

ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

SYRIAN TRANSITION

HTS leader vows to pursue former officials for torture

Israel carries out heavy airstrikes across Syria and destroys the country's naval assets

Syria's militant leader has vowed to pursue former senior government officials responsible for torture and war crimes, a day after he began talks on the transfer of power following President Bashar Assad's ouster.

"We will not hesitate to hold accountable the criminals, murderers, security and army officers involved in torturing the Syrian people," Abu Mohammed Al-Golani, now using his real name Ahmed Al-Sharaa, said in a statement on Telegram.

"We will offer rewards to anyone who provides information about senior army and security officers involved in war crimes," he said, adding the incoming authorities would seek the return of officials who have fled abroad.

The UN special envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen said the armed groups must transform their "good messages" to Syrians into actions on the ground.

"The realities so far is that the HTS and also the other armed groups have been sending good messages to the Syrian people," Pedersen said in Geneva.

"They have been sending messages of unity, of inclusiveness," he said, adding that "we have also seen ... reassuring things on the ground."

Meanwhile, Israel carried out a wave of heavy airstrikes across



Syrians pose with the opposition flag at a street in the coastal city of Latakia on Tuesday. AFP

The realities so far is that the HTS and also the other armed groups have been sending good messages to the Syrian people.

Geir Pedersen
UN special envoy for Syria

Syria as its troops advanced deeper into the country, a Syrian opposition war monitor said on Tuesday, and the Israeli defense minister announced that his forces had destroyed Syria's navy.

Israel acknowledged pushing into a buffer zone inside Syria following the overthrow of Assad. But it remained unclear if its soldiers had gone beyond that area, which was established

more than 50 years ago. Israel denied that it was advancing on the Syrian capital of Damascus.

Israeli officials have said they are striking military targets, including heavy weapons, suspected chemical weapons sites and air defense systems, to prevent them from falling into the hands of extremists. Photographs circulating online showed destroyed missile

launchers, helicopters and warplanes. Associated Press reporters in the capital heard heavy airstrikes overnight and into Tuesday morning.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said Israel intended to establish a demilitarized zone in southern Syria.

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Related report Page 7

DESTRUCTION

25 killed in new strikes on northern Gaza Strip

AFP Gaza Strip

Gaza's civil defense agency said on Tuesday that Israeli strikes in the north of the Palestinian territory had killed 25 people, including women and children.

"At 8 p.m. (1800 GMT) last night, Israeli strikes targeted a multi-story building belonging to the Al-Kahlut family, killing 25 people. Sixteen bodies have been identified, while others remain trapped under the rubble," said civil defense spokesman Mahmud Bassal, adding five women and five children were among the dead.

The Israeli army did not comment on the strike.

Bassal said: "Residents, without adequate support, are attempting

BACKGROUND

In November, Pope Francis suggested the global community should study whether Israel's campaign in Gaza constitutes a genocide of the Palestinian people.

to rescue those still buried."

The north of the Gaza Strip has been the focus of an intense Israeli military operation for more than two months.

The war in Gaza was sparked by Hamas's Oct. 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

Israel's retaliatory offensive in Gaza has killed at least 44,758 people, mostly civilians.

In November, Pope Francis suggested the global community should study whether Israel's campaign in Gaza constitutes a genocide of the Palestinian people.

He will meet Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Thursday, the Vatican said.

The Catholic pontiff has become more vocal in his criticism of Israel's military campaign in Gaza.

Related reports Pages 4&6

The Brief

DARFUR ATTACK

A Sudanese military airstrike on a market in North Darfur killed more than 100 people, a pro-democracy lawyers' group said. **P7**

JAIPUR SUMMIT

Saudi Arabia aims to strengthen economic ties with India, as highlighted by its participation in the Rising Rajasthan Investment Summit in Jaipur. **P8**

INDUSTRIES GAIN

Saudi Arabia's industrial production index rose by 5% in October, driven by robust growth across key economic sectors. **P12**

OCEAN ELEGANCE

Saudi Arabia launches first cruise ship in Jeddah

World-class 19-deck vessel can carry up to 3,362 passengers in its 1,678 cabins and suites

Arab News Riyadh

Cruise Saudi, dedicated to advancing the Kingdom's cruise industry, has introduced its first ship, AROYA, at Jeddah Islamic Port.

The ship's launch marks a significant step toward bolstering maritime tourism across the Kingdom, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

The vessel, which features 19 decks and 1,678 cabins and suites, can accommodate up to 3,362 passengers.

It offers a diverse culinary



AROYA is equipped with various entertainment facilities. SPA

experience with 12 restaurants and 17 cafes, serving dishes from five continents while highlighting Saudi flavors.

According to the SPA, AROYA is equipped with various entertainment facilities, including a shopping area, a 1,018-seat theater, a children's zone, and prayer areas.

It also features designated women's hours in health and entertainment venues, extensive sports amenities such as a walking track, and football and basketball courts.

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During UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's visit to the Kingdom, we reviewed bilateral investment relations and affirmed the Saudi private sector's desire to develop partnerships with the British side.

Khalid Al-Falih
Saudi Investment minister



Radar

KSA today



Dhahran Ithra camp

Ithra Center is inviting youngsters to a one-day camp to learn to appreciate nature, conserve resources and reduce waste through immersive cultural and artistic activities. Register through the Ithra app.



AIUla Starstruck

Discover the splendor of the Nabataean civilization in a multi-dimensional history-inspired experience under the stars, which tells the unique story of AIUla and its legacy. Visit experiencealula.com for more details about the event, which will run until Feb. 28.



Jeddah The 9 Circus

The 9 Circus features Russian acrobats performing a host of impressive feats, including with aerial hoops. The circus will run until Jan. 13. To book, visit jeddah.platinumlist.net.



AIUla Giant swing

This experience in AIUla offers thrill-seekers the chance to swing 85 meters above the ground in a 70-meter arc. Visit experiencealula.com for booking.

The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Saudi Arabia's Deputy Foreign Minister Waleed Elkhoreiji received the US Ambassador to the Kingdom Michael Ratney in Riyadh on Tuesday. During the meeting, they discussed

bilateral relations and ways to enhance them in various areas of cooperation, as well as prominent developments in regional and international arenas, the Foreign Ministry wrote on X.

Elkhoreiji recently also met with Sudan's Ambassador to the Kingdom Dafallah Al-Haji Ali, and discussed the current developments in Sudan and the efforts addressed in their regard.

#JOIN THE SQUAD

Citizens, residents and visitors in Riyadh explain to Arab News why Saudi Arabia is the best country to host the FIFA World Cup 2034.

(Saudi Arabia) has a very beautiful culture; it would be great if people got to experience it. It's a very organized country; it's growing a lot. Obviously, going more toward football, it has very nice stadiums; in all areas, the pitches are always in the best shape ... I have no doubt that it will be a very pleasant experience for everyone.

RENZO LOPEZ
AL-FAYHA FC PLAYER



BACKING THE BID
Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch all the videos of citizens, residents and visitors voicing their support for Saudi Arabia.



Today's Number

305

King Salman has approved the awarding of the Order of Merit Third Class to 305 citizens for donating blood 10 times, Saudi Press Agency reported.

Review

Lou

AFSHAN AZIZ

Located in Al-Khayat Center on Al-Andalus Street in Jeddah, Lou is quickly gaining attention for its stripped-down approach to burgers.

With a small menu and focus on quality over quantity, it's a spot that caters to burger lovers and adventurous foodies alike.

At the heart of the menu are the burgers, made with fresh ingredients and well-balanced flavors. The house special features a juicy, smashed Canadian beef patty topped with melted cheese, crisp vegetables



and signature sauce on a soft brioche bun. It's a straightforward yet satisfying combination that hits all the right notes.

For those seeking something more extravagant, the truffle burger takes the classic up a notch. The addition of creamy Emmental cheese and a rich truffle sauce elevates the experience, delivering a luxurious, earthy flavor.

Chicken lovers are not left out, with options like the classic chicken burger, featuring a crispy fried chicken breast and melted cheese and the spicy chicken burger, which brings just the right amount of heat.

The sides are also worth exploring. The chicken bites, stuffed with gooey cheese and served with a tangy buffalo sauce, stand out. These can be paired with a side of crispy fries or even kimchi for a more adventurous twist.

For more details visit [@loujeddah](https://www.instagram.com/loujeddah) on Instagram.

TheRegion

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Jeddah

• Ataya exhibition by Emirates Red Crescent will showcase women's fashion, jewelry, accessories, and home furniture. Featuring exhibitors and producers from the UAE and worldwide, the event will be held from Dec. 13-18 at the Abu Dhabi

National Exhibition Centre.

• Heritage Village in Bahrain invites visitors to embark on a journey through Bahrain's architectural wonders and intricate heritage. Uncover the enchanting tapestry of Bahrain's rich history, through activities that are suitable for all ages. Until Jan. 4. More details on calendar.bh.

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

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

Dec. 11	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	5:28	6:48	12:15	3:19	5:40	7:10
Madinah	5:33	6:55	12:15	3:15	5:35	7:05
Riyadh	5:05	6:27	11:47	2:46	5:06	6:36
Abha	5:12	6:31	12:04	3:13	5:36	7:06
Dammam	4:54	6:17	11:34	2:29	4:49	6:19



Spotlight

FALL OF ASSAD

SPECIAL COVERAGE

SYRIA

What happens to refugees now?

Jubilant after the fall of Assad, displaced Syrians are eager to return home — but fearful of further instability

Anan Tello London

Although Syria remains in a precarious state just days after the fall of the regime of Bashar Assad, hundreds of displaced Syrians have flocked to border crossings in Lebanon and Turkiye, eager to return to their homeland after more than 13 grueling years of civil war.

At daybreak on Monday, scores of people gathered at the Cilvegözü and Oncupinar border gates in southern Turkiye and the Masnaa crossing in Lebanon, confident for the first time in years that they would not face arrest or conscription when they reached the other side.

On Sunday, in a historic moment for the Middle East, a coalition of armed opposition groups led by Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham seized Damascus. Now a refugee himself, Assad fled the country and sought asylum in Russia, marking an ignominious end of his family's 54-year iron rule.

Syrians displaced across the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and further afield by the years of fighting and persecution in their home country poured into the streets in celebration, jubilant that the uprising that began in 2011 had finally succeeded in dislodging Assad.

Syria remains the world's largest refugee crisis. Since the outbreak of civil war in 2011 following the regime's brutal suppression of anti-government protests, the UN says more than 14 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes. While the majority sought refuge in other parts of Syria, including areas outside the regime's control, others fled to neighboring countries — primarily Turkiye and Lebanon, but also Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq. Many more risked the perilous Mediterranean crossing to Europe.

Some 7.2 million Syrians remain internally displaced, where 70 percent of the population is deemed to require humanitarian assistance and where 90 percent live below the poverty line, according to the UN refugee agency, UNHCR.

More than 5 million Syrian refugees live in the five neighboring countries — Turkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. Turkiye alone hosts around 3.2 million registered with the UNHCR, while Lebanon hosts at least 830,000.

Karam Shaar, a senior fellow at the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, a nonpartisan Washington think tank, believes the first Syrians to return are likely "the most vulnerable," such as those in Lebanon and in Turkiye, who have endured poverty and mounting hostility.

"In general, because of the situation in Lebanon and Turkiye



Many displaced Syrian Kurdish families, main, began to return to their homes in Afrin with Assad about to fall, which also led to long queues of cars, below, outside Damascus. AFP/Getty Images

WHERE ARE SYRIA'S DISPLACED?

With the fall of the Assad regime, civilians uprooted by the 13-year civil war are returning to their homeland



ARAB NEWS

being so bad, I think these people would be the most likely to come back," Shaar told Arab News. "Many of them would be willing to go back to the rubble of their houses as long as Assad is not there because it just can't get any worse."

In Lebanon, anti-Syrian sentiment has grown significantly since the country was plunged

into a debilitating economic crisis in 2019. There have even been cases of violence against members of the community and their property.

In Turkiye, Syrians have frequently been scapegoated by politicians. In July, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused opposition parties of fueling xenophobia and racism. His remarks came a day after anti-Syrian riots broke out in the Kayseri province after a Syrian refugee there was alleged to have sexually assaulted a 7-year-old Syrian girl.

A similar wave of violence erupted in an Ankara neighborhood in 2021 after a Turkish teenager was stabbed to death by a group of young Syrians. Hundreds of people took to the streets, vandalizing Syrian owned businesses.

Erdogan announced on Monday that Turkiye was opening its Yayladagi border gate with Syria to facilitate the safe and voluntary return of refugees, Reuters reported.

"Those with families in Syria are eager to at least pay them a visit," Marwah Morhly, a Turkiye-based media professional, told Arab News.

"Many are making plans to visit their hometowns with their children, who were born in Turkiye and have never been to Syria or met their relatives in person."

However, given the ongoing insecurity and political uncertainty in Syria, and the fact that



many Syrians have built lives in Turkiye, the decision to return is not an easy one to make.

Morhly herself is hesitant about visiting, despite longing for her hometown of Damascus. "I can't take a risk with a young child," she said, referring to her son. Such a decision would depend on a Syrian-Turkish agreement on the refugee issue, she added.

In Europe, home to at least 4.5 million Syrian refugees, several countries — including Austria, France, The Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Greece, and the UK — announced they had halted Syrian asylum applications

just hours after Assad's fall.

