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MONDAY, December 9, 2024
Jumada Al-Thani 8, 1446
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ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

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NEW DAWN

ASSAD OUSTED

- Regime collapses after five-decade rule
- Syrians wake up to new reality led by HTS
- Assad and family in Russia, granted asylum
- Prevent Syria from falling into disarray: KSA
- Israel takes over Golan Heights buffer zone

Arab News Riyadh

Syrians at home and refugees abroad experienced a historic day on Sunday, as they awoke to news of the collapse of the Assad regime that had ruled the country for more than five decades.

Forces led by Abu Mohammed Al-Golani of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, or HTS, took control of the capital Damascus on Sunday morning, the culmination of a rapid attack that began with the taking of Aleppo less than two weeks ago.

Prime Minister Mohammed Ghazi Al-Jalali was seen being escorted by Al-Golani's men to a meeting in which he reportedly handed over power, while anti-regime groups announced on state TV that President Bashar Assad had been overthrown and all prisoners released.

Assad and his family arrived in Russia and were granted asylum by the Russian authorities, Russian news agencies reported, citing a Kremlin source.

The Interfax news agency quoted an unnamed source as saying: "President Assad of Syria has arrived in Moscow. Russia has granted them (him and his family) asylum on humanitarian grounds."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had ordered the Israeli military to "seize" a demilitarized buffer zone on the Golan Heights-Syria border as a result of the overthrow of Assad. "We will not allow any hostile force to establish itself on our border," he said.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia affirms its support for the brotherly Syrian people and their choice.

Residents in Hama set ablaze a large banner bearing a picture of Bashar Assad hanging on the facade of a municipal building on Sunday. AFP

Netanyahu said the events in Syria were "a direct result of the blows we have inflicted on Iran and Hezbollah."

Saudi Arabia called for efforts to prevent Syria from falling into disarray. "The Kingdom affirms its support for the brotherly Syrian people and their choice," the Saudi Foreign Ministry said in a statement. The Kingdom appealed for "concerted efforts to preserve the unity of Syria and the cohesion of its people, so as to prevent it falling into chaos and division."

A US National Security Council spokesperson posted on social media that "President (Joe) Biden and his team are closely monitoring the extraordinary events in Syria and staying in constant touch with regional partners."

"The United States will continue to maintain its presence in eastern Syria and will take measures necessary to prevent a resurgence of (Daesh)," Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East Daniel Shapiro told the Manama Dialogue security conference in Bahrain.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer welcomed the fall of Assad. "The developments in Syria in recent hours and days are unprecedented, and we are speaking to our partners in the region and monitoring the situation closely. The Syrian people have suffered under Assad's barbaric regime for too long and we welcome his departure," Starmer said in a statement.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan told a press conference in Doha: "Turkiye calls on all actors to act with prudence and to be watchful."



The Brief

NEW LOOK

C Front is a lively waterfront destination in Qatif, offering diverse entertainment options along a stunning promenade. **P5**

RUSSIA VISIT

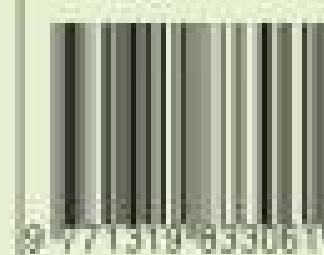
Defense Minister Rajnath Singh is set to launch Indian Navy's new warship in Kaliningrad during his trip to Russia. **P8**

TRADE GROWTH

Saudi Arabia's non-oil activities expanded by 4.8% in the third quarter of 2024, fueled by growth in retail trade. **P12**

ABU DHABI GP

Lando Norris ended McLaren's 26-year wait for the Formula 1 constructors' title as he won Sunday's Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. **P15**



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Spotlight

**FALL OF
ASSAD**
SPECIAL COVERAGE

SYRIA

THE END OF AN ERA

What began as a coup by Hafez Assad in 1970 ends with his son Bashar overthrown and Syria as divided as before

Jonathan Gornall London

In scenes reminiscent of every violent regime change in the Middle East's recent history, on Saturday afternoon, jubilant crowds in the Jaramana suburb of Damascus toppled a statue of Hafez Assad, founder of the family regime that ruled Syria for over half a century.

The beheading of the statue's bust, captured in shaky smart-phone footage, spoke volumes about the roots of the crisis now engulfing Syria.

President Bashar Assad, who fled Syria on Saturday and was given asylum by Russia on Sunday, inherited an autocratic system that his father forged out of the chaos of Syria's post-independence coups.

Hafez Assad, born in 1930 to a poor Alawite farming family, rose through the ranks of the military. Initially training as a pilot, he became involved in Syria's turbulent politics and played a key role in the 1963 Ba'athist coup. By 1966, he was defense minister, and in 1970, he seized power through his so-called Corrective Revolution.

Hafez's rule transformed Syria from a coup-prone state into what the Brookings Institution described as "a highly developed and coercive police state apparatus." For 30 years, he maintained authoritarian stability while suppressing dissent with brutal force. His legacy of repression set the stage for his son's rule.

Bashar Assad, initially pursuing a medical career, was thrust into politics after his older brother and heir apparent, Bassel, died in a car crash in 1994. Bashar entered the Homs Military Academy and spent six years preparing to succeed his father. Following Hafez's death in 2000, Bashar, then 34, became Syria's president, after



Demonstrators trample a carpet with a design showing President Bashar Assad during a protest outside the Syrian consulate in Istanbul, Turkiye, on Sunday. AFP

the constitution was amended to lower the age limit for the office.

Bashar's first test as leader came with the "Damascus Spring," a brief wave of pro-reform protests following his father's death. Demonstrators called for freedom of speech and an end to state oppression, but Bashar crushed the movement through arrests and crackdowns.

A decade later, in March 2011, Syria became swept up in the Arab Spring as mass protests erupted, demanding political reform and the end of Bashar's regime. The Assad government responded with violence, sparking a civil war that the UN officially recognized in 2012. The conflict escalated

as multiple factions, including extremist groups like Daesh and Al-Qaeda, became involved.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates that, by March this year, over half a million people had been killed in the conflict, including more than 164,000 civilians, with millions more displaced.

Throughout the war, the Assad regime employed indiscriminate methods of warfare, including barrel bombs and chemical weapons. Despite international outrage and promises to abandon chemical weapons in 2013, violations persisted. Shocking images of children killed in sarin attacks highlighted the regime's brutality.

As sanctions tightened and Syria's economy collapsed, the Assad regime turned to the production and trafficking of captagon, a highly addictive amphetamine, to sustain itself financially. A February 2023 Arab News investigation revealed that Syria had become the epicenter of captagon production, with active involvement from high-ranking officials and Bashar's brother, Maher Assad.

According to Caroline Rose, a senior analyst at the New Lines Institute, elements of the Syrian government, including Maher's Fourth Armored Division, were central to the captagon trade. The drug, smuggled with the

help of Iranian-backed militias, devastated communities across the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.

The regime's reliance on the drug trade underscored its desperation for revenue amid mounting international isolation. In April 2022, the New Lines Institute described Syria's captagon industry as a "hub for industrial-sized production," driven by ministerial complicity and political necessity.

Meanwhile, the conflict's toll on Syria's civilian population has been catastrophic. Millions remain displaced, living as refugees in neighboring countries or in dire conditions within Syria.

The regime's atrocities have left a legacy of trauma and destruction, with the country's infrastructure and economy in ruins.

In 2012, US President Barack Obama declared that Bashar Assad had "lost legitimacy" and needed to step down, but Assad doubled down on violence. With international efforts to broker a political transition failing, hope for a peaceful resolution seemed distant.

Today, with Bashar reportedly in hiding and Damascus under rebel control, Syrians are cautiously optimistic. After half a century of Assad family rule, the prospect of a future free from tyranny feels closer than ever.

Syria has a bright future without Assad

GHASSAN IBRAHIM

Today we are witnessing the emergence of a new Syria, one that exists without the Assad regime. This marks the end of more than five decades of rule, from Hafez Assad to his son Bashar. This change represents not only a shift for the Syrian people, but also a transformation for the region as a whole.

We are seeing the beginnings of a new Middle East, free from external interventions. What we have observed over the past few days, with Syrian opposition forces advancing in the north and gradually entering cities without destruction or

bloodshed, signifies the transition to a new phase.

This phase does not involve reopening old grievances with Syrian figures from the previous government, nor does it aim to provoke civil wars. This new phase is merely the beginning.

We envision a transitional stage characterized by justice, free from destruction and revenge — a period dedicated to planning for the future rather than dwelling on the past. This transition calls for emphasis on state institutions over individual power, fostering a civil, secular or liberal state that aligns with the diverse



Ghassan Ibrahim is a British-Syrian journalist and researcher on issues regarding the Middle East, most notably Turkiye, Syria and Iran. He can be reached at www.ghassanibrahim.com

identities of the Syrian people.

I believe that the country is on a path toward stability and the reestablishment of normal relations with neighboring countries, leading to a future where Syria becomes a crucial part of the axis of moderation in the region.

Syria should foster relations with both the East and the West, focusing on reconstruction — not just rebuilding infrastructure but also reshaping the entire state. There is a dire need for comprehensive changes in various sectors, from educational curricula to the internal operations of governmental institutions.

Syria requires a new approach to service delivery, emphasizing wise management that improves performance and combats the widespread corruption that has plagued the nation.

While challenges still exist, particularly from groups with militant backgrounds, I believe that the experiences of cities liberated from regime control demonstrate a collective desire to avoid the imposition of a strict religious governance.

We must pursue the vision of an inclusive Syria, one that stands as an exceptional model, having emerged from the shadows of one of the worst regimes in history.



Noor Riyadh fosters artistic and cultural exchange, supporting Riyadh Art's goal of boosting local talent and the city's cultural economy. Supplied

'LIGHT YEARS APART'

Diversity, creativity steal the spotlight at Noor Riyadh

Arab media professionals highlight how artistic movement fuels innovation in the Kingdom

Hebshi Alshammari Riyadh

Arab media professionals attending the Noor Riyadh festival have highlighted the significant artistic activity in Saudi Arabia, noting that the movement drives creativity and innovation in the Kingdom's contemporary arts scene.

Noor Riyadh serves as a platform for cultural exchange, aligning with Riyadh Art's goal of nurturing local talent and boosting the capital's cultural economy. The festival, held under the theme "Light Years Apart" until Dec. 14, features artworks by over 60 artists across three hubs: King Abdulaziz

Historical Center, Wadi Hanifa, and JAX district.

Some 43 international artists from countries including Australia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Türkiye, the UK, the UAE, and the US are showcasing their work, in addition to 18 Saudi artists.

Sara Al-Abri, a journalist at Oman's newspaper Al Roya, told Arab News that the festival stood out for its diverse artworks, with the use of modern technologies like digital lighting and interactive art creating a unique experience.

She said: "What particularly caught my attention was the

innovative integration of art and technology, adding depth and beauty to the venue."

She added that the event also embodied Saudi Vision 2030, which promotes culture and the arts. "I noticed a growing interest in contemporary and digital arts in Saudi Arabia, alongside traditional arts," she said.

Mohammed Alafthan, TRT World correspondent in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council), said contemporary arts in the Kingdom were making enormous strides and almost racing against time to keep up with global advancements, adding: "Saudi society, in all its segments, has a deep appreciation for creativity and visual arts. "The integration of the

Kingdom's ancient civilization with contemporary arts added a magical touch to the Noor Riyadh Festival."

Ahmed Al-Fadalah, a writer for Bahrain's newspaper Al Ayam, said: "The event was truly stunning. I was impressed by the diversity of the artistic forms displayed, reflecting the immense creativity of Saudi artists."

Al-Fadalah highlighted the high quality of the displayed works, and added: "(This) indicates noticeable development in the local art scene.

"An event like Noor Riyadh demonstrates Saudi Arabia's commitment to driving creativity and innovation in contemporary arts."

EXPANSION

Apple to launch online store in Kingdom in 2025, plans iconic retail location in Diriyah

Arab News Riyadh

Apple announced plans on Monday to expand in Saudi Arabia, starting with an online store launch in summer 2025.

The store will offer the full product range with service and Arabic support.

In 2026, Apple will open flagship retail stores, enhancing customer access to products and services.

As part of this expansion, Apple is planning an iconic retail store in Diriyah, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Tim Cook, Apple's CEO, said: "Our teams are looking forward to deepening our connections with customers, and to

bringing the best of Apple to help people across this country explore their passions, build their businesses, and take their ideas to the next level."

