to cook something very quick because you forgot something.

What's your top tip for amateur chefs?

Don't get stressed out. If you make a mistake, you can always adapt the dish. For example, if you put too much salt in something, say a stew, the most effective thing to kill the salt is to put a raw potato in the dish. It will absorb all the excess salt, so your dish is going to be perfect again. Everything can be solved, everything can be adapted.

What one ingredient can instantly improve any dish?



I have two. The first is soy sauce — a good quality soy sauce can improve a dish a lot. The flavor helps you not use salt, and it can give flavor to the dishes very subtly. The other ingredient is mushrooms. They are very earthy products, but the mushroom has umami — a flavor that comes from the earth that is something very delicate in the palette.

What's your go-to dish if you have to cook something quickly at home?

Stroganoff. It's an Eastern European dish. It is very quick. You can do it with salmon, you can do it with chicken, you can do it with steak. It's very versatile. You can do it with just vegetables too. All you need is paprika, ketchup, cream and the protein that you want. Everything



I really love this country. It is a safe place — a very good country to live in with the family and kids. I'm very happy to be here.

Chef Clet Laborde (left) is the executive chef at Sushi Samba in Riyadh (bottom), where dishes include the ceviche platter (far left). Images supplied

CHEF CLET'S RECIPE

Scan the QR code to learn to make his Brazilian cheese balls



sautéed together, and you serve it with rice. In 20 minutes, it's done.

What's your favorite cuisine?

Peruvian. I lived in Peru for 12 years. The cuisine has a mix of cultures and flavors that you're not going to find anywhere else. My favorite dishes would be ceviche and pollo a la brasa. We have both on our menu here. La

brasa is a very traditional dish that the Peruvians eat normally every Sunday — like how the Italians sit together to eat pasta on Sunday, in Peru they eat chicken la brasa with fries and salad. It's very traditional and it's delicious.

Are you a disciplinarian in the kitchen? Do you shout a lot? Or are you more laidback?

I'm not laidback, but I don't shout. I think the image a lot of people have about me, because I'm French, is that I will shout. I lived this environment when I was in France. I know how it is to work for a person that screams at you, or denigrates you in front of everybody. I always try to have a healthy environment for my chef and for my team. If I have any issue, I never call the person out in front of anybody. We go to the office, we sit down, we talk and we try to solve the problem instantly.

Screen Scene

NEW TO WATCH AT HOME



Black Doves

Starring: Keira Knightley, Sarah Lancashire, Ben Whishaw

Where: Netflix

Spy Helen Webb begins an affair that may compromise her marriage and her secret identity, especially when her lover becomes embroiled in the London underworld.



Bread and Roses

Director: Sarah Mani

Where: Apple TV+

Documentary about women in Afghanistan under Taliban rule. Central characters include a former government employee, a dentist who organizes activists from her clinic and a woman seeking refuge in Pakistan.



Jentry Chau vs the Underworld

Voice cast: Ali Wong, Bowen Yang

Where: Netflix

Animated action series. As the titular Chinese-American teen turns 16, she learns a demon king is hunting her, and rediscovers her secret powers that she's long suppressed.



Camp Crasher

Starring: Natalia Oreiro, Pablo Rago, Sofia Morandi

Where: Netflix

South American comedy. In an effort to connect with her teenage son and make him see her as a cool mom, overbearing Patri takes him and his friends on a camping road trip.

Highlights from Saudi gallery Athr's showing at Abu Dhabi Art Fair last month



Asma Bahmim

Saudi Arabia's Athr Gallery presented the works of three of its artists at last month's Abu Dhabi Art Fair, including Bahmim,

whose work, including the pictured piece "Slow and Chatty," "investigates the nuances and intricacies of storytelling as a craft," according to the gallery.

Rami Farook

Several of Farook's works were on display in Abu Dhabi, including this one — "Running Hysterically From a Drought, Towards



a Burning Field." His pieces, the gallery says, "are manifestations of the artist's inner monologue as he observes and processes ... turbulent current events."



Sara Abdu

Abdu's "I Loved You Once (Soundscape No. 1)," pictured here, was also on display recently in Frieze London and is part of a

series created by embroidering human hair on fabric, symbolizing resistance to the fading of memories and the ending of a life cycle, according to the artist.

Weekend



Hip-hop legend Eminem will perform at Soundstorm on Thursday Dec. 12.