Germany, which is home to the continent's largest Syrian diaspora, was one of the first European countries to respond.

Nancy Faeser, Germany's interior minister, said in a statement on Monday that the current "volatile situation" in Syria is the reason her country's migration authority has paused asylum decisions.

Austria has gone a step further, announcing plans to deport Syrian migrants. Interior Minister Gerhard Karner told Austrian media he has "instructed the ministry to prepare an orderly

return and deportation program to Syria. In The Netherlands, the government said it would stop assessing applications for six months. However, many are concerned it may also begin deportations.

Discussions about sending refugees back to Syria amid such uncertainty have left many Syrians anxious about their future. This is particularly concerning for those who have built lives and established roots in their host countries.

Anti-refugee discourse has become increasingly common since the height of the European refugee crisis in 2015, when around 5.2 million people from conflict zones across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East arrived on European shores.

For many governments in Europe, the fall of the Assad regime could offer just the opportunity they were waiting for to show they are addressing public concerns about migration by removing thousands of Syrians.

But until Syria's security situation stabilizes and its political future under its new de facto leadership becomes clearer, forced returns may be premature — or could even break international laws against refoulement should returnees come to harm.

Indeed, extremist groups like Daesh still at large, infrastructure in ruins, an economy crippled by sanctions, and uncertainty over the political agenda of the victorious HTS, Syria is by no means guaranteed peace and security.

Syrians and Lebanese celebrated, right, on the streets of Tripoli in Lebanon as news broke that Damascus had fallen to rebels. AFP



Netherlands envoy visits Arab News HQ



Netherlands Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Hans Peter van der Woude visited Arab News headquarters in Riyadh on Tuesday. He met Editor-in-Chief Faisal J. Abbas and the team. During the meeting, bilateral relations and the current situation in Syria were discussed.

AN photo

JOINT EFFORTS

Saudi Arabia reaffirms centrality of Palestinian cause

Minister Salman Al-Dossary urges unified Arab media strategy, AI integration to enhance content

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi Minister of Media Salman Al-Dossary has emphasized the importance of leveraging Arab efforts in the sector to support the Palestinian cause.

Al-Dossary made the comments while chairing the 20th session of the Executive Office of the Arab Information Ministers Council in Abu Dhabi, the Saudi Press Agency reported on Tuesday.

The meeting was attended by heads of Arab delegations,

institutions, and unions engaged in media-related activities.

Al-Dossary stressed the need for all Arab media outlets to highlight the resolutions issued during the recent Extraordinary Arab and Islamic Summit in Riyadh. These resolutions reaffirmed the centrality of the Palestinian cause, unwavering support for the national rights of the besieged people, and the pursuit of a just and comprehensive solution based on international agreements.

"We meet today to discuss 12 items as part of Arab efforts to enhance joint Arab media work,

foremost among them the Palestinian cause." He also emphasized the importance of the unified Arab plan for media engagement with environmental issues.

Al-Dossary highlighted Saudi Arabia's hosting of the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and the One Water Summit, stressing the importance of showcasing their outcomes in Arab media. He underscored the importance of leveraging artificial intelligence technologies in Arab media to enhance content and analyze audience behavior.

VISION 2030

Saudi Arabia showcases innovation in healthcare at Riyadh exhibition

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Health is showcasing its latest projects in therapeutic and pharmaceutical healthcare at the CPHI Middle East exhibition in Riyadh from Dec. 10-12.

Among the key highlights are advancements in biotechnology, highlighting the ministry's support for the national biotechnology strategy, which seeks to position Saudi Arabia as a regional and global biotechnology hub while enhancing self-sufficiency in the sector.

The pavilion also presents

investment opportunities in biotechnology, aiming to enable sector growth and establish the Kingdom as a global leader.

Key initiatives include implementing strategic incentives to attract international companies, promoting sustainable

marketing, enhancing financing capabilities, fostering joint investments and driving infrastructure investments.

Minister of Health Fahad Al-Jalajel said: "Hosting the CPHI Middle East exhibition in the Kingdom underscores our dedication to enhancing Saudi Arabia's role as a hub for pharmaceutical industry innovation in the region. This aligns with the Kingdom's efforts to implement the National Biotechnology Strategy, which aims to contribute 3 percent to gross domestic product, totaling SRI30 billion (\$34.6 billion) annually by 2040."

HIGHLIGHT

Fahad Al-Jalajel oversaw SR10 billion in agreements, including a SR1 billion project with Vertex Pharmaceuticals and a SR100 million investment with Tabuk Pharmaceuticals.

TheSpace

Confessions of a confused observer

ABDULELAH S. AL-NAHARI



The world feels like a funhouse mirror these days, doesn't it? Everything is distorted, twisted just enough that you recognize the shapes but can't quite make sense of the reflection staring back at you. It's like we've stumbled into a bizarre sequel to 2020, where the chaos of the pandemic has seeped into the very fabric of geopolitics, leaving us bewildered and grasping for answers.

I remember a time, not so long ago, when the global political landscape seemed, if not predictable, at least comprehensible. We could trace the threads of cause and effect, understand the motivations of nations and their leaders. But lately? It's as if the rulebook has been tossed out the window, replaced by a series of bewildering improvisations that leave us scratching our heads.

The case of Syria is particularly notable. Just weeks ago, the situation there, once thought to be fixed, was considered a dismal deadlock — a permanent fixture of the century. Rebel forces, seemingly outmatched and outgunned, swept through government-held territory with astonishing speed. The Assad regime, once seemingly invincible, appeared to crumble before our eyes.

It's enough to make your head spin. Where did those rebels find such strength? What happened to the formidable forces of Russia,

Iran and Hezbollah? Did they simply vanish into thin air? And what about Assad himself? One minute he's the defiant dictator; where will he wash ashore? Which nation will offer him sanctuary, a haven from the storm? Will it be a warm embrace, or a temporary respite — a fleeting moment of calm before the tempest descends once more?

Questions settle, resembling fall's foliage. With each rush of breeze, it's as if the responses scatter afar. Picture a theater performance, obscured by a foggy veil — that's us peeking at the sporadic activity and hearing snatches of conversation, yet the complete storyline escapes capture.

And then there are the shifting alliances, the sudden reversals of policy. Russia, once Assad's staunch ally, now seems content to cede influence to Turkiye. Iran, a steadfast supporter of Shia militias in the past, is rethinking its regional strategy. Closed-door negotiations — what deals have been agreed upon? In the silence, amidst hidden shadows, what type of commitments were made and reiterated?

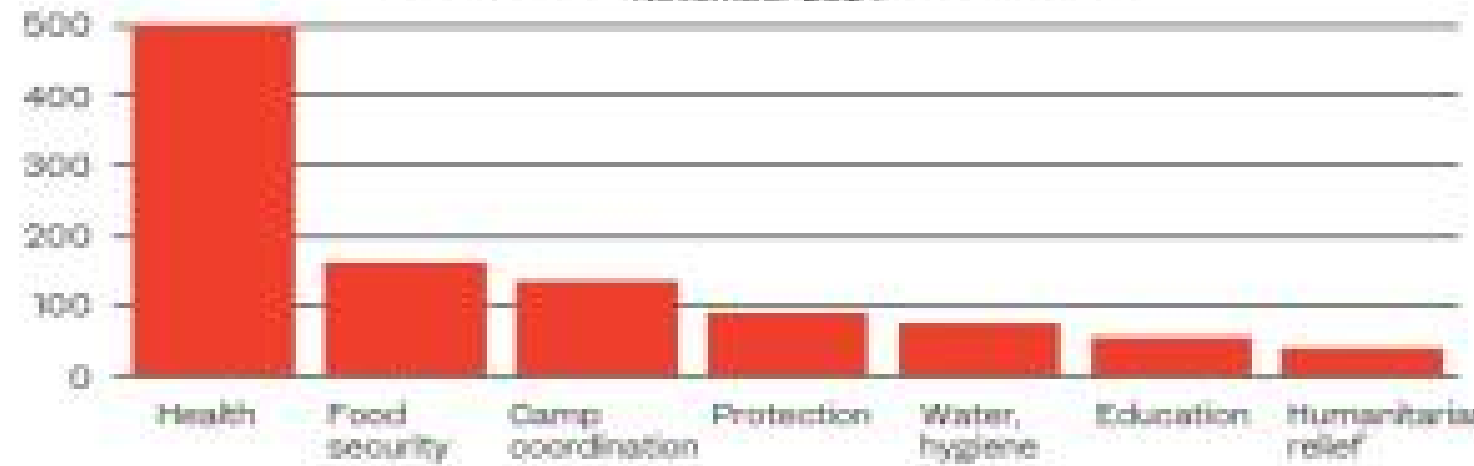
Maybe, just maybe, by acknowledging our confusion, by embracing our doubts, we can begin to find our way back to a place of clarity and understanding. Until then, we can only watch, wait, and hope for a brighter tomorrow.

Abdulelah S. Al-Nahari is a business and marcom partner at a marketing solutions firm and leads strategic growth initiatives in line with Saudi Arabia's digital-first vision. For full version, log on to www.arabnews.com/thespace

The Day's FIGURES

KSRELIEF PROJECTS IN YEMEN

November 2024



Source: ksrelief.org

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Cultural exchange
Diriyah forum explores history, trade, heritage

The International Diriyah Forum in Riyadh explored "Diriyah at the Intersection of History and Trade," emphasizing the region's global role.

The event included interactive sessions and presentations on preserving commercial heritage, cultural exchanges, Saudi coffee sittings, the portrayal of Najd in literature, and European travelers' views of the area.

The forum also covered Diriyah's economic history, sustainable trade, and the study of trade routes and ports, highlighting its role as a regional link to the world.

The forum also featured visual presentations of fieldwork along historic trade routes. **AN Riyadh**

Sustainability
Kingdom to lead 2026 talks on water challenges

Saudi Arabia has been selected to host the 2026 International Water Desalination and Reuse Conference. The selection highlights Saudi Arabia's leading role in the water sector and its commitment to sustainability and water security initiatives.

Riyadh was chosen during a recent conference in Abu Dhabi, which brought together global experts and specialists.

The 2026 congress will serve as a global platform to address critical water challenges such as scarcity and the effects of climate change. It is expected to attract experts from over 60 countries to showcase cutting-edge technologies, and present sustainable solutions for water management. **SPA Riyadh**

Ethics awareness
Scouts promote integrity on anti-corruption day

The Saudi Arabian Scouts Association joined in International Anti-Corruption Day on Monday by distributing brochures and materials to raise awareness of the value of integrity.

Association Secretary-General Abdulrahman Al-Mudaris said the association was committed to its annual participation in the occasion, which was designated by the UN General Assembly to foster a culture of integrity within society. Their efforts included encouraging the adoption and practice of integrity while reinforcing the religious, ethical and national principles that inspire the Saudi community to uphold it, he added. **SPA Riyadh**

GOING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

Saudi-UK trade sees robust growth in recent years

‘Now is the time for further investment into our country,’ says Starmer

Manal Al-Barakatli Riyadh

Recent British deals with Saudi Arabia and the UAE have created 4,000 new jobs in Britain and are part of UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's plans to raise living standards, he said during a recent visit to Riyadh.

Starmer was received by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at Al-Yamamah Palace in the Saudi capital this week, where discussions centered on enhancing bilateral cooperation in areas of mutual economic interest.

“The UAE and Saudi Arabia are key partners of ours. So I’ve been making the case that now is the time for further investment into our country, as far as Saudi Arabia is concerned,” Starmer told local press.

“For example, some of the deals we’ve done in the last few weeks have yielded 4,000 jobs, and so I’m here driving growth with the sole intention of making sure that when I say living standards will go up in the UK, people will feel better off that we’ve got the plan to follow through and deliver on that, with acts, with investment around the world.”

The visit included a high-profile business roundtable on Monday featuring Saudi Minister of Investment Khalid Al-Falih, Minister of Commerce Majid Al-Qasabi, Saudi Ambassador to the UK Prince Khalid bin Sultan, and Starmer.

Trade and investment: key drivers

Trade between the UK and Saudi Arabia has seen robust growth in recent years, with bilateral trade valued at £14 billion annually. The UK is a key exporter to the



During Keir Starmer's visit to the Kingdom, officials from the two countries outlined plans to boost economic relations and investment during a high-level business roundtable held in Riyadh. SPA

Kingdom, supplying machinery, vehicles and pharmaceuticals, while Saudi Arabia exports crude oil, petrochemical products and significant investments in non-oil sectors.

Recent discussions placed a particular emphasis on diversifying this trade relationship. Sectors such as green energy, digital transformation and healthcare innovation are seen as crucial for the next phase of bilateral economic engagement.

Saudi Arabia's investments in its ICT sector, projected to reach \$37.5 billion by 2024, present significant opportunities for British firms.

“The Kingdom's investment in ICT is a clear signal of its ambitions. For UK technology firms, this is a market of immense opportunity,” said Sarah Walker, CEO of ZainTECH UK, in a previous interview with Arab News.



FASTFACTS

- The Kingdom has been actively fostering global partnerships, as reflected in its agreements with the UK.
- Sectors such as green energy, digital transformation and healthcare innovation are seen as crucial for the next phase of bilateral economic engagement.