Apple's retail expansion builds on its investments in Saudi Arabia, including the region's first Apple Developer Academy, launched in Riyadh in 2021 in partnership with the Saudi government, Tuwaiq Academy, and Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University.

The all-women academy at the university offers world-class training for aspiring coders, designers, and entrepreneurs, preparing them for careers in Saudi Arabia's growing app economy. Nearly

HIGHLIGHT

Apple is investing in Saudi Arabia, creating jobs and introducing technologies for artists, entrepreneurs, small businesses, and commuters. Over the past five years, it has spent over SR10 billion (\$2.6 billion) with local companies.

2,000 students have completed programming courses and are now publishing apps on the App Store for both domestic and global audiences.

Apple is expanding learning opportunities through academy programs and partnerships. This summer, it hosted Saudi Arabia's

first co-ed Apple Foundation Program, a monthlong course on coding and app development focused on gaming.

Apple plans to expand the co-ed foundation offerings, with the next cohort scheduled for spring 2025.

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With the opening of the new metro earlier this month, Riyadh became the latest city to join over 250 others where users can ride transit with Apple Pay.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Rich heritage

Saudi designer finds inspiration in AlUla's history

In AlUla, a region rich in history and natural splendor, young Saudi designer Wejdan Al-Faqiri finds her muse. Drawing from the unique essence of her surroundings, she crafts designs that echo heritage and embody the region's identity.

Al-Faqiri's venture into clothing design stems from her deep appreciation for AlUla's details, evident in her creations and her love for handicrafts.

Recognizing the potential in AlUla's scenic beauty, such as rock formations and date palms, and historical sites, including ruins, Al-Faqiri translates these elements into products that narrate the essence and long-standing stories of the region.

Al-Faqiri's designs have garnered praise from tourists and visitors. Through her artistry, she aims to shine a spotlight on heritage preservation and the repurposing of discarded materials. **SPA Riyadh**

Riyadh conference

Philosophers discuss societal well-being

Speakers from all over the world addressed the fourth Riyadh International Philosophy Conference, which concluded on Saturday.

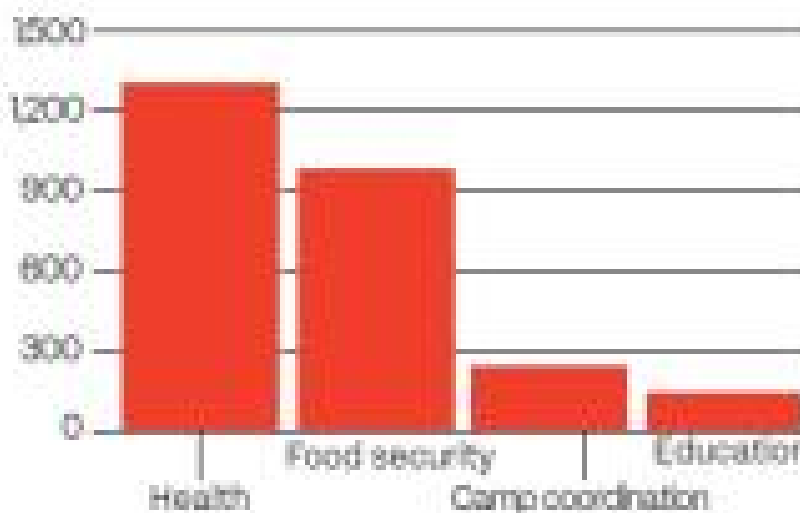
Subjects discussed included humanity's progress and the role of philosophy in shaping a better future in a multicultural world. Other talks focused on the quality of life, philosophy's role in societal well-being, improving urban life in the face of diversity, social solidarity for female athletes with disabilities, and the impact of AI on human life.

Mohammed Alwan, the commission's CEO, said that the conference helps philosophy contribute to addressing pressing global challenges through dialogue among thinkers from various countries.

The event emphasized philosophy's role in tackling contemporary societal challenges, exploring principles of justice, virtue, and happiness essential to prosperous societies. **SPA Riyadh**

The Day's FIGURES

KSRELIEF LARGEST COMPLETED AND ONGOING PROJECTS IN 105 COUNTRIES



Source: ksrelief.org

Cultural gathering

Kingdom to host Arabic day events in New York

The King Salman Global Academy for Arabic Language, in collaboration with the permanent mission of Saudi Arabia to the UN in New York, will stage events from Dec. 9 to 11 at UN headquarters to celebrate World Arabic Language Day.

This year's theme is "Arabic Language and AI — Advancing Innovation While Preserving Cultural Heritage."

The event displays the academy's efforts to promote Arabic in global organizations and highlights Saudi Arabia's dedication to preserving the language's cultural and scientific heritage.

It will include a panel discussion titled "Arabic Translation at the UN," featuring international experts, and a virtual training on "Arabic Translation Skills for Diplomatic Purposes" for UN staff. An Arabic Language Exhibition will feature artistic works and digital displays focused on the language's beauty, history, and impact on other civilizations. **SPA Riyadh**

Humanitarian mission

Saudi project clears 808 Houthi mines in Yemen

Members of Saudi Arabia's Project Masam removed 808 explosive devices from various regions of Yemen last week.

The total included four anti-personnel mines, 65 anti-tank mines, 731 unexploded ordnances and eight explosive devices, according to a report.

Ousama Al-Gosaibi, the initiative's managing director, said a total of 471,842 mines had been cleared since its inception in 2018.

The explosives were planted indiscriminately and posed a threat to civilians, including children, women and the elderly. The demining operations took place in Marib, Aden, Juf, Shabwa, Taiz, Hodeidah, Lahij, Sanaa, Al-Bayda, Al-Dhale and Saada.

The initiative trains local demining engineers and provides them with modern equipment. Teams are tasked with clearing villages, roads and schools to facilitate safe movement for civilians and the delivery of humanitarian aid. **AN Riyadh**

News Saudi Arabia

BUILDING BRIDGES

Saudi Arabia and UK forge deeper ties in trade, tourism and innovation

Kingdom has welcomed more than 165,600 British tourists since 2019

Tamara Aboalsaud,
Manal Al-Barakatli Riyadh

Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom are solidifying their partnership through expanded collaborations in key sectors, including finance, trade, tourism and innovation.

The strategic alignment reflects both countries' shared aspirations for economic growth and diversification, with Saudi Arabia leveraging its Vision 2030 initiative and the UK seeking stronger ties in the Gulf region.

Recent high-level discussions underscore a mutual commitment to bolstering bilateral trade, setting ambitious targets, and fostering cross-industry synergies.

These efforts are underpinned by cultural exchanges, increased tourism flows, and cooperative initiatives in emerging sectors such as clean technology and heritage preservation.

According to data from the UK government's Department for Business and Trade, total trade in goods and services with Saudi Arabia reached £17.6 billion (\$22.4 billion) in the year ending March 2024.

During a top ministerial meeting in Riyadh in September

between Saudi Arabia's Minister of Commerce Majid Al-Qasabi and the UK's Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds, officials discussed a target to increase bilateral trade to £30 billion (\$39.6 billion) by 2030.

After the meeting, Al-Qasabi noted the implementation of 79 initiatives in 13 economic sectors to strengthen Saudi-British relations that have led to more than 30 percent growth between 2018 and 2023.

"Economic growth is this government's driving mission, and boosting trade and investment with some of the world's biggest economies is crucial to that," Reynolds said in a statement.

The Kingdom was the UK's 23rd largest trading partner in the four quarters to the end of the year's first quarter, accounting for 1 percent of total UK trade.

Chairwoman of the Saudi British Joint Business Council Jennie Gubbins spoke to Arab News in November 2023 and said that bilateral trade between Saudi Arabia and the UK had increased 68 percent in the previous year.

She said at the time: "This is just a really exciting time. The relationship between Saudi Arabia and the UK, I think, is better than I've



The Saudi Tourism Authority and VisitBritain signed a declaration of intent to collaborate and share expertise on domestic and international tourism in May 2024. Supplied

We've always had a very strong relationship, but that relationship is getting closer as Saudi Arabia undergoes this huge societal and economic change.

Lucy Frazer
Former UK Secretary of State
for Culture, Media, and Sport

ever seen it, and I've been working between the UK and the Middle East for a long time.

"People who don't know what's going on in Saudi Arabia think maybe it's oil stuff, but it's

all about ... a huge growth in the technology (sector). Things like clean tech, fintech, health-tech, huge interest in all of those things," Gubbins said.

She also said that the council uses Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 as a "blueprint" to direct them toward the areas to focus on with continual growth.

Gubbins highlighted that Saudi megaproject NEOM opening its first international office in London is not surprising considering that Britons are the second-largest group of expatriates working at NEOM.

During a

November event at the British Embassy, Neil Crompton, the ambassador to Saudi Arabia, pointed out that the partnership between the two countries has expanded from traditional defense partnerships to include variable sectors such as tourism, people-to-people relations, and sports, especially since Vision 2030 was announced.

The tourism sector is an area of promising growth, with more British sports personalities, such as the cricketer Kevin Pietersen, visiting Saudi Arabia and many Saudis regularly traveling to London for holidays.

"I think the affection between the two countries is amazing," Crompton said. "Since we

introduced the visa waiver system in June 2022, over 500,000 Saudis have used it to go to London, in addition to the 100,000 who already had a 10-year visa or another passport."

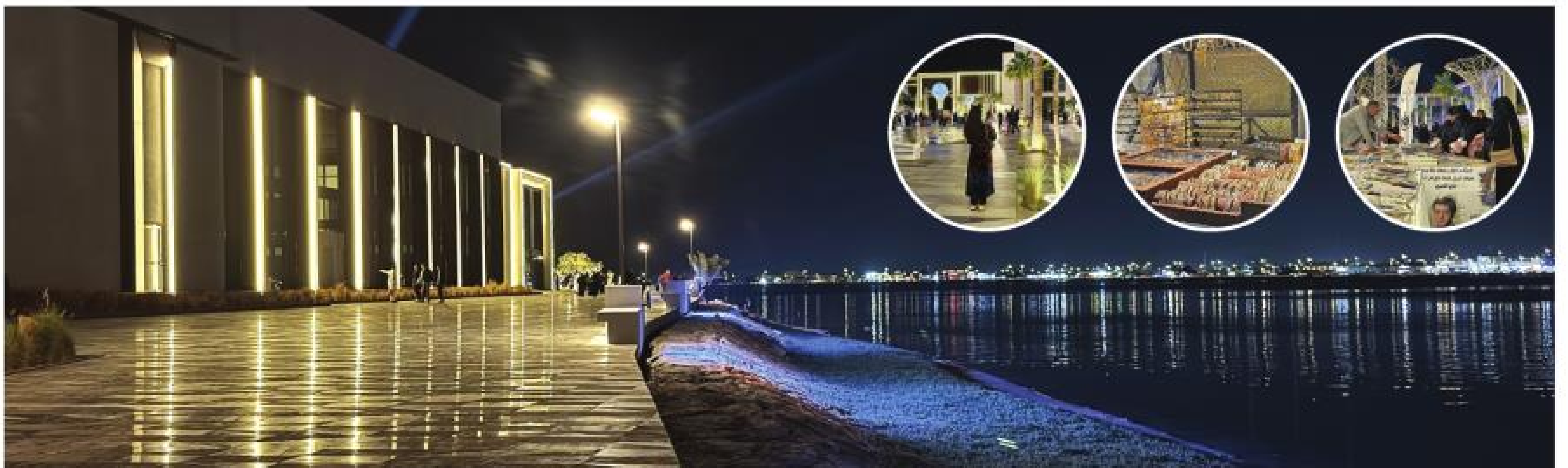
At the Great Futures Conference in May, the Saudi Tourism Authority and VisitBritain, the UK's national tourism agency, signed a declaration of intent to develop and grow tourism.

VisitBritain has predicted there will be 240,000 visitors to the UK from Saudi Arabia this year, a 9 percent increase from 2019.

At the event, Saudi Tourism Minister Ahmed Al-Khateeb said that the Kingdom had welcomed more than 165,600 British tourists and issued 560,462 e-visas for British visitors since 2019.

The former UK Secretary of State for Culture, Media, and Sport Lucy Frazer told Arab News: "We've always had a very strong relationship, but that relationship is getting closer as Saudi Arabia undergoes this huge societal and economic change."