MUSIC MATTERS

The must-see acts at Soundstorm

Some highlights from the lineup for MDLBEAST's three-day music festival in Riyadh, which starts Dec. 12

Arab News Riyadh

In just a few years since its launch in 2019, MDLBEAST Soundstorm has established itself as the Gulf's biggest

music festival, but also staked a claim to being the world's largest rave — last year's event reportedly drew in 730,000 attendees. This year's edition, the fifth, will

likely be even bigger, with more than 150 artists performing in 10 different areas around the festival venue. Once again, the focus is on electronic dance music, with

the vast majority of performers being DJ-producers — from global A-listers like David Guetta and Armin Van Buuren to local luminaries like Baloo

and Blirdberson. But there's plenty of variety on show too, from hip-hop legends to rock stars. Here are just a few of the can't-be-missed sets to catch next weekend.

FEATURED ACTS

This year's headliners on the Big Beast stage are an impressively eclectic bunch of genuine superstars. The hugely influential US rapper **Eminem**, who did much to popularize hip-hop in America — particularly among white people — performs on Thursday night, as do rock-rap pioneers **Linkin Park**, back on the road this year for the first time since their original co-lead vocalist Chester Bennington's death in 2017. His replacement is Emily Armstrong, co-founder of the LA rock outfit Dead Sara. Early reviews of the new lineup — which also includes drummer Colin Brittain stepping in to replace Rob Bourdon — have been promising: "Armstrong makes each Linkin Park classic her own without changing their shape, from the hulking 'Given Up' and its screaming breakdown to the raw beauty of 'Breaking the Habit,'" the Guardian wrote of their London performance in September. On Friday, UK rockers **Muse** — regularly dubbed one of the world's best live bands, Scottish DJ-producer **Calvin Harris** — the first British solo artist to rack up more than 1 billion streams on Spotify, and Grammy-winning US alt-hip-hop star **Tyler, The Creator** — co-founder of collective Odd Future — all play. And US



singer-songwriter **Camila Cabello** (pictured), who rose to fame as a member of Fifth Harmony — one of the bestselling girl groups in history — but whose solo output is heavily influenced by Latin music, wraps things up on Big Beast on Saturday, the same night that Hollywood star Jared Leto's band — US rockers **Thirty Seconds to Mars**, US rapper and singer **Russ**, and **The Roots** — the house band on "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon," led by Questlove — perform on the DWN Beast stage.

SUPERSTAR DJs

Among the dozens of top-quality DJ-producers taking to the various stages over the weekend, there are several global EDM luminaries, including Dutchman **Martin Garrix**, ranked No. 1 in DJ Mag's Top 100 DJs list in 2016, 2017 and 2018, who plays a back-to-back set with Sweden's **Alesso** on Thursday night; France's ubiquitous **David Guetta** (also playing a B2B set, this one with fellow "future rave" inventor, Denmark's **Morten Breum**); America's **Steve Aoki** (B2B with Bosnian-Swedish DJ **Salvatore Ganacchi**); Garrix's fellow Dutch DJ **Armin Van Buuren** (pictured), who has also topped DJ Mag's top 100 list in four successive years (2007-2010 inclusive), and then again 2012, giving him a record five "titles"; and (two of the) co-founders of progressive house stars Swedish House Mafia, now performing as a DJ duo, **Axwell and Sebastian Ingrosso**; and Grammy-winning South African DJ-producer **Black Coffee**. A full list of performers is available on the MDLBEAST website.



ARAB STARS

As well as the international A-listers flying in to Riyadh this week, a number of major regional stars are also performing at Soundstorm. From Lebanese diva **Elissa** (pictured), whose records have reportedly sold more than 30 million copies and whose long-delayed 13th studio album, "Ana Seketeen," was released in May, the hugely popular Egyptian rap artist **Marwan Moussa**, and his compatriot, the singer **Ahmed Saad**, to the Kingdom's own **Abdul Majeed Abdullah**, among others.



LOCAL HEROES

Once again, MDLBEAST is providing lesser-known Saudi acts with a huge platform on which to shine at Soundstorm. Keep an eye out for the all-female psychedelic rock band **Seera** (pictured), who've been rapidly accruing fans and media coverage over the past couple of years. In terms of DJ-producers, expect **Leen**, **Omar Bassad**, **Baloo**, **Loush**, **Hats and Klaps**, and **Blirdberson**'s sets to get the crowds going.