Renewable energy at the forefront

A cornerstone of the Saudi-UK partnership lies in renewable energy. Saudi Arabia has emerged as a global leader in clean energy, particularly in green hydrogen, where it aims to become a dominant producer.

James Penlington, CEO of London-based Renewable Edge, previously told Arab News: “Saudi Arabia's investments in green hydrogen are unmatched globally. As a UK company, we are keen to contribute

our expertise to support the Kingdom's sustainability goals.”

The Kingdom's focus on renewable energy is in line with its Vision 2030 target of generating 50 percent of its electricity from renewable sources by the end of the decade. This ambitious goal has attracted significant interest from UK firms specializing in solar, wind and hydrogen technologies.

Expanding educational and training partnerships

The growing Saudi-UK trade relationship is also fostering collaborations in education and training.

British universities and institutions are increasingly playing a role in developing Saudi Arabia's workforce, particularly in high-tech fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics and healthcare.

These partnerships are critical to Vision 2030's goal of building a

skilled and diversified workforce.

“Educational collaboration is an area where UK institutions can bring real value,” Lucy Harper, managing director of Tech Frontier UK, told Arab News on Tuesday.

“With Saudi Arabia focusing on human capital development, we are seeing opportunities to engage in programs that drive innovation and prepare the workforce for future challenges.”

Building on Vision 2030 success

Since the launch of Vision 2030 in 2016, Saudi Arabia has achieved significant progress in economic diversification.

According to official data, 87 percent of its 1,064 initiatives are either completed or on track, demonstrating the Kingdom's dedication to transforming its economy and creating new opportunities for international investors.

DEVELOPING LOCAL TALENT

NEOM Media, Hakawati Entertainment sign deal to make 9 feature films

Arab News Riyadh

NEOM Media and Hakawati Entertainment have announced a strategic partnership to produce up to nine feature films and establish a production services division in NEOM, further accelerating the growth of Saudi Arabia's film industry.

The partnership with Hakawati, a leading Saudi-based film, TV and literary management company, will localize screen production activities across future NEOM productions, according to a statement.

By using NEOM Media's infrastructure, including high-end soundstages, diverse shooting locations and extensive production support, the collaboration will enable high-quality

content creation, it said.

Two of the nine films are set to go into production in the first half of next year and further projects are under review.

Hakawati plans to establish an operational presence within NEOM's media hub by creating a production services division designed to meet the needs of international, regional and local productions. This will be supported by Hollywood-level talent and significant financial investments.

The partnership will also help the sector's evolution into a creative industries hub, while streamlining project execution and elevating filmmaking standards.

Michael Lynch, sector head of entertainment, culture and media at NEOM, said: “This



The NEOM Media, Hakawati Entertainment partnership will also help the sector's evolution into a creative industries hub. Supplied

partnership with Hakawati marks an important milestone in our shared commitment to advancing Saudi Arabia's media industry ... (and) reinforces our position as a

center for innovation and growth, reflecting the industry's confidence in our vision.

“Together, we are poised to unlock significant opportunities,

HIGHLIGHT

A Hakawati community will be established at NEOM in early 2025, in collaboration with NEOM Media's industry learning department, to support talent development.

drive the Kingdom's creative ambitions forward and establish a world-class media ecosystem.” Hakawati CEO Osama Al-Khurayji said: “While film and television production remain at the heart of our business, this partnership goes beyond content creation. Together with NEOM, we are committed to building a sustainable, world-class filmmaking ecosystem that will not only support our industry's

expansion but also contribute to Saudi Arabia's ambitious vision of becoming a global leader in entertainment and media.”

The partnership will also focus on developing Saudi talent through multidisciplinary programs and workshops that provide intensive training, shadowing opportunities and job placements for the local and international media markets.

A Hakawati community will be established at NEOM in early 2025, in collaboration with NEOM Media's industry learning department, to support talent development.

Also, a working group will identify and implement at least three new training programs by the end of 2025, ensuring ongoing opportunities for Saudi creatives.

GRAVE RISKS

Israel prevents Lebanese army and UNIFIL from opening key road

Freed Lebanese prisoners continue to arrive from Syria to reunite with families

Najla Houssari Beirut
The Israeli army fired a warning shot on Tuesday at a joint patrol of the Lebanese army and a Polish unit operating under UN peacekeeping force UNIFIL while trying to unblock the Altaroun-Bint Jbeil public road.

The Israeli military blocked the road last Thursday with a mound of earth.
UNIFIL and Lebanese army vehicles were seen on Tuesday driving on the Bint Jbeil road for the first time since the ceasefire.
Israel is being criticized for continuing to violate the ceasefire agreement under the pretext of having 60 days to withdraw from the south.
Its violations involve destroying remaining buildings, houses, facilities and roads along the border, rendering the area unlivable.
The Israeli army carried out extensive explosions in Khiam to destroy houses and buildings.
The entry of the Lebanese army's engineering teams to southern Lebanon has been postponed. A five-member committee responsible for enforcing the ceasefire agreement had previously approved the teams' entry.

The committee convened secretly on Monday in Naqoura, UNIFIL's headquarters, with the presence of military representatives of the Lebanese army, the Israeli army, the US, France, and UNIFIL.
A joint statement from the US and French embassies in Lebanon and UNIFIL said that the meeting aimed to coordinate the participants' support for the cessation of hostilities that went into effect on Nov. 27.
The group will meet regularly and coordinate closely to implement the ceasefire agreement and Resolution 1701, it added.
The Lebanese army links the gradual deployment of its soldiers south of the Litani River to the end of Israeli hostilities and the gradual withdrawal of Israeli military forces, allowing Lebanese troops to enter the areas.
Israeli forces in the south launched several artillery shells from a Merkava tank on the outskirts of Chihine and Jebbayn.
The Israeli army opened heavy machine-gun fire on the outskirts of the southern villages of Chakra, the Doubiyeh castle, and valleys adjacent to Qabrikh and Majdel Selem.
Several Israeli Merkava tanks backed off from Wata Al-Khiam toward Sarda and Aamra adjacent



Moaz Merheb, 51, is received by his family and friends in the northern port city of Tripoli after 18 years of imprisonment in Syria's Sednaya Prison. AFP

to the Wazzani orchards.
Parallel to its duties in southern Lebanon, the Lebanese army is also dealing with the developments at illegal crossings and on smuggling routes on the border between Lebanon and Syria, as Syrians attempt to enter Lebanon forcibly with militants gaining control of the country.
Israeli airstrikes had targeted Lebanon's land crossings with Syria under the pretext of preventing Hezbollah supplies from reaching Syria.
The Israeli airstrikes also put out of service the Al-Qaa-Jussiyeh crossing in the Bekaa and the Arida and Dabousieh crossings in the north, in addition to the Tal Kalakh crossing in Akkar in the north.
Lebanon's reopening of the Masnaa border crossing, the legal route to Damascus, facilitates

BACKGROUND

Israel is being criticized for continuing to violate the ceasefire agreement in Lebanon. The violations involve destroying remaining buildings and facilities and scraping roads in the border area, rendering it unlivable.

the return of Syrian refugees in Lebanon to their home country.
For the third consecutive day, the Masnaa border crossing witnessed heavy movement of Syrian refugees leaving for their country.
Lebanese General Security reported that the situation at the Masnaa crossing had improved after chaos erupted due to the absence of the Syrian General

Security at the Jdeidet Yabous border post, causing a large influx of Syrians.
The Lebanese army is involved in controlling the Masnaa border crossing, and Lebanon strictly vets which Syrians it allows to enter Lebanon — requiring either a travel document through the Beirut airport, a residency permit in Lebanon, or a sponsor who confirms their employment in Lebanon. Also on Tuesday, the Syrian Embassy in Lebanon lowered the flag previously used by the regime of Bashar Assad, raising that of the militants.
In other developments, Lebanese prisoner Muath Muraab arrived in his hometown of Bireh in Akkar on Tuesday after being detained in Sednaya Prison for 20 years.
He is the third prisoner to return to Lebanon from a list of dozens

of Lebanese detainees in Syrian prisons, whose existence had previously been denied by Syrian authorities during the Assad regime.
In the past two days, freed prisoners Suhail Hamaoui, Marwan Nouh, Mohammed Omar Al-Flaiti, and Moaz Merheb rejoined their families.
Additionally, Khalidiya Fayyad, who was arrested 22 years ago in the town of Sindiana in Akkar, was freed from the women's prison.
Lebanese State Security denied protecting anyone linked to the former Syrian regime after their relocation to Lebanon.
Recent media reports indicated that Lebanese State Security was protecting some Syrian figures and officials who fled to major hotels in Lebanon due to ongoing developments in Syria.



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ITALY VISIT

Pope to meet Palestinian president tomorrow

Reuters Vatican City

Pope Francis will meet Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Thursday, the Vatican said, as the Catholic pontiff has become more vocal in his criticism of Israel's military campaign in Gaza.
Abbas travels to Italy this week, where he is expected also to meet with Italian President Sergio Mattarella and Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. The Vatican announced the meeting with Abbas in a brief note on Tuesday but did not offer further details.
In November, Francis suggested



People ride on a truck in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip amid the continuing war between Israel and Hamas. AFP

the global community should study whether Israel's campaign in Gaza constitutes a genocide of the Palestinian people.
The comment, in a forthcoming book, drew a public rebuke from Israel's ambassador to the Holy See. Israel claims accusations of

genocide in Gaza are baseless and that it is solely hunting down Hamas and other armed groups.
Gaza authorities say almost 45,000 Palestinians have been killed and more than 106,000 injured in Israel's offensive, while most of Gaza's 2 million people are

homeless or displaced as famine looms.
Pope Francis and President Abbas have met several times and are last known to have spoken on the phone in November 2023, a month into the Israel-Hamas conflict.
The pope, as leader of the 1.4-billion-member Catholic Church, is usually careful about taking sides in conflicts but has recently been more outspoken about Israel's campaign.
In October, he criticized the "shameful inability" of the international community to end the war.

INVESTIGATION

Israel's PM testifies in corruption trial

Reuters Tel Aviv

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took the witness stand for the first time on Tuesday in his long-running corruption trial, saying he was being hounded for his hawkish

security policies.
Netanyahu, 75, is Israel's first sitting prime minister to be charged with a crime.
He is testifying at the same time Israel is engaged in a war in Gaza and facing possible new threats posed by regional turmoil,

including in Syria.
Last week, judges ruled that Netanyahu, indicted in 2019, must testify three times a week, forcing the longtime Israeli leader to juggle between the courtroom and the war room at Israel's Defense Ministry, minutes away from the courthouse.

News International

CLOSE SCRUTINY

Asma Assad: From 'rose in the desert' to pariah

Vogue published gushing profile of Syria's ex-first lady weeks before Arab Spring

Arab News London

The transformation of Asma Assad from a vaunted English "rose in the desert" to international pariah is the subject of fresh media scrutiny after the fall of the Assad regime in Syria.

A gushing March 2011 Vogue profile of former President Bashar Assad's wife, published weeks before the Arab Spring and later deleted, highlights the destruction of her reputation, the Daily Mail reported.

The "Power Issue" profile described the London-born computer science graduate as "on a mission to create a beacon of culture and secularism" in the Middle East.

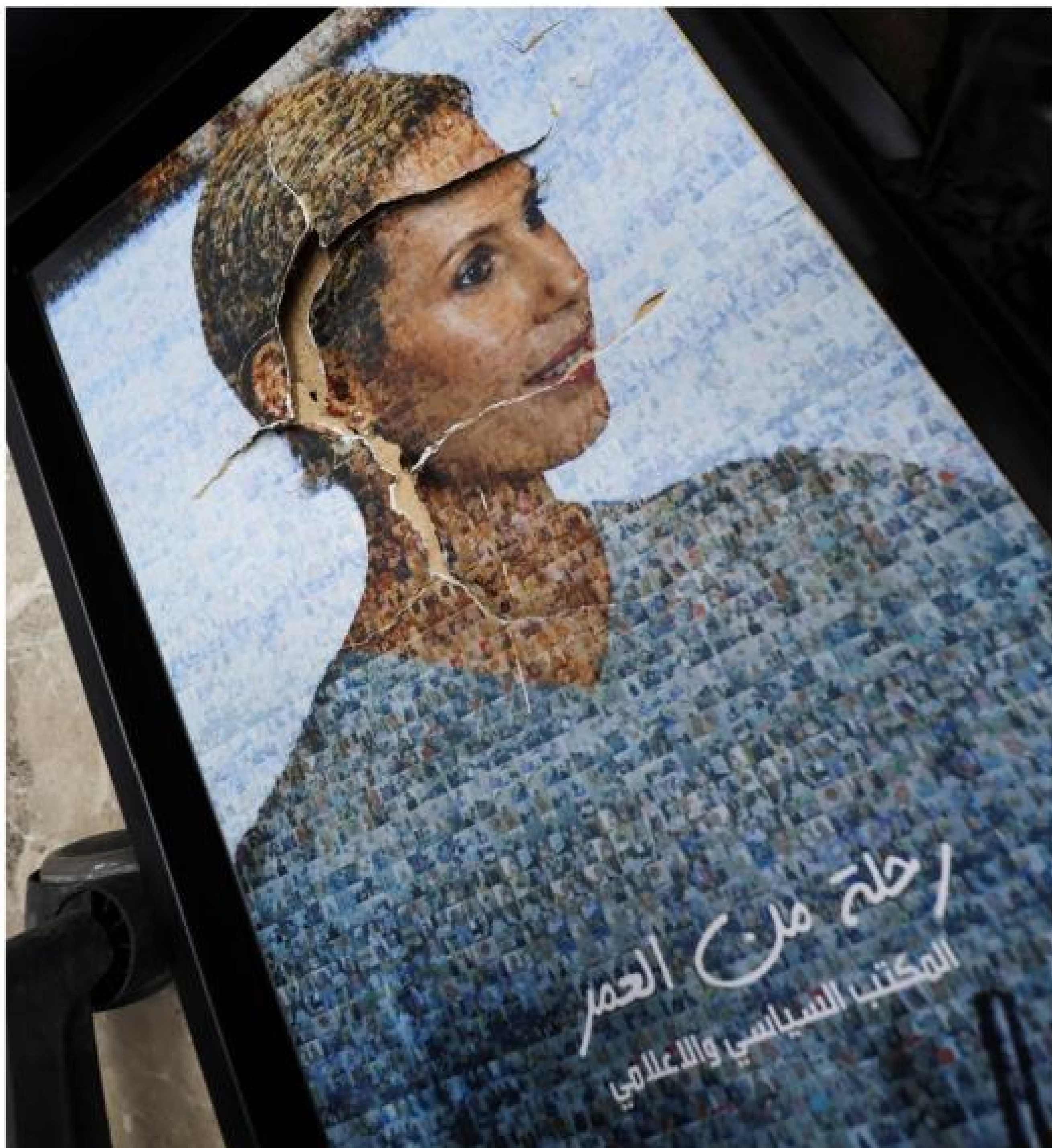
"The first impression of Asma Assad is movement: A determined swath cut through space with a flash of red soles," it said.