She added: "It's so dynamic and it's got so many ambitions for the future. And in the UK, we would like to be a strong partner in that. So we're collaborating in a number of areas sharing knowledge, sharing expertise, sharing best practice."



C Front boasts a beautiful 2-km promenade for families and friends to stroll along while enjoying captivating views of the glistening waters and lively community; it features local pop-up shops until Dec. 14. AN photos

SHOP AND STROLL

New Qatif promenade beckons locals with coastal views, diverse flavors

Hind Alkhunaiji Dhanran

Nestled in the vibrant Al-Shubaili neighborhood of Qatif, C Front emerges like a jewel along the coast, shimmering against the backdrop of the sea and the picturesque Qatif Corniche.

With 60 commercial units offering everything from trendy boutiques to delightful eateries, C Front promises shopping, dining, and entertainment catering to different tastes.

Upon entering, visitors are

greeted by a lively atmosphere where the salty breeze mingles with the aroma of diverse cuisines. The project boasts a beautiful 2-km promenade for families and friends to stroll along while enjoying captivating views of the glistening waters and lively community.

Enhanced by dancing fountains and spectacular lighting and sound systems, the promenade transforms ordinary shopping trips into extraordinary experiences.

Currently, C FRONT also features exciting pop-up shops that are available until Dec. 14.

These include local abaya designers, clothing shops, Arab perfumes, gold jewelry, frankincense from Oman, dried fruits, books, and a diverse range of restaurants serving sweet delights like chocolate and ice cream, as well as savory options like tacos and burgers.

There is also a play area and an "Ice Kingdom" where kids can play with snow.

While the pop-up shops are temporary, the permanent stores will remain open, promising a wealth of choices, including cafes, food outlets, and family-friendly options.

"The vision for developing C Front is to create a comprehensive destination that reflects the aspirations of Qatif and aligns with the Kingdom's Vision 2030 in supporting economic and social development," said Khaled Al-Rasoul Shahab, executive director of Al-Seef Al-Sharqi Co.

Laila Abualsaud, co-owner of Tree Optics with her husband, expressed her enthusiasm for being involved in this exciting project.

"Tree Optics was founded to deliver an exceptional eyewear shopping experience, emphasizing creativity and quality. We are proud to be the first store to open in the unique C Front location," she told Arab News.

Speaking about what is to come, Shahab said, "We plan to host a series of recreational and cultural events at C Front,

including seasonal markets, live performances, and activities for all ages.

"Collaborations with local and international brands will further enhance its appeal as a key destination in Qatif."

He also highlighted the range of businesses at C Front: "The project features a diverse lineup of restaurants, cafes, fashion shops, and the first hotel in Qatif, elevating service standards and enhancing the shopping experience with numerous options for visitors."

AGGRESSION

Doctor and his family killed in airstrike near Gaza hospital

Residents say Israeli forces blow up clusters of houses in Jabalia, Beit Lahiya and Beit Hanoun

Reuters, AFP Cairo

Israeli shelling hit a hospital in northern Gaza, wounding several people, damaging equipment, and disrupting surgeries, Palestinian health officials said on Sunday.

Hussam Abu Safiya, director of the Kamal Adwan Hospital in the town of Beit Lahiya — one of only three barely operational on the northern edge of the enclave — said the facility was struck by about 100 tank shells and bombs late on Saturday.

“The situation is extremely dangerous. We have patients in the intensive care unit and others awaiting surgeries. Access to the operating rooms is only possible after restoring electricity and oxygen supply,” Abu Safiya said in a statement.

He said the hospital is currently treating 112 wounded people, including six in the intensive care unit.

Israel’s military said it had conducted a review and found that its forces had not struck in the vicinity of the hospital or damaged any of its essential equipment.

Israel’s army “is in continuous coordination with hospital officials to provide humanitarian assistance to the hospital and maintain a consistent liaison,” the military said.

The Health Ministry of Gaza said a doctor was killed with his



family in an Israeli airstrike near the hospital on Saturday night.

Residents said the military blew up clusters of houses on Sunday in the northern Gaza areas of Jabalia, Beit Lahiya and Beit Hanoun, where Israeli forces have operated since October.

Later in the day, an Israeli airstrike killed five Palestinians

Palestinians inspect damage at the site of an Israeli strike on a house at the Nuselrat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip amid the Israel-Hamas conflict. Reuters

in the heart of Gaza City, taking the number of people killed in separate military strikes across the enclave to 11, medics said.

Palestinians say Israel’s operations on the northern edge of the enclave are part of a plan to clear people out through forced evacuations and bombardments to create a buffer zone. The Israeli military

denies this, saying it is fighting Hamas.

The war in Gaza has been raging for over 14 months, with much of the enclave laid to waste and more than 44,000 Palestinians killed, according to Gaza health authorities, as Israeli forces continue their drive to wipe out Hamas and rescue hostages taken

by the militant group.

The deadliest Israeli-Palestinian violence in decades began when Hamas stormed into Israel on Oct. 7, 2023.

Hamas and its allies took 251 people captive.

A total of 96 remain in Gaza, including 34 the Israeli military has confirmed are dead.

A one-week truce in November 2023 saw dozens of hostages exchanged for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, but since then negotiations have failed to make a breakthrough.

Sources within militant groups in Gaza said on Sunday that Hamas had told them to compile information on the hostages they hold in preparation for a ceasefire and hostage-release deal with Israel.

The sources said Hamas told factions, including Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front, and the Popular Resistance Committees, to prepare information such as whether their hostages were alive or dead.

A Hamas source said there had been “intensified contacts” recently between Hamas and Qatari, Egyptian and Turkish mediators, and that the group expected a new round of talks in Cairo “will begin in the coming days.”

The same source called on Israel to halt the war, saying the presence of its forces made it “difficult to reach all the captive groups to know the details of the living and dead prisoners.”

GRAVE RISKS

Prime Minister Mikati urges Lebanese ‘to show wisdom and calm during critical time’

Najla Housseari Beirut

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati stressed the need to tighten control over the border and distance Lebanon from the repercussions of the developments in Syria on Sunday.

Mikati discussed the situation at the Syrian border in a call with Gen. Joseph Aoun, head of the Armed Forces, and other security chiefs.

Lebanon currently hosts around 2 million Syrians, while more than 800,000 are registered with the UN. Many fled Syria after its civil war began in 2011.

Mikati called on the “Lebanese people, of all affiliations, to show wisdom and avoid provocations, especially at this critical time for our country.”

He urged communication with the National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared in Lebanon and the

committee addressing the issue of Lebanese detainees in Syria.

He requested the use of all available resources to contact the relevant parties for the release of hundreds of prisoners in Syrian prisons.

Recent developments in Syria, including the opening of prisons by opposition factions and the release of all detainees, along with videos on social media showing alleged Lebanese prisoners previously considered missing, have sparked widespread anger in Lebanon.

On Sunday, Lebanese citizen Marwan Nouh, who had been imprisoned in Syria, returned to Aarsal, Lebanon.

The president of the Committee of Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon, Wadad Halwani, called on Lebanese authorities to follow up on this issue, especially since Syrian officials had long denied the presence of Lebanese

prisoners in Syrian prisons.

In Tripoli, Sidon, and parts of Beirut, people celebrated the fall of the Syrian regime.

The Lebanese Army Command took security measures “to prevent any threat to civil peace.”

Social media activists circulated a video showing a group of Lebanese youth storming the Arab socialist Baath party’s office in Akkar, northern Lebanon, and removing posters of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad.

Also on Sunday, many pro-regime Syrian families, along with Lebanese families who had been living in Syria, namely in Rablah and surrounding villages, entered Lebanon.

Hezbollah in Bekaa sent out a message urging the residents of the pro-Hezbollah Baalbek-Hermel region to welcome them.

Amid these developments, an Israeli airstrike hit the

eastern ridge between Qoussaya and Anjar.

Early on Sunday, hundreds of Syrians gathered at Masnaa Border Crossing with Syria, waiting for Lebanese General Security to open it.

Many more closely followed the rapid military developments in their homeland through television and social media.

Around 400,000 Syrians returned home from Lebanon during the Israeli assault on southern Lebanon, which lasted for 64 days.

In Aarsal, a border town in eastern Lebanon whose terrain overlaps with Syria and includes the most significant number of Syrian refugee camps, people emerged from their tents at dawn and began chanting enthusiastic slogans.

One camp official, Abu Mohammed, told Arab News that people had not slept.

“We toured these camps in the Qalamoun region, Qusayr, and its countryside. All the people want to return, but we look forward to an orderly exit from Lebanon.”

He said that the refugee committees submitted a request to the relevant authorities in Lebanon to inquire about the procedures for return.

“We have been informed that those wishing to leave Lebanon may do so only once without possibly returning.

“Departure can

occur through Al-Zamrani crossing on the outskirts of Aarsal, a natural geographical passage and not an official crossing, or via Al-Matrabha crossing in Hermel, an unofficial route.

“The former leads refugees to Qalamoun, while the latter directs them to Qusayr.”

The General Directorate of General Security in Lebanon said it would provide all necessary facilities to return Syrians to Lebanon.

It noted that the repeated Israeli assaults on the land border crossings, particularly in the north, have led to the closure of these crossings until further notice to ensure the safety of travelers and entrants.

Consequently, Masnaa Border Crossing remains open for the place of entry and exit, especially for Syrian nationals, under the previously issued temporary exceptional measures and instructions.



Prime Minister Najib Mikati.

News International

HISTORIC COMEBACK

Ghana's ex-president Mahama returns with election win

AFP Accra

Ghana's former President John Dramani Mahama won a historic comeback election victory on Sunday after the ruling party accepted defeat with voters appearing to punish them for the government's handling of an economic crisis.

Following Saturday's election, New Patriotic Party candidate Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia on Sunday conceded Ghanaians wanted change after he failed to shake off widespread frustration over high costs of living.

His defeat ended eight years in

power for the NPP under President Nana Akufo-Addo, whose last term was marked by the west African state's worst economic turmoil in years, high inflation and a debt default.

For opposition National Democratic Congress party's Mahama, president from 2012-2017, it was his third attempt to reclaim the top post after falling short in 2016 and 2020 elections.

"Former President Mahama has won the presidential election decisively," Bawumia told a press conference.

Mahama's NDC also won the parliament elections, Bawumia said, referring to the



Ghana's economic woes dominated the election, after the country went through a crisis of default. Reuters

NPP's own internal collation of election results.

"The people of Ghana have spoken, the people have voted for change at this time

and we respect it with all humility," he said.

The speedy concession came as official vote tallies were still arriving.

Blaring horns and whistles and waving the party's green, white and red flags, Mahama supporters took the streets to celebrate outside the party campaign office in the capital Accra.

"They said he can't come back, and he has come. The nation builder is back to build our Ghana for us," said trader and Mahama supporter Leyla Alhassan enjoying the celebrations.

Mahama has yet to speak publicly. But on his X account, Mahama confirmed he received Bawumia's congratulatory call over his "emphatic victory."

The US Embassy in Accra also applauded a "successful election

that reflects the will of the Ghanaian people."

"The US looks forward to continuing our strong partnerships under" Mahama, it said on X.

Ghana's economic woes dominated the election, after the continent's top gold producer and world's second cacao exporter went through a crisis of default and currency devaluation, ending with a \$3 billion IMF bailout.

Earlier, NDC spokesman Sammy Gyamfi told reporters the party's internal review of results showed Mahama won 56.3 percent of the vote against 41.3 percent for Bawumia.

REFUGEE WOES

Migrants who survived Madagascar boat tragedy arrive back in Somalia

Survivors were stranded in the ocean for 13 days after their boat's engines failed

AP Mogadishu

Nearly 50 survivors of a migrant boat tragedy last month that left 25 people dead in the Indian Ocean off Madagascar arrived back in Somalia and were received by government officials.

The survivors aged 17 to 50 wore outfits made of fabric with the Somali national flag colors as they disembarked from a plane in the capital, Mogadishu, visibly relieved to return to safety.

Many young Somalis embark every year on dangerous journeys in search of better opportunities abroad. The UN agency has previously raised concerns over the rise in irregular migration from Horn of Africa countries as people flee from conflict and drought.

The survivors told The Associated Press that they were stranded in the ocean for 13 days after their boat's engines failed.