The "thin, long-limbed beauty with a trained analytic mind who dresses with cunning understatement" reportedly wanted Syria's youth to spearhead modernization by becoming "active citizens."

But soon after the profile was published, she and her husband became the public face of a brutal crackdown on popular protests that culminated in Syria's 13-year civil war, leading to more than 600,000 deaths and the displacement of millions.

Asma Assad turned to London law firm Carter Ruck as the civil war broke out. Newspapers who covered the family's affairs received threatening letters, but nothing could prevent her and her husband from becoming international pariahs after regime forces carried out a series of chemical weapons attacks against civilians.

Vogue removed the "rose in



A picture of Asma Assad is seen at one of the rooms in the Presidential Palace in Damascus after rebels seized the capital, on Tuesday. Reuters

the desert" profile as a WikiLeaks email hack revealed that she had spent \$318,000 on luxury furniture during the first year of the civil war. US estimates put the

Assad family's wealth at \$2 billion. Asma Assad was placed under US sanctions in 2020 and described as one of Syria's "most notorious war profiteers."

The former first lady owns at least 18 luxury apartments in Moscow's skyscraper district, where she is set to begin a new life in exile with her husband.

FAST FACT

Vogue removed the 'rose in the desert' profile as a WikiLeaks email hack revealed that she had spent \$318,000 on luxury furniture during the first year of the civil war. US estimates put the Assad family's wealth at \$2 billion.

ESCALATION

Airstrike on North Darfur market kills more than 100

AFP Port Sudan

A Sudanese military airstrike on a market in North Darfur killed more than 100 people on Monday, a pro-democracy lawyers' group said Tuesday, in a war marked by claims of atrocities on all sides.

The Emergency Lawyers said Monday's airstrike also left hundreds injured in Kabbabiya, a town about 180 kilometers (112 miles) west of El-Fasher, the state capital that has been under siege from the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces since May.

Tens of thousands have been killed and millions displaced in a 20-month war between the RSF and Sudan's army that has left the northeast African country on the brink of famine, according to aid agencies.

"The airstrike took place on the town's weekly market day, where residents from various nearby villages had gathered to shop, resulting in the death of more than 100 people and injury of hundreds, including women and children," said the lawyers group, which has been documenting human rights abuses during the conflict.

They described it as a "horrendous massacre committed by army airstrikes," though the military denied it had carried out the attack.

The army said in a statement the accusations were "lies" spread by political parties backing the RSF, adding that it would continue "exercising its legitimate right to defend the country."

A woman holds a child at a camp in North Darfur. Reuters



LEGAL LIMBO

Gambian fishing village seeks elusive statehood

AFP Ghana Town, Gambia

As Paul Techy queued with dozens of others in his coastal Gambian fishing village, he hoped to move one step closer toward finally belonging in the only country he had ever called home.

Gambian citizenship has long been an elusive goal for many residents of Ghana Town, most of whom were born in the tiny West African country but whose parents or grandparents emigrated from Ghana decades ago.

Lacking either Ghanaian or Gambian documentation, most are trapped in a legal limbo where they struggle to access basic services such as healthcare or formal employment.

"We recognize ourselves as Gambians, but Gambians don't

recognize us as Gambians," said 46-year-old Techy, who was born in the village on the shores of the Atlantic.

"They said you are a Ghanaian born in The Gambia, you are still a foreigner ... this is how they categorize us," he said.

Under The Gambia's constitution, a person is granted citizenship if they are born in the country — but only if one of their parents is a Gambian citizen.

Ghana Town sprung up in the late 1950s, when a group of Ghanaian fishermen traveled to The Gambia in search of lucrative waters and a better market.

The village's cinder block and corrugated metal houses are now home to around 2,000 people, including many of the original fishermen's descendants.



A man prepares a fishing net ahead of going out fishing in Brufut, Ghana Town, in this Oct. 31 file photo. AFP

The UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, says residents are "at risk of statelessness."

Being undocumented is not the same as being stateless, the UNHCR says, but having no legal records puts people at risk as they cannot prove links to any state.

Together with the Gambia Commission for Refugees, the UNHCR conducted an assessment in November to see if Ghana Town's residents could be considered for naturalization.

"Most of their fundamental human rights like access to nationality and access to social amenities are somehow difficult," said Omar T. Camara, a government representative working with The Gambia Commission for Refugees.

A team spent four days conducting interviews with

residents such as Techy, after which conclusions and recommendations will be drawn up and sent to lawmakers in the parliament. Camara said the exercise could pave the way for legal reform.

FASTFACT

Lacking either Ghanaian or Gambian documentation, most are trapped in a legal limbo where they struggle to access basic services such as health care or formal employment.

The UNHCR says that statelessness worldwide is driven by a number of factors including discrimination based on race or gender, as well as legislative shortcomings.

It estimated in November that there were nearly a million stateless people in Africa, including more than 930,000 in West Africa, leaving them vulnerable to marginalization and abuse.

Millions more are at risk because of conflicts in the volatile Sahel region, it said.

While The Gambia has ratified two UN conventions on ending statelessness, there is no process for formally recognizing stateless people in the country.

Ghana Town resident Gideon Money, 20, graduated top of his class and won a scholarship to study medicine in India, but said a lack of legal identity prevented him from going.

"My fellow students have left because they are termed as Gambians," he told AFP.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Saudi businesses explore energy, tourism opportunities in Rajasthan

Invest Saudi participates in Rising Rajasthan Investment Summit in Jaipur

Sanjay Kumar Jaipur

Saudi Arabia is exploring cooperation with India in solar and wind energy, infrastructure, tourism, and technology-based industries, its Ministry of Investment said on Tuesday, as it participated in the Rising Rajasthan Investment Summit in Jaipur.

The government of India's largest state by area is hosting the investment event from Dec. 9 to 11, as it seeks to double Rajasthan's gross domestic product to \$350 billion in the next five years.

The Saudi Ministry of Investment's pavilion in the forum's exhibition space presented Invest Saudi — the nationwide investment brand — and promoted opportunities in the Kingdom, while delegation members held talks with Indian companies.

"We are talking about supporting our private sectors: Indians to invest in Saudi Arabia and Saudi companies to invest in Rajasthan and India," Abdullah Al-Arfaj, director of international relations for South and West Asia at the Saudi Ministry of Investment, told Arab News.

"Through its participation in this summit, the Saudi Ministry of Investment seeks to foster

productive dialogue and build actionable partnerships ... The summit is an ideal platform to strengthen Saudi-Indian cooperation and establish the foundations for long-term, sustainable partnerships."

Al-Arfaj, who was meeting with Rajasthan leadership, said they were identifying "shared areas that can contribute to the economic growth of both nations, such as solar and wind energy, infrastructure development, tourism, and technology-based industries, as well as the development of smart cities, green energy initiatives, and advanced technological solutions."

The state's capital, Jaipur, is

a major tourist attraction. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, it is known as the "pink city" from the dominant color scheme of its 18th-century structures.

A number of cooperation agreements are expected to be signed during the summit between Saudi and Indian businesses.

Faisal Al-Jurbua, a member of the Saudi delegation, said his company was planning to establish a desert resort in Rajasthan — the first such property in the Indian state.

"Hopefully, in about six months, we're going to start," the CEO of Riyadh-based HAP Experience Co. told Arab News.



In high spirits Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales, Colonel-in-Chief, 1st Battalion Mercian Regiment, joins a Christmas event for families of the Regiment at Picton Barracks in Bulford, England, Tuesday. AP

'HERO TO ZERO'

UK doctors and nurses with long COVID to sue for compensation

Reuters London

Nearly 300 British doctors, nurses and other health workers with long COVID are suing the health service for compensation, saying they were not given proper protection during the pandemic.

They say their lives have been devastated by a host of severe

health complications. Most cannot return to work and many are housebound.

"This is life changing. People are really suffering financially. Some are living in poverty," said nurse Rachel Hext, one of the claimants.

"We're suing because this is the only way of providing for our futures."

Health staff with long COVID told the Thomson Reuters Foundation they felt betrayed by the government after risking their lives to work on the front-line during the pandemic. They contrasted the weekly public displays of appreciation for National Health Service workers at the height of the crisis with the lack of support they had received since becoming ill.

"It's been like hero to zero," said Hext. "We were clapped on doorsteps one moment, and abandoned the next."

The claimants include consultants, doctors, nurses and hospital porters. Many are in debt or using up savings to survive.

They say they were not given

adequate personal protective equipment, including high-grade masks, and often had to rely on flimsy surgical masks.

"I think we've got a very good chance of winning," said solicitor Kevin Digby, who is representing many of them.

More than 200 symptoms have been linked to long COVID, including cognitive impairment or "brain fog," extreme fatigue, shortness of breath and chronic pain.

The lawsuit is unlikely to be heard by the High Court before 2026 at the earliest because of Britain's ongoing public inquiry into the handling of the COVID crisis in which more than 230,000 people died.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Strong hold

Italy's mafias make billions from tourism

Italy's mafias make more than \$3.5 billion a year from the tourism sector and are primed to pocket even more from large-scale upcoming events, a research institute warned on Tuesday. Organized crime groups preying on vulnerable companies from hotels to restaurants are set to cash in on the Catholic Church's Jubilee celebrations in Rome and the Winter Olympic Games, the Demoskopika research institute said. "Italian tourism is under attack. The powerful 'Ndrangheta mafia alone accounts for half of the entire turnover," the report said. **AFP**

The consequences

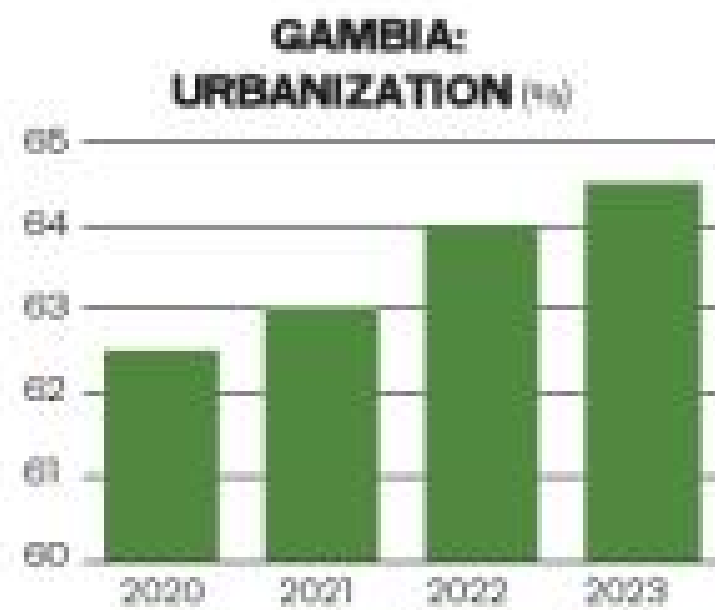
S. Korea slaps travel bans on top officials

South Korean authorities banned more top officials from leaving the country Tuesday, in the wake of President Yoon Suk Yeol's bungled attempt to impose martial law. Investigators are probing the president and a cabal of allies for alleged insurrection over the sequence of extraordinary events.

On Tuesday Cho Ji-ho, commissioner general of the Korean National Police Agency, and two other top police officials became the latest to be barred from foreign travel. Already under a travel ban are the former defense and interior ministers among others. **AFP**

The Day's FIGURES

Source: Statista



What We're Reading Today

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

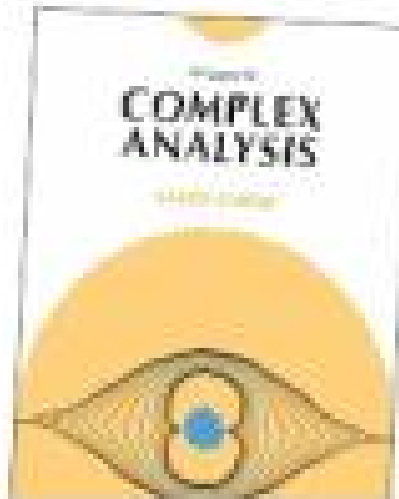
'A Course in Complex Analysis'

SAEED ZAKERI

"A Course in Complex Analysis" explores a central branch of mathematical analysis, with broad applications in mathematics and other fields such as physics and engineering. Ideally designed for a year-long graduate course on complex analysis and based on nearly 20 years of

classroom lectures, this modern and comprehensive textbook is equally suited for independent study or as a reference for more experienced scholars.

Saeed Zakeri guides the reader through a journey that highlights the topological and geometric themes of complex analysis.



'Doing well'

Brazil's Lula undergoes brain surgery

Brazil's 79-year-old President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva underwent surgery for a brain hemorrhage related to a recent fall, hospital officials said Tuesday. "The operation went without complications" on Monday night, and Lula was "doing well, under monitoring" in an intensive care unit, the Syrian Lebanese Hospital in Sao Paulo said in a statement posted on the president's Instagram account. The hemorrhage was linked to a fall Lula suffered on Oct.19, the hospital said. Lula had hit his head after falling in a bathroom at the presidential residence. **AFP**

National affair

Malaysia's PM deflects questions on former premier

Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim refused to answer questions on Tuesday on the existence of a royal decree that would allegedly allow jailed former premier Najib Razak to serve his prison sentence at home. Najib, who was prime minister between 2009 and 2018, was sentenced to 12 years in prison in August 2022, when Malaysia's top court upheld his conviction in a corruption case linked to the multibillion-dollar scandal at state fund IMDB. The sentence however was halved this year by a pardons' board chaired by former King Al-Sultan Abdullah. **Reuters**

ما تَزِدُّهُ نَبِيٌّ قَدْ عَظِيْمَةٌ فَغَيْرُهَا جَدُّهُ أَشَدُّ مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ مَرَّتَيْنِ
لَنْ أَصِيْبَ كَالْحَطَّاءِ لَمْ يُوْثِقْهُمُ، وَإِنْ أَطْعَمْتُ لَمْ أَرْجِعْ عَلَى نَفْسِي بِأَلَاةٍ
(أَمْرُ بْنُ الْعَاصِ)

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

I never faced a debacle and attempted to solve it without twice consulting with 10 from Quraysh; thus, if I succeed, I would be lucky and, if not, I would not blame myself.

Amr bin Al-As

(Arab commander, companion of the Prophet and governor of Egypt)

Opinion

Starmer's visit a step forward for Saudi-UK ties

CHRIS DOYLE



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

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

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's visit to Saudi Arabia should herald a step forward in the trading and business relationship between the two countries. Even historic relationships need renewal and updating. Fresh commercial ties will be welcomed by both governments, which will no doubt look to build on them. Bilateral trade has reached record levels, topping £17.3 billion (\$22 billion).

The UK's Labour government has a tough economic horizon. Even though the British economy is still strong, the sixth-largest in the world, like others it is struggling. Yet, even post-Brexit, it has much going for it and the country remains attractive for foreign direct investment.

But Starmer and Rachel Reeves, his finance minister, have staked their political futures on growth because, given the tight finances, growing the economy will be the only way the government will be able to escape the tight constraints it has imposed

on itself. It is why the UK is keen to close a free trade agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Boosting economic ties with the Arab world's largest economy will be appealing. The two governments have agreed a target of boosting bilateral trade to £30 billion by 2030, a significant but achievable challenge.

This is why Starmer, who was elected in July, made this visit so early in his tenure. His government needs some positive outcomes. The UK is continuing a year-long drive to boost trade that started in the spring, with a special focus on the sectors essential to Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

Saudi Arabia's direct investment in the UK since 2017 stands at about \$21 billion. Already, the Kingdom's investments in the northeast of England have been heralded as a major boost to the economy in an area long seen as deprived. Other major Saudi investments in the UK include a 40 percent stake in the famous central London department store Selfridges. The UK has some

strong, secure brands that states like Saudi Arabia like to invest in.

Starmer will be hoping to encourage further Saudi investment in both the renewable and nuclear energy sectors in the UK.

Could this relationship flourish? Yes, but, as with any relationship, it needs nurturing and requires genuine input. Mutual respect is vital. Starmer will have to listen to his hosts' concerns as well as their ambitions. He would do well to explore the changes in Saudi Arabia and consider that it is no longer a case of UK-Saudi relations being restricted to oil and defense interests. He should look at how women have become a greater part of the workforce, how the country is opening up and how tourism and cultural projects have boomed.

In the education sector, five British independent schools have established branches in Saudi. The University of Strathclyde is set to become the first British higher education institution to have a presence in the Kingdom. Yet perhaps

one of the most telling features is the fact that there are more than 14,000 Saudi students studying at UK universities.

If Starmer truly wishes to boost the trading part of the UK-Saudi relationship, then he and his colleagues have to establish closer personal ties. It is something that British businesspeople over the years have had to learn: that long-term ties built on personal dynamics make progress. The prime minister will have to cast aside the domestic carping that he has been traveling too much since taking office. This matters if he wishes to promote UK business interests.

Starmer has not had great exposure to the Arab world, so any visit like this will be a huge learning curve. British politicians and others can come across as distant in contrast to their Arab counterparts and the current UK leader is not especially known for his charisma. If they are to flourish in this market, Starmer and his team must see things through a long-term lens and as a relationship that is personal, not just commercial.

Even post-Brexit, the UK has much going for it and the country remains attractive for foreign direct investment

COURTESY AMIAD RAHM/ASHRAF AL-AWESAT



For many, the most impressive thing about the country is its extraordinary economic success

The sources of Japanese resilience

CHRIS PATTEN



Chris Patten, the last British governor of Hong Kong and a former EU commissioner for external affairs, is Chancellor of the University of Oxford and the author of 'The Hong Kong Diaries' (Allen Lane, 2022). © Project Syndicate

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I first visited Japan as a young member of the UK Parliament in the early 1980s. Yukio Satoh, an ambitious and forward-thinking diplomat who would later serve as Japan's ambassador to the UN, had recently been posted to the country's London embassy. Recognizing that the political dialogue between the UK and Japan was dominated by an older generation, Satoh sought to foster connections with a younger cohort of British politicians.

That visit sparked my long-standing enthusiasm for Japan, which led me to return dozens of times over the years, in various capacities. Most recently, I visited Japan as an international adviser to the Praemium Imperiale, a prestigious award commemorating the centennial of the Japan Art Association's founding. The Praemium Imperiale is an essential component of Japan's soft power. Over its 35-year history, it has been awarded to celebrated artists and architects from Japan and around the world.

Japan's contributions to the visual arts, film and architecture have left a lasting impression on me. But for many, the most impressive thing about the country is its extraordinary economic success.

Japan's postwar boom is often described as an "economic miracle." While I am skeptical of this term, there is no denying that the country experienced a remarkable transformation between the late 1950s and the 1990s. This can be attributed to several key factors: relative political stability, effective policymaking and substantial investments in education, job training and public health, as well as the ability to capitalize on opportunities created by increasingly globalized markets. I witnessed these dynamics first-hand during my tenure as governor of Hong Kong.

To be sure, the miracle did not last. After decades of rapid gross domestic product growth, especially between 1973 and 1991, the country entered a prolonged period of economic stagnation and deflation, often referred to as the "lost decades."

Japan's post-1990 economic stagnation was triggered by efforts to cool an overheated property sector through interest rate hikes and a strong yen policy intended to address US trade concerns. These measures were largely a result of the 1985 Plaza Accord, which boosted the yen's value and undermined the competitiveness of Japanese exports.

Given his threats to launch a trade war, US President-elect Donald Trump's second term potentially poses the most serious challenge to Japan's economic resilience in decades. One can only hope that Japanese policymakers confront Trump's proposed protectionist tariffs with the same resolve their predecessors demonstrated in countering Ronald Reagan's trade restrictions and currency manipulation.

Fortunately, Japan finds itself in a relatively strong position, with recent data underscoring its remarkable resilience in the face of the twin shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic and the global energy crisis. Admittedly, economic growth is slowing

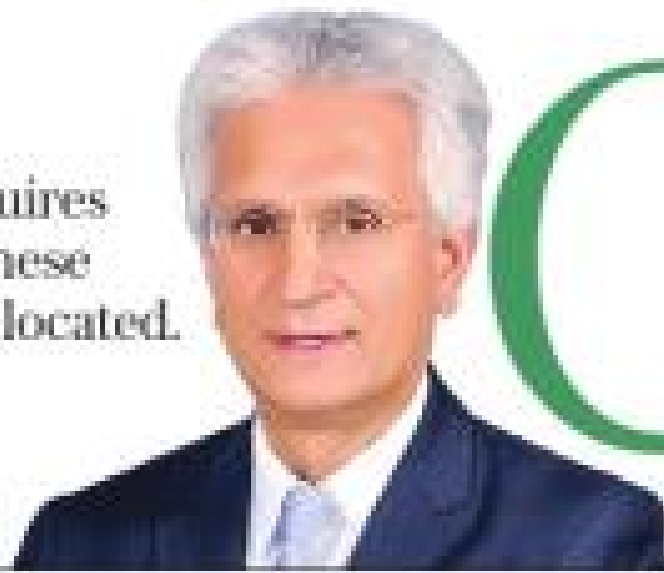
once again — the International Monetary Fund projects GDP to rise by just 0.3 percent in 2024, down from 1.7 percent in 2023 — and Japan has been overtaken by Germany as the world's third-largest economy. But it remains a prosperous country with an exceptionally high life expectancy.

A visit to Japan reveals the source of its resilience: a strong democratic society firmly rooted in the rule of law. But what impresses me most is the country's ability to navigate the tension between identity politics and globalization without succumbing to the divisiveness that currently plagues many other liberal democracies.

While Japan faces several daunting challenges — not least a rapidly aging and shrinking population — it retains a profound sense of national identity that seems to grow stronger, not weaker, in an increasingly interconnected world. Its self-assurance has endured the pressures of a globalized economy, which is why I am confident that it can weather whatever storms the future may hold.

Addressing water scarcity requires billions in investments, but these resources must be strategically allocated.

Merza Hassan
Arab Fund for Economic and
Social Development official



COP 16

SPECIAL COVERAGE



The World Bank's Global Director of Water, Saroj Kumar Jha, said his institution's platform will be built on international best practices.
AN photos by
Loal El-Kelawy

CLIMATE ACTION

World Bank launches drought risk, resilience platform

Initiative to strengthen decision-making frameworks and governance to tackle the issue

Nadim Hassan Riyadh

A new platform designed to help governments monitor and manage drought risks has been launched by the World Bank at COP16 in Riyadh, as concerns over the global impact of water scarcity grow.

The Drought Risk and Resilience Assessment aims to strengthen decision-making frameworks and governance to help tackle this growing issue.

The platform is designed to provide governments with tools to better understand droughts, create mechanisms for ongoing action, and anticipate and manage future risks.

It comes after Saudi Arabia used COP16 to announce the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership, which aims to provide early warning systems, training, and capacity building for 80 countries most vulnerable to a lack of water.

Speaking at the meeting of the Convention to Combat Desertification, the World Bank's Global Director of Water, Saroj Kumar Jha, said his institution's platform will be "built on international best practices," harnessing expertise from governments, scientists, and practitioners.

"Droughts do not occur suddenly but develop gradually



Experts speak at a panel during COP16 in Riyadh on Tuesday.

over time," he said. "What is important is that we need a system by which different parts of the government are able to collect the data."

Jha added that most developing countries lack national drought monitors to systematically collect data on factors such as soil, crops, water, rainfall, temperature, humidity, and weather.

He emphasized that establishing these monitors would become a key focus area moving forward.

Osama Faqeeka, Saudi Arabia's deputy minister of environment, highlighted the global urgency of addressing droughts, noting that projections suggest more than half of the world's population could face water scarcity in the coming decades.

He pointed to the increasing spread of droughts to new

regions, particularly Latin America, where 35 percent is now exposed to the phenomenon.

"What the outlook is telling us is that maybe this number is expected to double or even more," Faqeeka said. He also warned about the economic and social consequences of drought, including its impact on food prices, migration, and

economic stability. The deputy minister also emphasized that 80 percent of the impact of water scarcity falls on agricultural communities, particularly small-scale farmers. He called for more global action to combat drought, underscoring that Saudi Arabia has long relied on innovative approaches to water management.

"We have to realize that 90 percent of freshwater is in soil, not in the rivers, not in the lakes — it's in the soil, and when drought hits, the soil dries and life is taken away from it," Faqeeka said, adding that every dollar put in resilience and preparedness saves \$5 to \$10 from the response.

Global call to action

Speakers at COP16 emphasized the interconnected nature of the crisis and the urgent need for collaborative solutions.



Osama Faqeeka, Saudi Arabia's deputy minister of environment, highlighted the global urgency of addressing droughts.

FASTFACTS

- The platform is designed to provide governments with tools to better understand droughts, create mechanisms for ongoing action, and anticipate and manage future risks.

- Globally, since 1995, the world has lost 20 percent of its natural capital per capita.