Ahmed Hussein, traveling with his now-deceased cousin, said they were heading to Europe hoping for a better life. Two vessels carrying the migrants departed Somalia early last month.

"We were split into two small boats. The engine broke down, and we drifted at sea for 13 days with no functioning engine. We had no food or water, and the (few) dates we had ran out during those 13 days. We survived by catching some fish," he said.



The survivors aged 17 to 50 wore outfits made of fabric with the Somali national flag colors as they disembarked from a plane in the capital, Mogadishu, relieved to return to safety. AP

Officials in Madagascar and Somalia had earlier said the boats capsized but offered no further explanation. The authorities had also put the number of survivors at 48 but only 47 arrived in Somalia and the whereabouts of one survivor remained unclear.

The boats left from a beach near the Somali capital, Mogadishu, on Nov. 2 with 73 people on board and were believed to be

BACKGROUND

• Many young Somalis embark every year on dangerous journeys in search of better opportunities abroad.

• The survivors said they were stranded in the ocean for 13 days after their boat's engines failed.

headed to the French region of Mayotte, according to Jean-Edmond Randrianantenaina, the head of Madagascar's Maritime Ports Agency. Mayotte, an archipelago, is around 1,600 kilometers from Mogadishu.

Abdirashid Ibrahim, another survivor, recalled how some survivors had swollen ankles and couldn't walk after being rescued. "On the boat, we had

nowhere to sleep, no food, and we were crammed together. Some people died from shock, and others succumbed to starvation," he said.

Abdulkadir Bursal, director of the Africa Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who was at the airport to receive the survivors, told journalists that some of the people who helped the migrants embark on the

dangerous journey had been arrested while others died in the incident.

"Eight people involved in the trafficking of Somali migrants have been arrested," he said.

Maryam Yasin, the president's special envoy for migration, said the survivors were happy to be home.

"They assured me they will never take the same risk again."

'ROBBERY AT SEA'

Somali pirates demand ransom for Chinese vessel

AFP Mogadishu

Somali pirates who hijacked a Chinese fishing boat have demanded a ransom payment for the vessel and its 18 crew members, police and local officials said.

It was not immediately clear when the ship was taken hostage by gunmen wielding AK-47

assault rifles but the EU's anti-piracy force drew global attention to the incident on Thursday.

"The pirates are moving the ship off the coast ... they are looking for a safe haven," Mohamed Dini, a police officer in Eyl, a traditional pirate stronghold on Puntland's east coast, said.

The boat was hijacked by

SPEEDREAD

Alli Warsame, a local elder familiar with the case, said a Somali company acting on the boat's behalf had offered to pay a \$300,000 ransom. But the proposal was declined by the pirates.

men who had been contracted to provide "protection" before later being reinforced by other pirates, Dini said, adding that they had demanded payment for its release.

Alli Warsame, a local elder familiar with the case, said a Somali company acting on the boat's behalf had offered to pay a \$300,000 ransom. But the

proposal was declined by the pirates. Local fishermen said the boat came close to Eyl on Friday, but the pirates pushed back into the sea out of fear of Puntland's coast guards.

But "they cannot move deeper toward the ocean because they are afraid of the foreign military ships," said fisherman Abdirahman Said.

STEALTHY HARDWARE

Indian defense minister visits Russia to strengthen military ties

Indian minister will commission Russian-made warship for the Indian Navy

Sanjay Kumar New Delhi

Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh began a three-day trip to Russia on Sunday, as New Delhi seeks to further strengthen its military cooperation with Moscow.

Russia is India's biggest crude oil supplier and the main source of its military hardware, with their bilateral ties spanning over seven decades.

During his visit, Singh is set to commission the Indian Navy's latest warship, a multi-role stealth guided missile frigate INS Tushil in Kaliningrad on Monday, alongside the Chief of the Naval Staff Adm. Dinesh K. Tripathi, the Ministry of Defense said in a statement.

He will also co-chair with his Russian counterpart, Andrey Belousov, a meeting of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental

Commission on Military and Military Technical Cooperation on Tuesday.

"The two leaders will review the entire range of multi-faceted relations between the two countries in the field of defense, including military-to-military and industrial cooperation. They will also exchange views on contemporary regional and global issues of mutual interest," the statement read.

Singh's visit follows a series of high-level meetings between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin earlier this year, which includes their July meeting in Moscow.

Modi and Putin also met in Kazan in October, on the sidelines of the 2024 BRICS summit.

Putin is expected to visit India early next year, according to reports citing the Kremlin.

The Indian defense minister's visit will "symbolize" how the



India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh

India-Russia partnership has continued at a time "when other states have turned against Russia," particularly since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, said Amitabh Singh, associate professor at the Center for Russian and Central Asian Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

"This visit is in continuation with the annual meeting that (the

defense ministers) have. This becomes all the more relevant in the context of ongoing conflict in West Asia and Ukraine," he told Arab News.

New Delhi has abstained from publicly criticizing Russia over the Ukraine war and did not join the chorus of international sanctions slapped on Moscow, despite pressure from Western countries.

While India's dependence on Russian military hardware has decreased over the years as it diversified supply from other countries, Moscow still plays an important role for Indian defense needs, Singh said.

"India has not given up on Russia despite the differences and difficulties that the Russian military supplies are facing," he added. "We cannot stop our collaboration. We want to reduce our dependence, but we can't simply shrug off our dependence on Russia."

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Key player

South Korea's ex-defense minister arrested

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's former defense minister was arrested on Sunday over his alleged role in Yoon's declaration of martial law last week, prosecutors said. Ex-Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun was seen as a central figure in the debacle.

Yoon survived an impeachment vote in the opposition-led parliament late on Saturday, prompted by Tuesday's short-lived attempt to impose martial law, but the leader of his own party said the president would effectively be excluded from his duties before eventually stepping down. **Reuters**

Military activities

Taiwan reports Chinese arsenal near the island

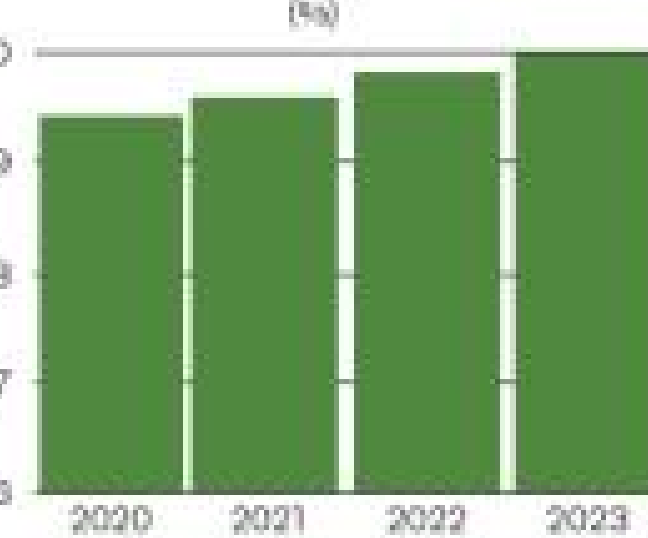
China sent 14 warships, seven military aircraft and four balloons near Taiwan between Saturday and Sunday, according to Taiwan's Defense Ministry, as Beijing ramps up pressure on the island it claims as its own.

China's military activities come amid speculation Beijing might organize military drills around the island in response to Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te's recent visit to Pacific allies, including US stops in Hawaii and Guam. China claims Taiwan, a self-ruled democracy of 23 million people, as its own territory. **AP**

The Day's FIGURES

Source: Statista

COMOROS: URBANIZATION



What We're Reading Today

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

'Europe's Alpine Flowers'

BOB GIBBONS

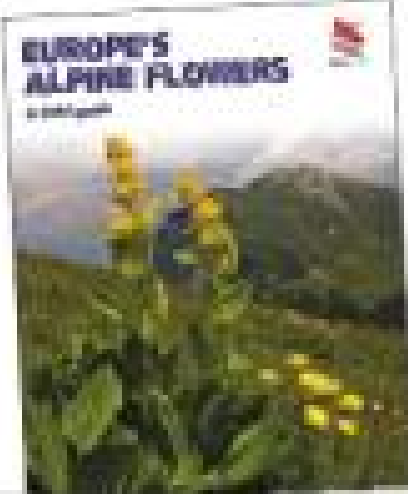
"Europe's Alpine Flowers" covers the flowering plants and conifers that occur regularly on mountains and in Arctic areas north of a line that runs from the Pyrenees to Southern Romania.

For many botanists—and gardeners—the alpine flora is the best it gets. There

are many species adapted to a harsh climate of extreme winter cold and strong winds, including some of our most beautiful rock plants, such as

gentians, saxifrages, and crocuses.

These also include subtle and rare flowers that require care to discover and identify.



Carbon monoxide

Dozens suffer poisoning at Swiss campsite

More than two dozen people suffered from carbon monoxide poisoning during a dinner in a dome tent at a campsite in central Switzerland, police said on Sunday.

"According to initial investigations, there was an excessive accumulation of carbon monoxide in the tent over the course of the evening, causing a number of people to suffer from carbon monoxide poisoning," the police said.

"Twenty-six people were hurt in the incident, with 17 people having to be hospitalized." First responders and rescue workers were deployed to the scene. **AFP**

Kidnapping girl

Around 300 lynch 3 men in Mexico

Three men accused of kidnapping and robbing a girl were lynched by a crowd in central Mexico on Saturday, local authorities said.

Lynchings have increased in Mexico in recent years, with experts saying the perception of impunity leads communities to take justice into their own hands.

The trio were killed on Saturday afternoon in San Juan Amecac, 68 kilometers southeast of the capital Mexico City, a local government statement said. Some 300 people participated in the lynching — hanging and beating the men until they were dead. **AFP**

Wild weather

A surfer rides a wave at Porthcawl, south Wales, on Saturday, as storm Darragh brings winds of nearly 90 mph to the west of Wales and north-west England. High winds and heavy rain have battered western parts of the United Kingdom.

AFP



PEACEFULLY GONE

Pakistani elephant Sonia dies less than two weeks after reunion with sister

Naimat Khan Karachi

Pakistani elephant Sonia died at the Safari Park in Karachi on Sunday morning, an official said, less than two weeks after she was reunited with her sister Madhubala after a 15-year separation.

Sisters Sonia, Malika, Noor Jehan and Madhubala were caught in the wild in Tanzania at a young age and brought

to Pakistan together in 2009 but were soon separated, with Noor Jehan and Madhubala moved to the Karachi Zoo and Malika and Sonia to the city's Safari Park.

Noor Jehan died in April 2023 at age 17 after a prolonged illness caused by neglect, leaving Madhubala alone at the zoo. After a 15-year separation, Madhubala was shifted to the Safari Park on Nov. 26 where she

was reunited with Malika and Sonia, who are estimated to be between 17 and 19 years old.

"Sonia, one of the three elephants at Karachi's Safari Park, passed away this morning," Amjad Zaidi, director of the Safari Park, told Arab News.

"There were no health issues, and she appeared to be in perfect condition," he said.

Dr. Amir Khalil, director of the international animal welfare

organization Four Paws, said a doctor from Lahore would conduct an autopsy examination on Sonia at Safari Park on Monday.

"Based on this post-mortem report, it will be clear what factors led to the unexpected demise of Sonia," Dr. Khalil told Arab News, highlighting that Sonia's last medical report showed she was deficient in protein.

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

One day, the candle will realize that the thread it was embracing was the cause of its own destruction.

Naguib Mahfouz
(Egyptian novelist and Nobel laureate)

Opinion

Setting the seal on a year of Saudi-UK partnership

ALISTAIR BURT



Alistair Burt is a former UK member of Parliament who has twice held ministerial positions in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, as parliamentary undersecretary of state from 2010 to 2013 and as minister of state for the Middle East from 2017 to 2019.
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This has been some year for the historic relationship between Saudi Arabia and the UK, bookended by two landmark events. In May, we saw the largest UK outward-bound trade mission in a decade head to Riyadh. Great Futures saw 450 senior British business representatives, representing a range of sectors, from health, education and tourism to clean energy, technology and investment, celebrate existing links and forge new ones. And the year will have a final seal set on it this week, as it concludes with the state visit of UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

His visit comes at a critical time for the region, as Syria reignites and Gaza awaits the Trump presidency, among other matters. But Starmer will want to ensure the bilateral relationship takes prominence.

Saudi Arabia and the UK demonstrate such a dynamic partnership, woven into the history of the wider region, but containing specific contemporary

ambitions for each other. Starmer has made no secret that the primary aim and drive of his government is growth and he has already shown a willingness to take tough decisions at home, making difficult choices to fulfill his determination. UK growth will depend on expanding trade and investment and, while new partners will always be sought, those who know Britain best are the most likely to recognize the new opportunities that are arising. The PM's visit will both refresh those existing ties and, I believe, prompt new ones on the back of Great Futures.

Our relationship works for both countries. Between 2017 and 2023, more than \$21 billion of investment came to the UK from Saudi Arabia, at a time when Britain was the third-largest source of foreign direct investment the other way. Annual bilateral trade now stands at £17 billion (\$21 billion), up from £12 billion in 2018, and things are moving fast.

I would expect the prime minister to continue the progress on the

long-sought-after free trade agreement throughout the Gulf Cooperation Council, which the UK government calculates as being worth a boost of perhaps £8 billion to trade. I also expect a lot of interest in the technology industries and businesses of the future, with UK companies already heavily involved in Neom and related opportunities. Nor will the people-to-people ties be neglected as, from tourism to education, many thousands travel each way every year.

Starmer's visit comes at a critical time, not only for the region and the world's economic prospects, but also in terms of discussing the two countries' common interest in ending conflict and bringing stability to a region currently devastated by war. The intelligence and security links between the UK and Saudi Arabia remain a core element of the trust and confidence between the two states. I suspect that, although a belief is held in London that the destiny of the Middle East is now being shaped rather more by the region's own states than by external powers, there is an

immense determination to share expertise and support at the tables where decisions must be taken and reassure friends that burdens will continue to be shared by a UK whose interest will never wane.

The UK knows that the new Middle East, as seen in Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia and similar prospectuses elsewhere, cannot afford regional conflict as its backdrop, as people need the opportunities in life that only stability can provide.

Relationships are tested over time and at times of significance. This is such a time. The ability that Saudi Arabia has shown in recent times to drive change on a major scale, look beyond its historical resources and create a new future is built on taking others with it and convincing them that the enmities of the past should be resolved, overcome and put aside in the same manner as old technologies and industries. This visit should allow the UK, from its political leadership to those building the economy of the future, to be seen as a key partner in that endeavor.

While new partners will always be sought, those who know Britain best are the most likely to recognize the new opportunities that are arising

COURTESY AMIAD HAIM/ASHRAF AL-AWESAT



A new generation of African leaders has become increasingly bold in seeking more diverse partnerships

France's changing role in Africa

DR. ABDELLATIF EL-MENAWY



Dr. Abdellatif El-Menawy has covered conflicts worldwide.
X: @ALMenawy

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France is facing an existential challenge to its relationship with its former colonies in Africa, as its political and military influence continues to wane.

New Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye announced last month that France would be forced to close its military bases in Senegal, stating that their presence conflicts with the country's sovereignty. At the same time, Chad issued a sudden statement terminating its defense cooperation agreement with France, while demanding the withdrawal of French forces from their N'Djamena base.

These developments are part of a series of successive withdrawals that began with Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger in 2022, when public and governmental demands for the expulsion of French troops escalated, sometimes even to the point of severing diplomatic ties, as seen in Niger.

France's relationship with Africa dates back to the 17th century, when it established its first trading posts in Senegal.

By the 20th century, French ambitions had evolved into full-scale colonization. Although the colonial era formally ended in the 1960s, France maintained its dominance through economic and military policies, the exploitation of resources and the tying of African currencies to the French franc. Yet, this once seemingly unshakable influence has steadily eroded over recent decades.

This decline stems from several factors. First, the emergence of global competitors like China, Russia and Türkiye, which offer economic partnerships without the strings that often come attached to French agreements. Second, the rising cost of French military interventions at a time when France is grappling with economic crises and social unrest. Third, a new generation of African leaders and grassroots movements that reject traditional alliances and demand greater national sovereignty and independence from former colonial powers.

The French military presence in Africa, once a symbol of influence, has now

become a source of contention. Operation Serval, launched by France in Mali in 2013, marked a clear turning point. Initiated to combat armed groups in the north of the country, the operation was carried out with insufficient coordination with the Malian army or consideration of the country's political and social dynamics.

When Emmanuel Macron assumed the presidency in 2017, he sought to reframe France's relationship with Africa. Macron visited Mali, advocating for a "new approach" based on partnership.

The rise of anti-French sentiment in Africa is not a passing phenomenon, but rather reflects a fundamental change in the balance of power. Africans increasingly view France as a symbol of neocolonial exploitation rather than a partner.

In response to this mounting rejection, France has launched a new strategy to reevaluate its military and political presence in Africa, with greater emphasis on development aid. However, these measures have not been enough to halt the

decline in relations.

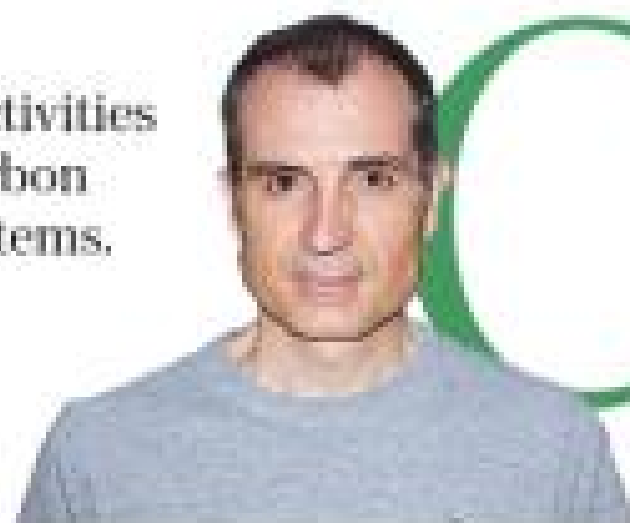
A new generation of African leaders and grassroots movements, born in the post-colonial era, has become increasingly bold in rejecting traditional alliances with France and seeking more diverse partnerships. Social media has amplified these voices, making it difficult for Paris to ignore their demands or reimpose its traditional dominance.

While Macron has promised that "the era of FrancAfrique is over," the decline in French influence is tied to deeper structural issues. Despite ongoing efforts to repair relations and redirect foreign policy, it appears that Paris is coming to terms with the fact that the age of its uncontested dominance in Africa has passed and it must instead adapt to a new reality shaped by multilateralism and equitable partnerships.

France seems to be losing its foothold in Africa faster than it anticipated. As geopolitical transformations continue to reshape the continent, the question remains: can Paris adapt to these new dynamics or is the era of FrancAfrique truly over?

Our projects improve restoration activities and monitor biodiversity and carbon sequestration across Saudi ecosystems.

Prof. Fernando Maestre
KAUST faculty member



COP 16

SPECIAL COVERAGE

SUSTAINABILITY

KAUST at the forefront of Kingdom's green revolution

Translating research into practical innovations, directly aligning with Vision 2030

Nadim Hassan Riyadh

With a vision that merges innovative research and practical solutions, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology is shaping the future of Saudi Arabia by tackling sustainability challenges and driving economic innovation.

Speaking to Arab News on the sidelines of UN Convention to Combat Desertification COP16 in Riyadh, Sir Edward Byrne, president of KAUST, emphasized the university's critical role in achieving the Kingdom's ambitious goals.

"KAUST has two major contributions to make: brilliant science to validate the principles and the direction forward, and technology implementation to enable the journey," he said.

KAUST's Accelerating Impact Strategy focuses on translating research into practical innovations, directly aligning with Vision 2030.

The university's initiatives are addressing pressing environmental challenges, fostering economic development, and positioning KAUST as a global research leader.

"We have several hundred projects currently geared to the environmental needs of the Kingdom," Byrne said.

KAUST is spearheading innovations in agriculture, energy, and water management, sectors vital to Saudi Arabia's future.

The university's Center for Sustainable Food Production is developing salt-resistant crops and advanced soil technologies to enhance dryland farming.

"Our researchers are making better soil that holds water, enabling efficient farming with minimal resources," Byrne said.

In energy, KAUST is pioneering clean energy generation and battery storage solutions.

"We've signed a memorandum on cryogenic carbon capture with the Ministry of Energy, showing how we can safely store carbon while transitioning to a diverse energy mix," Byrne said.

These innovations are not years away but are being developed and implemented now, benefiting both the Kingdom and the global community.

Water sustainability is another priority. KAUST is exploring methods to reduce the energy cost of desalination by up to 90 percent. "Generating water is incredibly energy-intensive," Byrne said.

He added: "We're looking at ways to make it far more efficient,



KAUST is spearheading innovations in agriculture, energy, and water management, sectors vital to Saudi Arabia's future. File

which is crucial for the Kingdom's sustainability goals."

Collaboration

Prof. Sami Al-Ghamdi, a leading expert in environmental impact research at KAUST, highlighted the importance of collaboration.

"Addressing sustainability and environmental issues requires partnerships," Al-Ghamdi said.

He added: "We work with ministries, companies like NEOM, and stakeholders to ensure our research translates into actionable solutions."

Al-Ghamdi stressed KAUST's role in bridging the gap between science and implementation, stating: "We don't just create academic papers. We develop solutions that can be applied locally, nationally, and internationally."

For example, KAUST is advancing the Red Sea research agenda, previously underexplored, to tackle global challenges related to energy, water, and food security.

Through startups and innovations, the university is driving real-world applications of its research.

"We're transforming

lab research into market-ready solutions, addressing issues like climate and environmental sustainability," Al-Ghamdi said.

Sustainability

Prof. Matthew McCabe is at the forefront of KAUST's Earth Observation Dashboard, a tool that monitors land degradation and restoration in real time.

"We are looking for planetary variables that we can turn data into actionable intelligence. And that's going to be of use for things like the Saudi Green Initiative and the African Forest Restoration

Project," McCabe said.

The dashboard provides independent verification of restoration efforts, a critical need as global agreements like the Kunming-Montreal Protocol call for restoring 30 percent of land by 2030.

"You will be aware that in COP there's a number of targets and policies that have been signed by representative countries. The Kunming-Montreal Protocol, for instance, calls for the restoration of 30 percent of land by 2030," McCabe said.

He continued: "Their targets and signatures on pages. What we actually need is independent verification that these activities and actions are actually happening. The beauty of having a platform in space is that it can see everything. It sees everywhere. There's no country that it's not passing over at some point in time."

McCabe underscored the economic benefits of restoring ecosystems noting: "I think having a healthy environment is the centerpiece of a prosperous economy. Full stop, so certainly there's going to be a huge explosion in green jobs."

The platform's capabilities extend beyond Saudi Arabia. "We're using lessons learned here to support large-scale projects like Africa's AFA100, which aims to restore 100

HIGHLIGHTS

● KAUST is developing salt-resistant crops and soil technologies to improve dryland farming.

● The university is pioneering clean energy solutions, including cryogenic carbon capture and battery storage.

● KAUST is working on reducing desalination energy costs by up to 90 percent.

million hectares," McCabe stated.

Land degradation

In another interview with Arab News, Prof. Fernando Maestre's work focused on land conservation through SAUDINet, a network dedicated to sustainable land management, stressed that land is fundamental for achieving sustainability.

"Our projects improve restoration activities and monitor biodiversity and carbon sequestration across Saudi ecosystems," Maestre said.

One critical gap Maestre's team is addressing is the lack of data on soil organic carbon in arid regions.

"There is a lack of data from Saudi Arabia, for instance, and for many other arid and hyperactive regions. One of the key objectives of our research program

is to contribute to fill this gap, providing reliable data obtaining and standardize manner across major Saudi ecosystems on soil carbon," he said.

Maestre added: "Another key component for research is to provide the ground data that are needed to validate remote sensing approaches that are currently being used to monitor biodiversity and to characterize vegetation productivity, to achieving land degradation neutrality."

By combining advanced satellite technology with ground data, Maestre's research supports both local and global sustainability efforts.

"Collaboration is key to addressing global challenges. By working with over 200 scientists from 25 countries, we bring a global perspective to local issues," he added.

Since its founding 15 years ago, KAUST has established itself as a global research powerhouse.