- Land degradation alone costs the global economy 10 percent of its gross domestic product annually.

- Most developing countries lack national drought monitors to systematically collect data on factors such as soil, crops, water, rainfall, temperature, humidity, and weather.

Valerie Hickey, global environment director at the World Bank, highlighted the economic toll of environmental degradation, saying: "Globally, since 1995, the world has lost 20 percent of its natural capital per capita," she said, adding that land degradation alone costs the global economy 10 percent of its gross domestic product annually.

The Kingdom's efforts to tackle the issue also align with broader environmental goals, including its Saudi and Middle East Green Initiatives, which aim to combat desertification and expand

vegetation cover.

Ayman Ghulam, CEO of the National Center of Meteorology, elaborated on Saudi Arabia's proactive response to the challenges posed by sand and dust storms, which are worsening due to climate change.

These include a dedicated regional center focusing on monitoring and mitigating the effects of storms, while the Climate Change Center addresses broader environmental impacts.

The cloud seeding program, another critical initiative, works to enhance rainfall and combat aridity, supporting water resource management and reducing the vulnerability of affected areas.

"These efforts demonstrate the Kingdom's commitment to sustainable development, environmental conservation and addressing the challenges of climate change and sand and dust storms, and drought and land degradation," Ghulam said.

Faqeeka urged global stakeholders to act decisively. "The time to act is now," he said, emphasizing that resilience requires partnerships across governments, NGOs, and the private sector.

By fostering collaboration and leveraging innovative solutions, the initiatives announced at COP16 aim to address one of the most pressing global challenges.

GASTAT

Robust manufacturing sector lifts Saudi industrial index by 5%

Other contributors to growth included the manufacture of chemicals and chemical products

Miguel Hadchity Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's industrial production index rose by 5 percent year on year in October, driven by robust growth across key economic sectors, official data showed.

According to figures from the General Authority for Statistics, the index also edged up 0.4 percent month on month, reaching 106.9 points.

The mining and quarrying sub-index, which includes oil production, recorded a slight 0.4 percent annual increase, with oil output ticking up to 8.97 million barrels per day from 8.94 million a year earlier.

Despite the annual increase, monthly performance for this sector remained stable with no significant changes recorded between September and October.

The manufacturing sector continued its robust growth, recording a 12.4 percent year-on-year increase in October. This expansion was primarily driven by a 32.6 percent surge in the production of coke and refined petroleum products compared to the same month of 2023.

Saudi Arabia's industrial production, central to Vision 2030, is driving economic diversification through manufacturing and non-oil growth.

Other contributors to the sector's growth included the



Saudi Arabia's industrial production, central to Vision 2030, is driving economic diversification through manufacturing and non-oil growth. File

manufacture of chemicals and chemical products, which rose by 0.6 percent, and food products, which grew by 4.8 percent.

On a month-to-month basis, the manufacturing sub-index advanced by 1.1 percent, driven

by a 2.7 percent increase in coke and refined petroleum products and a 0.2 percent rise in chemicals and chemical products.

Other manufacturing activities exhibited varied growth rates. The manufacture of non-metallic mineral products increased by 1.8 percent year on year and 0.8 percent month on month.

Basic metals manufacturing expanded by 4.3 percent annually and 1 percent compared to the previous month.

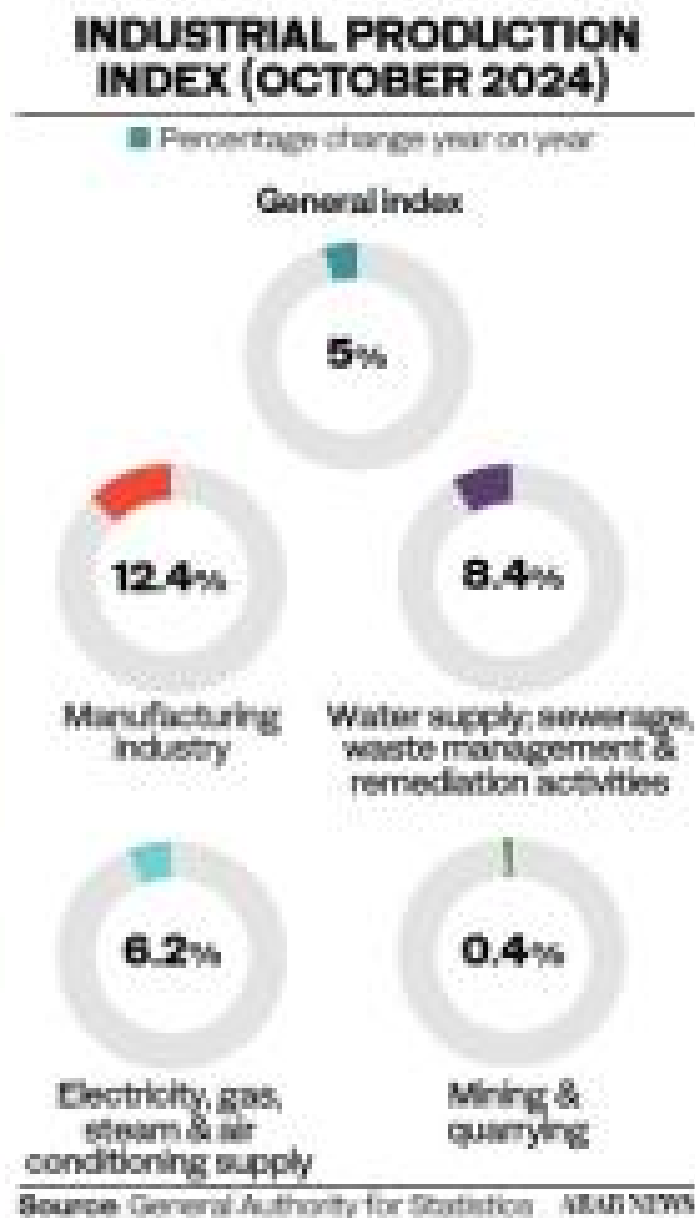
Paper and paper product manufacturing saw an 11 percent annual rise and a 1.1 percent monthly increase, while the production of electrical devices grew by 9.2 percent year-on-year and 0.1 percent month on month.

Furniture manufacturing posted notable growth, rising 14.4 percent annually and 0.5 percent monthly. Other economic activities within the manufacturing sector recorded a 4.3 percent year-on-year

increase and a 0.3 percent monthly uptick.

In the utilities sector, the sub-index for electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning supply rose by 6.2 percent year on year. Similarly, the sub-index for water supply and sewerage as well as waste management activities climbed by 8.4 percent over the same period.

These sectors also recorded positive monthly growth. The sub-index for electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning



supply rose by 0.9 percent compared to September 2024, while the water supply, sewerage, and waste management sub-index increased by 1.4 percent.

In October, oil-related activities expanded by 5.4 percent year on year and 0.5 percent month on month.

Non-oil activities also showed solid growth, rising 4 percent annually and 0.3 percent monthly. This highlights Saudi Arabia's commitment to diversifying its industrial base as part of its Vision 2030 initiative.

The IPI tracks changes in industrial output, using the International Standard Industrial Classification framework to monitor sectors such as mining, manufacturing, utilities, and waste management.

RATING

Fitch affirms Saudi Aramco at 'A+' with stable outlook

Reem Walid Riyadh

Fitch Ratings has reaffirmed Saudi Aramco's long-term issuer default ratings at "A+" for both foreign- and local-currency ratings, with a stable outlook, reflecting the oil giant's strong financial standing and its crucial role in the Saudi economy.

The rating is underpinned by Aramco's robust financial profile, though it is capped by the rating of its majority shareholder, the Saudi government, which owns 81.48 percent of the company. The Public Investment Fund holds an additional 16 percent.

According to Fitch, this structure influences Aramco's ratings due to the government's significant stake and control.

Fitch assigned Aramco a stand-alone credit profile of "aa-," highlighting its solid financial position. The agency also gave the company a short-term IDR of "F1+," which is aligned with the



In 2024, Saudi Aramco is expected to pay total dividends of \$124 billion. File

sovereign rating. The affirmation comes after Aramco's strong performance in 2023, when its total liquid production averaged 10.7 million barrels per day, and its hydrocarbon output reached 12.8 million barrels of oil equivalent per day.

This performance outpaced major global peers, including Shell, TotalEnergies, and BP.

In its statement, Fitch noted that Aramco's rating is constrained by Saudi Arabia's rating, in line

with Fitch's Government-Related Entities Rating Criteria.

This is due to the government's substantial influence over Aramco, particularly its regulation of production levels in accordance with OPEC+ commitments.

Fitch also emphasized the company's "Very Strong" governance, reflecting the government's strategic oversight, including the ability to determine Aramco's maximum sustainable oil production capacity.

Fitch also praised Aramco's sustainable dividend policy, which is set to include a base dividend of \$81.2 billion in 2024, with additional performance-linked payouts. "Under our oil price assumptions, we expect Saudi Aramco's capital expenditures and base dividend payments to be broadly covered by operating cash flow.

"We also assume that the company has the flexibility to adjust its dividend commitment if oil prices decline or if capital expenditures exceed current forecasts," Fitch said.

In 2024, Aramco is expected to pay total dividends of \$124 billion, including \$43.1 billion in performance-linked payouts, reflecting record cash flows from 2022-23. Fitch forecasts a reduction in capital expenditures from \$50 billion in 2024 to \$35 billion by 2028, with annual dividends projected to decrease to \$82 billion over the same period.

STOCKS

Saudi main index continues upward trend

Nirmal Narayanan Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's Tadawul All Share Index continued its upward trend for the third consecutive day, as it gained 96.24 points or 0.80 percent to close at 12,193.64.

The total trading turnover of the benchmark index was SR6.95 billion (\$1.85 billion) with 110 stocks advancing, while 118 declining.

Saudi Arabia's parallel market Nomu also edged up by 54.76 points to close at 31,557.61, while the MSCI Tadawul Index gained 15.72 points to 1,532.32.

Anaam International Holding Group was the best-performing stock of the day. The company's share price surged by 6.77 percent to SR142.

Saudi Research and Media Group was another top gainer, with the company's share price increasing by 4.23 percent to SR286.

Conversely, the share price of

Banan Real Estate Co. slipped by 9.88 percent to SR7.39.

On Dec.10, shares of Jahez International Co. for Information Systems Technology debuted on Saudi Arabia's main exchange. The company's share price, however, slipped by 9.04 percent to SR34.20.

On the parallel market, Dar

HIGHLIGHT

The total trading turnover of the benchmark index was SR6.95 billion (\$1.85 billion) with 110 stocks advancing, while 118 declining.

Almarkabah for Renting Cars Co. was the best performer with its share price increasing by 13.42 percent to SR60.

Saad Hussain Bin Dajam Group announced that it received an approval from Saudi Arabia's Capital Market Authority to float 2.05 million shares on Nomu.

Business News



Lebanon's dollar-denominated bonds surged by 30 percent in 10 days, reaching 13 cents to the dollar on Dec. 9. Reuters

FINANCE

Lebanon dollar bond rally sparks hope for reforms

Fast-changing situation in neighboring Syria contributed to the surge

Miguel Hadechity Riyadh

A rally in Lebanon's dollar-denominated bonds a day after Syrian militant groups removed President Bashar Assad from power shows growing optimism for economic and governance reforms in the region, according to an expert.

Makram Makarem, a senior director at Beirut-based Investment and Capital Bank, told Arab News that the prospect of reduced external influence in Lebanon through Iranian proxies in Syria, as well as the weakening of Hezbollah, has boosted investor confidence. Lebanon's dollar-denominated bonds surged by 30 percent in 10 days, reaching 13 cents to the dollar on Dec. 9, data from Bloomberg showed.

At least nine of the country's dollar bonds, maturing between

2026 and 2037, traded above 12 cents, a significant rise from their average for much of the year.

The 2029 bonds saw the largest increase, rising 2.03 cents to 12.76 cents on the dollar — the highest since December 2022, Reuters reported.

Although still significantly below face value, the bonds have rallied multiple times since Israel's recent military strikes in Lebanon.

"This optimism stems from expectations of reduced political interference and greater focus on governance," said Makarem.

The financial adviser at the Lebanese institution explained that the bond surge is driven by a combination of geopolitical and economic factors.

The removal of President Assad's government has disrupted a crucial supply route for Hezbollah, the Iran-backed Lebanese militia designated as a terrorist group by the US. He pointed out that

HIGHLIGHTS

● At least nine of the country's dollar bonds, maturing between 2026 and 2037, traded above 12 cents, a significant rise from their average for much of the year.

● The 2029 bonds saw the largest increase, rising 2.03 cents to 12.76 cents on the dollar — the highest since December 2022.

this, coupled with growing expectations of a breakthrough in Lebanon's long-stalled presidential election, has improved investor sentiment.

While the outlook is promising, Lebanon's entrenched corruption and political inefficiencies pose challenges, requiring strong reforms and sustained international support for meaningful progress, he added. On the

economic front, Makarem underlined that ongoing state debt restructuring efforts and historical recovery rates for defaulted bonds, which typically range from 20 percent to 50 percent, "indicate that current bond levels are undervalued, with recovery estimates projected between 20 percent and 30 percent."

Additionally, rising gold prices — which are positively correlated with Lebanon's recovery prospects due to the country's gold reserves — along with restructuring efforts in the banking sector, have raised growth expectations.

"However, sustaining this sentiment will depend on Lebanon's ability to implement reforms and navigate its entrenched political and economic challenges," he added. The bond rally has laid the groundwork for potential economic recovery by boosting confidence in Lebanon's financial markets.

REFORMS

UAE to impose 15% minimum tax on MNCs

Arab News Riyadh

The UAE will impose a 15 percent minimum top-up tax on large multinational companies starting in January, according to the country's Finance Ministry.

This move is part of the UAE's

strategy to increase non-oil revenue and align with global tax reforms. The Domestic Minimum Top Up Tax is part of the OECD's global minimum corporate tax agreement, which has been signed by 136 countries, including the UAE. The initiative is to ensure that large corporations pay a minimum tax rate of 15 percent and address tax avoidance practices. Under amendments to the corporate tax law, the DMTT will apply to companies with consolidated global revenues of €750 million (\$793.5 million) or more in at least two out of the four financial years leading up to the tax's implementation. "The UAE has shifted from a tax haven to a low-tax jurisdiction with the introduction of a 9 percent corporate tax rate in 2023," said Bal Krishen,

FASTFACTS

● The initiative aims to ensure that large corporations pay a minimum tax rate of 15 percent.

● The DMTT will apply to companies with consolidated global revenues of \$793.5 million or more in at least two out of the four financial years.

chairman of Century Group.

The DMTT is part of the OECD's "Two-Pillar Solution," which mandates that large multinational enterprises pay a minimum effective tax rate of 15 percent on profits earned in each country where they operate. Krishen said: "This move aims to create a fair tax system

and boost revenues for economic diversification beyond oil."

He said despite the 15 percent rate, the UAE will still be competitive compared to countries like the UK. The UAE's Finance Ministry also revealed that it is considering additional corporate tax incentives, including one focused on research and development that would apply to tax periods starting in 2026. This expenditure-based incentive could provide a refundable tax credit of 30 percent to 50 percent, depending on the size and revenue of the company.

The ministry is also exploring a refundable tax credit for high-value employment activities, which would be offered to companies based on eligible employee income costs. This incentive could come into effect on Jan. 1, 2025.

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Trade

China's exports slow sharply in November

China's exports slowed sharply and imports unexpectedly shrank in November. The disappointing trade figures follow other indicators showing patchy growth in November.

Outbound shipments grew 6.7 percent last month, data showed on Tuesday, missing a forecast 8.5 percent increase and down from a 12.7 percent rise in October. Of more concern for authorities, imports shrank 3.9 percent, their worst performance in nine months and dashing expectations for a 0.3 percent increase, keeping alive calls for more policy support to prop up domestic demand. Reuters

Prices

UK grocery inflation rises to 2.6%: data

British shoppers faced increased pressure on their budgets last month after grocery price inflation edged higher, industry data showed on Tuesday.

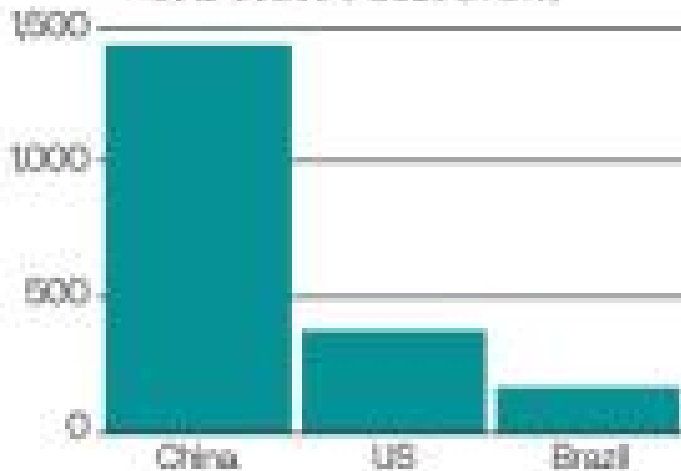
Market researcher Kantar said annual grocery price inflation was 2.6 percent in the four weeks to Dec. 1, having been 2.3 percent in the previous four-week period.

Prices are rising fastest in products such as toothbrushes, chilled smoothies and juices, and fragrances and falling fastest in items including household paper products, dog food and ambient savory meals, Kantar said. Reuters

Chart of THE DAY

In 2023, China recorded the highest installed renewable energy capacity globally

RENEWABLE ENERGY CAPACITY 2023 (in GW)



Source: Statista

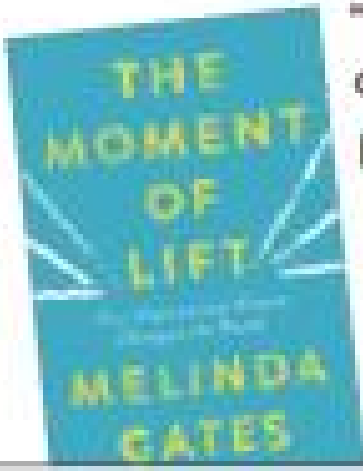
What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

The Moment of Lift

MELINDA FRENCH GATES

In this candid and inspiring book, Melinda Gates traces her awakening to the link between women's empowerment and the health of societies, says a review published on goodreads.com.



She shows some of the tremendous opportunities that exist right now to "turbo-charge" change. And she provides simple and effective ways each one of us can make a difference.

Outlook

Global airlines raise profit forecast for 2025

Global airlines on Tuesday raised their profit forecast for 2025 compared to the prior year, projecting revenues at more than \$1 trillion for the first time and a record 5.2 billion passengers globally.

Airlines around the world have seen their growth hampered by difficulties at Boeing and Airbus which have delayed jet deliveries.

Without newer planes, airlines say they cannot cut back jet fuel costs. Still, the International Air Transport Association said it expected the worldwide industry to generate \$36.6 billion of net profit this year. Reuters

Manufacturing

Italy industry output stagnates in October

Italian industrial output was flat in October from the month before, a weaker than expected reading, following a revised 0.3 percent decline in September, data showed.

A Reuters survey of 18 analysts had pointed to a 0.2 percent month-on-month increase in October. September's data was revised up marginally from an originally reported fall of 0.4 percent. On a work-day adjusted year-on-year basis, industrial output was down 3.6 percent, the 21st consecutive annual decline, after a 3.9 percent drop in September, national statistics bureau ISTAT said. Reuters

Our alliance with M Integrated Solutions goes beyond conventional collaboration; it represents a meeting of vision and values.

Salman Al-Asmari
Vice President of Naif Alrajhi Investment

Corporate

PRESS RELEASES FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

STRATEGIC COLLABORATION

Global live event agency inks Kingdom partnership

Naif Alrajhi Investment, a Saudi investment group, has announced a strategic partnership with M Integrated Solutions PLC, a creative agency and global leader in live events and immersive storytelling.

The partnership will reshape the landscape of live events in the Kingdom, bringing a unique fusion of business acumen and creative storytelling that will resonate deeply with audiences.

M has a reputation for engaging with live audiences in excess of 650,000, delivering personal experiences across varied demographics and cultures, and on every continent. The company has a track record of delivering strategic, high-impact live events for governments, brands, and organizations around the world. M's clients include the Dubai World Cup, Commonwealth Summit, COP, FIFA, Olympic Council of Asia, International Olympic Committee, Toyota, BAE Systems, Airbus, and various governmental agencies like the Department for Education, to name a few.

Salman Al-Asmari, vice president of Naif Alrajhi Investment, said: "Our alliance with M Integrated Solutions goes beyond conventional collaboration; it represents a meeting of vision and values, with both companies dedicated to fostering growth in

The partnership between Naif Alrajhi Investment and M Integrated Solutions PLC will reshape the landscape of live events in the Kingdom, fusing local values and international expertise.



line with the Kingdom's Vision 2030 objectives and beyond. Together, we aim to shape the future of live, immersive storytelling, driving both innovation and emotional engagement that resonate with our people and our culture."

Founded more than 30 years ago, M brings a heritage of excellence in strategic storytelling, audience engagement, and brand-building.

Through this collaboration, M plans to build upon and strengthen its presence in the Kingdom, positioning itself as the

provider of choice for live event solutions that bridge culture, commerce acumen, and creativity to empower brands to not only tell their stories, but to engage audiences, creating moments that are unforgettable.

Jim Curley, M's CEO, said: "This partnership reflects a deliberate strategy to formalize and expand our presence in Saudi Arabia, leveraging Naif Alrajhi Investment's cultural and business expertise to deepen our relationships at the highest levels of government and industry. Our combined strengths will allow

HIGHLIGHT

Through this collaboration, M plans to build upon and strengthen its presence in the Kingdom, positioning itself as the provider of choice for live event solutions that bridge culture, commerce acumen, and creativity to empower brands.

us to deliver a new caliber of experiences, making us the go-to agency for brands looking to make meaningful activities in the Kingdom."

John Young, executive creative director of M, said: "Saudi Arabia has always been a canvas for remarkable creativity and innovation, and we're thrilled to formalize our role in shaping the country's live event marketing space. We're excited to bring our international expertise and unique creative approach to a market that values bold ideas and groundbreaking experiences."

The partnership is set to redefine live events in Saudi Arabia, bridging local values and international expertise to deliver unparalleled brand experiences.

Corporate Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Sustainability ADIO partners with climate tech leader Partanna

The Abu Dhabi Investment Office has partnered with Partanna, a Bahamian climate tech company, to establish its regional headquarters and a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Abu Dhabi.

This collaboration, announced during the inaugural Abu Dhabi Business Week, held Dec. 4-6 under the patronage of Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, will establish Abu Dhabi as the regional epicenter for carbon-negative building materials.

Secure Network Cisco unveils plug-and-play AI solutions

Cisco announced new additions to its data center infrastructure portfolio: an AI server family purpose-built for GPU-intensive AI workloads with NVIDIA accelerated computing, and AI PODs to simplify and de-risk AI infrastructure investment. They give organizations an adaptable and scalable path to AI, supported by Cisco's industry-leading networking capabilities.

"Enterprise customers are under pressure to deploy AI workloads, especially as we move toward agentic workflows and AI begins solving problems on its own," said Jeetu Patel, chief product officer, Cisco.

Global Hospitality Hilton on expansion spree in Morocco

Hilton is accelerating its plans to more than double its portfolio in Morocco with the signing of nine hotels across seven of its global brands, including the debut of its iconic Waldorf Astoria Hotels and Resorts brand in the capital city of Rabat. This is in addition to the introduction of its luxury LXR Hotels and Resorts, lifestyle Curio Collection by Hilton, and value-driven Hampton by Hilton brands to the country.

Carlos Khneisser, vice president, development, Middle East and Africa, Hilton, said: "With 13.1 million tourists visiting Morocco in the first nine months of this year, an increase of around 2 million compared to the same period last year, the country is experiencing significant momentum as a sought-after tourist destination."

EXCELLENCE IN HEALTHCARE

Aster Sanad Hospital bags 4-star global rating from Newsweek

Aster Sanad Hospital — a multi-specialty hospital in Riyadh and part of GCC's integrated healthcare provider Aster DM Healthcare — bagged a four-star rating in Newsweek's prestigious Global Hospital Rating survey. This inclusion highlights Aster's commitment to excellence and innovation in healthcare, placing it among the few hospitals in Riyadh and the Kingdom to achieve this level of recognition.

The Global Hospital Rating, curated through a collaboration between Newsweek and Statista, serves as a comprehensive benchmark that evaluates hospitals worldwide across five critical criteria: provision of care, timeliness of care, patient experience and safety, IT and healthcare technology, and employer attractiveness.

To elevate patient experience at the hospital, Aster Sanad recently inaugurated a 50-bed grand wing, bringing the hospital capacity to 250 beds. The new wing, featuring VIP and single rooms thoughtfully designed for comfort

and privacy, allows patients to recover in a tranquil and sophisticated environment.

Alisha Moopen, managing director and group CEO, Aster DM Healthcare, said "Aster Sanad Hospital's four-star rating in Newsweek's prestigious Global Hospital Rating not only solidifies our position as one of the leading hospitals in the Kingdom but also underscores our commitment to the highest standards of clinical excellence and patient care. This recognition motivates us to continue pushing boundaries and challenging our own benchmarks, as we strive to set new standards of excellence for hospitals across the region. We remain dedicated to evolving our services to meet and exceed the needs of Riyadh and the wider community we serve."

Mohamed Al-Shamari, CEO of Aster Hospitals and Clinics, Saudi Arabia, said: "It is a great honor for Aster Sanad to be recognized among the few hospitals in the Kingdom to earn a distinguished four-star and above rating."

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Bupa Marathon supports public health, environment

Bupa Arabia for Cooperative Insurance hosted its Bupa Marathon 2024 on Nov. 30 in Riyadh's Misk City. The event, held under the slogan "Your steps bring life to our environment," brought together more than 2,500 participants of all ages and abilities, including people with special needs, to support the twin causes of public health and environmental sustainability.

The marathon was supported by Mohammed Bin Salman Nonprofitable City, the Saudi Sports for All Federation, and the Ministry of Sports, reflecting the cooperation between governmental authorities and the private sector to enhance physical activity and health awareness in Saudi society.

Hanan Al-Rasheed won first place in the 10-km women's race, while Abdulrahman Al Ansary bagged first position in the men's category. In the five-km race, Noor Al-Jubouri and Mahmoud Osman emerged winners in their respective categories.