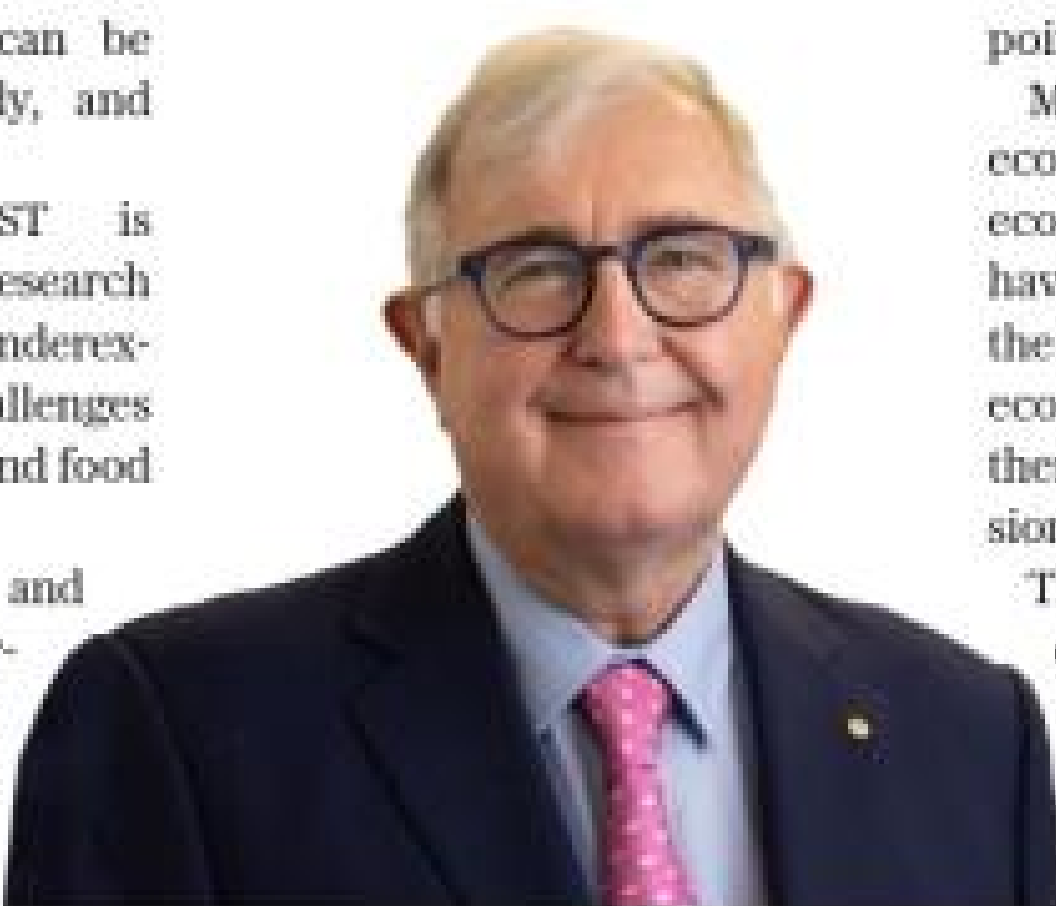
"KAUST is only 15 years old; in an incredibly short period of time, it's recognized globally as one of the world's truly great research universities that draws incredible engineering and scientific talent into the kingdom, and that's happening in an ongoing way," Byrne said.

KAUST's groundbreaking contributions are already transforming Saudi Arabia's view on global science.



We have several hundred projects currently geared to the environmental needs of the Kingdom.

Sir Edward Byrne
KAUST president



ECONOMY

Saudi Arabia's non-oil sector posts 4.8% growth in Q3

Kingdom's real gross domestic product grew by 2.8 percent year on year in the third quarter

Nirmal Narayanan Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's non-oil activities expanded by 4.8 percent year on year in the third quarter of 2024, fueled by growth in the wholesale and retail trade, and restaurant and hotel sectors, official data showed.

According to the General Authority for Statistics, wholesale and retail trade, along with restaurant and hotel activities, grew by 5.8 percent in the third quarter compared to the same period in 2023.

Additionally, activities in the financial, insurance, and business services sectors recorded a 5.7 percent increase year on year during the same period.

Bolstering the non-oil sector is essential for Saudi Arabia as it pursues economic diversification in line with the objectives of Vision 2030.

Last month, speaking at the World Investment Conference, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Economy and Planning Faisal Alibrahim noted that non-oil activities now contribute 52 percent to the Kingdom's gross domestic product.

The latest GASTAT report also highlighted that construction activities rose by 4.6 percent in the third quarter, while the transport, storage, and communication sector expanded by 4.5 percent during the same period.



Saudi Arabia's economic diversification initiatives under Vision 2030 are increasingly reflected in the robust performance of non-oil sectors. Reuters/File

In quarter-on-quarter terms, non-oil activities grew by 0.7 percent in the third quarter.

The report added that Saudi Arabia's real gross domestic product grew by 2.8 percent year on year in the third quarter. Quarter on quarter, the GDP rose by 0.7 percent.

At current prices, the Kingdom's GDP reached SR1 trillion (\$270 billion) during the period, according to GASTAT.

"Crude oil and natural gas activities achieved the highest contribution to the GDP at 22.8 percent, followed by government activities at 16.1 percent, and wholesale and retail trade, restaurants, and hotels activities with a contribution of 10.1 percent," said GASTAT.

Government activities saw a 3.1 percent year-on-year growth in the third quarter, though they contracted by

FASTFACTS

● At current prices, the Kingdom's GDP reached SR1 trillion (\$270 billion) in Q3.

● Activities in the financial, insurance, and business services sectors recorded a 5.7 percent increase year on year.

0.3 percent compared to the previous quarter.

Saudi Arabia's oil activities grew modestly, rising 0.5 percent year on year in the third quarter and 1.2 percent compared to the previous quarter.

Meanwhile, government final consumption expenditure increased by 6.2 percent year on year but declined by 1.8 percent quarter on quarter.

Gross fixed capital formation — a measure of investment in the economy — rose by 4.5 percent year on year in the third quarter and 0.9 percent compared to the previous quarter.

Saudi Arabia's economic diversification initiatives under Vision 2030 are increasingly reflected in the robust performance of non-oil sectors, positioning the Kingdom for sustainable long-term growth.

MINING SECTOR

KSA opens 22 gravel, sand quarry sites for bidding

Mohammed Al-Kinani Jeddah

Saudi Arabia has launched a competitive bidding process for 22 gravel and sand quarry sites to ensure a steady domestic supply of essential materials to support the country's expanding construction sector.

The Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources announced on Sunday that the sites are located in the Eastern Province and the Tabuk region.

The ministry stated that 10 of these sites are located in the Eastern Province, including five gravel licenses at the Al-Masnah Crushers Complex northeast of Hafar Al-Batin and five ordinary sand licenses at the Northwest Salwa Complex. Additionally, 12 gravel licenses are available at the South Wadi Amq Complex, situated southeast of Haql in the Tabuk region.

This initiative is part of Saudi



This initiative is part of Saudi Arabia's broader plan to develop its mining sector. File

Arabia's broader plan to develop its mining sector into a third pillar of its industrial base, alongside oil and petrochemicals.

The Kingdom is home to more than 5,300 mineral sites, estimated to be worth approximately SR5 trillion (\$1.33 trillion), and the Ministry of

Industry and Mineral Resources is focused on tapping into these resources to drive economic growth.

To this end, the government has launched the Accelerated Exploration Program to effectively harness the Kingdom's mineral wealth and support the development of the mining industry. This initiative aligns with Saudi Vision 2030 and the National Industrial Development

and Logistics Program.

Applications for the quarry site licenses will be accepted from Dec. 10-19. Interested investors can visit the "Taadeen" platform for more details.

The competition will unfold in four stages: meeting qualification requirements, announcing qualified competitors, bidding on the sites, and revealing the winning bidders. This process is designed to ensure transparency and uphold high standards within the mining sector's investment environment.

Last month, the ministry awarded 11 mining exploration permits to local and international companies for six exploration sites. These sites, covering a total area of 850 sq. km in Riyadh, Makkah, and Asir, were granted through a competitive licensing process aimed at strengthening the country's mineral sector.

STOCKS

Saudi main index edges up to close at 11,955

Reem Walid Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's Tadawul All Share Index posted a modest gain on Sunday, rising 23.39 points, or 0.20 percent, to close at 11,955.24.

The benchmark index saw a total trading turnover of SR4.58 billion (\$1.22 billion), with 158 stocks advancing and 70 declining.

Meanwhile, the Kingdom's Nomu market also saw positive movement, rising 313.47 points, or 1.01 percent, to close at 31,215.27. Of the 87 stocks listed on Nomu, 58 posted gains, while 29 experienced losses. The MSCI Tadawul Index increased by 2.47 points, or 0.17 percent, closing at 1,497.49. The best-performing stock of the day was Al-Baha Investment and Development Co., which saw its share price surge by 10 percent, closing at SAR 0.33.

Other notable gainers included MBC Group, whose shares rose by 5.31 percent to SR57.50, and Saudi Chemical Co., which saw a 4.9

percent increase to SR10.28.

On the downside, Dr. Soliman Abdel Kader Fakeeh Hospital Co. recorded the largest drop, falling 3.81 percent to SR68.20. National Co. for Learning and Education also saw its stock price decline by 3.67 percent, closing at SR230.80. Bawan Co. saw a 2.92 percent drop,

HIGHLIGHT

The benchmark index saw a total trading turnover of SR4.58 billion (\$1.22 billion), with 158 stocks advancing and 70 declining.

ending the session at SR48.15.

On the announcements front, the Saudi Exchange announced that it will begin listing and trading shares of Jabez International Co. for Information System Technology on the main market starting next Tuesday, following its transfer from Nomu.

Business News



Egypt's rise from 63rd place in 2015 underscores the nation's commitment to establishing itself as a global air transport hub. File

INFRASTRUCTURE

Egypt rises in aviation index with \$626m boost

Reforms position Egypt to lead in global air transport connectivity

Miguel Hadchity Riyadh

Egypt's aviation sector has risen 36 positions in the Air Transport Infrastructure Index, reaching 27th place globally in 2024, highlighting significant progress in the industry.

A report from the Cabinet's Media Center emphasizes that the country's rise from 63rd place in 2015 underscores the nation's commitment to establishing itself as a global air transport hub and improving its aviation infrastructure.

The analysis, released on Dec. 7, International Civil Aviation Day, stated that Egypt's Civil Aviation Ministry had earmarked 31.3 billion Egyptian pounds (\$626.7 million) for projects to enhance airport facilities,

modernize navigation systems, and strengthen safety measures, with completion targeted by June 2027.

"The Egyptian state is committed to enhancing the air transport system, a vital sector that supports the national economy," the Cabinet said in a statement.

The report highlighted improvements in Egypt's aviation sector. In the Air Transport Services Efficiency Index, Egypt rose to 23rd in 2024, compared to 40th in 2019. Similarly, the country advanced to 31st in the Airport Connectivity Index in 2024, up from 38th in 2019.

Since 2014, Egypt has increased its airport capacity by 28.5 percent, accommodating 66.2 million passengers in 2023, up from 51.5 million. The addition of four new travel

HIGHLIGHTS

• Egypt's Civil Aviation Ministry has earmarked 31.3 billion Egyptian pounds (\$626.7 million) for projects aimed at enhancing airport facilities, modernizing navigation systems, and strengthening safety measures, with completion targeted by June 2027.

• Since 2014, Egypt has increased its airport capacity by 28.5 percent, accommodating 66.2 million passengers in 2023, up from 51.5 million.

facilities has further bolstered this growth.

Sphinx International Airport has a capacity of 900 passengers per hour, while Berenice International Airport can handle

600 passengers per hour. Both Bardawil and Capital International Airports accommodate 300 passengers per hour.

Several key projects are transforming Egypt's aviation landscape. At Cairo International Airport, the baggage handling capacity was increased from 4,800 to 12,000 bags per hour.

Borg El Arab Airport saw the opening of a new terminal, expanding its capacity from 1.2 million to 6 million passengers annually. Sharm El Sheikh Airport's capacity was also increased to 10 million passengers annually.

Additionally, radar systems now cover 83 percent of Egypt's airspace, with investments totaling €206.6 million.

As part of its strategy to boost operational efficiency, Egypt began transferring the management of its airports to the private sector in March.

ENERGY

Aramco cuts January oil prices for Asian buyers

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi Aramco has reduced its January 2025 pricing for Arab Light crude oil for Asian buyers, according to the latest price list released by the state-owned oil giant. The official selling price for Arab Light crude was cut by

80 cents, bringing it to \$0.90 per barrel above the regional benchmark.

Similarly, the OSPs for Arab Extra Light and Super Light grades were also reduced by 60 cents per barrel and 70 cents per barrel respectively for January, while the OSPs for Arab Medium and Heavy grades saw cuts of 70 cents per barrel.

For North America, Aramco set the January OSP for its flagship Arab Light crude at \$3.80 per barrel above the Argus Sour Crude Index, according to an official statement.

Aramco produces five grades of crude oil: Super Light, Arab Light, Arab Extra Light, Arab Medium, and Arab Heavy.

These grades are distinguished by their density: Super

FASTFACTS

• The price for Arab Light crude was cut by 80 cents, bringing it to \$0.90 per barrel above the regional benchmark.

• The OSPs for Arab Extra Light and Super Light grades were also reduced by 60 cents per barrel and 70 cents per barrel respectively.

• For North America, Aramco set the January OSP for its flagship Arab Light crude at \$3.80 per barrel above the Argus Sour Crude Index.

Light has a density of more than 40, Arab Extra Light ranges between 36 and 40, Arab Light between 32 and 36, Arab Medium between 29 and 32, and Arab Heavy has a density of less than 29.

The global oil market has been under pressure in recent days. For the week, Brent was on track to fall by more than 2 percent, while West Texas Intermediate was on course for a roughly 1 percent drop.

Last week, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, a group known as OPEC+, pushed back the start of oil output rises by three months until April and extended the full unwinding of cuts by a year until the end of 2026.

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Assets

China's November FX reserves rise unexpectedly

China's foreign exchange reserves increased in November, official data showed on Saturday, defying market expectations of a decline.

The country's foreign exchange reserves — the world's largest — grew by \$5 billion last month to \$3.266 trillion, above a Reuters forecast of \$3.23 trillion and up from \$3.261 trillion in October.

The yuan weakened 1.8 percent against the dollar in November, while the dollar last month rose 1.8 percent against a basket of other major currencies.

Reuters

Debt market

Eurozone bond yields dip after US jobs data

Eurozone government bond yields dipped after data showed the US jobs market performed better than expected in November, but kept the Federal Reserve on track to cut rates in December.

The closely watched gap between French and German bond yields also narrowed as investors spied some glimmers of hope about a potential budget being passed despite a political crisis.

Germany's 10-year bond yield was last very slightly higher at 2.109 percent, having traded at 2.123 percent before the data was released.

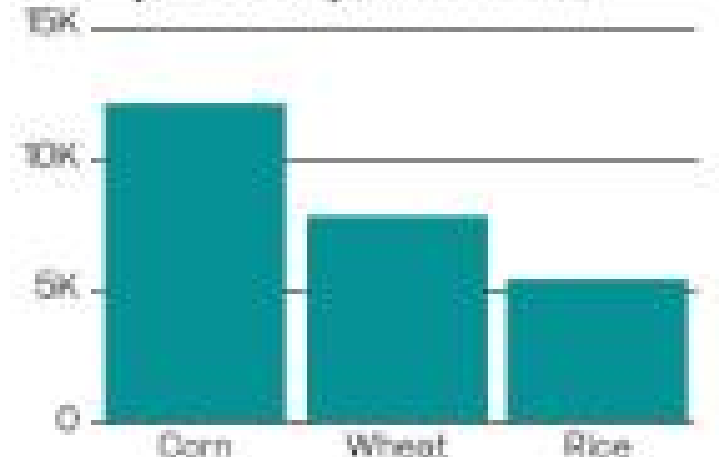
Reuters

Chart of THE DAY

The worldwide production of wheat was recorded at 784.91 tonnes in 2023-24.

Source: Statista

GLOBAL GRAIN PRODUCTION (2023-24) (in million tonnes)



What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

The Unbeatable CEO

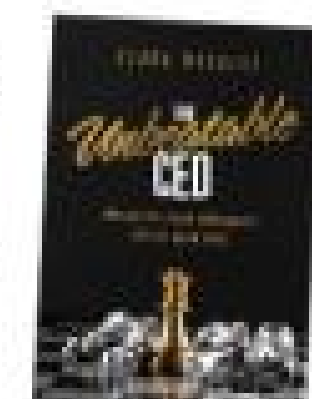
CLARK VITULLI

"The Unbeatable CEO" offers a transformative approach to leadership, aiming to break the common thread of executive burnout and loneliness at the top, says a review published on goodreads.com.

Authored by Clark Vitulli, a seasoned leader

with over 50 years of business experience, this book guides exhausted entrepreneurs and executives looking to redefine their approach to leadership.

It will help revitalize leadership styles, fortify business foundations, and guide leaders toward enduring success.



Employment

Canada jobless rate jumps to 8-year high

Canada's unemployment rate jumped 0.3 percentage points to an eight-year high of 6.8 percent in November as more people looked for work, the national statistical agency said.

Excluding 2020 and 2021, when lockdowns to slow the spread of COVID-19 dramatically affected work, this was the highest level since January 2017, Statistics Canada said.

Following little change in October, employment increased by 51,000 in the month. Gains were mostly in full-time work, and almost all in the public sector, it said.

AFP

Trade

US clears export of advanced AI chips to UAE

The US government has approved the export of advanced artificial intelligence chips to a Microsoft-operated facility in the UAE as part of the company's partnership with Emirati AI firm G42, Axios reported.

Microsoft invested \$1.5 billion in G42 earlier this year, giving the US company a minority stake and a board seat. As part of the deal, G42 would use Microsoft's cloud services to run its AI applications.

The US Commerce Department and G42 did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for comment.

Reuters

Airbus has appointed Eid Al-Qahtani as president for its new regional headquarters in Riyadh.



PRESS RELEASES

FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

New Murabba unveils ESG & decarbonization strategies

New Murabba, a Public Investment Fund company, has announced the launch of its environmental, social, and governance and decarbonization strategies, coinciding with International ESG Day, observed on Nov. 30. These strategic frameworks reinforce New Murabba's commitment to sustainable development and align with the Kingdom's Vision 2030.

New Murabba's comprehensive decarbonization strategy charts a clear path toward a low-carbon future, echoing the goals set out in the Saudi Commitment to Carbon Neutrality by 2060 and the PIF's pledge for operational net-zero emissions by 2050. This approach aligns seamlessly with the ambitious targets of the Saudi Green Initiative, which seek to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, champion renewable energy adoption, optimize energy efficiency, utilize low-carbon materials, and embrace circular economy principles.

Developed through extensive collaboration with employees, stakeholders, and leadership, New Murabba's ESG strategy underscores its dedication to responsible and sustainable practices. The strategy outlines clear objectives and actions across three core pillars:

- **Environment:** minimizing environmental impact through initiatives such as carbon footprint reduction and responsible resource management.
- **Social:** creating a positive social impact by fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion, prioritizing worker well-being and safety, and upholding strong ethical standards.



By prioritizing sustainability in every facet of its design and operation, New Murabba will serve as a model for responsible urban development.

- **Governance:** strengthening corporate governance through robust risk management, transparency, accountability, and responsible leadership.
- "We're proud to launch our ESG and decarbonization strategies, marking a significant milestone in our journey toward creating a sustainable urban destination," said Michael Dyke, CEO of New

Murabba. "Our decarbonization strategy is a testament to our dedication to supporting the Kingdom's vision for a carbon-neutral future by 2060. New Murabba is committed to leading by example, demonstrating how responsible development can drive positive change for both our community and the planet. We are confident that these strategies

will enhance our environmental performance and create long-term value for our investors and stakeholders." New Murabba's dedication to ESG principles and decarbonization strengthens confidence among stakeholders who prioritize sustainable and impactful development. The project's proactive approach

to sustainability positions it as an attractive prospect for those seeking long-term value and positive environmental and social outcomes. The strategies are intrinsically linked to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, supporting key goals such as SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and SDG 13 (climate action).

GLOBAL CONFERENCE

Saudi Electricity Company is UNCCD COP16 gold partner

The Saudi Electricity Company is participating as a gold partner of the 16th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, which is being held in Riyadh from Dec. 2 to 13.

The partnership is in line with the company's commitment to its role in supporting global efforts to achieve environmental sustainability, combat desertification, and enhance the preservation and sustainability of natural resources — all with the ultimate goal to ensure a prosperous future for generations to come.

The UNCCD COP16 is being attended by global leaders and decision-makers, along with environmental experts and representatives from various industrial sectors, to discuss sustainable solutions and environmental

challenges facing the world.

In a statement, CEO of SEC Khaled bin Salem Al-Ghamdi said: "We are proud of our partnership with this global conference, which represents an important platform to unify global efforts in facing environmental challenges, protecting natural resources, and enhancing cooperation with government agencies in these fields. We strive to enhance our investments in environmental preservation in line with our strategy for environmental, social, and corporate governance practices. We also aim to invest in clean and sustainable energy, and work on initiatives that enhance the company's practices in the circular economy and achieve a comprehensive and sustainable transformation in the energy sector."

Saudia Dairy and Foodstuff Company, known as SADAFCO, and Hyperview Logistics Company, owned by Hyperview Mobility (Shanghai) Company Ltd., have signed a non-binding groundbreaking memorandum of understanding to drive the adoption of hydrogen-powered logistics in Saudi Arabia. This collaboration marks a significant step toward achieving sustainable transportation and aligns with the goals of Saudi Vision 2030.

The partnership is currently in discussions to explore the possibility of testing hydrogen-powered trucks in the Kingdom.

SADAFCO described it as a testament to the company's commitment to reducing its environmental impact and embracing innovative

HYDROGEN MOBILITY

SADAFCO, Hyperview partner for sustainable transportation



This collaboration marks a significant step toward achieving sustainable transportation.

technologies. SADAFCO aims to achieve a zero-carbon fleet by 2045, with plans to have 90 percent of its fleet powered by clean energy by 2035. This initiative complements its ongoing efforts to test and integrate electric trucks in the Middle East. By collaborating with Hyperview, a leader in hydrogen mobility, SADAFCO is poised to redefine logistics operations in Saudi Arabia with zero-carbon solutions.

Dr. Feilong Liu, CEO of Hyperview Mobility, said: "This collaboration with SADAFCO is an exciting opportunity to showcase the potential of hydrogen-powered transportation in one of the world's most dynamic markets. Together, we aim to set new benchmarks for sustainable logistics."

Brian Strong, chief transformation officer of SADAFCO, added: "SADAFCO is proud to partner with Hyperview in advancing our zero-carbon fleet strategy."

Corporate Briefs

THE BEST OF THE BEST

Leadership

Airbus appoints president for regional HQ in KSA

Airbus has appointed Eid Al-Qahtani as president for its new regional headquarters in Riyadh, underlining the company's long-term commitment to the Kingdom and the wider region. Al-Qahtani will focus on strengthening partnerships with governments and stakeholders while driving new business in the region.

Airbus' regional headquarters located in Riyadh represents an expansion of the company's commercial, defense, space and helicopter businesses in the Kingdom and beyond. Since the 1970s, Airbus has significantly grown its presence in Saudi Arabia, continuously increasing its contribution to the Kingdom's aviation and aerospace sector.

Hospitality

Radisson supports sports with WFS sponsorship

Radisson Hotel Group hosted global sports leaders and attendees at the World Football Summit Asia 2024, which took place on Dec. 2 and 3 in Riyadh.

As the official hospitality and accommodation sponsor for the event, Radisson hosted the summit's welcome reception dinner while providing world-class accommodation for speakers, partners, and attendees.

As part of its ongoing support for the sports ecosystem, Radisson has developed its Sports Approved Program to cater to the needs of sports professionals, managers, coaches, and fans.

Malware

Most KSA firms fear AI-driven cyberattacks

A recent Kaspersky study reveals that businesses are increasingly worried about the growing use of artificial intelligence in cyberattacks. According to the findings in Saudi Arabia, 82 percent of surveyed companies reported a rise in cyber incidents over the past year, with almost half of respondents (62 percent) noting that many of these attacks were likely AI-driven. The study underscores the reality that AI, which has revolutionized numerous industries, is now also empowering cybercriminals, adding an additional layer of complexity to the threats businesses face.

The Washington Wizards withstood a 56-point explosion from Denver star Nikola Jokic to beat the Nuggets 122-113.