Meanwhile, in the 1-km race, Jana El-Houshy bagged first



The marathon brought together more than 2,500 participants of all ages and abilities.

position among women while Yassine Lafif came first in the men's category. In the special needs category, Omar Mahdi won first place in the 1-km race.

Alshereef Hamideddin, senior executive director of marketing at Bupa Arabia, said: "This marathon is not only a race for sport, but it's an invitation to motivate the community to adopt an effective and healthy lifestyle, as well as maintain the environment. We are proud of the positive energy and the huge attendance that we witnessed from all the participants; this assures the importance of such activities to enhance community spirit."

In line with its commitment to preserving the environment, Bupa Arabia planted a tree across the Kingdom for every participant. The initiative aims to increase green spaces and enhance environmental awareness.

The Bupa Marathon is part of Bupa Arabia's "Live Right" program, which launched in 2022 to promote a culture of healthy lifestyles in the Kingdom. The marathon is also in line with the goals of Saudi Vision 2030, which include enhancing physical activity, improving public health, and supporting environmental sustainability.

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola during training at the Etihad Campus, Manchester, Britain, ahead of their Champions League clash against Italian giants Juventus on Wednesday.



Sport News

ESPORTS

Saudi Arabia crowned inaugural champion of FIFAE World Cup featuring Rocket League

- Saudi Arabia triumph against France in the first of 3 FIFAE World Cup finals
- Next to be decided are FIFAE World Cup featuring eFootball on mobile and console

Arab News Riyadh

The first FIFAE World Cup featuring Rocket League concluded with Saudi Arabia being crowned world champions after four days of intense competition.

As players represented their national teams for the first time on the Rocket League scene, the Kingdom claimed victory over France in the final to take the title and lift the trophy in Riyadh at the weekend.

The winning team was made up of Rwa9, Killeerrz, trk511 and d7oom-24, whose road to success saw them defeat some of the world's best players and national teams. Sixteen nations took part in the inaugural tournament at the SEF Arena at BLVD Riyadh City.

Saudi Arabia's triumph will be seen as further confirmation of its growing influence in the global esports scene, with the country heavily investing in the gaming ecosystem as part of its Vision 2030 strategy.

The FIFAE Finals 2024 features multiple titles under the FIFAE banner for the first time. During the course of the event a total prize pool of \$450,000 will be distributed across the three world cups.

Attention now turns to the FIFAE World Cups featuring eFootball on mobile and console, which will both conclude on Dec. 12.



Players of Team Saudi Arabia with their panini cards after winning the FIFAE World Cup featuring Rocket League at SEF Arena in Riyadh. Gonzalo Arroyo/FIFA

ELECTRIC CAR RACING

Tickets go on sale for inaugural Jeddah E-Prix

Arab News Jeddah

Formula E has today announced that tickets for the 2025 Jeddah E-Prix — the new host city for the all-electric championship's race event in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia — are on sale.

The Early Bird sale has begun, with prices starting from SAR 50 (\$13), giving fans the opportunity to receive 25 percent off full-price tickets ahead of the general sale on Sunday, Dec. 22, when tickets will start at SAR 70.

Following six successful previous events in Diriyah, Formula E will return to Saudi Arabia, which will play host to a race event for its seventh year. The 2025 Jeddah E-Prix will take place on Feb. 14-15 at the Jeddah Corniche Circuit, set against the backdrop of the Red Sea coastline.

"Bringing Formula E to Jeddah for the first time is an exciting milestone for the championship," Jeff Dodds, CEO of Formula E,



After six years in Diriyah, Formula E action in Saudi Arabia will move to Jeddah in 2025. Supplied

said. "Saudi Arabia has been a key part of our journey, and racing in Jeddah reflects our commitment to growing the sport in new and dynamic cities around the world. The combination of Jeddah's

rich motorsport culture and its forward-thinking vision for sustainability makes it an ideal host for Formula E. We can't wait to see the cars light up the iconic Corniche Short Circuit and deliver a spectacular debut race for fans."

This will be the first time fans in Saudi Arabia can catch

a glimpse of the all-new GEN3 Evo race car as it is put through its paces on the revised Jeddah Corniche Circuit. The new GEN3 Evo car is capable of 0-60mph in just 1.82 seconds — 36 percent faster than the previous GEN3 and 30 percent faster than a

FASTFACTS

- Saudi Arabia will welcome Formula E to Jeddah in 2025 for Season 11 after six years of racing in Diriyah.

- Rounds 3 and 4 of the all-electric series will take place on Feb. 14-15 at a revised Jeddah Corniche Short Circuit.

current Formula One car. "We are thrilled to bring Formula E to Jeddah for the first time in 2025," said Alberto Longo, co-founder and chief championship officer, Formula E. "This city embodies a unique blend

of tradition and innovation that defines our championship. This new addition to the calendar also highlights our ongoing commitment to expanding the reach of Formula E, and we look forward to making history in Saudi Arabia once again."

Carlo Boutagy, founder of CBX, promoter of the Jeddah E-Prix, added: "It is incredibly exciting to be bringing Formula E to Jeddah for the first time, showcasing the power of electric motorsport to another part of Saudi Arabia."

"Not only will Jeddah provide thrilling racing as teams face new challenges on an unfamiliar circuit, but we are also creating experiences and activations away from the racing to engage our fans to offer the most entertaining weekend possible, whether that be their time in the Fan Village or the concerts after the race."

Tickets for 2025 Jeddah E-Prix are available for sale from WeBook.

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

FIFPRO vote

Messi, Ronaldo miss out on men's World XI

No Lionel Messi and no Cristiano Ronaldo. The all-time football greats did not make the men's world team of the year organized by global players' union FIFPRO on Monday.

The 37-year-old Messi, who plays for MLS side Inter Miami, and the 39-year-old Ronaldo, who plays for Al-Nassr in the Saudi Pro League, were the only players not with European clubs voted onto a 26-man shortlist by FIFPRO last week.

This year's team of the year featured six players from record 15-time Champions League winner Real Madrid and four from Premier League heavyweight Manchester City, with Liverpool's standout center half Virgil van Dijk the other player selected. **AP**

Bike crash

Cycling great Eddy Merckx breaks a hip

Cycling great Eddy Merckx broke a hip in a crash while bike riding, Belgian media reported on Monday.

The Het Nieuwsblad newspaper, quoting his family, said the 79-year-old Merckx would undergo surgery at Herentals hospital. Other Belgian media also reported Merckx's crash.

Merckx is regarded as the greatest cyclist ever. He won five Tour de France titles and three world championships. **AP**



With Spain, Portugal Morocco sets stage for 2030 World Cup

After decades of unsuccessful bids, Morocco will finally achieve its long-cherished dream of hosting the football World Cup in 2030, along with Spain and Portugal, in what the North African country hopes will boost its international image and economy.

FIFA is set to formally ratify the trio's candidacy on Wednesday, with Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay also hosting a game each to mark a century since the very first World Cup was staged in South America. **AFP**

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Greg Silverman — whose Stampede Ventures previously inked a 10-movie deal with Saudi Arabia's Film AlUla — attended the screening of one of those films, 'K-Pops,' at the Red Sea International Film Festival.



& Finally

TheSix

Local flavor

Here are six restaurants in Jeddah that will treat you to wholesome traditional food.



Seddah restaurant

A popular restaurant with many branches across the city, this spot has a diverse menu comprising traditional chicken and meat dishes served with heaped portions of rice. Don't forget to try out their cream kunafah for dessert.



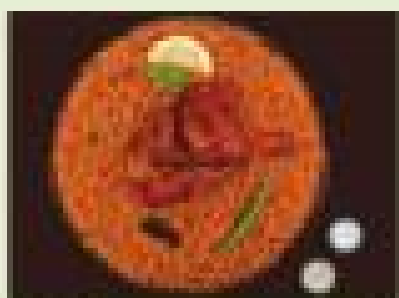
Labani

Their main courses mostly feature succulent pieces of meat on top of flavorful rice and their complimentary bone broth is tantalizing.



Menahi

This local restaurant serves dishes such as meat mandi, saleegh, and zurbian, among others. Their chicken koozi, which consists of rice with steamed chicken and noodles garnished with hardboiled eggs, is delectable.



AlRomanslah

This joint's red rice with grilled chicken paired with a thick tahini sauce and yoghurt is a must try. The restaurant has multiple branches across the Kingdom.



Shawaya House

Treat your family and friends to a wholesome meal of chicken kabza with a host of accompaniments on a budget from this restaurant.



Raydan

For a hearty meal that will keep you satiated for long, try their meat mandi.

CLOSE UP

Hollywood meets Bollywood on the shores of the Red Sea

Shyama Krishna Kumar Jeddah

British American actor Andrew Garfield and Bollywood superstar Shraddha Kapoor posed for photographs together on the red carpet at the Red Sea International Film Festival in Jeddah ahead of the screening of Garfield's latest film, "We Live in Time," on Monday night.

It was a meeting of Hollywood and Bollywood on the shores of the Red Sea as the pair, each bankable film stars in their own right, posed for photos and shook hands on the red carpet. "We Live in Time" had its MENA premiere at the festival. Although not joined by his co-star Florence Pugh, Garfield attended the screening alongside producers of the film, Adam Ackland and Benedict Cumberbatch. At the screening, the producers and star Garfield briefly addressed the audience to introduce the romantic drama. On Pugh and Garfield's performances in the film, British star Cumberbatch said, "They're already at the top of the game. They are our generation's best," before adding, "I'm jealous I'm not in the film." Garfield opened by greeting the audience in Arabic, saying "Assalamu alaikum (peace be upon you)." He then thanked the festival for bringing the film to Saudi Arabia. "So grateful to be welcomed here like it is my second home," added Garfield, who also attended the festival last year. "We Live in Time" is a South London-set romantic drama that follows an up-and-coming chef (Pugh) and a recent divorcee



Andrew Garfield and Shraddha Kapoor posed for photographs together on the red carpet. Below: Benedict Cumberbatch took to the stage alongside Andrew Garfield in Jeddah. Getty Images

(Garfield) across a decade as they find their lives forever changed by a chance encounter. Kapoor, the most followed Bollywood star on social media, hit the red carpet before the

screening in a multi-colored gown from couturiers Falguni and Shane Peacock's Rang Mahal collection. The actress has starred in hits like "Aashiqui 2" (2013), "Stree"

(2018), and the record-breaking "Stree 2" (2024), which became the highest-grossing Hindi film of all time, surpassing the previous record held by Shah Rukh Khan's "Jawan."



FILM FEST

Spike Lee sheds light on career in Jeddah

Nada Hameed Jeddah

On the sixth day of the Red Sea International Film Festival, cinema legend Spike Lee shared insights on storytelling, collaboration, and his enduring love for filmmaking. Known for his groundbreaking works including "Do the Right Thing," "Malcolm X," and "BlackKkKlansman," the five-time Academy Award-winning filmmaker delved into his journey, inspiring aspiring creatives and cinephiles alike. Lee reflected on his early challenges, emphasizing the importance of opportunity in the crowded industry. "From the very beginning, I wanted to give an opportunity for new talents," he said. "This is a very, very tough business. A lot of times, you can be very talented, but if you don't get a break, you're really stuck." Lee also spoke passionately about the collaborative nature of filmmaking. "Filmmaking is not a solo act. It's the collective coming together for one goal — to make films," he said. "Some people want to be the hero and do it by themselves, but it doesn't work like that." Lee's upcoming film is a reimagining of the Akira Kurosawa classic film "High and Low." The film stars Denzel Washington and will be released in 2025 by A24 and Apple. Whether directing narrative films or documentaries, Lee highlighted the universal importance of storytelling. "I don't have to put on another hat. It's telling the story — a different way to tell a story, but still telling a story," he explained. "Sometimes you see long days because the director doesn't know what they're doing," he added of poor directing.

INTERVIEW

Ukrainian sci-fi film explores love and loneliness

Shyama Krishna Kumar Jeddah

Conceived more than a decade ago but written and shot during Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, Pavlo Ostrikov's debut film, "U Are the Universe," is a poignant look at love and loneliness seen through a sci-fi lens. Screening as part of the Red Sea International Film Festival's "Favorites" section, "U Are the Universe" is a dramedy that tells the story of space trucker

Andriy. When his home planet explodes while he's dumping radioactive waste on one of Jupiter's moons, he becomes the last human alive. With only a wise-cracking robot for company, Andriy believes he's doomed to a life alone — until the voice of a Frenchwoman reaches him from a distant space station. "It's not like it was my goal, but somehow all my films turn out to be about loneliness and love," said Ukrainian filmmaker



Ostrikov in an interview with Arab News. "Maybe love is an answer for loneliness. If you feel alone, you need to find somebody in this universe. So, it wasn't my intentional approach. But, of course, it's an important topic for me, and when I watched my films after finishing, I saw this really clearly, that it's a really important theme and topic." Armed with a bunch of astrophysics books and a love of sci-fi

cinema, Ostrikov decided to tell a deeper story about the human condition. "I guess you couldn't make a sci-fi movie without mention of '2001: A Space Odyssey' by Stanley Kubrick. It is (a) game-changing film, and it was made so good," he said. "Even now, if you watch this film, you feel like it's a journey to space ... Also, I like 'Interstellar' by Christopher Nolan, because I like his scientific approach, it's not like a goofy sci-fi."