Sport News

SAUDI PRO LEAGUE

Benzema endorses KSA's 2034 World Cup bid

During Jeddah visit, superstar stresses importance of sport's grassroots development

Arab News Jeddah

French and Saudi Pro League superstar Karim Benzema expressed his confidence in Saudi Arabia's readiness to host the FIFA World Cup in 2034 during a recent meeting with young players in Jeddah.

The 2022 Ballon d'Or winner met trainees from the Saudi Football Federation's regional training centers at the weekend and emphasized the importance of grassroots development in building a competitive footballing generation.

Benzema, who joined Al-Ittihad in 2023 as part of Saudi Arabia's efforts to elevate its football scene, praised the country's transformation and extended an open invitation to the people of the world to experience its culture.

He said: "I advise you to visit Saudi Arabia. Anyone who has a preconceived idea should come for themselves. It is a wonderful country."

The striker also paid tribute to the nation's commitment to nurturing young footballing talent, saying: "Saudi football is developing, and I am confident that after 10 years Saudi Arabia will be fully prepared (for the World Cup)."

"Training and development begin with the young players, and this is the most important thing — creating a generation



FAST FACT

Saudi Arabia is the sole bidder for the 2034 World Cup and aims to become the second Middle Eastern country to host the tournament following the competition in Qatar in 2022.

Benzema praised the country's transformation and extended an open invitation to the people of the world to experience its culture. AFP

that can reach the highest level."

Saudi Arabia is the sole bidder for the 2034 World Cup and aims to become the second Middle Eastern country to host

the tournament following the competition in Qatar in 2022.

The Kingdom has embarked on an ambitious sports development strategy under its Vision

2030 framework, investing heavily in domestic leagues, infrastructure, and youth programs.

The official announcement

of the 2034 FIFA World Cup hosts is expected this month, with Saudi Arabia poised to host the world's biggest footballing event.

YAS MARINA CIRCUIT

Norris wins in Abu Dhabi, McLaren seal constructors' title

AFP Abu Dhabi

Lando Norris coolly claimed victory in a tense, emotional and incident-filled Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on Sunday to deliver McLaren's first constructors' championship in 26 years as Lewis Hamilton finished a remarkable fourth in his final race for Mercedes.

The 25-year-old Norris came home 5.832 seconds ahead of Carlos Sainz and his teammate Charles Leclerc to end Ferrari's title challenge on a night of accidents, penalties and tantrums under the floodlights at the Yas Marina Circuit.

"Papaya on top!" said Norris on his slowdown lap after the season-closing race.

"Congrats to everyone. Incredible. So proud of you all. You all deserve this. It's been a special one. Next year is going to be my year too."

McLaren had not won the teams'

Lando Norris celebrates on the podium after winning the Abu Dhabi Formula One Grand Prix at the Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi on Sunday. AFP



title since 1998, the year before Norris was born, and started the day with a lead of 21 points and a front row lockout, but saw Oscar Piastri sent spinning in a clash with newly crowned four-time champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull at the first corner.

This encouraged Ferrari, with Leclerc starting 19th on the grid,

and they mounted a defiant if vain bid for glory, finishing second and third ahead of Hamilton, who passed teammate George Russell on the final lap.

Russell came home fifth ahead of Verstappen, who was one of several drivers to be handed a 10 second penalty for his crash into Piastri, and Alpine's Pierre Gasly

SPEEDREAD

- Norris came home 5.832 seconds ahead of Carlos Sainz and his team-mate Charles Leclerc to end Ferrari's title challenge on a night of accidents, penalties and tantrums.

- Lewis Hamilton finished a remarkable fourth in his final race for Mercedes. Russell came home fifth ahead of Verstappen.

with Nico Hulkenberg taking eighth for Haas.

Fernando Alonso was ninth for Aston Martin and Piastri, after a battling drive, 10th in the second McLaren.

In hot, dry and clear conditions, Norris made a clean start from his eighth pole of the year to lead into Turn One where Verstappen

attacked Piastri on the inside and made contact with his car to send both spinning.

Piastri waited to rejoin in 20th and last, but Verstappen squeezed back into 11th as team-mate Sergio Perez's miserable season concluded with a spin out at Turn Six after contact with Valtteri Bottas's Sauber.

Leclerc, with a scintillating surge on the opening lap, rose from 19th to eight.

Verstappen was given a 10-second penalty for his "dive bomb" move on Piastri, who reported "yep, move of a world champion there" on McLaren team radio.

After a brief Safety Car intervention, Piastri hit the rear of Franco Colapinto's Williams, forcing the Argentine to pit with a puncture. Piastri also pitted for fresh hards before being given a 10-second penalty, as was Bottas for his part in ending Perez's race.

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Premier League

Arsenal's title bid dented by Fulham draw

Arsenal missed the chance to close to within four points of Premier League leaders Liverpool after being held to a 1-1 draw at Fulham on Sunday.

Bukayo Saka had a late winner ruled out by a VAR review for offside as the Gunners' four-match winning streak was halted in west London.

Raul Jimenez had fired Fulham into an early lead before William Saliba leveled thanks to another Arsenal goal from a corner. Mikel Arteta's men edge above Chelsea into second, six points adrift of Liverpool. AFP

Test cricket

Australia bounces back to beat India

Australia bounced back from a heavy home defeat to level the Border-Gavaskar test series at 1-1 after a comprehensive 10-wicket win in the second test against India on Sunday.

Pat Cummins took 5-57 as he bounced out the Indian lower order, with the visitors crashing to 175 all out in its second innings for a slender 18-run lead. Usman Khawaja and Nathan McSweeney then guided Australia safely to a ten-wicket victory to ease the pressure that had been building since the hosts were humbled by 295 runs in the 1st test at Perth. AP



NBA

Jokic shines, but Nuggets fall to Wizards

The Washington Wizards withstood a 56-point explosion from Denver star Nikola Jokic to beat the Nuggets 122-113 and snap their 16-game NBA losing streak.

Jokic, who won his third NBA Most Valuable Player award last season, posted a career scoring high — surpassing a 53-point performance in game four of the 2023 Western Conference semifinals against Phoenix and a 50-point regular-season best against Sacramento in 2021. AFP

Follow Arab News Briefs all through the day @ArabNews

Prominent Egyptian producer Mohamed Hefzy is setting up shop in Saudi Arabia by opening an outpost of his Film Clinic production company in Riyadh, he told Variety at the Red Sea International Film Festival in Jeddah.



Finally

TheSix

Eating Out

If you're a fan of tender steaks and succulent chops, visit any of these six meat-centric restaurants in Jeddah for a hearty meal.



Chef Eyad

Order a melt-in-the-mouth meat cut of your choice and get a host of refillable accompaniments.



Uncle Khalil's BBQ

Known for cooking their dishes "low and slow," their 16-hour meat will leave you yearning for more.



Sultan's Steakhouse

This Turkish restaurant serves a wide range of premium quality meat cuts — their meatballs with cheese is a must try.



Fogo de Chao

This upscale Brazilian restaurant will give you an hearty churrasco experience with flavorful side dishes from the country. The restaurant is also known for its feijoada, a traditional black bean stew made with sausage and served with rice.



Cribs of Ribs

Their 12-hour slow-cooked smoked brisket with brioche bread and wagyu beef burgers are tantalizing. The eatery also offers fall-off-the-bone Gulf dishes served with rice.



7ribs

Brisket tacos, sandwiches, burgers or just steaks, their delectable dishes will hit all the right notes.

CLOSE UP

Olivia Wilde inspires emerging filmmakers



Nada Hameed Jeddah

Hollywood star Olivia Wilde took center stage during an In Conversation segment on Sunday at the Red Sea International Film Festival in Jeddah's Al-Balad.

Known as an actor, director, and producer, Wilde's career includes acclaimed roles in film and television, including "House" and "Tron: Legacy." Her directorial debut in 2019's "Booksmart" made waves before she followed it up with the 2022 Venice Film Festival title "Don't Worry Darling."

Reflecting on the challenges of modern filmmaking, she said: "Out of boredom comes great ideas sometimes, but now no one's ever bored. Kids are much more interesting and imaginative than adults because they haven't been indoctrinated by clichés. As filmmakers, it's so important to challenge ourselves and not force our stories to be something familiar."

She also pointed out that narratives from diverse cultures can offer refreshing perspectives.

She said: "When you get out of what I consider to be the central hub of entertainment in the Western world, you find a lot

more interesting stories because people aren't raised with the same materials and cycles.

"Films coming from societies that haven't been indoctrinated with the same clichés have a singularity that is incredibly refreshing."

Wilde likened the filmmaking process to solving a puzzle, highlighting the integral role of casting, and added: "Casting is the most important part of the process because putting together a film is like solving a puzzle."

"If you aren't chosen, it's not because you're a failure — it's about whether you fit into the bigger picture of that specific project."

Wilde most recently starred in and directed "Don't Worry Darling," which debuted at the 2022 Venice Film Festival and grossed nearly \$100 million worldwide.

She said: "A director should be so prepared that they can answer any question."

"Actors enjoy taking risks and being vulnerable when there's a director who feels like they have their backs."

Reflecting on her dual experience as an actor and director, she added: "My experience acting made me a better producer and director because I understood the extreme vulnerability actors experience every day on set."

Olivia Wilde spoke to Dhafer L'Abedine on stage before she posed in the festival's studio area. Getty Images



Brad Pitt

NEW FILM

Brad Pitt turns heads at Abu Dhabi Grand Prix

Arab News London

Hollywood megastar Brad Pitt brought a touch of cinematic glamor to the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix this weekend as he continued filming scenes for the highly anticipated movie "F1," set to hit cinemas in June next year.

Pitt was spotted at the Yas Marina Circuit during Friday's practice sessions, wearing a white racing jumpsuit as he posed with teams and filmed scenes alongside co-star Damson Idris.

The pair were photographed with Ferrari's Carlos Sainz Jr. and Charles Leclerc, with the Spanish driver sharing selfies featuring Pitt, Idris, Leclerc and Ferrari team members, captioned: "Look who photobombed our team pic."

In the film, Pitt stars as Sonny Hayes, a fictional 1990s F1 driver who makes a dramatic return to the track after a career-ending crash to mentor rookie Joshua Pearce, played by Idris.

The movie contains a stellar ensemble cast, including Javier Bardem, Sarah Niles, Kerry Condon and Tobias Menzies, with Joseph Kosinski directing. Adding authenticity, seven-time F1 champion Lewis Hamilton and legendary producer Jerry Bruckheimer are among the project's key drivers.

The film blends the real-world of Formula 1 through fictional storytelling and the help of all 10 F1 teams. Real-life drivers such as Hamilton, Max Verstappen, Fernando Alonso, Sergio Perez and Sainz appear as themselves, adding an extra layer of authenticity.

Pitt underwent rigorous training to master the high-speed vehicles used in the film. "He's an amazing driver," Bruckheimer said. "Some of the F1 drivers said he's a natural athlete. He really is."

RED SEA FILM FESTIVAL

Park Sung-hoon talks K-dramas at Red Sea International Film Festival

Saleh Fareed Jeddah

South Korean actor Park Sung-hoon, who stars in Netflix's smash hit "Squid Game," jetted to Saudi Arabia for the Red Sea International Film Festival and spoke to Arab News about his hopes for Saudi-Korean cultural collaboration.

The rising star, who is also known for his roles in dramas such as "The Glory" and "Queen of Tears," lauded the popularity of Korean entertainment content in

the Kingdom.

"I am grateful for this, and this really motivated me to try to pay back for this interest, and here I am at the Red Sea International Film Festival enjoying every bit of it," he said.

Globally, three South Korean subscription platforms lead in Korean content offerings: Wavve, Watcha, and Tving, according to data science firm BB Media. Excluding local platforms, Amazon Prime Video currently holds the top position among



Park Sung-hoon

global subscription streaming platforms in terms of Korean titles, though Netflix is close behind.

The actor touched on the role of streaming platforms in popularizing Korean content, saying, "Korea has always put an effort to make good quality movies and dramas because it is a way of bringing joy and comfort to people even during hard times, and I think with the advanced changes in technology, streaming networks and platforms provided ways for

Korean movies and dramas to be shown to a wider audience."

As the Kingdom's entertainment scene continues to expand — with the likes of Film AlUla and the Red Sea Film Foundation offering support — the actor said he would like to see more collaboration.

"I am aware that the movie industry in Saudi Arabia is moving rapidly, and I would love to see more collaboration between Saudi Arabia and Korea in the film industry," he said.